Parental stress and coping in elite youth gymnastics.

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Abstract

The importance of parental involvement in youth sport is well established. Parents can enhance their children's sporting experiences by providing emotional, tangible, and informational support. Some understanding exists regarding the competition, organisational, and developmental stressors that parents encounter while providing such support. However, the strategies that parents employ to cope with these demands have not been examined. This study sought to understand how parents of elite youth gymnasts cope with the stressors they experience in relation to their children's sporting involvement.

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (Smith, 1996) was employed to facilitate an in-depth exploration of parents' experiences. Seven parents of national or international level gymnasts in mid-late adolescence participated in 1 or 2 semi-structured interviews. Iterative and inductive data analysis cycles produced themes that reflected parents' experiences and the researcher's interpretations of the parents' accounts.

Parents experienced a range of organisational, competitive, and developmental stressors including financial demands, watching their children compete, and child schooling. Parents employed numerous strategies to cope with such stressors. These strategies were organised into 4 themes: (a) detaching from gymnastics, (b) normalising experiences, (c) willingness to learn, and (d) managing emotional reactions. Parents detached by sharing parenting responsibilities, recognising their children's coping abilities, and maintaining a balanced lifestyle. Parents normalised experiences by recalling past experiences and comparing their experiences to others'. Parents learned how to cope effectively with the help of others and by reflecting on their past experiences. Emotional release, self-talk, and avoidance were employed to manage emotions. Parents suggested that increased informational and improved existing support from the sport governing body would improve their coping efforts. Overall, the findings suggest that parents in sport may not experience as much strain as previous studies imply. However, parents do encounter a variety of stressors and employ several strategies in their attempts to cope with these stressors.

Keywords: parents, youth sport, stress, stressors, coping.

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"The more I live, the more I learn. The more I learn, the more I realise, the less I know".

Michel Legrand

Introduction

Millions of children worldwide participate in community, school, and private sport programmes (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008; Woolger & Power, 2000). Consequently, a vast number of parents are also involved in youth sport. Unfortunately, the nature of parents' involvement in sport is not always positive. Parents have gained a reputation in media accounts and popular opinion for negative behaviours such as yelling at officials, encouraging their children to cheat, and sideline altercations with other supporters (e.g., Spiker, 2014).

Some research supports this negative perception of parents (e.g., DeFrancesco & Johnson, 1997; Feltz, Hepler, Roman, & Paiement, 2009; Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes, & Pennisi, 2006; Kidman, McKenzie, & McKenzie, 1999; Reade & Rodgers, 2009). For example, 29% of children surveyed by DeFrancesco and Johnson (1997) reported that a parent had embarrassed them during a match by yelling, screaming, or walking away from the venue. More concerning was that 13% of these children recalled experiencing physical abuse by a parent following a match. Coaches have also indicated that parents can be a negative influence in the sporting context. For instance, 36% of tennis coaches perceived parents to harm their children's sporting development by overemphasising winning, having unrealistic expectations, coaching their children, and criticising or excessively pampering their children (Gould et al., 2006).

Nevertheless, the importance of parental involvement in youth sport is well established. Indeed, children are unlikely to fulfil their true potential in sport without early and continuing emotional, tangible, and informational parental support (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Coaches have also noted that parents can positively influence their children's sporting experiences by emphasising hard work, providing unconditional love, and making sacrifices so their children can succeed (Gould et al., 2006). The sport parent role is evidently paradoxical in nature; on the one hand there are concerns regarding negative parental behaviours, but on

the other hand it is clear that parental support is critical to enabling children to participate in sport.

Providing support to their children in sport is not always easy for parents. Research has indicated that parents can experience stress as a result of their involvement in the youth sport environment (Harwood & Knight, 2009a, 2009b). Stress occurs when an individual appraises the demands of a situation to be beyond his or her perceived ability to cope (Lazarus, 1966). The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, conceptualised by Lazarus (1991, 1999), proposes that stress is a dynamic, bi-directional transactional process between the individual and their environment. The stress process involves an environmental demand, appraisals of that demand by an individual, and attempts to cope. A stressor is an environmental demand that an individual encounters. These demands may be internal or external to the individual in origin (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The individual evaluates the threatening nature of a stressor through a process of primary and secondary appraisals. Primary appraisals assess the significance of a stressor in relation to the individual's life goals and wellbeing (Lazarus, 1999). If an individual evaluates a demand as personally relevant through primary appraisals, secondary appraisals then occur. In secondary appraisals, the individual assesses their abilities to cope with the stressor at hand (Lazarus, 1991). The individual then employs coping strategies to manage the stressor, either by altering the demand or how they interpret the demand. Coping is achieved through ongoing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage demands appraised as overwhelming (Lazarus, 1993).

Within the sport parenting literature, some attention has been afforded to the stressors encountered by parents. For example, it has been identified that parents experience stress within youth tennis due to encountering competitive, organisational, and developmental stressors (Harwood & Knight, 2009a, 2009b). Competitive stressors are demands associated with the child's participation in competitions, for example opponents cheating, the child's physical readiness, and child nerves. Organisational stressors involve demands related to logistics, personal sacrifices, and systems in which parents operate associated with their children's

involvement in youth sport. Organisational demands include the financial impact of sport upon the family, transporting the child to training and competitions, and a lack of family time. Finally, developmental stressors are demands associated specifically with the child's development, including the child missing out on other opportunities and uncertainties surrounding the child's sporting future (Harwood & Knight, 2009a, 2009b).

In contrast to the understanding of the stressors parents can encounter in sport, knowledge of the ways in which parents cope with these stressors is very limited. It is imperative that parents cope well in the youth sport context because unresolved parental stress is suggested to give rise to negative parent behaviours such as high pressure and expectations (Harwood & Knight, 2015). Parental pressure and expectations have frequently been related to children's experiences of anxiety, stress, and burnout (Bois, Lalanne, & Delforge, 2009; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; Leff & Hoyle, 1995). As such, examining and improving parents' coping strategies is critical to enhancing the enjoyment and success of children, as well as the experiences of parents, in youth sport.

The purpose of the current study was to understand how parents of elite youth gymnasts cope with the stressors they experience in relation to their children's sporting involvement. Specifically, the study sought to address three research questions:

1. What stressors do parents of elite youth gymnasts encounter?
2. What strategies do these parents employ to cope with such stressors?
3. What further assistance do parents require to enhance their ability to cope?

Literature Review

Parental Involvement in Youth Sport

A vast proportion of children's time is spent within the family environment. Parents are therefore highly involved in their children's athletic experiences as financiers, coaches, cheerleaders, chauffeurs, and spectators (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Parents are so essential in youth sport that it has become recognised as a part of their societal role to encourage sporting success in their children (Coakley, 2006). Thus, if a child is perceived to have failed in sport, their parents are deemed responsible; if the child succeeds, the parents (particularly fathers) are perceived to meet societal expectations (Coakley, 2006).

Fredricks and Eccles (2004) suggested that parents fulfil three major roles in youth sport. Firstly, parents role model appropriate sporting behaviours to their children. Active parents have been shown to have a strong effect in influencing their children, in particular their daughters, to participate in physical activity (e.g., Greyson & Colley, 1986). Second, parents act as interpreters of sporting experiences to their children. Parental beliefs regarding value, competency, and enjoyment influence these beliefs in their child (Babkes & Weiss, 1999; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Lastly, parents are providers of sporting experiences to their children. Parents are responsible for initially signing children up for sport and ensuring their interest persists through the provision of emotional, practical, and financial support. In fulfilling these three roles, parents are seen as "integral" to the existence of youth sport (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008, p. 505).

The involvement of parents alters as a child progresses through youth sport. Côté (1999) identified three stages of elite talent development within youth sport, summarised in his Developmental Model of Sport Participation. These three phases are named the sampling stage, specialising stage, and investment stage. During the sampling stage, parents fulfil a clear provider role whereby they initiate their children's participation in sport, and ensure children have access to suitable opportunities. Sampling stage parents are often highly committed to their children's

participation in sport, demonstrated by altered family routines and the provision considerable emotional and tangible support.

As children progress to the specialising stage, their involvement focuses on one or two specific activities. Fun and excitement are retained as key elements, but skill development becomes increasingly important. During these years, parents take a growing interest in their children's sport and recognise the importance of practice in the development of their children as athletes during these years. Parents are not however, in most cases, responsible for instructing this practice. The role of coaches increases during this stage, which might therefore require parents to take a step back (Côté, 1999). Parents continue to emphasise school commitments alongside sport. The specialising stage can consequently be difficult for both parents and children because of the changing nature of their roles (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Keegan, Spray, Harwood, & Lavallee, 2010; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005).

In the investment stage, children are committed to achieving an elite level of performance in a single activity through daily deliberate practice that focuses on strategy and skill development. Children require highly specialised support, thus parents usually take a step back in this stage; their role is often confined to general supportive duties, including helping children cope with setbacks (Côté, 1999). The potential that a child exhibits to reach the top level in their sport causes their parents to take more of an interest in the children's future in sport. Indeed parents often advise their children regarding developing a career in sport. The time and money parents invest in their children can be extraordinarily high in the investment stage, and these children often become central to all family activities. As a consequence, parents demonstrate different behaviours towards each of their children and other siblings can experience jealousy and/or show bitterness towards their brother or sister in sport as a result (Côté, 1999).

Parents' Socialisation into Youth Sport. Socialisation is "an active process of learning and social development, which occurs as we interact with one another and become acquainted with the social world in which we live. It involves the formation

of ideas about who we are and what is important in our lives" (Coakley, 2001, p. 82). Studies have indicated that parents undergo socialisation into the "sport parent" role (e.g., Dorsch, Smith, & McDonough, 2009, 2015a). Socialisation into the sport parent role incorporates the behavioural, cognitive, affective, and relational changes that parents undergo in the youth sport environment (Dorsch et al., 2009).

In an early study of sport parent socialisation, Snyder and Purdy (1982) reported that parents in sport experienced an increased interest in sport due to their children's involvement in youth sport. This interest manifested itself in increased attendance at sporting events, reading about sport, and watching of sport on television. These changes were more pronounced if the parent had previous sporting experiences. Weiss and Hayashi (1995) supported Snyder and Purdy's (1982) findings in parents of youth gymnasts. The parents they interviewed had raised levels of attendance at gymnastics competitions, watched more sport, and read more articles about sport as a consequence of their child's gymnastics involvement. It is therefore evident that parents experience lifestyle changes as a consequence of their children becoming involved in youth sport. These lifestyle changes appear to be most prominent with respect to the time spent by parent within sporting environments.

Dorsch et al. (2009) provided a more in-depth analysis of the alterations that parents experience as a consequence of their socialisation into the sport parent role. After conducting focus groups with 26 parents of children enrolled in sport programmes, Dorsch et al. suggested that parents' socialisation has three dimensions: (a) changes in affect, for example increased emotional connection to sport and the use of emotional management strategies in sport; (b) adjustments in relationships, manifesting in altered communication styles with their children and spouses, and opportunities to network with other parents; and (c) alterations in cognition, such as increased interest in sport, thinking about sport, and learning of appropriate sideline behaviours. This latter category in particular supports earlier work surrounding parent socialisation in youth sport (cf. Snyder & Purdy, 1982; Weiss & Hayashi, 1995).

Clarke and Harwood (2014) reciprocated many of Dorch et al.'s (2009) findings in their study focussing on elite youth football. Clarke and Harwood (2014) reported that elite sport parent socialisation involves cognitive, relational, and affective aspects, including adjusting to social norms and expected behaviours, becoming involved in new parent-peer relationships, and negotiating power and responsibility with coaches. Parents had to adapt to organising their occupational, childcare, and transport arrangements around their child's involvement in football, and adopt a more encouraging, rather than instructional role, as their coaching involvement decreases. Socialisation into the specialising phase of youth football had many positive consequences for parents, including enhanced parental status due to their child's success in gaining an academy place, an increased sense of closeness with their child due the amount of time spent together in the youth sport context, and a shared sense of belonging at the academy. However, such socialisation also had negative implications for parents, including frustration resulting from a decreased sense of agency, limited communication from coaches, and anticipatory fear of their child being cut. Parents' experiences in youth sport, and particularly their experiences of socialisation, are therefore both complex and dynamic.

The aforementioned studies provided a good understanding of what constitutes sport parent socialisation. However, the processes underlying sport parent socialisation were less clear. Dorsch et al. (2015a) therefore sought to understand these processes, particularly during parents' initial period of involvement in youth soccer. Employing semi-structured family interviews, parent journals, and direct observations of parents in sporting contexts, the authors suggested four factors that influence parent sport socialisation: (a) process, whereby parents become behaviourally, cognitively, and emotionally engaged with others; (b) personal, during which individual characteristics and cognitive predispositions are altered; (c) context, comprised of micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-level changes; and (d) time, including life course and historically-dependent factors. For example, parents relied on cues from other adults regarding how to behave, experienced increases in sporting interest and knowledge, were affected by the team/individual nature of their child's sport, and responded according to their child's age and development. Such a wide range of

factors illustrates the complexity of the parent sport socialisation process, which is characterised by interactions between parents and the youth sport context.

Gender differences in parental involvement. Researchers have noted differences in the nature and level of support provided by mothers and fathers within youth sport (e.g., Wolfenden & Holt, 2005; Wuerth, Lee, & Alfermann, 2004). Wuerth et al. (2004) suggested that parents' self-perceptions of their role in youth sport differ according to gender. On the one hand, mothers perceived themselves as providing more positive support and understanding than fathers did. On the other hand, fathers scored higher than mothers on directive behaviours, including pushing their children to try harder and telling them how to improve (Wuerth et al., 2004). Wolfenden and Holt (2005) reported that, compared to fathers, mothers are more heavily involved in providing tangible support for their children, particularly when it comes to transportation. The authors also found that mothers make more personal sacrifices to enable their children's sporting involvement, for example mothers frequently declined social commitments and restricted their own exercise time for the sake of their children's commitments in sport (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). These differences may exist because mothers, rather than fathers, feel primarily responsible for childcare and family life (Wuerth et al., 2004).

Coakley (2006) proposed that the youth sport context enables fathers to be involved in their children's lives without challenging dominant gender ideology. That is, sport enables men to interact with their children without domesticating masculinity or masculising domesticity. Coakley argued that promoting sport to their children, and promoting their children's sporting successes to others, has been incorporated into the societal role for fathers. As a result, fathers who do not actively advocate their children's sporting interests are perceived to have fallen short of the standards for good parenting. Whereas fathers are usually involved in their child's sporting activities at a higher level, mothers provide the labour that makes youth sport participation possible. For example, fathers often finance their child's involvement, critique games, provide strategic advice, and select the coach and club. Alternatively, mothers wash playing kit, make match teas, and transport their children to and from

training and competitions. Both mothers and fathers therefore facilitate their children's successes in sport while operating in highly gendered roles.

Parents' interactions with their children have also been shown to differ as a function of child gender. Leff and Hoyle (1995) surveyed over 150 academy tennis players aged 6-18 years. They discovered that girls perceived greater support from both parents than did boys, whereas boys reported more pressure from both parents than girls. Boys also indicated higher perceptions of pressure from fathers than mothers. According to Coakley (2006), sport provides a context in which men and boys can demonstrate their masculinity. This may explain why boys experienced more pressure to succeed in sport, and why much of this pressure is derived from their fathers (Leff & Hoyle, 1995). In contrast, Bois et al. (2009) suggested that boys who play tennis did not experience pre-competition anxiety due to the presence of both parents, whereas girls involved in tennis and basketball, and boys participating in basketball players did. Within this sample, the highest perceptions of parental pressure were reported by girls playing tennis. The authors therefore posited that there is a three-way interaction between parental presence, gender, and sport type in affecting athletes' pre-competitive anxiety levels (Bois et al., 2009). The effect of gender on parental involvement in sport might therefore be more complex than originally thought.

Parental involvement at competitions. Verbal sideline behaviours are the primary method of parental involvement while children are competing in sport (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Considerable research has examined the behaviours exhibited by parents while spectating at youth sport events (e.g., Bowker et al., 2009; Kidman et al., 1999; Randall & McKenzie, 1987; Shields, Bredemeier, LaVoi, & Power, 2005). Most research agrees that the majority of comments that parents make are positive, however far too many negative comments exist to facilitate a sufficiently supportive environment for children (cf. Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehn, & Wall, 2008; Kidman et al., 1999). Parents themselves have cited aggressive behaviours of spectator parents as a deterrent of sport enjoyment for them and their children (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008). As Shields et al. summarised, "the playing fields of youth sports

are populated neither by angels not devils, but human beings who often act well, but who sometimes do not" (p. 43).

In an attempt to not only understand the nature of parents' comments at competitions, but also the factors influencing these, Holt, et al. (2008) employed parent diaries, interviews, and observations. They proposed that parents' comments ranged on a six-factor continuum from supportive responses to controlling responses, including: (a) praise and encouragement, (b) performance contingent feedback, (c) instructional comments, (d) striking a balance between positive and negative comments, (e) negative responses, and (f) derogatory comments. Praise and encouragement accounted for 35% of parental responses, while negative and derogatory comments constituted 15% of recorded responses. Holt et al. explained parents' sideline behaviours as resulting from the empathy that parents experience for their children in sport. Parents shared the emotions that their children experienced in sport, which altered according to situational and temporal circumstances. Parental responses therefore varied within competitive situations. Parents' behaviours were further explained by parental perceptions that they possessed knowledge and expertise in sport, which enabled them to make comments to their children.

Holt et al. (2008)'s proposed continuum of parent sideline behaviours has received some support within the literature. For example, Dorsch, Smith, Wilson, and McDonough (2015b) adopted Holt et al.'s continuum when observing parent sideline behaviours at youth soccer games. They reported very similar statistics to Holt et al.; 34% of parents' comments constituted praise and encouragement, whereas 11% were negative or punitive. Dorsch et al. also suggested that parents' goals likely influenced the nature of their verbal sideline behaviours. The interaction between the youth sport context and parents' goals (for example ensuring the child enjoyed sport, portraying a positive parent image, and building relationships with others), thus has the potential to both positively and negative influence parents' behaviours.

Not all parents engage in sport competitions in the same way. For example, there may be a gender effect in parental behaviours at competitions. Bowker et al. (2009) reported that women not only made more sideline comments than men (61% versus 39%) but also made more positive comments than men, who provided more negative and corrective feedback. Additionally, parents made a significantly higher number of negative comments at boys' games versus girls' games. The findings suggest that fathers may require more help to improve the nature of their comments than mothers. The suggestion that fathers provide more negative feedback than mothers, and that more negative comments are made at boys' games compared with girls' games, supports Coakley's (2006) contention that sport is an arena in which fathers can demonstrate their masculinity by having successful sons, whereas mothers exhibit their femininity by exhibiting a more caring approach.

Negative sideline behaviours have the potential to lead to a variety of maladaptive outcomes for children in youth sport. These negative outcomes, coupled with a media focus on negative parent sideline behaviours, have led sport governing bodies, charities, and youth sport organisations to publish guidelines for parents regarding their behaviours at youth sport events (e.g., Child Protection in Sport Unit, 2013). Since parental support is crucial to children's success and enjoyment within youth sport (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005), it is important that organisers, researchers, and practitioners within youth sport implement and evaluate effective sideline strategies that will benefit both parents and children. Elliott and Drummond (2014) sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the Australian Football League's code of conduct for parents (Australian Football League, 2010) by interviewing 50 parents and coaches. Many of the participants perceived the code did little to influence parent behaviours. Coaches and parents reported that there were too few consequences when the code was breached, ineffective policing of the code, and a culture of negative parent behaviours that became normalised over time. The elite sport culture of the Australian Football League further reinforced this negative culture by portraying images of aggression, violence, and a 'win at all costs' mentality. More research is therefore warranted to investigate the optimal strategies to manage parents' sideline behaviours at youth sport competitions. For example,

improving parents' abilities to cope with competition demands might reduce the number of negative sideline comments, since parental stress is suggested to be linked to poor sideline behaviours (Harwood & Knight, 2015).

Child Outcomes of Parental Involvement in Sport

Perceived parental support has been defined as, "young athletes' perception of his/her parents' behaviour aimed at facilitating his/her involvement and participation in sport" (Leff and Hoyle, 1995, p. 190). Perceived parental support has been consistently related to a number of positive outcomes for children involved in youth sport. Perhaps most importantly, perceived parental support has frequently been related to increased enthusiasm for and enjoyment of sport in young athletes (Anderson, Funk, Elliott, & Smith, 2003; Babkes & Weiss, 1999; Kanters, Bocarro, & Casper, 2008; McCarthy, Jones, & Clark-Carter, 2008; Power & Woolger, 1994; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006). Sport enjoyment has been recognised as a predictor of sustained involvement in youth sport (McCarthy et al., 2008). Research therefore suggests that perceived parental support has a protective effect on child burnout and withdrawal from sport via the enhancement of sport enjoyment (e.g., McCarthy et al., 2008; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006, 2009).

Parental support in youth sport is also associated with other benefits. For example, parental praise, encouragement, and understanding have been shown to have a significant protective effect on children's anxiety scores (Anderson et al., 2003). Furthermore, parental support has been related to a reduction in the number of stressors a child experiences in youth sport (VanYperen, 1995). Several researchers have also found parental support to be positively associated with perceptions of physical competence in children (Babkes & Weiss, 1999; Brustrad, 1993; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006). For example, Brustad (1993) surveyed 231 9-10 year olds and 81 of their parents, and reported positive associations between parental encouragement and perceived physical competence in their children. Further, Babkes and Weiss (1999) surveyed over 200 youth football participants and their parents. Children who perceived higher levels of parental support had increased perceptions of competence, sport enjoyment, and intrinsic motivation.

According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000), individuals are likely to experience greater levels of intrinsic motivation when three basic needs are meet. These three basic needs are: (a) autonomy (feeling in control of one's actions), (b) relatedness (sense of belonging in relationships with others), and (c) competence (perceptions of ability in a task). Intrinsic motivation is viewed as the optimal type of motivation due to its association with increased commitment, persistence in the face of failure, and enjoyment (e.g., Woolger & Power, 2000). Thus it is unsurprising that if parental support enhances perceived physical competence in children, it also boosts children's intrinsic motivation, as proposed by Keegan et al. (2010). Keegan and colleagues (2009, 2010) produced a detailed analysis of the specific parental behaviours that can enhance intrinsic motivation in children. Such behaviours included providing transportation, purchasing equipment, providing positive feedback, encouraging the enjoyment of sport, and spectating. Further research has suggested that parental support, involvement, realistic and attainable goals, and directiveness are also positively related to a child's experience of intrinsic motivation in youth sport via enhancements of perceived child competence (Babkes & Weiss, 1999; McCarthy et al., 2008; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006; Woolger & Power, 2000).

Parents can however also negatively influence their children's intrinsic motivation through their use of rewards, pressure, and punishment (Woolger & Power, 2000). For example, overemphasising winning and excessively criticising children's sporting performances may result in a reduction in children's perceived sporting competence (Bois et al., 2009). Controlling parent behaviours including the use of tangible rewards, and denying choices to children have been associated with reduced perceptions of child autonomy (Keegan et al., 2009). SDT suggests that reductions in child autonomy and perceived competence can have detrimental effects on intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Selected parental behaviours can therefore reduce a child's intrinsic motivation.

Achievement Goal Theory (AGT, Nicholls, 1984) posits that there are two types of goal involvements: (a) mastery climates, which focus on learning from failures, enjoyment, and self-referenced comparisons; and (b) ego goals, which emphasise winning, punishment of failures, and comparisons to others (Ames, 1992). A mastery goal climate is perceived to be the optimal environment, particularly for children, due to its association with a variety of outcomes, including wellbeing, intrinsic motivation, and self-esteem (O'Rourke, Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2011, 2012, 2014; Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2007; Smoll, Smith, & Cumming 2007). Parents are particularly influential in contributing towards their children's motivational climates. For example, O'Rourke et al. (2014) suggested that parents' relative impact on children's autonomy and self-esteem through the motivational climates they create is significantly higher than that of coaches. O'Rourke et al. (2012, 2014) also suggested that mastery climate scores were positively and significantly related to self-esteem and autonomy, whereas ego climate scores were negatively associated with self-esteem and autonomy.

Parental pressure has been correlated with ego climate scores in youth sport (Sisjord & Sorensen, 2004). Parental pressure is defined as "parental behaviours that are perceived by their children as implying high, unlikely, or unattainable expectations" (Leff & Hoyle, p. 190). It occurs when parents push their children hard to compete and/or win, and when parental affection is determined by sporting participation and/or results (Bois et al., 2009). Behaviours such as excessively criticising performances, punishing the child, and overemphasising winning can constitute parental pressure. Parental pressure has been linked to increased anxiety, fear of failure, feelings of inadequacy, guilt, negative appraisals of self-worth, and unhappiness for youth athletes (Bois et al., 2009; Leff & Hoyle, 1995).

Children have reported that perceived parental pressure is negatively related to their sport enjoyment in various studies (e.g., Anderson et al., 2003; Woolger & Power, 2000). For example, Scanlan and Lewthwaite (1988) reported that adolescent wrestlers experienced more enjoyment when they perceived less parental pressure and fewer negative parental interactions. Further, Fraser-Thomas et al. (2008)

compared the experiences of ten swimmers who dropped out of sport with ten who remained engaged with swimming. As opposed to the engaged swimmers, the children who ceased participation reported that their parents provided technical instruction while watching practices and meets, and applied considerable pressure to stay in the sport when the child wanted to withdraw from swimming. Pressurising parent behaviours may therefore cause children to drop out of sport through reductions in enjoyment.

Parental pressure can also lead to the development of fear of failure in children (Sagar, Busch, & Jowett, 2010). Fear of failure is "the motive to avoid failure with anticipatory shame in evaluative situations" (Sagar et al., 2010 p. 214). Fear of failure can lead to diminished performance and wellbeing, shame, and devaluations of the self in children (Sagar et al., 2010). From their interviews with elite youth athletes, Sagar and Lavallee (2010) suggested three types of parental pressurising behaviours that contribute to fear of failure in youth athletes: (a) punitive behaviours, including criticism, punishment, and the threat of love withdrawal; (b) parental controlling behaviours, where the child surrenders autonomy to their parents; and (c) parent high expectations for achievement, whereby parents express their disappointment to their child when they make mistakes and/or lose.

As illustrated above, most discussions regarding parental pressure have focused on negative and/or coercive behaviours. However, Lee and MacLean (1997) posited that it is the quality of parental pressure rather than its intensity that is important. By this assertion, parental pressure on the child to increase effort could facilitate more adaptive goals than pressure to beat others (O'Rourke et al., 2011). O'Rourke et al. (2011) therefore reconceptualised parental pressure as "a pattern of directive and controlling parent behaviours designed to prompt athlete responses and outcomes that are desirable to the parent" (p. 400). Their longitudinal examination of over 300 elite swimmers supported Lee and MacLean's (1997) contention. Therefore rather than being uniformly negative, parental pressure can have positive effects, depending on whether it occurs in a mastery or an ego context in accordance with achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1984).

Children's preferences for parental involvement in sport. Despite the relatively high levels of perceived negative parental sideline behaviours, children still overwhelmingly want their parents to attend their youth sport events (Shields et al., 2005). However, children do have specific preferences for how their parents should behave when they do attend (Knight, Boden, & Holt, 2010; Knight, Neely, & Holt, 2011; Omli & Weise-Bjornstal, 2011). Children have indicated that they want their parents to provide encouragement, exhibit emotional control, and adhere to sporting etiquette at competitions (Knight et al., 2011). Conversely, it has been suggested that children's least preferred parental behaviours include arguing with opposing parents, swearing, derogatory behaviours, and providing technical or tactical advice when they are not experienced in the sport (Knight et al., 2010; Omli & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011).

From their interviews with attendees of a youth tennis camp, Omli and Wiese-Bjornstal (2011) proposed three types of "sport parents" at youth sport events: (a) supportive parent, (b) demanding coach, and (c) crazed fan. The 'supportive parent' engaged in behaviours such as attentive silence, cheering, encouragement, praise, empathy, and protective intervention. The supportive parent is the type of parent that the children overwhelmingly wanted their parents to fulfil. 'Demanding coach' parents, who provided instruction, advice, and critical encouragement, were resisted but tolerated in some situations by the children. However, the children consistently resisted the 'crazed fan' type of sport parent across all situations. This role comprised behaviours such as arguing, blaming, criticism, disruption, yelling, and fanatical cheering. It can therefore be inferred that parents should exhibit supportive behaviours such as encouragement, praise, and empathy at youth sport events. Conversely, parents should avoid negative behaviours including blame, criticism, and yelling.

Nevertheless, children's preferences for parental behaviours do not remain static over time. The children interviewed by Knight et al. (2011) indicated that their preferences for parental behaviours have a temporal element. For example, before

competitions, children wanted their parents to be attentive to their individual needs, and help them mentally and physically prepare. During competition, children wanted their parents to encourage the team as a whole, focus on effort rather than outcome, maintain control of their emotions, and not attract attention, argue with officials, or attempt to coach. Children also had preferences for parental behaviours following a match, which included providing positive and realistic feedback. Parents should therefore be aware not only of how their children want them to behave, but how these behaviours change according to time and context.

Elliott and Drummond (2015) focused specifically on one temporal element of parents' involvement in youth sport: parent-child interactions following a match. Parental involvement in youth sport almost always extends into the post-game setting, for example, parents often provide transportation, emotional support, and feedback following the conclusion of youth sport competitions (Elliot & Drummond, 2015). Elliott and Drummond (2015) conducted interviews and focus groups with children and parents involved in junior Australian football with the aim of understanding parents' experiences after a game. Debriefing emerged as a widely practiced but contentious aspect of the post-game experience. From the children's perspectives, positive comments were welcomed whereas negative, critical, and/or corrective comments often stimulated anxiety. Parents can therefore facilitate a positive or a negative conclusion to youth sport competitions through their approach to debriefing (Elliott & Drummond, 2015). According to their children, parents should aim to be wholly positive in their post-game interactions with their children, and avoid negativity as much as possible.

Against the backdrop of research examining children's preferences for parental behaviours it can be deduced that parents would benefit from communicating with their children to understand what behaviours are most desirable (Knight et al., 2010). It is often difficult for parents to exhibit these optimal behaviours because many of the decisions made by parents in sport contexts are not rational but primarily emotional (Omli, LaVoi, & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2008). Consequently, many of the behaviours that parents exhibit are unintentional (Lauer, Gould, Roman, & Pierce,

2010a; Omli et al., 2008). It is therefore important to understand how parents experience competitive youth sport contexts to move closer to the desired and optimal parent behaviours indicated by research.

Parents' Experiences in Youth Sport

It is apparent that youth sport involvement is complex for parents to navigate (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). Parents can have both positive and negative experiences in youth sport. For example, Knight and Holt (2013a) illustrated several factors associated with Australian tennis parents' positive and negative experiences at youth sport competitions. Positive parental experiences were facilitated by positive on-court behaviours from their children and opponents, children performing to their potential, and socialising with other parents (Knight & Holt, 2013a). Conversely, negative parent experiences stemmed from factors including perceived child underperformance, cheating, parents becoming involved in matches, and tournaments not running to time (Knight & Holt, 2013a). These findings illustrate how parents' experiences in competitive environments can be both positively and negatively affected by personal, contextual, and policy-level factors.

The youth sport context can be challenging for parents because they are expected to provide emotional, logistical, and informational support to their children, while behaving in ways that facilitate their children's enjoyment and success. Wiersma and Fifer (2008) conducted ten focus groups with 55 parents involved in various organised youth sport leagues. Parents suggested that they encounter challenges when providing support to their children in sport. These challenges included child injury, a lack of family time, financial expenses, balancing commitment and fun, child frustration, and committing to an activity for a whole season. Subsequent research supported these parent experiences in sport (e.g., Knight & Holt, 2013a, 2013b; Clarke & Harwood, 2014). Parents' experiences in sport can be negatively impacted by such challenges. Indeed Bloom (1985) demonstrated how, in certain cases, families have relocated to provide their children with better coaches and training facilities, temporarily separated from their spouses/family to move to new training locations, and left jobs in order to transport and support their children in

sport. It can be assumed that due to the increased cultural emphasis on youth sport, and resultant earlier child specialisation, that such cases are becoming more frequent (Bean, Fortier, Post, & Chima, 2014).

Parents' challenging experiences of youth sport appear to continue even after their children have withdrawn from sport. In the first reported study examining the effects of athlete retirement on parents, Lally and Kerr (2008) interviewed six parents of former national/international level gymnasts, 3-5 years post-retirement. The authors reported that parents experienced lingering doubts regarding the long-term impact of negative coach behaviours, their daughters' gymnastics participation on their families, their daughters' limited social interactions outside of gymnastics, and their daughters' experiences of chronic pain. Thus the negative experiences parents have in youth sport are on-going and can be distressing for parents long after their children have stopped participating.

Parental stressors in youth sport. Harwood and Knight (2009a, 2009b) recognised that some of the difficulties encountered by parents in sport can cause them to experience stress. They therefore investigated what specific stressors parents can encounter in youth sport. In one study, they interviewed 22 tennis parents across the three stages of participation (Harwood & Knight, 2009a). In another project, the authors surveyed 123 parents regarding their competition, coaching, organisational, developmental, and personal experiences within youth tennis (Harwood & Knight, 2009b). From this data, they were able to categorise parental stressors into three distinct dimensions: (a) organisational, (b) competitive, and (c) developmental.

Organisational stressors are derived from organisational factors and processes that can affect parents' personal and family lives (Harwood & Knight, 2009b). Organisational stressors therefore concern the logistics, personal investments, and the sport systems associated with youth sport participation (Harwood & Knight, 2009a). Stressors included within this category include transport arrangements, financial demands, child injuries, and tournament organisation (Harwood & Knight, 2009b). For example with respect to finances, parents must budget their money, seek

sponsorship, and make monetary sacrifices in order to support their children in sport. Schmidt (2012) interviewed 18 parents of children involved in sport, all of whom agreed that the cost of youth sport was very high, and they were powerless to reduce it. Wiersma and Fifer (2008) also reported several challenges encountered by parents that stemmed from organisational sources. Such difficulties included a lack of family time, unequal time commitment between siblings, and managing child injuries. Weiss and Hayashi (1995) further illustrated the sacrifices made by parents, for example regarding their personal life and family time, for their children in sport. They reported that 70% of gymnastics parents felt their home lives revolved around their children's gymnastics participation. Further, 72% also stated that their personal life revolved around gymnastics. Finally, Lally and Kerr (2008) suggested that time demands associated with their daughters' gymnastics involvement were "perhaps the most overwhelming" for the parents they interviewed (p. 47). It is evident that parents encounter numerous organisational demands within youth sport.

Competitive stressors are concerned with parents' experiences at youth sport competitions (Harwood & Knight, 2009a). The competitive demands experienced by parents include performance and morality-related issues associated with their children's matches, including poor behaviours on the part of their children and/or the opponent, the parents' sense of helplessness during matches, and gossip between parents (Harwood & Knight, 2009a, 2009b). Competitive environments can present stressors for parents due to the close emotional bond between parent and child (Omli et al., 2008). Knight and Holt (2013a) suggested that negative parent experiences at competitions are derived from factors including perceived child underperformance, negative child attitude, opponents cheating, and tournaments not running to time. An additional study suggested that referee decisions, disruptive parents, the importance of the game, and the closeness of the score intensified parents' emotions at youth sport competitions (Holt et al., 2008). Further, Omli and LaVoi, (2012) posited that parents experience anger at youth sport competitions due to coaches, children, officials, or other parents acting in unjust, uncaring, or incompetent manners. These factors may act as additional competitive difficulties for parents in sport.

The final category of developmental stressors concerns educational issues, uncertainty surrounding sport transitions, and future decision-making (Harwood & Knight, 2009a). Developmental demands centre on children's development, both in sport and general life domains (Harwood & Knight, 2009a). Such demands include managing conflicts with the school, children's career progression in sport, and children missing out on other activities (Harwood & Knight, 2009b). For example, some of the parents interviewed by Harwood and Knight (2009b) reported struggling with choosing a coach that would enable their children to best progress within tennis. Parents involved in academy-level youth football also cited fears surrounding their children being released (deselected) from the academy, concerns regarding how their children would manage competing educational and sport pressures, and how to manage the lack of communication from coaches (Harwood, Drew, & Knight, 2010). Research therefore suggests that developmental demands are encountered in both football and tennis parent populations.

Harwood and Knight (2009b) suggested that the stressors parents experience change as a consequence of their children's stage of development as described by Côté's (1999) Developmental Model of Sport Participation. Harwood and Knight (2009b) reported that parents with children in the specialising and investment stages cited fewer competitive stressors compared to parents of children in the sampling stage of development. This may be due to increased familiarity with the competitive environment in the later stages of development. Furthermore, parents reported more stressors related to their children's sporting progression in the specialising and investment stages in comparison to the sampling phase. This can be explained by Côté's (1999) model, which suggests that in the specialising and investment stages, parents take more of an interest in their child as an athlete, whereas sampling parents primarily focus on achieving fun and enjoyment through youth sport.

There has been very little research examining any associations between the demands parents' experiences and the behaviours exhibited by parents in youth sport. Omli and LaVoi (2009) surveyed a large sample of children, parents, and coaches involved in football. Their data suggested that parents exhibit background anger

when observing their children compete. This background anger was created through behaviours such as coaching from the sidelines and yelling at the referee. Similarly, over half of the parents surveyed by Goldstein and Iso-Ahola (2008) reported experiencing anger while watching their child from the sidelines. The largest influences on their anger experiences were the referee and the team's play. Although more often than not, parents did not act upon this anger, some parents did mutter or yell comments, walk away from or towards the field, and/or make gestures. One parent even recalled encouraging another parent to confront other spectators in response to an anger-causing incident. Knight and Holt (2013a) and Harwood and Knight (2009b) identified watching their child compete as difficult for parents. Therefore it could be inferred that the experience of stress can lead parents to create background anger in youth sport. The ability to cope with demands is therefore imperative to enhancing parents' and children's experiences in youth sport.

Parental coping in youth sport. To date, studies examining parental stress in youth sport have focused primarily on understanding the stressors experienced by parents. The coping component of the stress process has consequently been somewhat neglected by research. A clear understanding of what strategies parents employ to cope with the demands they encounter in youth sport is therefore lacking. Indeed several researchers have called for more attention to be afforded to the strategies employed by parents to cope with the stressors they encounter in sport (e.g., Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Harwood & Knight, 2015; Holt & Knight, 2014; Knight & Holt, 2014).

Although youth sport researchers have not yet directly examined parental coping in sport, some studies have provided indications of how parents might cope in youth sport. For example, Knight and Holt (2013b) interviewed parents from the United States about their experiences in youth tennis. Their data revealed that parents employed four strategies to support their children in tennis: (a) interacting with other parents, for example to gather advice and information; (b) selecting a coach who had a holistic attitude towards the child's development, and was able to support the parents; (c) researching information, such as tennis psychology and technique; and

(d) spouses working together. The close emotional bond between parents and children involved in youth sport as explained by Omli et al. (2008) may render these strategies useful for parents in coping with stressors via enhancements of their children's experiences in youth sport. Wolfenden and Holt (2005) supported spouses working together in their study concerning perceptions of talent development in youth tennis. The authors reported that parents coped with the demands on their family time by dividing tasks between parents. Social support may therefore be a coping strategy of choice for parents in sport. These techniques and behaviours were not explicitly defined as coping strategies by the authors, however parents may use them to cope with the stressors they experience as a consequence of youth sport.

Parents have requested additional assistance to support their children in sport (e.g., Knight & Holt, 2013a). Parents' suggestions within youth tennis included more information regarding player progression, how to behave at tournaments, selecting and evaluating coaches, accessing funding options, and managing schooling (Knight & Holt, 2013a). The provision of this information may enable parents to cope more effectively with stressors pertaining to their children's future, competitions, coaches, finances, and education. The parents' suggestions aimed to enhance their ability to support their children in sport. As discussed, supporting their children is considered to be parents' primary function in youth sport (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Thus, these strategies may enable parents to cope with stressors that prevent parents from fulfilling their supportive functions in youth sport.

According to Harwood and Knight (2015), sport parenting expertise includes the ability to develop and deploy appropriate coping strategies to manage the various demands that parents encounter in youth sport. Indeed, several scholars have suggested that parents should employ a range of strategies to cope with the stressors they encounter in sport (e.g., Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes, & Pennisi, 2008; Harwood & Knight 2009a; Knight & Holt, 2013a; Lauer, Gould, Roman, & Pierce, 2010a, 2010b). Harwood and Knight (2015) posited that a failure to cope with emotions such as anger, disappointment, and worry can lead to detrimental consequences for children, opponents, other parents, and officials, as well as parents themselves.

Parents with children in a range of sports also reported that they believed negative parent behaviours during competitions were at least partially caused by parents' failure to regulate their own behaviours when they perceive their child is struggling (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). The qualities of parents' experiences, engagement in parental support, and personal enjoyment of youth sport, are therefore affected by their coping abilities (Harwood & Knight, 2015). It is consequently imperative that parents' coping strategies are understood and enhanced, in order to optimise experiences for all individuals involved in youth sport.

There is a significant knowledge gap in how parents manage the specific demands they face. To date, no studies have explicitly examined how parents cope with the stressors they experience as a consequence of their child's sporting participation. Much general parent coping literature exists outside of the athletic domain, some of which has utilised the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (e.g., Lake, 2012; Solem, Christophersen, & Martinussen, 2011). However, this research into parent coping has yet to be transferred into youth sport. Parent coping is a particularly interesting and important avenue to explore because of the possible benefits that it could glean for parents, children, spectators, officials, and coaches in youth sport. Understanding and enhancing parental coping in youth sport could reap potential benefits including increased enjoyment, sporting success, and wellbeing. The present study aims to close this gap by developing an in-depth understanding of how parents of elite youth gymnasts cope with the stressors they experience in relation to their children's sporting involvement.

Theoretical Approach to Parental Stressors and Coping

A particularly popular theoretical approach to studying coping in sport is the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus, 1991, 1999). The Transactional Model has been widely employed to understand the stress experiences of individuals in sport, including athletes and coaches (e.g., Hanton, Fletcher, & Coughlan, 2005; Mellalieu, Neil, Hanton, & Fletcher, 2009; Thelwell, Weston, & Greenlees, 2010). This model posits that stress is a dynamic process involving an environmental demand, appraisals of that demand by an individual, and attempts to cope with the

demand (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Lazarus emphasised that stressors, appraisals, and coping are interlinked and should therefore be examined together (Lazarus, 1999; 2000). However, Lazarus himself separated these components into individual concepts for the purpose of explanation and understanding (e.g., Lazarus, 1993).

Stressors are environmental demands that an individual encounters (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These demands may be internal or external to the individual in origin. As indicated previously, parents' involvement in youth sport can result in them encountering competitive, organisational, and developmental stressors (Harwood & Knight, 2009b). Stressors can vary according to: (a) duration, the length of time a demand is considered taxing; (b) frequency, how often the demand is encountered; (c) intensity, the strength of the stressful nature of the demand; (d) context, the situation in which the demand is encountered; and (e) predictability, the extent to which the demand can be anticipated by the individual (Crocker, Tamminen, & Gaudreau, 2015).

After encountering a demand, the Transactional Model suggests that an individual will engage in a process of cognitive appraisals. Cognitive appraisals are evaluations of the significance of what is happening in the person-environment relationship (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). That is, appraisals distinguish what is stressful from what is benign (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Rather than an environment or a demand being inherently 'good' or 'bad', an individual's experience of that environment as positive or negative depends on their interpretation of it. For example, one parent could appraise their child going abroad to compete as a stressor, for example due to their fear that the child will suffer from homesickness. Another parent could however appraise the same situation as an excellent opportunity for their child to gain valuable competitive experience. The Transactional Model distinguishes between two types of appraisals: primary and secondary (Lazarus, 1993, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Primary appraisals assess the personally threatening tendency of a demand. These appraisals involve the individual evaluating the personal significance of a stressor in

relation to their values, personal beliefs, situational intentions, and goal commitments (Lazarus, & Folkman, 1984). There are three types of primary appraisal: (a) irrelevant, the individual evaluates the situation as non-threatening to their values and/or goals; (b) benign, the individual appraises the situation as positive for their wellbeing; or (c) condition of stress, whereby the individual believes that the demand exceeds their coping resources and endangers their wellbeing (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). There are three further types of appraisal in the stressful condition (Lazarus, 1991). These are: (a) threat, which refers to anticipated damage that may occur in the future; (b) harm/loss, which refers to damage that has already occurred; and (c) challenge, which is concerned with a demanding situation that can be overcome by the individual (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Appraisals of a condition of stress require the deployment of a coping strategy to manage the stressor at hand (Lazarus, 1999).

Secondary appraisals occur after an individual has evaluated a stressor as harmful, threatening, or challenging through primary appraisals (Lazarus, 1999). These resultant appraisals undertake an assessment of the individual's coping resources to minimise, tolerate, or eradicate the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Secondary appraisals therefore form the cognitive underpinnings for coping (Lazarus, 1999).

Coping is achieved through ongoing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage demands appraised as overwhelming (Lazarus, 1993). Coping is a complex process that seeks to alter a stressor or how a stressor is interpreted in order to make it appear more favourable to the individual (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It is therefore a critical process for successful stress regulation and adaptation. Coping has the potential to influence outcomes such as athletic performance, mental health, and quality of life (Crocker et al., 2015; Ntoumanis, Edmunds, & Duda, 2009). Conversely, failing to cope with stressors often evokes negative emotional and behavioural reactions that can be detrimental to performance and wellbeing (Neil, Fletcher, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2007).

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping separates coping into two broad functions: problem-focused and emotion-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Problem-focused coping strategies aim to manage and/or alter the stressor at hand. Within sport, these strategies include behaviours such as goal setting, problem solving, time management, and information gathering (Levy, Nicholls, Marchant, & Polman, 2009). Emotion-focused coping strategies regulate the emotional distress resulting from demands but do not attempt to change the actual stressor. Examples of emotion-focussed strategies used in sport include deep breathing, visualisation, and acceptance (Holt & Hogg, 2002; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Nicholls, Hemmings, & Clough, 2010).

An additional higher-order category of coping is avoidance coping. Avoidance coping involves the individual mentally and/or physically disengaging from the stressor (Holt & Hogg, 2002; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Avoidance strategies include denial, withdrawal, and behavioural disengagement (Gutiérrez Doña, 2002). Avoidance coping is generally considered to be the least effective coping strategy due to its association with various maladaptive outcomes, including reduced quality of life, general distress, and the amplification of future problems (Holahan, Moos, & Schaefer, 1996).

Individuals select which coping strategy or strategies to employ according to a range of factors. Personal factors such as self-efficacy, motivational orientations, and personal goals can affect what coping strategy or strategies an individual chooses to adopt (Crocker et al., 2015; Lazarus, 1993). For example, in their survey of over 300 athletes, Nicholls et al. (2010) reported that higher global self-efficacy scores were significantly associated with the use of problem-focused coping strategies as opposed to emotion-focused or avoidance-based strategies. The nature of the stressor encountered by the individual can also determine what coping strategy or strategies are employed. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed the 'goodness of fit' model to predict what coping strategies might be utilised in response to particular stressors. They proposed that controllable or modifiable stressors are likely to give rise to

problem-focused coping. Conversely, stressors that cannot be changed by the individual will usually lead to emotion-focused coping.

The Transactional Model emphasises that coping is a constantly changing, contextual process. An individual may therefore rely on certain strategies at different times during a stressful encounter, or from one situation to another (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Most coping strategies are thus neither inherently effective nor ineffective; coping strategies can be effective in one situation and ineffective in another, or effective at one point in a situation and ineffective at another time point in the same environment (Lazarus, 1999). Researchers have, however, typically found that some forms of coping are more effective than others. For example, problem-focused coping in particular has been recognised as more effective over and above emotion-focused and avoidance coping (e.g., Yi, Smith, & Vitaliano, 2005).

Nonetheless, listing the coping strategies employed in sport does not indicate how well individuals cope with the demands they encounter. There is a fundamental distinction between coping efforts and coping effectiveness, "even though a person may deploy a coping strategy, it does not automatically follow that negative emotions related to the perceived stressor will be alleviated and that the strategy is therefore effective" (Nicholls, Holt, Polman, & Bloomfield, 2006, p. 315). Research indicates that employing a range of strategies to cope with a stressor (Hadd & Crocker, 2007; Holt, Black, & Tamminen, 2007), utilising problem-focused coping strategies (Yi et al., 2005), steering clear of avoidance-based strategies (Holt et al., 2007; Yi et al., 2005), and practicing coping skills (Holt et al., 2007) will likely lead to more effective coping. Tamminen and Holt (2010a) also suggested that anticipating stressors and what strategies to deploy to cope with them may lead to more effective coping than employing a more reactive approach to stressors as they are encountered.

Research Aims

Parents evidently experience numerous stressors in the youth sport environment. These stressors stem from organisational, competition, and developmental sources

(Harwood & Knight, 2009a). Research has not yet examined the strategies that parents use to cope with these stressors. Scholars have called for this gap in the literature to be addressed (e.g., Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Holt & Knight, 2014). Understanding parental coping in sport is essential to improving the experiences of both parents and children. Parental stress is suggested to cause negative parent behaviours such as parental pressure, which in turn has been related to increases in child anxiety and reductions in enjoyment, perceived competence, and autonomy (e.g., Harwood & Knight, 2015; Leff & Hoyle, 1995). The present study sought to understand how parents of elite youth gymnasts cope with the stressors they experience as a consequence of their children's involvement in youth sport, and consequently address three key research questions:

1. What stressors do parents of elite youth gymnasts encounter?
2. What strategies do these parents employ to cope with these demands?
3. What further assistance do parents require to enhance their ability to cope?

Method

Methodology and Philosophical Underpinnings

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed in this study to facilitate an in-depth understanding of parents' experiences. Conceptualised by Smith (1996), IPA aims to explore in detail how participants make sense of their personal and social worlds, and the meanings that particular experiences, events, and states hold for them (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Further, IPA is "particularly suitable when one is interested in complexity or process or where an issue is personal" (Kay & Kingston, 2002, p. 171). IPA was therefore an appropriate choice for this study because parental involvement in youth sport is highly complicated, and the stress process is both individual and subjective (Lazarus, 2000).

The theoretical underpinnings of the IPA approach are idiographic, phenomenological, and interpretative (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). From an idiographic perspective, IPA encourages researchers to value each participant's story on its own rather than adopting an overarching view of all the accounts. This produces an in-depth understanding of individual experiences that, in the present study, facilitated a rich understanding of the stressors experienced by parents and how they cope with these stressors. Phenomenology is concerned with retaining participants' perspectives on their worlds, and what it is like to be involved in these worlds. The phenomenological principle of IPA enabled participants' stories of their unique experiences to remain salient; rich descriptions could be gathered from the perspectives of participants so that their viewpoints and experiences were well understood.

Finally, the interpretative element of IPA concerns the researcher's centrality to the research process. That is, rather than simply describing participants' experiences, the researcher attempts to understand participants' experiences, while the participants themselves are attempting to do the same (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Thus, the interpretative stage of IPA produces a double hermeneutic, whereby two processes of interpretation occur. Although the researcher must listen closely to what

participants are saying, their interpretations do not necessarily have to conform to participants' accounts (Kidder & Fine, 1997). Instead, the researcher seeks to go beyond a description of the data (i.e., simply describing what the participants said) in order to produce a detailed account grounded in psychological concepts and terminology.

The selection of the IPA approach grounded this study in the interpretive paradigm, which aims to understand the complex world of human experience and behaviour (Krauss, 2005). Interpretivism posits that there is no single reality that can be objectively accessed and known for what it is (Smith & Sparkes, 2008). Instead, individuals experience different realities from their unique points of view that can only be accessed indirectly by speaking to people. These subjective realities are influenced by past experiences, personality, perceptions, interactions, and the social environment (Ponterotto, 2005). Multiple, constantly changing, and constructed realities are therefore perceived to exist. Within the interpretivist perspective, knowledge is established through the researcher's interactions with participants. The interpretivist researcher is therefore viewed as "a co-constructor of meaning," interlocked with participants in such a way that the findings of the investigation are a joint creation (Morrow, 2005, p. 254; Ponterotto, 2005).

Participants

The sample consisted of seven parents (5 mothers and 2 fathers), all of whom volunteered to take part in the study. The parents were recruited via purposeful sampling through the national governing body for gymnastics. The parents were aged 30-50 years (average age 44.67 years). Five had household incomes of £75,000-£100,000 per annum, one had a household income of £100,000 or above per annum, and one did not provide financial information. It is worth noting that small sample sizes are expected in IPA studies because smaller samples facilitate the collection of richer, more in-depth data from the perspectives of participants (Collins & Nicolson, 2002).

The participants were parents of six gymnasts (five girls and one boy) in mid to late adolescence (average age 12.5 years) who competed at national and/or international level, and had been participating in gymnastics for up to 10 years (average 5.83 years involvement) at the time of interview. It was important to recruit parents of children within the specified age range, who competed at a high level, to ensure that the duration and intensity of parents' involvement in gymnastics rendered them able to draw upon a plethora of experiences during the interview process. It was anticipated that, due to the length of time and level of their involvement, these participants would have had the opportunity to develop coping strategies in youth gymnastics.

Data Collection

Following receipt of University Ethics Board approval, participant recruitment commenced. The research team contacted the national governing body for gymnastics to obtain their support for the study. After this consent had been given by the organisation, the research team contacted the governing body to ask for approval to talk to parents of their elite athletes. The governing body were asked to share the information letter with potential parents or to seek approval from parents to pass on their information to the research team, who would then contact them directly. The governing body gained approval to share the contact information with the research team from 16 parents who met the sampling criterial. The lead research then sent each potential participant an email that provided an overview of the study and ended with an invitation to contact the research team via email to express interest in participating. The information letter for the study was also attached to this original email. Seven parents responded individually to the invitation to participate. The lead researcher then liaised individually with these seven parents via email in order to organise a convenient time and place to meet with each parent. Each participant was interviewed individually except for two parents, whose first interview was conducted together. These two parents were a married couple who felt more comfortable speaking about their experiences together.

Prior to starting data collection, two pilot interviews were conducted with parents of youth athletes who had similar characteristics to the participants of the main study. The purpose of these pilot interviews was to provide an opportunity to become familiar with the interview guide and to ensure this guide was appropriate for answering the research questions (Smith et al., 2009). After the pilot interviews had been conducted, the research team debriefed, and adjustments were made to the wording and ordering of some questions. For example, the first question was changed from, "how is your child enjoying their gymnastics participation?" to, "how has it been for you being a gymnastics parent?" An interview prompt, in the form of a diagram depicting the stress process (Appendix A), was also introduced as a consequence of the pilot interviews. Both of these modifications were implemented in an attempt to encourage the parents to speak about the strategies they used to cope with the stressors they experienced, rather than focusing solely on the stressors reported.

Semi-structured interviews. Interviews were employed as the tool for data collection due to their ability to elicit rich data on sensitive issues involving emotions, experiences, and feelings (Denscombe, 1998). Semi-structured interviews are considered the ideal data collection method in IPA because they facilitate the collection of rich data from the perspectives of the "encultured informants" (Spradley, 1979, p.47). Interviewing therefore emphasises the phenomenological component of IPA.

Before each interview commenced, participants were asked to provide informed consent (Appendix B) and complete a short demographic questionnaire (Appendix C). After their first interviews, parents were invited to participate in follow-up interviews to elaborate on points of interest and/or address any unanswered questions. Four of the seven participants accepted this offer. On average, the first interviews lasted 57.75min (22.58min – 130.51min), whereas the average duration of the second interviews was 39.71min (27.01min – 61.82min).

An interview guide (Appendix D) was created based on the guidelines set out by Rubin and Rubin (2012) and previous research conducted in this area (e.g., Knight & Holt, 2013b). This guide provided the interviewer with an order of specific questions to ask, however the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for changes in questions to occur in response to any emerging and/or interesting themes (Silverman, 2013). Each interview began with introductory questions that focused on how their parents' children had become involved in gymnastics and how they were performing in it, for example, "how did your child first get involved in gymnastics?" These introductory questions sought to establish rapport with the participants and put them at ease. The interview then moved on to transition questions that aimed to build the main structure of the interview by directing the questions towards the topic of parent stressors and coping. An example of a transition question was, "what are the causes of any stress you experience due to gymnastics?" Main questions followed, which asked about specific stressors and attempted to link these stressors to particular coping strategies. Examples of probes were also included within the interview guide to develop answers that required elaboration and/or clarification (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Finally, parents were asked summary questions that reviewed their experiences, provided the opportunity for any final comments, and prepared parents for the end of the discussion. At the conclusion of each interview, every parent was thanked for their participation and asked if they had any further questions or stories to tell.

Data Analysis

IPA, while being a well-established and respected analytic technique, should be viewed as an approach rather than a specific procedure of data analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Indeed, it has no prescriptive methodology and not all researchers carry out IPA studies in the same way. Using the guidelines set out by Smith and Osborn (2003), the following steps were undertaken to derive meaning from the interview data. It is important to note that data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection to ensure immersion within the data. This concurrent nature strengthened the quality of the data because the participants' stories, told in the interviews, remained salient during the analysis phase (Smith, 1996).

The audio files from each interview were transcribed as soon as possible following every interview. Pseudonyms were assigned to each of the participants and any identifying information was removed to ensure confidentiality. Next, the idiographic process of data analysis began, starting with several close readings of a single transcript to increase familiarity with the data. Annotations of aspects considered meaningful, important, and/or interesting were made in the left hand margin. These descriptive comments produced an overall narrative to each transcript, forming the phenomenological stage of the analysis, wherein the participants' accounts remain central. During this stage, an attempt was made to temporarily "bracket" (to set aside) presuppositions and critical judgements in order to focus on what was actually present in the data (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 131). This was achieved primarily through reflexive journaling.

Following this phenomenological stage of analysis, the transcript was revisited, and the interpretative stage commenced in the right hand margin. During this phase, the initial notations were transformed into concise phrases that aimed to summarise the essential quality of what was found in the passage, but with a higher level of abstraction and psychological terminology than the phenomenological stage (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This process involved interpreting what the initial notes could mean in relation to higher-level ideas. As a result, "the interpretation may well move away from the original text of the participant" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 90). That is, through interpreting the parents' accounts, abstract ideas arose that uncovered hidden meanings within the data, not explicitly stated by the participants. For example, the initial notation of 'child supported by coach' was developed into 'child ability to cope,' and then 'parent ability to detach'.

The next step was to connect the themes. Themes were initially listed chronologically as they appeared in the data. A more theoretical ordering was then undertaken, whereby themes were clustered together if they expressed similar ideas. Overarching terms that were deemed to summarise the nature of the theme as a whole were named 'superordinate' themes. For example 'parent able to detach' was

elevated to become a superordinate theme, encompassing 'child ability to cope', 'sharing the parental role', and 'maintaining a balance' (Smith & Osborn, 2003). A coherent table of themes was then designed. This table illustrated where in the scripts each theme could be found and included meaningful quotes to ensure it was clear that the interpretations were grounded in the participant's account.

This process of reading a transcript, making initial notations, and formulating themes, was started afresh for each interview transcript, resulting in numerous tables of various themes that had arisen from each individual interview. After each interview had been analysed in this way, the tables were examined for convergences and divergences across participants. Where possible, themes were merged if they expressed similar ideas; others were removed completely if they were perceived to lack meaning in comparison to others. The relative importance of each theme was decided not simply upon prevalence in the data but also the richness of data passages and how the theme helped illustrate other aspects of the account. Once all the themes had been confirmed, a final table was produced (Appendix E), which contained all the themes, a description of each, and example participant quotations.

The final stage of the data analysis involved translating the themes into a narrative account in order to present the findings. This began immediately following the conclusion of the aforementioned data analysis steps to ensure momentum. It became apparent during the writing process that data analysis continued during this phase as themes were refined and adapted.

Methodological Rigour

In recent years, there has been much discussion amongst researchers regarding the strategies employed to assess the quality of qualitative work (e.g., Sparkes & Smith, 2009; Tracy, 2010). Yardley (2000) suggested four broad principles that can act as criteria for good qualitative work, which have been adopted, applied, and recognised as essential within IPA by Smith et al. (2009). These criteria are: (a) sensitivity to context, (b) commitment and rigour, (c) transparency and coherence, and (d) impact and importance. Numerous strategies (detailed below) were utilised in this project,

aimed at meeting these four criteria in an attempt to produce high-quality qualitative work.

First, two pilot interviews with parents of children of a similar age to those in the study were conducted prior to the commencement of data collection. This piloting provided an opportunity to ensure the questions were understandable, suitable for the sample, and led to information-rich responses to the research questions. As a result of this piloting, the wording of several questions was altered slightly to ensure they were easier to understand, an interview prompt (Appendix A) was introduced to emphasise the link between stressors and coping strategies, and follow up interviews were implemented to enable unanswered questions and/or points of interest to be addressed. The pilot interviews also provided a chance to practice using the specific interview guide before the actual interviews began. Piloting therefore reduced the potential for interviews to deviate and increased the trustworthiness of the results.

Second, the same interviewer conducted all the interviews. This consistency ensured the nature of the interview, and in particular the delivery of questions, was kept relatively constant across all parents. Further, the interviewer's contextual understanding from prior experience within youth gymnastics and previous interviews helped to establish rapport with the participants. The lead researcher had been involved in gymnastics at a high level as a child, but had been forced to withdraw due to problems associated with injuries and financial demands. This gave her a good level of contextual understanding regarding the demands that young people, and to an extent also their parents, experience in youth gymnastics, alongside the terminology, structure, and processes involved in the youth gymnastics culture. Thus, maintaining interviewer consistency fulfilled the needs for commitment and rigour, impact and importance, and sensitivity to context. Additionally, in-depth interviewing was used to elicit rich, meaningful, and expressive data. In this way, a more complete picture of parents' coping experiences was presented. Follow-up interviews were also offered to each participant to provide an opportunity for more in-depth data to be collected. These second interviews addressed unanswered questions and points of interest from the first interviews, and also gave participants

the opportunity to present new ideas or aspects of their experiences, after a process of reflection following their first interviews. As a consequence, the requirements of sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, and impact and importance, were fulfilled.

Third, an audit/data trail was maintained during the data analysis process that illustrated the analytical decisions that were made as the raw data units were transformed into the final interpretative superordinate themes. For example, the superordinate theme of 'detaching' arose from comments in the right hand margins of the transcripts, including 'sharing the parent role', 'child ability to cope', and 'child support network'. These themes were then defined, deemed to tap into the same overarching theme, and connected. This process also facilitated researcher reflexivity by emphasising reflection on the decisions that had been made, with personal biases in mind. This met the need for transparency and coherence in the research process.

Fourth, throughout the duration of this project a reflective journal was kept, which documented emerging ideas, challenges encountered, and acknowledged values that might have affect the research. In this way, attempts to "bracket", or set aside, researcher biases were made (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 131). Reflective journaling aimed to identify and remove these biases from the study. Journaling therefore assisted in meeting the criteria of sensitivity to context, transparency and coherence, and commitment and rigour.

Finally, after each transcript had been analysed, but before the results were written, each theme was discussed with a critical friend who sought to gain clarification and question thinking regarding different ideas. As a consequence of these discussions, certain interpretations were refined, having concluded that they were not as abstract or developed as they could have been. Such conversations continued during the writing phase of the analysis, further refining the themes. The needs for commitment and rigour, and transparency and coherence, were therefore addressed.

Results

All the parents reported experiencing a variety of demands as a consequence of their children's involvement in gymnastics. The parents consequently employed a wide range of coping strategies in order to manage these demands. This chapter presents an overview of the participants, the stressors they experienced, and an analysis of the coping strategies utilised. Parents' recommendations for how the sport governing body could facilitate enhanced parental coping are also discussed towards the conclusion of this section. Although the parents reflected on past experiences during their interviews, it is important to note that their stories described the meanings these experiences held at the point of interview (Papathomas & Lavallee, 2010). Factors affecting these accounts included subsequent experiences, narrative resources, and motivations at the point of interview (Riessman, 2008).

Participants

In line with the IPA approach, individual idiographic profiles were created for each individual parent. However, due to concerns regarding deductive disclosure, a decision was made not to include these profiles within this thesis. Key information about the group of parents is provided as an alternative. This summary has been compiled from the demographic information and narratives provided by the participants in their interviews.

- All of the parents were married or had long-term partners, thus all the children were being raised in two-parent households.
- All of the parents had several children, the majority of whom were also involved in youth sport in activities such as football, gymnastics, and golf.
- All of the parents were employed full-time, in a variety of occupations.

Gymnasts. The parents represented six gymnasts (female and male), who participated in rhythmic or artistic gymnastics. They all competed at national or international level in their respective disciplines. All of the gymnasts trained for over 20 hours per week and competed at least seven times per year, ranging up to 12 times per year. The children had been involved in gymnastics for up to ten years.

Stressors

The parents reported that they encountered numerous stressors as a consequence of their children's involvement in gymnastics. As Sofia explained, "well everything's difficult. Not wanting to sound negative, but yeah". Stressors were categorised as emanating from competitive, organisational, and developmental sources. The most frequent and intense stressors reported by the parents included level of competition, time and travel demands, child injury, child nutritional habits, children's behaviours related to gymnastics, and managing educational demands.

Competitive stressors. Competitive demands were parental stressors associated with a child's participation in competitions. The parents reported competitive stressors including their children's anxiety, the level of competition, the duration of competitions, and watching their children perform. For example, long competitions resulted in parents sitting in venues for up to eight hours per day, yet their children usually only competed for an accumulated time of ten minutes. Parents often had to remain at competitions until their conclusion in order to hear the final results. Philip explained how the length of the competition day, and short duration of his daughter's performances, presented a competitive stressor, "I suppose [a stressor is] being stuck in a gym on a competition day for seven hours when she's on or about nine minutes of the day with her three routines".

All of the parents also reported watching their children compete as a stress. As a consequence of watching their children, parents often experienced nerves that manifested in behaviours such as trembling, crying, and nausea. As Sofia explained, "I get nervous but I try not to show. It it's like 'hold me I'm fainting!' I feel really you know like nervous and I feel sick and all the rest of it". Parents did not appear to cope well with this stressor, for example Emma reported how she struggles on competition days:

> I don't eat the whole day, I can't literally swallow anything, I can't eat, I can't drink, um and I distance myself from [John] because I can't act

> normally and I know that will then stress him out so I just literally, and there is no way of, I'm just bad. I'm just bad all day.

These behaviours caused interpersonal issues between Emma and John at competitions, which acted as a further stressor for them both. John reported that he employed humour to cope when watching his daughter compete, in addition to the behaviours exhibited by his wife. However, John's use of humour as a coping strategy acted as a further stressor for Emma:

> John: Emma ignores me when I'm there.
>
> Emma: Yeah, because he's so light hearted and tries to make a joke about it, I can't deal with that.

As Emma and John's experience suggests, parents' coping efforts presented further stressors for parents in sport, particularly within their interpersonal relationships.

The parents recognised that their children's anxiety presented a parental stressor because parents wanted to reduce or prevent negative experiences for their children. Philip explained:

> She's only been upset a few times, but then she gets very, very nervous, [daughter] does before she goes on. Which, that sort of worries me, not worries me, but that affects me as well. Because you're looking at them and you can tell.

Parents explained that they often experienced negative interactions with their children as a consequence of their children's experiences of anxiety. Anne described how her daughter's pre-competition anxiety caused her to "snap" at her mother in the car:

> She'll turn around and say "don't say anything to me. Don't talk to me". So I don't say nothing. You just think "right ok, just be quiet and say nothing". So we could be going over in the car in absolute silence and like the worse thing I can say to her is "ok, are you alright?" And she can turn and snap and bite your head off.

Negative interactions between parents and children were therefore an additional stressor for parents associated with competitions.

Another stressor recalled by parents was related to their attempts to keep siblings happy at competitions. Anne explained that her son could not understand why he had to remain at a competition for the whole day, instead of leaving after his sister had finished her routines. Consequently, Anne struggled to keep him occupied and avoid negative interactions with him:

> To him it was boring. I mean, because he's come to see his sister and once she's been on, that's it. He wants to go home then. They don't understand that they have to stay to watch everybody else, they have to wait 'til the very end.

Parents therefore reported stressors associated not only with their children who were competing, but also with their siblings who struggled to manage their feelings of boredom and frustration at competitions.

Organisational stressors. Organisational stressors involved demands related to the logistics, personal sacrifices, and systems in which parents operated. Most of the stressors that the parents reported derived from organisational sources. These demands included finances, time and travel arrangements, child nutritional habits, child injury, the behaviours of other gymnastics parents, and a lack of gymnastics knowledge.

All the parents reported experiencing stressors associated with time and travel demands, including transporting their children to training and competitions, encountering traffic, and restrictions on their family, social, and exercise time. For example, Diana struggled to transport her daughter to training sessions, in part because she could not rely on her family to help her:

> Because trying to find transport, you can't, I mean my parents are elderly, my in-laws are elderly, you know you can't be relying on people to run them round all the time... when this training programme started, when she increased her hours it was like "oh my god, how am I going to do that?"

All of the parents also cited a lack of family time as a stressor. For example, Emma and John explained how they were constantly "clock watching" when they went out together because they knew that they would soon be required to pick their daughter

up from or drop her off to her gymnastics commitments. Liz also explained how her family rarely spent time together:

> I think where it's harder is where we don't go away on as many weekends because that's missing a whole weekend chunk. You know, we don't go away and do as many family weekend things and if you do, you have that guilt because he's not training.

For many parents, the stressor of a lack of family time was exacerbated by negative experiences of not being able to book holidays. Parents often struggled to schedule holidays due to their children's intense training schedules and not knowing exactly when competitions will be held. As Emma and John explained:

> Emma: Holidays, oh god, trying to book holiday.
>
> John: I have a major issue with it.
>
> Emma: It is a nightmare…
>
> John: So we booked a holiday around British training and they changed their schedule. I had to rebook the holiday, cost me more money, you know, and I did, I hit the roof didn't I?

Changing holidays to fit around gymnastics also produced a financial stressor for parents. Gym fees, subscriptions to the sport governing body, injury tape, wrist guards, leotards, medical expenses, travelling to competitions, and paying for hotel accommodation presented further demands on parents' finances. John explained how, "we're not skint and it's still a massive financial burden". Philip expressed his surprise at how expensive gymnastics was:

> The biggest thing, if anything, is the, what I was unaware of, is the financial cost. As a whole, because there's things like leotards, I never had any idea they would be as much as that, I thought £100 or something for a nice one. But the nice ones you're starting at £300 to £350 now, and then if you want all the things sewn on then it just starts going up and up and up.

Parents therefore experienced substantial demands on their finances from a range of sources associated with gymnastics.

Injury presented an additional stressor for parents. Liz's fear of her son becoming injured was twofold. On the one hand, she feared her son sustaining an injury within gymnastics. On the other hand, she was scared of him getting hurt outside of gymnastics:

> It's sort of on two levels because obviously it's, by the nature of what we do, and he's 14 now so he's doing some quite scary stuff. Um. So on the one hand it's that you don't want him to have that fall and have sort of a really nasty injury. But on another level it's you don't want him to get a knock or a break or something that the average child you'd think "oh well, it comes with the territory, it's to be expected" because you're so conscious of having time out.

Liz therefore feared injury (and recalled it as a stressor) not only because of the pain her child would endure, but also because of the length of time it would take him to be physically ready to compete.

The parents reported interpersonal difficulties within gymnastics as a stressor. Negative interactions occurred most frequently between parents and coaches, other gymnastics parents, and their own children. Most of the parents suggested that they had good interpersonal relationships with their children's coaches. However, Anne explained that her daughter and her daughter's coach often experienced conflict, "she does clash with her coach, they both – the same temperament and they're both stubborn, strong willed, determined, and neither will give in to the other. And that I find difficult sometimes to cope with". Further, Anne reported, "there can be a lot of bitchiness amongst parents, a lot of tension among parents, competitiveness amongst parents. And I think you know, which does affect the children's performance then". Emma agreed, "it's not a nice atmosphere and it doesn't benefit me. In fact it stresses me out even more".

Parents' further reported stressors associated with their children's nutritional habits. Emma reported that she experienced demands resulting from her daughter travelling abroad without her because of how much (or how little) her daughter was being fed, "she's lost a bit of weight, she has toned up, she went down to like 37[kg] or

something when she was in [location abroad] because they were starving her". Nutritional stressors were also experienced closer to home. Diana expressed difficulties in providing appropriate nutrition to her daughter:

> You sort of Google "gymnast diet" and something, and obviously it wasn't the same because she's 12, she's growing, she's going to start going through puberty soon so it's difficult, it was really difficult. You know, am I giving her the right foods for her to grow properly? And because she was having so many fractures, she doesn't really like dairy products either. I'd make her drink a glass of milk in the morning and then she'd be heaving and I'd be thinking "oh my god, I'm doing this all wrong!"

Finally, the parents' lack of gymnastics knowledge presented another organisational stressor. This lack of understanding impacted upon parents' interactions with their children in particular. For example, Philip explained that he "struggles with the terminology of gymnastics" and Anne reported that, "there's like lots of different moves and we don't know. So she'll say 'how was my such and such?' and I have no clue so I just say it looked lovely". Parents' lack of knowledge appeared to make them feel disconnected from their children's experiences and from the gymnastics context on the whole.

The demands that arose from parents' lack of gymnastics knowledge were furthered by a perceived lack of information from the sport governing body. John discussed how a lack of planning or information from the sport governing body acted as a stressor:

> The gym world is selfish, people phone you up and say can [name of child] go down to [venue] this weekend, four days after Christmas. Emma was like "yes, of course". I'm sitting there thinking "fucking taking the piss". You know, but that's the expectation... but you've seen the training schedule, that's an elite athlete. You can't go phoning somebody up the day before saying training has changed, it's now the other side of the country. It's not fair.

These last-minute arrangements were often financially draining for the parents. For example, late notice about competition dates prevented Anne from booking her hotel accommodation sooner. She therefore incurred increased prices, in addition to the difficulties caused by having to make last minute travel arrangements:

> It'll be "oh yeah, this competition next week". "Oh what time?" "Oh I don't know yet". And they let you know on the Thursday or something like that and you're stressed and you can't book hotels and everything's booked up.

A lack of information therefore negatively impacted on parents' interactions with their children, time and travel arrangements, and finances.

Developmental stressors. This category of stressors contains demands associated specifically with a child's development. The parents reported experiencing various developmental stressors including their children's potential to progress in sport, children's behaviour related to gymnastics, managing educational demands, level of child coping, level of opportunity to engage in social activities away from gymnastics, and child behaviours pertaining to the expectations on them from within the sport. For example, Sofia expressed her concerns about her daughter's future in gymnastics, "I'm conscious that there will come a year where she's not able to do it anymore". Philip also described how he worried about his daughter's future and related these concerns to his fear of child injury:

> But that's my only concern because I know, I mean, you mentioned it yourself, you had an injury. Now if she doesn't keep up where she is, she'll be dropped like that. So to me, you could give up all your education, go into this sport and you're doing really, really well and you have an injury or something, boomph, that's it.

Philip therefore wanted to ensure that his daughter still valued education because he was concerned that an injury could render her unable to compete in gymnastics in the future.

Despite his intentions, Philip encountered challenges in balancing educational demands with gymnastics. He reported several difficulties in managing his daughter's schooling. These stressors ranged from ensuring his daughter did her

schoolwork, getting absences approved from her current school, and negotiating a training schedule with her future school. He explained:

> My only worry is when she goes to the big school, will they be, will they sort of accommodate what we really want or will they expect us to move around, that's when it is you must be there, or she'll have to do it outside of school and get lecturers and people like this and help, which I don't really want, I'd rather you have the time in school.

Anne, Emma, and John cited their daughters' behaviours related to with gymnastics as a further stressor. These parents were often unable to escape from gymnastics due to the "obsession" on the part of their children. For instance, Anne's inability to escape gymnastics acted as a stressor:

> They can't walk, even in a supermarket. She has to do the cartwheel or do handstand walks. You know, I've been in H&M and I've just seen feet you know, because she's doing the handstand walk. And I don't think, I don't know if they don't realise it. She just can't snap out of it. Not at all. You know, it's like an obsession.

The parents further explained that their children's opportunities to engage in social activities away from gymnastics acted as a stressor. The parents expressed concerns that their children's participation in gymnastics caused them to miss out on "normal" social opportunities. For example, many of the parents reported that their children frequently declined invitations to social occasions because of training and/or competition commitments. Emma explained:

> The other thing that stresses me is that she has very few friends in school because she has to remove herself so often, I mean it's not as if she hasn't got any friends, she just doesn't have any close friends.

Finally, the parents perceived that their children experienced considerable pressure to succeed. Consequently, the level of child coping to manage this pressure acted as a further developmental stressor. Emma and John explained this demand by highlighting the unique demands of gymnasts compared with other sports:

> John: As a rugby player you reach your peak at 25, 26, 27, whereas as a gymnast, you're already 10 years too old to be competing at that point. [name of child] is currently I suppose where you would be as an 18-, 19-year old rugby player. And she's only 12, so she's having to deal with those pressures way, way before [her time]...
>
> Emma: It's a stupid age to be an elite athlete.

The children's behaviours pertaining to the expectations on them from within the sport therefore acted as a stressor for parents, not least because they perceived that their children were so young to be competing at an elite level.

Coping Strategies

Parents reported encountering numerous stressors derived from a range of sources within elite youth gymnastics. Several strategies were reported to be employed to cope with these stressors. These strategies are discussed within four superordinate themes: (a) detaching from gymnastics, (b) normalising experiences, (c) willingness to learn, and (d) managing emotional reactions.

Detaching from gymnastics. One of the main strategies parents utilised to cope with the stressors associated with gymnastics was by detaching. Detaching was evident through parents' implicit and explicit suggestions that they withdrew from gymnastics to avoid becoming consumed by it, or overwhelmed by the demands associated with their children's involvement. As Diana explained:

> Yeah I mean I don't get very involved, I know nothing about gymnastics, I'm not a gymnastics coach... and you know, the coach has got a good relationship with all the girls, she wants the best out of them, and I just trust her to deal with it.

Detaching appeared beneficial for parents because it reduced the intensity of stressors and the frequency of encounters. Although parents used detaching to manage a variety of demands, the most apparent were time and travel demands, child injuries, schooling, and their child missing out on "normal" life experiences. Parents' abilities to detach appeared to be facilitated by: (a) sharing parental responsibilities, (b) child ability to cope, and (c) maintaining a balance.

Sharing parental responsibilities. To manage demands such as schooling, child injury, and transportation, the parents shared some of their parental responsibilities with others. Examples of these responsibilities included transporting children, financing their gymnastics involvement, and providing emotional support. In sharing these tasks, the parents were able to detach from gymnastics because they were confident their responsibilities were being fulfilled. For example, in order to cope with the demand of transporting their child to training and competitions, the parents created a lift sharing system within their gymnastics parent communities. At Philip and Diana's club, for example, Philip often took his daughter's team to a venue, whereas Diana collected them afterwards. As Philip explained:

> When we started there, it was like how much do you want for fuel and all this, and it was like look let's just, it's pointless asking me that because I've got a company car and it's paid for by a business so I don't pay for it. But if I do this, can you do the next one? You know and we just take it in turns. And it seems to work like that.

Some coaches also provided transportation to the children, which further enabled parents to cope with the logistical demands of gymnastics.

Other members of the parents' families also shared parental tasks. Several parents relied upon their children's grandparents to assist with travel arrangements. Emma explained, "like I said, most of it is taken up with her grandfather, he does most of the running around. I do the picking up in the evenings". Further, Diana's sons supported their sister by packing her bags for school and liaising with teachers when she was absent, "her brother will do her schoolbooks for her. He likes doing it because he likes helping her. He'll say 'mum I'll do her school books' because otherwise she goes into meltdown a bit, she's tired, doesn't know what to do". This help from her sons reduced the demands Diana experienced, in particular surrounding her daughter's schooling, because she knew her daughter was well supported in balancing her educational and gymnastics pursuits.

Coaches also helped parents to step back from gymnastics by developing a close relationship with the children and providing them with much emotional support. Some of the coach-gymnast relationships were so close that coaches were viewed as part of the family, as Sofia explained, "they're past the point of being coaches, they're like – for them they are coaches and they have the image of respect and everything but they're like a family". The parents were therefore able to trust the coaches to care for their children. By providing emotional support to the children, coaches attenuated parents' concerns regarding their children not being able to cope with the pressures and demands associated with gymnastics. Anne explained, "they see the coaches more than they see us, and we've always told her if she's finding things difficult and she can't talk to me, she should talk to them". Parents were therefore able to detach because they were secure in the knowledge that their children were safe and being cared for.

It took time for the parents to develop sufficient trust in others to be able to share their parenting responsibilities with them. This appeared to be a gradual process, which some parents were only just starting to embrace. For example, during her two interviews, Liz came to understand that if she was able to reduce her involvement in her son's gymnastics, she might be able to cope more effectively with demands. She recognised that she would likely experience fewer and less intense stressors if she left gymnastics-related decisions to her son and his coach. Liz expressed her future intentions when dealing with competition demands, "should he have done his harder routine? Again, that's not down to me. That's up to him and his coach so I'm going to step back and I'm going to stay chilled". Liz therefore suggested that detaching from competitive situations might alleviate some of the anxiety and guilt that can be experienced by parents.

The sports organisation responsible for the gymnasts also helped parents to detach by sharing parental tasks, and consequently reduced some of the demands encountered by parents. For example, two of the six gymnasts received funding from the organisation and all accessed sport science support, including strength and conditioning, physiotherapy, psychology, nutrition, and medical assistance. Emma

commented on how her daughter's move into the centralised system had attenuated her concerns regarding injury in particular, "now she's here she gets everything. So she gets a massage a week, she gets physio on tap, she gets the ice... so I'm less worried about that now because I know everything is here on tap for her". By fulfilling traditional parental responsibilities of funding their children's sport involvement and attending to children's physical and psychological needs, the governing body enabled parents to cope with stressors such as child injury and financial demands.

Overall, parents generally treated their sport parent role as a "team effort". This was evident from their choice of language, for example Sofia often concluded her explanations with, "that's how *we* do it", recognising that she shared her parental tasks with others to cope with the stressors she faced. Such support was particularly important for parents who could not heavily rely on their partners for various reasons. The partner's parental role was thus also being shared with others. However, one parent found it more difficult to share her responsibilities. Emma reported that she did not have good relationships with the gymnastics parents at her club and therefore could not share her responsibilities with them. Of all the parents interviewed, Emma described the largest perceptions of stress. Such perceptions might have been related to Emma's decision to fulfil all the required gymnastics tasks alone.

Child's ability to cope. Parents relied on their own children's abilities to cope to facilitate parental detachment from gymnastics, and consequent coping with stressors. Particularly, due to their children's own coping abilities, parents felt more able to cope with stressors such as nutrition, schooling, and child injury. The parents explained that recognising their children's own ability to cope enabled them to detach because the children did not require parental intervention to manage the demands they encountered.

Parents described their children as being self-motivated, committed to their sport, understanding of expert advice, and organised. Consequently, parents perceived their

children to be capable of managing the demands they faced. For example, all of the parents explained how their child collected work and sat tests in advance when they were scheduled to miss lessons. Relying on their children to manage educational demands facilitated parental coping with stressors surrounding child schooling, including missing important work. Sofia spoke about her daughter's coping abilities:

> She is very, for her age, she is really very responsible. I mean it's like she was in school yesterday but she's not in school today so she went into school yesterday and asked for all the homework and all what she needed.

Sofia also relied upon her daughter's mature and responsible nature to get herself to and from her training sessions on the train:

> But all the other three or four trainings are in [location], about an hour from here, so she travels on her own, she gets the train. So it's like, they've got to grow up at a young age. Because other kids don't even know what it's like getting on a bus.

Given her daughter's abilities to manage different requirements, Sofia was able to cope with demands surrounding transportation and logistics, thereby reducing the need for Sofia to do so her herself. Sofia was consequently able to detach and cope with the demands she encountered.

Similarly, Diana explained that she coped with the stressor of child nutrition by relying on her daughter to manage her own eating habits. Diana reported that her daughter understood her nutritional requirements, "nutritionally she manages herself really well… she reads all the information from the dietician, she meets with her regularly, and she's really good". Thus Diana stepped back, leaving her daughter to cope with her own nutrition instead of Diana struggling to manage it, as had previously been the case.

A sense of perspective on the part of the children, particularly in relation to their sporting futures, further facilitated parental coping. For example, Emma's daughter was very aware of her future prospects and was realistic about her chances of success, "she doesn't have any sort of ideas of Olympics does she? Her main aim is Commonwealth. She wants, that's what she's going for, and after discussion, is to

get in an American Uni, scholarship, so a route". All the parents cited their children's realistic goals as facilitating their detachment from gymnastics because they were less concerned about the pressures experienced by their children to meet goals the parents deemed unlikely. Parents therefore did not feel the need to intervene to alter their children's goals or enhance their abilities to cope.

Both Diana and Sofia explained that their daughters adopted self-referenced goals, for example Diana's commented, "she sort of concentrates on herself rather than concentrating on others, so she wants to better her own scores, better her own performance". Such an approach enabled their daughters to cope with the demands of being elite athletes because they did not experience the pressures that could arise from constant comparisons to others. The parents were consequently able to cope with the stressor of child behaviours pertaining to the expectations on them from within the sport, which subsequently enabled parents to further detach from gymnastics.

A stressor often reported by the parents was their children's level of opportunity to engage in social activities away from gymnastics. The parents coped with this stressor by relying on their children to decide between social opportunities and their gymnastics commitments. For example, Anne recalled her daughter choosing not to go on a trip with her church group due to her training commitments:

> And I said, "oh, you know, do you want to go?" But she said "oh no it's fine" but she said it so matter-of-factly that I knew she was – it was her sort of like decision. Because if she'd have wanted to go, she'd have just turned around and said, "I want to go".

Because her daughter made the decision to prioritise gymnastics on her own, the onus on Anne to help her daughter choose between options or explain why she should resist peer pressure for the sake of gymnastics was eliminated. Parents therefore coped with the stressor of children missing out on other opportunities by relying on their children's independent decision-making and prioritisation of gymnastics.

Finally, parents expressed the idea that their children's support networks enhanced their own ability to detach from gymnastics. Their children's support networks included coaches, teammates, teachers, and peers. For example, Diana's daughter's school friends also participated in high-level sport, and so understood the demands that can be experienced as a result. They consequently provided a high level of support to Diana's daughter. For example, they all met up to catch up on work and arranged to spend time together outside of school when they could, as Diana explained, "luckily her school friends participate in sport as well so they know what it's like… as I say there's two girls and two boys and they do a lot of sport and they support each other as well". Diana's daughter therefore managed her schoolwork effectively and had understanding friendships. This helped Diana cope with demands regarding her daughter falling behind in school and having limited friendships outside of gymnastics.

Maintaining a balance. Many parents reported struggling to cope with the all-consuming nature of gymnastics. For example, Anne found it difficult to understand why her daughter must always be stretching, jumping, or turning. Other parents recalled similar experiences and expressed concerns about their children missing out on balanced life experiences, including school trips and friendships, due to gymnastics. As Emma explained, "there isn't any part of her life where she can just be a normal kid and that stresses me". The final sub-theme within detaching concerns the idea of parents actively resisting both them and their children being consumed by gymnastics, by encouraging and maintaining a balanced lifestyle.

The parents explained a number of strategies they employed in their attempts to give their children balanced life experiences and identities independent of gymnastics. Such strategies included Liz going against the advice of her child's coach and allowing him to go on a school skiing trip, and Emma and Anne allowing their daughters chocolate and pancakes as treats. As Emma put it, "I will allow her a treat a week because for Christ's sake she's 12 and should have a treat a week!" By encouraging their children to, at times, resist adhering to the strict gymnastics lifestyle they usually adhered to, the parents limited the impact of gymnastics on

their children's lives, and consequently their own. Parents were therefore able to cope with their fears of gymnastics taking over.

Anne in particular was very concerned by the thought of her daughter not having a balanced childhood. To cope with this fear, Anne offered alternatives to gymnastics-based activities to her daughter, who only wanted to create routines and watch gymnastics videos. Anne also admitted to "overcompensating" by spoiling her daughter during the holidays with a plethora of fun activities:

> Perhaps during the day in the holidays… and they might get an afternoon off sometime and you try to overcompensate then. Think, "alright, we can go swimming and bowling," you try to fit too much in then. So you try to fill up all your time with her.

By spoiling her child with these activities, Anne was able to cope with her fear that her daughter was "obsessed" with gymnastics.

Emma reported actively trying to increase her child's friendship circle outside of gymnastics by creating opportunities for her daughter to spend time with children from school:

> Um… so I'll say to her "what did you do at school today?" "Oh I did this". "So who were you sitting next to?" and she knows, she knows where I'm going with it… "Oh I sat next to so and so". "Do you want to invite them over…?"

By encouraging the development of non-gymnastics friendships, Emma attempted to achieve a degree of balance in her daughter's life. She was therefore able to cope with her fears of her daughter being consumed by gymnastics and consequently missing out on regular life experiences.

The parents also emphasised the need to protect other family members from the consuming nature of gymnastics. For some of the parents, ensuring their other children were not overlooked due to their sibling's achievements in gymnastics led to them being spoiled. For example, Sofia admitted to spending extra time and money to ensure her son also had opportunities to enjoy himself and spend time with his parents outside of gymnastics, "it's like half term, he went away with his dad, I

stayed here because she had to compete and do things". The language she used to describe him, "the other one", illustrates her attempts to remove him from the gymnastics world. Retaining an element of balance within their family lives facilitated parental coping with a lack of gymnastics-life balance because parents were able to reduce the perceived impact of gymnastics. By reducing the impact of gymnastics on their families, parents were able to further detach and consequently cope with the demands they encountered.

Normalising experiences. Parents attempted to normalise their gymnastics experiences, and those of their children, to cope with the stressors they encountered. That is, parents reappraised demands as normal in the context of their life histories and the histories of others. As such, they aimed to reduce the intensity of specific stressors. For example, Sofia explained that experiencing stress is normal for her in the context of her job:

> Well my life is a stress. The way that we work and we live and everything, it's quite dynamic in a way so it's like we've got to be here and then we've got to be there, we manage lots of businesses.

By reappraising stress as normal within the context of her occupational life Sofia was able to cope with the stressors associated with gymnastics, because she viewed them as less threatening.

Normalising was employed to cope with a range of stressors but the most commonly reported were child schooling, child injury, time and travel, their children's perceptions performance disappointments, and finances. For example, Philip attempted to normalise his experiences of transport demands in order to reduce the perceived impact that this stress had on his lifestyle, "I mean I live off stress in here anyway, it's a stressful environment what I do". Parents' attempts to normalise gymnastics experiences in order to cope with demands are discussed as: (a) attempts to normalise parents' own experiences and (b) attempts to normalise child experiences.

Normalising parents' own experiences. To manage stressors such as other gymnastics parents behaviours, children's experiences of anxiety, time and travel demands, and finances, parents attempted to normalise their experiences of these demands. Reappraising stressors as less intense acted as a coping strategy that reduced the impact of stressors on parents' lives. One way in which parents normalised stressors was by comparing their children's experiences to those of other gymnasts. This strategy was employed to facilitate parental coping with the stressors of child schooling, injury, and children's "obsessive" behaviours towards gymnastics in particular. For example, Diana explained how her husband had protested about how much schooling their daughter would miss due to gymnastics:

> Because my husband was like "she can't do it! Education comes first!" um but then you look at the other girls she trains with, they've also done the same thing, she's not the only child to have done it, and all the other girls were older than her and they've managed to do it, they juggle the schoolwork and gym.

Diana attempted to normalise her child missing school by making comparisons to other gymnasts. She used these comparisons as justification to her husband to allow their daughter to miss school for gymnastics.

Anne also attempted to normalise her daughter's obsession with gymnastics by comparing her behaviours to those of her teammates, "I do think that they're all the same because you see them you know, and they're all either stretching or they you know they're doing some leaps and jumps or whatever". Normalising their daughters' behaviours enabled Anne and Diana to reduce the intensity of stressors, which enhanced their perceptions of coping because fewer coping resources needed to be deployed.

The parents made further comparisons in their attempts to normalise stressors. For example, parents related their experiences to those of other parents in order to reduce the intensity of stressors including time and travel demands, financial costs, and the demands of competition. John compared his experiences to other parents when discussing the constraints on his time that arose due to his daughter's gymnastics

involvement, "it's no different to anyone else with kids, it's not as if, she's in the gym most the time, but we don't sit in gym with her". Anne also normalised her experiences at competitions by comparing them to those of other parents, "everybody's sort of going through the same emotions, the same turmoil and everything". By reappraising their experiences as normal by comparing them to other parents the parents in this study were able to reduce the perceived intensities of stressors. Again, reducing the intensity of the stressors they encountered helped parents to cope because they had to utilise fewer coping resources.

The final comparison made by the parents was between gymnastics and other sports. In order to cope with demands such as the behaviours of other gymnastics parents and their children's obsession behaviours relating to gymnastics, the parents normalised these stressors within other sports. For example, Emma and John normalised their negative experiences with other gymnastics parents as 'par for the course' within youth sport by making comparisons to other sports:

> Emma: As soon as you start hitting elite, it's very much a, "my daughter should be doing it, and your daughter only won because of this", or yeah.
> John: I wonder though if you look through any sport whether that's the case.
> Emma: I'm sure it is.
> John: Obviously your rugby dads and your football dads, your hockey dads. I bet it is.

By normalising their negative experiences, Emma and John were able to cope with the negative interactions they had with other gymnastics parents, because these interactions were perceived to have a limited impact upon their lives.

Parents further coped with stressors they encountered in gymnastics by creating routines that normalised gymnastics within their lifestyles. This strategy facilitated coping with stressors including child nutrition, time and travel demands, and child schooling. For example, at the weekend, Sofia prepared her daughter's food for the week in bulk and subdivided this into daily portions for her to eat at training or while travelling. As she explained, "you get used to living life like that, eating meals in a car and just, yeah. You get used to it".

The parent who appeared to utilise routines the most was Diana. She relied heavily on set, normalised routines, possibly because she had the highest number children, worked night shifts, and her husband lived away from the family home. She described routines that her family had in place for almost all aspects of life, for example:

> So I can now take her to gym, drop him off at the golf club, take her to gym, go and do some shopping, pick him up from the golf club, go home, put all the stuff away, prepare food, and then go back down to pick her up.

These routines made gymnastics just another part of everyday life for Diana's family. Indeed, when Diana's husband returns home from working away, he does not understand these routines. This lack of understanding often caused problems:

> He doesn't help at all really. I think it's because he works away from home as well, when he comes home he doesn't see the routines that we've got and the routine we have got seems to work pretty well.

The parents also coped with stressors such as finances, other gymnastics parents' behaviours, and time and travel by normalising their encounters with these demands within previous life experiences. Examples of these previous experiences included prior involvement in youth sport, occupational experiences, and parents' own involvement in sport. Parents were able to cope with the stressors they encountered because they had previous experience in doing so. Diana in particular utilised this coping strategy due to her extensive previous experience in youth sport. She described how she was able to manage time and travel demands by reappraising them as normal within the context of her previous experiences:

> Since they have been born they've been used to being stuck in the car and being taken to watch their siblings doing other sports. So it just, it carries on really. So for the last I don't know, about 18 years, yeah 18 years.

Parents therefore coped with stressors such as time and travel demands by normalising their encounters with these demands within the context of their previous experiences. This allowed them to employ coping strategies they had utilised previously in order to cope with these familiar demands

Normalising child experiences. By assisting their children in normalising their own experiences, the parents aimed to facilitate child coping, with competition anxiety in particular. That is, the parents conveyed to their children that the stressors they encountered were normal and thus attempted to reduce the intensity of the demands encountered by their children. For example, most of the parents reported trying to calm their children down before a competition by normalising their experiences of anxiety. Philip explained how he made comparisons to his own experiences to help his daughter cope with her pre-competition anxiety:

> But yeah, I have a chat to her before she goes on and I'll say are you nervous, "yeah, a bit". I say "well that's good, you've got to be nervous, you're nervous and everything". Because I play in a band as well. And I say, "well every time we do a gig", and I've been doing this for like 20 years, I said, "every time I go on, I'm always nervous. But it makes you play better; it makes you do what you do better".

Philip also drew on comparisons to role models in order to normalise his daughter's experiences of anxiety before a competition:

> Because it is inevitable... everybody gets nervous, I mean even [Commonwealth medallist] said to [daughter] before, she said I was nearly sick when I went on in the Commonwealth's when she won on the last routine. So yeah, it happens to everybody, you've just got to be able to cope with it.

By reducing the emphasis placed on anxiety, Phillip hoped his daughter would be able to cope with her anxiety and that subsequently he could cope more effectively at competitions.

Parents also encouraged their children to normalise their experiences of performance disappointments. For example, after she had made mistakes in a competition, Anne told her daughter that, "it happens to everybody". Further, Diana explained to her daughter that, "everyone has a bad day; everyone has a day that's not as good as they'd like it to be, move on, start again tomorrow". Parents therefore encouraged their children to view their experiences as normal because "everyone" has the same

experiences. Parents therefore sought to reduce the intensity of the demands associated with underperformance that were experienced by their children. Enhanced child coping in turn facilitated parental coping with the stressor of child inability to cope.

Parents normalised experiences of injury in their attempts to assist children's coping. Anne recalled an event in which her daughter had put her hands up to protect her face from a ball at lunchtime. This protective reflex damaged her fingers to such an extent that she was unable to train. Anne normalised her daughter's reaction as a reflex in an attempt to prevent the child blaming herself for her injury, "so I say to her 'it doesn't matter [daughter], it's a natural reaction, if something comes at you towards your face you're going to have that reaction'". Liz also attempted to normalise her son's experiences of injury by comparing his experiences to those of his teammate:

> And in fact another one of the boys, he broke his hand last weekend playing football so he's in the same situation, so he's gone to the training camp but obviously there's not much that he can do and he's going to miss the British next week. So these things, you know, these things happen.

Parents normalised their children's injury experiences by comparing their experiences to those of their teammates. Parents consequently reduced the threatening nature of the stressor of injury for their children. Children were therefore able to cope more effectively because fewer coping resources needed to be deployed. Enhanced child coping consequently facilitated parental coping with their concerns regarding their children's coping abilities.

Willingness to Learn. The parents expressed a willingness to learn in order to facilitate their coping in youth gymnastics. Parents did not pretend to be experts within gymnastics; they were open to enhancing their knowledge to enable them to cope with the stressors they encountered. Parents enhanced their knowledge by reflecting on their own experiences and by actively and passively gaining advice from others. Admitting to knowledge gaps and actively seeking to reduce these enabled the parents to cope with stressors such as child injury, child nutrition, and

the demands of competition. For example, Anne learned that her daughter would communicate with her about gymnastics if and when she wanted to, and that pushing her to do so would likely only make things worse:

> They do it when they're ready and I've learned that, and I think I've learned it the hard way sometimes! You know, and that's the reason now why I don't say nothing. I'll wait for her to say something to me, like "oh, I've been practicing such and such today" or "oh, I've been doing this, I've done that, this might be ready". And you just think "oh, well that's great". And then I'm thinking "I must remember those names to look up on YouTube later so I can see what it is!".

Through trial and error Anne had come to understand her daughter's communication patterns and that she should not disrupt these. Further, she actively sought to increase her gymnastics knowledge by researching terminology on the Internet. Anne was therefore able to cope with her lack of gymnastics knowledge and stressors arising from negative interactions with her daughter. The theme of willingness to learn is discussed as two subthemes: (a) learning from others, and (b) learning from their own experiences.

Learning from others. The parents took advice from others in order to cope with the stressors they encountered in gymnastics. These 'experts' included other gymnastics parents, physiotherapists, nutritionists, doctors, and the parents' own children. These sources of information helped the parents cope with stressors such as parental experiences of blame, child injury, and child nutrition.

Other gymnastics parents were a source of much information for many of the parents. For example, Philip explained how he sought advice from other gymnastics parents regarding how best to resolve issues with his daughter's school, which he described as his biggest concern:

> They're [other parents] the first people I would go to with any, you know, "how do you get on with your school with this?" Yeah I always ask them first, and the coaches are there, they're always, if I've needed it and because I'm not very good with the terminology of the gymnastics.

Philip was willing to seek help from others in order to enhance his knowledge. He was therefore able to cope with the stressor of child schooling because he had sought advice on what he should do to solve the problem he faced. Further, he actively increased his knowledge of gymnastics terminology by learning from his daughter's coaches, which enabled him to cope with the stressor of lack of gymnastics knowledge.

Diana also recognised that other gymnastics parents helped her cope with her lack of gymnastics knowledge through the provision of advice:

> One of the girls [my daughter] is going away with next week, we were just talking about size of tracksuit and where to sew the badge onto and which arm and how far away... you know, and I didn't know that so she shared that information with me.

Diana turned to other gymnastics parents for advice, which she had never done in any of the other sports she had been involved in. The advice she gained enabled her to cope with the stressor of lack of gymnastics knowledge by directly reducing this knowledge gap.

Many of the parents recognised that their children were experts within gymnastics and that they could consequently learn a lot from them. For example, Anne struggled to understand why some gymnasts performed certain moves at a competition and why her daughter did not:

> But of course when you come to competitions, you're watching different things. And you'll say, "well why aren't you doing that? If she can do that, why aren't you doing that?" And she'll say, "yes but I'm doing such and such", which might be equal in marks.

Anne actively sought to enhance her gymnastics knowledge by learning from her daughter. This enabled her to cope with her lack of gymnastics knowledge because this knowledge gap was in part reduced.

Parents were also willing to learn from medical professionals in order to enhance their coping in the youth sport context. These experts included physiotherapists,

doctors, nutritionists, and psychologists. With their help, parents were able to cope more effectively with the stressors of child injury, child nutritional habits, and watching their children cope in particular. Most of this medical support was provided as a part of the gymnasts' performance pathway. Parents therefore did not always actively seek out this help but were provided with it by the sport governing body. For example, Diana learned from the dietician, "about a gymnast's diet, what food groups they should be eating at every meal... how important all the nutrition is, fluids, give us sort of a list of foods pre- and post-competition". Anne also explained how she and her daughter see the nutritionist once a year:

> When they go to [national governing body headquarters], we normally go up again about once a year, and they see the nutritionist when they get there, and we go have a talk with the nutritionist as well and they give us different recipe ideas, and um recipe sheets for like lunchboxes, to keep them varied and things like that.

This support was provided by the sport governing body. However, Anne later reported seeking advice from the nutritionist outside of their annual meeting. Gaining advice from the nutritionist helped Anne and Diana to cope with the stressor of child nutritional habits because they were provided with information that enabled them to provide better, more suitable nutrition to their daughters.

Parents further gained advice from counsellors and psychologists regarding how to cope when watching (and waiting to watch) their children perform at competitions. Emma and John had previously struggled to watch their daughter compete together. Emma reported that the strategy John used at competitions, humour, only acted as a further stressor for her. Emma and John actively sought support to facilitate their coping when they watched their daughter at competitions, as Emma explained:

> He's seeing a counsellor, and we've had discussions about how his actions impact upon both myself and [daughter]. Last competition, which was Sunday, a lot better. He brought marking along to help occupy himself. I was fine, I am getting a lot better at competitions.

Seeking this professional guidance increased both Emma's and John's awareness of the effects of their behaviour on each other. They were therefore able to work towards finding a strategy that helped them both to cope at competitions.

Finally, parents were willing to learn from physiotherapists and doctors in order to cope with their children's experiences of injury. All of the parents reported actively seeking the opinions of osteopaths, physiotherapists, doctors, and specialists in order to understand different issues and what they could do to alleviate problems. Liz was in a slightly different situation to most of the parents when it came to child injury, due to her occupation as a physiotherapist. She thus reported additional stressors, for example, she felt pressurised by her husband and her son to provide "quick fixes" when her son became injured, despite the fact that she was not a specialist sports physiotherapist. In order to cope with this pressure, she always sought a second opinion after assessing her son's injuries, "and I took him to you know, see a doctor in A&E when he hurt his shoulder just because it was easier saying, 'they've said there's nothing broken and there's no dislocation' rather than me". She also actively added to her professional training by learning aspects of specialist sport physiotherapy:

> When he hurt his shoulder I did take him to see a colleague who's a private sports physio, and she saw him a couple of times just so that we could assess him together and she could give her opinion and I found that was easier because we were going with what she said about whether he should be competing or shouldn't be and she would give me ideas as to what other exercises I could be doing with him.

Consequently, Liz developed the skills required to treat her son in a more sport-specific way. She was therefore able to cope with the pressures on her to help her son get back to training quickly by improving her own knowledge and training. Further, seeking a second opinion reduced her concerns that she may give the wrong advice.

Learning from experiences. Although parents were evidently willing to learn a great deal from others, they also discovered a considerable amount through their own

individual experiences. This was an on-going process for many of the parents, as Emma explained:

> There is no right or wrong, as I've said I've tried going in different ways, I've tried going in as a mother, I've tried going in as a second coach. That failed. Dismally. So I reverted it to being a mother, but I've also reverted to being an equal, you know, so… I'll tell you, when I find a way that works! I shall let you know. [Laughter]

Parents learned from their own experiences in order to cope with stressors such as their experiences of anxiety at competitions, their children's nutritional habits, and parental experiences of blame. For example, John explained how he had learned over time that Emma's behaviours at competitions were not intended to be malicious towards him, but reflected her inability to cope with her feelings of not being in control:

> It took me a while to accept that it wasn't me. Over time, literally the first couple of times I went, it felt that she was genuinely taking it out on me you know. But I learned that, I understood that a lot more.

Learning from their own experiences also assisted parents in coping with negative interactions with their children. Almost all of the parents reported that they had learned how to behave in ways that best suited their children before and after competitions. For instance, Diana explained:

> Before a competition she doesn't like to speak about it because obviously we don't know anything and like my husband will say, "oh will you be doing one of them turny things?" and she's like that [angry; exasperated], "oh my god!". So we tried not speaking about it at all but then I found that makes her more nervous, so just get in the car, get the music on, have a singalong [laughter], talk about other things, but then when she gets out of the car I'll say like, "love you, proud of you" and then she goes off and does her thing.

Diana's experience suggests that the parents had learned what behaviours did and did not work for them through trial and error experiences. They were then able to employ the strategies that did work and thereby cope more effectively.

Most of the parents cited their children's nutritional habits as a stressor. Parents' willingness to learn from their experiences enabled them to cope with this stressor. For example, Anne and Diana reported that their daughters could not eat on competition mornings. The mothers learned that they could give their daughters a big meal, high in carbohydrates, the night before to compensate for their lack of eating the day after. Diana explained:

> Like the evening before I try to give her a really high-carb meal, might even have a Chinese or something, bit of a treat, um and just try and give her loads of carbs the night before. Then in the morning she won't eat or drink anything.

Anne also struggled to encourage her daughter to eat after training, as well as before competitions. She therefore learned how to get her daughter to eat without her daughter realising that she was eating:

> She loves nuts again, so I'll always go and put nuts upstairs for her then, pretzels and dips so when she's doing her homework she will sort of like tend to snack, pick on them... I found out, yes, yes. I played around and found out the most I could give her without her really realising.

Trial and error experiences therefore enabled the parents to encourage their children to eat when they did not want to. This facilitated parents' ability to cope with the stressor of child nutrition because they knew that their children were gaining some nourishment.

Finally, parents learned from other sport experiences and applied these lessons to gymnastics. For example, Diana's previous experiences in elite youth football taught her how to organise her time efficiently, "so we manage to juggle things, as I said we've been doing it for a while now and you just, you just learn to juggle and you learn to manage your time more efficiently". She was therefore able to cope with time demands because she had previously developed coping skills that she was able to employ within gymnastics.

Similarly, Liz spoke of how she applied the lessons she had learned through her non-gymnastics son's elite youth sport participation, to gymnastics. Within this other

sport, Liz and her second son had learned about, "growth mindsets and fixed mindsets". She then applied these lessons to gymnastics by encouraging her son involved in gymnastics to have a "growth mindset". Liz wanted her son to rise to challenges rather than avoid them, learn from criticism rather than become defensive, and use failure as a motivator to improve rather than blaming others for his shortcomings:

> Because it's hard then not to think 'what mindset is he?" – and I think perhaps it's a better way to cope if you try to make him much more independent in a way, because I know that if he wasn't doing well in a comp, I'd think "that's because I didn't make him eat the right breakfast", and I didn't say to him "make sure you're focused before you get on an apparatus" or "are you sure you've got enough chalk?" and you blame yourself.

By applying the lessons she had learned in another sport to gymnastics, Liz was able to cope with parental experiences of blame by encouraging her son to take responsibility for his own gymnastics involvement.

Managing emotional reactions. The previous themes detail how parents modified their behaviours and behavioural reactions to demands in order to cope with the stressors they faced. This final theme explores how parents managed their emotional reactions to the stressors they experienced. Parents used these emotional regulation strategies less frequently than the aforementioned strategies. This might be due to the effectiveness of strategies parents employed to modify their behavioural reactions, which reduced their need to manage negative emotional reactions. In order to manage their emotional reactions, parents employed: (a) emotional release, (b) self-talk, and (c) avoidance strategies.

Emotional release. Parents reported utilising emotional release strategies in order to cope with the negative emotions they experienced due to time and travel demands, issues with coaches, and spousal disagreements. Parents employed emotional release strategies to cope with negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, and disgust. Venting and unloading on others enabled parents to release their negative emotions and then move on from their experiences of these. For example, Diana experienced

negative emotional reactions resulting from her perception that she was constantly in the car. These emotions included anger and anxiety. When asked how she coped with these negative emotions, she explained:

> Scream a lot! Um, it was, yeah. Scream mainly...in the car at myself, just to let it out. You just think, "oh my god, I just can't be in the car anymore!" And then five minutes, you feel ok again.

Venting therefore enabled Diana to release her negative emotions and move forward from these negative experiences.

Anne shared Diana's use of emotional release to cope with negative emotions. She utilised emotional release to cope with the anger that arose due to spousal disagreements about their daughter's training schedule. Anne explained how she would cope with these negative emotions by, "shouting and bawling. Yes, just get it over and done with and that'll be it." John also vented in his attempts to cope better with demands associated with booking a holiday. Emma explained that "he'll have a rant" and is then able to move forward.

Parents explained that unloading on others also enabled them to cope with negative emotions such as anger and disgust. Parents appeared to unload most often on their spouses. Unloading enabled parents to cope with demands concerning time and travel demands, interpersonal issues with coaches, and the behaviours of other gymnastics parents in particular. For example, John recalled a negative experience when he drove his family and his daughter's coach to a competition, which resulted in an argument between him and the coach. He explained how he unloaded on his wife Emma, "I mean I got to the hotel and I unloaded on her because I do, I think sometimes you have to get a bit of perspective on life you know". After unloading on his wife, John was able to put his negative emotions behind him and move forward.

Diana also employed unloading to cope with the stressors she encountered. She explained how she unloaded, "to my husband. And I've got a friend who's got

nothing to do with gymnastics as well, she just yawns". However, Diana was careful not to unload on other gymnastics parents:

> If there are any concerns, it's best to discuss with my husband, do you know what I mean? Because otherwise it goes a bit pear shaped. Over the years seeing through football and tennis, seeing parents confide in other parents and children getting slated, it just gets, sometimes it can just get a bit nasty.

Parents therefore unloaded on others in order to cope with the negative emotions they experienced due to demands they encountered in gymnastics. Unloading enabled the parents to move on from their experiences of negative emotions. Some parents were careful to not unload on other gymnastics parents however because of the negative effects they feared this could cause.

Self-talk. Parents utilised self-talk in order to cope with negative emotions they experienced at competitions and those derived from their children travelling abroad. For example, Emma explained how she used self-talk to cope with the anxiety she experienced when her daughter travelled without her, "a lot of just talking to myself, just talk to myself. Saying to myself, 'if she's not texting me saying 'I'm upset, I want to come home', then it's ok! It's me that's got the problem, not her."

The parents appeared to experience intense negative emotions at competitions, in particular anxiety. This anxiety was often derived from child and parental experiences of nerves and the potential for child underperformance. Philip explained that he experienced anxiety at competitions because of his concerns that his daughter could underperform and then become upset. He employed self-talk to cope with these thoughts and feelings:

> You've just got to bite your lip and just pray they don't drop that ball... so yeah, I mean I just have to deal with it. I just have to tell myself over and over again that, "she'll be fine".

Self-talk therefore enabled Philip to cope with the negative emotions he experienced as a consequence of his daughter's participation in gymnastics.

Escape, avoidance, and distraction. Finally, parents reported employing avoidance strategies in their attempts to cope with negative emotions. Such emotions derived from stressors including child injury, managing child schooling, watching their children compete, and the behaviours of other gymnastics parents. For example, Anne explained how she coped with her fear of child injury by ignoring it, "I just sort of, just try to put it at the back of my mind". Anne therefore coped by the stressor by pretending it did not exist.

Some of the parents attempted to cope with their negative emotional reactions by escaping the situations that caused these experiences. These situations included their children travelling abroad, their children's behaviours related to gymnastics, and spouse behaviours. For example, John explained how he attempted to cope with Emma's obsessive behaviours by escaping:

> We went to [location] overnight and [daughter] was taking part in the [competition] and I left the hotel, I wasn't prepared to sit there whilst she watched the feeds, that's just ridiculous, in a small confined space. So I just went to the pub and she rung me when it was finished.

Escaping from their hotel room enabled John to cope with the anger he experienced towards his wife's obsessive behaviours, which arose due to her absence from her daughter's competition.

Parents also employed distraction techniques to cope with the negative emotions they experienced. All the parents reported that their children wanted their performances filmed at competitions. Some parents enjoyed videoing their children's routines because it acted as a distraction strategy. For example, Diana explained how filming her daughter provided a distraction from the fact that she was actually performing, "I find if I video it, it's as if I'm not actually watching her because otherwise I'm like that! [Shaking, unable to watch] I get really nervous". Employing videoing as a distraction strategy enabled Diana to cope with the anxiety she experienced due to the potential for her daughter to become injured or underperform. Further, in her second interview, Emma reported that John had begun to bring work with him to competitions, "last competition which was Sunday, a lot better. He

brought marking along to help occupy himself". Being able to do work at competitions appeared to distract John from the anger and frustration he experienced due to Emma's obsessive behaviours.

Finally, some of the parents avoided the negative emotions they experienced by postponing their engagement with stressors. For example, Anne delayed addressing her daughter's school demands, "and in a way, like you say, like it is a very short career span and school's going to be there forever, she can always do the academic work later on". By postponing her daughter's educational obligations until a later date, Anne was able to cope with the negative emotions she experienced as a consequence of educational stressors.

Parents' Recommendations

The parents were asked how the sport governing body could help them to cope with or manage the stressors they encounter. Diana and Sofia reported that they were content with the support they received. They therefore did not have any suggestions for how their coping could be enhanced by the sport governing body. For example, Sofia expressed her satisfaction, "no, no, they're really supportive and I can say the things that they've done for her are just amazing".

The remaining five parents made several recommendations to the sport governing body regarding further support that would be beneficial to them. What was considered important was an individualised approach to each parent and child. As Emma explained, "there isn't one way of dealing with it because we're all different. So there isn't one way of dealing with each one". Their suggestions were organised into two sub-themes: (a) increased information provision, and (b) improved support provision.

Increased information provision. The parents suggested that increased information provision from the sport governing body might enable them to cope more effectively with some of the stressors they encountered relating to child nutrition, child injuries, lack of gymnastics knowledge, and time and travel demands. For example, Emma,

Philip, John, Anne, and Liz all expressed a desire for more advanced notice of competition and training dates, as Liz explained:

> Sometimes you don't know about things until the last minute... So if there was any opportunity to have like a calendar for 12 months so then you could plan round it and you could try to plan holidays and other things at better times rather than "what's the date? Where's the calendar?" and all the stress that that causes.

Earlier notice of commitments would enable the parents to plan their travel arrangements in advance, reducing the issues that arose as a result of last minute planning. Being able to make transportation and accommodation bookings in advance would also likely save the parents money, enabling them to cope with stressors associated with finance. Further, advanced provision of information could reduce parental guilt from having to decline or rearrange commitments they had already made. For example, Liz recalled a time when her son had a training session rescheduled at the last minute, which then conflicted with an important family celebration. Liz therefore experienced guilt regardless of the commitment they chose to attend.

One of the major stressors that Anne experienced was her daughter's nutritional habits. She explained how she often found it difficult to keep her daughter's meals varied and interesting, "because it is a struggle sometimes, you know 'I can't give them this, I gave them that last week!'" She suggested that a recipe booklet might enable her to cope more effectively with this stressor by giving her ideas on what to prepare:

> Because you see people work as well so it's things you can make beforehand you know, like soups and things like that, that will keep for a couple of days. And it's something that the whole family can eat... So a little recipe booklet would be ideal. Because they'd only need to give us that twice a year... they could email it to everybody or just put it on the website.

Increased information provision via a recipe booklet could therefore enable parents to cope more effectively with the stressor of child nutrition because they would receive expert help to resolve the issues they experienced.

Anne specified that increased information provision in the form of a terminology handbook might also enable her to cope with her lack of gymnastics knowledge. As she explained:

> Lots of us, we don't know what certain terms are. Our child might come out and say, "oh I did this today" and you do pick up bits along the way, but there's other things then they come out and say, "oh, we're doing like a codswallop" and I'm thinking, "ooh that's nice, where have you been doing that then, on the bars is it?" and then they look at me like "no, on the vault!" "Oh, alright then!" [Laughter]. So I think yeah, a terminology book would be nice. You know, and again, not only that but these moves are named after Russians, Romanians, and we're not even sure how to spell them on YouTube!

Anne had evidently attempted to increase her gymnastics knowledge by conducting research on the Internet, but large knowledge gaps still remained. She suggested that being able to refer to a terminology handbook would not only enhance her gymnastics knowledge but also reduce the number of negative interactions she experienced with her daughter as a result of Anne's lack of understanding.

Finally, parents suggested that the sport governing body could provide a better idea of what parents should expect prior to children entering into elite performance pathways. As Anne explained:

> I think it would be nice once you know that the child is going to go in a certain direction and they have potential and if they're able to fulfil their potential and get the best out of them, then I think perhaps then they should sit down with the parents and explain "this is the commitment" because it is a big commitment, we do give up a lot. And this is what is involved... You know what's in front of you, you know what's expected of you, you know what's expected of the child.

Emma agreed, and related this to the experience of child injury:

> To sit you down and tell you, "right this is what's going to happen, it's not the end of her career, she can work through it, we can manage it, this is what

> will be done, we can help in this way". Oh god, I would've so much appreciated that.

By preparing parents before they experienced stressors, normalising their experiences of such stressors, and suggesting how they could cope, the sport governing body could potentially enhance parental coping in the youth sport context.

Increased support provision. In addition to providing more information, parents also thought they would benefit from more support provided directly to parents and children. Improving existing financial, medical, and psychological forms of support would enhance parents' abilities to cope with the stressors of child injury, financial concerns, parent blame, and negative interactions with their children. For example, both Liz and Anne requested more support from physiotherapists. Liz explained that this would not only help her cope with fears surrounding child injury but also reduce the onus on her as a physiotherapist to become involved in her son's gymnastics within a professional capacity:

> I wish that they had the funds to be able to provide physio so I could be completely detached from that and um because I know that the funding is really limited... so most certainly yeah if they had some medical support for the gymnasts then I wouldn't have to get involved at all, which would suit me.

Anne also suggested that the sport governing body could expand its provision of sport psychology support. She explained that while her daughter saw the psychologist if and when she needed to, that Anne herself would benefit from being able to call on this support:

> Psychology would also be another good one... different ways of the parents being able to say things to the children to get sort of the best, from them. And knowing what to say. Avoiding what can trigger them off... Because we come out sometimes, too direct. You know, "why aren't you doing this? Why aren't you doing that?" And again, they get their defences up again, they get their barriers up, whereas somebody else could approach it and think "oh no,

> if I ask this question it could lead to that and I'm going to get to the same outcome". Sort of just explain sometimes how we can do it.

Anne therefore suggested that help from a sport psychologist would enable her to learn how to behave around and communicate with her child in order to achieve positive outcomes for them both. Parents' use of sport psychology support could therefore reduce the frequency and intensity of negative interactions with their children.

Finally, Anne made several recommendations for how the sport governing body could assist parental coping with stressors concerning finance. She suggested that if the organisation formed partnerships with hotels and medical professionals, it could help reduce the financial costs faced by parents. For example, the sport governing body could make deals with hotels located near to competition venues:

> I think maybe if they gave a list of perhaps certain hotels, you know and perhaps they could do a deal with certain hotels, then as well. Book these hotels, all near to the arena or whatever, phone them up and say you're from you know, give them a code or whatever, you have £10 discount.

Anne further proposed that the sport governing body could negotiate with medical professionals because it is not always possible for the children to be seen by the centralised, funded physiotherapist:

> Because the children are all sort of from different areas, if they could produce a list of like suitable physios for the children in the local areas and even if they could perhaps to go them physios then and negotiate a discount rate, you know something like that. You know, "this gym will send this many kids to you", you know, could you do a discount rate?

By forming partnerships and endorsements with professionals, the sport governing body could enable parents to cope more effectively with stressors concerning finances, child injury, and accommodation arrangements.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand how parents of elite youth gymnasts cope with the stressors they experience in relation to their child's sporting involvement. Overall the findings suggest that these parents encounter a variety of competitive, organisational, and developmental stressors. The most pertinent parental stressors included child nutrition, child ability to cope, educational demands, child injury, time and travel demands, and financial concerns. The parents employed a wide range of strategies to cope with the stressors they encountered. These strategies were organised into four higher order themes: (a) detaching, (b) normalising experiences, (c) willingness to learn, and (d) managing emotional reactions. Parents suggested several ways in which their coping could be enhanced, including increasing information provision and improving existing sources of financial, medical, and nutritional support.

Parents' Stress Experiences

Overall, the parents did not describe large perceptions of strain related to their children's involvement in elite youth gymnastics. This was despite reporting numerous demands they appraised as stressors within the youth sport context. This suggests that although parents' experiences of stressors were frequent, they were perhaps not too intense and/or parents' coping efforts were effective in reducing their experiences of stress. This explanation aligns with the suggestion that stress is a process comprised of demands, appraisals of demands, coping efforts, and evaluations of coping effectiveness as conceptualized by the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus, 1993).

The overall findings of the present study suggest that parents experienced a number of common stressors such as child injury, time and travel demands, finances, and watching competitions. There may therefore be several stressors that are faced by all parents of elite youth gymnasts in the United Kingdom. However, not all of the parents experienced identical stressors; indeed the parents recalled several different stressors to one another. For example, four of the parents recognised the behaviours

other gymnastics parents as a stressor, whereas three did not. Further, some of the parents did not perceive that they were able to cope with time and travel demands, whereas others found coping with these demands manageable. These findings suggest that although several commonalities exist between parents' encounters with stressors, the overall stress experiences are unique and personal to individuals, which again aligns with Lazarus' (1999) contention that stress experiences are individual and personal.

The inter-individual differences apparent in the parents' stress experiences may derive from several factors. Some of the parents had encountered stressors previously (whereas others had not), and this prior experience appeared to be related to reductions in the frequency and intensity of stressors. Several parents described previous encounters with stressors within youth sport and in occupational settings as enabling them to cope more effectively with demands associated with youth gymnastics. The stressors experienced by parents in sport may therefore be relatively common across a variety of contexts. Consequently, parents may employ transferable and rehearsed coping skills across a variety of contexts. Parents in sport could therefore be encouraged to reflect on previous coping experiences, practice coping skills, and apply coping strategies they employ outside of sport within youth sport, in order to manage demands more effectively. Indeed, Tamminen and Holt (2010b) reported that adopting a problem-focused approach whereby individuals anticipate stressors and which coping strategies to deploy (proactive planning), leads to more effective coping in athletes than employing a more reactionary approach to coping. The same is probably also true for parents in sport contexts.

Stressors. Further aligned with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, the stressors experienced by parents were also dynamic in nature (Lazarus, 1993). Specifically, parental stressors varied according to time period and the context. For example, the demands experienced by parents at competitions varied from those experienced in their day-to-day lives, including demands associated with training. Additionally, stressors encountered by the parents altered within the same context. Competitive stressors varied depending on whether they were experienced before,

during, or following their children's performances. Such demands included logistical arrangements, child injury, and length of the competition day, respectively. The changing nature of stressors as reported by the parents suggests that stress is a personal, context-dependent, and temporal process (Lazarus, 1999). Similar conceptualisations of stress have been reported in other parenting research, particularly that pertaining to child illness (e.g. Franck, Cox, Allen, & Winter, 2005; Reid & Bramwell, 2003; Young Seideman et al., 1997). The similarities between youth sport and other parenting domains suggest that the nature of parents' stress experiences may be relatively consistent across contexts. If parents' experiences of stress are indeed similar across contexts, researchers and practitioners may find that the coping strategies employed by parents in other domains may be effective within youth sport. Future research could therefore implement and/or assess the coping effectiveness of strategies that are employed in other parenting domains within youth sport.

The present study illustrates the variety of demands that parents experience as a consequence of their children's involvement in youth gymnastics. Stressors reported by the parents included the financial impact of sport on the family, child distress at competitions, and uncertainties surrounding their children's potential to progress in sport. Such demands have been reported in various other studies as sources of parental challenges and/or negative experiences in sport (e.g., Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009a, 2009b; Knight & Holt, 2013a, 2013b; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). The findings of this study therefore align with previous research within football and tennis, demonstrating the commonalities in parents' experiences across different sports. From a practical perspective it appears that practitioners and organisers across a broad range of youth sports likely need to work to help parents address these demands.

The likenesses between parents' experiences of stressors across these various sports may be explained by the similarities between various youth sport environments. For example, across all sports there is an increasing push for children to specialise early (Gould, 2010; Jayanthi, Pinkham, Dugas, Patrick, & LaBella, 2013). This emphasis

on early specialisation is resulting in children at a younger age engaging in highly competitive sport. It would make conceptual sense that parents in sport might find competitive stressors particularly challenging, due to their children participating in intense competition earlier than ever before. Practitioners and researchers within the youth sport context should therefore be aware that these processes could be having detrimental effects on parents, as well as children (Jayanthi et al., 2013; Malina, 2010; Merkel, 2013).

Youth gymnastics is a particularly interesting sporting context to explore considering the young age of competitors, lower number of competitions, and emphasis on aesthetics when compared to other activities (Ryan, 1995). For example, gymnasts usually retire before the age of 20 years, whereas athletes in most other sports continue to participate at the elite level until the age of 30 years and above (Lally & Kerr, 2008). As might be expected due to the relatively young age of children and their demanding training schedules, parents' experiences of educational demands appeared to be particularly frequent and intense. Sport governing bodies should therefore aim to support and enhance parents' efforts to maintain their children's education. It may also be beneficial for governing bodies within gymnastics to develop more comprehensive educational programmes to supplement children's schooling. There is an increasing understanding of the importance of athletes maintaining dual careers, whereby individuals participate in elite sport while also maintaining their education or a vocation (Aquilina, 2013). The findings of the present study suggest that governing bodies should start preparing athletes for their transition into the working world far earlier than is currently the case. This is most probably linked to earlier sport specialisation in children, as well as the younger age at which retirement from gymnastics occurs (e.g., Jayanthi et al., 2013; Lally & Kerr, 2008).

Many of the parents in this study also seemed to report experiencing intense stressors related to their children's nutritional habits. This might be explained by the emphasis placed upon aesthetics (slenderness) within youth gymnastics (Sundgot-Borgen & Torstveit, 2004). Most of the parents reported that their children were weighed

regularly, often once a week. Consequently, the parents often had to manage their children's emotional reactions to putting on weight, the distress caused by having their bodies compared to other gymnasts', and their children's adherence to their nutritional plans. Eating disorder literature within sport has consistently reported that the reinforcement of the thin ideal in sports such as gymnastics is strongly related to body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, and clinical eating disorders (e.g., Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Kerr, Berman, & De Souza, 2006; Petrie, 1993; Smolak, Murnen, & Ruble, 2000; Sundgot-Borgen, 1994). The present study adds to this literature by illustrating that the emphasis on slenderness can also present a stressor for parents. Interestingly, the mother of the only boy gymnast represented in this study was the only parent not to report stressors associated with nutrition, eating, body image, and weight. However, the parents of all the female gymnasts reported experiencing stressors associated with their daughters' nutrition, eating, and body image. Practitioners should therefore recognise the implications that the emphasis on slenderness within youth gymnastics can have on parents, as well as their daughters, and aim to reduce this emphasis by reflecting upon the recommendations existing research (e.g., Kerr et al., 2006).

The unique nature of gymnastics is also evident in its competitive schedule. The children represented in this study competed in less than 10 events per year on average, which is substantially fewer than those youth involved in sports such as rugby, football, and hockey, who usually expect to play a game every weekend during the season (Ryan, 1995). Due to the limited time spent within competitive environments, one might expect parents' experiences of competitive stressors to be reduced in frequency and intensity. However, the lower number of competitions seemed to increase the intensity of competitive stressors for parents because the perceived importance of every competition was exceptionally high. The competitive stressors reported by the parents in this study aligned with the factors suggested by Knight and Holt (2013a) as negatively affecting parents' experiences at tennis competitions. This further reinforces the suggestion that parents' experiences across various sports may be more similar than they are different.

Gymnastics parents' intense encounters with competitive stressors might also suggest that their coping strategies at competitions might not be as effective as their non-competition efforts. This could be due to parents' inability to use problem-focused coping strategies derived from their perceived helplessness within competitive environments. The parents interviewed by Knight and Holt (2013a) suggested several ways in which their experiences at competitions could be improved, including increased education and support for players and parents (e.g., teaching coping skills), and organisational changes (e.g., increased number of match officials and better enforcement of rules). Due to the similarities between these tennis parents' experiences and those of gymnastics parents in the present study, practitioners and organisers within youth gymnastics might benefit from implementing these suggestions within youth gymnastics in a bid to improve parents' experiences at competitions (Knight & Holt, 2013a).

Coping. The findings suggest that parents often employ multiple strategies in combination to cope with the stressors they encounter in elite youth gymnastics. These strategies varied according to the stressor, the situation, and the temporal period at hand, as per Lazarus' (1999) model. Studies have suggested that such a multidimensional approach to coping is widespread within sport. For example, Gould and colleagues (1993a, 1993b) and Nicholls, Holt, Polman, and James (2005) indicated that elite athletes often utilise several strategies simultaneously to manage stressors they face. Further, in their longitudinal study examining coping, Tamminen and Holt (2010a) illustrated that the coping strategies employed by athletes fluctuate over a season. The findings therefore suggest that parents' coping efforts are similar to athletes'. Methods employed to enhance athletes' coping, such as practicing strategies, anticipating what coping strategies to use in response to various stressors, and adopting problem-focussed and emotion-focussed strategies according to the Goodness of Fit model, could potentially be used to help enhance parental coping in sport (Hot et al., 2007; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Tamminen & Holt, 2010a). However, parental coping in sport may already be somewhat effective. Lazarus (1993) emphasised that in order to be successful, coping must change across time and various stressful conditions. Parents' temporal, contextual, and dynamic coping

may therefore render their coping efforts effective. These patterns of coping challenge the assumption that parents do not cope well with the stressors they experience in relation to youth sport (Harwood & Knight, 2015; Philipson, 2013). However, future research in sport should aim to measure parents' coping effectiveness directly.

The parents suggested numerous ways in which social support enabled them to cope with the stressors they experienced. Significant others assisted parental coping through the sharing of parental responsibilities (detaching), helping parents reappraise their experiences as 'normal' (normalisation), the provision of advice (willingness to learn), and enabling parents to unload their emotions (managing emotional reactions). Social support therefore emerged as a key component across all four themes of parent coping. Social support has been recognised across various domains of psychology as critical to individuals' coping efforts and wellbeing (e.g., Ganster, Fusilier, Marcelline, & Mayes, 1986; George, Blazer, Hughes, & Fowler, 1989; Harris, Winskowski, Engdahl, 2007; Viswesvaran, Sanchez, & Fisher, 1999). For example, social support has been reported as key to individuals' coping efforts in the general stress literature (e.g., Cobb, 1976), in elite, recreational, adult, and youth sport populations (e.g., Bianco, 2001; DeFreese & Smith, 2013; Green & Weinberg, 2001; Rees & Hardy, 2000; Smith, Smoll, & Ptacek, 1990), and in parents across the lifespan (e.g., Hoekstra-Weebers, Jaspers, Kamps, & Klip, 2001; Hudson, Elek, & Campbell-Grossman, 2000; Shinn, Wong, Simko, & Ortiz-Torres, 1989). Further, Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory suggests that creating and maintaining relationships with others (relatedness) is a basic need that all individuals have a desire to fulfil, and that doing so will likely lead to optimal wellbeing.

The suggestion that parents in sport rely on each other for considerable support was somewhat unexpected, considering the current atmosphere in youth sport that suggests parents should refrain from interacting with each other (Strean, 1995). Indeed the parents in this study, as well as those who have participated in various other studies, have reported that other parents in sport are frequently a source of negative experiences, anger, and/or stress (e.g., Knight & Holt, 2013a; Omli &

LaVoi, 2012). For example, disputes between parents at Australian junior tennis tournaments caused parents much distress, and could even prevent them from attending their children's matches (Knight & Holt, 2013a). Further, parents have reported that other parents' sideline behaviours at youth sport games have contributed to parents' perceptions of background anger, as well as parents' own experiences of anger, in sport through behaviours such as swearing, taunting, criticism, and becoming involved in physical and/or verbal altercations (Omli & LaVoi, 2009, 2012). In contrast, this study suggests that gymnastics parents gleaned benefits from engaging with other parents, amongst others. Previous research has indicated that parents want to interact with other parents in sport in order to reduce feelings of exclusion, boredom, and anxiety (Knight & Holt, 2013a, 2013b). Nonetheless, the present study furthers this research by indicating that many parents rely on each other to a great extent, and that doing so is important to parent's coping efforts in youth sport.

When considering the role of detaching from gymnastics as a coping strategy, it was apparent that it was particularly important in helping parents to manage stressors relating to time demands. The parents expressed considerable frustration that a vast proportion of their lives revolved around gymnastics, which aligns with previous literature (e.g., Harwood & Knight, 2009a, 2009b; Weiss & Hayashi, 1995). The findings of the current study indicate that parents employed detaching in order to reduce the perceived impact of gymnastics on their lives. One of the ways in which parents were able to detach was by achieving a gymnastics-life balance. In their grounded theory of optimal parental involvement in youth tennis, Knight and Holt (2014) recommended that parents keep tennis in perspective in order to develop an understanding emotional climate for their children. The present study suggests that in addition to facilitating better experiences for their children, resisting the all-consuming nature of youth sport also facilitates parental coping. Given such a finding, it might be appropriate for sports organisations to recognise that parents need to maintain balanced lifestyles in order to cope with sport-related demands. In order to help parents achieve this, practitioners could facilitate social relationships

for both parents and children and recognise that children and their parents need to spend time away from gymnastics.

Parental detachment, and resultant coping, was also achieved through the sharing of parental responsibilities. Sharing tasks enabled parents to reduce their 'workload', as well as avoid activities they found challenging and/or unenjoyable. Knight and Holt (2013a) reported similar findings within youth tennis. They suggested that spouses work together within tennis in order to support their children. The present study adds to this finding by demonstrating that parents' division of tasks facilitates parental coping, and extends much further than spouses. The parents shared tasks with their children's siblings, grandparents, and coaches, as well as the parents' friends, spouses, and other gymnastics parents. Thus, the relational context of youth sport may be more complex and important than once thought. However, parents who do not have access to such an extensive support network may struggle to cope with the demands associated with youth sport. One mother in this study experienced relational difficulties with some of her family members and with other gymnastics parents, and consequently struggled to share her parenting responsibilities. This particular mother exhibited the largest indications of stress. Although it is not possible to conclude that it is this lack of support network that is directly responsible for these raised levels of strain, it does warrant further investigation. It is unclear as to whether other coping strategies could replace 'sharing tasks' for parents who do not have a wide support network. Future research should more closely examine how the nature and extent of parents' support networks affect their coping efforts.

The parents explained how they were often unable to detach from gymnastics due to the close emotional bond they shared with their children. This was especially evident within competitive environments because parents were often powerless to help their children. Parents' feelings of empathy towards their children were therefore heightened within competitive contexts. Parents therefore also experienced anxiety, nerves, and distress alongside their children. The close emotional bond between parent and child has been recognised as a key factor within youth sport (e.g., Holt et al., 2008; Knight & Holt, 2013a; Omli et al., 2008). Holt et al. (2008) suggested that

parents empathise with their children and therefore can experience the same emotions as their children in relation to sport. Watching their children compete can be a particularly challenging experience for parents because the competitive environment threatens the emotional bond between parent and child (Omli et al., 2008). Thus this study emphasises the intensity and closeness of the connection between parent and child, and illustrates that it is a factor in parent coping within the youth sport environment. That is, it appears as though gymnastics parents' close emotional bonds with their children can hinder parents' coping efforts in sport. It would likely be impossible for practitioners to fully detach parents from this close bond with their children. More research is therefore required to examine the optimal methods of parental coping at competitions, when parents feel at their most powerless.

The second theme pertaining to parental coping was parents' normalisation of experiences. Parents reappraised their experiences as 'normal' within their life experiences and those of others to cope with demands such as child injury, time and travel demands, children's obsessive behaviours towards their sport, and financial demands. Normalisation has been identified as a coping strategy within multiple domains of psychology (e.g., Lowes & Lyne, 2013; Mortensen, & Lundby, 2015; Rehm, & Franck, 2000; Stålberg, Ekerwald, & Hultman, 2004). Within the parenting literature, many studies have reported that normalisation has enabled parents to cope with their children's experiences of chronic illness and disability (e.g., Gray, 1994; Hodgkinson & Lester, 2002; Roy & Chatterjee, 2005). For example, parents of children with cystic fibrosis (Hodgkinson & Lester, 2002), autism (Gray, 1994), and genetic disorders (Roy & Chatterjee, 2005) have employed normalisation strategies in their attempts to cope. However, limited evaluations have been undertaken into the effectiveness of these strategies, so it is unclear as to whether parents should be encouraged to normalise their experiences of stress. Stress has numerous negative consequences, thus parents' attempts to somewhat accept it via normalisation might produce unhealthy consequences for them (e.g., APA, 2013). Future research is therefore warranted to understand the implications and effectiveness of this strategy.

Limited attention has been devoted to normalisation strategies within the sport literature. McArdle, Moore, and Lyons (2014) included a normalisation element within their transition programme that sought to support athletes through their retirement from Olympic sport. McArdle et al.'s programme illustrates that normalisation has been employed, even encouraged, within elite sport. Nonetheless, this appears to be the only citation of normalisation as a coping strategy within the sport literature. An examination of wider sport psychology literature indicated that rather than standing alone as a coping strategy, normalisation may be included in sport research within descriptions of rationalisation, acceptance, and/or reappraisal strategies (e.g., Nicholls et al., 2005, Holt & Hogg, 2002, Thelwell et al., 2010). Normalisation may therefore be a strategy already employed within sport, but not as of yet described independent of other processes. This study indicates that normalisation holds sufficient meaning to be considered on its own within sport parent psychology, and that consequently research in sport should examine normalisation strategies independent of other techniques.

Parents' willingness to learn from their own experiences and those of others further enabled them to cope with the stressors they experienced. Parents articulated that seeking and gaining the advice of others, in addition to reflecting on their own past experiences, enabled them to develop coping strategies best suited to them. Learning has been employed in order to cope with demands in both athlete and parent populations. For example, Tamminen and Holt (2012) suggested that one of the ways in which children learn about coping in sport is by reflecting on past experiences. Further, Knight and Holt (2013a) suggested that tennis parents sought information regarding tennis psychology and techniques from the Internet and from experts in order to support their children. In a later study, Knight and Holt (2014) also recommended that parents engage in independent learning in order to support their children in youth sport. This study extends knowledge in this area by demonstrating that parents do indeed engage in learning within youth sport, which elicits positive coping outcomes for parents as well as their children.

The parents expressed the idea that learning within the gymnastics context enabled them to better fulfil their parental responsibilities. Learning about how to cope may therefore have enhanced parents' feelings of competence within their sport parent role, because they had developed more effective ways of responding to the various demands they faced. Parents' attempts to learn can therefore be explained by Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self Determination Theory (SDT). SDT proposes that individuals must fulfil their innate need for competence in order to optimise motivation and wellbeing. By learning about the demands associated with gymnastics, the nature of the gymnastics parent role, and how they could cope with the stressors they experience, parents enhance their parenting abilities within the youth sport context and thus experience competence in their gymnastics parent role.

There could however be several issues associated with parents 'learning on the job'. For example, the parents in this study reported that they sought and took advice from others in youth sport, including other parents in sport. These individuals may not recommend optimal coping strategies either because they are unaware of what these are and/or because their children might gain from other parents' inability to cope. Indeed, some of the parents explained how they sometimes felt that other gymnastics parents had 'agendas' in trying to ensure their children became the best. Previous research has indicated that this may also be an issue within youth tennis (Knight & Holt, 2013b). Firstly, parents perceived that other parents might be unhelpful due to their fear of their children being superseded by others. Secondly, parents warned against blindly adopting behaviours exhibited by other tennis parents, such as yelling and criticising, due to the negative effects that these behaviours could have on their children. Parents should therefore be encouraged to think critically when taking the advice of others in order to ensure they are employing optimal coping strategies for them.

An additional issue associated with parents learning through trial and error experiences implies that they learned from mistakes. If parents do indeed learn via trial and error, they must first make mistakes in order to learn from these. It might not be possible for parents to rectify their mistakes in full. For example, a parent

might interact with their child after a competition in a way that negatively impacts on their child's self-esteem. Although the parent may learn to avoid communicating with their child in such a way as this from this experience, the experience still results in negative consequences for the child. It is therefore important to develop methods of parental learning that do not involve making errors. Additionally, although parents may learn coping strategies they deem useful, these strategies may not be the most effective techniques that parents could use. Further research is therefore required to not only examine the most effective coping strategies for parents in youth sport, but also how parents can learn about these.

In contrast to normalisation, the emotional regulation strategies described by the parents in this study have attracted substantial attention within the sport psychology literature. The present study suggests that parents employ emotional regulation strategies, including self-talk, avoidance, and unloading, in their attempts to cope, especially when demands have built up and their behavioural regulation strategies are no longer effective. Emotional regulation strategies have been described as "processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions" (Gross, 1998, p. 275). Considerable research has examined the use of these strategies in athlete populations (e.g., Gould et al., 1993a, 1993b; Holt, 2003; Holt & Hogg, 2002). For example, studies have indicated that various athlete populations employ self-talk in their attempts to cope with sport-related stressors (e.g., Gould et al., 1993a, 1993b; Holt, 2003; Holt & Hogg, 2002; Neil, Hanton, Mellalieu, & Fletcher, 2011; Nicholls et al., 2005; Thelwell et al., 2010).

The widespread use of self-talk strategies within sport has led to studies dedicated to the types, outcomes, and effectiveness of these techniques (e.g., Goudas, Hatzidimitriou, & Kikidi, 2006; Hamilton, Scott, & MacDougall, 2007; Hatzigeorgiadis, Theodorakis, & Zourbanos, 2004; Van Raalte et al., 1995). The similarities in coping between parents and athletes suggest that coping in sport may incorporate several strategies that are universal to individuals within it. Practitioners could apply research examining self-talk strategies in athletes to parents. For

example, research suggests that in order to optimise self-talk in athletes it needs to be assisted (e.g., with prompts and/or audio content), motivational, and positive (Goudas et al., 2006; Hamilton et al., 2007; Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2004). Parents should therefore be encouraged to employ positive and motivational self-talk, and practitioners could assist parents in their self-talk efforts in a bid to enhance parent coping.

The parents most frequently employed self-talk strategies within competitive settings. As discussed, competitions were the most threatening to parents due to the potential for child underperformance, injury, and distress, and the parents' helplessness to intervene. Parents were consequently unable to detach or employ other problem-focused strategies to the same extent within competitive settings compared with non-competition contexts. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) 'Goodness of Fit' model could provide an explanation for this pattern of coping. This model suggests that an individual will usually employ problem-focused strategies in situations where a stressor can be altered. However, when an individual cannot change the stressor at hand (e.g., parents' observations of child distress and underperformance at competitions), individuals will likely utilise emotion-focused coping. The parents' experiences supported this model of coping, so it can be deduced that the most parents employ emotion-focused coping strategies within competitive environments. Researchers should therefore examine the effectiveness of these strategies, because the amount of distress reported by the parents as arising from competitions suggests that they are not exceedingly effective.

Several parents reported venting to and unloading on others in their attempts to cope. Parents unloaded on their spouses, partners, and peers in order to cope with stressors such as time and travel demands, interpersonal issues with the coach, and managing educational concerns. Venting has been recognised as a coping strategy outside of the sporting domain (e.g., Affleck et al., 1999; Tamres, Janicki, & Helgeson, 2002). For example, several parents of children recently diagnosed with epilepsy reported that they employ emotional ventilation as a coping strategy (Nguyen, Pertini, & Kettler, 2015). Unloading provided a cathartic function and was seen by many as a

necessary step for regulating their feelings of grief. Studies have suggested that there might be gender differences in the adoption of unloading as a coping strategy (e.g., Tamres et al., 2002; Ware & Raval, 2007). The fathers interviewed by Ware and Raval (2007) indicated that their gender role dissuaded them from expressing their emotions in the same way as mothers could. Limited research exists on this topic within the sport environment. Within the sport literature, venting and unloading of emotions have often been grouped together with explanations of seeking social support (e.g., Tamminen & Crocker, 2013). The findings of the present study suggest that venting and unloading should be treated as separate strategies from seeking social support. Parents indicated that coping was achieved as a result of their unloading rather than others providing direct support to them. Parents in sport may therefore reap benefits from the cathartic function of unloading as suggested by Nguyen et al. rather than from the direct support of the individual who is listening. Future research should examine the role of this listener. For example, if their function is more important than the closeness of their relationship with the parent, individuals within youth sport, for example coaches, sport psychologists, and other parents, could fulfil this function.

There are several issues concerning the use and recommendation of emotion focused coping strategies. Problem-focused strategies are generally perceived as the 'gold standard' for coping due to their capacity to change the nature of the situation causing stress (Penley, Tomaka, & Wiebe, 2002). Emotion-focused strategies can only attempt to manage the emotional consequences of stressors. Such techniques have been associated with increased distress, depressive symptoms, reduced mental toughness, and future experiences with stress (Kaiseler, Polman, & Nicholls, 2009; Ntoumanis et al., 2009). Further, in their meta-analysis of coping in health psychology, Penley et al. reported that problem focused coping was positively correlated with overall health outcomes, whereas emotion-focused coping was negatively correlated. Therefore parents and practitioners should take care in encouraging the implementation of the emotional regulation strategies reported in the present study. More research is warranted to ensure these strategies are beneficial for parents in the long term, as well as the short term.

Parents' Recommendations

The parents proposed several ways in which their coping in youth sport could be enhanced. These suggestions included improved financial support, medical assistance, and information provision from the sport governing body. For example, parents expressed their desire for psychology-based education regarding coping strategies and communicating with their children, particularly following competitions. These findings support the recommendations of tennis parents interviewed by Knight and Holt (2013b), who requested psychological assistance to optimise their behaviours at competitions, manage schooling, and understand player progression. Parents' request for psychological support also suggests that parents understand that communicating with their children after competitions can be a highly contentious experience for both parents and children, as suggested by Elliott and Drummond (2015). More attention must therefore be afforded to assisting parents' interactions with their children following children's competitive efforts.

Parents emphasised their desire for more information and education from the sport governing body. They believed that this would enable them to cope more effectively with stressors including lack of gymnastics knowledge, time and travel demands, and child injury. Parents' request for further information was not surprising considering their use of learning as a coping strategy; information enabled parents to better understand the gymnastics context, their role, and associated demands. Cook (1985) contended that information-seeking facilitates more effective coping by increasing an individual's alertness to environmental cues and demands, which in turn provide individuals with more information on which to base appropriate coping responses (cf. Anshel & Anderson, 2002). Studies have illustrated that information seeking is a common coping strategy within sport (e.g., Anshel & Anderson, 2002; Anshel & Kaissidis, 1997; Anshel, Porter, & Quek, 2008; Anshel, Williams, & Williams, 2000; Nicholls & Polman, 2007). For example, Anshel and Sutsaro (2007) reported that high school athletes sought information to cope with stressors such as difficulties within the coach-athlete relationship. The present study suggests that

such an approach might also be beneficial for parents within youth sport. Sports governing bodies should therefore work to keep parents highly informed.

Information and education have also appeared as common themes within the sport parent literature (e.g., Knight & Holt, 2013b, 2014; Strean, 1995). For example, in an early study Strean (1995) indicated that parents should be educated about the youth sport context. This was despite coaches' contentions that the less parents knew the better, due to the reduced likelihood of them interfering. However, this study suggests that parents do not want more information in a bid to become more involved (or interfere) in gymnastics but rather because information would facilitate parents' employment of coping strategies associated with detachment from youth sport. That is, more information would simply reduce the parents' fears surrounding their lack of knowledge, and enable them to step away from gymnastics, confident that they understood what was occurring within it.

Parents' need for information and education has also been recognised by organisations. For example, The Football League's (2014) Players' and Parents' Guide promises biannual parents' evenings to keep parents informed of their children's progress, the performance pathway, and their children's future prospects within football. However, the parents in this study suggested that similar opportunities to understand more about their children's youth sport participation appear to be few and far between. Parents of children enrolled in elite youth football academies also reported difficulties associated with a lack of communication from coaches and the academy structure (Harwood et al., 2010). Although sports governing bodies may perceive that they are helping parents cope by withholding information from them, Cook (1985) argued that on a long-term basis, this may prove maladaptive for parents' coping efforts. Tamminen and Holt (2012) emphasised that parental trust in coaches is essential for children's coping efforts in youth sport. The findings of the present study indicate that quality relationships with coaches are also important for parental coping in youth sport. Organisations, coaches, and managers within youth sport should therefore consider ways in which

they could provide substantially more information to parents of the children involved in their sports.

The parents in this study suggested a number of organisational changes that would enable them to cope more effectively. These recommendations included more advanced notice of competition dates, increases in governing body funding, and endorsements of hotels and medical professionals that could lead to financial discounts for parents. Some of these requests align with those desired by the tennis parents interviewed by Knight and Holt (2013a). Despite these similarities in findings, the present study extends this previous research by moving beyond the competitive environment. Knight and Holt's (2013a) research focused specifically on parents' experiences at tennis competitions, however this project examined all aspects of the sport parent experience. Parents' recommendations for enhanced coping thus have competitive, organisational, and developmental implications.

Parents' suggestions for enhancing their coping consisted of two dimensions. On the one hand, most of the parents requested more advanced notice of gymnastics commitments. On the other hand, several parents expressed their desires for a number of changes that were unique to them. For example, only one participant requested a recipe booklet to enable her to cope with demands associated with her child's nutrition, although this appeared to be one of her most important suggestions. This is tied to the aforementioned contention that the parents' experiences of stress and coping were personal, unique, and individual to them (Lazarus, 1999). Parents therefore require different resources from one another in their attempts to cope with stressors.

This individualised approach to parent stress and coping emphasised by one of the mothers. She expressed her desire for a more individualised approach to sport governing body support. Many researchers have suggested that stressor, appraisal, coping, and emotional experiences are deeply individual in nature (e.g., Burton & Naylor, 1997; Eubank & Collins, 2000; Jones & Swain, 1995; Lazarus, 1999). Consequently, previous research has called for an individualised approach towards

assisting coping efforts within sport environments (e.g., Bertollo, Saltarelli, & Robazza, 2009). For example, Bertollo et al. suggested that sport psychologists should be mindful of individual differences in order to optimise behaviours within sport, including coping attempts. Other studies have taken heed of this suggestion, for example Wagstaff, Hanton, and Fletcher (2013) reported that one-on-one psychology sessions were perceived as useful by athletes in enhancing emotional regulation. Such research provides a strong rationale for an individual-centred approach within sport, which sport governing bodies should strongly consider implementing within the youth sport environment, including when working with parents.

Although parents employed learning in order to cope with stressors, they expressed the idea that being prepared for the demands they might face in youth sport would also help them to cope more effectively. Most of the parents did not know what to expect when their child became involved in sport and were consequently unprepared to encounter, or cope with, demands. Only one parent had prior experience within elite youth sport, and she repeatedly reported calling on this experience in order to employ the coping strategies most suitable to the stressor and context at hand. This parent had some understanding of what demands were associated with elite sport, and was therefore able to normalise these experiences to a greater extent than the other parents. This might explain why she exhibited enhanced coping in comparison to the remaining participants.

Preparation has frequently been identified as a coping strategy within sport literature. For example, Holt et al. (2007) reported athletes' perceptions of their coping effectiveness increased when they were able to anticipate the stressors they could experience and the coping strategies they would consequently employ. Tamminen and Holt (2010b) also suggested that anticipating stressors and what strategies to deploy to cope with these may lead to more effective coping in athletes than employing a more reactive approach to stressors as they are encountered. The participants' recommendations suggest the same may also be true for parents. Sport governing bodies, coaches, and sport psychologists should therefore attempt to make

parents aware of the stressors they might experience so that they can anticipate which coping strategies to employ. The effectiveness of parent coping may consequently be improved.

Applied Implications

Parents appear to encounter a wide range of organisational, competitive, and developmental stressors in elite youth gymnastics. This finding supports research conducted within various other sports (Harwood & Knight, 2009a, 2009b; Knight & Holt, 2013a; Omli & LaVoi, 2008). As such, all sport governing bodies, coaches, and applied practitioners should attempt to reduce the frequency and intensity of parents' encounters with these demands. Doing so would likely yield positive effects for a range of parents, because many of these stressors have been reported across different sports, countries, and cultures (e.g., Harwood & Knight, 2009a; Knight & Holt, 2013a; Omli & LaVoi, 2008). Sport governing bodies could, for example, develop parents' understanding of common gymnastics injuries, liaise more closely with schools regarding absences, encourage coaches to meet regularly with parents to discuss their children's future prospects, provide more advanced notice of training and competition dates, and hold more social events for parents. These suggestions might help parents cope more effectively with stressors associated with child injury, managing educational demands, concerns regarding child future, time and travel demands, and other sport parents, respectively.

Governing bodies, coaches, and sport psychologists could also prepare parents for encounters with stressors in the youth sport context. By warning parents of what demands they may face due to their children's sport involvement, parental coping might be enhanced. As discussed, preparation has been identified as an important coping strategy within sport (e.g. Holt et al., 2007; Tamminen & Holt, 2010b). When athletes have been able to pre-empt the stressors they might experience and the strategies they could employ to cope, they have reported more effective perceptions of coping in comparison to responding to demands as they are encountered (Holt et al., 2007; Tamminen & Holt, 2010b). The same may also be true for parents,

particularly considering their thirst for information within the youth sport environment.

The findings suggest four higher order coping strategies employed by parents in the youth sport context: detaching from the sport, normalising their experiences and those of their children, being willing to learn from their and others' experiences, and employing emotional regulation strategies. These strategies could be employed by other parents in their attempts to cope with the stressors they encounter in youth sport. Sports governing bodies, coaches, and youth sport organisations could encourage parents to adopt these strategies in various ways. For example, parental detachment could be encouraged through the identification of others with whom responsibilities could be shared, via enhancements in child coping (e.g., through the encouragement of realistic and attainable goals, a focus on the individual child rather than making comparisons to others, and the fostering of an extensive support network), and by suggestions of activities that could reduce the perceived impact of youth sport on the family.

In a bid to normalise experiences, sport psychologists could provide assistance to parents to help them create and adhere to routines that work for them and their families. Parents may also engage with others within the youth sport context in order to normalise their experiences. For example, parents could talk to other parents in order to compare experiences and reappraise their experiences as 'normal'. Sport psychologists, governing bodies, and coaches could facilitate these inter-parental interactions by encouraging parental disclosure and hosting group sessions that enable parents to share their stories. Parents may also find that normalisation is an effective strategy to cope with general parenting demands, which can enhance their overall wellbeing (Lazarus, 1993). Further, because practicing coping strategies has been linked to enhancements in coping, parents' use of normalisation to cope with non-sport demands may enhance the effectiveness of coping efforts, through using normalisation, within youth sport (Tamminen & Holt, 2010b).

Finally, parents could be provided with a number of emotional regulation strategies to help manage the negative emotions they experience. Self-talk and emotional release (including venting and unloading) strategies have the potential to enhance parental coping. Parents could therefore identify other individuals to whom they can unload and vent. Spouses, partners, coaches, grandparents, and peers could assist parental coping by providing parents with opportunities to unload emotions. Further, parents could practice self-talk techniques that they appraise as useful. Sport psychologists could help parents identify in what situations, and in response to what stressors, they should employ self-talk techniques. The effectiveness and long-term impact of these strategies may however render them less useful than the other aforementioned coping methods.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that should be taken into account, particularly by those who intend to conduct further research in this area. Firstly, four out of seven parents attended individual follow-up interviews. These interviews enabled the researcher to follow up on points of interest, seek clarification, and hear additional stories of parents' experiences. The remaining three participants were unavailable to be interviewed a second time. Consequently, the opportunity to gain a more in-depth understanding of parents' experiences may have been missed. Further, all of the parents were interviewed individually except for John and Emma. Their joint interview may have prevented either or both of them from disclosing intimate personal stories, particularly about each other. However, the combined nature of their first interview was also beneficial in that it provided rich detail regarding their relationship and family life, and illustrated the convergence and divergence between their coping experiences.

The findings of this study indicate that stress is a constantly changing, dynamic process. The parents' experiences of stress therefore changed over time and from one situation to another. Interviews may not have captured the dynamic nature of this process as effectively as other methods. Daily participant diaries, for example, have been employed within the stress literature in an attempt to capture the changing

nature of stress over time (e.g., Nicholls et al., 2006). Although parents did recall previous experiences of stress during their interviews, these narratives did not portray their exact experiences at the time, but the meanings that these experiences held at the point of interview (Papathomas & Lavallee, 2010). Subsequent experiences, narrative resources, and the parents' motivations therefore influenced their stories at the point of interview (Riessman, 2008). This data was extremely beneficial in that it provided an insight into how the parents made sense of their worlds. However, this study did not examine the changing nature of parental stress experiences within various contexts.

The language used in the interviews may present an additional limitation. IPA employs the spoken word to explore individual experiences (Back, Gustafsson, Larsson, & Berteröc, 2011). Within social constructionism, language constructs rather than describes reality (Burr, 2003). The manner in which questions were asked could therefore lead parents to a particular answer. Researcher reflexivity, for example through the use of a research diary, aimed to attenuate this bias but it is likely that it still existed. However, because the IPA approach emphasises researcher's interpretations, this is not of great concern in comparison to other approaches which prefer for researchers to be totally removed from the research process (e.g., Hammersley, 2000). IPA's use of the spoken word to understand individuals' experiences also relies on individuals' willingness to speak about them (Back et al., 2011). Potential participants with information rich stories to tell may therefore have been dissuaded from enrolling in the study due to their reluctance to speak about their experiences. Those parents who did participate may also have omitted particular narratives from their accounts because they were unwilling to talk about them. Interesting and meaningful stories may consequently have been lost. A final limitation with respect to language was the parents' interpretation of terminology. Although the terms 'stressor' and 'coping' were explained to each parent prior to their first interviews, there is a possibility that participants may have interpreted these terms differently and become confused when explaining their experiences. Consequently, the data may not accurately describe their experiences of stressors and/or coping.

Future Research Directions

Future research should explore a number of interesting avenues identified within this study. Firstly, it is important to recognise the dynamic, temporal nature of the stress process. Researchers could therefore undertake longitudinal examinations of parental coping in the youth sport context, for example, over the course of a season, or longer. Such a longitudinal approach has been undertaken with respect to athlete populations (e.g., Holt et al., 2007; Nicholls et al., 2005, 2006; Tamminen & Holt, 2010b), however, there is an absence of any longitudinal sport parent research with respect to coping (cf. Holt & Knight, 2014). An examination of parental coping that seeks to understand if and why the nature of parental coping alters over time may further research in this field and reveal developmental, temporal, and contextual changes in parents' coping methods.

This study illuminates the coping component of the stress process in parents of elite youth athletes, which had previously been neglected by research (Holt & Knight, 2014; Lazarus, 1991, 1993). An understanding has been gained regarding the stressors that some gymnastics parents experience, as well as the strategies they employ to cope with these demands. However, several remaining concepts within the stress process as described by Lazarus (1999) have yet to be examined in parents. For example, research has not yet understood parents' appraisal processes in youth sport. In the present study, several parents exhibited signs that they experienced more demands than others, but the underlying reasons for this were not clear. Furthermore, although this study suggests how some parents cope, it does not indicate how effective these parents' coping strategies were (Nicholls et al., 2006). Understanding the effectiveness of various strategies might enable researchers to recommend what strategies to use from one situation to another in a bid to enhance parents' coping efforts. The effectiveness of parents' coping strategies, and methods to enhance these, should therefore be examined by research.

The present study adds to existing research that has examined parental stress experiences in activities including tennis and football (e.g., Harwood & Knight,

2009a, 2009b; Knight & Holt, 2013a, 2013b; Omli & LaVoi, 2008). Tennis, football, and gymnastics are relatively traditional sports for children to participate in. The stressors encountered by parents of children involved in less mainstream sports such as snowboarding, surfing, and wrestling may vary from those reported by the parents in this study, and in aforementioned research. For example, parents of children involved in water-based sports may experience more demands associated with child injury, safety, and equipment. Future research should therefore seek to examine parental stressors in non-mainstream sports, especially because participation in such activities appears to be on the increase (Jones, 2008; Millar, 2010).

The present study illustrates that siblings and grandparents frequently play a large role in supporting youth athletes. Researchers may therefore consider examining the youth sport experiences of these family members. Indeed, Kay (2000) emphasised that while some siblings enjoy their experiences within youth sport and often support their sibling, other siblings can experience feelings of bitterness, jealousy, and loneliness. Understanding the stressors that these individuals encounter, and the strategies they employ to cope with these demands, may improve the youth sport context for these family members and children alike.

Finally, the nature of parental coping should be examined within other sports and cultures. Gymnastics is a unique sport due to the very young ages of elite competitors, its individual nature, the emphasis on aesthetics, and the relatively low number of competitions in comparison to other sports such as football and tennis. It was therefore an extremely interesting context to explore. Researchers should interact with parents within other sports to understand and develop their coping strategies. For example, team sport parents may relate differently to the social context of youth sport due to the higher number of parents and children involved. Further, culture has been shown to cause differences in coping (e.g., Anshel, Williams, & Hodge, 1997; Puente-Diaz & Anshel, 2005). For example, athletes from the United States of America were shown to employ more approach coping strategies, and fewer avoidance strategies, than Australian athletes (Anshel et al., 1997). However, Crocker et al. (2015) emphasised that in multicultural societies,

nationality does not equate to culture. Parental coping in sport should therefore also be examined across various cultures, as well as nationalities.

Conclusion

Overall, the present study illustrates the inherently complex nature of stress and coping in parents within elite youth gymnastics. The parents in this study exhibited varying levels of demands stemming from a wide variety of competitive, organisational, and developmental demands. In their attempts to cope with these stressors, parents employed several strategies. These strategies included detaching from gymnastics, normalising their experiences, a willingness to learn from experiences, and attempting to regulate emotions. There is the possibility that other parents could enhance their own coping efforts by employing these strategies. Youth sport organisations might facilitate improved parental coping by improving the quality of informational, financial, and medical support. Future research should undertake longitudinal examinations of parental coping in sport, evaluate the coping effectiveness of parents' coping strategies, and seek to understand the nature of parental coping in other sports and cultures.

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Appendices

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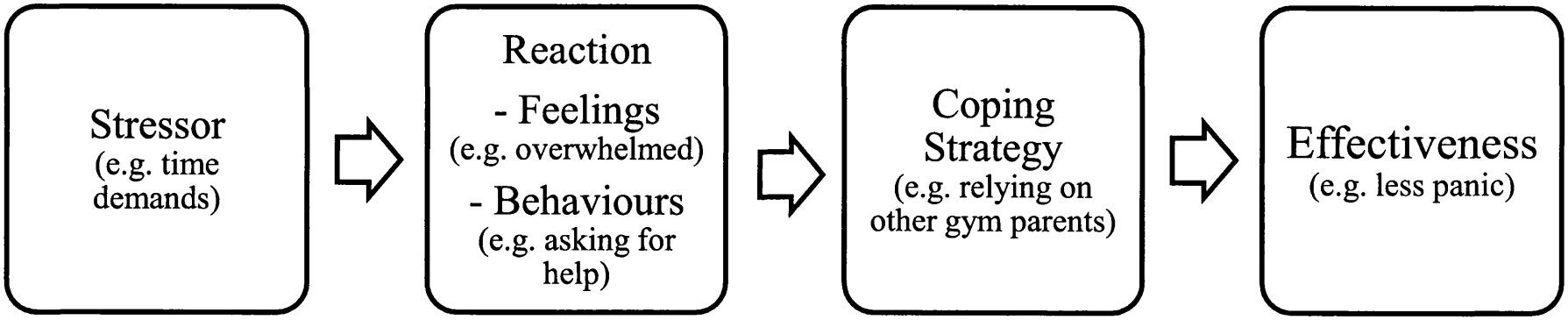
Appendix A

Interview Prompt

THE STRESS PROCESS



Appendix B

Participant Consent Form

Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe

Applied Sports Technology Exercise and Medicine Research Centre (A-STEM)
Sport and Health Portfolio, College of Engineering

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
(Version 1.1, Date: 09/10/2014)

Project Title:

An investigation into what strategies parents employ to cope with the stress of their children's involvement in elite youth sport.

Contact Details:

Lead Researcher
Naomi Burgess; 808161@swansea.ac.uk

Supervisor
Dr Camilla Knight; c.j.knight@swansea.ac.uk / 01792 606 590

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated 09/10/2014 (version number 1.1) for the above study, and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without my medical care or legal rights being affected. ☐
3. I understand that sections of any of data obtained may be looked at by responsible individuals from the Swansea University or from regulatory authorities where it is relevant to my taking part in research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to these records. ☐
4. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
Researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix C

Participant Demographic Questionnaire and Training Schedule Form

Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe

Applied Sports Technology Exercise and Medicine Research Centre (A-STEM)
Sport and Health Portfolio, College of Engineering

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Project Title: An investigation into what strategies parents employ to cope with the stress of their children's involvement in elite youth sport.

Demographic Information

What is your age? _____

What is the age of your child who is involved in gymnastics? _____

For how long has he/she been involved in gymnastics? _____

What level is your child training/competing at?

_____

What is your household income? (Please circle)

< £25,000 £25,000 - £50,000 £50,000 - £75,000 £75,000 - £100,000 £100,000 <

What are the approximate monthly costs of your child's participation in gymnastics?

£_____

How many times a year does your child compete in gymnastics?

_____

What does their usual training schedule look like?

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
Training hours			

	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Training hours				

Name of participant _____ Date _____ Signature _____

Appendix D

Interview Guide

Ethics statement:

Before we begin, I would like to remind you that this interview is going to be audio recorded but that all the information you tell me during this interview will be kept strictly confidential. You are entitled to stop the interview and the recording at any point during the interview or stop the interview altogether if you so wish. You also have the right to not any answer questions if you do not want to. There are no right or wrong answers; I am just interested in your experiences and particularly, the stories you have to tell. Do you have any further questions before we start?

Introductory questions:

- How has the experience of being a 'gymnastics parent' been for you?
- Please could you tell me about your experience of being a gymnastics parent?
    - Overall experience positive/negative?

Transition question:

- When you think about supporting your child through their gymnastics participation, what are the main causes of any stress you have experienced?

Main questions:

- In relation to … (specific stressor cited in previous question):
    - What is it about this experience that you find particularly stressful?
    - What particular emotions do you experience at the time (anger, confusion, guilt)?
    - How frequently would you say you experience this particular stressor?
- How do you cope with this particular stressor?
    - Probe for behavioural (what actions did you take?), physical (how did your body react?), cognitive (what were your immediate thoughts?) and emotional (what emotions did you experience?)
- How effective do you think this/these strategies were at helping you cope with the stressors mentioned?
    - Probe for the reasons for this.
    - If ineffective what would you do differently to cope better the next time you experience this stressor?

Repeat these questions picking out specific key stressors.

- As a gymnastics parent, what additional help would you like to help you cope with the demands you face?

Summary questions:

- Overall, what would you say are the three main stressors that you experience as result of your child's participation in gymnastics?
- Overall, what are the key strategies you adopt to cope with each of these stressors? How effective do you think these coping strategies are?

Conclusion:

- Thank you so much for participating; those are all my questions for now. Is there anything else you wish to share with me?
- The interview is now finished. Thanks for giving up your time to take part in this study; I really appreciate it. Would you mind if I were to follow up with you after this interview, if I felt the need?

Appendix E

Table 1. *Themes and Sub-themes Present Across the Parents' Accounts.*

Superordinate Themes	Subthemes	Description	Illustrative Quotations
Detaching	Sharing parental responsibilities	Parents shared their parental responsibilities with others in order to cope with stressors. Responsibilities included transporting their children to training and competitions, providing emotional support, providing tangible (e.g., medical, financial) support, and liaising with the school. Parents shared these duties with their children's siblings, grandparents, and coaches, alongside the parents' spouses, other gymnastics parents, peers, and the sport governing body. Sharing tasks with others enabled the parents to cope with stressors such as time and travel demands, managing child education, child distress, child ability to cope,	Yeah and just, he's getting older now anyways so I think I've got to, having talked to you, learn how to step back and just let it go. They tend to talk to each other as a small group I suppose because they're all going through the same thing… they see the coaches more than they see us, and we've always told her if she's finding things difficult and she can't talk to me, she should talk to them. Because I know that if she was upset, because she thinks I know nothing about gymnastics anyway, and that I wouldn't have a clue about what she's upset about, I know that she can go to the older girls as well, and they're great. They're fab for her when she gets injured and stuff too. She won't listen to me but if I tell the coach then she'll listen to her and she will say you know,

		and lack of gymnastics knowledge.	you have to wear your trainers because it's more protection for her heels, um. Should he have done his harder routine? Again, that's not down to me. That's up to him and [coach] so I'm going to step back and I'm going to stay chilled.
	Child ability to cope	By recognising their children's coping abilities, parents were able to cope with demands including fear of child injury, child distress, child underperformance, and time and travel demands. Parents reported that their child's intrinsic focus, support networks, organisation, maturity, intelligence, and self-motivation enabled them to detach from gymnastics.	No, no, I don't have to tell her anything, but then again it is her way. She is very, for her age she is really very responsible, I mean it's like she was in school yesterday but she's not in school today so she went into school yesterday and asked for all the homework and all what she needed. But all the other 3 or 4 trainings are in [location], about an hour from here, so she travels on her own, she gets the train. So it's like, they've got to grow up at a young age. Because other kids don't even know what it's like getting on a bus other than the school bus, but no, she has to do it.
	Maintaining a balance	Parents attempted to achieve a balanced lifestyle,	I just tend to watch it with them, I think I watch it with them

		incorporating but not overwhelmed by gymnastics. Parents therefore encouraged their gymnasts to pursue other activities, defied the advice of coaches and nutritionists, encouraged friendships outside of gymnastics, and continued to emphasise the importance of education. Parents also made time for their other children outside of gymnastics so that they did not become consumed by their sibling's sporting involvement. Achieving a balance enabled the parents to detach from gymnastics and thus cope with stressors including child obsession with gymnastics and child's future in particular.	and say 'oh come on, shall we watch something else now? Let's have a look at something else.' So we don't see her as such. And then it's food, bath, bit of homework, perhaps she might watch a little bit of telly, and it's bed. So you do try to then, on the holiday time they do try to train them… perhaps during the day in the holidays… and they might get an afternoon off sometime and you try to overcompensate then. Think alright, we can go swimming and bowling, you try to fit too much in then. So you try to fill up all your time with her. I will allow her a treat a week because for Christ's sake she's 12 and should have a treat a week!
Normalising experiences	Normalising parents' experiences	Parents normalised their own experiences in order to reappraise stressors as less intense and thus required fewer	Well my life is a stress. The way that we work and we live and everything, it's quite dynamic in a way so it's like we've got to be here and then we've got

	coping resources to manage these. Parents normalised their experiences by comparing them to others, including gymnasts, gymnastics parents, and parents involved in other sports. By recognising that others experience and cope with the same stressors they faced, the parents were able to manage stressors including educational demands, time and travel demands, competition nerves, and other gymnastics parents.	to be there, we manage lots of businesses so we have to be very organised. I mean I live off stress in here anyway, it's a stressful environment what I do. So yeah, we tend to cut down on other things. If I need something I tend to go without, which is the same as most gym parents, we will go without to make sure the children have got what they need. Everybody's sort of going through the same emotions, the same turmoil and everything.
Normalising child experiences	Parents normalised their children's experiences in order to cope with stressors. Parents compared their children's experiences to their own, the children's teammates, role models, and "everyone" in general. Parents thus enabled both themselves and their children to better cope with stressors, because	She's the youngest of five but there's only two at home now so she's got… they've all been involved in sport at some point. The only time she gets stressed is before a competition and obviously that's normal. Everyone has a bad day, everyone has a day that's not as good as they'd like it to be, move on, start again tomorrow. Because it is inevitable…

		the threatening nature of these stressors were reduced. Enhanced child coping facilitated improved parental coping. Paernts were thus able to cope with stressors such as child distress, fear of child injury, and child underperformance.	everybody gets nervous, I mean even [Commonwealth medallist] said to [child] before she said I was nearly sick when I went on in the Commonwealth when she won on the last routine. So yeah, it happens to everybody, you've just got to be able to cope with it and try and teach yourself that you're strong enough to… everybody has this, you're not the only one, I'm the only one who's nervous here and everyone else is cool, no everyone is nervous.
Willingness to learn	Learning from others	Parents were willing to learn from others in order to better cope with the stressors they experienced. Parents actively sought advice from experts within gymnastics, including coaches, physiotherapists, nutritionists, other gymnastics parents, and their children. Parents were consequently better able to cope with stressors such as lack of	They're the first people I would go to with any, you know, how do you get on with your school with this? Yeah I always ask them first, and the coaches are there, they're always, if I've needed it and because I'm not very good with the terminology of the gymnastics, Um… so when he hurt his shoulder I did take him to see a colleague who's a private sports physio and she saw him a

	gymnastics knowledge, managing educational demands, fear of child injury, and child nutritional habits.	couple of times just so that we could assess him together and she could give her opinion and I found that was easier because we were going with what she said about whether he should be competing or shouldn't be and she would give me ideas as to what other exercises I could be doing with him. We've had – he's seeing a counsellor – and we've had discussions about how his actions impact upon both myself and [child]. Last competition which was Sunday, a lot better.
Learning from experiences	Parents reflected on their own experiences in order to cope with the stressors they encountered. Parents reflected on their previous experiences within the youth sport context and their occupational lives in particular. Parents learned from trial and error experiences, whereby they attempted various coping strategies and adopted those they perceived as	Over the years seeing through football and tennis, seeing parents confide in other parents and children getting slated, it just gets, sometimes it can just get a bit nasty. What I tend to do, I tend to finish her routines because I'm not actually looking at her, so if I find if I video it, it's as if I'm not actually watching her because otherwise I'm like that! I get really nervous.

		most effective. They were consequently able to cope with stressors including child nutritional habits, time and travel demands, child future, and communicating with their child before competitions.	I think maybe it's because we've sort of been through elite sports with older children, and what will be will be. You know, you can't push them, they've got to want to do it themselves, just be there to support. I found out, yes, yes. I played around and found out the most I could give her without her really realising. It's – they do it when they're ready and I've learned that, and I think I've learned it the hard way sometimes! You know, and that's the reason now why I don't say nothing. I'll wait for her to say something to me, like 'oh, I've been practicing such and such today'.
Managing Emotional Reactions	Emotional release	Parents employed strategies such as venting and unloading on others to release the negative emotions they experienced. These emotions included anger and frustration, and were linked to time and travel demands, interpersonal issues with	Scream a lot! Um, it was, yeah. Scream mainly…in the car at myself, just to let it out. You just think 'oh my god, I just can't be in the car anymore!' And then five minutes, you feel ok again. F He will just calm down himself and realise M Yeah, I'll have a rant

	coaches, and the all-consuming nature of gymnastics.	
Escape, avoidance and distraction	Parents attempted to cope with negative emotions by escaping the demand/s causing them stress. Such demands included spouse behaviours, gymnastics 'obsession', competition nerves, and travel demands. Parents escaped by removing themselves form the situation causing stress and instead going to a pub. Parents talked to other parents, brought work, and videoed their child at competitions as a form of distraction. Parents avoided stressors such as their child's future in gymnastics by postponing dealing with these stressors until a later date.	We went to [location] overnight and [daughter] was taking part in the [competition] and I left the hotel, I wasn't prepared to sit there whilst she watched the feeds, that's just ridiculous, in a small confined space. So I just went to the pub and she rung me when it was finished. I just sort of, just try to put it at the back of my mind To my husband. And I've got a friend who's got nothing to do with gymnastics as well, she just yawns
Self-talk	Parents reported engaging in self-talk to cope with negative emotions, particularly at competitions. These emotions	You've just got to bite your lip and just pray they don't drop that ball… so yeah, I mean I just have to deal with it. I just have to tell myself

	derived from competition nerves, child distress, and fear of child injury. Parents explained that repeating positive thoughts enabled them to manage such demands.	over and over again that 'she'll be fine.' A lot of just talking to myself, just talk to myself. Saying to myself, 'if she's not texting me saying 'I'm upset, I want to come home', then it's ok! It's me that's got the problem, not her.