Parental Influence on Children’s Cognitive and Affective Responses to Competitive Soccer Participation

Megan L. Babkes and Maureen R. Weiss

This study examined the relationship between children’s perceptions of parental influence and their psychosocial responses to competitive soccer participation. Female (n = 114) and male (n = 113) athletes completed self-reports of soccer competence, enjoyment, intrinsic motivation, and parents’ influence on their participation. Mothers (n = 160) and fathers (n = 123) reported their own attitudes and behaviors toward their child’s participation. Regression analyses revealed that mothers and fathers who were perceived as positive exercise role models, who had more positive beliefs about their child’s competency, and who gave more frequent positive contingent responses to performance successes were associated with athletes who had higher perceived competence, enjoyment, and intrinsic motivation. Children who also perceived their fathers as being more involved in their soccer participation and exerting lower amounts of pressure to perform had more positive psychosocial responses. However, a nonsignificant relationship was found for mother and father reported influence with children’s psychosocial responses.

It is commonly observed, after visiting any playing field, court, or gymnasium, that parents have a substantial impact on children’s sport experiences. Parents can play an important role in all aspects of socializing their children into sport, as well as contributing to children’s psychosocial development through sport participation (4, 6, 16). However, limited research has been conducted on the mechanisms by which parents contribute to athletic outcomes experienced by their children.

Research on the parent-athlete relationship has focused on two major areas: (a) the effects parents have on socializing their children into sport (i.e., getting them initially involved), and (b) the impact parents have on their children’s behaviors and attitudes once they are participating in sport or physical activity (4, 6, 15, 16). Several researchers have recently initiated research on the relationship be-

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tween parents’ beliefs about and role modeling of physical activity with their children’s attraction and inclination to maintain participation in physical activity. Inconsistent results have been found on the importance of parental role modeling: Some studies have found a nonsignificant relationship to children’s athletic participation (9), while others reported a significant relationship to young athletes’ affective responses to sport participation (32). In contrast, children’s perceptions of parental beliefs about the value of sport and their physical competence were significantly related to children’s own competence beliefs (13, 24). Moreover, children’s perceptions of and parents’ self-report of attitudes toward physical activity, in the form of enjoyment of and encouragement to participate in physical activity, were related to higher levels of children’s attraction to physical activity (5, 7).

Research has also examined the impact that parental behaviors and attitudes have had on children’s cognitions and affect during their involvement in sport and physical activity (1, 3, 10, 11, 27). Children’s perceptions of their parents’ behaviors and attitudes about sport involvement have had the strongest relationship to children’s own perceptions of competence and motivation, while parents’ self-reported attitudes and behaviors, when assessed, have not been predictive of children’s cognitive responses. Moreover, children and teenagers who perceived less parental pressure and more parental support experienced greater positive affect from their sport involvement (3, 14, 35), while excessive parental pressure and low parental support were related to detrimental affective and behavioral responses in children—namely, competitive anxiety, interpersonal stress within their team, and attrition from sport (20, 32, 38).

Parent-athlete studies have been conducted within a variety of theoretical frameworks. Dempsey et al. (9), using Eccles and colleagues’ (12, 13) expectancy-value model, found that parent’s self-reported moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) was not related to children’s MVPA behavior. By contrast, parents’ perceptions of their child’s MVPA competence were modestly related, and children’s beliefs (expectancies, task goal orientation) toward their own MVPA were strongly related to their activity level. Kimiecik et al. (24) extended the previous study and found that children’s beliefs (perceived fitness competence and goal orientations) were strong predictors of their own MVPA behavior, and perceptions of parental beliefs about their child’s fitness competence were strongly related to the child’s MVPA beliefs but not their activity levels. Using a modified expectancy-value model, Brustad (5, 7) found that parental enjoyment of physical activity and encouragement of their child’s activity were significantly related to the child’s perceived physical competence and attraction toward physical activity. Achievement goal theory has also been used to examine the relationship between youth athletes’ and parents’ goal orientations toward sport. A significant relationship has been found between children’s degree of task and ego goal orientation and perceptions of their parents’ degree of goal orientations (10, 11), as well as the degree of ego orientation held by parents and how they perceived their child’s success in sport (33).

Harter’s (17, 18) competence motivation theory is a framework that seems particularly well suited for studying the parent-athlete relationship. A central construct of Harter’s model is the fundamental role of domain-specific self-perceptions of competence and control in motivational processes. Individuals who perceive that they are competent and have control over their behaviors in a particular
domain are more intrinsically motivated to pursue optimal challenges (41). Competence motivation theory also emphasizes the role of significant others in the development of children’s perceived competence and control, affect, and intrinsic motivation. Individuals who receive contingent praise by significant others for independent mastery attempts should gradually internalize a self-reward system and develop a mastery goal orientation. Harter has contended that significant others, especially parents, exert a primary influence upon children’s emerging self-related perceptions through the feedback they provide for children’s mastery attempts in achievement domains. The nature of significant others’ responses to children’s mastery efforts and performance outcomes conveys a wealth of information to children about personal aptitude in that particular domain.

Support for competence motivation predictions regarding the role of significant others in children’s psychosocial development in sport has primarily emerged from research on coaching behaviors (2, 21). Horn (21) found that coaches’ provision of contingent criticism in response to performance errors that included instruction for skill improvement was related to higher levels of perceived physical competence in 12- to 14-year-old female softball players. Black and Weiss (2) found that swim coaches who were perceived as giving more frequent contingent praise and information following desirable performances and more frequent encouragement combined with information following undesirable performances were associated with athletes (ages 12–18 years) who had higher perceived success, competence, enjoyment, and preference for challenging activities. The significant relationship established between athletes’ self-perceptions and indices of coaches’ feedback provides empirical support for competence motivation theory applied to the sport domain.

Parents’ role in the sport domain has only received limited attention within Harter’s (17, 18) framework (3, 27). McCullagh and colleagues (27) investigated the relationship between parent- and child-reported perceptions of the child’s physical competence and motives for participation in sport. Results showed a significant relationship between children’s self-perceptions and parent’s perceptions of the child’s competencies in both social and athletic domains. Correlations between child- and parent-perceptions of the child’s competence with participation motives, however, were nonsignificant. Brustad (3) examined perceived parental pressure as one of multiple potential correlates of positive and negative affect experienced by young basketball players. Analyses revealed that perceptions of low parental pressure were related to higher levels of enjoyment. In contrast to theoretical predictions, results showed that high competitive trait anxiety (CTA) was not associated with perceptions of high parental pressure. However, high CTA athletes had more frequent worries about negative evaluations from significant others than medium- or low-CTA athletes.

To date, the encouragement and reinforcement provided by parents and coaches examined within Harter’s (17, 18) model have been linked to psychosocial responses of children and adolescents in the academic (30, 31) and sport (2, 3, 21) domains. More specifically, children’s perceived competence, enjoyment, and intrinsic motivation have been linked to the frequency and type of feedback received from significant others. However, research on the role of parental feedback within this theory has not been adequately explored in the sport domain. Because parents have been identified as a critical influence in children’s sport experience, it is important to assess how parental behaviors and attitudes relate to children’s
psychosocial outcomes in athletics (4, 6, 16). Parents' extensive involvement in organized youth sport provides tremendous opportunities for communication of competence-related beliefs and expectations to their children.

Recent research has examined various parental constructs on children's cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses in the sport domain. However, a clear understanding of the types of parental beliefs and behaviors associated with children's psychosocial responses have yet to be determined. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine, within Harter's (17, 18) competence motivation theory, the relationship among parent's reported behaviors and attitudes, young athletes' perceptions of their parent's behaviors and attitudes toward their sport participation, and children's perceptions of their own competence, enjoyment, and intrinsic motivation. Based on theory and research, it was hypothesized that: (a) children who perceive their parents' behaviors and attitudes as more supportive toward their sport involvement will have higher perceptions of competence, enjoyment, and intrinsic motivation, and (b) children's perceptions of parental behaviors and attitudes will be more strongly related to their self-perceptions of competence, enjoyment, and motivation than will reported parental behaviors and attitudes. Additionally, the relationships between perceived and reported parental attitudes and behaviors were examined to determine the nature and strength of the consistency that existed between children's and parents' perspectives of parental influence.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants included 227 youth athletes (114 females, 113 males), mothers (n = 160), and fathers (n = 123) who were from a competitive “select” statewide soccer program. These select soccer programs require athletes to try out in order to participate at a higher level. The rationale for using a competitive “select” level was that both the athlete and parents have made a substantial investment in time, money, and effort toward the soccer experience.

All youth were selected to play on teams based on soccer ability and an age requirement of being younger than 11 years at the start of the fall season. This age group was chosen because developmental research has shown that parents are a significant socializing influence in this lifespan period (15, 22, 23). According to the governing organization's guidelines, children were allowed to play in any age category as long as they were under the stated age (i.e., a 9-year-old could potentially play on a U-11 team, but a 12-year-old could not play on a U-11 team). Soccer players in this study ranged in age from 9.0 to 11.6 years of age (M = 10.6, SD = .54). Data were collected during the spring, explaining why some athletes had already turned 11 years old. All participants identified both a mother and a father with respect to reporting aspects of parental influence. Demographic data revealed that the large majority of participants were Caucasian (91.6% athletes, 97.5% mothers, 93.5% fathers).

**Design**

A multivariate correlational design was used to determine the nature and strength of the relationships between reported parental behaviors and attitudes, children's
perceptions of parental behaviors and attitudes, and children's psychosocial responses. Predictor variables included reported parental attitudes and behaviors and children's perceptions of parental behaviors and attitudes in relation to the child's soccer participation. Dependent variables consisted of youth athletes' perceived soccer competence, level of intrinsic motivation, and enjoyment experienced while playing soccer.

**Measures**

**Parental Attitudes and Behaviors.** Parental attitudes and behaviors toward their child's sport involvement were measured using a questionnaire that was derived from two sources: (a) Lindstrom's (26) master's thesis study on the construction of a parental attitudes and behavior questionnaire, and (b) the measure from Brustad's (5, 7) studies of parental influence on children's attitudes toward physical activity. Additional questions were developed by the authors. Both Lindstrom's (26) thesis and Brustad's (5, 7) measure were grounded within Harter's (17, 18) competence motivation theory. In addition, the items extracted from Brustad's measure were previously shown to be reliable items in scales designed to reflect the same constructs represented in this study. The items developed by the authors were grounded in competence motivation theory and were included to further contribute to the reliability and validity of the measure.

Lindstrom's (26) thesis provided the groundwork for the parental influence measure used in the present study. Her original measure was the result of a multi-phase process that included qualitative identification of items, content validity assessments for each construct, factor analyses, and internal consistency evaluations. Operational definitions of parental attitudes and behaviors based on Harter's (17, 18) competence motivation theory and other empirical research on parental involvement in youth sport were used as a guide for choosing and generating specific categories and related items for the measure. Lindstrom initially identified seven categories of parental attitudes and behaviors related to children’s sport experience. These included advocacy of child's sport participation (i.e., encouragement), beliefs about child’s competency in sport, responses contingent upon child’s sport performance, expectations about child’s sport participation, involvement in child’s sport participation, parental role-modeling of exercise and sport behavior, and value placed on sport and exercise participation by parents. Lindstrom dropped the value construct following content validity assessments and placed these items into one of the six remaining subscales.

Item and factor analyses revealed adequate validity for many items contained in each subscale. Specifically, Lindstrom's (26) subscale reliabilities, based on Cronbach's (8) alpha coefficient, ranged from .86 to .56, with role-modeling achieving the highest score of internal consistency and advocacy resulting in the lowest score. All four of the other subscales attained reliability scores well over the .70 criterion (28). In addition, an exploratory factor analysis yielded the predicted 6-factor solution, while confirmatory factor analyses revealed adequate validity for many items contained in each subscale (i.e., high factor loadings, adequate goodness-of-fit statistics).

Lindstrom's (26) study provided an important foundation for the development of a valid measure of parental influence in the sport domain. However, Lindstrom only looked at children's perceptions of parental attitudes and behaviors associated with their child's sport experience. Due to practical considerations
for data collection and the preliminary nature of the questionnaire development, she also only gathered data on children’s perceptions of their father’s influence on their sport experience. The present study expanded previous research by assessing children’s perceptions of fathers and mothers, as well as each parent’s report of her or his own attitudes and behaviors related to the child’s sport involvement by modifying the questionnaire items to correspond to children’s perceptions. Although Lindstrom’s study only examined the perceived influence of fathers, there is no empirical or theoretical evidence to date suggesting that mothers should be measured differently. Additionally, the items from Brustad’s (5, 7) measure were developed and previously used to assess both mother and father influence.

Consequently, six subscales of parental influence on youth soccer players’ performance were included in the measure employed in this study. Two versions of the parental attitudes and behavior questionnaire were completed by each child, one for their mother and one for their father. Each subscale included six items that reflected the particular parental attitude or behavior construct. The response format for each subscale employed a 5-point Likert scale ranging from almost always (5) to almost never (1). Both children and their parents responded to separate forms of this questionnaire. The children’s items focused upon their perceptions of parents’ attitudes and behaviors related to their soccer participation. The parent version solicited responses reflecting the parent’s report of attitudes and behaviors toward the child’s soccer ability, performance, and general athletic involvement. Modifying the measure used in the present study to reflect parents’ reports of their own influence was valid based on the generation and identification of items compiled by adults (both sport psychology practitioners and parents) in Lindstrom’s (26) study. In other words, the original content validity of the constructs and items were assessed by adults similar to those recruited to complete the measure in the present study.

The perceived and reported parental influence subscales used in this study included: (a) advocacy, which was defined as parents’ encouragement or discouragement of their child’s participation in organized sports; (b) beliefs about competency, which assessed parents’ attitudes and communication related to their perception of their child’s soccer and general athletic ability; (c) performance contingent responses, which was defined as the affective and behavioral reactions demonstrated by parents following children’s display of soccer ability; (d) pressure, which assessed parents’ desire that their children’s performances demonstrate high levels of competence; (e) involvement, defined as the extent to which parents took part in their child’s sport participation either directly (i.e., giving instruction) or indirectly (i.e., attending games); and (f) role modeling of exercise and sport behaviors, defined as parents’ amount of and affect toward their own physical activity participation. The role modeling, involvement, and performance contingent responses subscales represented parental behaviors, while the advocacy, beliefs about competency, and pressure subscales were used to assess parental attitudes. Sample items for each of the six parental influence subscales can be seen in Table 1.

Lindstrom’s (26) preliminary work in developing a measure of parental influence targeted perceptions of organized sport participants that were similar to the present sample in terms of age, gender, and ethnicity. Research on sources of social influence in youth sport has shown that the age range included in the present sample is susceptible to parental attitudes and behaviors (16, 22, 23). Therefore, the measure used in the present study was considered adequate based on theoreti-
Table 1  Sample Questions From the Parent and Child Versions of the Parental Influence Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Sample item question</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent reported</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>I encourage my child to play soccer.</td>
<td>Brustad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about competency</td>
<td>I think my child is good at soccer.</td>
<td>Lindstrom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive contingent responses</td>
<td>I congratulate my child after good soccer performances.</td>
<td>Babkes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure</td>
<td>I put pressure on my child to play soccer well.</td>
<td>Lindstrom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>I practice or play soccer with my child.</td>
<td>Lindstrom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role modeling</td>
<td>I like physical activity and exercise.</td>
<td>Brustad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child perceptions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>My parent encourages me to play soccer.</td>
<td>Brustad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about competency</td>
<td>My parent thinks that I am good at soccer.</td>
<td>Lindstrom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive contingent responses</td>
<td>My parent congratulates me after good soccer performances.</td>
<td>Babkes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure</td>
<td>My parent puts pressure on me to play soccer well.</td>
<td>Lindstrom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>My parent practices or plays soccer with me.</td>
<td>Lindstrom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role modeling</td>
<td>My parent likes physical activity and exercise.</td>
<td>Brustad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Brustad refers to Brustad (5, 7); Lindstrom refers to Lindstrom (26). Babkes refers to the first author (blind review).

cal and empirical evidence. However, prior to data collection, three 9-year-old children were used to pilot test both versions (father and mother) of the parental influence questionnaire to ensure comprehension and to obtain an estimate of the time required to complete the survey. The children were allowed ample time to complete the questionnaire and encouraged to identify any problems understanding the questions during the pilot administration. None of the children experienced any difficulty in comprehending the items, and all three finished the entire questionnaire within 30–40 min.

Motivation. The challenge, curiosity, mastery, judgment, and criteria subscales of the Motivational Orientation in Sport Scale (39) were used in this study to assess children’s motivation in soccer. Previous studies that have assessed children’s motivation in sport have found the subscales to be valid and reliable (2, 3, 37, 40, 42). Items on the subscales used in this study were reworded to reflect children’s motivational orientation in soccer rather than in the classroom or sport in general.

Each of the motivation subscales included six items that assessed children’s intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation in the physical domain. The challenge subscale
measured whether children prefer challenging soccer skills or prefer to do only the easy skills assigned by the coach. The curiosity subscale was defined as children’s desire to satisfy their own interest and curiosity as opposed to playing soccer well in order to please others. The mastery subscale measured children’s preference for attempting to learn and improve soccer skills on their own or whether they prefer to depend on their coach for help and guidance. The judgment subscale assessed whether children felt capable of making their own decisions about what to do in soccer in contrast to relying solely on their coach’s judgments about what to do. The criteria subscale examined children’s sources, either internal or external, for determining their success and failure in soccer.

Children responded to a structured alternative response format. First, children chose which of two statements was most like them. For example, one item on the challenge subscale stated, “Some kids like hard soccer skills because they’re challenging BUT Other kids prefer easy soccer skills that they are sure they can do.” Upon choosing which child was most like them, they then indicated whether the statement was really true or sort of true for themselves. The score for each item ranged from 1 to 4, with 4 representing the highest degree of intrinsic motivation. Scores for each subscale were determined by averaging the six items.

**Perceived Soccer Competence.** Perceived soccer competence was measured using the athletic competence subscale (6 items) of Harter’s (19) Self-Perception Profile for Children. The subscale was modified to pertain to soccer ability. This scale also used a structured alternative response format. The children first chose between two statements, indicating which one was more like them. Then they decided whether the statement was really or sort of true for them. Perceived competence was scored by averaging the six items ranging from high perceived competence (4) to low perceived competence (1). Weiss and Chaumeton (41) documented previous research that has demonstrated this measure to be valid and reliable.

**Enjoyment.** Three questions were used to assess children’s enjoyment in soccer. These questions were adapted from similar measures of sport enjoyment (3, 34, 35). These three questions were: “How fun is soccer participation for you?” “How much do you like soccer?” and “How much do you enjoy being on a soccer team?” Responses were indicated via a Likert scale for all questions ranging from very much (5) to not at all (1).

**Procedure**

Permission to conduct this study was facilitated by initially contacting the coordinator of the statewide soccer association. Team information, such as coaches’ names, gender of team, and age group, was received from the youth soccer coordinator. The coaches of 40 teams (20 girls and 20 boys) received a letter explaining the purpose of the study and a request for their players and parents to volunteer as participants. A follow-up phone call was made to all coaches in order to receive permission to use their team in the study. Twenty-six coaches (11 girls’ teams, 15 boys’ teams) granted permission to use their teams in the study. Initial visits to each team’s practice were arranged with the coach to distribute parental information letters and consent forms. Each child was then requested to bring the form home, have their parents sign it, and return it to their coach at practice. Once coaches had received the majority of parental consent forms, a questionnaire administration date was arranged according to team practice or game dates and times.
On the arranged date for administering the questionnaires, coaches allotted the last 30 min of a regular season practice session or the 30 min following completion of a game for the athletes and their parents to complete questionnaires. At the practices, parents were requested to arrive 20 min earlier than their normal pick-up time in order to complete questionnaires. At the games, all participants began the questionnaires 10-15 min after completing the game. Only the youth soccer players with signed parental consent forms and a parent present to complete a questionnaire were permitted to participate in the study. Children also completed a consent form prior to answering the questionnaire items.

For children from the same family, each child completed the perceived mother and father questionnaire separately; as well, parents completed a separate questionnaire for each child in the program. In the case of a split family, the parent who completed the questionnaire was determined by the child and this was consistently the parent at home. If a child from a split family was unclear about who he or she was evaluating on the perceived parental questionnaire, the researcher clarified that it was the parent at home.

If both parents were unable to be in attendance, the one parent present was asked to bring a questionnaire home for their spouse or partner to complete. The parent was asked not to discuss their answers with their partner before he or she had completed the entire questionnaire. This procedure was done to maximize the number of parent-reported questionnaires, and especially the number of fathers and mothers so that their influence could be examined separately. Parent questionnaires completed at home were sealed in an envelope provided by the researcher and returned to the coach prior to pick-up by the researcher.

Data Analysis

Four multivariate multiple regression analyses were conducted in order to test the hypotheses. For the first two analyses, children’s perceived mother and perceived father influence on the six subscales served as the predictor variables and children’s psychosocial responses (five motivation subscales, perceived competence, and enjoyment) were the criterion variables. For the last two analyses, mother and father reported influence on the six subscales served as the predictor variables, and children’s psychosocial responses were the criterion variables. Following any significant findings, the canonical correlation, canonical loadings, and redundancy index were assessed to determine the nature and strength of the relationship between the two sets of variables. Finally, simple correlations were computed between perceived and parent-reported attitudes and behaviors on the six subscales to address the nature and strength of the relationship between parent and child perspectives of parental influence.

Results

Scale Reliabilities

Each measure used in the present study was evaluated for internal consistency reliability using Cronbach’s (8) alpha coefficient. The scales included those for perceived mother (six scales) and father (six scales) influence, reported mother (six scales) and father (six scales) influence, perceived soccer competence (one
scale), intrinsic motivation (five scales), and enjoyment (one scale), for a total of 31 subscales. Using an acceptable criterion of .70 (28), 27 scales demonstrated acceptable reliability. However, item analyses (item intercorrelations, item-total correlations, squared multiple correlations) suggested that alterations on six scales would increase their reliability values. These scales were: mastery motivation, criteria motivation, perceived mother beliefs about competency, perceived mother involvement, perceived mother role modeling, and perceived mother performance contingent responses. Specifically, two items were deleted from the subscales of mastery motivation, criteria motivation, and perceived mother beliefs about competency. To create more parsimonious assessment of constructs, three items from the perceived mother involvement scale and two items from the perceived mother role-modeling scale were removed.

Three items that assessed mothers’ perceived performance contingent responses were unreliable and deleted from analyses. These items represented negative responses contingent upon poor performances. Because the resulting scale only reflected positive contingent responses to successful sport performances, the subscale was labeled as “positive contingent responses to success.” To retain consistency of this construct (i.e., positive responses), the subscale for perceived father performance contingent responses was also altered by removing the same three items deleted for mothers.

In an effort to maintain the consistency of items in measuring parental influence, it is particularly important to note that all items used to assess children’s perceptions of mothers and fathers were worded and formatted in exactly the same manner. Given these procedures, the problems encountered in the reliability evaluation of the perceived mother scale (but not perceived father scale) were quite perplexing. However, adequate reliabilities were established for most of the subscales, thus allowing perceived mother influence to be assessed in relation to children’s psychosocial variables. Finally, four scales were unreliable and deleted from all subsequent analyses. These scales were: judgment motivation (.57), curiosity motivation (.43), perceived mother advocacy (.34), and perceived mother pressure (.57).

**Descriptive Statistics**

The means (see Table 2) suggested that soccer players’ perceptions of parental influences were dependent on the specific construct assessed. Specifically, these athletes had favorable perceptions of mother and father advocacy, beliefs about competency, positive contingent responses, and role modeling, as well as father involvement (all scores above the scale midpoint of 3.0). Soccer players perceived father pressure as moderately favorable (just below the midpoint) and perceived low amounts of pressure and involvement from mothers. Mean scores indicated that parents consistently reported their own attitudes and behaviors toward their child’s soccer participation in positive terms. Five of the six subscales were above the midpoint, while pressure was slightly below the midpoint. Descriptive statistics also revealed that the athletes had positive perceptions of their own psychosocial responses associated with playing soccer. Enjoyment was perceived in quite favorable terms, perceived soccer competence was rated above the midpoint of the scale (i.e., 2.5), as were preference for optimal challenges, use of internal criteria, and curiosity motivation. Mastery and judgment motivation were right at the midpoint.
### Table 2a  Means and Standard Deviations for all Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived parental influence</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency</td>
<td>4.67</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive contingent responses</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>0.85</td>
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<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role modeling</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>1.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reported parental influence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>0.34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competency</td>
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<td>Positive contingent responses</td>
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<td>0.31</td>
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<td>Pressure</td>
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<td>0.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role modeling</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>0.76</td>
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### Table 2b  Children’s Psychosocial Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived soccer competence</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge motivation</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery motivation</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity motivation</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgment motivation</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria motivation</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The range of correlations among perceived mother attitude and behavior variables was $r = .00$ to $0.51$ and between perceived father attitude and behavior variables $r = -.09$ to $0.58$. Correlations for mother-reported attitude and behavior variables ranged from $r = -.09$ to $0.42$, while those reported by fathers ranged from $r = .02$ to $0.52$. Correlations between perceived mother and perceived father variables ranged from $r = .34$ to $0.68$, and among soccer players’ psychosocial responses, correlations ranged from $r = .09$ to $0.47$. The range of these correlations indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern for the main analyses.

**Perceived Parental Influences and Children’s Psychosocial Responses**

**Mother.** The overall multivariate relationship between perceived mother influence and youth soccer players’ psychological constructs was significant: Wilks’ $\lambda = .77$, $F(20, 724) = 2.92$, $p < .001$. The correlation between the two sets of variables, $R_c = .40$, indicated a moderate relationship. In addition, the canonical loadings were examined to determine which variables contributed most to the overall relationship between perceived mother attitudes and behaviors and soccer players’ enjoyment, perceived competence, and intrinsic motivation. The canonical loadings for both sets of variables can be seen in Table 3. A loading greater than or equal to $.30$ represents a significant contribution to the multivariate relationship (29).

For the predictor variables, the loadings suggested that perceived mother beliefs about her child’s competency, positive contingent responses to success, and role modeling contributed significantly, while the loadings for the criterion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mother loadings</th>
<th>Father loadings</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Predictor variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived advocacy</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>-.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived beliefs about competency</td>
<td>-.864</td>
<td>-.761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived positive contingent responses</td>
<td>-.817</td>
<td>-.651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived pressure</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived involvement</td>
<td>-.181</td>
<td>-.569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived role-modeling</td>
<td>-.485</td>
<td>-.476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Criterion variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived soccer competence</td>
<td>-.535</td>
<td>-.677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>-.914</td>
<td>-.755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge motivation</td>
<td>-.640</td>
<td>-.647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery motivation</td>
<td>-.232</td>
<td>-.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria motivation</td>
<td>-.434</td>
<td>-.684</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Blanks denote unusable (i.e., unreliable) scale scores.
variables suggested that soccer enjoyment, preference for optimal challenges, perceived soccer competence, and preference for internal criteria were significant contributors. Specifically, the loadings suggested that children who perceived that their mothers had more positive beliefs about their soccer competency, who gave higher amounts of positive contingent responses for success, and who served as positive role models through their own exercise behavior, reported greater preference for optimal challenges and use of internal criteria to determine competence, as well as higher perceived soccer competence and enjoyment of soccer participation. The redundancy index revealed that 5.7% of the variance in the psychological constructs was explained by perceptions of mother influence on soccer involvement.

Father. The overall multivariate relationship between the set of perceived father attitudes and behaviors and player psychological variables was also significant: Wilks' $\lambda = .76$, $F(30, 842) = 2.01$, $p < .002$. The correlation between the two sets of variables, $R_c = .37$, indicated a moderate association between perceived father influence and soccer players' cognitive and affective responses. The canonical loadings for both sets of variables can be seen in Table 3. For the predictor variables, beliefs about the child's competency, positive contingent responses to success, involvement, pressure, and role modeling contributed significantly to the multivariate relationship. For the criterion variables, enjoyment, internal criteria, perceived soccer competence, and challenge motivation all contributed significantly to the relationship.

These loadings suggested that youth soccer players who reported more positive perceptions of their father's beliefs about athletic competency, greater frequency of positive contingent responses to success, greater involvement in their soccer participation, and higher amounts of role modeling, had more positive perceptions of soccer competence, experienced greater enjoyment, and preferred optimal challenges and internal criteria to judge one's soccer competence. Additionally, athletes who perceived less pressure from their fathers to perform well were also higher on self-perceptions, enjoyment, and intrinsic motivation. The redundancy index revealed that 5.4% of the variance in soccer players' psychological constructs was explained by perceptions of their fathers' attitudes and behaviors.

**Reported Parental Influences and Children's Psychosocial Responses**

The overall multivariate relationship between mother-reported attitudes and behaviors and players' psychosocial responses was not significant, Wilks' $\lambda = .78$, $F(30, 598) = 1.29$, $p < .15$, as was the relationship for father-reported attitudes and behaviors, Wilks' $\lambda = .70$, $F(30, 450) = 1.42$, $p < .08$. These results, combined with those from the previous analyses, infer that children's perceptions of their parents' attitudes and behaviors were more important contributors to their self-perceptions, affect, and motivation than were parent-reported attitudes and behaviors.

**Relationship Between Perceived and Reported Parental Attitudes and Behaviors**

An exploratory question of interest concerned the associations between children's beliefs about their parents' attitudes and behaviors and parents' reported attitudes and behaviors. That is, what is the nature and strength of the relationship between
children’s perceptions of mothers’ competency beliefs and mothers’ reported competency beliefs? Correlations between perceived mother and reported mother variables were low to moderate in magnitude, ranging from $r = .07$ (positive contingent responses) to $r = .52$ (role modeling). Correlations for perceived and reported father variables were also low to moderate in magnitude, ranging from $r = .09$ (positive contingent responses) to $r = .57$ (involvement). These results reveal a discrepancy between parents’ report of how they think and act with respect to their child’s soccer participation and how children perceive their parents’ attitudes and behaviors.

**Discussion**

The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between parental attitudes and behaviors with competitive youth soccer player’s motivation, enjoyment, and perceptions of ability within Harter’s (17, 18) theoretical framework. Harter (17, 18) suggests that the role parents play in contributing to their child’s developing competence motivation is determined by the child’s perceptions of parent feedback and reinforcement. Children’s perceptions of how their parents view their sport involvement has, however, usually been the only perspective assessed in the parent-athlete relationship. The present study extended previous research by assessing both children’s perceptions of and parents’ self-reports of parental attitudes and behaviors related to the child’s sport involvement.

In describing the influential role of parents as significant others, Harter (17, 18) did not distinguish between mothers and fathers as potential contributors to children’s self-perceptions and motivation. Moreover, empirical studies on parental influence have either only tapped children’s perceptions of father beliefs and behaviors, with the assumption that he is more influential in the sport domain, or children’s perceptions of their “sport significant parent.” This is unfortunate because children may perceive their mother’s and father’s contributions differently in their sport experience. Thus, the present study included both fathers’ and mothers’ attitudes and behaviors to extend this gap in the literature. Specifically, the first hypothesis was that children who perceived mother and father attitudes and behaviors as more supportive toward their sport involvement would have higher perceptions of competence, intrinsic motivation, and sport enjoyment.

The first hypothesis was supported. Youth soccer players who perceived their mothers as more positive role models through exercise participation, as having more positive beliefs about their soccer competency, and as giving more frequent positive responses to successful sport performances were more likely to prefer internal criteria for judging their competence, prefer optimal challenges, report higher perceived soccer competence, and experience greater enjoyment of soccer participation. Hypothesis one was also supported in that young athletes’ perceptions of father influence yielded similar findings as mother influence. In addition to the categories identified as significant for mothers, soccer players who perceived greater involvement from their fathers, in the form of instruction and game attendance and who perceived less pressure to perform, reported greater enjoyment, perceived competence, and motivation.

Studies have also neglected to assess whether it is what parents report they do and think or what children believe their parents think and do that has the greatest effect on children’s motivation, perceptions of ability, and affect in the sport
domain. The second hypothesis systematically explored this question by assessing the relationship between reported mother and father influences and children’s psychosocial responses to competitive soccer, and then comparing the findings to those obtained on children’s perceived parental influence. Specifically, the second hypothesis stated that children’s perceptions of parental attitudes and behaviors would be more strongly related to their enjoyment, motivation, and perceived soccer competence than would reported parental attitudes and behaviors.

This hypothesis was also supported. Results revealed nonsignificant relationships between mother- and father-reported attitudes and behaviors with young athletes’ motivation, enjoyment, and self-perceptions of soccer competence. The combined results pertaining to both hypotheses suggest that perceived mother and father influence are stronger than reported parental attitudes and behaviors. It can, therefore, be concluded that children’s perceptions of what their parents do and think, rather than what parents claim to do and think, are more important to children’s psychosocial responses.

In addition to the specific hypothesis testing, interesting findings were revealed by the correlations depicting how parents reported they believed and behaved and how their child viewed their actions and beliefs. Low to moderate associations were found for each of the six parental influence categories. Overall, the relationship was higher between perceptions and reports of parental behaviors (e.g., role modeling, involvement), as opposed to parental attitudes (i.e., beliefs about competency). These findings provide evidence of a discrepancy between children’s perceptions and parents’ reports of attitudes and behaviors toward the athlete’s soccer participation. These results imply that parents need to recognize that there is a fine line between their own perceptions and those of their child concerning such areas as pressure versus support, approval versus disapproval, and positive versus negative responses to performance. That is, what parents perceive as social support and actions of approval may be perceived by their children as pressure to perform and actions of disapproval.

The results pertaining to the relationships between parental influence and youth athletes’ perceived competence, affect, and motivation support as well as extend previous research on parental influence. For example, some researchers have found that perceived mother and father role modeling of exercise or physical activity, as well as perceived parental involvement, were positively associated with children’s affective responses to sport, attraction to physical activity, and perceptions of physical competence (5, 7, 20, 25, 32). The present study replicated and extended these results regarding the perceived influence of parents’ (both mothers and fathers) behaviors on children’s enjoyment, intrinsic motivation, and perceptions of physical competence.

Previous research on parental influence in youth sport has also examined perceptions of parental attitudes, such as pressure, expectations, and responses to performance outcomes (1, 20, 25, 35). The present study’s findings replicate as well as extend these results. Specifically, children who perceived less pressure to perform well by fathers reported greater sport enjoyment, as well as higher amounts of perceived competence and intrinsic motivation. Kimiecik and colleagues (9, 24) found significant relationships among children’s perceptions of their parents’ beliefs about physical competency, their own perceived fitness competence, and their physical activity behavior. Similarly, the present study found that children who perceived that their parents had positive beliefs about their soccer competence had higher self-perceptions of soccer ability, as well as greater enjoyment and intrinsic motivation.
Only a handful of studies have assessed parents’ self-reported influence on their child’s sport experience (1, 5, 9, 10). Results from Averill and Power’s (1) study revealed that parents showed different patterns of reported involvement in their son’s soccer participation. While maternal support and performance goals had a significant positive association with their child’s level of enjoyment, paternal performance goals and directiveness had a significant negative correlation with their child’s ability and effort. In Duda and Hom’s (10) exploration of parent-athlete goal orientations, parent- and child-reported task and ego goals were not significantly related to each other. Furthermore, Dempsey and colleagues (9) found that parents’ self-reported MVPA levels were not related to their child’s physical activity levels. These study findings were extended in the present investigation by obtaining information from both mothers and fathers, and these were found to be nonsignificantly related to children’s psychosocial responses. The knowledge base on parental involvement in youth sport was thus expanded by combining the results from assessments of perceived and reported mother and father influence.

Four years ago, Brustad (4) poignantly stated that “everybody talks about parents in sport, but nobody does any research on them!” (p. 72) In response to his lament, studies including the present investigation have contributed to the existing knowledge base on parental influences in youth sport. However, more research is necessary to better understand the impact that parents have on their child’s sport experience. First, continued measurement efforts are necessary to validate parental influence factors and items to create a tool that consistently defines mother and father attitudes and behaviors. Second, the role of parents on children’s psychosocial responses should continue to be examined within theoretical frameworks such as Harter’s (17, 18) competence motivation theory. Assessing potential differences of mothers on fathers on self-perceptions and affective responses of male and female athletes separately would be meritorious; as well, the interactive influence of parents, peers, and coaches on young athletes varying in developmental level may help explain more of the variance in psychosocial development. Third, given the nature of current family dynamics, research might examine the impact of alternative family structures (e.g., single parent, same-sex) on children’s experiences in the sport domain. Finally, similar to the coach training research conducted by Smith, Smoll, and Curtis (36), future studies should evaluate the effectiveness of parent education sessions on parents’ attitudes and behaviors toward their children’s sport experience and subsequent athlete responses.

In conclusion, the present study supported the influence of certain parental attitudes and behaviors on children’s psychosocial responses within Harter’s (17, 18) competence motivation theory. The relationships between perceived parent and child constructs were significant, highlighting the critical role of parents in children’s expression of positive affect, perceived competence, and intrinsic motivation in the sport domain. Moreover, evidence supported the claim that children’s perceptions, as opposed to reports from parents, are the most critical factor in the parent-athlete relationship.

References


Notes

1 It was necessary for six teams (five boys’ teams, one girls’ team) to complete questionnaires after games rather than after practices. Similar to administration at practices, soccer players began questionnaires before talking to their parents. Parents completed questionnaires in a separate area to avoid distracting their children during data collection. The researchers acknowledge that collecting data from athletes and parents following a game rather than a practice may have potentially affected their responses. However, each of these teams won the game played prior to completing questionnaires, and the procedures for collecting data were held constant to those following practices. Therefore, there is no compelling reason to believe that the nature of the responses should be different from those provided after practices.

2 Potential gender differences were first examined to determine whether separate analyses were necessary for girls and boys. A one-way MANOVA, with gender as the independent variable and perceived parental influences as the dependent variables, revealed that there were no significant gender differences: Wilks’ \( \lambda = .92, F(10, 210) = 1.74, p < .08 \). Therefore, all multivariate multiple regression analyses were conducted by collapsing across gender.

3 Information on the specific items removed can be requested directly from the authors.

Acknowledgment

This study was conducted as fulfillment for a master’s thesis by Megan L. Babkes under the guidance of Dr. Maureen R. Weiss at the University of Oregon, Eugene, OR.