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PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEISURE CONSTRAINTS AND FACILITATORS IN
ELITE YOUTH SOCCER: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

By

Chelsea C. Police
B.S., Ball State University, 2016
M.S., University of Louisville, 2018

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Education and Human Development at the University of Louisville
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership and Organizational Development

Health and Sport Sciences
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2021

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A Dissertation Approved on

April 23, 2021

by the following Dissertation Committee:

Marion E. Hambrick, Chair

Meera Alagaraja

T. Chris Greenwell

Meg G. Hancock

DEDICATION

To all my female geniuses out there,
this one is for you.

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I would first like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Marion Hambrick for your support and guidance this entire process. You never failed to encourage me and instill confidence in my abilities when I needed it most. Thank you for always pushing me to be the best version of myself. Your mentorship has been invaluable, and I am forever grateful.

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To my fellow doc students, I would not have survived this process without your encouragement and constant support. To my cohort, I cannot wait to see where life takes

you. To the first and second years, your time is coming, and I am excited to see you all excel in the next few years.

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To Josh, thank you does not seem like enough. You have supported this dream of mine from the beginning. Thank you for being my hype man through the highs and lows and believing in me even when I did not believe in myself. I love you so much and cannot wait to see where this life takes us.

ABSTRACT

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEISURE CONSTRAINTS AND FACILITATORS IN
ELITE YOUTH SOCCER: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

Chelsea C. Police

April 23, 2021

The purpose of this study was to examine perceived constraints and facilitators among parents and guardians as key stakeholders in elite youth soccer clubs. Specifically, this study identified constraints and facilitators affecting continued participation, negotiation strategies employed to help overcome constraints, demonstrated the role of parents and guardians play in organizational success, and illustrated their stakeholder salience.

The present study utilized leisure constraint and stakeholder theories as the theoretical foundation. Leisure constraint theory outlined the three categories of constraints (and facilitators), which are intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. Stakeholder theory described how constituent groups affect organizational success by examining their specific wants and needs in an elite soccer context.

To address the study's purpose, a qualitative phenomenological approach was utilized. Two different data collection techniques were employed: (a) a demographics survey and (b) personal interviews. The survey was sent to member of a single elite youth club in the Midwest. Survey responses provided insight into the club's members and their characteristics, including gender, age, household income, and race. Those who were

willing to participate in an interview were then contacted, and ten interviews were conducted. Results of the study determined there were a wide variety of reasons which inhibit, or help, continued participation. For example, lack of facility quality negatively affected continued participation, while positive coaching experiences positively affected continued participation. Parents and guardians also employed several negotiation strategies to overcome constraints, including relying on others, to help ensure continued participation. Finally, parents and guardians were found to play a key role in organizational success but lacked elements of power, legitimacy, and urgency.

The study's results produced several theoretical and practical implications for researchers and club organizers. First, this study identified similarities and differences to previous literature. For example, use of parents and guardians as the study's sample further added to leisure constraint and facilitator literature by examining those who do not actively participate but serve as their children's core decision-maker. This study also expanded stakeholder literature by investigating parents' and guardians' wants and needs and their effect on organizational success. From practical perspective, it is important for club organizers to recognize and understand parents' and guardians' perspective. This could include allowing them to provide feedback in a clear and systematic manner. This study provided valuable insight into parents and guardians as key stakeholders in a club soccer specific context.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Parents' Perceptions of Leisure Constraints and Facilitators in Elite Youth Soccer:

A Phenomenological Approach

Sport in the United States (U.S.) plays a significant role in society, especially among children and adolescents. Approximately 60 million children, aged 6 to 18, reported playing at least one organized sport (Post et al., 2018). However, according to the Aspen Institute (2019), sport participation rates declined from 45% in 2008 to 38% in 2018, which they described as “a crisis” (p. 1), resulting in fewer physically active children. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC; 2020) recommends a minimum 60 minutes of physical activity per day, a recommendation only achieved, on average, by 24% of children in the U.S. (Aspen Institute, 2019). According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2018), partaking in regular physical activity as children decreases the likelihood of contracting chronic diseases in adulthood. While regular physical activity takes place in a variety of ways, parents often choose to enroll their children in sport to promote and encourage regular exercise (Kremer-Sadlik & Kim, 2007).

Despite the overabundance of youth sport organizations and programs available, limited access still exists, particularly for low-income families (Aspen Institute, 2019; Friedman, 2013). In 2018, only 22% of children taking part in regular sport participation came from households with incomes below \$25,000, while 43% came from homes with

household incomes above \$100,000. In a recent study by Morning Consult (2020), 33% of adults agreed their children's participation in youth sport causes financial strain. On average, parents spend \$693 per child per year on recreational sport activities (Aspen Institute, 2019). However, as competition becomes more competitive, children may choose to participate in specialized travel leagues such as Amateur Athletic Union basketball or Babe Ruth League baseball and softball, where parents pay league fees for participation (Cocco & Spencer, 2019). In most cases, these fees do not cover travel and equipment costs, placing even greater financial burden on parents and guardians (Chang, 2020).

Climate of Youth Soccer

While issues regarding participation permeate through various youth sports, this issue is especially prevalent among the youth soccer community, where pay-to-play models are common. Pay-to-play models require payment in exchange for participation and are created by private organizations (Bowers et al., 2010). Club sports and agency-sponsored sports (e.g., Little League Baseball or Pop Warner Football) are among the most common private programs known for requiring participation fees (Seefeldt & Ewing, 1997). These pay-to-play models are also utilized by the United States Soccer Federation (USSF) and can create participation barriers, particularly among middle- and low-income families. For example, American families with incomes above \$100,000 constitute 25% of the U.S. population, yet produce 35% of youth soccer players, whereas 25% of families with incomes below \$25,000 produce only 13% of youth soccer players. Eckstein (2017) noted between the ages of 13 and 18, nearly 40% of players will leave the sport: "The result is a system more attuned to identifying the *best payers* than the *best*

players [emphasis added]” (para. 12). This pay-to-play environment could contribute to fewer players in the elite level pool, causing major development issues at this level and potentially creating lasting ramifications. For instance, on October 17, 2017, the U.S. Men’s National Team (USMNT) failed to qualify for the 2018 FIFA World Cup (FWC), and this has not happened since 1986 (Rogers, 2017; Smith, 2017). Stakeholders questioned why such an outcome occurred. Many people blamed poor coaching, while others expressed displeasure with the youth soccer development program, particularly as it relates to talent identification and cultivation (Eckstein, 2017). While the reason behind the USMNT’s failure to qualify for the 2018 FWC remains unclear, it suggests an examination of the current elite youth development system, particularly the pay-to-play model, could help address this issue while highlighting the factors and challenges some face participating in elite youth soccer.

Understanding the specific challenges experienced by those directly affected by the pay-to-play model further illustrates the disparity among upper- and lower-income families participating in elite youth soccer programs. In a recent interview, Otto Loewy, a former Major League Soccer (MLS) player, shared his story and the hardships faced because of the pay-to-play system (Chang, 2020). Loewy and his mother worked odd jobs, including painting lines on soccer fields, to offset rising costs. In middle school, Loewy’s mother paid roughly \$2,000 per season for his participation with costs increasing to \$3,000 per season in high school. While Loewy’s situation describes only one scenario, it showcases the financial hardships associated with youth soccer and the pay-to-play model, especially for low-income families. Stories such as these are not uncommon. Dr. Kirsten Hextrum, a professor at the University of Oklahoma who

researches equity in sport, said, "...We've had an increase of private sports clubs popping up to replace what was once done by low-cost, recreational or school sports" (Chang, 2020, para. 11). The growth of privatized sport organizations, specifically in the youth soccer community, further exacerbates the disparities experienced by individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds who wish to participate in these opportunities.

Theoretical Frameworks

It is important to investigate leisure constraints and facilitators from the perspectives of elite youth soccer club parents and guardians as key stakeholders to better understand youth development programs and their success. Given their decision-making ability, parents and guardians can directly affect their children's continued participation, which affects youth sport organizations and their propensity to survive. Leisure constraints are factors which prevent or reduce individuals' abilities to participate in leisure activities (Godbey & Crawford, 1987). Conversely, leisure facilitators are factors which enable or promote leisure participation among individuals (Raymore, 2002). Stakeholders are defined as individuals or groups, internal or external to an organization, who are directly or indirectly affected by the organization's decision-making (Freeman, 1984).

Research surrounding leisure constraints and facilitators focuses heavily on the leisure activity participants. This study, however, focused on parents and guardians of participants as key stakeholders by examining their perceived leisure constraints and facilitators which affect their children's continued participation in elite youth soccer. Two theoretical frameworks were employed for this study: (a) leisure constraint theory and (b) stakeholder theory. Leisure constraint theory helps to identify the different

perceived constraints experienced by parents and guardians (Crawford & Godbey, 1987), while stakeholder theory seeks to prioritize the wants and needs of stakeholder groups to ensure organizational success (Mitchell et al., 1997). Combining these two frameworks provided an opportunity to identify relevant leisure constraints and facilitators as well as further understand the role parents and guardians assume as key stakeholders in elite youth soccer clubs.

Leisure Constraint Theory

Leisure constraint theory is a theoretical framework developed by Crawford and Godbey (1987) to identify and categorize leisure constraints. Leisure constraints encompass the many reasons people experience an inability to participate in leisure activities. For example, in elite youth soccer, potential constraints include cost, limited support, and lack of time. While the type and degree of perceived leisure constraints differ among individuals, Crawford and Godbey (1987) suggested leisure constraints can be categorized into three different levels: (a) intrapersonal, (b) interpersonal, and (c) structural. Intrapersonal constraints include psychological factors such as self-efficacy, level of interest, or perceived ability (Casper et al., 2011; Crawford et al., 1991). For instance, an intrapersonal constraint might occur if a child wants to play soccer but does not believe they have the skills necessary to succeed. Interpersonal constraints describe the influence of others such as parents, coaches, and peers on continued participation, where children who feel more supported by these individuals are more likely to participate (Alexandris et al., 2002). Children and their families who are unable to participate due to a lack of resources experience structural leisure constraints. Structural

constraints in elite youth soccer may include cost, lack of time, access to quality facilities, and transportation.

Another key aspect of leisure constraint theory includes the hierarchical nature of the leisure constraint levels. This hierarchy is significant as it relates directly to individuals' ability to overcome leisure constraints. Intrapersonal constraints are the easiest to overcome, while structural constraints are the most difficult (Atkins et al., 2014; Crawford et al., 1991). For example, children can overcome a lack of confidence in their skills by simply practicing regularly; however, overcoming a lack of resources such as financial means requires more complex solutions. Resolutions needed to reduce constraints are called leisure constraint negotiation strategies, which aim to modify participation (Hubbard & Mannell, 2001). Negotiation strategies for parents and guardians may include sacrificing their own time and energy to accommodate the demands of elite youth soccer participation as well as working multiple jobs to cover participation costs. While these are only two potential negotiation strategies, they illustrate the difficult decisions and hardships parents and guardians experience to ensure their children's continued participation in elite youth soccer.

Stakeholder Theory

Simply identifying leisure constraints and facilitators is not sufficient. Instead, it is also important to discuss parents and guardians as key stakeholders who help ensure organizational success. Stakeholders are individuals or groups in and outside an organization who are directly affected by organizational decision-making (Freeman, 1984; Sotiriadou, 2009). Organizational success relies heavily on meeting the needs, goals, and motivations of stakeholders (Freeman, 1984). In a youth sport context, many

people consider participants to be the most important stakeholders as they engage in the activity. Parents and guardians, however, dictate if and when their children can participate, indicating their decision-making directly affects the organization and its success. As such, this study aims to pinpoint specific needs and goals of parents and guardians of children participating in elite youth soccer programs, providing information to club organizers to help improve organizational success.

In addition to stakeholder success, stakeholder theory includes the prioritization of stakeholders and achieving stakeholder salience. Stakeholder prioritization includes identifying and analyzing key groups and their specific needs (Mitchell et al., 1997). Analysis of this type also helps identify specific stakeholder attributes. Those attributes are power, legitimacy, and urgency. Stakeholder groups with power have the ability to influence organizational decision-making. Legitimacy encompasses the appropriateness of claims made by stakeholders. Finally, urgency highlights the degree to which action is necessary when assessing stakeholder claims (Mitchell et al., 1997). Examples of stakeholders in an elite youth soccer club include coaches, players, and sponsors. To achieve stakeholder salience, constituent groups should possess more than one attribute. Furthermore, those who possess more than one attribute will experience higher levels of prioritization than others, which suggests their needs and goals will be met first. Players represent internal stakeholders who possess the stakeholder attributes of legitimacy and urgency, while coaches and sponsors possess all three. Players, while a focal point of organization, may not have as much influence on organizational decision-making, whereas coaches and sponsors likely have strong decision-making influences.

Understanding how these attributes interact is vitally important given they directly affect organizational success.

Statement of the Problem

Parents and guardians recognize the importance of sport participation and its benefits, but equal opportunities do not always exist, specifically in elite youth sport. While many of the same benefits exist such as development of discipline, teamwork, and time management skills, a shift in offerings from recreational and school programs to private sport clubs has created unintended consequences such as restricting access and creating further disparities for families from low socioeconomic backgrounds. This is problematic as it eliminates participants based on circumstance, not talent, while simultaneously catering to those with the financial means and resources to participate in elite youth soccer. This disparity makes the decision-making process for parents and guardians regarding youth soccer participation increasingly more difficult. Though existing literature addresses various constraints to participation for youth, few studies focus on the parents and guardians as key stakeholders and the driving force behind continued sport participation.

Study Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine perceived constraints and facilitators among parents and guardians as key stakeholders in elite youth soccer clubs. This study also defined leisure constraints, identified specific leisure constraints examples unique to elite youth soccer, and illustrated individuals' methods to negotiate leisure constraints. To address the study's purpose, the study investigated the following research questions:

RQ1. What perceived constraints do parents and guardians of elite youth soccer players find inhibiting to continued participation?

RQ2. In what ways do parents and guardians of elite youth soccer players negotiate their perceived leisure constraints?

RQ3. What perceived facilitators do parents and guardians of elite youth soccer players find helpful to continued participation?

RQ4. What roles as key stakeholders do parents and guardians play in organizational success?

RQ4a. How do these stakeholder roles depict power, legitimacy, and urgency?

RQ1 and RQ3 classified the specific constraints and facilitators parents and guardians experience in a youth soccer club environment. RQ2 investigated ways in which study participants negotiate, or overcome, perceived leisure constraints. RQ4 illustrated the role parents and guardians play in elite youth soccer and RQ4a demonstrated how these roles depict stakeholder salience. To answer these research questions and sub-question, a qualitative case study approach was utilized to examine the perceptions of parents and guardians related to their children's participation in elite youth soccer clubs.

Significance of the Study

The qualitative methodology chosen provided in-depth information related to the reasons parents and guardians choose to continue their children's participation in elite youth soccer programs. This study aimed to provide feedback to elite youth soccer clubs regarding their current organizational practices, while recognizing the important role parents and guardians play as key stakeholders in ensuring continued participation.

Additionally, understanding these stakeholders and their decision-making process provided valuable insight to organizational issues needing improvement or identify those practices working well, helping to ensure equal access to sport participation opportunities. In addition to practical findings, this study produced theoretical implications related to leisure constraints and facilitators as well as stakeholder theory related to youth sports. Parents and guardians serve as the study's focal point, a perspective not previously explored in the leisure constraint literature.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations and delimitations in the present study require discussion. Limitations are imposed restrictions due to factors such as chosen research design or funding constraints, which are out of the researcher's control. Delimitations occur based on the boundaries or limits set by the researcher (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The study's limitations and delimitations will be discussed in the next section.

Limitations

Limitations in a qualitative study coincide with the study's credibility, confirmability, transferability, and triangulation (Lincoln & Gupta, 1985). For example, results of the study will not be transferable to all elite youth soccer clubs due to the qualitative nature of the study and small subset of the target population. The chosen club's characteristics such as size, program offerings, and geographic location may not match those of another, suggesting this study's findings will differ based on unique club characteristics. Additionally, the study's sample was limited to parents and guardians with children between the ages of 9 and 15. Limiting the sample to this specific group

does not fully encompass all individuals involved in elite youth soccer programs, which may affect the study's results and subsequent discussion.

Another key limitation is the potential for recall bias as participants were expected to provide retrospective details during the research process. Asking participants to recall past information may not result in the most accurate descriptions of the overall experience (Tarrant et al., 1993). Social desirability was also a concern, where the participants may have provided their responses based on what they believed the researcher wanted to hear and not their own experiences.

Finally, the researcher's relationship to the research topic is a limitation. As a longtime soccer fan, the researcher has seen firsthand the issues related to elite youth soccer development. Researcher reflexivity helps identify intersections between the researcher and the phenomenon while simultaneously acknowledging the researcher's assumptions and preconceptions which may affect the various elements of the study (Macbeth, 2001). While having an interest will help create rapport with study participants, it is important to understand researcher reflexivity and recognize how it may affect or influence the study's results.

Delimitations

A major delimitation of this study included limiting the scope. Because not all aspects of elite youth soccer can be investigated at once, the researcher chose to focus solely on parents and guardians with children currently enrolled in a youth soccer club. The decision to collect data from those currently involved provided valuable insight into issues within the elite youth soccer environment as well as provide an avenue for future research with individuals who no longer participate in elite youth soccer programs.

Limiting the scope also means limiting the data collection to a single research site. Doing so allows for convenient data collection processes given time and location constraints. Furthermore, the researcher chose to focus on elite youth soccer as these programs disproportionately affect low-income families and their ability to participate at a high level.

Definition of Terms

- Elite soccer clubs – unsubsidized systems which exist outside of traditional school or recreation soccer programs as way to improve players’ skills in preparation for high school or intercollegiate sports and place a stronger emphasis on competition and winning, where teams are often segregated by gender and age and require fees for participation such as registration, equipment, and travel costs as well as a substantial time commitment necessary for participation (Kooistra & Kooistra, 2018; Post et al., 2018)
- Intrapersonal constraint – psychological factors unique to the individual such as competence, ability, or level of interest which affect leisure participation (Crawford & Godbey, 1987)
- Interpersonal constraint – external influences such as parents, coaches, and peers who affect leisure participation (Alexandris et al., 2002)
- Legitimacy – the appropriateness of stakeholder claims within an organization (Mitchell et al., 1997)
- Leisure constraint – reasons or limitations imposed upon individuals which inhibit participation in leisure activities (Dube & Choyal, 2018; Hawkins et al., 1999)

- Leisure constraint negotiation – process by which individuals attempt to overcome leisure constraints by adopting strategies which affect participation (Hubbard & Mannell, 2001; Jun & Kyle, 2011)
- Leisure facilitator – reasons or actions which promote participation in leisure activities (Raymore, 2002)
- Pay-to-play model – participation model created by private sport organizations, which require payment in exchange for participation (Bowers et al., 2010)
- Power – stakeholder’s ability to influence organizational outcomes (Mitchell et al., 1997)
- Sport participation – leisurely or competitive activities which strengthen physical fitness, mental well-being, and group interaction (Hallmann et al., 2017)
- Stakeholder – an individual or group who is directly affected or influenced by the decision-making of an organization and its success (Freeman, 1984)
- Structural constraint – leisure constraints which occur largely due to a lack of available resources such as time, transportation, or cost (Crawford & Godbey, 1987)
- Urgency – highlights the degree to which stakeholder claims require immediate attention (Mitchell et al., 1997)

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Largely due to the perceived benefits, sport participation plays a vital role in society (Newman et al., 2016). Youth sport participation promotes physical fitness while simultaneously allowing children to learn a variety of transferable skills including discipline, time management, and teamwork. Additionally, children have the opportunity to interact with their peers through competition (Kremer-Sadlik & Kim, 2007). However, as children become more involved in sports and leagues become more competitive, parents and guardians may be forced to make difficult decisions regarding their children's continued participation. Parents and guardians are often asked to pay considerable fees and devote significant time all in the name of sport participation. For example, TD Ameritrade (2019) reported 27% of parents and guardians spend \$6,000 or more per year on youth sports. This financial burden is compounded with time commitment, where 19% of parents and guardians reported spending 20 or more hours per week on their children's sport-related activities (TD Ameritrade, 2019). This notion is especially prevalent in youth soccer, where to continue playing at the elite or senior team level, substantial financial and time commitments are required (Drape, 2018). Average costs for youth soccer participation range from \$1,400 to upwards of \$10,000 (Chaverst, 2020). These costs include annual registration fees and monthly membership fees, and do not include "invisible" costs such as hotels, gas, and food for sport-related travel. These requirements

create accessibility inequities based on the socioeconomic status of players and their parents and guardians.

Given the financial and time commitments necessary for youth sport participation, further exploration of participation facilitators and constraints was warranted, particularly from the perspective of parents and guardians. While previous research explores leisure constraints, these studies focus primarily on the athletes taking part in the activity (Casper et al., 2011; Dollman & Lewis, 2010; Eime et al., 2017; Hallmann et al., 2017; Holt et al., 2011; Post et al., 2018). These studies, however, do not consider others directly involved in the children's ability to participate (e.g., parents and guardians). As such, the current study addressed this research gap. The purpose of this study was to examine perceived constraints and facilitators among parents and guardians as key stakeholders in elite youth soccer clubs. This study furthermore aimed to define leisure constraints, identify specific examples unique to elite sport participation, and highlighted ways in which individuals negotiate these constraints.

History of Youth Sport

Given the importance of youth sport in society, one should understand its origin and evolution. Youth sport today looks vastly different than in previous centuries. Dating back to the 19th century, youth sport participation included children primarily from lower-income families, taking part in activities outside the home with non-parental supervision (Friedman, 2013). Children from middle- and upper-class families, meanwhile, enjoyed in-home activities such as dance and music lessons, shying away from more competitive activities such as sport. The youth sport system recognized today looks quite different, where children from middle- and upper-class families engage more regularly in

competitive sport in comparison to lower class families because of the financial burden sport participation can create (Picchi, 2019). Friedman (2013) determined the income-based participation shift began post-World War II when children's schooling became mandatory. Because obligatory school established a designated time for learning, leisure time also became an important priority. Parents found ways to occupy their children's time through sport, which led to the development of leagues, tournaments, and youth sport organizations.

The emergence of organized sport helped establish organizations designed specifically for sport participation. For example, the YMCA and New York City's Public School Athletic League for Boys led to formal and organized contests between children (Friedman, 2013; Koester, 2000). These early organizations did not require payment for participation. The Great Depression, however, caused sport organizations to struggle financially with many discontinuing their operations, giving rise to fee-based participation and national pay-to-play leagues such as Pop Warner Football and Little League Baseball in 1929 and 1939, respectively (Albrecht & Strand, 2010; Friedman, 2013; Koester, 2000). As a result, children from lower class families lost opportunities to participate in and benefit from competitive athletic contests because of these financial requirements.

Youth Sport Participation Benefits

Researchers have widely examined the benefits and positive associations between physical activity and youth sport participation (Neely & Holt; 2014; Ullrich-French & McDonough, 2013). This line of research is known as the Positive Youth Development (PYD) program, where identifying potential benefits in sport participation is a common

focus. These studies more specifically investigated “intentional efforts to develop interests, skills, and abilities that will enable youth to navigate life’s challenges and thrive” (Neely & Holt, 2014, p. 255). Ullrich-French and McDonough (2013) described the PYD program as building strengths and resources for young children, while integrating developmental goals. These efforts are particularly important during the early childhood years, defined as the period between five and eight years of age (Neely & Holt, 2014). Physical activity, a cornerstone of the PYD program, helps address issues associated with physical and psychological well-being (Hallmann et al., 2017; Ullrich-French & McDonough, 2013).

Examples of positive outcomes associated with PYD programs and sport participation include enhanced life and social skills, moral development, goal-related skills, and personal values (Riley & Anderson-Butcher, 2012). Many children and adolescents, however, do not get the daily recommended amount of exercise, which can lead to obesity and related chronic diseases (Casper et al., 2011). To combat this issue, Casper et al. (2011) suggested using sport as a viable medium to promote increased physical activity in children, where sport increases leisure time physical activity in children and adolescents. Studies show “children involved in sport spend less time in sedentary behaviors like watching television and playing video games than nonparticipants” (Casper et al., 2011, p. S32). Given the perceived benefits of youth sport participation, it is important to examine ways in which these benefits are or are not achieved. Understanding the reasons some children may or may not reap the benefits of sport activity is equally important, and researchers can better understand these reasons by examining constraints and facilitators to participation.

Leisure Constraint Theory

Leisure constraints are defined as “reasons, perceived or experienced, why an individual is inhibited in or prohibited from leisure activity participation” (Hawkins et al., 1999, p. 180). Dube and Choyal (2018) added, “Leisure constraints include obstacles, limitations, impediments, restrictions, and other factors placed in front of individuals either by themselves or by culture, society, or environment” (p. 419). As a result, leisure constraints prevent people from engaging in satisfying leisure experiences. Research on leisure constraints first originated in the 1980s and passed through a series of critical developmental stages, including shifts in terminology. The term “leisure constraints” replaces the phrase “barriers to recreation participation,” which did not fully encompass the complex and dynamic components of constrained leisure activity (Jackson & Scott, 1999). Using “constraint” in place of “barrier” provides a more well-rounded depiction of the issue at hand, particularly beyond physical obstacles which may inhibit individuals from participation in specific leisure activities. Jackson and Scott (1999) referred to the leisure constraints concept as a more experience-oriented idea, which includes both internal and external constraints.

Since the pivotal change in the research terminology, Godbey et al. (2010) further explored leisure constraint theory to identify the factors which promote and deter participation in leisure activities. This research focus suggests constraints to participation exist when interference occurs between leisure preferences and participation (Nadirova, 2000). A wide variety of factors affect one’s ability to participate, and Crawford and Godbey (1987) categorized these leisure constraints into three different levels: (a) intrapersonal, (b) interpersonal, and (c) structural. The three levels describe and explain

the relationship between leisure constraints and leisure activity preferences (Godbey et al., 2010). Intrapersonal constraints include various psychological states influencing leisure activity preferences. Examples include level of interest, appropriateness of the activity, or perceived ability. Interpersonal constraints describe a participant's relationship with others such as parents, family members, or peers and how these relationships can influence participation (Alexandris et al., 2002). Structural constraints exist due to the lack of resources needed for leisure activity participation (Crawford & Godbey, 1987), and these include socioeconomic status, time, or transportation.

Building upon the leisure constraint literature, Crawford et al. (1991) suggested a hierarchy exists among the three levels, where intrapersonal constraints are more proximal and structural are more distal, meaning individuals are more likely to overcome intrapersonal constraints than structural ones. The idea of proximal versus distal constraints becomes important in the context of leisure constraint negotiation. Research suggests intrapersonal constraints are more easily negotiated than structural constraints (Alexandris et al., 2002; Casper et al., 2011; Jun & Kyle, 2011; Son et al., 2008). Often out of an individual's control, structural constraints prove the most difficult to negotiate, particularly in youth sport contexts as discussed in the next section.

Leisure Constraints in Youth Sport

Previous literature outlined the perceived benefits of physical activity as a result of sport participation among children and adolescents (Hallman et al., 2017; Holt et al., 2011). Benefits include increased self-esteem, improved academic performance, and further developed social skills from partaking in sports (Holt et al., 2011). Despite perceived benefits, sport participation is not always easily accessible for all. Sport

participation is defined as “all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction, such as play, recreation, organized or competitive sport, and indigenous sports and games for the purpose of development” (as cited in Hallmann et al., 2017, p. 468). This definition gives a false sense of sport participation being easily accessible. Holt et al. (2011) countered this idea of easy accessibility, indicating fair and equitable access to sport participation does not always exist and identifying potential constraints for individuals. These constraints can prevent individuals from reaping sport participation benefits (Hallmann et al., 2017).

Common leisure constraints include lower socioeconomic status; limited time and self-efficacy or competence; reduced access to facilities, and social/geographic isolation (Casper et al., 2011; Dollman & Lewis, 2010; Eime et al., 2017; Holt et al., 2011; Post et al., 2018). External influences such as parents, peers, and coaches also play a vital role in children and adolescents’ continued participation, particularly when this participation requires significant financial and time commitments (Atkins et al., 2014; Fawcett et al., 2009). While a wide variety of participation constraints exist, Casper et al. (2011) utilized the leisure constraint theory to categorize common constraints in youth sport-based programs on the three aforementioned levels: (a) intrapersonal (e.g., self-efficacy or competence), (b) interpersonal (e.g., parents, peers, and coaches), and (c) structural (e.g., socioeconomic status, time, facilities, and social/geographic isolation). Studies such as Casper et al. (2011) rely on the perspectives of children, while the present study focused on parental perspectives. This distinction is significant and places more emphasis on interpersonal and structural constraints as parental figures do not have to contemplate their abilities to successfully take part in the leisure activity. Recognizing how these

various constraints affect continued participation is vital to keeping children involved and engaged in sport related activities, helping them obtain previously reported benefits.

Interpersonal Constraints. As noted above, previous leisure constraints research has focused primarily on sport participants, while this study addressed the parents and guardians as participants. It is important to consider external influences such as parents, coaches, and peers who may create interpersonal constraints (Atkins et al., 2014; Dollman & Lewis, 2010; Fawcett et al., 2009; Hultsman, 1993). Parents, coaches, and peers may directly or indirectly affect children and their continued participation given their proximity to these athletes. In one study focused more on parents and guardians, Fawcett et al. (2009) approached interpersonal constraints from a broad perspective, exploring the role of parental support on leisure activity. The researchers found children with parents who deem leisure activity important participate more often and for longer periods of time.

Other studies (Atkins et al., 2014; Dollman & Lewis, 2010; Hultsman, 1993) focused their research other influential groups such as peers and coaches. Dollman and Lewis (2010) explored leisure constraints using the “is it worth it, am I able, reinforcing, and enabling factors” (p. 319). Derived from the Youth Physical Activity Model, these factors encapsulated the physical, intrapersonal, emotional, and environmental experiences of children as they relate to sport participation. The study examined the differences among these four elements based on gender, controlling for age. Of the four components, the is it worth it, reinforcing, and enabling factors were significant predictors of continued participation for both gender groups. Among the three significant predictors, boys reported more positive influences on sport participation than girls,

suggesting certain factors are more inhibiting to participation for girls than boys. For example, an enabling factor such as transportation availability created more limitations for girls than boys. Additionally, reinforcing, where children feel encouraged and supported by parental feelings, was higher for boys than girls, indicating the power of other individuals as support systems affects continued participation. Lastly, the is it worth it, or emotional factor, had the greatest influence on continued participation for both boys and girls. This observation indicates attitudes and personal beliefs can positively affect children's desires to continue participating despite other potential and physical intrapersonal constraints encountered.

Hultsman (1993) investigated the influence of peers and coaches on sport participation, researching participants who once had interest in an activity but never joined and those who once participated but no longer did. The results differed based on gender, where young girls were more heavily affected by coaches than young boys when deciding to join an athletic team. This finding indicates adults must be cognizant of their ability to sway the decisions of children regarding sport participation. Additionally, no significant relationship existed between individuals who participated and then subsequently stopped an activity and their peers or coaches, suggesting children who wish to continue participating in an activity will do so regardless of certain external influences.

Researchers also should consider the role age plays in the level of influence by coaches and peers, particularly at the recreational level of sport. Atkins et al. (2014) determined the influence of coaches on continued participation grows with age, meaning children learn more about their coaches and become more aware of their coaching

philosophies over time. This finding suggests children recognize the role coaches play on the participation environment – positive or negative. Peers also significantly affect continued participation, providing support and encouragement to their counterparts. Various influences on sport participation exist, and it is important to consider those interpersonal relationships, which may result in constraints or hardships for individuals in sport.

While children play sports, parents and guardians play a significant role in allowing participation in these activities. Most leisure constraint literature focuses on the participants (Casper et al., 2011; Holt et al., 2011; Hultsman, 1993). Equally important is understanding perceived constraints experienced by parents or other caretakers, particularly when considering young athletes, as these adults ultimately determine if and when their children can participate in sport. Hardy et al. (2010) explored this phenomenon, identifying leisure constraints of Australian parents with children aged 5 to 17, who participated in at least one sport activity. The most significant constraint was activity cost, especially when considering individual household income. Participants with a household income less than \$80,000 were more likely to allow their children to participate in organized sport if costs for participation (e.g., footwear and uniforms, coaching or lesson fees) were lower. Additionally, parents of children ages 5 to 12 indicated they were more likely to allow participation in sport activities if costs were lower, the activities took less time, and activities were more accessible in the local area (Hardy et al., 2010). While sport participation has its benefits for children, continued participation can be difficult and burdensome for parents and guardians, particularly when they cannot maintain the necessary commitments and costs associated with

organized sports. This study provides an example of the combined effects of leisure constraints, both interpersonal and structural, the latter discussed in more detail below.

Structural Constraints. Structural constraints are often the primary focus in leisure constraint literature (e.g., Casper et al., 2011; Hallmann et al., 2017; Holt et al., 2011; Wicker et al., 2013). For example, parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds wish to enroll their children in youth sport activities, but often struggle to pay registration fees and other associated costs (Holt et al., 2011). Casper et al. (2011) investigated perceived constraints in adolescents based on different socio-demographic groups such as grade, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and prior sport participation. While Casper et al. (2011) aimed to identify those structural constraints, limitations exist for future studies particularly when assessing this study's sample. The researchers relied on the viewpoints of middle-school aged children and free/reduced lunch as the socioeconomic indicator. Drawing conclusions from this data proves problematic given young children may be more susceptible to information or recall bias (Tarrant et al., 1993), meaning they may not provide accurate information for analysis. Young children may not accurately recall specific information such as household income or parents' education level, producing inaccurate results. Additionally, utilizing free/reduced lunch as a socioeconomic indicator may not fully depict the socioeconomic status of each student. Instead, total household income may be more appropriate as a socioeconomic indicator.

Socioeconomic status can represent one structural constraint. Another key structural constraint often experienced in sport participation is facility access and quality, although previous research produced varying results on the significance of this constraint

factor (Casper et al., 2011; Eime et al., 2017). Casper et al. (2011) reported student grade, ethnicity, and prior sport participation produced the most significant relationships with facility issues. Among those findings, prior sport participation proved most interesting when considering facility access and quality. The authors suggested prior sport participation may provide athletes an opportunity to see and experience more facilities over time. Having this additional exposure to various facilities and their quality will likely affect the overall perceptions of sport participants regarding other facilities by creating preconceived notions about facilities and their qualities. Casper et al. (2011) identified the need for further research to investigate how influential facility access and quality are on continued sport participation. Eime et al. (2017) further explored the concept of facility quality on sport participation rates based on geographic location and socioeconomic status. Unlike the previous study, Eime et al. (2017) discovered a significant relationship between participation rates and socioeconomic status in metropolitan areas, meaning location may affect individuals' access to sport activities. Furthermore, the authors determined a relationship exists between participation rates and facility quality overall. This finding identifies the importance of understanding specific determining factors which may influence individuals' decision to continue participating, particularly relating to the environment of play.

Leisure Constraints in Elite Youth Sport

The studies above addressed perceived constraints among recreation youth sport participants. Leisure constraints, however, can exist across different levels of activity. As such, it is imperative to investigate the constraints specific to elite youth sports, which affect talent identification and cultivation (Johnston et al., 2018; Unnithan et al., 2012;

Vaeyens et al., 2008). These leagues are often designed to develop athletes' skills for high school, collegiate, professional, or even senior national level play (Kooistra & Kooistra, 2018). Leagues of this type require parents and guardians to pay registration fees, and even travel expenses as needed as well as devote substantial time to the program. Exploring this disparity further provides a more well-rounded view of the issues plaguing the USSF and its current elite youth development model (Kooistra & Kooistra, 2018; Post et al., 2018).

Like the Hardy et al. (2010) study, Post et al. (2018) examined socioeconomic status using individuals' household income and highest level of education as indicators for propensity to participate in elite youth sport clubs. This study investigated sport participation characteristics such as sport specialization and participation volume on sport participation rates in elite youth sport. While attending a club team tournament, parents completed questionnaires and provided demographic and socioeconomic information as well as details about sport specialization. Based on the socioeconomic information collected, Post et al. (2018) found approximately 62% of respondents disclosed a household income of greater than \$100,000, while 8% of participants reported a household income of less than \$50,000. Additionally, 70% of participants reported having a Bachelor's degree or higher. This demographic information highlights differences in the socioeconomic statuses of parents and guardians whose children participate in club team sports. In this case, the results further illustrate the disparity pay-to-play models create between upper- and lower-income families.

Beyond the demographic information, Post et al. (2018) identified a significant relationship among level of sport specialization and household income, suggesting those

with higher incomes are more likely to have children who are highly specialized athletes. Further, this finding proves significant as parents and guardians who have more money and time can invest in their children in ways those with less money and time cannot. In a related study, Marcen et al. (2013) investigated the relationship between socioeconomic status and parental support among youth elite athletes, recognizing the presence of both interpersonal and structural constraints. The results revealed parental support played a role in athlete self-confidence and motivation, but the level of parental support differed significantly based on socioeconomic factors. More specifically, single parent households reported higher levels of parental support for young athletes (Marcen et al., 2013). The authors attributed this finding to the dual role single parents play (e.g., “both” parental figures).

Post et al. (2018) also found a significant difference between sport-related expenditures and education level. This differs from the not statistically significant relationship between income and education level found by Marcen et al. (2013). Parents with higher education levels were more likely to spend more money on sport-related activities, particularly club teams as opposed to school sport activities (Post et al., 2018). This finding coincides with Hardy et al. (2010) and suggests participation costs are a common and substantial structural constraint experienced by parents of young athletes. Interestingly, Post et al. (2018) did not mention the specific sport of focus for this study. This omission is particularly troublesome as the findings lack necessary information to provide additional context to the study. Namely, these results could have different interpretations based on the nature of the sport itself. Because of this, further research is necessary to assess how these constraints differ for specific elite youth sports.

Differing perspectives exist regarding perceived constraints within elite youth sports. Somerset and Hoare (2018) conducted a systematic review of existing literature and determined cost and time represented the most significant constraints to participation. Access to the sport also proved important, particularly when considering elite youth sport participation. While Somerset and Hoare (2018) determined access is an issue when examining sport participation constraints in general, little research exists regarding access for elite youth sports. As key objectives of elite youth development programs, talent identification and cultivation prove difficult if limited access exists. Therefore, access as a leisure constraint requires further exploration. Youth sport organizers should also recognize access and other issues as perceived constraints and identify ways to encourage involvement for participants from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Doing so allows children equal opportunity to experience the benefits of youth sport participation.

Negotiating Leisure Constraints

Despite the perceived benefits of youth sport participation, overcoming leisure constraints proves difficult and requires parents and guardians to employ various negotiation strategies. Successful negotiation strategies provide an outlet to “modify rather than foreclose participation” (Hubbard & Mannell, 2001, p. 146). This statement suggests individuals may not overcome all constraints but negotiating some supersedes forgoing participation altogether. Hubbard and Mannell (2001) investigated four different theoretical models (independence, negotiation-buffer, constraint-effects-mitigation, and perceived-constraint-reduction models) to outline the process of mitigating leisure constraints. In general, the four models highlighted the unique relationships between constraints, negotiation, motivation, and participation using a quantitative approach.

To test the hypothesized leisure constraint negotiation models, Hubbard and Mannell (2001) surveyed corporate employees whose companies provided recreation services such as worksite fitness programs and competitive sport activities. Participants responded to a questionnaire, which examined the roles of leisure constraints, negotiation, and motivation on participation. The researchers determined motivation did not directly affect participation. This result was not statistically significant, suggesting a desire to partake in an activity does not guarantee participation. The findings also showed leisure constraints negatively affected participation, while a positive relationship existed between negotiation and participation. Additionally, a positive relationship existed between leisure constraints and negotiation, indicating people with negotiation resources or strategies were more likely to overcome leisure constraints.

Drawing upon Hubbard and Mannell's (2001) findings, the present study focused on the relationship between leisure constraints and negotiation as well as their effects on participation. This study extended the existing literature, given parents and guardians are not active participants in elite youth soccer, but rather key stakeholders who must negotiate leisure constraints on their children's behalf. Understanding the relationship between negotiation and participation becomes especially important as it highlights the way parents and guardians elect to negotiate their perceived constraints.

In a more recent study, Son et al. (2008) examined Hubbard and Mannell's (2001) proposed relationship between constraint and negotiation. The authors determined negotiation and constraint affect participation independently, and therefore, limit the usefulness of negotiation resources. Furthermore, Jun and Kyle (2011) examined the roles of identity conflict and facilitation. They found participants were more likely to negotiate constraints when identity facilitation increased. This finding suggests identity salience positively affects individuals' ability to overcome perceived constraints and participate in their chosen activity. For example, if parental figures accept their own unique identities, it becomes easier to overcome constraints. Conversely, experiencing internal conflict between identities makes negotiating participation increasingly more difficult. If parents and guardians want their children to participate in sport but cannot due to perceived constraints, parents and guardians may question their abilities as parental figures, creating additional identity conflict. While these studies identified a wide variety of negotiation strategies, it is important to understand how the negotiation process may differ based on the individual circumstances and the chosen leisure activity.

Parents and guardians often find ways to overcome or negotiate certain constraints despite individual circumstances (Jackson & Rucks, 1995; Jun & Kyle, 2011). Time and cost constraints are difficult to address, and parents may forgo their own endeavors allowing their children the opportunity to participate (Holt et al., 2011). Jackson and Rucks (1995) discussed this more specifically:

Most people who experience a problem with time and commitments, for example, choose to negotiate this class of constraint by modifying their use of time;

similarly, the problem of lack of skills is most often tackled by acquiring those skills. There were, however, some important and innovative exceptions. For instance, time constraints or lack of skills might be dealt with by modifying leisure aspirations or finding new partners. (pp. 103-104)

Parents and guardians attempt to make sacrifices to combat financial burdens of youth sport participation, yet despite their intentions this may not always be feasible. Other potential solutions for families from low socioeconomic backgrounds should be considered. Parents and guardians are unable to help their children achieve their goals or continue participation if costs become too burdensome. Finding ways to defray participation expenses could mean partnering with local non-profit organizations or asking club organizers and coaches for assistance. Elite club organizers should attempt to find local organizations willing to help those unable to cover the financial commitment. Sport practitioners should also acknowledge some parents and guardians attempt to sustain sport in their children's lives and take responsibility for this important stage of life, yet some struggle immensely with negotiating these constraints (Holt et al., 2011).

Leisure Facilitators in Youth Sport

While identifying and understanding leisure constraints serves a valuable purpose when discussing leisure activities, acknowledging participation facilitators adds an additional layer when determining factors promoting continued participation. Many studies focus on leisure constraints, which prevent continued participation. Conversely, other studies identify various facilitators, which encourage and bolster continued participation (Abdelghaffar et al., 2019; Hutzler & Bergman, 2011; Kang et al., 2017; Raymore, 2002; Stodolska et al., 2014; Swinton, 2006).

Raymore (2002) first explored facilitators, which describe conditions enabling leisure participation. More specifically, Raymore (2002) defined facilitators as, “factors that are assumed by researchers and perceived or experienced by individuals to enable or promote the formation of leisure preferences and to encourage or enhance participation” (p. 39). Like Crawford and Godbey (1987), Raymore (2002) categorized facilitators into three analogous levels: (a) intrapersonal, (b) interpersonal, and (c) structural. Intrapersonal facilitators relate to individual characteristics, traits, or beliefs. Interpersonal facilitators include external influences such as parents, coaches, and peers, and structural facilitators comprise organizations, institutions, and demographic characteristics. All three facilitator types enhance individuals’ propensity to participate in leisure activities.

Using Raymore’s (2002) facilitator framework, Stodolska et al. (2014) conducted a qualitative study exploring facilitators in an organized minority youth baseball program. Interviews with the program participants indicated several facilitators exist within each of the three levels. Participants identified feelings of confidence, perseverance, and dedication as intrapersonal facilitators. Common interpersonal facilitators included strong support from coaches and team members. Participants also mentioned Major League Baseball support and a sponsoring organization as key structural facilitators. One anticipated finding did not appear – parental support as a facilitator. Previous literature (e.g., Dixon et al., 2008; Partridge et al., 2008) indicated parental support plays a key role in promoting sport participation. Stodolska et al. (2014) determined this difference comes because of the participants’ demographics as minority youth, where parents and guardians involved themselves less often in their children’s leisure activities. Lareau

(2002) echoed this sentiment, claiming minority youth, and those with lower socioeconomic status, experience less parental support than children from middle-class families.

Abdelghaffer et al. (2019) examined facilitators driving adolescent physical activity. The authors conducted focus groups with adolescents, parents, and teachers and found perceived enjoyment and competition, perceived health and financial benefits, social support, and access to opportunities as the key factors encouraging adolescent physical activity. Perceived enjoyment and competition as well as perceived health and financial benefits constituted intrapersonal facilitators, according to Raymore's (2002) hierarchy. Social support can be categorized as an interpersonal facilitator and access to opportunities as a structural facilitator. Kang et al. (2017) also found similar results through their investigation of female college soccer players and their leisure behaviors. Like Stodolska et al. (2014), support of the organization also emerged as a key structural facilitator promoting participation. Raymore (2002) acknowledged the strong focus on constraints to participation but determined emphasis on why individuals can participate is as important as identifying why they cannot.

Leisure constraints describe why individuals cannot participate, while leisure facilitators depict why they can. In both cases, constraints and facilitators are categorized as intrapersonal, interpersonal, or structural. Examining these factors which affect parents and guardians as key stakeholders in an elite youth soccer context helps address the issues surrounding youth soccer development programs in the U.S. by specifically identifying and acknowledging the needs of parents and guardians. The next section will

further justify the important role parents and guardians play as key stakeholders in elite youth soccer programs.

Stakeholder Theory

Youth sport participation relies heavily on parents, coaches, and athletes to ensure the sport organization's success. They represent individuals in and outside the organization who feel the effects of organizational decision-making (Sotiriadou, 2009). These constituent groups are called stakeholders (Mitchell et al., 1997) and are broadly defined as, "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (Freeman, 1984, p. 53). Organizations depend on these stakeholders for success, compelling researchers to investigate stakeholders and the roles they play in a variety of contexts, particularly within sports (e.g., Chelladurai, 2001; Papadimitriou & Taylor, 2000; Parent, 2008; Parent & Deephouse, 2007; Shilbury & Moore, 2006). Little research, however, exists regarding parents and guardians as key stakeholders in youth sport development programs. As such, it is imperative to explore the key stakeholders affected by leisure constraints and facilitators. Such an exploration provides valuable insight into the decision-making process of stakeholders and allows the potential for organizational change.

Stakeholder theory seeks to identify key actors of an organization or group, both internally and externally. Freeman (1984) asserted "an organization's general success is directly linked to the needs, goals, and motivations of the parties with whom the organization interacts" (p. 53), suggesting organizations must strongly consider the interest of all individuals involved with the organization, whether internal or external. Two key questions arise with stakeholder theory: "What is the purpose of the

corporation?” and “What responsibility does management have to stakeholders?” (Freeman, 1984). While the original stakeholder theory research focused on corporations, these two questions apply when considering the role parents and guardians play in the elite youth development decision-making process. In the latter context, leaders of elite youth development clubs should consider their purpose and responsibility to parents and guardians and their effects on continued participation. Additionally, stakeholder theory stresses an organization’s social responsibility, meaning a mutual relationship exists between society and the organization, where the organization should provide a societal benefit, while society creates an environment for organizational success (Mullins, 2009).

In stakeholder theory literature, Freeman’s (1984) definition is often contested due to its ambiguity and inability to identify key constituents (Clarkson et al., 1994; Friedman et al., 2004). Subsequent literature summarized stakeholder identification based on four characteristics, where stakeholders (a) must be connected to the organization, (b) represent definable interests, (c) exist in an organization’s environment simply by their interest, and (d) may be composed of different group configurations (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Ekeren, 2017; Friedman et al., 2004; Starik, 1994). Friedman et al. (2004) determined organizations must work to identify, analyze, and prioritize constituents. Some stakeholder theorists argue no key stakeholder group should be considered more important than others (Collins, 1994; Hummels, 1998; Jones & Wicks, 1999), while others disagree with this notion. In fact, Mitchell et al. (1997) suggested a key tenet of stakeholder theory includes prioritization of key groups and their specific needs.

To underscore the prioritization of needs, Mitchell et al. (1997) identified three stakeholder attributes: (a) power, (b) legitimacy, and (c) urgency. Power describes

stakeholders' ability to influence an organization, legitimacy refers to the appropriateness of stakeholder claims, and urgency reflects the extent to which action is required for claims. This framework highlights stakeholder salience levels, which help organizational leaders prioritize the demands of their stakeholders (Boesso & Kumar, 2009; Parent & Deephouse, 2007). Mitchell et al. (1997) emphasized at least one attribute must be present for a stakeholder to exist. However, possessing power alone in a stakeholder-manager relationship does not guarantee high salience. Likewise, legitimacy and urgency individually do not ensure salience. Stakeholders possessing a single attribute are latent stakeholders, those with two attributes are expectant stakeholders, and those with all three attributes are known as definitive stakeholders. Determining the types of stakeholders within an organization provides valuable insight for managers and helps establish stakeholders' prioritization order (Boesso & Kumar, 2009; Parent & Deephouse, 2007). Additionally, because these attributes can overlap, understanding how they interact as well as the way they affect organizational decision-making is vital (Boesso & Kumar, 2009; Friedman et al., 2004; Parent & Deephouse, 2007).

Stakeholder Theory in Youth Sport

Stakeholder theory serves as a foundation to explain the relationships between various organizations and their constituents. As a result, expectations present themselves within the organization-stakeholder relationship (Friedman et al., 2004). Previous research (Bouckaert & Vandenhove, 1998; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Jones, 1995; Rowley, 1997) suggests a contractual relationship occurs when the "organization and constituent have legal, ethical, or moral responsibilities to the other and each seek specific goals" (Friedman et al., 2004, p. 15). While organization-stakeholder

relationships materialize in a variety of contexts, the sport specific club-parental figure relationship requires further exploration. As Friedman et al. (2004) suggests, the success of the relationship relies on the presence of clear goals, and by examining the perspectives of parents and guardians, club organizers will better understand the wants and needs of its constituents as stakeholders, which can affect continued participation. Thus, it is important to explore these relationships within youth sport participation. Because parents and guardians play such a significant role, the organization-stakeholder relationship becomes even more important (Sotiriadou, 2009). Club organizers should recognize the decision-making power parents and guardians possess and the affect it has on continued participation.

Within the organization-stakeholder relationship of elite youth sports exists the need for talent identification and development. Parents and guardians expect these activities to take place within their child's chosen sports program. The topic of talent identification and development has been heavily researched in a variety of countries and contexts over time (Barreiros et al., 2014; Huijgen et al., 2009; Pankhurst et al., 2013; Relvas et al., 2010; Vaeyens, et al., 2008). Pankhurst et al. (2013) identified five different constructs used to investigate talent identification and development. These five constructs include (a) sport specialization and selection, (b) practice, (c) athlete development, (d) junior and adult success, and (e) role of stakeholders in the sport system. While all five play a role in the talent identification and development process, the fifth construct highlights the relevancy of stakeholders in a youth sport participation context (Pankhurst et al., 2013).

Pankhurst et al. (2013) and Brouwers et al. (2015) explored the role of three key stakeholder groups – coaches, sport organizations, and parents – on talent identification and development in tennis. Their results indicated little consensus exists about the role of key stakeholders when assessing the ideal outcomes of talent identification and development. In both studies, a significant disconnect existed among the key stakeholders. For instance, coaches and leaders of the sport organizations displayed a sense of self-interest as they are directly involved in the talent identification and development process. The presence of self-interest indicates these two stakeholder groups may not always have the athletes' best interest in mind (Brouwers et al., 2015). While coaches and sport organizations are crucial to the elite development pathway (Brouwers et al., 2015), it is also important to consider the familial support given to athletes, helping them negotiate their own interpersonal constraints (Dollman & Lewis, 2010; Pankhurst et al., 2013). Parents had a more indirect role in the talent identification and development system but had a profound effect on their children's participation by introducing them to sport activities and encouraging them to persevere despite hardships (Pankhurst & Collins, 2013; Pankhurst et al., 2013).

While previous literature identifying parents and guardians as stakeholders exists, most focus on parental behavior (e.g., Gould et al., 2008; Omil & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011) or parental perceptions of a sport program (e.g., Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Schwab et al., 2010; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). Harwood and Knight (2016) suggested, "The role of the parent in competitive sport remains highly topical, yet our scholarly understanding of parents in varying contexts, sports, and cultures remains relatively narrow" (p. 84). The present study seeks to further expand the research scope of parenting in sport by

examining the role parents and guardians play as the ultimate decision-makers in their children's continued participation. Clarke and Harwood (2014) determined more studies are needed to fully understand parental experiences, particularly when assessing sport program success.

Parents and guardians are often deeply invested in their children's sport careers, but this intense involvement does not always yield positive outcomes. Gould et al. (2008) and Omil and Wiese-Bjornstal (2011) noticed a significant increase in poor sideline behaviors of parents during youth sporting events and explored this phenomenon further. Gould et al. (2008) assessed coaches' perceptions of parental sport behavior, while Omil and Wiese-Bjornstal (2011) investigated children's perceptions of their parents' sideline behavior during youth sporting events. Overall, coaches recounted favorable experiences with parents, where parents displayed positive behaviors such as focusing on the sport process and not the outcome, providing support to the child, and emphasizing total development. Parents who emphasized winning and performance were viewed more negatively by coaches. Furthermore, coaches recognized the importance of parents and their role in youth sport development (Gould et al., 2008).

While Gould et al.'s (2008) study had overwhelmingly positive perceptions of parents in a youth sport context, Omil and Wiese-Bjornstal's (2011) findings highlighted the negative aspects of parents in youth sports. Three themes arose from the results: (a) supportive parent, (b) demanding coach, and (c) crazed fan. Supportive parent equated to the way children wished their parents would act on the sideline, which included attentive silence and cheering during appropriate moments. Demanding coach focused on coaching from the sideline. Overall, children indicated parents should not coach from the sideline

because it interferes with the coach's authority, but they were more willing to accept advice from parents privately. Crazy fan related to the emotional aspect of sideline behavior, where children largely preferred their parents to remain calm and keep their emotions in check while spectating, avoiding yelling at athletes, coaches, or officials.

Schwab et al. (2010) explored differences between player and parental perspectives of a youth football program in the U.S. This quantitative study examined nine different variables from skills learned to coaching effectiveness and likelihood of participation the following year. From the results, statistically significant differences existed between players and parents for all variables except league sportsmanship. This result indicates players and parents perceive youth sport programs differently. Players, on average, had a more positive outlook of their football program, ranking each variable of interest higher than their parents. Schwab et al. (2010) determined, "While positive experience for children in youth sport programs rate as a high priority, perhaps more effort could be made in enhancing parents' youth sport experiences, since they are the ones who will make final decisions about their children's future participation" (p. 47). This conclusion is relevant to the current study as it further illustrates the need for parental perspectives as separate but key stakeholders in youth sport contexts.

In addition to parental behaviors, parents have been the research focus when exploring success of youth sport programs. Wiersma and Fifer (2008) examined the positive and negative aspects of youth sport programs from parents' perspectives. Utilizing focus groups, the researchers collected data from 55 individuals and found four key themes. The first theme included parental joys, which highlighted the positives parents received from watching their children participate in sport such as observing

success and enjoyment as well as establishing peer relationships with other parents. Second, parents outlined various difficulties and challenges faced within youth sport programming, specifically managing expenses and transportation, balancing competition and fun, and understanding the overall demand of their children's participation. Parents also identified factors related to parental misconduct as a key theme, where children's age, sport, competitiveness played a role in how parents acted during youth sporting events. Finally, adult responsibility influenced their perceptions of a youth sport program, with the recognition that adults directly influence the youth sport participation and there is responsibility in doing so appropriately.

Using a phenomenological approach, Clarke and Harwood (2014) explored parental experiences and perceptions of elite youth soccer programs. Interviews with parents of children aged 8 to 11 from various English soccer clubs were conducted. Participants identified three key themes: (a) parent socialization in soccer culture, (b) enhanced parent identity, and (c) increased parental responsibility. Parents indicated their children's participation in elite youth soccer required them to adapt to new rules and environments, while actively choosing to support their athletes. This encouraged parents to develop inter-club relationships with their peers. Parents also highlighted how their children's acceptance in elite youth soccer reflected positively on them, enhancing their own parental identity. Finally, parents also experience increased levels of responsibility to their children, ensuring they reach their potential, while simultaneously offering protection as needed. While these findings help assess elite youth soccer programs, further research is needed to understand the way in which parents and guardians as key stakeholder prioritize their assessment of these programs.

A core tenet of stakeholder theory centers around the prioritization of key stakeholders based on the stakeholder attributes of power, legitimacy, and urgency (Mitchell et al., 1997). Stakeholder prioritization often considers the proximity of stakeholder to the organization (e.g., internal or external), where those located internally are given higher priority than external stakeholders (Mitchell et al., 2017). Driscoll and Starik (2004) stated, “The greater the proximity, the greater likelihood of the development of stakeholder relationships” (p. 63). This notion of stakeholder prioritization is particularly relevant when considering parents and guardians in youth sport context. Given participants are the individuals engaging in an activity, they are often identified as the most proximate stakeholders, indicating sport managers are more likely to pay attention to activity participants than other stakeholders (Mitchell et al., 2017). However, this proves problematic when assessing the role parents and guardians play in youth sport development (Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). Parents and guardians play an integral role in the sport participation decision-making process, particularly within pay-to-play models (Gould et al., 2008). Without the financial contribution of parents and guardians and their decision to actively enroll their children in sport, organizational success becomes increasingly difficult. Thus, this study aimed to examine parents and guardians as focal stakeholders, while assessing their stakeholder salience.

Summary of Literature

Sport participation provides various benefits for young children; however, constraints can limit or inhibit their ability to continue participating. This notion holds true particularly when thinking about important stakeholders, specifically parents and

guardians, who make the final decision regarding youth sport participation. Time and cost are among the most common constraints experienced by these individuals, which in turn makes continued participation even more difficult. Parents and guardians may take specific actions to negotiate these constraints by limiting their own endeavors, but this practice is not always feasible or sustainable. As such, it is important to identify and address these constraints, ensuring children can continue their sport participation and reap the many benefits of leisure activity. This chapter also examined studies involving facilitators to participation. Finally, this chapter explored parents and guardians as key stakeholders in elite youth soccer programs. Shifting the focus from participants to parents and guardians as the key stakeholders provides a more well-rounded viewpoint of elite youth soccer programs and perceived constraints and facilitators. Together these elements provide context to the current climate in youth soccer development.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research strategies for the study, while providing the rationale for each step in the research process from data collection to analysis. The purpose of this study was to examine perceived constraints and facilitators among parents and guardians as key stakeholders in elite youth soccer clubs. This qualitative study sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What perceived constraints do parents and guardians of elite youth soccer players find inhibiting to continued participation?

RQ2. In what ways do parents and guardians of elite youth soccer players negotiate their perceived leisure constraints?

RQ3. What perceived facilitators do parents and guardians of elite youth soccer players find helpful to continued participation?

RQ4. What roles as key stakeholders do parents and guardians play in organizational success?

To further understand the stakeholder salience, the following sub-question was examined:

RQ4a. How do these stakeholder roles depict power, legitimacy, and urgency?

With the study's purpose and research questions in mind, this study used a qualitative research approach. Despite previous youth sport development studies utilizing both qualitative (Atkins et al., 2014; Dollman & Lewis, 2010) and quantitative (Casper et

al., 2011; Hallmann et al., 2017; Post et al., 2018) methodologies, a qualitative approach was more appropriate for the current study. Korstjens and Moser (2017) stated qualitative research “takes into account the natural contexts in which individuals or groups function, as its aim is to provide an in-depth understanding of real-world problems” (p. 275). Using a qualitative approach for this study provided in-depth knowledge of leisure constraints and facilitators encountered by parents and guardians in elite youth soccer programs, further highlighting their lived experiences as key stakeholders.

Leisure constraint theory and stakeholder theory served as the theoretical foundation, where leisure constraint theory describes different intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural factors influencing participation. Stakeholder theory recognizes the importance of individuals, including their respective power, legitimacy, and urgency, in and outside of the organization as necessary for organizational success. Using the described theoretical framework and a qualitative approach, this study examined the current state of an elite youth soccer development program in relation to continued participation from parent and guardian perspectives, providing an in-depth understanding of this sport context.

Phenomenological Approach

To address the study’s purpose, a phenomenological approach was utilized. According to Creswell et al. (2007), a phenomenology seeks to describe commonalities among participants experiencing specific phenomena, which can include events, situations, experiences, or concepts (Astalin, 2013). In this case, the study investigated and analyzed the commonalities shared by parents and guardians with children participating in a specific youth soccer program, capturing the essence of their individual

experiences, including the participation barriers and facilitators they face as stakeholders within this context. This approach provides detailed descriptions summarizing the “what” and “how” of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, the phenomenological methodology allows the researcher to embrace his or her own personal connection to the research problem in conjunction with participants’ experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Phenomenology is a common methodological framework utilized in education research, which highlights the importance of a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). From a sport management perspective, Kerry and Armour (2000) suggested use of a phenomenological approach is appropriate when examining sport from a sociological point of view. The present study aimed to understand parental behavior regarding continued sport participation and the role parents have as stakeholders within an elite youth soccer organization. The phenomenological approach has been utilized in similar contexts, specifically youth sport participation, parental roles in sport, and parents as key stakeholder in youth sport programs (e.g., Bowers and Green, 2013; Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Gould et al., 2008; Todd & Edwards, 2020; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008).

Philosophical Assumptions

Due to the human element associated with the research problem, this study utilized a social constructivist perspective, which values the importance of understanding society from cultural and contextual perspectives, while constructing knowledge base on this new-found understanding (Derry, 1999; McMahon, 1997). When considering this study, the social constructivist paradigm suggests further information is needed to fully understand the current youth development structure. Specifically, parents’ and guardians’

impressions of the organization (cultural) and their own circumstances (contextual) on continued participation as well as an understanding of their place as organizational stakeholders.

Social constructivism grounds itself in three main assumptions about reality, knowledge, and learning. Reality is created with human activity (Kukla, 2000), knowledge is generated based on human interaction and their environments (Ernest, 1999; Gredler, 1997; Prawat & Floden, 1994), and learning occurs when individuals are actively engaged in a variety of social activities (McMahon, 1997). These key tenets of social constructivism are especially relevant in the context of youth sport participation, particularly as they relate to parents and guardians and their ability to allow continued participation. The role of decision-maker requires human activity constituting reality, knowledge exists based on individuals' environments, and finally, learning occurs through socialization and activity. Parents and guardians experience reality in the decision-making process when weighing various youth development options. This task encourages parents and guardians to act in the best interest of their children. Next, parents and guardians as organizational stakeholders consider the environment of the program, where their children will learn and grow. By having this awareness, parents and guardians gain additional knowledge which affects youth sport participation and as stakeholders with the organization. Lastly, interaction occurs for children in youth sport programs, but also adds a socialization factor for parents and guardians, where adults can interact with one another both as parents and guardians as well as organizational stakeholders, constituting the final social constructivist tenet of learning. Understanding

the key assumptions of social constructivism will prove beneficial when posing questions to participants, interpreting data, and reporting the study's findings.

To provide additional context to the social constructivist paradigm, one should address the philosophical assumptions stemming from this perspective. These two philosophical assumptions include epistemology and ontology. Epistemology describes the relationship between the researcher and the topic being researched (Lee, 2012; Tuli, 2010). More specifically, knowledge is obtained by collecting subjective evidence from the study's participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This characteristic suggests a reliance on personal contact with study participants to further understand their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Tuli, 2010). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) determined participants' views and opinions further validate knowledge through firsthand occurrences. In addition to the personal connection established with the study's participants, Farzanfar (2005) indicates epistemology applies when the study's aim is to further understand a specific phenomenon and not for generalizability of results. Given the chosen methodology is a case study, the epistemological assumption proves appropriate.

In general, ontology describes the nature of reality (Grix, 2002). Blaikie (2000) provides a more well-rounded definition describing ontology as,

...claims and assumptions that are made about the nature of social reality, claims about what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact with one another. In short, ontological assumptions are concerned with what we believe constitutes social reality. (p. 8)

Creswell and Poth (2018) stressed the importance of embracing multiple viewpoints and realities in qualitative research when utilizing an ontological approach.

An ontological approach applies in this study's context as realities among participants will differ with common themes emerging (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These different themes will develop using the words of participants.

Together these philosophical assumptions will guide the study's methodology, namely, the techniques necessary for data collection, interpretation of the findings, and the way in which the results are written. The study required personal contact and firsthand interaction with the study's participants as well as garnering multiple viewpoints to better understand the realities of individual participants.

Study Participants

While many individuals are involved with youth soccer development in the U.S., this study focused on viewpoints of parents and guardians, particularly those with children ages 9 to 15. Post et al. (2018) found 70% of children forgo sport participation by the age of 13. As a result, study participants with children in the previously identified age range provided insight into the decision-making process regarding continued elite soccer participation and the current youth development system.

Research Site

Study participants were recruited from Metropolitan Football Club (MFC), a newly established elite youth soccer club in the Midwest. The club currently employs six full-time staff members, who are committed to upholding MFC's mission of providing soccer experience to all those interested. In addition to the full-time staff, MFC enlists the help of approximately 30 coaches. Presently, the club enrollment numbers include approximately 440 boys and girls across 46 teams, ranging in ages from under-8 to under-19. Teams engage in weekly training sessions, where the number of days and times

vary across age groups. The under-8 and under-9 teams have two scheduled training sessions and a third optional one, totaling 3.5 hours/week for the three sessions. For those under-10 teams and above, the time commitment increases with three training sessions/week, totaling 4.5 hours/week. Travel commitments and cost also differ by age group. Those in the oldest age group will participate in approximately 5 to 6 tournaments in a calendar year and annual participation fees range from \$1,150 to \$1,970. These fees do not include the price of uniforms or travel expenses.

To recruit study participants, purposive and snowball sampling techniques within the specific sports club outlined above were employed. According to Palinkas et al. (2015), use of a purposive criterion sampling procedure in phenomenology research is appropriate as the technique focuses on identifying and studying information-rich groups, providing valuable insights and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Purposive criterion sampling allows the research to identify a set criterion for study participants. The criterion for participant selection is all interview participants must have at least one child, aged 9 to 15, who currently participates in the chosen youth soccer club. For this study, participants were recruited from the aforementioned U.S. Youth Soccer and USSF affiliated club in the Midwest. Snowball sampling was also utilized to recruit participants by word of mouth. This technique allows current participants to refer other candidates who might be interested in the study and fit the pre-determined criterion (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Sample Size. The appropriate number of participants needed for phenomenological research varies. Some researchers suggest a heterogeneous group of people experiencing the phenomenon ranges in size from 3 to 15 individuals (Creswell,

2013; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Steeves (2000) argues empirical knowledge drives sample size and 10 to 15 participants is more appropriate. While there is no pre-determined threshold for sample size, it is necessary to achieve saturation. Saturation is a stage in qualitative research where no additional data are found, signaling the end of the data collection process (Saunders et al., 2017). To determine if saturation has been met, identifying patterns in codes and themes is necessary. The researcher can conclude saturation has been reached once no additional codes and themes are found. Therefore, no pre-determined sample size was established to ensure the phenomenon is appropriately captured.

Access and Entry

Permission to conduct the present study involving human subjects was obtained through the University of Louisville Institutional Review Board (IRB) in December 2020. To protect participant identities, pseudonyms were utilized, and all data identifiers were removed. Participants were informed of their right to confidentiality prior to the interview. Finally, data collected from the study was stored electronically on a password-protected computer to further protect study participants.

Data Collection

To obtain the in-depth understanding of the study's underlying phenomenon, the use of multiple methods and triangulation is crucial. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), this strategy adds rigor, breadth, and depth to the study. Therefore, this study employed the following data collection methods: (a) demographic survey and (b) personal interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A pilot study was conducted prior to the main data collection process to test the interview protocol. This small-scale study is

designed to inform the main study, providing the researcher an opportunity to adjust the protocol as needed (Kim, 2010). The pilot study was conducted using an individual who meets the criteria outlined previously.

Survey

Following IRB approval and permission from the club director, potential participants were contacted. Upon agreement to participate, individuals were asked to complete a short questionnaire to collect demographic information. This data collection process does not necessarily help explain complex issues but helps describe participants' characteristics in relation to the target population. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), the use of surveys serves to complement other data collection methods. The demographic information collected included gender, household income, education level, and number of children aged 9 to 15 participating at the research site. The full survey can be found in Appendix A. Participant demographics provided valuable insight into the make-up of the participants and allow comparisons to previous demographic information related to youth soccer participation (e.g., Post et al., 2018). Such a comparison allowed the researcher to assess potential commonalities or distinctions about soccer participation in a different youth soccer context.

Personal Interviews

Selected as the primary data collection method, interviews provided robust data by capturing individuals' perspectives and personal experiences related to the research topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In addition, interviews serve as the cornerstone of qualitative research, which help unearth people's lived experiences.

Interviews also allowed the researcher to clarify participants' statements and probe for more information throughout the interview process.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using video conferencing software based on interviewee preferences and availability. While face-to-face interviews were the preferred interview process, other methods are appropriate and will not affect the outcome of the results (Archibald et al., 2019). Prior to their participation, interviewees received information about the process including the study's purpose, their right to opt out of the study at any time, and who to contact if questions or concerns arise. The full preamble can be found in Appendix B. Interview questions were made available prior to the interview for participants. Grounded in theory, sample interview questions were as follows:

1. Tell me about your experience with youth soccer program.
 - a. In your opinion, what are the positive aspects of the program?
 - b. What are the negative aspects of the program?
 - c. Why did you choose this particular club?
2. What factors influence your decision to allow your child(ren) to participate in youth soccer? (Post et al., 2018).
 - a. Of the factors named, which do you find to be the biggest priority in terms of your child(ren)'s participation?
 - b. What role does this prioritization play in your decision-making process?
3. What factors might prevent your child(ren)'s continued participation in youth soccer? (Crawford & Godbey, 1987).

- a. Consider only the factors which might prevent continued participation for the following questions:
 - i. What factors outside the program negatively influence your decision-making process regarding continued participation?
(Crawford & Godbey, 1987).
 - ii. What factors within the program negatively influence your decision-making process regarding continued participation?
(Fawcett et al., 2009; Dollman & Lewis, 2010).
 - iii. In what ways do other individuals negatively influence your decision-making process regarding continued participation?
(Atkins et al., 2014; Pankhurst et al., 2013).
- 4. What factors might help your child(ren)'s continued participation in youth soccer?
(Raymore, 2002).
 - a. Consider only the factors which might help continued participation for the following questions:
 - i. What factors outside the program positively influence your decision-making process regarding continued participation?
(Raymore, 2002).
 - ii. What factors within the program positively influence your decision-making process regarding continued participation?
(Stoldoska, et al., 2018).

- iii. In what ways do other individuals positively influence your decision-making process regarding continued participation?

(Raymore, 2002).

- 5. What resources or assistance would help to ensure your child(ren)'s continued participation? (Knight & Holt, 2014).

- a. How might club organizers/directors address these concerns or needs?

(Wiersma & Fifer, 2008).

- b. What sacrifices have you made to ensure your child(ren)'s continued participation in youth soccer programs? (Holt et al., 2011; Jackson &

Rucks, 1995).

- c. What improvements to the current system could be made to help parents and guardians ensure continued participation? (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008).

- d. If you have concerns or needs, what is your level of comfort reaching out to a senior level official within the program? (Sotiriadou, 2009).

- e. How might club organizers improve your level of comfort when addressing your concerns or needs as club soccer parent or guardian?

(Parent & Deephouse, 2007).

- 6. In what ways does the program seek feedback from parents and guardians? (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008).

- a. How do you feel that feedback is taken and incorporated into the program?

(Sotiriadou, 2009).

- i. How do you think your voice is heard within the program?

(Sotiriadou, 2009).

- ii. How might the way feedback is taken and incorporated influence your decision-making process regarding continued participation? (Sotiriadou, 2009).
 - iii. To what degree do you feel club organizers value your input as a parent or guardian of child participating in youth soccer? (Ekeren, 2017).
 - iv. When feedback is provided, how quickly do you feel club organizers make changes? (Parent & Deephouse, 2007).
- 7. How is information from club organizers provided to parents and guardians? (Holt et al., 2009).
 - a. In what ways is information provided efficiently? (Holt et al., 2009).
 - b. How might you improve avenues of communication between yourself and club organizers? (Holt et al., 2009).
- 8. Have you ever experienced a time when you felt the needs of others in the youth soccer program were deemed more important than your own? (Parent & Deephouse, 2007).
 - a. If so, please provide examples.
 - i. How did this make you feel? (Parent & Deephouse, 2007).
 - ii. How did the situation affect your perceptions of the club program? (Parent & Deephouse, 2007).
- 9. How would you describe your role as a parent or guardian of a child participating in a club soccer program? (Parent & Deephouse, 2007).

- a. To what degree do you feel you are a part of organizational decision-making? (Parent & Deephouse, 2007).
 - i. How often do you feel you are consulted about organizational decisions which may affect your child's continued participation? (Parent & Deephouse, 2007).
 - ii. To what degree do you believe you are a valued member of the youth soccer community? (Ekeren, 2017).

10. What else would you like me to know about your experiences with your youth soccer program?

The semi-structured interviews lasted between 21 and 45 minutes. To ensure the accuracy of transcriptions, the interviews were recorded. Once the transcription process was complete, member checking occurred, where participants were asked to review a transcript of the interview to double check their responses, ensuring response clarity and data trustworthiness.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research is a complex process performed in conjunction with the data collection procedure (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) depict the data analysis process as a spiral beginning with managing and organizing data and ending with providing an account of the findings. Given the various data collection methods this study utilized, producing numerous data points, it is imperative data remain organized. Once data were organized, the researcher began to read through the data to get a better understanding of the information, taking careful notes along the way (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Once familiar with the data, the first round of coding began. Data were analyzed using inductive and deductive coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994), identifying common themes from the participants' transcripts. Inductive coding "involves discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one's data. Findings emerge out of the data [and] through the analyst's interactions with the data..." (Patton, 1995, p. 453). This open coding technique allowed themes to emerge organically and established clear links between the data and the research questions (Thomas, 2003). In the second round of coding, pattern coding was utilized to group commonalities and further organize the emergent themes from the previous round of coding. Once the second round of coding was complete, the data analysis required an interpretation of results and a description of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To address RQ1 and RQ3, constraints and facilitators identified by study participants were categorized by type – intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. These constraints and facilitators and further divided into sub-categories. A visual depiction of the categories and sub-categories were organized and illustrated parents' and guardians' perceived constraints and facilitators. Wiersma and Fifer's (2008) exploration of parental involvement in youth sport used a similar data analysis technique to organize higher- and low-order themes which emerged from the data. While identifying leisure constraints is important, RQ2 sought to understand strategies parents and guardians employed to overcome leisure constraints. Data collected from participant interviews were analyzed and emergent themes organized. For instance, parents and guardians who routinely experience transportation constraints, may elect to ask another parent or guardian to carpool as a negotiation strategy. Following Hubbard and Mannell (2001), information

about the relationships between leisure constraints, negotiation, and participation was further examined and applied in the youth soccer specific context. Understanding negotiation strategies utilized by parents and guardians helped inform club organizers about the wants and needs of the individuals who directly affect organizational success.

The previous research questions focused on perceived constraints and facilitators and strategies employed to overcome constraints. RQ4 focused on parents and guardians as key stakeholders. By examining their roles as stakeholders, findings will help club organizers recognize the importance of parents and guardians as a focal point in the organization. Data were analyzed to understand stakeholder salience by acknowledging elements of power, legitimacy, and urgency experienced by parents and guardians. Additionally, exploring stakeholder salience helped identify different stakeholder types (see Mitchell et al., 1997). To examine the power attribute, the researcher looked for ways in which parents and guardians influence the club. This investigation could include how parents and guardians perceive the way club organizers receive and implement feedback as well as their overall involvement in club decision-making. For instance, parents and guardians who have ability to change club operations such as practice or game schedules would power within the organization.

Stakeholders possessing legitimacy require attention from the organizer as their claims have been deemed appropriate. The present study aimed to identify elements of legitimacy through the interview process, looking for ways in which parents and guardians identify positive and negative aspects of their club soccer experience. More specifically, parents and guardians who raise concerns about potential leisure constraints will have legitimate claims, but evidence of this does not necessarily mean they can

change their circumstance. An example of legitimacy in a youth soccer context might include parents and guardians expressing concerns about their inability to cover the costs of their children's continued participation. Legitimacy means nothing without power and urgency. Even if parents' and guardians' concerns or issues are acknowledged, having no influence does nothing to improve the club or address their claims. Finally, urgency illustrates the extent to which stakeholder claims require immediate attention.

Investigating the urgency attribute required assessment of feedback and requests from parents and guardians. For example, a parent or guardian identifying cost as a potential leisure constraint and reaching out to club organizers would possess urgency if club organizers worked quickly to find a resolution.

Exploring the attributes of power, legitimacy, and urgency helped classify the stakeholder group which parents and guardians belong (e.g., latent, expectant, or definitive). While using data from participants was the main focus when assessing stakeholder attributes, document analysis may also provide valuable insight by corroborating or contradicting the perceptions of parents and guardians.

Researcher Positionality

As a lifelong soccer fan, I have always had an interest in the success of the U.S. national teams. I grew up watching some of the world's greatest female soccer players, using them as my own personal inspiration throughout my playing career. As I grew older, I began to notice the stark difference between the success of the U.S. Women's National Team (USWNT) and USMNT. In terms of winning, the USWNT is by far the more superior team, winning four FIFA Women's World Cups and four Olympic gold medals. This observation led me to question the system utilized by U.S. Soccer when

developing and cultivating talent for the senior national teams. Although I am not a direct insider to the elite youth development structure, as I only played club soccer for a short time, I am aware of the constraints and facilitators of the development process. Having this level of knowledge will help me build rapport with participants and establish the necessary trust required for this study, particularly because I may discuss sensitive topics with study participants.

While a personal connection exists between the research and the research problem, the outsider perspective is equally important. This study focused on the role of parents and guardians in youth sport participation; I must acknowledge I am not a parent or guardian. Therefore, I do not fully understand or identify with my participants and their decision-making process regarding sport participation. However, being an outsider helps remove potential biases from the study. I am cognizant I do not have all the answers, which allowed me to fully grasp participants' responses and generate meaningful results, while recognizing how my own personal feelings may influence those results.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

The equivalent of validity in quantitative research, credibility helps ensure the believability of results in qualitative studies (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure credibility, Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer four strategies: (a) prolonged engagement, (b) persistent observation, (c) triangulation, and (d) member checking. Prolonged engagement means investing sufficient time in the field to build trust and obtain rich data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Persistent observation encompasses

identifying the study's most important elements to encourage focus throughout the entire process. Triangulation utilizes different data sources, investigators, or data collection methods during the collection process. Finally, member check allows participants the opportunity to examine the study's results and interpretations, providing feedback as necessary (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While these strategies have merit in qualitative research, Korstjens & Moser (2018) determine not all four strategies apply in every study. For the purposes of this study, three of the four strategies will be employed – persistent observation, triangulation, and member checking.

Dependability and Confirmability

Closely related, dependability and confirmability ensure the stability and accuracy of data (Houghton et al., 2013). Common strategies employed to establish dependability and confirmability are the creation of audit trails and reflexivity. Audit trails require detailed and organized notes, outlining the researcher's decision-making process as well as the path to completion (Houghton et al., 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflexivity encapsulates the personal contributions from the researchers like personal interests in the research topic, which should be noted throughout the study. Both strategies were utilized throughout this study by taking detailed notes during the interview and coding process, making sure accurate records were kept, while also recognizing my own personal assumptions and interests in the research area.

Transferability

Transferability describes the extent to which study results can be applied in similar research contexts or environments (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). While phenomenological study results are not generalizable, results may be useful and transfer

across similar organizations. To better facilitate transferability, researchers suggest providing a “thick description” of the research process and the participants, allowing others to determine if results apply to their own research setting (Houghton et al., 2013; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Implications for Research, Theory, and Practice

The purpose of this study was to examine perceived constraints and facilitators among parents and guardians as key stakeholders in elite youth soccer clubs. While studies involving sport participation are prevalent, most examine this phenomenon from athletes’ or participants’ perspectives. However, this study focused on perceived constraints and facilitators experienced by parents and guardians in their roles as caregivers to the athletes and key stakeholders within the organization. Such a perspective has both practical and theoretical implications on sport participation.

From a practical perspective, parents and guardians serve as vital stakeholders within the youth soccer development system as their children’s primary decision-maker. Without parents and guardians actively enrolling their children in youth soccer programs, the youth development system would cease to exist. Given their importance to youth development, club organizers and coaches should find ways to help parents and guardians negotiate their perceived constraints and amplify their perceived facilitators. Doing so, may help relieve the burden parents and guardians experience when contemplating continued sport participation. Furthermore, results from this study will be shared with club organizers to provide valuable feedback to the organization, where meaningful change can happen.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study added to the leisure constraint literature as well as the stakeholder literature. Leisure constraint theory identifies and categorizes common constraints to participation. However, previous studies focused primarily on the participants and their perceived constraints. This study further explored perceived constraints, but from an outside perspective—parents and guardians who support their children’s sport participation while managing leisure constraints and facilitators. This outside perspective provides valuable insight relating to the current youth development system and further understand factors which help or hurt continued participation. Results also highlighted parents and guardians as key stakeholders in the organization by assessing the stakeholder attributes of power, legitimacy, and urgency. In theory, parents and guardians should possess all three attributes given their proximity to elite youth soccer and decision-making ability, yet the perceptions of parents and guardians might say otherwise. This is especially true when considering the role leisure constraints play and their ability to inhibit or reduce participation. Encountering leisure constraints may in fact reduce parents’ and guardians’ feelings of power, legitimacy, and urgency within the organization. So often, players become the sole focus as the individuals taking part in the activity. However, this study aimed to highlight the importance of parents and guardians as focal stakeholders within the organization. Without parents’ and guardians’ decision to enroll their children in youth soccer programs, programs would not operate as designed and hinder organizational success.

Summary/Statement of Significance

Using a qualitative case study approach, this study aimed to identify leisure constraints and facilitators in youth development for parents and guardians with children

in elite youth soccer clubs. As previously mentioned, a strong emphasis on youth sport participation in the U.S. exists. However, not all children have equal access or opportunity to participate in sport and leisure activities. Further understanding parents' and guardians' experiences as key stakeholders will help identify and recognize the elements of the youth development system which are helpful and hurtful. Additionally, information gathered from this study examined leisure constraints and facilitators from a new perspective, adding to both the leisure constraint and stakeholder literature.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine perceived constraints and facilitators among parents and guardians as key stakeholders in elite youth soccer clubs. Leisure constraint theory and stakeholder theory served as the theoretical framework for two primary reasons: (a) to identify specific constraints and facilitators experienced by the study's participants and (b) describe the presence or lack of power, legitimacy, and urgency felt by parents and guardians in a club soccer environment. This study employed a phenomenological approach, which aimed to better understand the commonalities experienced by parents and guardians with children participating in a specific youth soccer program. To address the study's purpose, the following research questions were investigated:

RQ1. What perceived constraints do parents and guardians of elite youth soccer players find inhibiting to continued participation?

RQ2. In what ways do parents and guardians of elite youth soccer players negotiate their perceived leisure constraints?

RQ3. What perceived facilitators do parents and guardians of elite youth soccer players find helpful to continued participation?

RQ4. What roles as key stakeholders do parents and guardians play in organizational success?

To further examine the role parents and guardians as stakeholders in this context, the following sub-question was developed:

RQ4a. How do these stakeholder roles depict power, legitimacy, and urgency?

Ten parents and guardians meeting the study's criteria participated in semi-structured interviews. On average, interviews lasted 37 minutes and ranged between 21 and 45 minutes. In each interview, the researcher inquired about elements of the club which helped or hindered continued participation as well as explored parents' and guardians' perceived role as stakeholders within the organization.

Research Site

Before delving into the demographic attributes of club members and study participants, an explanation of the elite soccer club under investigation in the current study and its characteristics is warranted to better understand the club composition and its potential effect on continued participation. MFC is an elite youth soccer club established in 2020 in the Midwest and employs six full-time staff members. MFC also enlists the help of 30 coaches for approximately 46 teams. Enrollment for these teams includes approximately 440 boys and girls ranging in ages from under-8 to under-19. Members of the club participate in weekly training sessions, which vary based on the child's age and the time of year. For example, the under-8 and under-9 teams participate two times a week with an optional third training session offered during the fall and spring seasons, totaling 3.5 hours per week. The under-10 teams and older have three scheduled training sessions during the fall and spring seasons, totaling 4.5 hours per week. The time commitment decreases during the summer and winter sessions for all age groups as these are not viewed as mandatory training periods.

MFC has both indoor and outdoor facilities, where practices and games take place. Parents and guardians noted four total facilities – one indoor and three outdoor. These facilities are not located in the same areas of town. Using the indoor facility as the starting point, distances to the three outdoor fields range between 7 to 12 miles. However, these distances vary depending on where parents and guardians live with respect to each facility. The indoor facility and one set of outdoor fields are owned and operated by the club itself, while the remaining outdoor facilities are owned by other organizations. Use of the indoor or outdoor facilities typically depends on time of year and the weather, where the outdoor season runs from March until October and the indoor season occurs during the remaining months. During the outdoor season, poor weather translates to more participants practicing and playing inside as needed.

In addition to the facility type, the indoor and outdoor seasons lend themselves to different roster sizes for the teams. For example, indoor games are 7v7, meaning seven athletes are on the field at a time for each team, with average roster sizes of 11-14 players, while outdoor games are 11v11, meaning 11 athletes are on the field for each team, with average roster sizes of 15-18 players. Roster sizes can vary depending on club numbers, where teams are determined through club-wide tryouts. Tryouts typically take place in May or June, depending on the age group. The club will create more than one team at each age level to limit the roster sizes when possible. If there are multiple teams per age group, they are typically designated as first team, second team, and so on, where the best players are placed on the first team. This depends entirely, however, on club numbers and those wishing to participate in club soccer. In general, smaller roster sizes provide increased opportunities for playing time and individual interaction with the

coaching staff. For example, an 11v11 team with a roster of 15 has four substitutes, providing more opportunity for player rotations, whereas an 11v11 team with a roster of 20 has nine substitutes, offering fewer opportunities for player rotation during a game. Smaller roster sizes, however, are not always feasible, particularly with elite youth soccer club competitors nearby seeking to recruit the same players for their teams.

Demographics

For this study, parents and guardians of the elite soccer club participants were asked to complete a short survey designed to better understand the club's demographic composition and collect contact information for potential interview participants. Table 1 and Table 2 provide a demographic summary of all individuals who completed the initial survey process and the ten individuals who participated in an interview, respectively.

Table 1

Demographic Summary of Survey Participants

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Female	50	56.18
Male	38	42.70
Unknown	1	1.12
Age		
18-24	1	1.12
25-34	2	2.25
35-44	55	61.80
45-54	27	30.34
55-64	2	2.25
65-74	2	2.25
Marital status		
Married	81	91.01
Partnered	1	1.12
Divorced	3	3.37
Separated	1	1.12
Never married	3	3.37

Household income		
\$0-\$50,000	3	3.37
\$50,001-\$100,000	9	10.11
\$100,001-\$150,000	24	26.97
\$150,001-\$200,000	21	23.60
\$200,001+	26	29.21
Prefer not to answer	6	6.74
Education level		
High school diploma or equivalent	3	3.37
Some college	5	5.62
Associate's degree	5	5.62
Bachelor's degree	41	46.07
Master's degree	28	31.46
Professional degree	4	4.49
Doctorate degree	3	3.37
Race		
Asian	4	4.49
Hispanic or Latino	3	3.37
White	81	91.01
Prefer not to answer	1	1.12

*percentages may be > 100% due to rounding

Table 2

Demographic Summary of Interview Participants

#	Name	Gender	Age	Marital status	Household income	Education level	Race	Children aged 9-15 in household	Children 9-15 participating at MFC	Time at MFC
1	Morgan	Female	35-44	Married	\$100,001 - \$150,000	Master's Degree	White	2	1	1 year
2	Kendall	Female	35-44	Married	\$150,001 - \$200,000	Master's Degree	White	1	1	3 years
3	Blake	Male	35-44	Married	\$150,001 - \$200,000	Master's Degree	White	2	1	6 months
4	Quinn	Female	35-44	Partnered	\$150,001 - \$200,000	Professional Degree	White	6	2	3 years
5	Charlie	Male	35-44	Never Married	\$150,001 - \$200,000	Associate Degree	Hispanic or Latino	2	1	3 years
6	Jordan	Male	45-54	Married	\$150,001 - \$200,000	Bachelor's Degree	White	1	1	3 years
7	Shae	Female	45-54	Separated	\$50,001 - \$100,00	Master's Degree	Asian	2	1	5 months
8	Lee	Male	35-44	Married	\$150,001 - \$200,000	Master's Degree	White	3	1	4 years
9	Lennon	Male	35-44	Married	\$200,001+	Bachelor's Degree	White	2	1	4 years
10	Riley	Male	35-44	Married	\$150,001 - \$200,000	Bachelor's Degree	White	2	2	4 years

The demographic survey was distributed via email to parents and guardians through the club's executive director. Participants were reminded their participation was completely voluntary, and they could opt out at any time. After cleaning and organizing the data, which included removing incomplete or duplicate responses and recoding the data from text to numerical values for analysis, the survey garnered 89 complete responses. Respondents were asked to provide their gender, age, marital status, household income, education level, and race. Of the respondents, 56.18% ($n = 50$) identified as female, and 42.70% ($n = 38$) identified as male. The gender identity of the last individual ($n = 1$) was unknown. A majority of respondents, 92.14% ($n = 82$), were in the 35-44 and 45-54 age ranges. Additionally, 92.14% ($n = 82$) were married or partnered, while the remaining 7.86% ($n = 7$) were divorced, separated, or never married. When examining household income, parents and guardians with an annual household income of \$200,001+ constituted 29.21% ($n = 26$) of the sample. The second largest group included those earning \$100,001-\$150,000, and the \$150,001-\$200,000 group was a close third with 26.97% ($n = 24$) and 23.60% ($n = 21$) of the sample, respectively. The majority of respondents, or 79.78% ($n = 71$), earned \$100,001 or more compared to 13.48% ($n = 12$) earning \$100,000 or less. The majority of respondents, 77.52% ($n = 69$), reported having a Bachelor's or Master's degree. Finally, 91.01% ($n = 81$) of respondents were White, 4.49% ($n = 4$) were Asian, and 3.37% ($n = 3$) were Hispanic or Latino.

Survey participants who indicated their willingness to participate in an interview were contacted. At the start, interview participants were selected using a systematic approach, taking care to have representation from the various demographic groups. However, after email communications went without response, additional parents and

guardians were contacted to obtain the study's ten participants. Of those participants agreeing to an interview, six identified as male and four identified as female. Participants were all in the 35-44 or 45-54 age ranges. All participants except one reported a household income of \$100,001 or more. Eight participants were White with the remaining two identifying as Asian and Hispanic or Latino. Five participants reported a Master's degree as their highest level of education, three held Bachelor's degrees, one held a Professional degree, and the remaining individual held an Associate's degree.

Findings

While the demographic and research site information provide valuable insight into the "look" of the club, the following sections highlight key findings from interviews with parents and guardians who have children participating in this elite youth soccer club. To address the study's purpose and better understand the club soccer landscape, parents and guardians were asked to share their experiences at this youth soccer club and the role they played with continued participation. The first and third research questions examined specific constraints and facilitators experienced by the parents and guardians. Leisure constraints are factors which hinder participation, while leisure facilitators promote participation. Both leisure constraints and facilitators are classified into three categories: (a) intrapersonal, (b) interpersonal, and (c) structural (Mitchell et al., 1997; Raymore, 2002). Intrapersonal constraints and facilitators refer to attitudes, beliefs, or traits which may prohibit or enable continued participation. Examples include interest level, competence, and self-efficacy or the lack thereof. Interpersonal constraints and facilitators highlight the role other individuals play in continued participation such as parents and guardians, coaches, and peers. Finally, structural constraints and facilitators

occur largely due to the absence or availability of resources and are typically out of individuals' control such as cost, time, and facility access. Together, constraints and facilitators depict the factors which inhibit or enable continued participation in an elite youth soccer context.

Given the existence of leisure constraints, the second research question detailed constraint negotiation strategies employed by parents and guardians to ensure continued participation. Negotiation strategies are tactics which help individuals overcome leisure constraints (Hubbard & Mannell, 2001). Hubbard and Mannell (2001) recognized eliminating all leisure constraints entirely is not possible, but negotiation strategies provide an avenue for individuals to avoid giving up participation completely. Some constraints are more difficult to negotiate than others and may require individuals to forgo their own endeavors to ensure continued participation (Holt et al., 2011; Jackson & Rucks, 1995; Jun & Kyle, 2011). For example, structural constraints such as time and cost are more difficult to overcome than intrapersonal constraints such as perceived ability and interest level (Crawford et al., 1991). It is important to understand and recognize the use of negotiation strategies because parents and guardians who can negotiate their perceived constraints are more likely to ensure continued participation for their children than those who do not.

Beyond identifying constraints, facilitators, and constraint negotiation strategies, the fourth research question and accompanying sub-question investigated the role of parents and guardians as key stakeholders and organizational success. The study sought to understand the role parents and guardians played in organizational success and how elements of power, legitimacy, and urgency presented themselves in the club soccer

environment. Power refers to the clout parents and guardians possess in the club, legitimacy describes the relevance of their claims as stakeholders of the organization, and urgency characterizes the extent to which action is necessary for their stakeholder claims (Mitchell et al., 1997).

Collectively, the study's research questions examined specific characteristics which hindered or promoted continued participation from parents' and guardians' viewpoints. Furthermore, participants identified strategies utilized to overcome perceived constraints necessary for continued participation. Finally, this study sought to understand parents' and guardians perceived roles within the club soccer environment. The study's findings will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

RQ1. What perceived constraints do parents and guardians of elite youth soccer players find inhibiting to continued participation?

Leisure constraints are factors which inhibit continued participation and can be classified as intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural (Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Crawford et al., 1991). In the present study, a total of eight constraints emerged. The two intrapersonal constraints were (a) child's level of interest and commitment and (b) child's lack of skill and motivation. Three interpersonal constraints included: (a) negative experiences with peers, (b) negative coaching experiences, and (c) club environment. The three structural constraints were: (a) cost, (b) family crises, and (c) lack of facility quality. Specific constraints are summarized in Table 3 below. All the constraints listed above will be discussed in the next sections.

Table 3

Thematic Findings in Relation to Crawford and Godbey (1987)

Theme
Intrapersonal
Child's level of interest and commitment
Child's lack of skill and motivation
Interpersonal
Negative experiences with peers
Negative coaching experiences
Club environment
Structural
Cost
Family crises
Lack of facility quality

Intrapersonal Constraints. Intrapersonal constraints relate to the psychological factors influencing continued leisure participation. In a sport specific context, the most common intrapersonal constraints included lack of skill and lack of interest (Alexandris et al., 2002). Godbey et al. (2010) contended intrapersonal constraints are the most influential because if the desire or preference for an activity does not exist, the likelihood of continuing will diminish well before other interpersonal or structural constraints emerge. Alexandris et al. (2002) also examined intrapersonal constraints, finding perceived lack of skill negatively affected continued participation. When asked about factors inhibiting participation, parents and guardians described their children's lack of interest and lack of skill as the main drivers of continued participation from an intrapersonal perspective. Using parents and guardians as the study's target population contrasts with previous studies (e.g., Alexandris et al., 2002; Casper et al., 2011) focused

on participants and the constraints they faced, and lends a new perspective given their role as the core decision-makers with respect to continued participation.

Child's Level of Interest and Commitment. In their interviews, parents and guardians pointed out they wanted their children to take part in a least one extracurricular activity. Parents and guardians insisted they allowed their children to choose their extracurricular activity, in this case soccer. Some described their children starting the process at the recreational level before ultimately joining the elite side, signaling their children's continued interest. When asked about factors which would affect continued participation, parents and guardians discussed the importance of their children's interest in and desire to participate. Shae said of her child, "I think...it just comes down to [my child's] interest. I mean, if [my child] wasn't interested in soccer, then we wouldn't be participating." Blake recounted, "...[If my child] said he didn't want to do [play soccer] anymore, I'm not sure there's anything [the club] could do to convince us [as parents] to have our son do it if he didn't want to do." Quinn described this idea further stating, "...if they enjoy what they're doing, and they're committed to it, they don't have to be great at it. But if they're committed to it, and they're enjoying it, then I want to help them continue to participate." This sentiment aligns with previous research (Alexandris et al., 2002; Godbey et al., 2010), which determined interest levels for leisure activity participants plays a significant role in their decision to participate. The current study also adds to leisure constraint literature by examining a different target population, where parents and guardians, not the participants themselves, were the study's focal point.

Parents and guardians also acknowledged their children's commitment to club soccer and mentioned the importance of meeting the expectations of said commitment.

Specifically, parents and guardians noted once their children started an activity, they would be required to finish out the season before reevaluating continued participation.

Blake described this phenomenon saying:

Over the years, [my child] has kind of gone... 'I do this for a little bit, but I'm done and don't want to do it anymore.' And so, we let [the child] know that this is [a] time commitment...if you're gonna be on this team, you're on the team until the end.

Similarly, Quinn said:

...my youngest want[ed] to quit his old club, [but] he made a commitment to the year. He made a commitment to the team. And so even though he wasn't enjoying it – he didn't want to go to practice, and he didn't care about games – he still went because he made a commitment...Once you're in, you're going to finish your commitment.

Level of interest has been touted in previous leisure constraints research (e.g., Alexandris et al., 2002; Godbey et al., 2010). Alexandris et al. (2002) indicated intrapersonal constraints serve as a demotivating factor with respect to continued participation, indicating absence of motivation or desire hinders one's willingness to perform a particular activity. This notion was demonstrated when parents and guardians suggested their children's desire directly affected their decision-making process regarding continued participation. This result is important to understand given the role interest plays in the decision-making process. Parents and guardians seemingly allowed their children to have some autonomy over their participation despite parents and

guardians serving as the core decision-makers but stressed the importance of staying committed for the activity's full duration.

Child's Lack of Skill and Motivation. Given the competitive nature of club soccer, players must complete a tryout process, meaning there is a chance they will not make a team's roster. If a child has an unsuccessful tryout, participation is hindered. Parents and guardians alluded to the tryout process and the possibility of not being able to participate. Shae described the realities of club soccer, saying, "I guess if [my child] doesn't...make the team next year, I guess we wouldn't be part of it. So that would negatively...affect us." Lennon added:

We've been in that scenario where...three teams have been cut to two and...one of [my children] wasn't able to stay at the same club because [my child] was on the third team. So, dealing with that side of it [is] frustrating for everyone involved.

Kendall provided a different perspective on the tryout process, voicing concern around the motivation of players participating at the club level. She stated:

I don't love [it], but while I do understand, with the other league opening and messing up everything, they took every [player] and it was...everybody's on your team...[W]e want the same kind of motivation for all the players. Right now, it[] kind of feels like we had to just take what we got. And so, there's some of that...frustration for my child. Is [my child] practicing outside of practice [and] watching soccer, [while] trying to learn and then another person's getting equal playing time, if not more? Because they're just on the team. That's the kind of stuff that's annoying now because...they're not all really trying.

This finding relates directly to perceived lack of skill because children participating in this club are evaluated by coaches and club organizers during a tryout period and a decision is made about their physical abilities, suggesting children's perceived competencies are primarily in the hands of club leadership. This tryout process means if their children do not meet the standard set by the coaches, parents and guardians may have to seek other alternatives for club soccer participation. These actions happened to their children, and participants and guardians recognized how this situation negatively affected continued participation. This finding also mirrors Crawford et al. (1991), as failure to make the team immediately diminishes the likelihood of participating at that specific club. Furthermore, the lack of motivation exhibited by their children and other children who do not put in the required effort aligns with previous literature (e.g., Alexandris et al., 2002; Crawford et al., 1991) as it is a psychological factor hindering continued participation. The intrapersonal constraints identified by parents and guardians included child's level of interest and commitment and child's lack of skill and motivation. Together these constraints showcase the attitudes, beliefs, and traits inhibiting continued participation for parents and guardians with children in an elite youth soccer program.

Interpersonal Constraints. Interpersonal constraints refer to the ways in which other individuals hinder continued participation (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). Family members, coaches, and peers are among the most common individuals playing a role in continued participation (Atkins et al., 2014; Dollman & Lewis, 2010; Hultsman, 1993). In the present study, these groups proved influential, but in a different way. Parents and guardians recognized their secondary relationship within the club environment, but also

understood the significant effect they may have on their children's participation. In the present study, negative experiences with peers, negative coaching experiences, and the club environment emerged as the main interpersonal constraint themes. Recognition of these factors led the parents and guardians to identify the ways in which these individuals may negatively affect their children, and, therefore, force them to reconsider continued participation.

Negative Experiences with Peers. Peers were a deciding factor with respect to continued participation. When examining the role of peers, participants identified two key factors: (a) their children's peers and (b) their own peers. Children participating in this club environment practiced two or three times a week with game schedules varying throughout the year. They played in leagues and tournaments both of which may require travel. Interactions with other children varied day-to-day. During practice, players may only interact with their own teammates, but during games and tournaments may interact with multiple teams. From the parental perspective, interactions between parents and guardians also varied. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly reduced the number of interactions between parents and guardians due to safety protocols, but the study participants did acknowledge pre-pandemic relationships with parents and guardians existed.

Both situations yielded results suggesting if the people surrounding them and their children were not a good fit, they would find an alternative club. First, parents and guardians acknowledged their children's peers can negatively affect continued participation if issues such as being overly competitive or displaying bad attitudes were not resolved by club organizers. Kendall identified a specific scenario stating:

[The players] were competitive with each other. So, if one [player] was getting better at something, it wouldn't be like, oh, that's great. It'd be like here, let me stomp your toe because I don't want you to get to playing time and [I] have less.

Charlie expressed a similar sentiment about bullying and his decision to allow his child to continue participating. "The camaraderie among[] his teammates [is important]. Are there bullies on the team? [If so,] that would make us definitely reevaluate [participating]." Jordan described how his child's peers negatively influenced continued participation, saying:

You've got some attitude problems on the team. [This]...is probably the biggest [negative] factor...The negative attitudes within a team, it's cancer, right? It'll carry over and impact other players and that spills over to the parents, and it's just, it's a bad recipe.

Recognizing the negative effect their children's peers could have on continued participation is important, but negative experiences with peers also meant parents' and guardians' interactions with one another. Those who were rude to other parents and guardians, players, and officials adversely affected overall perceptions of the club and jeopardized parents' and guardians' willingness to return to the program. Lee had this to say about other parents and guardians with children participating in the soccer club:

We've all played those, those teams with the obnoxious parents that won't shut up and gets on the kids more than the coaches do. So, when we run into something like that, I'm out... Let the coaches coach, let the refs ref, and then you can coach your kid after the game.

Quinn also expressed strong feelings about parents and guardians and their behavior on the sideline, “If people start showing up to games, and they’re yelling at their kids in ways that are unproductive...and derogatory, that would definitely negatively influence my willingness to stay.” Previous literature addressing interpersonal constraints focused on the participants (e.g., Atkins et al, 2014; Dollman & Lewis, 2010; Hultsman, 1993), but this study examined the influence of peers on continued participation in two ways: (a) the children’s peers and (b) peers of parents and guardians. The former is supported by previous literature, where other children can influence continued participation. However, the latter further expands the influence of peers—by examining a peer group not previously examined within this research context—on continued participation.

Negative Coaching Experiences. Peers are not the only influential figures affecting continued participation. Club coaches were also found to influence parents’ and guardians’ decision-making process regarding continued participation. Participants described mixed feelings when discussing coaching. When asked specifically about internal factors which negatively affected continued participation, parents and guardians mentioned coaching in some capacity. Among the most common elements of coaching creating constraints were coaching philosophy and rapport with the children. Parents and guardians described needing a coach whose philosophy matched the club’s values as well as coaches who related to their players. Charlie stated, “...you can have five good coaches, but all it takes is one bad coach to make you either not participate with that club, or...figure something else out.”

Coaches are entrusted to facilitate player development in the club soccer environment by encouraging and challenging players on the field and building transferable skills such as teamwork and discipline off the field (Washington & Karen, 2001). Coaches are also responsible for creating practice and game plans designed to improve players' skills and promote personal growth both on and off the field (Kooistra & Kooistra, 2018). Parents and guardians discussed the importance of having a coach who understood what was appropriate for the players depending on their age, gender, and skill level. Quinn discussed the significance of coaching philosophies, stating, "if the quality of coaching or the coaching pedagogy behind it changed, I would have a hard time keeping her in the league.... There are...some programs in town that I would not consider putting her in because of the coaching methodology." Morgan further elaborated on the negative effect poor coaching philosophies could have on continued participation:

I think if it was...somebody...like the old coaches that I had [at my old club] where [they] dismiss [and] don't care [or] are not giving them the opportunity. I mean, opportunities are a huge thing. [If] those [opportunities] were taken away, [We] would be like, oh, we've got to find something else to do.

Quinn and Morgan both described situations where the coaching philosophy may negatively affect continued participation, implying coaches played a vital role in the retention of players in club soccer programs.

Jordan further expressed the important role coaches play in establishing rapport with children and helping ensure continued participation, "If you have the wrong coach or the wrong fit, that's, that could have a lot to do with the decision-making process." Jordan elaborated further saying, "[A previous coach] had never coached boys in his life,

and he had never coached this age group, and that was a train wreck.” Lee also conveyed the importance of establishing relationships saying, “...if we have a coach that doesn’t communicate well with the families [or] doesn’t interact well with the players, that can create an issue.” While many parents and guardians voiced positive sentiments about the coaching staff at the current club, they did not hesitate to describe the characteristics of previous coaches which led them to consider other club soccer programs. This particular point was addressed by Blake who said:

I have heard through the grapevine that there are some coaches that you don’t want...and if we had to get a coach that was a lot more in your face, and really treated him like college kids instead of these 10-year-olds that they are...that would make it very difficult for me to...make my [child] go to practice.

Quinn added:

If coaches...show up and are yelling at kids in ways that are unproductive and derogatory, because I’ve heard some horrible comments from coaches, about our kids, not from our coaches, but from other coaches, about our kids [and their own kids]...That would definitely negatively influence[] my willingness to stay.

These negative experiences parents and guardians witnessed highlight the importance of coaches building and maintaining rapport with children. Parents and guardians would not hesitate to discontinue participation if negative experiences with coaches took place.

As evidenced in this study, negative coaching experiences may negatively affect continued participation, depending on the circumstance. Atkins et al. (2014) assessed the role of coaching on continued participation and found children’s perceptions of coaching

changed over time. When considering the role of coaching from the perspectives of parents and guardians in this study, their coaching expectations were established from previous experiences. They, therefore, held their children's coaches to certain standards as influential figures in their children's lives. Hultsman (1993) also examined the influence of coaches on continued participation, finding this influence to not be statistically significant. The present study, however, directly contrasts with Hultsman (1993). Parents and guardians explicitly stated if the coaching was substandard or negative experiences were encountered, they would discontinue participation and find an alternate club.

Club Environment. Another interpersonal constraint outlined by parents and guardians was the club environment. Participants stated an environment which does not meet the needs of the children or fails to uphold strong standards expected of a club program would inhibit continued participation. Parents and guardians provided specific examples of negative factors related to the club environment, including roster sizes which were too large and the lack of a competitive environment, which hindered proper development. When discussing negative aspects of the program, Riley said, "One thing that I have seen lately has been too many players on a team, like my oldest son's team's got 18 players on an 11 [person] team. At that age group, I just think that's [too many]." Jordan expressed his concerns over the roster size disclosing:

One issue that I see within the club is the rosters are too big across a lot of age groups. Certainly, that's what we've experienced in our [time in the club] for [my child's] team. So, when you have a roster that's 20 kids deep, playing time is hard to kind of go around. So, it makes [my child] work harder. But at the same time, if

you are not getting a return on your investment for the...time and effort you're putting in as well as on the parental side, the financial and time commitment we're sacrificing, that could be a factor to consider going elsewhere as well.

Lee disclosed similar dissatisfaction about roster size:

One of the issues that's been a little bit of a frustration that we've experienced personally over the last year of playing is...for 11v11. [We've been told] we're gonna have 17 kids...our goal is not to overfill the team, where we're constantly struggling with...time on the field. I think we're now at 21, and we've added one or two kids...kind of mid-season, so that was a frustration to me.

Traditionally, outdoor soccer games have 11 players per team on the field. In Riley, Jordan, and Lee's cases, an 18-person, 20-person, or 21-person roster meant there were seven, nine, or ten available substitutes, respectively. Having large roster sizes diluted the teams and created greater competition for playing time. Given parents' and guardians' commitment and their financial investment to the club, participants wanted their children to get the most out of the club experience, which is threatened when roster sizes grow too large.

In addition to roster sizes being too large from the outset, parents and guardians recounted the club bringing random players to join teams for league games and tournaments. Quinn described this situation and the results saying, "[Our coach] was like this girl is gonna play with your team in the tournament, and she's never practiced with you before. And we're just gonna see how it goes. And it went horribly." Kendall added, "Sometimes random players show up to games and practices with no warning...it can be frustrating for us as parents and the kids on the team." Despite the club's well-intentioned

desire to bring in additional players, arguably to increase the chances of winning, parents and guardians did not appreciate or understand the club's decision-making process. This was especially true when the additional players did not produce a positive result and little to no explanation for the extra players was provided to parents and guardians. These situations caused frustrations for parents and guardians, which may result in them finding alternative club options if they continue.

Individuals who negatively affect continued participation create interpersonal constraints. The study's results indicated negative experiences with peers and coaches as well as the club environment can hinder continued participation. Negative experiences with peers were viewed by parents and guardians in two different ways: (a) their children's peers (e.g., other players) and (b) their own peers (e.g., other parents and guardians). Parents and guardians determined their children's own peers could hinder continued participation if negative experiences occurred. Furthermore, study participants recognized how other parents and guardians affected continued participation given parents and guardians attended practices and games, which sometimes required spending extended time with one another, where poor behavior by other parents and guardians would result in participants seeking alternative options.

Coaches also played a vital role to ensure continued participation. Parents and guardians acknowledged having the right coach can make all the difference, and it only takes one bad experience for parents and guardians to reconsider continued participation at the current club. Finally, parents and guardians described how the club environment itself could inhibit continued participation, inferring if the club did not meet their children's needs or failed to meet the expectations of a club soccer environment, they

would be forced to consider alternative options. Parents and guardians specifically identified roster sizes being too large and lack of competitive environment as two factors negatively affecting continued participation from a club environment perspective. These perceived interpersonal leisure constraints describe the feelings and attitudes parents and guardians had about the activities in which their children were involved. Participants stressed the importance of extracurricular activities, but they were not willing to sacrifice on the program's quality.

Structural Constraints. Structural constraints are created due to a lack of resources. In a sport context, time and cost are among the most common (Hardy et al., 2010; Post et al., 2018). In this investigation, parents and guardians expressed similar perspectives, identifying cost and family crises as two structural constraints. They identified facility quality as an additional perceived constraint, which mirrors Eime et al. (2017) and Casper et al. (2011). These studies found perceptions of facility quality varied based on prior sport participation, suggesting standards for facility quality are set by earlier experiences in a sport environment (Eime et al., 2017; Casper et al., 2011). This lack of resources, particularly facility quality, is typically out of the individuals' control and may be attributed to individuals' socioeconomic status or club offerings and hindrances. Parents and guardians have the ability to choose which club to enroll their children, but the facilities and their quality are solely the responsibility of the club and may vary depending on the club's available resources. The subsequent sub-sections will identify and explain the presence of structural constraints in a club soccer environment.

Cost. Club soccer requires a significant financial commitment, which can be more burdensome for some than others. As noted in the introduction, parents and guardians can

spend upwards of \$10,000 on club soccer participation (Chaverst, 2020). Study participants all acknowledged their ability to afford the membership fees and extraneous costs for equipment and travel, knowing not everyone has the same luxury. For Lennon, the financial commitment was described as, “Not cheap... the cost [for] just being part of the club in general, the equipment cost of...new shoes, outgrowing shoes [and] new kits, every couple of years.” Others said it is “costly,” “expensive,” and “a money grab.” More specifically, Riley stated, “I sometimes get concerned that [club soccer is] more of a money grab to get more players on a team than it is to actually have kids on there that should be competitive soccer players.” This statement relates back to parents’ and guardians’ complaints about roster sizes being too large, where club numbers appeared more important than overall player development.

Other parents and guardians questioned the objective of the club. For example, Lee described the current state of sport:

...so much of youth sports...has become so much of a business not necessarily about the development of the kid and what’s best for the kid and what’s best for the sport. It’s all about turning a profit. That’s my only frustration...And really has created a barrier for others to get into the program and get into the sport.

Lee also referenced other player development systems, which differ drastically such as European systems where players are developed under the guidance of a professional club with little to no financial commitment from the players being developed (Relvas et al., 2010). He said, “I think that it might be a barrier for a lot of folks to get into the competitive programs because of the cost...you look at other countries, and that barrier doesn’t exist. It seems like [here] we have to profit from everything.”

All but one interview participant in the present study reported a household income of \$100,001 or more, indicating socioeconomic status played a role in continued participation (Casper et al., 2011; Hallmann et al., 2017; Holt et al., 2011; Wicker et al., 2013). Parents and guardians from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may wish to enroll their children in club soccer but cannot pay the registration fees and other associated costs (Holt et al., 2011). Despite their financial security, the participants in this study illuminated the negative effects cost can have on initial and continued participation. Furthermore, changes in financial stability could cause parents and guardians to reevaluate continued participation due to the complexity of overcoming this structural constraint.

Family Crises. Another theme unique to this study was the presence of family crises and its effect on continued participation. Children actively engaging in club soccer rely heavily on their parents and guardians to ensure continued participation by committing the money, time, and energy required of the program. As such, parents and guardians acknowledged the way in which a catastrophic situation could inhibit continued participation. More specifically, participants identified loss of disposable income and health issues as two major factors which could negatively affect their children's ability to continue participating in club soccer.

As previously mentioned, cost plays a major role in continued participation. Participants expressed their current financial situation was stable but recognized the comfort they enjoyed could change at any time and jeopardize their children's continued participation. Blake said, "One factor that would impact our decision-making? Disposable income. If one of us lost our job...that would be a huge, huge impact on his

ability to play.” Riley added, “If there was some sort of change in my employment...and we couldn’t afford to pay for it anymore...that would be a factor.” Lennon also provided insight stating, “If the cost ever got [to] the point where it didn’t fit within a family budget, or our employment situation changed...then sports kind of come behind those [situations].”

In the present moment, disposable income was not an issue, but parents and guardians still stressed its importance as a constraint to participation and the potential ramifications should their situations change financially. Previous literature does not address this structural constraint specifically, and this finding adds another layer to the role cost and socioeconomic status play on continued participation, further explaining the decision-making processes of parents and guardians.

Lack of Facility Quality. Given the cost component of the club soccer environment, there was an expectation from parents and guardians for the club to have well-maintained fields for participation. Skill development plays a significant role in club soccer. Without quality facilities, participants felt the condition of skill development suffered, which could affect continued participation. For this particular club, facility space did not prove problematic. Ample field space—both indoor and outdoor—was available, but field quality proved less than stellar. The club owned and operated a single indoor facility and a set of outdoor fields. However, other fields were rented to accommodate the club’s needs. The terms participants used to depict the outdoor fields, particularly those owned by the club, included “subpar,” “not well-maintained,” and “inconsistent.” Riley described his frustration with field quality, “I think playing on [quality] fields help kids develop, and it makes it a lot easier to play if you’re [not]

playing on fields [with] mole hills and places that have...broken glass and bark...so I think better fields would help.”

Aside from the field conditions, the way in which facility space was divided was not perceived as equitable by the parents and guardians. Jordan described this situation as a type of “class warfare,” where those players on the first, or best, team experienced the best fields offered by the club. Jordan added parents and guardians of players on the second and third teams were making the same financial commitment as those on the first team but not receiving similar benefits. He stated:

When we first came in, we were part of the second team. But we saw firsthand just the drastic difference in the commitment and focus that the club put on the first team versus the second...they were clearly not getting the same opportunities. The second and third team did not have the same training facility opportunities...[The] first team gets all of the priority and all of the press and...hype. [The] second and third team[s] are treated like second [and] third...And that’s something I think this club could really work to improve.

Jordan expressed his frustration with the club giving priority to those on the team designated as the best, leaving the other teams to feel less important and underappreciated. This revelation is significant because it highlights inequities between teams based on status despite parents and guardians making the same financial commitment. Casper et al. (2011) determined lack of quality facilities is detrimental to continued participation especially for families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. While the study’s participants were not from low socioeconomic backgrounds, this club effectively created a hierarchy based on players’ skill level with respect to facility quality

instead of financial situation, which parents and guardians found troublesome given their financial contributions to the club.

Structural constraints created obstacles with respect to continued participation due to a lack of resources. Parents and guardians determined cost, family crises, and facility quality to be key structural constraints hindering continued participation. While cost did not deter parents and guardians from enrolling their children in club soccer due to their financial stability, they acknowledged club soccer is expensive and could prevent those with fewer financial resources from participating. Furthermore, participants described how familial situations such as changes in employment or health could create constraints and inhibit participation, recognizing the privilege and opportunity enjoyed today is not guaranteed forever. Finally, participants expressed the importance of facility quality to ensure continued participation. Lack of facility quality, according to parents and guardians, affected skill development, which is an important aspect of elite club soccer programs. These structural constraints proved detrimental to continued participation for parents and guardians with children participating in an elite youth soccer program

Summary. The first research question sought to identify perceived intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural leisure constraints experienced by parents and guardians with children in an elite youth soccer program. Parents and guardians described eight constraints negatively affecting continued participation. Those constraints were as follows: (a) child's level of interest and commitment, (b) child's lack of skill and motivation, (c) negative experiences with peers, (d) negative coaching experiences, (e) club environment, (f) cost, (g) family crises, and (h) lack of facility quality. Recognizing how these constraints affect continued participation helps club organizers understand the

current club soccer landscape and difficulties experienced by parents and guardians to ensure continued participation. Ways in which parents and guardians negotiated their perceived constraints will be discussed in future sections.

RQ2. In what ways do parents and guardians of elite youth soccer players negotiate their perceived leisure constraints?

While parents and guardians identified factors which hindered participation, their children were still actively involved in club soccer, signifying participants found strategies to overcome their perceived constraints. Hubbard and Mannell (2001) described constraint negotiation strategies as actions designed to overcome constraints rather than eliminating them completely. Through their research, the authors developed four different theoretical models to understand the unique relationships between constraints, negotiation, motivation, and participation. The researchers determined constraints negatively affect participation, while negotiation positively affects participation. There was also a positive relationship between constraints and negotiation, hinting implementation of negotiation strategies helps individuals overcome leisure constraints. Son et al. (2008), however, found constraints and negotiation affect participation independently, limiting the effectiveness of negotiation strategies.

In the present study, participants acknowledged negotiation strategies required sacrifices to ensure their children's continued participation. Specifically, parents and guardians referenced giving up their own endeavors to ensure continued participation, a phenomenon explored previously (Holt et al., 2011; Jackson & Rucks, 1995; Jun & Kyle, 2011). Above all else, participants alluded to the financial commitment to playing club soccer and the time commitment required as well as the strategies employed to navigate

these constraints. While these constraints were organized based on the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural hierarchy, it is important to acknowledge overlap between constraints is possible, highlighting the complexity of this phenomenon. Cost and time are common constraints requiring negotiation strategies (Holt et al., 2011; Jackson & Rucks, 1995; Jun & Kyle, 2011). Other sacrifices discussed by the participants included the familial component and overall interest of their children. Specific negotiation strategies employed will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

Maintaining Interest. The first theme emerging when asked about negotiation strategies was maintaining interest. Parents and guardians indicated their children's interest was vital. Parents and guardians acknowledged overcoming some constraints may not always be feasible. But if their children show interest and remain committed to participating, as the adults, they will find a way to overcome perceived constraints. Blake described this notion saying, "...as a parent, if the kid is enjoying it, you do find ways to figure out [how] to handle it." Jordan added, "[soccer] became the sport that [my child] liked the most...so we've supported that." In addition, parents and guardians mentioned their children's enthusiasm as a confounding factor for successful leisure constraint negotiation. Blake said of his child, "The factor that...allow us to let him participate in [club] soccer is [my child's] desire. That really is the motivating factor. It's [my child's] desire." Shae also noted, "I think...it just comes down to [my child's] interest. I mean, if [my child] wasn't interested in soccer, then we wouldn't be participating."

Parent and guardians identified their children's interest as a key factor needed to negotiate constraints. Above all else, if their children expressed interest, the participants were determined to make participation in club soccer possible. This finding suggests

parents and guardians saw the value of club soccer participation as long as the children wanted to participate. Interestingly, parents' and guardians' desire to overcome perceived constraints due to their children's interest is a contradiction to Hubbard and Mannell's (2001) findings with respect to the constraints-effects-mitigation model. In this model, the relationship between motivation and participation was not statistically significant, signifying a desire to participate in an activity does not necessarily guarantee participation. However, parents and guardians provided a different perspective where motivation or desire to participate positively influenced participation and their decision-making process. Namely, parents and guardians would not force their children to engage in an activity unless they showed interest. This revelation is particularly important because club organizers must understand how to build interest in soccer to recruit and retain players and their families.

Relying on Family. Many participants identified having multiple children all involved in different extracurricular activities outside of soccer. When asked about personal sacrifices, some parents stated needing to make other arrangements for their children not enrolled in soccer, and even mentioned the possibility of sacrificing these other activities for soccer. Jordan explicitly stated, "We have another child and sometimes the other kid's activities get sacrificed for soccer." Jordan described actively choosing to negotiate potential conflict by forgoing participation for his other child. This decision-making process highlights the priority and role of soccer in this family's life. Additionally, it shows how participation in youth soccer affects the entire family unit. Quinn acknowledged the delicate balance of meeting the needs of all her children, stating,

...How do you juggle your family time so that your kids who are doing the thing, get what they need, but the kids who aren't doing the thing, get what they need too? And that often involves sacrifices on the part of the parent, there are things I could be doing, that I'm not doing...

Another key idea the parents and guardians identified in negotiating constraints from a familial perspective included relying on family members to help meet the expectations of participating in youth soccer. Lennon said:

...So, we're a family of five, with all three kids playing club sports and both parents working. So, the juggle of multiple practices every night, multiple games every weekend, multiple tournaments every weekend, it's constantly a measure of...who can get to where and where can we lean on other families, our own families, college students, sitters to help kind of supplement the logistics side.

While reliance on others helped Lennon negotiate the time constraint, Shae recounted the difficulty of not being able to rely on others due to her status as a single parent stating, "It's like, there's nobody. If I can't make it, then he doesn't make it to practice...so, I guess in a way it's, it's just a big-time commitment." For this parent, negotiating transportation constraints proved increasingly more difficult than those from two-parent households.

Managing Time. In addition to the family involvement required for continued participation, parents and guardians also described the major time commitment required for participation in club soccer. Some participants noted the distance from their homes to the various club facilities, which contrasts with previous comments made by parents and guardians about the convenience of location. This contrast suggests differences existed

between parents and guardians despite demographic similarities. For example, Kendall stated:

I've cut my work hours, because one of the practice fields of ours, [is] almost 50 minutes from our house...I have to...do all this stuff that should happen at a normal time in the evening, because we're getting back later because it's so far away.

Kendall was not the only participant to emphasize time management and the effect it may have on parental work schedules. Work hours and having flexibility as a working parent were commonalities among the study participants. Several individuals indicated they may have to change work hours, including leaving early or making up hours later, solely to accommodate their children's game or practice schedules. Shae said:

...it's time management, I tend to work long hours at my job. And sometimes it's...the practices, and the games aren't necessarily...at a time that, not that it doesn't work for me, but it forces me to stop, which is a good thing...I mean, I work from home, so I have to stop what I'm doing earlier than I normally would on a non-practice night.

Having the flexibility to do so appeared second nature to these parents; however, Lee recognized the privilege some individuals possess to help meet the demands of youth club soccer participation not experienced by others. Specifically, Lee stated, "Soccer is a major time commitment. My family is fortunate that we can meet those time expectations, but that is not true for everyone." This distinction is significant because it illustrates how perceived constraints differ depending on individual situations.

Previous research documented the difficulty time can cause with respect to continued participation (Holt et al., 2011; Jackson & Rucks, 1995; Jun & Kyle, 2011). However, these studies examined the role time plays on active participants, not secondary individuals such as parents and guardians as investigated in the present study. Despite the different target populations, there were some parallels in the findings. Namely, children participating in sport often have other obligations such as school, which requires time management. One could equate children's obligation to school to parents' and guardians' work schedules, which affect their available time for leisure activities. A major difference, however, is autonomy. Parents and guardians made it abundantly clear their jobs allow for flexibility, whereas attending school is nonnegotiable. This distinction is significant because it highlights how individual situations can yield varying results, which can make negotiating a time constraint and ensuring continued participation more difficult.

Overcoming Cost. Participants described the financial commitment associated with club soccer yet did not allow it to impede their children's participation. This aligns with Hubbard and Mannell's (2001) constraints-effects-mitigation model, where constraint negotiation positively influences participation. When discussing the financial commitment of club soccer, Jordan said:

...there's that big financial commitment. From time to time...my wife and I have done some extra work here and there just to make sure we've got money...to help pay for other things outside of just living. And some of that included soccer.

It is important to note the extra effort necessary for parents and guardians to meet the financial expectations of club soccer. In Jordan's case, working extra hours supplied

the supplementary funds necessary to ensure continued participation. Additional work was not the only strategy parents and guardians employed to overcome the cost factor. Participants also mentioned giving up family vacations to accommodate their children's club costs. One participant stated, "We've skipped going on some...mini vacation[s] because soccer's a priority and soccer had a tournament or an out-of-town away game." Actively choosing to forgo a vacation provides an example of the prioritization parents faced to ensure continued participation and overcome constraints such as cost.

These two strategies align directly with other studies (e.g., Holt et al., 2011; Jackson & Rucks, 1995; Jun & Kyle, 2011), where parents and guardians actively chose to work more or sacrifice other opportunities to defray participation costs. It is worth noting that study participants acknowledged their financial stability and being fortunate enough to afford club soccer, but even so, sacrifices were necessary. This finding further explains the relationship between constraints, negotiation, and participation as outlined by Hubbard and Mannell (2001), where constraints combined with negotiation strategies positively influence continued participation.

Given the pay-to-play model currently employed by the club and other privatized sport programs, issues associated with cost will never fully subside. However, it is important for club organizers to work closely with parents and guardians to find and implement solutions to help ensure continued participation. Doing so will allow club sport participation to become more accessible to all despite varying socioeconomic backgrounds.

RQ3. What perceived facilitators do parents and guardians of elite youth soccer players find helpful to continued participation?

When examining continued participation, studies often focus on why individuals cannot participate (e.g., Casper et al., 2011; Dollman & Lewis, 2010; Eime et al., 2017; Holt et al., 2011; Post et al., 2018). However, Raymore (2002) asserted understanding why individuals can participate is as important as why they cannot. Facilitators are factors which help or enable continued participation. Like leisure constraints, leisure facilitators can be classified as intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural (Raymore, 2002). A total of six facilitators emerged in the present study. The two intrapersonal facilitators were (a) participants' perceptions of safety and (b) participants' interest level. Two interpersonal facilitators included: (a) positive coaching experiences and (b) positive interactions with other parents and guardians. The two structural facilitators were: (a) financial aid opportunities and (b) facility access. Table 4 provides a summary of the themes presented in the following sections.

Table 4

Thematic Findings in Relation to Raymore (2002)

Theme
Intrapersonal
Participants' perceptions of safety
Participants' interest level
Interpersonal
Positive coaching experiences
Positive interactions with other parents and guardians
Structural
Financial aid opportunities
Facility access

Intrapersonal Facilitators. Intrapersonal facilitators are individual attitudes, beliefs, or characteristics which enable continued participation (Abdelghaffar et al., 2019;

Hutzler & Bergman, 2011; Kang et al., 2017; Raymore, 2002; Stodolska et al., 2014). Examples of intrapersonal facilitators in sport include self-motivation, activity enjoyment, and interest level (Abdelghaffar et al., 2019; Hutzler & Bergman, 2011; Kang et al., 2017; Stodolska et al., 2014). Stodolska et al. (2014) and Hutzler & Bergman (2011) determined self-motivation and activity enjoyment to be two significant intrapersonal facilitators, whereas Kang et al. (2017) found interest level to be an important driver of continued participation. This difference highlights how individual preferences can affect continued participation. The current study's participants identified two key leisure facilitators: (a) participants' perceptions of safety and (b) participants' interest, which positively affected continued participation in an elite youth soccer club setting.

Participants' Perceptions of Safety. The health and safety of their children played a major role in continued participation. The current environment created by the club was viewed positively by participants, where parents and guardians felt their children were safe and well cared for during team activities and events. Riley described his feelings about the club environment, saying, "Fortunately, both my kids have been extremely well taken care of within the club and that makes us want to stay." Morgan described the club environment and her appreciation, stating, "I thought it was a healthy environment, it seemed like a healthy environment...It's a safe environment, there's not bullying." Lee also added, "I think it's just having a positive environment and a big picture, from a community perspective having a positive environment on each club level." Safety also proved to be a major concern for Shae, describing its role in continued participation:

...I felt [they've] made me as a parent feel safe about [my child] continuing on because I don't think I would have, if I felt like our safety was in jeopardy or the safety of [my child] was going to be in jeopardy, then I don't think I would have continued [participating].

Shae also addressed the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the safety measures implemented about the club stating, "...[The club] remained open and...very conscious of the governor's mandates...so that made me as a parent feel safe about [my child] continuing on." Quinn also addressed the pandemic saying, "I've never felt dismissed when I expressed concerns [about the pandemic]...the club was really supportive and made us feel safe." The internal feelings of safety allowed parents and guardians to experience some level of comfort entrusting the club with their children, which positively influenced their decision-making process regarding continued participation.

Parents and guardians also felt their children had an opportunity to grow and develop as soccer players and human beings, which participants described as an important factor for continued participation. Specifically, Jordan stated, "just thinking big picture is the opportunity to develop...at the next level." He later added, "We feel it's the right place for [my child] to grow and develop. Every club has their pluses and minuses...we feel like [the current club] is where we definitely want to be next year." Participants acknowledged finding an environment which made them and their children feel safe and promotes growth are two key factors in continued participation.

Participants' Interests. While a feeling of safety in the club environment was an important enabling factor, parents and guardians alluded to their own interest in soccer as former players and found joy in sharing it with their children. Interest level as a facilitator

exists; however, it is often explored through the perspective of those involved in the activity (Abdelghaffar et al., 2019; Hutzler and Bergman, 2011; Kang et al., 2017; Stodolska et al., 2014). In this study, level of interest from parents and guardians emerged from the data as a factor positively affecting continued participation in club soccer. Parents and guardians enjoyed sharing a common activity with their children. Kendall described this experience, “It’s nice for me because I played soccer, and I understand it, and I love it,” with Charlie adding, “I played soccer myself, which gives us an opportunity to share common interests.” Riley also explained his affinity for the game, stating:

I [have] played soccer my entire life, and I still play soccer on an over 30 indoor team...I can’t pull myself away from playing...I love the game, I [have] watched it my entire life, so that helped me encourage my kids to want to pick up soccer from an athletic ability standpoint.

Morgan also said, “I played soccer when I was young...and it was something for us to do together.” Participants found a way to relate and involve their children in an activity they enjoyed, which created a bond and helped ensure continued participation. Activity participants’ level of interest as a facilitator exists in previous literature (e.g., Abdelghaffar et al., 2019; Kang et al., 2017). However, the current study expands level of interest as a facilitator by including parents and guardians, who may or may not participate in soccer today but did previously. This is significant because level of interest still serves as a focal point for continued participation, stemming from parents’ and guardians’ previous experiences and not the children themselves. The focus on external individuals in the leisure facilitator literature is lacking. Therefore, the perspectives

shared by the parents and guardians specifically further explained and expanded the role of facilitators on continued participation discussed in the literature.

Interpersonal Facilitators. In addition to intrapersonal facilitators, other individuals play an integral role in enabling continued participation. Stodolska et al. (2014) explored interpersonal facilitators in a sport specific context, where participants described the influences of teammates and coaches and other program staff as instrumental to their continued participation in a minority youth baseball program. Hutzler and Bergman (2011) also found peers and parents played a significant role in ensuring continued participation for competitive swimmers with disabilities. Like Stodolska et al. (2014) and Hutzler and Bergman (2011), the present study found (a) positive coaching experiences and (b) positive interactions with other parents and guardians as two emergent themes, which will be discussed in more detail below.

Positive Coaching Experiences. Given their proximity to and influence on their children, participants stressed the importance of having a good coach who keeps the children's best interest in mind. Parents and guardians, overall, recounted positive experiences with the coaching staff and their chosen coaching methods. Blake said, "I am very happy with the level of coaching...I think our coach has a great balance between pushing the kids, understanding the need to have some fun...[and] the level of encouragement is appropriate for each player." Kendall added, "Our favorite thing about the program is [my child's] coach...He is very encouraging, and he really enjoys his job." Participants even alluded to leaving the club if their coach moved to another club as well as expressed hope the coach would continue with their children's age group as that does not always happen. Jordan described this process saying, "[My child] has a great coach

now that we hope stays with [the team] when they go to the next age group.” This perspective follows previous literature (e.g., Dixon et al, 2008; Partridge et al., 2008; Stodolska et al., 2014), where coaching support helped ensure continued participation, specifically in a club soccer context.

Positive Interactions with Other Parents and Guardians. Beyond the support their children received from the coaching staff as a facilitator to continued participation, a unique characteristic of examining parents and guardians as the target population is the relationships these individuals develop with one another as a facilitator. Previous literature focused on parental support of those engaged in leisure activities (Atkins et al., 2014; Dollman & Lewis, 2010; Fawcett et al., 2009; Hultsman, 1993). The current study sought to understand how parents and guardians interacted with one another and how those social factors positively affected continued participation.

Previously, participants explained how other parents and guardians might inhibit continued participation. Individuals who acted inappropriately or negatively toward players as well as other parents at practices or games were identified as reasons where other individuals hindered continued participation. Participants also described the relationships among parents and guardians which helped ensure continued participation.

Kendall discussed her experience with club parents and guardians, saying:

All the parents on the team have the same goal for the [kids]...We even carpool together and just stuff like that to help each other. They're just a really nice group of parents and you just don't see a lot of that everywhere...I wouldn't want to necessarily leave these parents because we just enjoy them and their girls so much.

Blake added, “There [are] quite a few of us [parents] that have a pretty good rapport and will go get lunch here and there.” He later continued, “It’s a fun community [where] a lot of parents are very interactive and supportive [with each other].” Similarly, Riley spoke to the strong bond between parents and guardians, saying, “I love the parents on both of my kids’ teams, and when we go out for competitive tournaments...it’s always fun to hang out with them...We enjoy that camaraderie.” Quinn also described how positive interactions with other parents ensured continued participation, saying, “...one of the factors that keeps us with this club is that there’s a fair bit of indirect coaching of parents to not be jerks [and] to not show up as jerks with kids or other parents.” This indirect coaching is evidenced by parental expectations created by club leadership to discourage negative behaviors.

While the activity of club soccer is for the children, study participants found it important to establish relationships and build community with other parents and guardians. This finding highlights parental support extends beyond the children themselves to those watching and interacting on the sidelines. As one participant noted, the club tried to make positive interactions a priority by encouraging parents and guardians to adhere to the parental expectations and refrain from engaging in unsportsmanlike behavior toward players, coaches, referees, or other parents. These measures helped to ensure positive interactions which were important to parents and guardians and their children’s continued participation.

Parents and guardians described two important ways other individuals positively affected continued participation. Those factors included positive coaching experiences and positive interactions with other parents and guardians. Parents and guardians found

these characteristics to be beneficial aspects of the club, meaning club organizers should continue to employ coaches who uphold the club's overall mission as well as enforce the parental expectations to maintain the perceived positives outlined by parents and guardians.

Structural Facilitators. Structural facilitators encompass organizations, institutions, and demographic characteristics which prove beneficial to continued participation (Raymore, 2002). In a sport specific context, common structural facilitators included facility access, socioeconomic status, and institutional support (Hutzler & Bergman, 2011; Stodolska et al., 2014). Stodolska et al. (2014) reported institutional support from Major League Baseball helped provide key resources including equipment and funding to ensure continued participation. Additionally, Hutzler and Bergman (2011) determined facility access was integral to continued participation, particularly in a swimming context. In the present study, the two main structural facilitators to emerge from the interview process were (a) financial aid opportunities and (b) facility access. In general, financial aid opportunities provide relief to those who may not normally be able to afford club soccer. Facility access comprises the field availability for club members. Both structural facilitators positively influence continued participation.

Financial Aid Opportunities. The cost of club sports can be a difficult obstacle to overcome as acknowledged by the participants in this study. To combat the cost issue, this study's club offered financial assistance for those in need and who had an interest in playing soccer more competitively. Participants described this financial assistance as covering the registration fees for those players in need but mentioned it did not cover additional costs associated with travel such as hotel stays, food, and gas. This is

especially important given travel is an integral part of playing club soccer. When asked about ways in which the club could provide assistance or resources to ensure continued participation, participants described themselves as fortunate and not requiring “things.” However, Quinn provided a specific example of where this assistance could come into play:

I think one thing that could be super helpful...deals [with] the financial aid situation, and how the kid is in the club, but not fully integrated into the team. It would be really interesting to think about that soccer scholarship fund extending to the incidentals that go along with travel for soccer...it doesn't even have to cover the full amount. But could there be a stipend that goes to that kid or that family to support their travel the same way that there's a financial aid package that goes to support their tuition and their uniform package?

This idea of team integration prompted Quinn to highlight the lack of diversity, inequities, and obstacles created by the pay-to-play models, stating:

I know, I've had this conversation with several parents on my [child's] team, that we would personally be willing to put money into [a] fund so that the [players] who are there on scholarship don't feel like they have to eat the cheese sandwich that they brought with them...it really gets to this idea of club, cohesion and team cohesion and not making those [players] who are like disproportionately black and brown [players] feel like they're not integrated into this otherwise completely white, upper middle class team. I think that would be a really big improvement, and it would go a long way to show the club's commitment to inclusivity.

Riley also offered a potential solution to alleviate cost-related issues stating:

I think it's important for all kids to be able to play soccer, and I think if they could offer some sort of financial help for people that couldn't, that would be ideal, [if the club is] looking for people to do things periodically to help them...maybe [the club can] offset that cost based on maybe certain skills that people have [or]...volunteer to do something to help alleviate the cost.

This participant actively recognized her privilege from a financial perspective and was willing to help those in need to alleviate difficulties associated with cost for others. Despite the gesture, this idea of needing financial aid to participate reinforces previous research which suggests structural constraints, particularly cost, are difficult to overcome by individuals with limited financial means (Alexandris et al., 2002; Casper et al., 2011; Jun & Kyle, 2011; Marcen et al., 2013; Post et al., 2018; Son et al., 2008).

Parents and guardians did mention financial aid opportunities existed should families require financial assistance. Jordan said, "Maybe more scholarship opportunities [should be available] for some kids whose parents are struggling to make those payments." Charlie added, "I believe that [the club] does offer financial aid...to ones who want to participate but cannot afford it. I'm not sure how it works, but I know...we've donated for various things that I believe goes to people like that." Financial aid opportunities follow Stodolska et al. (2014) and the importance of institutional support. In this situation, those who are unable to afford registration fees can receive assistance from the club, providing the necessary financial support they need to ensure continued participation. Interestingly, parents and guardians in this study knew financial assistance was available, but they admitted they did not know how the process of obtaining this aid worked because they did not use it or need it. This finding is significant because

participants indicated word of mouth played a big role in recruiting them and their children to the current club. Club organizers must recognize the influence parents and guardians possess. More specifically, if parents and guardians are unable to articulate the financial aid process to an interested party, the club may miss out on a valuable recruitment opportunity.

Facility Access. Facility access is a vital part of club soccer. Players and coaches must have space available to hold games and practices which are imperative for athlete development. Facility access and quality have largely been viewed as an inhibiting factor to participation (e.g., Casper et al., 2011; Eime et al., 2017). However, the present study found facility access to be a contributing factor to continued participation primarily due to the available indoor and outdoor space secured by the club. While parents and guardians expressed concerns about facility quality, they acknowledged having access to several facilities is an advantage because multiple teams across varying ages can all practice at the same time. Additionally, access to an indoor facility allowed for extra flexibility when bad weather occurred. Parents and guardians expressed their favorable perspectives, focusing on the space availability and facility locations.

Lennon described his satisfaction with the facilities saying, “[The club] boasts...established facilities. The fact that they have a large indoor facility helps with year-round soccer. They have both indoor and outdoor space which has been a positive for us.” Riley added, “The indoor facility is another big reason why we decided to stay. I like having the option of being able to play outdoor as well as being able to go indoor.” Charlie also stated, “[We] can do year-round soccer because of their indoor facilities. That’s kind of the negative with other sports. [Soccer] gives you that advantage.”

In addition to the space itself, parents and guardians also appreciated being close to both the indoor and outdoor facilities. Riley stated, “Selfishly, the [outdoor facility]...is close to where I live and then [the indoor facility] is equidistance from my house...so we [don’t] have to worry about driving all over the place in order to get them to practice, so location has a lot to do with [positive aspects]. Charlie also said, “For us, the main reason we went with [this club] is location. The facility is close, which made the decision easier.”

Having access to field space—both indoor and outdoor—emerged as a priority for parents and guardians. Having the flexibility to go inside during the winter or bad weather days helped ensure continued participation. Furthermore, some participants appreciated the convenience of facility location, which helped parents and guardians manage the time and travel commitments. Traditionally, facility access creates constraints (Casper et al., 2011; Eime et al., 2017), but this study provided a different perspective, which helps club organizers understand the positive aspects of the current club environment.

Summary. Raymore (2002) emphasized the importance of understanding why participants can continue participation, rather than why they cannot. The third research question examined this idea further, identifying specific factors which promoted continued participation in an elite youth soccer program. Like leisure constraints, facilitators are categorized as intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. Parents and guardians identified a variety of facilitators which ultimately helped ensure their children’s continued participation. These facilitators were (a) participants’ perceptions of safety, (b) participants’ interest level, (c) positive coaching experiences, (d) positive

interactions with other parents and guardians, (e) financial aid opportunities and (f) facility access. Identification of leisure facilitators highlighted positive aspects of the club soccer program. Furthermore, recognition of these positives helps club organizers determine where the program is exceling, which becomes useful to recruit and retain club soccer players and their parents and guardians.

RQ4. What roles do parents and guardians as stakeholders play in organizational success?

The previous three research questions outlined parents' and guardians' decision-making process regarding continued participation. The fourth research question sought to understand the role parents and guardians play in organizational success. Constituent groups exist in and outside the organization and are affected by organizational decision-making (Mitchell et al., 1997; Freeman, 1984; Sotiriadou, 2009). In this study's context, parents and guardians were key stakeholders as they were the primary decision-makers with respect to their children's initial and continued participation. Understanding parents' and guardians' perceptions of their role in club soccer is especially important when considering stakeholder salience, which exists when two or more stakeholder attributes are present. These stakeholder attributes are power, legitimacy, and urgency. Power describes the influence individuals possess to make meaningful change in organizations, legitimacy refers to appropriateness of claims, and urgency highlights the extent to which organizations act upon claims (Mitchell et al., 1997). Understanding stakeholder salience is important for parents and guardians because it provides valuable insight into how they are valued and prioritized as key members of the soccer club. Essentially, without parents and guardians, children would be unable to participate in club soccer, jeopardizing the

club system and the pay-to-play model, which shows club organizers must be more aware of the role parents and guardians play on organizational success. The following sections will highlight participants' perceptions as key stakeholders and address stakeholder salience.

Feedback. Organizational success relies heavily on constituent feedback to ensure concerns are heard and the needs of stakeholders are met (Freeman, 1984). Club soccer program success is not different. When asked specifically about the way feedback was sought from parents and guardians, responses were mixed. Participants overwhelmingly stated the lines of communication between parents and guardians and club organizers were open, and opportunities to provide feedback, thoughts, or concerns were possible. Additionally, in most cases, parents and guardians felt comfortable reaching out to coaches and club organizers, if needed. For example, Quinn recalled her comfort level, "I'm not shy. I'm not afraid to ask questions or say what I'm thinking...I've had several great conversations with...my daughter's coach." Jordan reiterated similar feelings, saying:

...if I see things that I just feel are truly wrong, I have no problem, voicing concerns, and [we] try to be as professional about it as we can. So, we're not just a parent complaining, and whining or whatever. But I feel like it's the parent['s] responsibility. If something's truly not right, it needs to be addressed, because we do pay dearly in time and financially to participate.

Kendall added additional context, "I...personally would be comfortable talking to anyone I needed to, to handle things," and Morgan emphasized she "wouldn't have any

problem at all” reaching out to club organizers and coaches. However, Lennon expressed some apprehension about communicating freely:

I think each coach is different...I will say the coach that we have now, I don't know that there's a strong comfort level to bring up...minor issues that...we'd like to talk about. I mean, he's a no-nonsense guy... But I'd say...overall, anytime we've had an issue, and I've reached out to him, club leadership, they've always been positive and responsive and helpful.

While these lines of communication appeared to be open from the participants' perspectives, the club failed to seek specific feedback from them. Parents and guardians were asked if the program sought specific feedback. Lee replied, “Not to my knowledge.” Lennon added, “I don't think so. I don't recall there being kind of a club survey or an opportunity to have a detailed kind of one-on-one question or conversation with folks.” When pressed further about the way in which obtaining feedback could be improved, parents and guardians suggested club-wide surveys following fall and spring seasons to combat the lack of a systematic feedback process. Specifically, Lee described his vision for parent- and guardian-provided feedback, “[I think] having at each end season, a survey [should be] sent out to the parents, [asking] are they pleased with the facilities or [if] they have a list of questions. Then parents have the opportunity to provide that feedback.” Quinn conveyed a similar perspective:

I don't feel like they do a lot of surveying. I'm sure there's a little bit of informal checking in like, I know, there have been...conversations where we're just checking in, how's it going? But I don't know that the club has, at least I have not experienced the club to have a formal process for that... I think it would be

helpful. I feel like it would help the club as well to understand where parents are coming from.

Providing avenues for parents and guardians to assess the club gives them an opportunity to express concerns and offer suggestions for improvement. Furthermore, club organizers may find this beneficial as they may be alerted to issues not visible to them as well as find potential solutions to identified problems. Incorporating this feedback then shows parents and guardians their input is valued, while understanding not every individual will be happy all the time. If parents and guardians feel valued and heard, they are more likely to continue their child's participation. This relates directly to organizational success as defined by Freeman (1984), where the needs and wants of stakeholder groups must be met to ensure a favorable outcome. Freeman (1984) also suggested organizations have an obligation to their constituents, and Friedman et al. (2004) determined organizations should identify, analyze, and prioritize stakeholders. Finally, this further adds to role of stakeholders in a sport system as outlined by Brouwers et al. (2015) because parents and guardians are essential to the development process and club organizers must do more to guarantee its member's voice are heard and valued to ensure continued participation.

Development. The development process for children also proved to be a common theme among parents and guardians as decision-makers. More specifically, the business-first mentality of club organizers, where club numbers were prioritized above development, made participants question the club's overall mission. Situations such as having large roster sizes or not having appropriate tryout procedures to increase club numbers left individuals frustrated and disappointed, particularly when the reasons

behind the decisions were not communicated by the team's coach or one of the six full-time staff members to parents and guardians. Jordan voiced his concerns:

The roster size is way too big, especially...this year. We were told by senior members of this organization, 'we're going to cap your roster size at 16. We've heard your concerns from the previous year about the roster size being too big, because we were at 18 last year, we're gonna cap it at 16.' That was told to us by two different members of the senior leadership of this organization who have that ability to speak that for the club. And we have 20 now, with no explanation for why then we have 20, other than the club was caught with not enough kids to make two full teams for [my child's] age groups.

Jordan's frustration mirrored that of other parents and guardians who felt club revenue was prioritized above development of the players and the club's overall mission. Participants described how these feelings created constraints, which could result in seeking other alternatives for participation.

Likewise, frustrations for Kendall began when the club elected to keep all athletes who tried out for the previous season. She said:

[Having] real tryouts and taking players that are motivated to be there and holding them accountable [is needed]. If they're not...coming to practice or if they're not putting forth effort...I want to see them be held accountable for that. [W]hen I was in sports, [if] I didn't come to practice, I didn't get to play. And...that's the way it should be....

Kendall also acknowledged the COVID-19 pandemic and loss of players to a club competitor played a significant role in the club's decision not to cut players, further

highlighting the business-first mentality described previously. However, she emphasized she would not allow this to happen long term, saying:

I can speak for other parents...we will only tolerate one more year of that...I don't think you'll see it being tolerated more than that, because, and the only reason it's been tolerated is because of what this year has been. But that is a major area of frustration is just not addressing those type of behaviors, like not coming to practice, but you get the playing time.

As such, parents and guardians acknowledged these two factors combined with a lack of communication negatively affected their perceptions of the club and hinted alternative play options may be explored. This finding further explains the role of parents and guardians as the key decision-makers regarding continued participation and aligns with previous studies exploring parentals roles with elite youth sport organizations (Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Gould et al., 2008; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). More importantly, parents and guardians make a financial commitment which suggests they are focal stakeholders despite not actively participating in club soccer (Friedman et al., 2004). In fact, Jordan explicitly stated, "...you could easily say without the parents, you have no club." Therefore, club organizers must be cognizant of their decision-making and its effect on parents and guardians as key constituents within the organization.

Organizational Decision-Making. Parents and guardians, despite wanting a voice and an avenue to provide feedback, felt as though organizational decision-making was best left to the experts. Jordan provided his perspective:

Honestly, I think parents do need to be kept at a distance...I am saying we need more of a voice, which we do. But I think it'd be completely unfair to say the club

has to let parents be part of the decision-making process for the entire club. I think that's unrealistic. And I think it's a recipe for disaster.

Quinn also echoed Jordan saying:

So, I feel like it needs to be a balance between like managing the business and the organization that is the club. And I don't need to have input into that. I don't manage Costco, I don't manage Kroger...But also, it needs to be done from the perspective of giving the kids the best experience possible.

Riley described the frequency of feedback as "seldom, but [done] when needed."

When asked further about the role parents and guardians should play in organizational decision-making, he said:

I wouldn't say every parent [should be involved]. I would say that there's specific parents based on knowledge and understanding of soccer...[who] know how the organization works. That would probably make sense, but you run into a problem, if you've got too many parents that are involved in those types of decision making, because the politics become involved...I think, if they were going to have parent involvement, maybe have...a parent representative...to discuss parents' concerns.

These are examples where parents and guardians argued there is a delicate balance between seeking feedback and giving parents full control of the club, which as Jordan mentioned could be a disaster. However, transparency about the decision-making process resonated with parents and guardians. They did not necessarily want to make those business decisions for the club, but they did want to be informed given their financial and time commitments offered to the organization. This assertion by parents and

guardians showcased how they were affected by organizational decision-making, and therefore, were stakeholders as described by Freeman (1984) and Sotiriadou (2009). This also suggests parents and guardians played a role in organizational success (Freeman, 1984; Friedman et al., 2004), adding to stakeholder theory in an elite youth soccer specific context.

Summary. The investigation of parents and guardians as key stakeholders outlined the important and necessary role parents and guardians play in organizational success. Three themes emerged from participant interviews: (a) feedback, (b) development, and (c) organizational decision-making. Parents and guardians described needing more of a voice in the organization, but they acknowledged the delicate balance between allowing parents and guardians to have input and relinquishing control, which could prove detrimental to all parties involved. Additionally, parents and guardians mentioned the importance of their children's development, which they noted can be overshadowed when decisions such as overfilling rosters or not holding traditional tryouts were made. This proved especially problematic when communication about the decision-making process was lacking, making parents and guardians feel as though the club's bottom line mattered more than their children's development. Parents and guardians are an essential part of club soccer and ensuring continued participation. As such, club organizers must find ways to solicit feedback, giving parents and guardians a chance to provide input as well as be more transparent when organizational decisions are made. Doing so will allow parents and guardians to feel more involved and valued as key stakeholders in a club soccer environment.

RQ4a. How do these stakeholder roles depict power, legitimacy, and urgency?

Recognition of parents and guardians as key stakeholders is vital but understanding their stakeholder attributes is equally important. Power, legitimacy, and urgency form the foundation for stakeholder salience and prioritization. Mitchell et al. (1997) determined constituent groups must possess power, legitimacy, or urgency to be classified as stakeholders, but a single attribute does not guarantee stakeholder salience. Stakeholder salience is important to understand as it plays a major role in stakeholder prioritization (Mitchell et al., 1997; Parent & Deephouse, 2007). Namely, stakeholders with higher levels of salience (e.g., expectant and definitive stakeholders) will be prioritized above those with lower levels (e.g., latent stakeholders). The following sections will discuss power, legitimacy, and urgency of parents and guardians in club soccer and examine the presence of stakeholder salience experienced by study participants.

Power. Stakeholder power relates directly to individuals' ability to initiate change within an organization (Godbey et al., 2010). The presence of stakeholder power in club soccer from the participants' perspective generated a mixed result. Parents and guardians described the various commitments required of them to ensure continued participation. However, they did not seem to question the club when no formal avenues of feedback were provided. This finding suggests their power was limited unless they reached out to club leadership specifically. Shae said, "[Communications] always end with if you have any questions, we can reach out to them." Lee added, "The lines [of communication] are open, but we must take the first step." Furthermore, this realization is problematic because those who may not feel comfortable reaching out individually may not have their voices heard, which in turn might affect their willingness to stay in this club environment.

A lack of power also signals to parents and guardians how they are valued as a member of the organization. Without power, parents and guardians are unable to make meaningful change within the organization, jeopardizing their stakeholder salience and overall organizational success (Freeman, 1984; Parent & Deephouse, 2007). As such, club organizers should find ways to solicit feedback from parents and guardians, providing them with a voice and say in organizational decision-making, boosting parents' and guardians' power.

Legitimacy. Stakeholders with legitimacy feel as though their needs are valued (Mitchell et al., 1997). Parents and guardians discussed the openness of communication should someone want to reach out to them. In general, participants were happy with this process because they felt a strong level of comfort to make connections with club leadership. Additionally, parents and guardians described how receptive team managers, coaches, and club leadership were to participants asking questions or expressing concerns. Quinn said, "You can email, you can call. I've never had a situation where I didn't hear back within a day or so...I've never had a situation where I felt like [the club] made me feel like I was asking dumb questions." Shae added, "I think they're receptive to feedback from the parents...they always say if you have any questions, concerns reach out." This ability to reach out indicates a presence of legitimacy, an attribute needed for stakeholder salience. As key stakeholders, possessing legitimacy means parents and guardians concerns are taken seriously and club organizers recognize the role they play in organizational success. However, legitimacy does not mean actions will be taken to address those concerns (Mitchell et al., 1997; Parent & Deephouse, 2007). This describes urgency which will be addressed in the following section.

Urgency. Urgency refers to how quickly action is necessary for stakeholder claims (Mitchell et al., 1997). When parents and guardians acknowledged individual communications, they seemed pleased with the response, showing a level of urgency for those specific claims. Quinn said, “It’s been really nice that most of the time, when I’ve had a concern and sent an email, I get an email directly back from the director of the club, even if I don’t necessarily start there.” Lennon added, “Overall, anytime we’ve had an issue, and I’ve reached out to club leadership...they’ve always been positive and responsive and helpful.” One area where parents and guardians felt less confident about their needs being met was with respect to organizational decision-making. Parents and guardians felt club leadership would listen but did not feel comfortable that leadership would implement the changes. Jordan said, “I think depending on what your feedback is...helps determine the level [to which] you are heard. If you’re contacting them to volunteer, they cannot respond fast enough. [If] you are contacting them with some issue, that probably gets shoved aside.” This situation ties back to the comments parents and guardians made about feedback and whether the club initiates club-wide opportunities for feedback to be provided. Unlike the previous situation, urgency is less prominent overall.

Summary. This sub-question investigated how elements of power, legitimacy, and urgency permeated through this key stakeholder group. Parents and guardians described a lack of power given feedback was not solicited in a club-wide fashion, leaving some parents and guardians without a voice. Legitimacy was present according to parents and guardians, where they felt the club did a good job opening the lines of communication should they ever need to ask questions or voice concerns. Finally, urgency proved more complicated. Parents and guardians were pleased with the timely

responses they received from club organizers when they initiated contact, but they felt less confident about whether the club would implement meaningful change if they were to provide specific feedback. These perceptions from parents and guardians highlight the complex nature of stakeholder salience and how incidents of various types increase or decrease their feelings of power, legitimacy, and urgency as key stakeholders in the club soccer environment.

Summary of the Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine perceived constraints and facilitators among parents and guardians as key stakeholders in elite youth soccer clubs. This chapter outlined the key findings from interviews ($n = 10$) conducted with parents and guardians of children participating in an elite youth soccer club, using leisure constraint theory and stakeholder theory as the theoretical foundation. First, parents and guardians identified intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints, which hindered their children's continued participation. Those eight constraints included: (a) child's level of interest and commitment, (b) child's lack of skill and motivation, (c) negative experiences with peers, (d) negative coaching experiences, (e) club environment, (f) cost, (g) family crises, and (h) lack of facility quality. The findings suggest there is a wide variety of reasons parents and guardians may forgo participation from their children no longer being interested in the activity to negative experiences with other individuals in and around the club to changes in their financial situations. While these all constitute different situations, it is important for club organizers to understand the potential obstacles parents and guardians face when ensuring continued participation.

Constraints identify reasons individuals are unable to participate, but negotiation strategies are tactics used to overcome constraints. The second research question aimed to identify specific negotiation strategies employed by parents and guardians to ensure continued participation, including (a) maintaining interest, (b) relying on family, (c) managing time, and (d) overcoming cost. More specifically, the findings determined if their children showed interest in the activity, participants were willing to make the necessary sacrifices such as adapting work hours, enlisting the help of family members, and forgoing other activities all in the name of club soccer participation.

Negotiation strategies help parents and guardians overcome leisure constraints but understanding why individuals can participate is equally important. The findings of the third research question identified key factors, known as facilitators, which help ensure continued participation. Like constraints, facilitators are categorized as intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. From the interviews, the following six facilitators were found: (a) participants' perceptions of safety, (b) participants' interest level, (c) positive coaching experiences, (d) positive interactions with other parents and guardians, (e) financial aid opportunities, and (f) facility access. These findings highlight various factors which promote continued participation, from having interest in the activity as a parent to having positive experiences with coaches and other peers to having ample facility access for their children to learn and grow as soccer players. Understanding the club's strengths from the participants' perspectives helps club organizers recognize where they can further amplify club initiatives to ensure continued participation.

While identifying the constraints, negotiation strategies, and facilitators provides a well-rounded perspective of the club environment, the fourth research question and

accompanying sub-question sought to further understand parents' and guardians' role as key stakeholders on organizational success and determine their stakeholder salience. Parents and guardians identified three key factors with respect to organizational success: (a) feedback, (b) development, and (c) organizational decision-making. Interestingly, parents and guardians described wanting opportunities to provide feedback to the club but did not feel they should be part of organizational decision-making. Furthermore, parents and guardians expressed concerns about the club's objective and the effect it had on their children's development. Finally, the study sought to identify the stakeholder attributes of power, legitimacy, and urgency experienced by parents and guardians. The findings suggested a lack of power existed given parents and guardians did not have a formal avenue to provide club feedback. Parents and guardians did demonstrate elements of legitimacy and urgency, where they felt club organizers allowed open communication and responds quickly. Possessing these stakeholder attributes is evidence of stakeholder salience, which plays a major role in stakeholder prioritization.

The findings presented in this chapter provide both consistent and conflicting findings from existing literature. The following chapter further discusses these findings in detail, highlighting similarities and differences between the present study and existing literature as well as provides theoretical and practical implications of the findings.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

A strong emphasis is placed on sport participation among children and adolescents (Newman et al., 2016). Those participating in sport engage in physical activity while building transferable skills such as teamwork, time management, and discipline, all perceived benefits of youth sport participation. Being active in sport also allows children to socialize with their peers through competition (Kremer-Sadlik & Kim, 2007). Over time, however, increased sport involvement and competition in sport may force parents and guardians to make difficult decisions regarding their children's continued participation.

Participating in more competitive leagues often means parents and guardians must pay sizeable fees and commit significant time. A TD Ameritrade study (2019) found 27% of parents and guardians spent approximately \$6,000 or more per year on youth sport participation, while 19% of respondents reported spending 20 or more hours per week on their children's sport-related activities. The financial and time commitments required by parents and guardians are especially common in elite youth club soccer programs, where average costs range from \$1,400 to \$10,000 or more (Chaverst, 2020). Chaverst (2020) determined these cost estimates include membership and registration fees required for participation, but do not include additional costs required for sport-related travel such as food, hotels, and gas. The financial burden and time commitment necessary creates

accessibility disparities, particularly for those who lack the minimum resources required to ensure continued participation.

Given the disparities created by the pay-to-play model, the purpose of this study was to examine perceived constraints and facilitators among parents and guardians as key stakeholders in elite youth soccer clubs. The study's purpose was investigated through the lens of leisure constraint theory and stakeholder theory. Leisure constraint theory presents a framework to identify and classify leisure constraints (and facilitators), while stakeholder theory highlights the roles parents and guardians play in organizational success. Understanding perceived constraints and facilitators helps determine specific inhibitors and enablers experienced by parents and guardians as the core decision-makers of their children's continued participation, while illustrating their perceptions as key stakeholders in the club soccer environment. The experiences of parents and guardians were framed by four key research questions:

RQ1. What perceived constraints do parents and guardians of elite youth soccer players find inhibiting to continued participation?

RQ2. In what ways do parents and guardians of elite youth soccer players negotiate their perceived leisure constraints?

RQ3. What perceived facilitators do parents and guardians of elite youth soccer players find helpful to continued participation?

RQ4. What roles do parents and guardians as stakeholders play in organizational success?

To further understand parents and guardians as key stakeholders, the following sub-question was developed:

RQ4a. How do these stakeholder roles depict power, legitimacy, and urgency?

The research questions were answered through in-depth interviews with parents and guardians ($n = 10$) with children participating in elite youth soccer. This chapter outlines the results from the study based on the research questions. Theoretical and practical implications, the study's limitations, and future research are also discussed.

Implications

Results of the interviews produced several key findings. Parents and guardians identified intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints and facilitators, which they perceived to influence their children's continued participation. A few examples of constraints found in the present study included lack of skill, negative coaching experiences, and lack of facility quality. Leisure facilitators described by study participants were perceptions of safety, positive interactions with other parents and guardians, and financial aid opportunities. Those findings provided further context about why individuals can or cannot participate in club soccer programs. Additionally, parents and guardians identified strategies they employed to ensure continued participation. These strategies included maintaining interest, relying on family, managing time, and overcoming costs. Together, these findings provided insight into parents' and guardians' decision-making process regarding continued participation.

The final research question and accompanying sub-question examined parents and guardians as key stakeholders in the club and their influence on organizational success as well as investigated their stakeholder salience. Parents and guardians described feedback, development, and organizational decision-making as factors influencing organizational success. Additionally, elements of power, legitimacy, and urgency were investigated to

further understand their stakeholder salience. Findings suggested parents and guardians lacked power, while possessing elements of legitimacy and urgency as key stakeholders.

The study's findings provide several theoretical and practical implications. The study's theoretical implications offer commentary on similar and opposing findings based on existing literature, whereas practical implications discuss suggestions for club organizers to ensure continued participation. The following sections discuss the findings and aforementioned implications in more detail.

Theoretical Implications

Leisure constraint theory and stakeholder theory served as the study's theoretical foundation, laying the groundwork for this research. While these theories are well-established in sport management literature (e.g., Alexandris et al., 2002; Friedman et al., 2014; Parent & Deephouse, 2007; Post et al., 2018), several theoretical implications emerged from the present study's findings. These theoretical implications are discussed in the subsequent sections.

RQ1. What perceived constraints do parents and guardians of elite youth soccer players find inhibiting to continued participation?

Intrapersonal Constraints. Intrapersonal constraints constitute psychological factors, including attitudes, beliefs, or characteristics, which negatively affect continued participation (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). Examples of intrapersonal constraints in sport include perceived ability, motivation, and interest level (Alexandris et al., 2002; Casper et al., 2011; Crawford et al., 1991). Previous studies examined the role of intrapersonal constraints on continued participation (e.g., Alexandris et al., 2002; Casper et al., 2011; Crawford et al., 1991). Crawford et al. (1991) further expanded Crawford and Godbey's

(1987) discussion on intrapersonal constraints. More specifically, Crawford et al. (1991) examined the psychological factors of intrapersonal constraints, asserting these constraints are more difficult to overcome than previously thought. The authors determined intrapersonal constraints are derived from the individuals' beliefs about the appropriateness of the activity, their interest in the activity, and their competence or perceived ability. These psychological factors which affect continued participation are significant because Crawford et al. (1991) contended if individuals cannot overcome these constraints, participation is unlikely.

Of the three intrapersonal constraints identified by Crawford et al. (1991), interest and perceived ability presented similarities with the current study. Parents and guardians described how failure to make the club team would negatively affect continued participation and force them to seek alternatives for their children. This aligns with perceived ability, where club coaches made determinations about children's abilities (Crawford et al., 1991). Additionally, parents and guardians acknowledged how important their children's interest was when considering continued participation.

Alexandris et al. (2002) investigated the relationship between intrapersonal constraints and motivation in an adult recreation sport program, focusing specifically on the program participants. The authors found three higher-order themes which inhibited leisure participation: (a) individual/psychological, (b) lack of knowledge, and (c) lack of interest. These three constructs were statistically significant predictors of amotivation. Therefore, Alexandris et al. (2002) determined intrapersonal constraints were demotivators with respect to continued participation, indicating lack of motivation inhibits one's propensity to perform a particular activity.

The present study's findings echoed Alexandris et al.'s (2002) results, where the child's level of interest and commitment and the child's lack of skill and motivation emerged as deterrents to continued participation. More specifically, if their children were not interested in participating, parents and guardians did not see themselves forcing participation unless their children were already committed, which would require them to complete the season. Additionally, lack of skill and motivation mirrored the previous study, where a lack of motivation negatively affected continued participation. Parents and guardians expressed concerns over the tryout process, where all individuals were given a spot on the team, resulting in differing levels of motivation among players. Players who did not appear to put forth the same effort still received playing time, a point of frustration for the study participants.

Casper et al. (2011) examined the same intrapersonal constructs (i.e., individual/psychological, lack of knowledge, and lack of interest) based on specific demographic characteristics of middle school aged children. Statistically significant differences based on gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and prior sport participation existed for the individual/psychological and lack of knowledge constructs, indicating individual circumstance played a role in continued participation. Prior sport participation was the only statistically significant indicator for lack of interest, implying those with fewer sport participation opportunities were less likely to be interested in sport participation than those with more opportunities. Casper et al.'s (2011) findings with respect to lack of interest differed from Alexandris et al. (2002) and the present study, which may be attributed to a difference in target population. Children may not fully comprehend the factors preventing continued participation compared to the parents and

guardians in this study. Examining this perspective provided a different look into the psychological factors influencing continued participation.

Interpersonal Constraints. In addition to intrapersonal constraints, the study also identified interpersonal constraints, which are created because of other individuals (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). In a sport specific context, these individuals may include parents, coaches, and peers (Atkins et al., 2014; Dollman & Lewis, 2010; Fawcett et al., 2009; Hultsman, 1993). Given their proximity to the activity participants, parents, coaches, and peers may affect continued participation both directly and indirectly. Previous studies have examined the roles of individuals within these groups on continued participation (Atkins et al., 2014; Dollman & Lewis, 2010; Fawcett et al., 2009). Fawcett et al. (2009) focused their study on the influence of parental figures and found those who made leisure activity a priority were more likely to have children who participated more frequently and for extended periods of time. Dollman and Lewis (2010) also investigated perceptions of parental support based on gender, finding boys felt more supported and encouraged by parental figures than girls. This determination highlights how varying support systems can affect continued participation. Like Fawcett et al. (2009), the current study's participants encouraged sport participation, supporting their children in the process. Overwhelmingly, the parents and guardians indicated their responsibility as parental figures was to provide support in any way possible.

While the role of parents as influences on participation was the focus of the above studies, other researchers examined the role of coaches and peers (Atkins et al., 2014; Hultsman, 1993). Like Dollman and Lewis (2010), Hultsman (1993) examined the role of gender differences on continued participation, while focusing more specifically on

influences from coaches and peers. Hultsman (1993) determined influence by these groups differed based on gender, where girls were more heavily influenced by these individuals than boys. Furthermore, the study examined the relationship of outside influences on individuals who previously had interest in an activity but never joined or those who participated at another time but no longer did, finding no statistically significant relationship between outside influences and those who once participated in an activity and stopped. This finding suggests children who want to participate in an activity will do so regardless of external influences (Hultsman, 1993). Understanding these studies (e.g., Dollman and Lewis; Hultsman, 1993) helps recognize the potential effect of coaches and peers on continued participation.

While gender differences served as the focal point for the Hultsman (1993) study, Atkins et al. (2014) explored the influence of coaches and peers on recreational sport by age. The researchers found the influences of coaches on continued participation increased as children grew older, indicating they became more aware of their coaching preferences over time. Children seemingly understood the role coaches played with respect to continued participation. Similarly, peers were found to be significant influences on participation, where those who felt supported by their peers were more inclined to continue to participate regardless of age.

The present study also investigated the influence of coaching. As noted above, Hultsman (1993) found coaching to be a non-significant indicator of participation for those who once participated in an activity and discontinued, insinuating those who want to participate will do so despite outside influences. However, in the current study, from parents' and guardians' perspectives, if negative coaching experiences occurred, they

expressed that they would not hesitate to seek alternative options for their children's club soccer participation. Additionally, study participants addressed both coaches and peers as potential deterrents to continued participation. One key similarity found between the current study and Atkins et al. (2014) was the relationship between coaching and age. Parents and guardians recognized coaching philosophies and methodologies should vary based on the age group, meaning those in the under-9 age groups should not be coached in the same ways as under-19 players. This similarity reinforces the idea that coaches have significant influence on continued participation and must recognize how they may affect players and their families. Parents and guardians acknowledged the presence of one bad coach can negatively affect continued participation despite having positive experiences previously, further highlighting the need for clear and appropriate coaching philosophies.

In contrast, participants' expectations about club soccer coaching standards differed from Atkins et al. (2014), where notions of coaching were developed over time. Parents and guardians described having preconceived ideas about their expectations for coaches in the club environment and would consider alternative options if those expectations were not met. Additionally, parents and guardians described their expectations for their club soccer program. Given their time and financial commitment to club soccer, they stressed the importance of their children's development as the club's primary focus. Examples of the club environment negatively affecting continued participation included rosters being too large and lack of a competitive environment. This idea of the club environment represents an important finding not addressed in previous literature. Parents and guardians acknowledged if their children's needs were not met or

standards fell below what they expected of a club soccer program, they would seek alternatives, thereby hindering continued participation.

Previous studies investigated the role of parents, coaches, and peers on continued participation (Atkins et al., 2014; Dollman & Lewis, 2010; Fawcett et al., 2009; Hultsman, 1993), and their findings mirror the present study. Parents and guardians described how these individuals and the club environment negatively affected continued participation. Like Atkins et al. (2014), negative experiences with their children's peers and coaching issues created interpersonal constraints, where parents and guardians felt strongly about reconsidering continued participation if issues between players as well as coaching issues were not addressed.

While similarities exist between previous studies and the current study, differences also stem from examining varying study participants. The present study examined parents and guardians, whereas the previous studies used children as their population of interest. This difference in target population is important because parents and guardians serve as the core decision-makers with respect to their children's continued participation. If the parents and guardians veto involvement, children will not participate. Examining a different participant group also changed the perspective on interpersonal constraints. Previous studies identified parental support as an inhibitor to continued participation (Atkins et al., 2014, Dollman & Lewis, 2010). This study expanded the scope of parental figures and their influence on continued participation. Parents and guardians described the way other parents and guardians negatively affected continued participation by yelling or criticizing players, coaches, referees, or other parents. Thus, the influential role of parents and guardians extended beyond simply supporting their

children in an activity, and the emergent interpersonal constraints outlined their personal interactions rather than their children's interactions with others.

Interpersonal constraints manifested as a result of interactions with individuals in and around the organization. The present study examined interpersonal constraints from parents' and guardians' perspectives. This point of view adds a new layer to the literature, where the influence of coaches, peers, and parents does not necessarily affect the children involved in the activity, but rather the parents and guardians as core decision-makers and their approach to ensure continued participation. This study also goes beyond examining parents, coaches, and peers by incorporating the club environment as an interpersonal constraint, acknowledging the perceptions of a club standards held by the parents and guardians served as an influential factor on continued participation.

Structural Constraints. Structural constraints were also examined in the study and are inhibiting factors to participation due to a lack of resources (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). This constraint type has been the primary focus in leisure constraint literature (Casper et al., 2011; Hallmann et al., 2017; Holt et al., 2011; Wicker et al., 2013). Examples of structural constraints include cost, socioeconomic status, time, geographic location, and access to facilities. The most common structural constraint identified by previous literature for both recreational and elite sport programs was cost (Casper et al., 2011; Eime et al., 2017; Hardy et al., 2010; Holt et al., 2011; Post et al., 2018). Parents and guardians from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may have a more difficult time paying registration fees and other associated costs, limiting their children's ability to participate. Hardy et al. (2010) and Holt et al. (2011) both identified cost as a major deterrent to continued participation, where individuals from lower socioeconomic

backgrounds were less likely to participate than those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds because of the costs associated with the sport-related activity.

In addition to socioeconomic status, Post et al. (2018) investigated perceived constraints of parents and guardians with children participating in an elite sport environment. Approximately 62% of the study respondents reported a household income above \$100,000, while only 8% reported a household income of less than \$50,000. Additionally, 70% of respondents reported earning a bachelor's degree or higher. The researchers determined those with higher household incomes reported an increased likelihood of having children who were highly specialized athletes, determining parents and guardians with more financial resources can invest more in their children than those with fewer financial resources. Post et al. (2018) also found a statistically significant difference between cost and education level on participation rates, differing from Marcen et al. (2013) who found cost and education level to not be statistically significant with respect to participation rates. Post et al. (2018) contended those with higher levels of education were more likely to spend money on sport-related activities such as club teams.

In the current study, parents and guardians mentioned the significant financial commitment associated with club soccer participation. The findings of Post et al. (2018) most closely aligned with the present study, using a similar target population of parents and guardians to examine elite sport participation. However, their study failed to identify the sport of interest, suggesting different sports may yield different results. Like Post et al. (2018), a majority of the current study's participants reported a household income above \$100,000 and earned a Bachelor's degree or higher. This parallel further showcases how access to sport-related activities, especially club sports, may be more

feasible for families from higher socioeconomic backgrounds because of cost-related factors. The present study also coincides with Hardy et al. (2010) and Holt et al. (2011), who also found cost was a contributing factor of continued participation.

Aside from cost as a structural constraint, previous literature described facility access and quality as another factor inhibiting continued participation (Casper et al., 2018; Eime et al., 2017; Wicker et al., 2013). Casper et al. (2018) examined perceived constraints of middle school aged children, and the structural constraint of interest derived from their study was facility access or quality. The researchers determined prior sport participation produced a significant relationship with facility issues, where those with prior sport experiences developed expectations about facility quality by visiting and inspecting various facilities over time. Similarly, Wicket et al. (2013) examined the importance of sport infrastructure, including facility access, on continued participation. The authors determined participation rates can be negatively affected if there are not available facilities. Eime et al. (2017) also found a significant relationship between participation rates and facility quality, indicating the facilities where individuals participate can negatively affect continue participation if they are not well-maintained.

Facility quality also emerged as a structural constraint in the current study, following previous literature. Parents and guardians indicated field quality was inconsistent depending on the location, which negatively affected their perceptions of the club overall. Additionally, parents and guardians expressed concerns about which teams were given access to specific fields. Those on the best teams were given priority access to the best fields despite parents and guardians making the same financial contributions. This created what participants described as “class warfare,” highlighting club inequities.

Without quality fields, parents and guardians felt their children's development would suffer, causing them to reconsider continued participation. This finding parallels Wicker et al. (2013), where infrastructure, namely facilities, played a role in continued participation.

Previous studies and the present study both found cost and facility quality as key constraints to participation (Casper et al., 2011; Eime et al., 2011; Hardy et al., 2010; Holt et al., 2011; Wicker et al., 2013). When comparing the findings of previous studies with the present study, differences also exist. As previously mentioned, the household incomes of most participants exceeded \$100,000. This is significant because parents and guardians acknowledged club soccer is expensive, but the cost did not deter their children's continued participation. However, they did note this may not be the case for everyone, identifying cost as a potential constraint to participation. The cost factor also made parents and guardians question the club's objective, debating if their children were seen only as a source of revenue. This finding adds to the literature by questioning the true goal of youth sport participation. In this instance, parents and guardians felt more of an emphasis was placed on money than on player development, a decision they viewed negatively. This perspective was not examined in previous literature and can largely be attributed to parents and guardians, and not athletes, as the target population. The present study interviewed parents and guardians as the participants, who could discuss their household income and the effects of socioeconomic status on continued participation. Doing so allowed for a better understanding of how these factors negatively affected continued participation.

Another key difference between previous studies and the current study is the inclusion of family crises as a constraint. Parents and guardians in this study described two catastrophic situations, loss of disposable income and health issues, which would negatively affect continued participation. Loss of disposable income links directly to cost, where if funds set aside for club soccer must be used elsewhere, participation is hindered. Furthermore, if parents and guardians experienced health issues or an injury which made the commitment to club soccer more difficult, they would reconsider continued participation. Given these situations would be out of the control of the individuals, they are categorized as structural constraints, hindering continued participation.

Previous studies examined structural constraints with cost and facility access being the most prevalent (Casper et al., 2018; Eime et al., 2017; Hardy et al., 2010; Holt et al., 2011; Post et al., 2018; Wicker et al., 2013). The present study produced similar findings, where structural constraints hindered continued participation. Cost and facility access were among the commonalities, but the presence of family crises highlighted another key structural constraint from parents' and guardians' perspectives. This additional constraint further explains the role parents and guardians play in continued participation by examining how their personal situations affect their children's ability to remained engaged with an activity despite not being directly involved in participation.

Summary. Parents and guardians identified several constraints inhibiting continued participation. These constraints were categorized as intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural based on Crawford and Godbey's (1987) leisure constraint framework. Constraints emerging in the present study such as lack of skill, negative experiences with peers, and facility quality followed previous literature (e.g., Alexandris

et al., 2002; Atkins et al., 2014; Casper et al., 2011; Eime et al. 2017; Wicker et al., 2013). Club environment and family crises emerged as constraints not previously examined. Additionally, the present study further added to leisure constraint theory by investigating perceived constraints from parents' and guardians' perspectives instead of their children who play club soccer. These findings highlighted the difficulties faced regarding continued participation in an elite youth soccer program.

RQ2. In what ways do parents and guardians of elite youth soccer players negotiate their perceived leisure constraints?

The above sections described similarities and differences between previous literature and the current study with respect to leisure constraints. The following sections compare and contrast negotiation strategies employed to overcome leisure constraints. In general, Hubbard and Mannell (2001) asserted negotiation strategies provide an outlet to navigate leisure constraints to ensure continued participation. The researchers recognized overcoming constraints completely is not feasible, but negotiation strategies work to mitigate leisure constraints and avoid forgoing participation altogether. In their investigation of negotiation strategies, the authors developed four theoretical models (independence, negotiation-buffer, constraint-effects-mitigation, and perceived-constraint-reduction models) designed to describe the unique relationships of constraint, negotiation, and motivation on participation. The model of interest for this study was the constraint-effects-mitigation model, where all factors positively influenced participation except constraint.

Son et al. (2008), however, determined negotiation and constraint affect participation independently, implying negotiation strategies may not be as helpful to

overcome leisure constraints. Individual circumstances play a role in one's ability to negotiate leisure constraints (Jackson & Rucks, 1995; Jun & Kyle, 2011). Cost and time constraints were among those discussed when investigating negotiation strategies. Forgoing personal endeavors was among the most common negotiation strategy employed to ensure continued participation (Holt et al., 2011; Jackson & Rucks, 1995; Jun & Kyle, 2011). This strategy outlines the sacrifices required to ensure continued participation, a process parents and guardians of children in this elite youth soccer program reported.

Similar to previous studies (e.g., Holt et al., 2011; Jackson & Rucks, 1995; Jun & Kyle, 2011), the current study's participants identified specific strategies they utilized to ensure their children's continued participation. The two overlapping factors included cost and time. Parents and guardians described working additional hours or jobs to afford the financial expectations of club soccer. In addition to extra work, parents and guardians also described giving up vacations to accommodate costs associated with elite club soccer participation. Furthermore, adaptation of work schedules helped to mitigate constraints due to time, where parents and guardians described leaving early or working after games and practices to meet the time requirements of the club soccer environment. In both situations, parents and guardians gave up their own endeavors to ensure their children's continued participation, which aligns with previous constraint negotiation literature (Holt et al., 2011; Jackson & Rucks, 1995; Jun & Kyle, 2011).

Examining the role of parents and guardians as the core decision-makers on continued participation also provided two unique negotiation strategies: (a) relying on family and (b) maintaining interest. Parents and guardians emphasized the commitment

required for club soccer and the difficulties created when balancing multiple children in various activities. Previous studies (Holt et al., 2011; Jackson & Rucks, 1995; Jun & Kyle, 2011) found individuals may give up their own endeavors in the name of continued participation. The present study found parents and guardians sometimes sacrificed other children's activities to fulfill the requirements of club soccer. While this negotiation strategy still required sacrifice, it was not the children involved in soccer or the parents and guardians themselves making the sacrifice, but rather the other children within the family. This distinction is significant because ensuring continued participation affects the entire family unit and highlights the priority placed on club soccer.

Children's interest also added a different perspective to constraint negotiation literature. Hubbard and Mannell's (2001) constraints-effects-mitigation model found the relationship between motivation and participation to not be statistically significant, indicating even if individuals have a desire to participate, it may not be feasible. This notion directly contradicts the present study's findings, where parents and guardians stated their children's desire to participate in club soccer was the driving force behind their involvement. They further indicated they would find a way to meet the requirements and expectations of club soccer as long as their children remained interested. This difference in findings may be attributed to the target population. Hubbard and Mannell (2001) focused on the individuals (i.e., the children as participants who do not make financial choices), whereas the present study examined parents and guardians as key stakeholders adjacent to those engaged in the activity.

Summary. In their interviews, parents and guardians stressed the importance of leisure activity for their children. Despite the perceived benefits participating in club

soccer offered, parents and guardians understood leisure constraints existed, creating obstacles which may prevent continued participation. To combat the obstacles created by leisure constraints, parents and guardians employed various negotiation strategies to help ensure continued participation. Overcoming cost and managing time mirrored previous studies (e.g., Holt et al., 2011; Jackson & Rucks, 1995; Jun & Kyle, 2011), while relying on family and maintaining interest provided new insights into tactics used to overcome constraints. Parents and guardians described adapting work schedules, relying on others, and forgoing vacation time all for club soccer participation. These negotiation strategies required sacrifices from parents and guardians as well other family members to ensure continued participation, highlighting the complexity of elite youth soccer participation.

RQ3. What perceived facilitators do parents and guardians of elite youth soccer players find helpful to continued participation?

Raymore (2002) sought to identify specific facilitators for participation. The author argued understanding and classifying leisure facilitators helps provide a more well-rounded depiction of leisure involvement. While constraints and facilitators are closely aligned, the author emphasized the presence of a facilitator does not mean an equivalent constraint has been negotiated, indicating the relationship between constraints and facilitators are more complex than simply being described as opposites. Additionally, a lack of constraints does not automatically facilitate participation. This statement is relevant to the current study as it means club organizers must do more than simply address constraints, but instead truly generate interest in the activity. The following sections discuss intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural facilitators in more detail.

Intrapersonal Facilitators. Intrapersonal facilitators are attitudes, beliefs, or traits which promote continued participation (Raymore, 2002). In a sport specific context, intrapersonal facilitators may include interest level, perceived ability, or overall competence. Previous studies have examined the role of intrapersonal facilitators on continued participation (Hutzler & Bergman, 2011; Stodoloska et al., 2014). For example, Stodolska et al. (2014) investigated youth sport participation in organized sport programs. The authors identified one intrapersonal facilitator, which they labeled “I kept pushing myself and keeping myself humble.” Participants described their own motivation as a key facilitator, where the higher motivation, the more likely they were to return to the program. Hutzler and Bergman (2011) examined leisure facilitators for competitive swimmers with disabilities, finding the joy and fun of the activity helped promote continued participation. Parents and guardians, as the current study’s participants, identified their level of interest as a key factor in their children’s continued participation. They described playing soccer themselves and wanted to share the activity with their children. This finding related to Stodolska et al. (2014), where level of interest positively affected continued participation. The study’s results also pertained to Hutzler and Bergman (2011) because parents and guardians found their own enjoyment in soccer, prompting them to share their experiences with their children.

While these studies present facilitators in a sport specific context, they differ from the present study. Stodolska et al. (2014) and Hutzler and Bergman (2011) both examined facilitators from the participants’ perspectives. While understanding facilitators from this perspective is valuable, the present study sought to explore what helps parents and guardians as the ultimate decision-makers ensure continued participation for their

children. This study's findings also further add to literature focused on elite sport participation (e.g., Hardy et al., 2010; Holt et al., 2011; Post et al., 2018; Wicker et al., 2013) by examining the reasons parents and guardians choose to participate, rather than why they do not. This is significant as it provides a more well-rounded picture of individuals' propensity to participate in elite youth sport programs, specifically club soccer.

Presence of a safe environment also emerged as an intrapersonal facilitator and was described as feelings pertaining to their children's health and safety. This theme encompassed three main elements: (a) bully-free zone, (b) safety protocols, and (c) place of growth. First, study participants described their club's current climate as one that did not tolerate bullying, a climate they acknowledged did not exist everywhere. Additionally, feelings of safety emerged as a priority especially given the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic. Parents and guardians applauded the club's efforts to adhere to safety protocols and mandates, all while remaining open for participation. Finally, the club created an atmosphere where parents and guardians felt their children were well taken care of and could grow and develop as soccer players and human beings.

The present study diverged from the aforementioned ones based on the emergence of presence of a safe environment as a theme. Having a safe environment, which included a bully-free zone and presence of safety protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowed parents and guardians to feel at ease. These feelings of safety helped enable continued participation. This particular theme did not emerge in previous studies (e.g., Hutzler & Bergman, 2011; Raymore, 2002; Stodolska et al., 2014), and further expands leisure facilitator literature by illustrating the specific internal feelings of parents and

guardians who enroll their children in elite youth soccer programs. In general, parents and guardians viewed these factors positively, which they emphasized helped ensure continued participation.

Intrapersonal facilitators are internal feelings or perceptions which help promote continued participation (Raymore, 2002). The present study further advanced the literature surrounding intrapersonal facilitators by examining a different target population as well as investigating them in an elite youth soccer context. Previous studies (e.g., Hardy et al., 2010; Holt et al., 2011; Post et al., 2018; Wicker et al., 2013) examining elite sport participation focused on leisure constraints (i.e., why one cannot participate), whereas the present study sought to identify specific factors which promote participation. This additional viewpoint adds more context to elite sport participation, while also highlighting parents' and guardians' unique perspectives and the facilitators they found necessary for continued participation. Namely, their own interest in soccer, which allowed their children to engage in an activity they seemingly both enjoyed, and the presence of a safe environment, where parents and guardians felt comfortable leaving their children in the hands of club organizers.

Interpersonal Facilitators. The second facilitator group outlined by Raymore (2002) is interpersonal facilitators, which constitute specific individuals who positively affect continued participation. Previous studies examining leisure facilitators identified peers, coaches, and parents as the main drivers for continued participation (Hutzler & Bergman, 2011; Stodolska et al., 2014). Stodolska et al. (2014) found participants appreciated the support of their teammates as well as support from coaches and program staff. These positive relationships helped ensure continued participation. Hutzler and

Bergman (2011) in their study of participants with disabilities found having supportive coaches and parental figures instrumental to continued participation. The authors determined the support from these individuals proved even more important as participants navigated life with a disability. The present study mirrored the findings of both Stodolska et al. (2014) and Hutzler and Bergman (2011) regarding the influence of coaches on continued participation. In particular, parents and guardians stressed the importance of having positive coaching experiences, where their children could grow and develop on and off the field.

In addition to support from peers and coaches, Stodolska et al. (2014) anticipated finding parental support as another important influence on continued participation. However, participants in their study did not mention this support as an enabling factor for continued participation. The authors attributed this non-finding to the participants being minority youth from low socioeconomic backgrounds and parental figures not having the time to attend games and practices. This contrasts with the present study as well as Hutzler and Bergman's (2011), where parental support played a significant role in continued participation. The differences between the present study and Stodolska et al. (2014) may be attributed to the target population as well as the variation in socioeconomic status. Parents and guardians in this study were overwhelmingly White and from households earning \$100,001 or more, which diverges from minority youth from low socioeconomic backgrounds in the aforementioned study. This distinction is significant as it highlights how different individuals prioritize and support their children's leisure activities based on socioeconomic status and other factors. Examining parents and guardians in this study also provided a unique perspective with respect to parental

support by discussing how positive interactions with other parents and guardians affected continued participation. Study participants stressed the importance of having other parental figures they could tolerate while attending their children's games and practices. This unique perspective further expands the notion of parental support as a leisure facilitator by considering the social interactions parents and guardians desired and their effect on continued participation.

Development of interpersonal facilitators occurred when individuals such as parents, coaches, and peers positively affected continued participation. The present study found positive coaching experiences and positive interactions with other parents and guardians as the key interpersonal facilitators. Positive coaching experienced followed previous literature (Hutzler & Bergman, 2011; Stodolska et al., 2014), where coaches in this study created a positive environment focused on the children's development. Hutzler and Bergman (2011) also determined parental figures played an important role in facilitating continued participation, a finding shared with the present study. However, the emergence of parental support as a theme diverged from Stodolska et al. (2014). This difference indicates personal situations such as lack of time may affect parents' and guardians' ability to support their children's leisure activities. Finally, in the present study, parental support encompassed parents' and guardians' interactions with each other. Having positive relationship with other parents and guardians helped ensure continued participation, as they interacted with one another during their children's practices and games. This finding further expands literature on leisure facilitators by considering a previously unexplored target population and point of view.

Structural Facilitators. Structural facilitators are factors which encourage participation due to the presence of resources (Raymore, 2002). Structural facilitators relating to sport include facility access, socioeconomic status, and institutions (Hutzler and Bergman, 2011; Stodolska et al., 2014). Stodolska et al. (2014) identified a key structural facilitator as institutional support. The researchers examined a baseball program for minority participants, supported by Major League Baseball, which provided equipment and funding. This institutional support offered the necessary resources for the program to continue and ensure participation. Hutzler and Bergman (2011) found access to facilities to be another key facilitator, where participants stressed pool access directly affected their ability to participate.

The finding of institutional support as a structural facilitator offers a parallel to the current study. Stodolska et al. (2014) acknowledged the participants were from low socioeconomic backgrounds and support from a major sport organization was vital to ensure continued participation. While the participants in the present study did not have the same socioeconomic backgrounds, they recognized socioeconomic status and cost played a substantial role in continued participation. As such, they identified the club's financial aid opportunities as a facilitator, where those who could not afford club soccer had an opportunity to receive financial assistance to offset costs. This assistance mirrors the institutional support reported by Stodolska et al. (2014). It is important to note, however, parents and guardians were aware of the financial aid opportunities but had no understanding of the process to obtain this financial support, which proves problematic when recruiting those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Another key similarity between previous literature and the present study is facility access. Parents and guardians noted all the facilities available to the players. More specifically, parents and guardians appreciated having indoor and outdoor space available. They insisted this allowed their children the flexibility to play year-round. This finding follows Hutzler and Bergman (2011), where pool access proved vital to continued participation. Having available space allows parents and guardians to believe their children have the necessary opportunities to learn, grow, and develop as soccer players, helping ensure continued participation. Additionally, parents and guardians feel as though they made a good investment of time and money when ample facility space is available.

The two key structural facilitators found in the present study were financial aid opportunities and facility access, both of which appeared in previous literature (Hutzler & Bergman, 2011; Stodolska et al., 2014). These emergent themes, while not new, reinforce the importance of organizational support to help supply the necessary resources for continued participation and having ample space for children to participate. Without these structural facilitators, leisure participation would prove difficult in this elite youth soccer context. In the present study, these two factors further highlighted the positive aspects of this club from parents' and guardians' perspectives. This finding is especially important when considering parents and guardians as key stakeholders and their decision-making process regarding continued participation.

Summary. Leisure facilitators enable or promote continued participation (Raymore, 2002). Like constraints, facilitators are categorized as intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural (Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Raymore, 2002). Examples of leisure facilitators found in the present study echo previous studies (e.g., Hutzler &

Bergman, 2011; Stodolska et al., 2014) and include interest level, positive coaching experiences, and financial aid opportunities. However, presence of a safe environment presented a new leisure facilitator, where parents and guardians felt their children's health and safety were a club priority, and, therefore, positively affected continued participation. This is especially important given the time and financial commitments made by parents and guardians. Additionally, the present study advanced leisure facilitator literature by investigating this phenomenon in an elite youth soccer context, providing valuable insight into the reasons parents and guardians allowed their children to continue participating in club soccer.

RQ4. What roles do parents and guardians as stakeholders play in organizational success?

Reliance on parents, coaches, and athletes is imperative to ensure success in sport organizations, particularly in a youth sport context (Sotiriadou, 2009). These groups represent individuals in and outside the organization who are affected by organizational decision-making (Sotiriadou, 2009). They are called stakeholders (Mitchell et al., 1997) and play a substantial role in organizational success (Freeman, 1984). Previous literature investigating parents and guardians as key stakeholders exists; however, most prior studies center on parental behavior (Gould et al., 2008; Omil & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011) or parental perceptions of a sport program (Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Schwab et al., 2010; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008).

Gould et al. (2008) and Omil and Wiese-Bjornstal (2011) investigated coaches' and children's perceptions of parental sport behavior, respectively. According to Gould et al. (2008), coaches expressed positive experiences with parental figures, emphasizing the

parents' overall support for their children's development. Parents and guardians who prioritized winning and overall performance were viewed less favorably by coaches. While Gould et al. (2008) found parents and guardians were viewed positively overall, Omil and Wiese-Bjornstal (2011) provided a different viewpoint. In their study, children identified the negative aspects of parents and guardians in youth sports, resulting in three key themes: (a) supportive parent, (b) demanding coach, and (c) crazed fan. Children expressed wanting their supporters to remain calm and avoid negative behavior such as yelling at players, coaches, and officials.

While this perspective was provided from the children involved in the activity, a parallel to the current study exists. Parents and guardians also did not view negative behaviors from other parents and guardians favorably. They described wanting an environment where other parents and guardians acted positively toward their own children and other players, coaches, and parents. They further explained yelling at other players, coaches, and officials would not be tolerated and would force them to consider alternative options for their children. Club organizers reinforced this idea by developing parental expectations in the club soccer environment to combat negative behavior.

In addition to studies of parental behaviors, previous research focusing on parents' perceptions of youth sport programs exists (e.g., Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Schwab et al., 2010; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). Schwab et al. (2010) explored player and parental perspectives of a specific youth football program, finding players were more likely to view the program positively than parents. This finding suggests priorities and expectations differ among players and their parental figures with respect to youth sport programming. This result is of particular interest to the current study, where parents and

guardians provided a different perspective than the players. This finding indicates parents and guardians might possess a different set of standards for a club soccer program than their children, which relates to development as key theme in the present study. Parents and guardians expressed concerns about the program's overall mission as result of roster sizes being too large and relaxed tryout procedures. In this case, the standards parents and guardians expected were not upheld, causing them to view the club less favorably.

Schwab et al. (2010) further determined sport organizations should do more to improve the experiences of parents and guardians in youth sport programs given their role in making decisions about future involvement in sport-related activities. This directly aligns with concerns parents and guardians had about the club and not being provided an opportunity to give feedback in a systematic way. Giving parents and guardians an opportunity to provide feedback allows club organizers to make improvements, which are imperative to organizational success (Freeman, 1984; Sotiriadou, 2009).

Wiersma and Fifer (2008) and Clarke and Harwood (2014) also examined parents' perceptions of youth sport programs. Wiersma and Fifer (2008) sought to identify the positive and negative aspects of youth sport programs, finding their children's enjoyment and establishing peer relationships as positive aspects of the program. Expenses and transportation, balancing competition with fun, and the overall demand of sport participation were among the negatives parents and guardians mentioned. Clarke and Harwood (2014) also discovered the importance of peer relationships between parents, indicating positive interactions with other parents positively influenced continued participation. These two studies most closely aligned with the present study by focusing on parents' perceptions of youth sport programs,

providing important similarities, particularly when assessing the positive and negatives of youth sport programs. The current study, however, produced different findings with respect to parents' and guardians' roles in organizational success by examining specific factors such as feedback, development, and organizational decision-making which benefit both parents and guardians as key stakeholders and club organizers to help ensure continued participation.

Summary. Given the uniqueness of the present study, three themes emerged when examining parents and guardians as key stakeholders in elite youth soccer programs: (a) feedback, (b) development, and (c) organizational decision-making. Parents and guardians described the club lacking a formal system to provide feedback but acknowledged their power should be limited, allowing leadership to make the final decisions. According to Freeman (1984), soliciting feedback is imperative for organizational success. Next, parents and guardians expressed feeling as though the club viewed them as source of revenue. This feeling was supported by large roster sizes and tryouts where all interested players made the team with no explanation from the club. These two factors combined with a lack of communication made parents and guardians feel as though the club simply tried to improve its financial performance instead of focusing on their children's development.

Organizational decision-making constituted the final theme, where parents and guardians determined they should not necessarily be involved in the club's business decisions. This finding proved interesting given parents' and guardians' desire to have a voice. They acknowledged a delicate balance existed between allowing parents and guardians to provide feedback and relinquishing control to club members, but also

welcomed more transparency about the decision-making process. Because parents and guardians are affected by organizational decision-making, one can conclude they are stakeholders despite not actively participating in the activity, and therefore, are imperative to organizational success (Freeman, 1984; Sotiriadou, 2009).

RQ4a. How do these stakeholder roles depict power, legitimacy, and urgency?

The previous research question sought to identify the role parents and guardians play as key stakeholders on organizational success. This research sub-question expanded the examination of parents and guardians as key stakeholders by investigating stakeholder salience and the corresponding attributes of power, legitimacy, and urgency. Understanding stakeholder salience is important because it provides insight into stakeholder prioritization, where those with higher levels of salience are prioritized ahead of those with lower salience levels (Boessmo & Kumar, 2009; Mitchell et al., 1997; Parent & Deephouse, 2007). This is particularly relevant to the current study as parents and guardians are not participating in the activity themselves but are the ultimate decision-makers with respect to continued participation, suggesting club organizers should do more to prioritize the wants and needs of parents and guardians. The following sections address stakeholder salience including power, legitimacy, and urgency in more detail.

Power. The stakeholder attribute of power describes stakeholders' ability to influence the organization (Mitchell et al., 1997). Boessmo and Kumar (2009) investigated managers' perceptions of power, legitimacy, and urgency among stakeholders in a corporate setting. Five stakeholder groups were investigated: (a) labor unions, (b) financial community, (c) social and environmental, (d) customer groups, and

(e) professional and industry groups. The authors found managers believed all five stakeholder groups possessed power, meaning they could influence the organization in one way or another. The authors attributed this finding to the managers' close relationship with each stakeholder group. While this study is not sport specific, it is relevant to the present study as it highlights the importance of establishing strong relationships between leadership and stakeholders to increase stakeholders' feelings of power within the organization, making them feel more valued.

Parent and Deephouse (2007) investigated Mitchell et al.'s (1997) stakeholder salience framework by interviewing managers at two large-scale sporting events. Study participants constituted various levels of management as well as volunteers and full-time staff members. In all interviews, participants identified the presence of power in their roles. This finding makes sense as these individuals constituted organizing committee members tasked with making key decisions to facilitate two mega sporting events. The presence of power in their study, however, diverges from the current study's findings, where parents and guardians felt they did not have power within the organization. This perceived lack of power existed because parents and guardians were not given an opportunity to provide feedback to the club, limiting their ability to influence organizational change. It is also important to acknowledge parents and guardians wanted a voice in the organization but were content with organizational decision-making coming from club leadership, limiting their own power to a degree. The difference between these two studies may depend largely on the stakeholders' proximity to the organization, where the organizing committee members are directly involved with the event, whereas parents

and guardians may be viewed as more secondary stakeholders since they do not actively participate in club soccer.

The present study determined parents and guardians wanted more of voice in the organization where they could provide feedback and offer suggestions to the club organizers. Doing so would allow them to voice concerns at specific periods of time, helping them feel more involved in the organization. Parents and guardians suggested anonymous surveys at the end of each season or parent representatives who act as liaisons on behalf of all parents and guardians. Implementation of these feedback avenues helps parents and guardians feel more involved in organizational decision-making, improving their power within the organization.

Legitimacy. Legitimacy refers to the appropriateness of stakeholder claims (Mitchell et al., 1997). Stakeholders who possess legitimacy feel as though their claims are warranted. Presence of legitimacy was the second common stakeholder claim found by Boesso and Kumar (2009). Managers perceived labor unions, financial community, and social environment groups all to possess legitimacy. This finding makes sense as these stakeholder group largely deal with employees, money, and legal issues, which are important components of corporations. However, managers determined possession of legitimacy to be the least important stakeholder attribute because having appropriate claims does not guarantee action will be taken to address those claims. In the current study, parents and guardians contributed time and money to club soccer, playing a major role in organizational success, which helped legitimize their claims as key stakeholders.

In a sport specific context, Parent and Deephouse (2007) also found legitimacy to be the second most common stakeholder attribute managers of the organizing committees

in their study described possessing. Considering the role these managers played in ensuring event success, recognizing the needs of the event was vitally important. Despite the frequency of legitimacy as an attribute and the importance of recognizing event needs, the authors determined possession of legitimacy means nothing without elements of power and urgency. Namely, without power stakeholders have no influence on the organization and without urgency the claims of outlined by stakeholders go unaddressed.

When comparing the results of the previous studies (Boesso & Kumar, 2009; Parent and Deephouse, 2007) to the present study, a similarity exists. Parents and guardians described the open lines of communication between them and club organizers and coaches. Furthermore, club organizers never made parents and guardians feel as though they were being dismissed or they were asking stupid questions. This allowed parents and guardians to believe their wants and needs would be heard, making them feel more valued in the organization and as key stakeholders. In this case, parents and guardians possessed legitimacy, one of the key attributes to stakeholder salience. However, as previous studies described, legitimacy does not carry much weight without possession of power and urgency.

Urgency. While parents and guardians felt as though their concerns were legitimate, legitimacy does not guarantee club organizers will act on the wants and needs of parents and guardians. Acting upon stakeholder claims describes the stakeholder attribute of urgency (Mitchell et al., 1997). According to Boesso and Kumar (2009), urgency was the least prominent among managers. Based on managers' perceptions only two groups were found to possess urgency: (a) financial community and (b) customer groups. This finding suggests claims from a financial and consumer perspective are more

actionable than others, particularly when considering the corporation's bottom line and the individuals who affect it. This mirrors the role parents and guardians played in the club soccer environment, where they contributed financially and were consumers, meaning they directly affected the organization's financial success.

Parent and Deephouse (2007) also found the presence of urgency to be the least prominent among managers of organizing committees for mega sporting events. This finding provides an interesting perspective given the perceived presence of power and legitimacy noted previously, which suggests the organizing committee members could influence event decision-making and their claims were valued, but the action taken to address these claims was lacking. When evaluating levels of urgency in the present study, results were mixed. Parents and guardians felt as though club leadership responded quickly to emails and other individual communications, which signaled a level of urgency for individual claims. This was especially true when emails included offers to volunteer at tournaments and other club events. However, parents and guardians were less optimistic about club leadership integrating specific feedback into the club. They felt as though club organizers would listen to their claims but were less confident that change would be implemented, jeopardizing their feelings of urgency within the organization.

Summary. Power, legitimacy, and urgency represent the three attributes of stakeholder salience. Previous studies (e.g., Boesso & Kumar, 2009; Parent & Deephouse, 2007) found power to be the most prominent attribute, which diverged from the current study as parents and guardians wanted more of a voice in the organization but recognized that power should be limited. Legitimacy and urgency were less prominent in previous studies but more prevalent in the present study. Parents and guardians felt their

claims were heard and felt club organizers responded in a timely fashion. However, they did not necessarily believe action would be taken on claims especially when expressing concerns. These elements of power, legitimacy, and urgency are significant as they add additional context to the role parents and guardians play in organizational success.

Summary of Theoretical Implications. This section outlined the study's theoretical implications by comparing and contrasting previous literature to the study's findings. Both similarities and differences existed, highlighting the uniqueness of the present study and further expanding literature on leisure constraints and facilitators, constraint negotiation strategies, and stakeholders and their salience. In particular, the present study examined a target population not previously examined with respect to elite youth soccer clubs, further adding to leisure constraint and facilitator literature. Negotiation strategies were also explored, finding interest and motivation as key factors to continued participation, providing a new perspective in the literature. Additionally, this study investigated the role parents and guardians play in organizational success and their stakeholder salience. This was especially important given parents and guardians are the core decision-makers with respect to their children's continued participation and play in integral role in the club's longevity and success. While theoretical implications provide valuable insight in research, it is also important to discuss practical implication which will benefit club organizers. These practical implications will be addressed in more detail below.

Practical Implications

There are several practical implications of this research, which can prove beneficial to club organizers. In particular, the findings of this study highlight both

positive and negative aspects of the club as described by parents and guardians and explored their role as stakeholders in a club soccer environment. Understanding these findings is vitally important as they allow club organizers to assess and potentially adapt current practices to recruit and retain athletes.

Intrapersonal Constraints. When considering the intrapersonal constraints identified by parents and guardians, there are ways club organizers can address these obstacles. First, club organizers may benefit from organizing an open house event or risk-free trial period for perspective players and their families. Doing so allows parents and guardians to learn more about the organization and helps club organizers generate interest in the club without forcing parents and guardians to make a financial commitment if their children's interest in the activity is a concern. For individuals currently involved at the club, maintaining or growing players' level of interest is paramount. Club organizers may elect to host events for players outside of their typical club commitments. For example, the club may choose to host watch parties for major soccer events such as the FIFA World Cup. This allows club organizers to connect with players outside of practice and games, but also gives them the opportunity to engage with soccer in a different way, sparking more interest from participants, which in turn can ensure continued participation.

Interpersonal Constraints. In the current study, the influence of others on continued participation was apparent. Parents and guardians acknowledged they would change clubs if they encountered negative experiences with peers and negative coaching experiences. To combat negative experiences with peers, club organizers should address issues as they arise, particularly if it involves players on the same team. Parents and

guardians acknowledged if those issues continued without being addressed, they can have lasting ramifications on the team and may force them to reconsider their participation in the club. Additionally, negativity from other parents and guardians was a negative for participants. Club organizers should continue to educate parents and guardians on their expected behavior as a member of the club and consistently enforce these policies. This helps alleviate issues from the beginning and creates a positive environment for all.

To ensure negative coaching experiences do not occur, it is important for club organizers to consider the age, gender, and skill level when selecting coaches. Parents and guardians emphasized the importance of an appropriate coaching philosophy, which can mean the difference between staying at the club or going elsewhere. For example, the coaching philosophy for the first team may differ from the third team, where more of an emphasis is placed on winning for the first team, whereas the third team philosophy may be to improve every day. These differences may seem small, but it is important for club organizers to recognize these distinctions to ensure the coaching fit is appropriate.

Another interpersonal constraint described by study participants was the club environment. For parents and guardians, there is a minimum expectation that the club uphold strong standards given their time and financial commitments to club soccer. Two prominent concerns arose: roster sizes described as too large and lack of a competitive environment. Club organizers may justify large roster sizes by claiming more players are given an opportunity to grow and development, despite greater competition for playing time, while also generating additional club revenue. However, if roster size issues persist, parents and guardians may elect to seek alternative options, leaving the club with no players and no money. Allowing everyone to participate regardless of skill level dilutes

the competitiveness of the teams, particularly if those playing are not motivated to participate. To combat these concerns, club organizers should set clear guidelines about roster sizes and communicate with parents and guardians when those expectations cannot be reasonably upheld.

Structural Constraints. In addition to the intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints experienced, parents and guardians identified structural constraints (i.e., cost, family crises, and lack of facility quality) inhibiting continued participation, which provide additional practical implications. First, cost was a major talking point for participants. Many acknowledged their financial circumstance allows them to participate in club soccer but recognized this is not the case for everyone. Parents and guardians offered suggestions to alleviate cost issues including allowing individuals to work or volunteer for the club in exchange for reduced costs. This suggestion encourages parents and guardians to become involved in the club and allows their children an opportunity to play despite potential socioeconomic inhibitors.

Additionally, for parents and guardians who can afford it, making personal donations to the club for expenses such as travel, membership fees, and equipment fees was proposed. They determined this additional contribution to the club would be worth it if it meant more diversity and opportunities for those from lower-income households. This rationale is important, allowing more opportunities for those unable to afford the cost of club soccer. Despite knowing financial assistance was available, parents and guardians were unaware of how individuals can acquire this funding. Given their lack of knowledge about this process, it is important for the club to advertise or communicate how people can access these funds. Doing so could help with recruiting, so parents and

guardians not in the know or who may not travel in the same social circles as current parents and guardians can take advantage of financial assistance and participate in club soccer. Club organizers also should inform parents and guardians about the financial aid procedures because parents and guardians identified word of mouth as a key recruitment tool. If parents and guardians cannot share details of the financial aid offerings, the club may lose out on opportunities to bring in new players.

Next, parents and guardians acknowledged personal situations such as loss of disposable income or health issues could negatively affect continued participation. While the club has no control over these situations, it is important for club organizers to provide support when possible. This could simply be asking parents and guardians what they need or how the club can assist in difficult times. Even if the club cannot rectify the situation, parents and guardians may appreciate knowing the club cares, which would reflect positively. This is especially important given parents and guardians described word of mouth as a recruitment tool for this club.

The final structural constraint identified was lack of facility quality, where parents and guardians described club-owned outdoor fields as being subpar. Given the club's small full-time staff, field maintenance may prove difficult. However, this provides an excellent opportunity for volunteers to help maintain the fields in exchange for reduced costs. This solution helps ensure facility quality, while offering opportunities for families to alleviate cost issues associated with club soccer. Parents and guardians also expressed concerns about which teams are given access to the best fields. To combat this issue, the club should consider a rotating schedule for field access, making sure the "best" teams are not routinely given preferential treatment.

Another key takeaway for club organizers is offering opportunities for parents and guardians to provide feedback in a formal and systematic way. Parents and guardians described being able to reach out to club leadership with questions, comments, or concerns but felt having a club-wide process made more sense. One recommendation from parents and guardians comprised surveys sent to all club members at the end of each fall and spring season. Doing so would allow parents and guardians who may not feel as comfortable reaching out individually a chance to be heard. They also recommended having club meetings at the beginning and end of each season. The meeting at the beginning of the season could be tied to an open house event described previously, where new and current members can receive all relevant club information and ask questions as needed. An end of the season meeting would allow parents and guardians to describe what worked well during the season and where improvements can be made in future. This gives club organizers valuable information about the opinions of parents and guardians to help ensure continued participation. Furthermore, parents and guardians proposed having parental representatives who work as liaisons between parents and guardians and the club to ensure voices are amplified throughout the organization.

Summary of Practical Implications. Several practical implications were identified from this study. These practical implications offer solutions for club organizers as described by parents and guardians. For example, parents and guardian identified ways to help alleviate costs for those who need it by allowing them to work in exchange for reduced costs or donating additional funds to supplement travel and equipment costs. Because of the financial and time commitment parents and guardians contribute to the

club, it is important for club organizers to find and implement solutions to ensure continued participation.

Limitations

Given the nature of qualitative research, certain limitations exist. First, the study's results may not be transferable to all elite youth soccer clubs in the U.S. given the small subset of the target population examined. This study focused on a newer elite youth soccer club located in the Midwest. The research site's characteristics such as geographic location, tenure, size, and program offerings may not mirror that of other elite youth soccer clubs, indicating the study's results could differ based on the club's unique qualities. Examining clubs of varying sizes, tenures, and locations might yield different findings. For example, results of the present study may not transfer to a smaller, older club in a different geographic location such as the Pacific Northwest. Older clubs may experience different organizational issues than younger ones. Additionally, the size and program offerings of other clubs may relate directly to the available resources of those clubs, producing varying results from the current study.

The study's sample participants, size, and demographic characteristics are also limitations. The study focused on the parents and guardians of children participating in elite youth soccer. Related stakeholders such as coaches, other club organizational leaders, and the children playing the sport might have differing perspectives. The small sample size may not reflect all parents and guardians involved in elite youth soccer programs, particularly when examining the sample's demographic traits. Study participants were overwhelmingly White, married, and financially well-off. Additionally, all participants were in the 35-44 or 45-54 age ranges. Those in other demographic

categories may provide varying perspectives than participants in the current study, especially those with household incomes of \$100,000 or less. The study's sample was also limited to those with children between the ages of 9 and 15. Given the club ranges in age from under-8 to under-19, this particular subset of parents and guardians did not fully encompass all those individuals involved in elite youth soccer programs.

This study examined investigated this phenomenon at a single point in time with a newly established organization. Conducting this study during a single period of time is a limitation because personal situations can change constantly, meaning parents' and guardians' perceived constraints and facilitators could change over time. Additionally, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic presented an interesting circumstance where results of a different study could vary with those reported in the current situation. The club is also newly established. As the club ages and organizational leaders gain more experience over time, these changes could alter parents' and guardians' perspectives on continued participation and their role as key stakeholders.

Other key limitations include recall bias and social desirability. Parents and guardians were asked to recount their past experiences during the interview process. Because participants were providing retrospective details, there is always a risk information will be recounted inaccurately, skewing the study's findings (Tarrant et al., 1993). Furthermore, parents and guardians may have provided responses they felt the researcher wanted to hear rather than their own experiences. Presence of social desirability can influence the study's findings and subsequent discussion.

Future Research

Based on the study's findings, there are avenues to expand this line of research. The present study focused solely on club soccer participation at a single research site. Future research is necessary to determine if clubs with different characteristics would produce a similar result. It also would be worth examining how pay-to-play models in other sports affect continued participation from parents' and guardians' perspectives. Examining clubs, both large and small, across various locations, new and established, and with varying program offerings would provide a more well-rounded depiction of parents' and guardians' experiences in a club soccer context.

Next, all but one participant reported earning \$100,001 or more, highlighting a need for further research for individuals who earn \$100,000 or less, particularly those who earn significantly less. Those earning \$50,000 or less were not represented in the current sample. This socioeconomic difference may yield different results than the present study. Parents and guardians from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may encounter different constraints and facilitators as well as employ different negotiation strategies which affect continued participation. Additionally, they may perceive their roles as stakeholders and stakeholder salience differently than the current study's participants.

There is also an opportunity for a longitudinal study with this particular club or other club programs. For the current research site, additional research may involve revisiting the club to see if suggestions from parents and guardians generated from this investigation were implemented and examining how parents and guardians perceive these

changes, focusing on their role as key stakeholders. Studying the club in the future might also provide insights into how sport organizations adjust to a post-pandemic environment. Following the current study's framework, a longitudinal study at another club would also prove beneficial to further understand how the unique characteristics described above affect participants' perception of elite youth soccer programs.

Another pathway for future research includes studying a different target population, namely those who do not currently participate in elite youth soccer programs. Examining this new target population further expands the investigation of the role parents and guardians play as key stakeholders and provides a unique perspective with respect to their decision-making process. The current study identified interest as a facilitator, whether expressed by the parents and guardians and their children. Understanding how club organizers can potentially create and expand this interest would prove useful to recruit and retain new players and their families.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine perceived constraints and facilitators among parents and guardians as key stakeholders in elite youth soccer clubs. Specifically, the results of this study revealed the positive and negative aspects of elite club soccer which affect continued participation. This study also sought to fill a gap in the literature by examining leisure constraints and facilitators from parents' and guardians' perspectives, rather than the children actively participating in club soccer. As the ultimate decision-makers, parents and guardians have the final say with respect to participation; therefore, it was important to further understand their decision-making process.

This study utilized leisure constraint theory and stakeholder theory as its theoretical framework. Leisure constraint theory outlined the specific factors which influence continued participation, while stakeholder theory recognized the significance of constituent groups and the role they play in organizational success as well as their stakeholder salience. Together these two theories provided valuable insight into parents' and guardians' decision-making process regarding continued participation and their contributions to organizational success by examining their role as key stakeholders and further understanding the sacrifices required in a youth soccer context.

To address the study's purpose, a phenomenological approach was employed to better understand parents' and guardians' lived experiences. Semi-structured interviews allowed parents and guardians to describe their perceived constraints and facilitators as well as specific strategies they utilized to ensure their children's participation. Constraints such as lack of interest, club environment, and lack of facility quality were identified as factors which could negatively affect continued participation. Additionally, facilitators such as participants' interest, positive coaching experiences, and financial aid opportunities were viewed positively with respect to continued participation. The role parents and guardians play on organizational success was also explored, where they described wanting more of a voice to provide feedback, while still leaving organizational decision-making to club leadership. Finally, elements of power, legitimacy, and urgency were investigated to better understand stakeholder salience. Parents and guardians described wanting more, but limited, power within the organization. They also expressed possessing elements of legitimacy and urgency, where they felt their claims were appropriate and action was taken to address those claims.

These results produced several theoretical and practice implications for researchers and club organizers. From a theoretical perspective, these results further expand the scope of leisure constraint literature by examining a target population that does not actively participate in the activity but has a vested interest as their children's core decision-maker. Additionally, the results provide valuable insight into parents' and guardians' contributions to organizational success, thereby asserting their designation as key stakeholders in a club soccer environment. The study's results also prove beneficial for club organizers to recruit and retain participants. Understanding the factors which inhibit or promote continued participation allows club organizers to help reduce constraints and amplify facilitators to ensure continued participation, while also valuing parents and guardians as key stakeholders because without them, the club would struggle to exist.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Demographics Survey

1. Name: _____
2. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Other (please specify): _____
 - d. Prefer not to answer
3. What is your age in years?
 - a. 18-24
 - b. 25-34
 - c. 35-44
 - d. 45-54
 - e. 55-64
 - f. 65-74
 - g. 75 or older
4. Which of the following best describes your current marital status?
 - a. Married
 - b. Partnered
 - c. Widowed
 - d. Divorced
 - e. Separated
 - f. Never married
5. Which of these describes your household income last year?
 - a. \$0 - \$50,000
 - b. \$50,0001 - \$100,000
 - c. \$100,001 - \$150,000
 - d. \$150,001 - \$200,000
 - e. \$200,001+
 - f. Prefer not to answer

6. Which of these best describes your highest level of education?
- a. Some high school
 - b. High school diploma or equivalent
 - c. Vocational training
 - d. Some college
 - e. Associate degree
 - f. Bachelor's degree
 - g. Master's degree
 - h. Professional degree
 - i. Doctorate degree
 - j. Other
7. What is your race?
- a. American Indian or Alaska Native
 - b. Asian
 - c. Black or African American
 - d. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - e. White
 - f. Other (please specify): _____
 - g. Prefer not to answer
8. How many children ages 9-15 currently live your household?
9. Of those children, how many currently participate at Mockingbird Valley Premier? _____
10. How long have your children participated in club soccer at Mockingbird Valley Premier?
11. How long have you been a member of Mockingbird Valley Premier?

Appendix B. Study Preamble

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEISURE CONSTRAINTS AND FACILITATORS IN ELITE YOUTH SOCCER: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

Dear Participant:

You are being invited to participate in a research study about participation in youth soccer programs by answering survey questions about the subject. The purpose of this study is to examine perceived constraints and facilitators among parents and guardians as key stakeholders in elite youth soccer clubs. This study is conducted by Dr. Marion Hambrick and Ms. Chelsea Police, M.S. of the University of Louisville. Participation will involve first answering questions on an initial survey, and then answering questions during an audio recorded interview. There are no known risks for your participation in this research study. The information collected may not benefit you directly. The information learned in this study may be helpful to others. At the end of the survey, you will be given an opportunity to provide your contact information if you are interested in partaking in the interview portion of this study. The information you provide will help address issues in youth soccer programs by understanding factors which affect continued participation. Your completed survey will be stored at the University of Louisville. The survey will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete; and the interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes to complete.

Individuals from the Department of Health and Sport Sciences, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPPO), and other regulatory agencies may inspect these records. In all other respects, however, the data will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Should the data be published, your identity will not be disclosed.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. By answering questions on the initial survey, you agree to take part in this research study. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study, you may stop taking part at any time. If you decide not to be in this study or if you stop taking part at any time, you will not lose any benefits for which you may qualify.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office at (502) 852-5188. You can discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject, in private, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is an independent committee made up of people from the University community, staff of the institutions, as well as people from the community not connected with these institutions. The IRB has reviewed this research study.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research study, please contact Dr. Marion Hambrick at (502) 852-8286 or Ms. Chelsea Police at (260) 668-6207.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research or research staff and you do not wish to give your name, you may call 1-877-852-1167. This is a 24-hour hot line answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.

Sincerely,

Chelsea Police

CURRICULUM VITAE

Chelsea C. Police

Department of Health & Sport Sciences ~ University of Louisville ~ Louisville, KY
40292

(260) 668-6207 ~ chelsea.police@louisville.edu

Education

Ph.D.	University of Louisville
Educational Leadership and Organizational Development
Specialization: Sport Administration
Advisor: Marion E. Hambrick, Ph.D.
Dissertation: <i>Parents' Perceptions of Leisure Constraints and Facilitators in Elite Youth Soccer: A Phenomenological Approach</i>	May 2021
M.S.	University of Louisville
Sport Administration	May 2018
B.S.	Ball State University
Major: Actuarial Science
Minors: Economics and Business Foundations	May 2016

Research

Research Interest

Exploring youth sport participation constraints and facilitators in the United States.

Peer Reviewed Publications

Police, C.C., & Hambrick, M.E. (2020). The Women's Tennis Association and media framing of the 2018 U.S. Open final. *SAGE Business Cases*. 1-15.

Shreffler, M.B., Cocco, A.R., Presley, R.G., & **Police, C.C.** (2019). Preferential learning in sport management courses: An assessment of student learning styles, instructional methods, and course outcomes. *Sport Management Education Journal*, 13(2), 83-91.

Other Publications

Murfree, J.R., Swim, N.M., & **Police, C.C.** (2020). Youth sport concussion legislation: nonstandard standards of care. *Sports Litigation Alert*, 17(8).

Research in Progress

Cocco, A.R., **Police, C.C.**, & Spencer, T.C. (Awaiting Resubmission). The Neymar effect: Examining transfer value determinants in the English Premier League in consideration of recent market developments. To be submitted to *Journal of Sport Economics*.

Murfree, J.R., & **Police, C.C.** (Manuscript in Progress). Adidas x Parley: An exploration of corporate social responsibility. To be submitted to *Case Studies in Sport Management*.

Murfree, J.R., Shreffler, M.B., & **Police, C.C.** (Manuscript in Progress). Imposter phenomenon and increased work demands on sport management faculty. To be submitted to *Sport Management Education Journal*.

Police, C.C., Cocco, A.R., Montanaro, A., & Stone, S. (Data Analysis). Analysis of factors which affect game outcomes in Major League Soccer. To be submitted to *Journal of Applied Sport Management*.

Police, C.C., Moorman, A.M., & Cocco, A.R. (Data Collection). An examination of the impact of NIL policies and monetization opportunities for collegiate female soccer players. To be submitted *Journal of Intercollegiate Athletics*.

Conference Presentations

Police, C.C., Cocco, A.R., Montanaro, A., & Stone, S. (2021, February). Analysis of factors which affect game outcomes in Major League Soccer. ASMA Conference.

Police, C.C., Moorman, A.M., & Cocco, A.R. (2021, February). An examination of the impact of NIL policies and monetization opportunities for collegiate female soccer players. SRLA Conference.

Murfree, J.R., Shreffler, M.B., & **Police, C.C.** (2020, May). Imposter phenomenon and increased work demands on sport management faculty. North American Society of Sport Management (NASSM) Conference, San Diego, CA. <http://www.nassm.org/NASSM2020/ProgramSchedule/>

Swim, N.M., Murfree, J.R., & **Police, C.C.** (2020, March). Youth concussion legislation: Nonstandard standards of care. Sport and Recreation Law Association (SRLA) Conference, Louisville, KY.

Murfree, J.R., & **Police, C.C.** (2019, November). Adidas x Parley: An exploration of corporate social responsibility. North American Society for the Sociology of Sport (NASSS) Conference, Virginia Beach, VA.

Shreffler, M.B., Cocco, A.R., Presley, R.G., & **Police, C.C.** (2019, May). Preferential learning in sport management courses: An assessment of student learning

styles, instructional methods, and course outcomes. NASSM Conference, New Orleans, LA.

Cocco, A.R., **Police, C.C.**, & Spencer, T.C. (2019, February). The Neymar effect: Examining transfer value determinants in the English Premier League in consideration of recent market developments. Applied Sport Management Association (ASMA) Conference, Nashville, IN.

Grants and Funding

Police, C.C. (2019). Travel costs for the NASSM Conference to present. Funded by the Graduate Student Council, University of Louisville, in the amount of \$350.
Funded.

Teaching

Instructor of Record

SPAD 437: Data and Analytics Spring 2021
Undergraduate, Hybrid

SPAD 284: Issues and Ethics in Sport Spring 2021
Undergraduate, Hybrid

SPAD 604: Financial Principles in Sport Spring 2020, Fall 2020
Graduate, Online

SPAD 390: Sport Governance Fall 2019, Spring 2020, Fall 2020
Undergraduate, Face-to-Face & Hybrid

HSS 114: Fitness Walking Spring 2019
Undergraduate, Face-to-Face

Teaching Assistant

SPAD 284: Issues & Ethics in Sport Fall 2018, Spring 2019

SPAD 490: Senior Seminar Fall 2018

Guest Lectures

Spring 2019

SPAD 284 *Issues and Ethics in Sport* – Ethical Issues in Sport Governance

SPAD 404 *Financial Principles in Sport* – Economic Impact Analysis

Fall 2018

SPAD 404 *Financial Principles in Sport* – Economic Impact Analysis

SPAD 490 *Senior Seminar* – Market Valuation Simulation

Central High School *SPAD Sport Marketing Magnet Program* – Unique Sports and Games

Service

Department

2019 – Pres. Health and Sport Science Department Student Engagement Committee

Program

2018 – Pres. Sport Administration Master's Program Admissions Committee

2019 – 2020 Sport and Recreation Law Association Conference Local Planning Committee

2018 – 2019 Sport Administration Program Marketing

Professional

2020 – 2021 Sport and Recreation Law Association Board of Directors Student Representative

2019 – 2020 Sport and Recreation Law Association Student Committee Member

Professional Development

2021 to Present – Udemy: R Programming A-Z: R for Data Science & R Programming: Advanced Analytics in R for Data Science

2020 to Present – StackSkills: Excel From Beginner to Advanced

2019 – Delphi University: Principles of Online Course Design – University of Louisville – Delphi Center for Teaching and Learning

Honors and Awards

2021 to Present – Chi Sigma Mu, Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA) Honors Society

2017 – College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA) Tutoring Level I Certification

Relevant Work Experience

University of Louisville Health & Sport Sciences
University of Louisville Sport Administration Graduate Assistant

Louisville, KY
August 2018 - Present

- Serve as instructor of record for two courses in the Sport Administration program, teaching both graduate and undergraduate students
- Facilitate and create class activities and/or assignments throughout the semester
- Advise and assist students in and outside the classroom
- Assistant faculty with research projects as needed

Thornton's Academic Center of Excellence

University of Louisville Student-Athlete Tutor

Louisville, KY
September 2016 -
Present

- Conduct 20-30 tutoring sessions a week as assigned by the tutor coordinator
- Foster an engaging learning environment, while encouraging students to ask questions
- Exhibit patience and understanding with struggling students
- Submit required reports after each scheduled session, tracking students' participation and progress
- Work and communicate with academic advisors to ensure proper support for each student-athlete

University of Louisville Sport Performance

Catapult Performance Analytics Intern

Louisville, KY
September 2017 - July
2018

- Understood and utilized the Catapult technology and software as well as basic physiology components through weekly instructional meetings with Sport Performance staff
- Attended 10 practices/week, collecting live data through GPS technology and storing it for later use
- Streamlined and organized data as needed by other members of the LSP department
- Create data visualizations for weekly coaches' reports

Volunteer Experiences

2019 – NCAA Men's Final Four, Minneapolis, MN

2018 – Breeders' Cup Economic Impact Study, Louisville, KY

2017 – World Games, Wroclaw, Poland

2017 – Kentucky Derby Festival Half Marathon Gear Check, Louisville, KY

2017 – Kentucky Derby Festival Half Marathon Packet Pick Up, Louisville, KY

2016 – Urban Bourbon Half Marathon Corporate Challenge Liaison, Louisville, KY

Current Memberships

North American Society for Sport Management
Sport and Recreation Law Association