ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL CONFIDENCE, COMPETITIVE STRESS, AND COPING STRATEGIES OF YOUTH SPORTS PARTICIPANTS

A Project

Presented to the faculty of the Division of Social Work
California State University, Sacramento

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

by
Tiffany A. Pulsipher
Maureen A. Forbes

SPRING
2012
ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL CONFIDENCE, COMPETITIVE STRESS, AND COPING STRATEGIES OF YOUTH SPORTS PARTICIPANTS

A Project

by

Tiffany A. Pulsipher

Maureen A. Forbes

Approved by:

__________________________________, Committee Chair
Francis Yuen, D.S.W.

__________________________________
Date
Student: Tiffany A. Pulsipher
Maureen A. Forbes

I certify that these students have met the requirements for format contained in the University format manual, and that this thesis is suitable for shelving in the Library and credit is to be awarded for the thesis.

Dale Russell, Ed.D., L.C.S.W.  Date

Division of Social Work
Abstract

of

ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL CONFIDENCE, COMPETITIVE STRESS, AND COPING STRATEGIES OF YOUTH SPORTS PARTICIPANTS

by

Tiffany A. Pulsipher

Maureen A. Forbes

The primary purpose of this descriptive and exploratory study was to understand anxiety levels, coping strategies, and confidence levels in youth sports participants. This study focused on male youth baseball players in the Sacramento, California area between the ages of 11-14. A secondary objective of this study was to identify parental perception of youth anxiety, coping strategies, and confidence levels. The information found regarding youth self-reported anxiety levels, confidence, and coping strategies was found to be significant and, therefore, helpful to those working in the areas of youth development with regard to better understand the dynamics of participation in youth sports and the areas of study. Because more children are participating in youth sports programs than ever before, this research is useful for all those involved in the development, implementation, and facilitation of youth sports programs. The parental perspective component gathered critical information and helped the researchers appreciate the association between actual self-reported results from the youth participants.
and the perceptions that parents have regarding behaviors and emotions of the participants. For this study, 31 male youth baseball players were given a questionnaire with 42 questions. The researchers used 39 parental interviews to examine understanding awareness of youth’s feelings during competition and how these feelings manifest into behaviors. The results revealed that although there was not as much anxiety experienced as the researchers hypothesized, there were areas where anxiety was increased, including differences in levels of anxiety between levels of play or skill. Confidence levels were also reported very high both among the youth participants as well as in the perception of the parents. Three universal coping strategies that help explain the lower anxiety levels through association emerged, and different coping strategies used between skill level were also found.

__________________________, Committee Chair
Francis Yuen, D.S.W.

__________________________
Date

v
DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to all youth baseball participants and those who support them such as parents and coaches. Thank you to the youth, parents and coaches in the Laguna Youth Baseball League of Elk Grove, and Hard 90 Baseball Academy of Sacramento for your enthusiastic participation in this study. Without your voices, this project could not have been a success.

We would also like to dedicate this project to those who participate in and appreciate all youth sports programs, and to those who realize that these programs can be fun while also teaching confidence, coping strategies, and other valuable life skills to the children who play. We hope that those motivated by learning about youth development will always strive to find creative ways to help children grow and learn.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank, first and foremost, my wonderful husband Rod for your patience, love and understanding in my endeavor to obtain my education. You always made me believe in myself and your encouragement and support will forever be the main reason I was able to achieve my goals. To my mom who made the countdown fun and who helped me get through those tough times with chicken noodle soup and a heart to heart. To my children: Layne-for accepting the change in your life that my going back to school required; Greysen-for being the inspiration behind our topic and showing me the meaning of quiet confidence; and Lexi-for your sweet soul and caring ways. I know it was not easy to have your mom away so much, but hopefully this will encourage you all to go as far as possible with your education.

I share the credit of my work with my thesis partner and friend Maureen Forbes. You and I made a great team – you were the calm encouraging voice when I got frantic and anxious. Thank you for putting up with my quirks and all my type “A” antics. You will be a friend for life and for that alone this experience was worth all the hard work.

Lastly, I owe my deepest gratitude to Professor Francis Yuen who I felt always truly listened to my concerns and input. You showed me that anything could be accomplished if you look at it as a hurdle race…one hurdle at a time.

Tiffany
There are many people to whom I owe a debt of gratitude for the support, guidance, and encouragement that they have provided to me, during the course of the past two years in which I have endeavored to co-create this project. First and foremost, I want to acknowledge and thank my project partner, Tiffany Pulsipher, for the tremendous effort and talent put forth by her in making our project the comprehensive work that it is. Her commitment and careful attention to tasks, details, and timelines kept us moving forward; and coupled with her creative abilities and patience with me, I couldn’t have asked for a better project partner. Thanks Tiff! Secondly, I feel privileged to have been able to work with Dr. Francis Yuen, our project advisor; and want to thank him for guiding every aspect of our joint effort, from start to finish. Dr. Yuen’s critical input was invaluable, appreciated, and vital to the success of our project. Thirdly, without the love, support, and encouragement of my parents, Dr. Kenneth and Eileen Forbes, my son, my siblings and extended family, graduate school and this project would not have been a reality. A special thanks to my brother-in-law, Thomas Scott, for mornings spent assisting my project partner and me in deciphering the numbers for our data analysis and helping to get us through that taxing portion of the project. Lastly, I want to acknowledge my friends, old and new, for the support and inspiration that they offered to me, prior to and during this whole endeavor. Some have inspired me to pursue my MSW twenty years after receiving my B.A.; and newer friends, some whose friendships were formed during graduate school, will be lifelong friends. You know who you are. All I
can say is thank you to everyone who has touched my life in the journey of completing this project and graduate school. I am truly blessed.

Maureen
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter 1. THE ISSUE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Collaboration</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Issue</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Issue</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivating Factors for Sports Participants</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating Factors for Parental Influence</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels of Competition</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition in Youth Sports</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Competitive Orientation and Motivational Approaches ..................................................26
How Youth Think About Competition ........................................................................28
Types of Anxiety...........................................................................................................29
Symptoms of Competitive Stress ..............................................................................32
Coping Strategies .......................................................................................................34
Outside Influences that Impact Sports Participants .................................................38
How Parents Influence Young Athletes .....................................................................41

3. METHODOLOGY .....................................................................................................45
Study Design ................................................................................................................45
Population and Sampling ............................................................................................46
Protocol for Protection of Human Subjects ...............................................................47
Research Instrumentation and Design .....................................................................49

4. OUTCOMES ..........................................................................................................52
The Youth Questionnaire ............................................................................................52
Parental Interview Guide ...........................................................................................63
Additional Analysis .....................................................................................................72

5. SUMMARY AND FINDINGS .................................................................................83
Regarding Youths (Overall) ........................................................................................83
Regarding the Comparison of Youth Recreational and Travel Ball Players ..........85
Regarding Parental Perceptions ...............................................................................86
A Composite Youth Baseball Player .........................................................................87
Conclusions........................................................................................................................................88
Implications for Social Work........................................................................................................92
Evaluation and Recommendations.................................................................................................93
Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research .......................................................94
Appendix A. Coach’s Consent.........................................................................................................97
Appendix B. Parental Informed Consent Form .............................................................................98
Appendix C. Informed Assent Form...............................................................................................100
Appendix D. Youth Self-Assessment of Social Confidence, Competitive Stress, and Coping Strategies Questionnaire .........................................................................................102
Appendix E. Parent/Guardian Perception of Youth Social Confidence, Competitive Stress, and Coping Strategies - Interview Guide .........................................................105
References......................................................................................................................................108
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tables</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Table 1 Comparison of Modes</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Table 2 Basic Anxiety Questions Results</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Table 3 Somatic Anxiety Questions Results</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Table 4 Competitive State Anxiety Questions Results</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Table 5 Confidence Questions Results</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Table 6 Coping Strategies Questions Results</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Table 7 Parental Perception Interview Results</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Table 8 Ranking for Reasons Player Does Not Play Tournament Baseball</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Table 9 Ranking for Reasons Player Does Play Tournament Baseball</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Table 10 Chi Square Test Results</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Table 11 Fisher’s Exact Test Results</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Table 12 Fisher’s Exact Test Results for Recreational Players</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Table 13 Fisher’s Exact Test Results for Travel Ball Players</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1

THE ISSUE

Jason had his first opportunity to pitch the baseball during an important game last season. That opportunity was no small deal for the 11-year-old who has played on his competitive travel team for a year and the sport of baseball since he was four. Up until then, he had never pitched in a game, so the nervous excitement that he was feeling inside him continued to swell. The game played on, and Jason was pitching well.

However, that positive streak did not last; Jason threw balls that fell short and at one point, even hit the batter with the ball. The coach went ballistic—screaming and yelling at the young pitcher which, in turn, had a ripple effect upon more than just Jason and the other players on the field. Jason’s mother, who was seated in the bleachers, witnessed the stressful scene unfold before her, which sent her own stress level skyrocketing as she watched her son being yelled at, in front of the entire audience. The young pitcher’s mother responded with a yell at the coach and then walked away.

As for Jason, by all appearances, he maintained his cool on the field and played it off. He later admitted, however, that he was embarrassed by his lack of experience and his ability to perform. From the young ball player’s perspective, he never wanted to give up as he was accustomed to the coach yelling at him, and maintained his determination to continue doing his best.

TJ is 13 years old and plays on the same competitive baseball team as Jason. The young ball player admits that he feels ongoing pressure to perform whenever he is at bat
and that he copes with the stress by just “being out there practicing every day” and is constantly trying to improve. TJ says that sometimes the pressure for a batter to perform is “intense,” adding that the batters who “crack it out of the field get all the glory” whereas, the ones who are consistently good players and who still hit good balls do not get the same recognition. This seemingly unequal distribution of recognition is reportedly felt by the players, teammates, and parents alike and is just one of the ongoing stressors that are present in the realm of youth competitive baseball.

Recreational youth sports are a pastime and rite of passage, oftentimes, and are played by adolescents and children throughout the United States. In the sport of baseball, there exists Cal Ripken, Little League, which are lower level recreation, and competitive, travel, and tournament ball which are higher levels of competition. Youth and their families gather daily for practices, scrimmages, and games, spending long hours for the sake of the adolescent’s opportunity to engage in a positive event. This scene is played out across America and has been for generations, largely since baseball was introduced to this country. Primary reasons for adolescents playing baseball are that of engagement in a fun, fast-paced activity, opportunities for exercise, and the development of skills. In addition to the positive aspects, this sport also includes a host of other factors such as stress, anxieties, pressures, and a range of emotions that can have a considerable impact on the youth’s development.

In baseball and in youth sports in general, stressors are an ever-present part of the game. Stress that accompanies competing is something that young athletes must take in
stride and learn to deal with appropriately, so as not to let it negatively affect their playing. Alternatively, in the case of young athletes who are still developing effective coping strategies to manage their anxieties, this stress may impact them to such a degree that it prevents them from performing at their best, perhaps negatively affecting their perceptions of enjoyment of the game, or may even result in more serious, detrimental physical and mental health effects (Engh, 1999).

**Statement of Collaboration**

Researchers Maureen Forbes and Tiffany Pulsipher worked collaboratively on all aspects of this thesis project. Both researchers focused efforts on obtaining human subject review committee approval, researching and writing the literature review, and development of the instrumentation for data collection and analysis (youth questionnaire and parental interview guide). Joint participation was also necessary to ensure quality and quantity of data samples. Both researchers contributed equally and engaged in ongoing partnership to create the finished product.

**Background of the Issue**

Organized youth sports in America, include any sports programs that “provide a systematic sequence of practices and contests for children and youth” (Seefeldt & Ewing, 1996, p. 2) and differ in terms of sport, competitive level, costs involved, qualifications, and skill levels. Some sport programs, such as intramural and interscholastic, are school-based; while others, such as recreation or academy ball, or travel teams are community based or privately operated. Regardless of the category of sports program, youth and
adolescents across the country engage in sports activities for the thrill and excitement that come with it; and, in some cases, not anticipating the pressures, stresses, and strains that are typically integral components as well.

Before the introduction of Little League Baseball in 1939, and up until about 1954, American youth had limited opportunities to formally engage in sports; and such occurrences consisted primarily of activities that were organized by non-profit social agencies, such as YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, and others (Engh, 1999; Seefeldt & Ewing, 1996). After 1954, more organized, structured, and competitive sports emerged; carrying with it, more expectations, greater demands, and corresponding stressors for the players. The number of youth who participate in organized sports exceeds 40 million (Le Menestrel & Perkins, 2007). While this number is impressive in terms of opportunities presented for American youth, it also brings to light the untold numbers of youth who may experience emotional pressures that are inherent in organized sports, and begs the question as to effectiveness of coping strategies possessed by these youth and the importance of sports and youth development.

Research on stress and coping in youth sports, in general, has been done (Anshel & Delany, 2001; Holt, Hoar, & Fraser, 2005; Le Menestrel & Perkins, 2007) to name a few. However, as Pugh, Wolff, Defrancesco, Gilley, and Heitman (2000) suggest, “there is a need for additional research on youth sports” (p. 780), and it can be surmised particularly in the area of youth and adolescent baseball. Obtaining a better understanding of the issues of stress and its impact on youth baseball participants, so as to
bring about possible positive changes, is significant in terms of youth development on and off the field, and is the reason this study is important.

Competitive stress, as experienced by virtually all sports players at some time or another, occurs when a player’s ability to perform a competitive task is challenged, thereby potentially jeopardizing the self-esteem of the player (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1988). Common stressors that exist in the sport of youth baseball often originate from pressures that are placed upon players from coaches, parents, peers, and the player him or herself. Stressors in the form of performance worries, public criticism by coaches or others, as well as perceptions and expectations of adults are among the most common factors contributing to athletic stress (Pugh et al., 2000). To a youth or adolescent who is still developing athletic finesse and acquiring his sense of self, these stressors are often no small matter and properly managing them plays an important part in the youth’s overall development.

An appraisal process exists, for youth sports participants, that is ongoing and which is determined, in part, by the ability of the athlete to successfully meet the situational demands that are encountered during the course of playing (Smoll & Smith, 1996). Intrapersonal skills, or coping strategies, among youth and adolescent sports players exist in varying degrees; therefore, some players may likely be better equipped than others in dealing effectively with the various stressors that are a part of playing the sport. An ability to stay focused and block out distractions or sources of stress, whether external or internal, is a coping strategy commonly exhibited by many successful sports
players (Anshel, 1996). An awareness of the coping strategies that are utilized by youth sports players for handling the ongoing stressors that are encountered at all stages of the game, as well as during pre and post game times, is important for the player and others to know, so as to minimize any potential for negative effects upon the player.

The importance of gaining awareness and a better understanding of the issues of stress, its effects on youth baseball participants, and coping strategies possessed by these young players is not to be underestimated. Adolescence is a time when youth are impressionable and trying to find their way in the world, while looking to those around them (parents, peers, coaches, and other adults) to help them in doing so. If a youth, parent, or coach has unrealistic expectations of the player, the physical as well as emotional well-being of the young person can be adversely affected, resulting in conditions such as headaches, frustration, digestive problems, depression, or other disorders (Engh, 1999). As a result of this study, the researchers hope to increase the awareness and understanding of these sport-related issues among players, parents, coaches and those who are instrumental in guiding the youths towards a healthy, young adulthood.

**Statement of the Issue**

The sport of youth baseball has intrinsic, causal factors of stress that result in varying stress levels in these players. The degree of coping strategies among adolescent boys varies, and because of this, a number of them may not be able to emotionally deal appropriately with the stressors that come with recreational and competitive baseball
playing on their own. Some adolescents experience greater stress while playing baseball than do others; as well, some players possess coping strategies that are less effective than their counterparts. Lastly, parental and adolescent study participants’ beliefs surrounding stress levels and the youth’s coping abilities may not align.

These issues are important to social workers, particularly those who work in the school or child welfare systems; and who may encounter youths who are struggling to deal with such stressors on their own due to lack of parental/guardian awareness or familial support. Social workers are concerned with these issues in terms of the opportunities that they provide for youth development within the community as well as in the school environment. Additionally, these issues are also critical to social work in terms of social workers possessing awareness as to the benefits, as well as the potential detriments, that can be associated with playing sports. As such, social workers can better support the young person and the family in regards to providing encouragement or other positive reinforcement, or to address potential clinical symptoms with which the youth may present.

**Purpose of Study**

The primary basis for this study is that sport competition is a vital social process for adolescent boys and can, therefore, have considerable impact on development. Sport competition provides a venue for publicly showcasing motor ability to people who play a significant role in these adolescent’s lives (Smoll & Smith, 1978). The social implications of sport competition are significant but involvement in youth sports can also
create pressure that can lead to anxiety. Specifically, this study aims to identify sports anxiety or stress levels in Sacramento, California area adolescent boy baseball players, as well as coping strategies employed that allow these boys to effectively deal with these pressures. Additionally, this study will examine parental perception of the stress levels experienced by the sports participants and compare and contrast the findings of the self-reported parental awareness to the actual youth sport participant experience.

There are three primary objectives to this study. The first is to ascertain the levels of stress experienced by male youth baseball participants in a varying range of competition level. The second is to isolate the most commonly used coping strategies and to identify the most effective of these strategies. The third goal is to establish how parents perceive youth sport participant anxiety levels and coping strategies.

**Theoretical Framework**

Youth development, especially during late adolescence relies heavily on the reciprocal relationships of the family and surrounding systems in place. Systems theory states that all parts of a system are interconnected and when one part experiences change, so too will the other parts. A family is one such system, but the interaction one has with other organizations or entities can also create a system (Walsh, 2010). This includes immediate and extended family systems, as well as other social, spiritual, or academic systems. Systems concepts focus on the roles of different environments such as home, school, or community in shaping a child’s life, and how interactions within those environments influences a child’s emerging character (Hamon, Ingoldsby, Miller, &
Smith, 2009). Sports teams can be included in this realm and can combine with a youth’s family to create either a secure, or tumultuous system. According to family systems theory, the interaction that occurs within and between these systems has tremendous influence over people, particularly one who is maturing from a child into the late adolescent and early teen years (Hamon et al., 2009). Child psychiatrists are confident that conditions in the child’s home have an influence on “personality and mental health” at both the present stage of development and future stages (Humphrey, 2003, p. 37). This would suggest that relations within the family system are crucial to youth development.

Anxiety within a system can create pressure that impacts each individual; “A highly anxious system behaves predictably differently from a less anxious one” (Roberts, 2009, p. 447). When the pressure to succeed in a sports environment becomes intense, it can create anxiety for the youth sports participant. Parental perception of performance can also create strain, with both types of anxiety creating identifiable stress on the family system. When parents attach too much importance on achievement or are over-anxious they can increase the stress and anxiety levels for the youth. These feelings of apprehension “readily transmit from person to person and young people when parents or coaches are anxious will be fully aware of this” (Davies, 1989, p. 74). The behavior of the individual youth cannot be fully understood without also fully comprehending the pressures and anxieties placed on the family system (Roberts, 2009).

Research shows that adolescents are increasingly at risk of developing delinquent behaviors when parents practice ineffective parenting strategies or are inconsistent in
building emotional attachment or communicating (Roberts, 2009). By building a strong family system that includes openly talking about successes and failures in all aspects of life, including sports, and creating strong emotional attachments parents can help create resiliency in their children. Youth sports provide an ideal learning opportunity that can enhance the connections between family members. Supportive and positive interaction surrounding competition can allow youth sports participants to have constructive experiences related to competition.

In line with systems theory, a youth sports participant can benefit greatly from positive interaction with his or her family members, teammates, and coaches. Having an encouraging role model who can either relate how they have coped with stress in the past, or model this behavior in a sports situation can be helpful to anxious players (Davies, 1989). Teammates, coaches, and parents are all key to helping a youth sports participant build coping strategies and effectively deal with stress. Parents and guardians are especially important in this process, as they are the ones most often looked to for support. Additionally, all systems within a child’s life must be fully understood and taken into consideration if one hopes to gain a clear picture of adolescent development (Hamon et al., 2009).

Family systems theory states that one of the keys to a healthy progression into adulthood is differentiation. The idea of differentiation describes one’s balance between functioning effectively both apart from and within the family, and all other systems (Walsh, 2010). Adolescents take on different roles in life such as family members taking
on a role within the family system like child, sister, or brother. As adolescents develop they also begin the fulfillment of outside roles such as student, athlete, or teen. These roles create behavioral patterns that dictate family functioning. Adolescents must learn to maintain a sense of equilibrium in his or her role within the family as well as his or her role in other areas of life. The adolescent must learn to differentiate between roles while not upsetting the balance of the family. This balance relies heavily on effective communication and healthy rules within the family unit (Hamon et al., 2009).

Understanding how these areas of an adolescent’s life intersect and how stress or anxiety in one or more areas can affect all others is critical to understanding youth development.

**Definition of Terms**

**Competitive Confidence**

A specific positive emotional reaction when striving for success in a sport environment in response to certain stressors, as measured using the Youth Self-Assessment of Social Confidence, Competitive Stress and Coping Strategies Questionnaire (YSCCSCS-Q).

**Competitive Stress**

An ongoing transaction between an individual and the environmental demands that may cause physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension associated primarily and directly with sport performance, as measured using the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory 2 (CSAI-2).
Coping Strategies

Habitual modes and methods of managing responsibilities, problems, and difficulties to obtain a successful goal or result, as measured by a Competitive Coping Strategies Test.

Youth sports participant

Boys between the ages of 11 and 14 years taking part in competitive level, travel or tournament team baseball in the Sacramento, California, U.S.A. area. The skill level required for participation on these teams must meet a minimum standard.

Assumptions

Key assumptions that should be made regarding the topic of competitive youth sports participation are as follows: 1) Youth baseball is a significant social reality and popular activity among the target population; 2) Participants in youth sports experience both positive and negative effects in key areas of development and family relations; 3) The physical element of sports participation provides for the overall well-being of the youth, not just physical health; and 4) Parents choose extracurricular physical activities for their child to help promote both physical and overall well-being.

Justification

Should our research findings substantiate that particular coping strategies are more effective than others for youth sports participants in controlling their stress, then this information may be useful to communities and could be applied in agencies that serve the youth population, school settings, after-school programs, parks and recreation
programs, and others. For instance, these agencies and programs may be able to incorporate sports instruction and other skill-building activities to assist youth in the development of particular coping strategies, so as to better control their stress and promote positive attitudes and skills. In addition, perhaps school policies can be devised for creating partnerships with community recreation and youth sports programs and agencies, such that an emphasis on the development of particular coping skills for stress management and youth development can be coordinated.

Research studies on the socioemotional benefits of sports participation indicate the positive effects, due in part to the development of positive coping strategies, such as higher rates of managing emotions, psychological resilience, increased attachment to community, and reduction of social isolation (Le Menestrel & Perkins, 2007). The development of good coping strategies and techniques for managing social in youth, as a result of sports participation, can lead to lasting benefits for the individuals in young adulthood and as adults.

The information that we collect could be reported to community youth sports programs, county social service providers, area agencies that serve the youth population, local school districts, and the state department of education to assist them in devising programs and services that promote the development of identified effective coping strategies for stress management and promoting youth development.

In the event that our research findings indicate that there is not a difference among the coping strategies used for controlling stress by youth sports participants, then we may
rule out that particular coping strategies are better than others for managing stress, and can look towards establishing another hypothesis. As social workers, we have an obligation to the youth of our community to identify resources and establish programs and other services that will support them in developing the necessary skills to become capable, competent individuals of the community.

**Limitations**

The results may or may not be able to be generalized; however, at the very least, the findings may prove to be useful to the youths, their parents, and their coaches.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The history of youth sports begins in the early 1900s where acknowledgement of the importance of physical activity to health led to the creation of school-based sports programs. As more interest was shown in these programs and the competition levels skyrocketed most sports programs were reduced or dropped from schools and soon became community and privately sponsored. This trend led youth sports away from the era of informal play to the highly organized sports programs of today (Smoll & Smith, 1996). Youth sports popularity continues to expand and more opportunities exist for any youth wishing to play. Distinct degrees of play have been established, and competition has been brought to a whole new level.

Motivating Factors for Sports Participants

Across America millions of children play youth sports for a multitude of reasons. Active involvement, improving skills, creating friendships, social recognition, and attentions are all valid reasons why many children choose team sports (Murphy, 1999). Murphy’s (1999) research also shows that the number one reason given to play, however, is to have fun. Environmental factors are also largely influential in the motivation of youth to participate in either team or individual sports (McCullagh & Yan, 2004). Studies suggest that American children are motivated to participate in sport activity by such factors as individual challenge, health and fitness, and personal accomplishment. Additionally, compared to other cultures, American youth reported both competition and
recognition as powerful motivators to take part in team or individual sports (McCullagh & Yan, 2004).

Although achievement largely shapes motivation in youth sports participants, it is not always the central concern. Rather, social awareness and integration as displayed by developing connections and demonstrating competence in social settings is also an important aspect of team sports participation (Allen, 2003). Ingrained in most physical activities are both interpersonal and social interaction, thus providing a setting for engagement in such motivating factors as affiliation and social status. Adolescents have a developmental need for social connections and often experience a positive affect from growing and strengthening these bonds (Allen, 2003). Using sports as a way to fit in socially can be an instrumental motivating factor for youth when deciding whether to participate or not.

**Motivating Factors for Parental Influence**

Studies by Yan and Thomas (as cited in McCullagh & Yan, 2004) also suggest that parental influence is central to a youth’s decision about which sport of physical activity in which to become involved. Socio-economic factors would, therefore, also be a critical aspect in determining the types and levels of sport in which a youth participates. If parents do not push the child to participate because they do not have the time or ability to provide transportation to and from the activity, or if they do not have the financial means to support the activity the child will not be motivated to take part in a sport. The higher the level of competitive play the more cost is a factor. Most tournament and travel
teams require a membership to an academy or club and tournament fees often range into the hundreds of dollars for just one weekend of play. These fees are in addition to all of the necessary protective and essential game-playing equipment. For those on the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum the only option is community-sponsored programs that may not offer the same competition as a privately sponsored team. Consequently, parents may choose to avoid sports for their child based on the costs involved.

Physical and social development of a child begins in infancy and studies suggest that sport socialization begins just as early (Smoll & Smith, 1996). In early childhood boys are often subtly influenced to try physical activities. Social constructs dictate that males are the physically superior sex and, therefore, encouraged to use their bodies as a display of masculinity. Sports and other forms of physical activity also play a large role in social, psychological, and physical maturation of adolescent boys (Smoll & Smith, 1996). Parents choosing to influence these aspects of youth development may choose organized sports as a method by which they can promote the concepts of self-worth, peer acceptance, and physical prowess. With each of these components being linked to one another, a parent may see youth sports as a way to increase their child’s adult worth.

As exemplified by recent research that suggest that greater physical ability is directly associated with higher levels of peer acceptance, parents may see sports as a means to gain social status for their child (Smoll & Smith, 1996). The additional benefits of increased self-confidence and physical health that accompany a successful sports
experience also add to the parental motivation to push their child toward organized sports.

Parents may tend to encourage participation in youth sports because they feel it helps advance social success. The idea behind this belief is that the experience of playing a team sport helps promote self-awareness, healthy peer relationships, and management of emotion. The literature shows that these traits are all critical to psychological resilience, or the ability to bounce back from real or perceived problems (Le Menestrel & Perkins, 2007). In essence, participation in sports helps reduce the risk of social isolation for adolescents thus parents find allowing their children to play sports produces a huge advantage to overall development.

Those with whom an adolescent chooses to associate has long been a challenge for parents. When adolescents make the choice to befriend those who engage in risky behavior, often those influences are negative on the teen. Studies show that the types of peers teens choose to connect with is related to the types of activities in which the teen chooses to engage. Research shows that being involved in a sport is associated with “completing more years of education, increase attachment to school, and higher grades in school” (Le Menestrel & Perkins, 2007, p. 17). Student athletes tend to have friends who are also athletes and, therefore, more focused on academics (Le Menestrel & Perkins, 2007). It stands to reason that parents would encourage participation in sports to help their adolescent focus more on academics and less on peers who choose to encourage risky behavior.
Levels of Competition

Youth sports, particularly male youth baseball has, in recent years, become segmented into specific levels of play. These levels are based on factors that include; age, gender, skill, and amount of time played. Additionally, these levels are heavily influenced by financial means of the player’s family and parental motivation. Players are put onto teams based on age or gender, and these teams are often separated based on skill and the amount of time a player has been participating in the sport. The lower levels of competition include recreational, city, and park leagues and often demand minimal cost. The alternative is the much more competitive and costly private sector that includes travel and select or elite teams.

Recreational, City, and Park Leagues

Recreational leagues include what most people think about when they think male youth baseball – Little League. Babe Ruth Baseball, Cal Ripkin, and Pony leagues would also fall into this category as well as park and city leagues. These types of leagues play at a lower level of competition than do the travel teams, and often also adopt rules that differ to help the youth experience and learn the game with little competition and instead a focus on fun. Although there is generally a try-out for the teams, all who wish to participate may, and no cuts are made. These try-outs are used to help coaching staff determine at which level each player is capable of playing. Once placed on a team, each team member is allowed equal play time and usually, until the final tournaments, the wins or losses do not count. These types of leagues are often broken down into levels of
Major, Minor, Rookie, and T-ball. In some leagues there also exist the levels of AAA and AA between the Major and Minors. This allows players of all skill levels the opportunity to play, have fun, and feel successful because they are placed on a team that meets their level of ability (Babe Ruth League, Inc., 2006). On average recreation leagues have 15-20 games per season (Ogden & Warneke, 2010).

Little League teams are also based on geography within the communities choosing to organize. Not all communities see youth sports as a priority and, therefore, do not participate in Little League. Some communities, such as Elk Grove, CA, choose instead to establish a recreational league affiliated with other baseball organizations such as the Cal Ripkin league that is a division of the larger organization of Babe Ruth Baseball. Adult volunteers are required to create a league in a community, and unless approximately 25 adults make the commitment to these organizations, no program can be established (Little League, 2010).

After a season of non-competitive, or seeding games is played, a final tournament takes place to establish the overall season winning team. This allows each team to showcase all they have learned during the season and permits the players to experience some of what higher levels of competition demand. All-Star teams are selected from these teams who will play in a more advanced competition. At the all-star level within these leagues the teams play and, if wins continue, could advance to major tournaments such as Little League or Cal Ripkin World Series.
Many players join these leagues to try and learn a sport, and with the lenient rules can do so with little pressure. Players who are lower skilled, or have little-to-no previous experience have, in these leagues, a venue in which to practice and improve both knowledge and skill. Coaches and staff are all volunteers in these organizations and embrace all players. Often lessons regarding teamwork are a focal point. The game is about fun much more than it is about strict competition. However, if a player does show an aptitude for the game and a strong desire to stand out, he or she may be selected for an all-star team that could propel the youth to the next level of play.

**Travel Team and Elite Players**

Based on the relatively low levels of competition and short seasons of recreation, city, and park leagues, many players seek to play at a higher level. To experience longer seasons and more intense competitions, parents and players are looking to the private sector that provides travel teams, academies, and elite or select leagues. As the name would suggest, travel teams (as well as most academies, elite, and select leagues) look for higher competition tournaments and take teams to play all over the country and sometimes throughout the world. Most times the motivation to expand to nationwide tournaments is the increased exposure to high school and college recruiters. With this increase in exposure come higher financial obligations, more pressure to perform well, and a much greater time commitment (Ogden & Warneke, 2010).

Feltz and Ewing (as cited in Pugh et al., 2000) describe elite players as having five or more years of experience and who are selected for regional all-star tournaments.
Research shows that these players played many more games all year, averaging 60 games per season, and if they were not playing games they were practicing regularly throughout the year (Ogden & Warneke, 2010). In order to be selected for an elite or travel team, players tryout, are invited to play, or are chosen by coaches based on previous all-star selection (Ogden & Warneke, 2010). This suggests that with an aim of being accepted onto one of these higher level teams, youth and parents must make a solid commitment to the sport. It also suggests that the higher the level of competition, the higher the stress involved in becoming “good enough.” Some of the additional stressors reported at the elite level were poor situational performance, other players doing poorly, and being yelled at by a coach or parent (Pugh et al., 2000).

**How Level of Play Influences Stress Level**

It stands to reason that the higher the level of play or competition, the higher the level of stress for the youth. Studies have shown that too much competition is one of the main reasons cited by youth for dropping out of sports (Le Menestrel & Perkins, 2007). When stress levels get too high based on the pressure to perform, youth cease to enjoy the sport. It has been noted that high levels of parental involvement can add to a player’s enjoyment of the game and therefore reduce the risk of drop out (Le Menestrel & Perkins, 2007). Additionally, some youth move from one sport to another to help find a balance of intensity in competition level. This would imply that when a youth begins to feel overwhelmed in one sport based on competition level, they choose another, less intense, sport to help alleviate this stress. When the main focus of youth sports is on goal
achievement, rather than fun or skill development, an atmosphere conducive to increased stress levels can be created (Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006).

**Competition in Youth Sports**

In the sport of youth baseball, as well as in other facets of youth sports, it is typically during the course of playing and having fun that young persons begin to discover the many benefits that are associated with playing on a team. Competition can help build teamwork and leadership, as well as build confidence. There are a myriad of other advantages that often emerge when one plays competitively in sports, which may not initially have been intended or realized. The competitive aspect of youth sports; however, as some would see it, also has drawbacks or disadvantages. Some hold that organized and competitive youth sports place too great an emphasis on winning, as well as have created unfavorable conditions and characteristics among those who are involved in these programs; from children to adults and in player to spectator (Coakley as cited in Torres & Hager, 2007). Parents wanting the best for their child would do well to consider the pros as well as the cons when considering competitive youth sports for their child.

**Advantages**

In addition to the obvious benefits of enjoyment, skill development and socialization that young persons gain from participating in organized team sports, the advantages of such involvement are most often far-reaching and long lasting. Much research has been done on the link between participation in youth sports and the benefits,
both physically and emotionally, to the youths’ overall well-being. Physical health benefits of participation in competitive youth sports include such positive outcomes as improved skeletomuscular and circulatory systems, reduction in instances of obesity or in being overweight, as well as an increased likelihood of maintaining an active lifestyle into adulthood (Le Menestrel & Perkins, 2007). Additionally, adolescents who are involved in athletics are often more likely to develop healthier attitudes towards food and diet, as well as tend to refrain from smoking cigarettes or other addictive substances.

Extensive literature exists documenting the positive association between competitive youth sport players and emotional benefits. Recent studies have revealed that greater degrees of sports participation correlated positively with emotional and behavioral well-being; most notably that of self-concept (Donaldson & Ronan, 2006). Possession of positive self-concept is an invaluable tool to a young person who may find himself in situations on the field, and in life, which do not always turn out favorably.

Competitive sports are found to be instrumental in providing youths with the opportunity to develop skills and other attributes that are as valuable on the field as off; such as understanding of the importance of teamwork, development of good sportsmanship skills, and playing fairly. Interesting findings obtained in a study conducted by Donaldson and Ronan (2006) indicate that the emotional well-being of adolescent sports participants is positively associated regardless of the player’s gender, socioeconomic status, or overall general health. The numerous physical and emotional benefits that are gained by young persons who play competitively in sports are difficult to
disregard; and, as such, they continue to influence individuals’ decisions to participate in sports.

**Disadvantages**

As with almost everything, engagement in competitive youth sports also has a flipside. It can be argued, by some, that organized youth sports does not promote a healthy environment nor does it put the interests and needs of children and youths first; rather, such programs are instead modeled after adult-inspired priorities (Torres & Hager, 2007). It is no secret that some youth sports programs have an over-emphasis placed on winning, performance, and outcomes; all of which frequently come at a cost, most often and the very least of which, is a decrease in the level of enjoyment for the young persons.

Of additional importance, Larson et al. (2006) report Scanlan, Babkes, and Scanlan’s 2005 study findings which indicate that some competitive youth sports programs abound with negative developmental experiences, in part due to significant levels of stress associated with goal achievement. Because young persons differ in their capacities to manage various external stressors, some young sports players may experience higher levels of stress than others; subsequently detracting from their overall performance and enjoyment levels, and, perhaps, leading to serious mental and physical health conditions. Player burnout, which has been studied extensively by Raedeke and Smith (as cited by Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2009), has been shown to stem from a decreased sense of personal accomplishment and sheer exhaustion (physical and emotional) and is more commonly associated with young persons who lack social and
parental support, as well as sufficient coping skills to manage their stress. Mindfulness by parents and other adults who enroll young persons in competitive sports, of a young person’s emotional and physical well-being, is as important as their attention to the youngster’s performance ability on the field.

**Competitive Orientation and Motivational Approaches**

In competitive sports, there are two distinct orientations with regard to competitive attitude, the ego orientation, and the mastery (or task) orientation; both of which are like levels on a continuum (Murphy, 1999). Those who possess higher ego orientation are more concerned with how they look or compare to others and are driven to win because scores and results of competition directly reflect on them. Those higher on the mastery orientation continuum want to excel at a sport and are driven by improving skill and mastering their sport. An understanding of achievement goal theory within the context of sport achievement, as suggested by Nicholls (as cited in Smith et al., 2006), holds that the different goal orientations are critical to a player’s assessment of success and failure and are important determinants of motivation. An awareness and deeper appreciation of what motivates and drives young persons to compete athletically is important, perhaps, in terms of providing useful information to coaches, parents, and other adults who are engaged in and supportive of the youths’ athletic experience.

**Ego Orientation**

Much research has been done in the area of athletic goal orientations (ego and mastery). Smith, Cumming, and Smoll (2008) discuss current research indicating that
achievement goal theory studies have been primarily focused on adolescent and older populations, which is likely due, in part, to Nicholls (as cited in Smith et al., 2006) study conclusion determining that youngsters aged 11 and below do not possess ability to discern between ego and mastery achievement orientations. Adolescents and older athletes are aware of differences in motivation factors; and those possessing higher ego orientation are believed to be motivated more by how their performance compares to others, as they view their personal success or achievement by seeking social validation.

An important research finding that stems from studies done by Duda and Hall (as cited in Smith et al., 2006) and which is of relevance to stress levels and coping strategies of adolescent sports participants, is that of the association between higher ego orientation and increased levels of performance-related anxiety. Also implicated in this study, among such individuals, is the manifestation of decreased commitment to practice as well as, in some cases, decreased overall enjoyment. Finding ways to identify and work with youth sports participants who do possess higher ego orientation, so as to reduce their levels of stress and anxiety, may well serve to increase not only their performance skills but their coping strategies as a result.

**Mastery Orientation**

Sports participants who possess higher mastery orientation than others, according to research by Nicholls (as cited in Smith et al., 2006), typically exhibited a notion of success and measured achievement by reflecting inwards and utilizing self-evaluation in measuring their skill development and performance abilities. Additionally, Smith et al.
(2006) report on study findings by Duda and Hall revealing these individuals more often report levels of enjoyment associated with playing the sport and internal satisfaction that exceeds levels possessed by their ego-oriented counterparts; along with reported decreased anxiety associated with performance. It should be noted that players possess one or both of these orientations, in varying degrees, at various times, and it is from this perspective that research and those interested in understanding and advancing goal orientation differences should operate (Smith et al., 2006). These research findings and others are important in the realm of youth sports and youth development, in terms of the potential they offer for program development that promotes such benefits as are associated with mastery orientation.

**How Youth Think About Competition**

What are the common thoughts and perceptions of the competitive experience held by young persons who play competitively in baseball and other sports? Answers can be revealed by examining the literature in the area of competitive youth sports participants, which focuses specifically on the youths’ developmental experiences. A case study by Pugh et al. (2000) of elite male youth baseball athletes indicates that young persons who play competitively overwhelmingly indicate fun as their primary motivation for choosing to play, followed by opportunities for challenge, and rank winning as third. This same study reveals an interesting finding that indicates a relationship between player performance and associated positive or negative feelings existing not only within the athlete himself, but associated with teammates’ performances as well. This study and its
findings seem to suggest that while having fun and challenging players’ individual abilities are extremely important to them, most young athletes also seem to value such intrinsic qualities as good sportsmanship and teamwork.

Other studies, such as Putnam’s (as cited in Ogden & Warneke, 2010) reveal that some young elite baseball players believe that playing against better players makes themselves better players. This belief may or may not be true; however, the thinking is that such competitive playing may possibly increase their chances for playing at higher levels of competition in later years. It is up to the young person to take in all of the experiences, positive and negative, that come with playing competitively in youth sports, so as to make the most out of the sports experience; hopefully, what is gained and learned in the course of doing so will remain with the individual long after the playing is done.

It is up to the young person to take in all of the experiences, positive and negative, which come with playing competitively in youth sports, so as to make the most out of the youth sport experience; hopefully, what is gained and learned in the course of doing so will remain with the individual long after the playing is done.

**Types of Anxiety**

Research done on anxiety and stress indicates that two distinct types of anxiety have been measured. The first, trait anxiety, measures an individual’s personality tendencies that are mostly permanent dispositions (Cratty, 1983). The second, state anxiety, measures an individual’s reaction to situational stress or reaction to situations. Since both of these anxiety and stress types are present in all individuals it would be
important to take both into account when measuring anxiety levels in athletes.

Additionally, Mellaalieu, Hanton, and Fletcher (2009) suggest, “‘stressors’ refer to events, situations, or conditions, while ‘strain’ describes an individual’s negative response to stressors” (p. 3). This would allude to the fact that each youth sports participant comes across different situations to which each individual reacts in different ways.

**Trait Anxiety**

Young persons are predisposed to and experience anxiety in ways that are similar to adults. Trait anxiety, specifically, is present as part of an individual’s temperament and overall disposition, and is the degree to which an individual experiences anxiousness in everyday situations (Davies, 1989). By nature, some individuals possess greater amounts of trait anxiety that do others, thereby, resulting in increased anxiousness for such individuals. For young persons who have varying degrees of exposure to and experience conducting themselves in different social situations, the stress of such experiences can have varying effects depending on the situation and their abilities to manage anxiety.

**State Anxiety**

Anxiety that exists as a transient state, manifesting in predominantly stressful situations, is known as state anxiety. Research has established that individuals who possess higher levels of trait anxiety often possess increased levels of state anxiety, particularly in situations that are deemed to be stressful or a threat to one’s self-image.
(Davies, 1989). It follows that an individual’s level of state anxiety is correlated to how stressful a situation is perceived to be, as well as, the degree and type of coping strategies that an individual possesses to manage the stress.

**Sports-related Anxiety**

Different types of sports-related anxiety have been determined to be present in sports participants, such as performance anxiety and spectator and performance (audience) (Davies, 1989). Factors contributing to each of these sports-related anxieties are the presence and levels of an individual’s trait and state anxieties. Specifically related to research, a study done by Han et al. (2006) which examined the influence of temperament and anxiety on sports performance, resulted in findings that indicated the trait and state anxiety scores of baseball players was lowest, as compared with nine other team and individual types of sports. This is significant to our research study based on the fact that the samples being used are specifically youth baseball players. In addition to the sports participant’s own influencing dynamics, other contributing factors to sports-related anxieties can be found to originate from sources outside the player, and can have positive or negative impact.

**Performance Anxiety**

For an athlete of any age, anxiety can be a factor with which one must contend and, for many individuals, can disrupt or interfere with their ability to perform at their best. Performance behavior anxiety is when a player has difficulty performing the tasks of the game due to excessive worry or feelings of anxiousness. In this type of anxiety,
the player becomes too worried or too tense and loses the competitive edge because physical capability is lost (Davies, 1989). This type of anxiety comes from within the player rather than from perception of ability from others.

**Spectator and Audience Anxiety**

A useful framework to understand different forms of anxiety is provided by Davies (1989). This framework, therefore, is also being used to understand anxiety in this study. The second type of sports-related anxiety, spectator and performance has more to do with how outside sources such as parents, peers, or coaches affect the player’s anxiety (Davies, 1989). When too much pressure is placed on the player from external sources, similar consequences such as performance anxiety can occur.

**Symptoms of Competitive Stress**

Symptoms of sports-related anxiety can manifest in many different ways. The ways in which stress shows up in an athlete can be triggered by such factors as performance, the nature of the task or sport, and what is going on when the stress occurs (Cumming, Grossbard, Smith, & Smoll, 2009). Eysenck (as cited in Collins & Eubanks, 2000) suggests that individuals react to stress or anxiety in different ways, and the indicators that stress is occurring are markedly dissimilar among people. The three major forms of anxiety manifestation are cognitive, somatic, and behavioral.

**Cognitive Anxiety**

Cognitive anxieties are when a player experiences stress in the thought process with such symptoms as racing thoughts, inability to concentrate, or loss of confidence.
Research indicates that the inability to cope with mental challenges associated with competitive stress as well as psychological and emotional trials are often highlighted in youth sports (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009). The presence of excessive worry and concentration disruption are also manifestations of cognitive anxiety and can be a predictor of athletic success (Cumming et al., 2009).

**Somatic Anxiety**

Somatic anxiety is the physical manifestations of worry such as in the form of excitement for the upcoming event, or worry and racing thoughts (Davies, 1989). Some players have a nervous energy that can be directed toward preparation, while others feel nauseated or get a headache (Davies, 1989). Still others get sweaty palms, quickened breathing, and tightened nerves (Wolff, 1993). In a study done by Smith, Ptacek, and Patterson (as cited in Cumming et al., 2009), it was found that youth athletes with higher performance anxiety levels were at considerably higher risk of sustaining an injury than those with lower performance anxiety levels. This would indicate that performing under intense pressure could lead an athlete to encounter difficulty executing the task of the sport safely.

**Behavioral Anxiety**

Research done by Seagrave and Hastad (as cited in Donaldson & Ronan, 2006) shows that participation in a high exposure, physically aggressive sport can lead to antisocial behaviors. This could be due to higher levels of anxiety associated with these types of sports and the behaviors could be a symptom of increased stress levels. Other
behavioral anxiety symptoms are seen in actions such as nail biting, fidgeting, or avoidance of eye contact. Some athletes feel such intense pressure to perform that they experience an inability to cope. This can be displayed when the athlete gets burned out or decided to drop out of the sport (Cumming et al., 2009; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009).

**Positive Symptoms of Anxiety**

Stress symptoms are not always negative, and studies suggest that youth sports participants often find ways in which to use their sports experience, including stress, in a positive way. There is, of course, the undisputed aspect of the positive effect of physical activity which would include such somatic factors as a healthy body-weight, healthy respiratory and cardiovascular systems, and increased muscle mass. Fraser-Thomas and Côté (2009) found that sports helped build cognitive factors including resiliency as well as the ability to relax, refocus, and control nerves. Additionally, perseverance is positive behavioral symptom of stress that can help an athlete in all aspects of life. When athletes feel anxiety and stress while competing but continue to endure they can learn that determination can help them accomplish their goals. The ability to persevere is, therefore, an indication that intense pressure occurs but can be overcome.

**Coping Strategies**

A coping strategy is specific to a single response such as mental images, positive thinking, or constructive self-talk that is used for managing internal or external demands that are considered to be stressful (Morley, Nicholls, Polman, & Taylor, 2009). With all the known information regarding anxiety stress levels in athletes, this study hopes to
focus on the ways in which youth sports participants use coping strategies to effectively alleviate or deal with stress. Some of the ways that have been suggested in past research to cope with higher stress levels right before or during a competition are: mental coping strategies, visual imagery, and meditation (Cratty, 1983). Becoming self-aware, or knowing when a state of tension has occurred is part of the coping process (Davies, 1989; Mellaalieu et al., 2009; Murphy, 1999).

**Types of Coping Strategies**

Based on research done on coping strategies in youth athletes, four distinct types of conscious effort to deal with or eliminate stress or demand have been recognized. These four types represent two different binaries both of which can be used with the other. The first of these dichotomies is approach and avoidance, the second is problem-focused and emotion-focused.

The approach method is when there is a confrontation of the sources of stress or a calculated effort to reduce it. This would include such behaviors as initiating some action, increasing efforts while playing, or seeking additional information about the stress. The avoidance method, on the other hand, is a dodging of anxiety-creating stimuli and their consequences. This type of behavior could be seen in such ways as ignoring of stress, discounting high stress levels, using distractions, and psychological distancing (Anshel, 1996).

Problem-focused methods are coping strategies that are task oriented and can include: Problem solving; altering situational pressures; changing goals; reducing
involvement; finding alternatives; suppression of competing behavior; seeking social support; actively avoiding stressors; increasing efforts; and vocal assertion. Emotion-focused strategies involve regulating emotion to reduce and manage stress. This might include: mental or behavioral withdrawal; self-preoccupation; avoidance; denial; relaxation; acceptance; fantasizing; positive self-talk; mental imagery; and psychological minimizing (Anshel, 1996; Holt et al., 2005).

These two branching types of coping can also be used together to create task-specific strategies. When and which of these strategies is used depends on the situation and the tendencies of the athlete. The combinations of coping styles include: a) problem-focused/approach—a psychical confrontations such as with another player or umpire on the field; b) problem focused/avoidance—rapidly moving to the next play in the game; c) emotion-focused/approach—rethinking a play and getting agitated or emotional about it again and again; and d) emotion-focused/avoidance—planning or thinking about the next play or the next game (Anshel, 1996). Players often do not only use one of these mechanisms for coping, rather they may use many or all of them during different stressful situations. Knowing exactly when to use which coping strategy can be a challenge that most athletes experience in an effort to find the most effective means to relieving pressure.

**When Coping Strategies are Employed**

By recognizing when coping strategies will be useful, an athlete can actively participate in such approaches as relaxation, cognitive modifications, or systematic
desensitization. Youth who participate in competitive sports are subject to external and internal stress and pressures with which they must cope. The manner and extent to which youth sports participants are able to manage stress is the subject of much consideration. Research done by Holt, Hoar, and Fraser (as cited in Baron, 2007) indicates that “young adolescents and children tend to use social support, detachment, problem solving, and isolations as ways of handling stress in sports” (p. 63). Parents and coaches hold a majority of the responsibility in teaching these techniques to youth sports participants, but ultimately it is up to the athlete to determine when and how to use coping strategies in an effective way.

**Effectiveness of Coping Strategies**

Which coping methods and strategies used among adolescent athletes have been the focus of studies, and the results show that young athletes use problem-focused and emotion focused techniques about equally, but that this age group tends to favor avoidance methods over approach methods. In a study by Eubanks and Collins (as cited by Fraser et al., 2005), the effectiveness of coping strategies has been linked to the perception of the outcome. When a youth sports participant views a coping strategy as facilitative as opposed to debilitative they felt that both problem-focused and emotion-focused methods were more effective. This would suggest that a coping strategy would be useful when the athletes perceived it to be helpful to the sport situation. Effective coping strategies among adolescents seem to be ones that are positive in nature and maintain an optimistic focus (Holt et al., 2005).
Studies by Krohne and Hindel (as cited in Anshel & Delaney, 2001) show that avoidance techniques tend to produce less anxiety and help the athlete remain focused on the sporting situation. However, select attention to stressors that could serve as a distraction, as would be used in the approach method, were noted to create attention to the important or relevant features of the sporting situation. The coping strategies that are put into use by young athletes are not mutually exclusive or singular. Rather, the process by which these athletes determine which strategies, or combination of strategies to use is a complex process that remains dynamic both on and off the field (Spriddle, 1988). The most constructive forms are determined individually and are dependant upon the situation.

**Outside Influences that Impact Sports Participants**

In the realm of sports, outside influences are external factors that exist and whose presence may influence, positively or negatively, the playing ability of an athlete. For the purposes of this study, specific external influences that will be examined and discussed are coaches, and peers or teammates of youth sports participants. Each of these factors has a direct affect on the athletic performance of young athletes. Additionally, the physical setting itself, can also be a significant contributing factor of the external environment, playing a role in the overall outcomes of sports participants (Côté, Deakin, & Strachan, 2009).
Coaches

One external factor that is particularly influential to youth sports participants is the role of coaches; and it is from this association that the coach-player relationship is formed. Coaches are significant social agents whom are often instrumental in influencing player motivation, either positively or negatively, and whom can have a direct affect on whether a young athlete continues to pursue athletics or drops out along the way (Harwood, Keegan, Lavallee, & Spray, 2010). Coaches provide input or feedback to players in a variety of ways; either directly in the form of verbal or non-verbal communication (e.g., praise or criticism; gestures; or other body language) or indirectly, such as in showing favoritism; or conversely, as in not allowing a player the opportunity to play or as in instances of unfair calls or game-related decisions being made.

Harwood et al. (2010) report that young players who received positive feedback from coaches responded with motivation forms that were adaptive or favorable whereas, negative feedback from coaches often produced frustration in young athletes and greatly undermined player motivation, as well as the relationship with the coach. Similarly, Horn, Fox, and Labrador (as cited in Harwood et al., 2010) emphasize the importance of on-going, frequent interactions with all players, by coaches, in which concerted efforts are made to elicit players’ feedback regarding their perceptions, attitudes and opinions. The coach-player relationship is an important aspect of youth sports; these studies speak to the impressionable nature of young persons, who look to coaches and other adults who are in positions to instruct athletically, and which stresses that overall, positive results are
realized when coaches exhibit appropriate actions and provide verbal and non-verbal feedback that create positive sports environments for all.

**Peers and Teammates**

Unlike any other outside factor, the influence that peers and teammates have on youth sports participants is unique and reciprocal by virtue of their very nature. Research on the influence of peers and teammates on young athletes, and which is of relevance to this study, focuses on motivational aspects (Harwood et al., 2010), as well as positive and negative influences (Frazer-Thomas & Côté, 2009). In terms of motivational aspects encountered, Harwood et al. (2010) reported that young persons involved in youth sports were influenced by their peers through the course of their social relationships, conversations and exchanges that are evaluative of one another’s performances, as well as through peer behaviors that are competitive or collaborative.

Peer and teammate influences can be constructive and positive, contributing to motivational aspects that enhance the overall youth sports experience. Joesaar, Hein, and Hagger (2011) report findings by Moreno et al. indicating a mastery or task-oriented sports climate in which peers were supportive and engaged cooperatively, resulted in favorable sports-related experiences and outcomes. This point is important in terms of its meaning for youth development within or outside of sports programs or, perhaps, in terms of its implications for addressing the topic of youth sport dropout.

In some instances, the influence of peers can be negative and impact the young person to such a degree that it adversely affects their playing or, perhaps, leads to the
youth to exiting the sport altogether. Frazer-Thomas and Côté (2009) report negative peer experiences among adolescent sports participants to be typically associated with jealousies, competitive rivalries, and exhibiting poor work or play ethics (e.g., skipping practice, immaturity, etc.). For young athletes who lack the skills necessary to resolve intra- and interpersonal conflicts, such influences can negatively impact their overall enjoyment of playing sports.

**Parental Perceptions**

Parents are typically eager to support the young, developing sports participant who is their child. Often what a parent believes the child feels or needs in terms of sports-related issues or concerns are not the same as what the child thinks or believes to be true. In many instances, the perceptions of parents trump or take precedence over the child’s, sometimes to the satisfaction of both the parent and child, but other times, perhaps, to the detriment of the young person. It is important for parents to maintain their perceptions, as their insight is oftentimes right, and could serve as a springboard for engaging the youth in discussion; however, it is also important that parents allow young persons the opportunity to fully experience situations and things for themselves during this important time of growth and development.

**How Parents Influence Young Athletes**

The influence that parents have on their child athlete derives from the specific parental role that parents play in the young person’s life and is typically that of support and facilitation (Harwood et al., 2010). This influence is exerted by parents on the
playing field as well as off; and carries over into daily life activities at home, at practices, and in many other aspects of the child’s life. Some parents’ enthusiasm or zeal is carried beyond the point of support or facilitation. Parents whose emphasis is on the performance aspects of the sport may sometimes pressure the child’s coach(es); some of whom may have tendencies themselves to emphasize performance in their coaching styles (Torres & Hager, 2007). While often well-meaning, the result can lead to burnout or dropping out of the sport altogether, particularly for young athletes who lack the skills to adequately manage outside pressures as well as their emotions.

Youth sports participants are keenly attuned to and aware of the presence of their parent, particularly during the course of competitive games. This gives rise to the significance that the influence of parents exerts on young athletes and the importance of parental mindfulness as to how they may be impacting their child’s sport experience. Findings by Frazer-Thomas, Côté and Deakin (2008) indicated the importance of parents being able to step back in terms of their involvement and presence at the young person’s practices and performances, particularly as their child enters adolescence. In addition, De Knop et al. (as cited by Frazer-Thomas et al., 2008) stress that parental expectations of the child athlete should not be too rigid, nor should they be for goals that are set by anyone other than the child.

Parental Perceptions of Young Athletes’ Stress Levels and Coping Strategies Utilized

Research on parental perceptions of stress levels and coping strategies used by youth sports participants is somewhat limited. However, experiential knowledge
possessed by the researchers indicates that parents hold a wide range of beliefs regarding their child’s competitive stress levels and coping mechanisms used that may prove to be supported, in whole or in part, by the researchers’ data. Many parents are inclined to think that young male athletes feel some pressure to perform at all levels, with the added belief that the higher the skill level and expectations, come corresponding increases in stress levels. Some parents believe that one way in which to help their child to better develop certain skills might be to provide added hours of practice, private lessons, or extra pressure on the child to perform; thereby perceiving that these extras are helpful to the child, without necessarily believing that the child’s stress level, as a result, is increased. Additionally, in terms of coping strategies utilized, parental beliefs may vary from possibly believing that their child does not experience stress to a degree that requires a particular coping mechanism or, perhaps, believing that their child uses minimal, but effective coping strategies during stressful competitive times, such as taking a deep breath or other simple measure.

**Influence of Parental Perceptions on Young Athletes**

In terms of exploring the influence that a particular aspect, such as parental perceptions of a young athlete’s competence or other similar parental ideas regarding sport, Bois, LaLanne, and Del Forge (2009) stress that such research is hindered from “a lack of congruence in the definition and assessment of parenting practices and a lack of systematic assessments of parental influence on children’s target variables such as anxiety” (p. 997). It stands to reason, therefore, that the literature on the specifics
regarding the influence of parental perceptions on youth sports participants is subsequently lacking. The researchers of this study intend to examine, as one component of our study, the parental perceptions held regarding stress and anxiety levels of young athletes and their beliefs about the coping strategies used, as well as the influence of such perceptions, as we believe this to be an interesting area of study with important implications.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the methods used to investigate youth sports participant’s anxiety levels, confidence levels and coping strategies. Additionally, this chapter provides information regarding the process used to seek parental perception of these same variables. This chapter covers study design, population and sampling, protocol for protection of human subjects, and research instrumentation and design.

**Study Design**

The proposed research question, which looks at stress levels and the effectiveness of coping strategies among youth sports participants, was studied through a descriptive research design; yielding both qualitative and quantitative data. As there is already significant research on aspects of this topic, an exploratory study was not deemed necessary. Rather, a descriptive study design was appropriate for our purposes, as it examined the correlation among variables such as level of play and stress level. This study provides a better understanding of the relationship between competitive youth sports participants and the particular coping strategies that are most effective in controlling their stress. It also provides insight into parental perceptions that exist regarding stress levels and the effectiveness of particular coping strategies used by the competitive youth sports participants. The data collection methods for this study consisted of a questionnaire for the youths and face-to-face interviews with the parents.
Upon completion of the questionnaires and interviewing, the data was analyzed and the findings were determined.

**Population and Sampling**

The population for this study was youth males who participate at the non-competitive, competitive level, travel, or tournament team baseball league from the Hard 90 Baseball Academy or Laguna Youth Baseball-Cal Ripkin League, ages 11 to 14 years, in the Sacramento, California area; and their parents or guardians. The study aimed to sample at least 30 youth sports participants and at least 40 parents. This was a non-random, purposive sampling approach involving typical case sampling, as the sports participants are believed to be typical or similar to the “average” competitive youth baseball sports participant.

Advantages of using the purposive sampling approach are that it allows for “a deliberate process of selecting respondents based on their ability to provide the needed information” (Royse, 2011, p. 204). Potential disadvantages of purposive sampling are that the number of potential study participants was limited, as well as the fact that the results are intrinsically biased, and may not be able to be generalized to the overall population. Nonetheless, it is the researchers’ belief that the advantages of this study will outweigh any potential limitations and will result in findings that are beneficial and applicable to the individuals involved and beyond.
Protocol for Protection of Human Subjects

The researchers adhered to the Sacramento State University guidelines and received approval from the Division of Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee. There was minimal risk for participation in this research study, and there was no cost for participating. This study was considered to have minimal risk of any discomfort because the nature of the questions pertained to confidence and stress levels experienced with relation to competition. Although the questionnaires were given to underage participants this study was considered to be “minimal risk.” The nature of the questions pertains to confidence and stress levels experienced in relation to sport competition and, therefore, some participants may have experienced some discomfort. However, the topic of the study was considered daily conversational so any discomfort experienced would have been minimal.

All National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics were strictly adhered to for this study to ensure professionalism guidelines were followed. More specifically, all participant information was kept confidential and not shared with anyone not affiliated with the study.

Informed consent was gained from coaching staff and parents of all youth sports participants as well as informed assent from the adolescents who wished to participate. Inclusion in the study was voluntary and the informed consent and assent specified that all participants had a right to refuse to take part in the study at any time. Participants were also be told they could refuse the entire study, or any part of the study that they
choose at any time. Because this study sought information from a very specific population, confidentiality was used to the extent to which all surveys and questionnaires did not have any identifying markers or information attached to them. The researchers ensured that each response was appropriately handled with anonymity being of the utmost importance.

The information sought was in regards to very specific situational stressors and coping strategies. This information was gleaned from both youth sports participants and their parents/guardians. Therefore, underage participants were working closely with their parents/guardians during the process thus creating a support system and preventing undue harm. This research asked both youth sports participants and their parent/guardian to report on actual and perceived confidence levels and coping strategies in relation to a competitive sports environment. Because this study sought information around confidence levels and coping strategies and some of this information came from underage participants it was submitted for reviewed as a research proposal with at risk potential.

Informed consent was obtained through the use of coach consent forms for conducting the study. See Appendix A for Coach’s Consent Form. Informed consent forms were provided to parents or guardians to establish voluntary participation. See Appendix B for the Parental Informed Consent Form. Informed assent forms were used to solicit youth participation. See Appendix C for the Informed Assent Form. The consent forms outlined the purpose of the study, procedures, confidentiality issues and risk involved.
Research Instrumentation and Design

The youth sports participants were be given a 42-item questionnaire that allowed ranking of answers on a four-point Likert-type scale. The youth decided if the statements were experienced “never,” “hardly ever,” “sometimes,” or “often.” The researchers used the interview guide questions and checklists to interview the parents or guardians. See Appendix D for the Youth Self-Assessment of Social Confidence, Competitive Stress, and Coping Strategies Questionnaire, and Appendix E for the Parent/Guardian Perception of Youth Social Confidence, Competitive Stress, and Coping Strategies - Interview Guide.

The study data was coded and entered for computer analysis using the SPSS program. The Youth Self-Assessment of Social Confidence, Competitive Stress, and Coping Strategies Questionnaire (YSCCSCS-Q) score was computed for each youth sports participant. If the research hypothesis stating that youth sports participants have higher levels of both stress and confidence when they play a higher level of competition is correct, then those playing at a higher level of competition would likely report higher levels of both stress and confidence. Chi Square and Fisher’s exact tests were used to determine if a difference exists between the two variables of stress and level of competition and confidence and level of competition. The mean scores were compared to determine if the differences found are statistically different from those that would occur by chance.
If the research hypothesis that states that youth sports participants use effective coping strategies to cope with competitive stress is correct, it is expected that the participants’ responses on the YSCCSCS-Q would show a lower score on stress level and higher scores on confidence level. The association between these two variables is further examined by Chi Square test and Fisher’s exact test. The frequency distribution of coping skills used by those scoring lower on stress level or higher on confidence level as scored on the YSCCSCS-Q should indicate effectiveness of specific coping strategies. By determining level of stress or confidence as high or low and comparing frequency of use as determined by number of occurrences of coping strategies using Chi Square we tested for association.

To test the research hypothesis that states parental perception of stress levels, confidence levels, and use of coping strategies differ from actual levels and use are correct, answers obtained using the Parent/Guardian Interview Guide were scored using nominal levels of measurement to create a percentage. This percentage was then compared to the actual YSCCSCS-Q scored responses. We then used comparison of percentages, Chi Square, and Fisher’s exact tests to compare the two variables of parental perception to actual levels determining if differences exist as well as other appropriate inferential statistics.

Additional descriptive statistics were used to further analyze study data such as:
1) Are there any significant differences in socioeconomic levels and level of competition; and 2) What specific feelings and emotions do parents or guardians perceive as
significant? The research findings and their implications are summarized in the final chapter.
Chapter 4

OUTCOMES

The purpose of this study was to explore youth sports participant’s anxiety levels, confidence levels, and coping strategies so as to gain insight into the players’ levels of anxiety, confidence, and the particular coping strategies that are most used and effective in controlling their stress. A secondary objective was to further understand parental perceptions of these variables. By using a youth sports questionnaire that was distributed to 31 youth sports participants and interviewing 35 parents or guardians of youth sports participants, data was collected that allowed for analysis.

The Youth Questionnaire

The youth questionnaire, developed by the researchers based on the current literature and guided by the purpose of this study, consisted of 42 questions that used nominal variables and looked at five different themes; basic anxiety, somatic anxiety, cognitive state anxiety, confidence, and coping strategies. The youth participants answered the questions in one of four ways; never, hardly ever, sometimes, or often. Due to the sample size and need to better reflect the youth’s choices, the four responses were consolidated into two nominal groups. These answers were then grouped into either “yes” or “no” categories. The never or hardly ever responses became “no” and the sometimes or often responses became “yes.” These answers were then tabulated to calculate the frequency distribution and percentages of yes or no answers. From this information the five variables were then looked at to determine commonalities and
differences, which revealed data that supported the researchers’ hypothesis that youth sports participants use effective coping strategies to cope with competitive stress, as well as some unexpected data results.

Using the variables of yes or no for all of the questions on the youth questionnaire, the researchers were able to ascertain some measure of central tendency for each category of questions which aided the researchers’ understanding of the average response for each category. For the basic anxiety category the mode, or most frequently reported percentage of yes or no answers was unable to be determined. For the somatic anxiety category the mode was 48, which was accounted for by 15 respondents that reported either yes or no to a question more than any other. For the cognitive state anxiety category the mode was 65 with all 20 variables for this mode being reported as negative or that no cognitive state anxiety occurred. In the confidence category the mode was 97 with all respondents reporting yes to this variable. The final category, which explored coping strategies, revealed that the mode was 100 with three questions or coping strategies being reported as being used by 100% of participants. Table 1 shows the prevalence of choice of coping strategies.
In the category of basic anxiety, the data shows that a majority of youth sports participants do not experience basic anxiety before a game (n=23, 74%, and n=24, 77%). The information did, however, show that during the competition many of the youth sports participants felt anxious (n=21, 66%). Additionally, this category showed that a large portion of participants were not worried about being able to focus on the game (n=25, 81%), and that only a little less than half worried about making mistakes during the game (n=18, 42%). A vast majority of participants stated they felt they were treated fairly by the coaching staff (n=30, 97%) and were given equitable play time when they showed adequate effort (n=29, 94%). Table 2 shows the results of the basic anxiety questions.
Table 2  

*Basic Anxiety Questions Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I worry I might not be able to focus (on the game).</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before I compete I feel uneasy.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I compete I worry about making mistakes.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During a competition I feel anxious.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before I compete I feel worried.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like the coaches treat me fairly.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The effort and work I put out is rewarded fairly with play time.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentages that reflect the young participants’ feelings of experiencing fair treatment by their coaches, as well as feeling rewarded with play time that was equitable to their efforts put forth, are notably significant. These data suggest a coach-player relationship that is positive in nature and are aligned with study findings by Harwood et al. (2010). As such, it stands to reason that these outside influences contribute to intrinsic factors likely possessed by these players that are reflected in their overall abilities to largely manage their competitive worries, thereby allowing for enjoyable play and positive player motivation.
Somatic Anxiety

The results that stand out from the somatic anxiety category are that a substantial majority of participants stated they felt calm during a competition (n=30, 97%), and relaxed before a game (n=28, 90%). Furthermore, most youth reported that they did not get upset feelings in their stomach (n=22, 71%), or have tense feelings in their bodies during a game (n=19, 61%). About half of the participants experienced somatic symptoms such as sweaty hands (n=16, 52%), or a faster than usual heart beat (n=16, 52%) during competition. In addition, approximately half of the participants reported somatic symptoms such as finding it hard to sit still (n=16, 48%) or feelings of nervousness (n=16, 47%) before the competition. Table 3 shows the somatic anxiety question results.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes Answers</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No Answers</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before I compete I get an upset feeling in my stomach.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During a competition my hands are sweaty.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before competition I find it hard to sit still.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During a competition I feel calm.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before I compete I feel nervous.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes Answers</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No Answers</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During a competition my heart beats faster than usual.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before I compete I feel relaxed.</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During competition my body feels tense.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, while the data which indicate the majority of young athletes surveyed expressed that they feel relaxed before a game coincides with data results from the basic anxiety category indicating that approximately three quarters of the participants do not experience pre-competitive anxiety, these same youth (of whom two thirds admitted to experiencing feelings of anxiousness during competitive play) are largely able to maintain a sense of calm about them, during play, such that it does not result in significant somatic symptoms such as upset stomach or tense feelings in their bodies. This could be due to the possession of coping strategies that are effective enough to allow for the presence of an overall calm state of being by the youth sports participants.

**Cognitive State Anxiety**

The cognitive state anxiety category focuses on worries that the players may have before or during a competition. The data from this category showed that collectively the youth sports participants did not worry about such things as choking under pressure (n=24, 77%), not performing well (n=20, 65%), losing (n=19, 61%), competing (n=21,
84%), or meeting their athletic goals (n=20, 65%). Table 4 shows competitive anxiety question results.

Table 4

**Competitive State Anxiety Questions Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes Answers</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No Answers</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I worry about choking under pressure.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I compete I worry about not performing well.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I worry about losing.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I worry that others will be disappointed with my performance.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am worried about competing.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I worry that I may not do as well in a competition as I could.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am worried about meeting my athletic goals.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data are in alignment with study findings by Duda and Hall (as cited in Smith et al., 2006), which indicate decreased anxiety associated with performance among sports participants who possess higher mastery orientation than others. It stands to reason that these particular players who were surveyed do, in fact, possess greater mastery orientation than ego orientation; therefore, worry and anxiety do not appear to be
manifested to a large degree in these players. The two areas where the participants split down the middle were worrying about disappointing others (n=17, 55%), and not doing as well as he could during competition (n=15, 48%).

Confidence

This classification showed overwhelming similarities between participant’s answers. The predominance of answers that asserted confidence can be seen as each question was not only answered yes, but the percentages are significant. During competition 94% of the participants said they felt comfortable (n=29), 97% claimed they had confidence they would play well (n=30), 97% said they were confident in their ability (n=30), and 97% stated that they felt confident before a competition that they would perform well (n=30). Additionally, a full 100% of participants said that they were confident they could meet the challenge of the competition (n=31), and that during competition they felt self-confident (n=31). Table 5 shows confidence question results.
Table 5

*Confidence Questions Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes Answers</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No Answers</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During competition I feel comfortable.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have confidence that I will play well.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During competition I am confident in my ability.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before a competition I am confident about performing well.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During a competition I am confident I can meet the challenge.</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During competition I feel self-confident.</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am worried about meeting my athletic goals.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consistency in the youth participants’ responses, as the mode was 97 for this category, is particularly noteworthy as it speaks to the significant levels of confidence possessed by the youth who were surveyed. It can be concluded that similar numbers of fellow team members and peers of the Hard 90 Baseball Academy or Laguna Youth Baseball-Cal Ripkin League also likely possess this high level of confidence. The conclusive nature of the data from the confidence category revealed what the researchers had hoped to find in this study, as possession of confidence in youth is critical to positive youth development. Furthermore, the overwhelming response of every participant surveyed, indicating their confidence in being able to meet the challenges of competition.
and that this confidence remained with them throughout the game, speaks volumes of the confidence levels held by these young sports participants.

**Coping Strategies**

The youth sports questionnaire endeavored to determine which coping strategies were employed by the youth before and during competition. The most significant findings were the use of blocking out distractions (n=31), continuing to play hard regardless of the game situation (n=31), and the complimenting of teammates in order to keep a positive attitude (n=31), each of which was used by 100% of the participants.

Thinking about winning (n=29, 94%), wanting to play well (n=30, 97%), only focusing on positive aspects of the game rather than the negative (n=28, 90%), visualizing performing well (n=30, 97%), and hearing positive praise from coaches or others (n=29, 94%) were all used by a preponderance of the participants. Seventy-four percent of respondents used positive self-talk (n=23), 71% tell themselves to relax when they begin to feel tense (n=22), 81% try not to let coach feedback negatively affect their play (n=25), and 84% do not worry about what others say or think about their performance (n=26).

About half of the participants listen to music before a game to help calm them down (n=17, 55%), but most respondents do not use the strategy of humming or singing to help them cope with anxiety (n=24, 77%).
Table 6

*Coping Strategies Questions Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes Answers</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No Answers</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When I play sports, I can block out distraction and focus my attention.</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I am playing, I say or repeat positive things to myself, so that I perform better.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I listen to music before a game to help calm me down before playing.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about winning helps me to play better.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I feel my body getting tense, I tell myself to relax so I can calm down.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hum or sing to myself when I am playing.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a coach criticizes me, I try not to let it negatively affect my playing.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No matter how the game is going, I continue to play my best.</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to play well makes me try harder.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I only focus on the positive; not the negative when playing.</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not worry about what others might say or think about my performance, which allows me to play better.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before making a play, I visualize performing it well.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I compliment a teammate to keep myself positive during a game.</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing praise from a coach or others is more helpful to me than something negative that is said.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data obtained regarding the use of coping strategies by the young ball players who were surveyed point categorically to the fact that the youths do, in fact, rely on certain coping strategies more than others. The mode of 100, which was indicated for three questions (or strategies), equates to every player who was surveyed using three particular coping strategies. While the researchers had anticipated obtaining results that indicated the use of some coping strategies over others, the highest mode attainable (100) was unexpected. Further, it is interesting to note that these three unequivocally employed strategies (blocking out distractions so as to focus attention, continuing to play hard regardless of how the game is going, and maintaining a positive attitude by complimenting teammates) speak to the utilization of mental coping strategies that originate within the young ball players, as opposed to reliance on an external or outside influence or that of a physical coping strategy (such as listening to music, etc.). Lastly, in contrast, the coping strategy least employed by the young ball players who were surveyed (by less than one quarter), is that of using a mental diversion, such as humming or singing, to alleviate anxiety.

**Parental Interview Guide**

When using the parental interview guide, researchers used a variety of methods to gather information. Nominal variable questions were used for seven of the questions and simply asked for yes or no responses. Qualitative responses were used for three of the questions which provided opportunity for participants to provide narrative information, one question asked participants to use ranking order, and one question used a checklist to
determine which variables participants perceived were applied the most frequently. The
different types of data collection methods helped create a well-rounded response from
participants and helped researchers uncover valuable information.

**Nominal Variable Questions**

When asked if the parent observed their child’s anxiety levels increase prior to a
game, 66% said that no, they did not see this happen (n=23). However, when asked if the
parent thought their child felt anxious during the game 63% said yes (n=22). When asked
about their child getting physical symptoms of stress either before or during a game, a
majority of parents said they did not believe this happened (n=28, 80%). Most parents
did believe their child worried about what coaches or others say about his performance
(n=23, 66%), and that they do compare their capabilities to other players (n=19, 56%).
An overwhelming majority of parents think their child believes he is capable of
competing successfully (n=34, 97%), and 83% of parents think their child believes
winning is important (n=29). Table 7 shows the results of the parental perception
interview questions.
Table 7

*Parental Perception Interview Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes Answers</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No Answers</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you observe your child’s anxiety levels to increase prior to a game?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your child feel anxious when competing?</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your child compare his capabilities to other player’s?</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your child get physical symptoms of stress before or during a game?</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your child worry about what coaches or others say about his performance?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your child think he is capable of competing successfully?</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is winning important to your child?</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reported parental observations of increased anxiety levels in youths prior to a game, in which two-thirds (66%) of parents interviewed stated that they did not notice increased anxiousness in their child, compares with data results from the youth questionnaire in which slightly over half (52%) of the youths surveyed expressed that they did not find it hard to sit still prior to a game. The relative closeness of the numbers (a difference of only 14 percentage points) seemingly indicates that the parental intuitiveness and the youths’ reported anxiety are somewhat aligned.

Parental perceptions surrounding their child’s worries of what coaches or others might say about his performance far exceeds what the youths themselves expressed (66%...
compared with 16% respectively). Discussion as to what may account for these vast differences in data is addressed in Chapter 5.

Data results of parental perceptions regarding their child’s confidence indicate that nearly every parent surveyed (97%) perceive that their child believes he is capable of competing successfully. These results compare significantly with data results of the youths who were surveyed regarding their confidence levels. The solid data results obtained from the parents aligns perfectly with those reported by the youths, revealing identical percentages, as 97% of the youths reported feeling confident in their abilities and of performing well. Additionally, the same data of the parental perceptions of youths’ confidence align very closely in regards to the youths’ data results of 100%, indicating their feelings of confidence that they can meet the challenges of competition and overall feelings of self-confidence. The alignment of the data sets from both the parents and youths who were surveyed indicates that, in terms of their child’s confidence, the parents are most perceptive and aware.

Qualitative Analysis

To analyze the qualitative information gathered from the parental interview, researchers independently studied the narratives to determine trends, similarities, and unique aspects of the descriptive data. The researchers then compared their independent results to add inter-rater reliability to the findings.

During the parental interview parents stated most often that the child feels excitement during a game. Parents also report their children feel pride and happiness,
while playing. Other trends showed that parents believe their child gets frustrated either with his own play, or with the team’s play and that they child feels both anxiousness and nervousness during competition. Many parents also reported that the child felt “pressure to perform”, or that they did not want to fail during the game. Conversely, a unique idea that was mentioned by two parents was that their child feels calm or relaxed during the game. Further, an interesting and unique statement provided by the parent of a youth who had several years of experience playing travel ball (and echoed by several similar parental comments), was that of “It’s not about personal emotion, they are conditioned not to feel emotion.”

Wins and losses and how the child or team performs seemed to dictate most of the parental perception of the child’s emotion after a game. If a team wins or the child or team does well it is perceived by the parent that the child is happy or excited. When the team loses or the child or team does not do well the child was perceived to be disappointed or frustrated, but mostly “sad.” Several parental comments stated that the child’s feelings and emotions depend on how the child performed, or how he perceived his own performance as well as on calls made during the game. An interesting alternate outcome is the report that some parents perceive a sense that their child did not care much or that he had a large sense of relief after the completion of the game. Additionally, many parental comments regarding observations and perceptions of their child’s feelings or emotional state after a game, regardless of the outcome, include “he takes it all in stride”, “he’s pretty even-keeled”, or “he gets over it quickly and is able to move on.”
Parents reported overwhelmingly (5:1) that yes, their child does communicate with them about both excitement and disappointment experienced during a game. The child was, however, more inclined to share or express feelings when they were excited. Some parents reported that the children would only talk to them about the game if the parents initiated the communication, and some reported that the child would talk about the technical aspects of the game with dad and the emotional aspects with mom. Other parental comments relevant to the child communicating with the parents regarding feelings of excitement associated with the game included “if the game went well, all enjoy re-living the moment,” or “he enjoys analyzing his performance, and likes to do play-by-plays, etc.”

A few parents reported that the child would talk to them when the outcome of the game was good, but not when it was bad. One parent stated that her child “never talks about the bad stuff.” A much smaller amount of parents reported that their child would not speak about the game at all and stated that their child would “clam up,” or “needs a cooling off period.”

**Ranking**

For the ranking question we asked parents to first state if their child played for a tournament team that requires a higher level of skill and competition, or if they played for a recreational team. We then asked each type of respondent to provide the top three reasons why they had their child playing at the higher level, or why they did not. We asked them to give a rank 1 to the most important reason, followed by rank 2 being the
second most important reason, and rank 3 being the third most important reason. The following tables (Table 8 and Table 9) show both the ranking that was reported and used the formula: \( x = (\frac{1 \times \text{Rank} \#1) + (2 \times \text{Rank} \#2) + (3 \times \text{Rank} \#3)}{\text{# of Total Ranked}} \) to determine the overall ranking.

Table 8

*Ranking for Reasons Player Does Not Play Tournament Baseball*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Rank #1</th>
<th>Rank #2</th>
<th>Rank #3</th>
<th>Overall Rank</th>
<th>Total Ranked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child does not want to play</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of knowledge about available teams, structure and process involved in getting child on a team</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not fit with the family schedule/Time commitment too great</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill level</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost is prohibitive</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 8, it can be determined by looking at the overall ranking score of 1, which denotes the primary ranking of all of the variables, that more parents- four-selected “other” as the foremost reason that their child does not play tournament ball. Analysis of the “other” reasons provided by these parents for choosing not to have their child play in tournament ball revealed the following: two parents stated that their child “plays multiple sports,” further indicating that tournament ball does not fit with their family’s schedule or that the time commitment is too great; another parent cited
“unprofessionalism of the coaches” however did not expand further as to in what sense this was meant; and the fourth parent stated the reason that their child does not play tournament ball as being that their child “lacks the confidence.”

The second most selected reason that parents indicated as to why their child does not play tournament ball, as determined by looking at the next lowest overall ranking number (1.25), is that of the child not wanting to play. Four parents selected this reason, with three of the four ranking it as their primary reason.

Lastly, the third reason determined to account for parents not having their child play tournament ball can be found by looking at the third lowest overall ranking number, which is (1.75). Lack of knowledge about available teams, structure, and the process involved in getting a child on such a team are the reasons given. Again, four parents selected this reason, with three of the four ranking it as their secondary reason.

Table 9

*Ranking for Reasons Player Does Play Tournament Baseball*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Rank #1</th>
<th>Rank #2</th>
<th>Rank #3</th>
<th>Overall Rank</th>
<th>Total Ranked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher competition level</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More opportunity to play</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better instruction</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for future</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From Table 9, by looking at the overall ranking score of 1, it appears that “other” is the lowest score and would therefore appear to be the primary reason that parents indicated their child plays tournament ball. However, although “other” has the lowest score, this is actually skewed based on the fact that only one respondent had indicated that particular reason. A more accurate result would be the overall ranking of 1.74, because 19 parents had responded to that selection. Therefore, by looking at the overall ranking score of 1.74, which denotes the more accurate primary ranking of all of the variables, more parents (9) selected “higher level of competition” as the foremost reason that their child plays tournament ball.

The second most selected reason that parents indicated as to why their child plays tournament ball can be determined by looking at the next lowest overall ranking number, which is (2) and, from looking at the table, is actually split between two reasons. More opportunity to play and better instruction were the two reasons selected by parents as being important factors in having their child play tournament ball. An almost equal number of parents selected these two reasons, 16 and 15 parents respectively, which largely accounts for the equal overall ranking.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Rank #1</th>
<th>Rank #2</th>
<th>Rank #3</th>
<th>Overall Rank</th>
<th>Total Ranked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost was reasonable for level of play</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to travel</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>null</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finally, the third reason that is determined to account for the child choosing to play tournament ball can be found by looking at the next lowest overall ranking number, which is (2.26). Preparation for the future was the reason that was important to the 19 parents who ranked this reason. Clearly these parents and youths have a vision towards continued ball playing beyond the youths’ current early teenage years.

**Additional Analysis**

When determining association between variables, the researchers used Chi Square testing with Yates’ Corrections, and calculated the p value using a two-tailed design. The exception was when one of the variables was less than five based on participant response. In this case the researchers used the Fisher’s exact test. Table 10 shows the test results of the Chi Square testing comparing the parental observation and each of the coping strategies that were reported used by the youth sports participants. Table 11 shows the results of the Fisher’s Exact testing.

Associations between parental observation of their child’s anxiety levels increasing prior to a game and the coping strategies used were mostly statistically significant with the exception of two particular coping strategies. Listening to music before a game, and humming or singing before a game, which were the two reported least used by youth sports participants, did not have any direct association with parental observed increase in anxiety levels.
Table 10

*Chi Square Test Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parental observation v. Saying or repeating positive things</td>
<td>8.970</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.0027*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental observation v. Thinking about winning</td>
<td>22.083</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.0001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental observation v. Telling themselves to relax</td>
<td>7.449</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.0063*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental observation v. Not letting coach criticism affect play</td>
<td>12.523</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.0004*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental observation v. Wanting to play well</td>
<td>25.106</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.0001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental observation v. Only focusing on the positive</td>
<td>19.338</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.0001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental observation v. Not worrying about what others might say or think about performance</td>
<td>14.580</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.0001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental observation v. Visualizing performing well</td>
<td>25.106</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.0001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental observation v. Hearing praise from a coach or others</td>
<td>22.083</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.0001*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* - Statistically significant  p < .05
Table 11

*Fisher’s Exact Test Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Statistical Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parental observation v. Blocking out distractions</td>
<td>.0001</td>
<td>Extremely Statistically Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental observation v. Continuing to play as best as possible regardless of game situation</td>
<td>.0001</td>
<td>Extremely Statistically Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental observation v. Complimenting a teammate</td>
<td>.0001</td>
<td>Extremely Statistically Significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another comparison using Chi Square that showed association were the parental perception regarding whether youth worry about what coaches or others say concerning their play vs. the youth sports participants self reported worry about the same ($\chi^2=14.580$, df=1, p=.0001). Using Fisher’s exact testing, other associations arose. The three coping strategies that were reported used by 100% of youth sports respondents (blocking out distractions, continuing to play as best as possible regardless of the game situation, and complimenting a teammate) show association with extreme statistical significance to the least reported anxiety variables which include: somatic anxiety of having a tense feeling in the body during competition (p=.0001); the basic anxiety of worrying about being able to focus on the game (p=.0001); and the cognitive state anxiety of worrying about competing before or during a competition (p=.0001). Association was also found between youth sports participants feeling calm during a competition and their feeling confident they can meet the challenge (p=.0001).
Some of the variables that were not found to have associations with statistical significance were the youth sports participant’s report of feeling calm during a competition and the three most used coping strategies (p= 1.0), and youth sports participant’s report of not letting coach criticism affect play vs. worry about what others might say or think about their performance ($\chi^2=.111$, df=1, $p=.7396$). Most youth reported that they did not let coach criticism affect their play, and most also reported that they did not worry about what others said or thought about how they performed, however, these two variables were not found to be connected. Additionally, while most youth sports participants reported that they believe the coach treats them fairly, and that their effort and work was rewarded fairly with play time, there was not a statistically significant association found between these two variables ($\chi^2=.350$, df=1, $p=.5540$).

**Comparison of Travel and Recreational Players**

To ascertain whether the level of play had any impact on players, the youths’ questionnaires were separated depending upon whether the child indicated that he played travel ball or recreational ball. Of the 31 youth sports participants, there were 18 travel ball players, 9 recreational ball players, and four participants did not specify either level; therefore, those questionnaires were not factored. These questionnaires were then evaluated according to the same criteria as the initial analysis of the youth questionnaires (e.g., grouping the responses into “yes” and “no” categories, tabulating, and calculating the frequency distribution and the percentages of yes and no answers) so as to determine
commonalities and differences among the five different themes of basic anxiety, somatic anxiety, cognitive state anxiety, confidence, and coping strategies.

**Basic anxiety.** Overall, in the basic anxiety category, more recreational ball players than travel ball players indicated feeling uneasy before competing as well as of being worried about making mistakes when competing, as indicated by the data which revealed 33% (n=3) versus 6% (n=4) and 67% (n=6) versus 33% (n=6), respectively. Additionally, equal percentages were discovered for both levels of players for the variables of anxiousness during competition, (67% or n=6 for recreational players and n=12 for travel players), and 22% reported feeling worried before competition (n=2 for recreational players and n=4 for travel players). Those same percentages reveal an interesting parallel that exists for the given variables between the two levels of play. Travel players, overall, indicated greater satisfaction with the coaches’ treatment (n= 18, 100%) and 94% reported being rewarded fairly with play time that reflects their amount of effort and work put forth (n=17), as compared with 89% (n= 8) for both variables for the recreational ball players.

**Somatic anxiety.** Data from the travel ball players revealed that they exhibited more somatic anxiety symptoms than did the recreational ball players. Despite 100% (n=18) of the travel ball players indicating that they feel calm during competition as compared with 89% (n=8) of recreational ball players, for three variables (that of their bodies feeling tense, hearts beating faster, and sweaty hands), 61% (n=11) of travel ball players experienced such symptoms, as compared with 33% (n=3); 44% (n=4); and 56%
(n=5) respectively, of recreational ball players. These data seem to suggest that the higher level of competitive play results in a corresponding greater manifestation of somatic anxiety symptoms in the travel ball players.

**Cognitive state anxiety.** Interestingly, identical percentages were revealed between the two levels of play for three variables in the category of cognitive state anxiety. For both travel and recreational ball players, (n=14 and n=7, respectively), or 78% indicated that they were not worried about choking under pressure; (n=12 and n=6, respectively), or 67% expressed that they were not worried about meeting their athletic goals; and (n=10 and n=5, respectively), or 56% indicated they did not have worries about losing. The data for other variables (e.g., worrying that others will be disappointed with his performance and worrying that he may not do as well in a competition as he could) were closely split down the middle for both variables and both levels of play at 50% (n=9), and 56% (n=5), for travel and recreational players respectively. However, all but one travel ball player, (n=17, 94%) indicated that they were not worried about competing. Clearly it can be seen, from these data, that both levels of competitive play exhibit similar cognitive state anxieties.

**Confidence.** The category of confidence revealed similarities in data between the two levels of competitive play and which closely mirrored the initial, comprehensive youth sports participants’ questionnaire results. Both levels of play, travel and recreational, indicated identical data results for the two variables previously determined by the researchers to be utilized by all of the youth sports participants during competition.
Confidence in being able to meet the challenge and feeling self-confident were established to be the variables possessed by the players (n=18, 100% and n=9, 100%, respectively). In addition, data results revealed that the recreational ball players possessed two other universally established variables compared with one other variable indicated as possessed by all of the travel ball players. The variables indicated by 100% of the recreational ball players were those of confidence in one’s ability during competition (n=9) and overall confidence that one will play well (n=9); whereas the variable indicated by 100% of the travel ball players as being universally held is that of possessing pre-competitive confidence in performing well (n=18). The data results for both of the competitive levels are extremely close as well as extraordinarily high; however, careful examination and analysis revealed that the travel ball players actually possess a slightly greater amount of reported confidence than do the recreational ball players (as determined by a five percentage point difference between the travel ball players’ confidence (94%) versus the recreational ball players’ confidence percentage (89%). Nevertheless, the confidence possessed and exhibited by the players of both levels of competitive play speaks to their individual and collective capacities.

**Coping strategies.** Analysis and comparison of the data in the coping strategies category indicated that in addition to the three coping strategies that the researchers had previously determined were utilized by all of the youth sports participants (blocking out distractions, continuing to play hard regardless of how the game is going, and complimenting a teammate so as to maintain a positive attitude during the game) an
additional coping strategy was discovered to be universally employed by both travel and recreational ball players (n=18, 100% and n=9, 100%, respectively). The specific strategy, which is that of visualization of performing a play well before actually making it, speaks to the intrinsic nature and importance of the mental coping strategies upon which players of both competitive levels rely. Other mental coping strategies found to be universally employed by each level of competitive play as revealed by the data include recreational ball players indicating that wanting to play well made them try harder (n=9, 100%) and data relevant to travel ball players revealed that they 100% of the players only focus on the positive, not the negative, when playing (n=18). Finally, an interesting, unexpected result that the data revealed is that 28% (n=5) travel ball players employed the strategy of humming or singing to oneself when playing whereas 11% (n=1) of recreational ball players reported use of this strategy. What may account for this difference and what significance it may have on the travel ball players’ overall anxiety levels, mental state, and competitive performance could be the source for additional, future research.

By using the Fisher’s exact test to assess for association, the researchers chose the variables of the newly found coping skills that were universal to both recreational players and travel players (visualization of performing play well, and wanting to play well making them try harder) and tested them against the lowest reported anxiety symptoms from each of the three anxiety categories (basic anxiety, somatic anxiety, and cognitive state anxiety). The Fisher’s exact test was used to find the p value, or statistical
significance rather than Chi Square due to the fact that the coping strategies variables each had a report of zero participants claiming they did not use the strategy. Tables 12 and 13 show the results of the associations found for recreational players and travel players comparisons.

Table 12

*Fisher’s Exact Test Results for Recreational Players*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Statistical Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visualizing playing well v. Significant Basic anxiety of feeling worried before a competition</td>
<td>.0023</td>
<td>Very Statistically Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualizing playing well v. Somatic anxiety of having a heartbeat that is faster than usual</td>
<td>.0009</td>
<td>Very Statistically Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualizing playing well v. Cognitive State Anxiety of being worried others will be disappointed in their performance</td>
<td>.0824</td>
<td>Not Quite Statistically Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to play well v. Somatic Anxiety of having a tense feeling in the body</td>
<td>.0090</td>
<td>Very Statistically Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to play well v. Somatic Anxiety of having a heartbeat that is faster than usual</td>
<td>.0294</td>
<td>Statistically Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to play well v. Cognitive State Anxiety that others will be disappointed in their performance</td>
<td>.0824</td>
<td>Not Quite Statistically Significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 13

_Fisher’s Exact Test Results for Travel Ball Players_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Statistical Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visualizing playing well v. Basic anxiety of feeling uneasy before a competition</td>
<td>.0001</td>
<td>Extremely Statistically Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualizing playing well v. Basic anxiety of making a mistake during a competition</td>
<td>.0001</td>
<td>Extremely Statistically Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualizing playing well v. Basic Anxiety of being worried before a competition</td>
<td>.0001</td>
<td>Extremely Statistically Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualizing playing well v. Somatic Anxiety of having a tense feeling in the body</td>
<td>.0090</td>
<td>Very Statistically Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualizing playing well v. Somatic Anxiety of having a heartbeat that is faster than usual</td>
<td>.0294</td>
<td>Very Statistically Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualizing playing well v. Cognitive State Anxiety that others will be disappointed in their performance</td>
<td>.0824</td>
<td>Extremely Statistically Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to playing well v. Somatic Anxiety of having a tense feeling in the body</td>
<td>.0031</td>
<td>Very Statistically Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to playing well v. Somatic Anxiety of having a heartbeat that is faster than usual</td>
<td>.0031</td>
<td>Very Statistically Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to playing well v. Cognitive State Anxiety of worrying that others will be disappointed in their play</td>
<td>.0004</td>
<td>Extremely Statistically Significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants of this research gave much insight into the areas of anxiety levels experienced before, during and after a competition, coping strategies that are used most often, and the confidence levels of youth playing the sport of baseball. This descriptive study helped the researchers better understand how each of these categories worked together, and which were associated.
The different levels of play were studied as well in an attempt to learn about how the implied increase in intensity at the higher level would influence the youth sports participant’s anxieties. Similar to some of the literature that suggests that higher levels of play increase a youth’s stress and, therefore, increasing their risk for dropping, or burning out (Le Menestrel & Perkins, 2007), this study also suggests that travel ball players do, in fact, experience slightly higher levels of both basic and somatic anxiety. Interestingly, the third category of stress, cognitive state anxiety, did not reveal such a difference.

The discovery of the parental perspective of the player’s anxieties, coping strategies, and confidence was also very interesting. Because current literature was lacking in information specific to parental perception of their child’s anxiety as well as their ability to cope, it becomes important to note that this study shows, in most cases, that the parents and the self-reported results of the youth sports participants was generally congruent. Comparing the youth responses to the parental responses has given a glimpse into both the similarities and differences that exist between player and parent. As these similarities and differences were compared, associations that were worthy of note appeared. In the next chapter these findings will be summarized and discussed. Areas of further research were also discovered, along with limitations to the study. These too will be discussed, as well as additional relationships between the findings and those discovered in the current literature.
Chapter 5

SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

This study extensively examined social confidence, competitive stress, anxiety levels and coping strategies of adolescent boy baseball players, ages 11 to 14 years old, from the Hard 90 Baseball Academy and Laguna Youth Baseball-Cal Ripkin League of Elk Grove, California. Objectives such as identifying and better understanding specific coping strategies that are utilized in competitive youth baseball, their effectiveness in terms of controlling stress, as well as of gaining insight into the correlation among variables such as level of play and competitive stress were primary purposes for conducting the study. This study was also conducted to provide the researchers with a better understanding into parental perceptions that exist regarding stress levels of the young players and the effectiveness of particular coping strategies employed. Major findings that resulted from this study, relative to the aforementioned variables, include the following:

**Regarding Youths (Overall)**

- Youths largely reported that they do not experience basic anxiety before a game; however, they do admit to feelings of anxiousness during a competition (in spite of an ability to maintain an overall sense of calm.)
- Most players reported that they do not experience somatic anxiety symptoms—those who did, most frequently cited sweaty hands or a faster than usual heart beat during competition.
✓ Cognitive state anxiety was largely not a factor for most young players, as most reported that they are not worried about competing, choking under pressure, or of not performing well.

✓ An unexpected finding regarding self-confidence was that every youth baseball participant reported that he possesses self-confidence and is confident in his abilities to meet the challenge.

✓ Additional unexpected findings revealed that the all of the youths surveyed employ three of the same significant coping strategies during competition: blocking out distractions; continuing to play hard regardless of the game situation; and complimenting a teammate so as to remain positive during the game.

✓ The three aforementioned coping strategies, that were found to be utilized by every ball player surveyed, show association with extreme statistical significance to the least reported anxiety variables—(having a tense feeling in the body during competition; worrying about one’s ability to focus on the game; and worrying about competing either before or during a competition.)

✓ Extremely statistically significant associations were identified among the variables of the three coping strategies reportedly used by 100% of the players and the least reported anxiety variables—those of having a tense feeling in the body during competition (somatic anxiety); worrying about being able to focus on the game (basic anxiety); and pre-competitive and competitive worrying (cognitive state anxiety).
Statistical significance indicating association was also identified between the young ball players’ feeling calm during a competition and their confidence in their abilities to meet the challenge.

**Regarding the Comparison of Youth Recreational and Travel Ball Players**

- Equal percentages were discovered for both levels of players for the variables of anxiousness during competition and of feeling worried before competition, reflecting overall basic anxiety.
- Data from the travel ball players revealed that they exhibited more somatic anxiety symptoms than did the recreational ball players.
- Travel players, overall, indicated greater satisfaction with the coaches’ treatment and reported being rewarded fairly with play time that is commensurate with their effort and work put forth.
- Both levels of competitive play exhibited similar cognitive state anxieties, as identical percentages were revealed between the two levels of play for three variables (out of seven) in the category of cognitive state anxiety.
- Travel ball players measured slightly higher than the recreational ball players in terms of reported confidence levels, as determined from the data which indicated the results from both were extremely close and exceptionally high.
- An additional coping strategy was discovered to be universally employed by both travel and recreational ball players—that of visualization of performing a play well before
actually making it—in addition to the three coping strategies that the researchers had previously determined to be utilized by all of the youth sports participants.

**Regarding Parental Perceptions**

- Statistically significant associations were found between parental observations of their child’s anxiety levels increasing (prior to a game) and the coping strategies reportedly used by the youths, for all but two of the fourteen strategies (the two least-used strategies, that of listening to music and humming or singing before a game, were found not to have any direct association.)

- Data indicating that nearly two thirds (63%) of parents thought that their child felt anxious during a game is very closely aligned with the youths’ reported data results indicating that just over two thirds (68%) of youths acknowledged experiencing anxiousness during competition.

- Parental perceptions of the youths’ confidence levels is in close alignment to that of the youths’ self-reported data results of 100%, indicating their overall feelings of self-confidence and their feelings of confidence that they can meet the challenges of competition.

- Parents perceived their child to be happy or excited, depending on the outcome of a game (win) or if the child or team played well. Conversely, the child was perceived by the parent to be sad, frustrated or disappointed if the team lost, or if the child or team did not perform well.
Parents largely reported that their child does communicate with them after a game regarding their feelings; however, they are more inclined to do so when they were excited or if the parent initiated the conversation.

The top three reasons cited that parents have their child playing tournament ball were identified as: (1) Higher level of competition; (2) More opportunity to play/better instruction; (3) Preparation for the future.

The top three reasons cited that parents do not have their child playing tournament ball were identified as: (1) “Other reasons”—e.g., “The child plays multiple sports/time commitment is too great, etc.; (2) Child does not want to play; (3) Lack of knowledge about available teams, structure, and process involved in getting a child on a team.

**A Composite Youth Baseball Player**

Based on the information obtained and the results of this study, the researchers were able to compile a composite player, “Joe,” who reflects the multitude of qualities and attributes that are most often present or exhibited by the adolescent males from the Elk Grove, California area who play competitive baseball on the various teams. The composite player, Joe, is 11.74 years old (as determined by the average of the ages of all of the youths who were surveyed.) He does not experience pre-competitive anxiety, as he is most often relaxed before game time; however, in spite of experiencing a general sense of calm that remains with him during a game, he does admit to some feelings of anxiousness, which can sometimes result in sweaty hands or a faster than usual heartbeat.
Joe is not concerned about competing or choking under pressure, as he possesses overall self-confidence and a confidence in his abilities that he will perform well and meet the challenge of the competition. Joe possesses coping strategies upon which he relies and which serve him well when he is under the pressures and stresses of competition. Specific coping strategies that he employs are those of blocking out distractions, continuing to play hard regardless of how the game is going, and complimenting his teammates in order to keep a positive attitude. A desire to play well, coupled with visualization of performing a particular play well, and receiving positive praise or other input from coaches, teammates, and others, are also of significant importance to Joe’s overall coping strategy implementation and confidence. Generally free from worry, which allows him to focus on the game, Joe believes that he is treated fairly by the coaching staff and is rewarded with equitable playtime for his amount of effort put forth.

Conclusions

At the onset of this study, the researchers had formulated several hypotheses about youth sports players, their stress and anxiety levels, coping strategies, and their confidence levels; as well as of beliefs and perceptions held by their parents or guardians. The researchers had anticipated that these hypotheses would be affirmed as a result of the study. After careful application of the youths’ questionnaires and measured efforts to conduct high-quality, thorough parental interviews, data was obtained and subsequently analyzed, yielding results, which the researchers then interpreted.
The researchers had asserted that youth sports participants possess higher levels of both stress and confidence when they play at a higher level of competition; thereby, those playing travel or tournament ball would likely report higher levels of both anxiety and confidence. This hypothesis was found to be substantiated. Results revealed that differences did exist in the degree of anxiety between levels of play or skill, and that the travel ball players exhibited more somatic anxiety symptoms and measured slightly higher in terms of reported confidence levels, than did those who play recreational ball. These results coincide with study findings presented by Ogden and Warneke (2010) indicating increased levels of stress associated with higher levels of competition, as the players strives to increase and improve their overall competitive abilities. Further, these results align with positive self-concept study findings, reported by Donaldson and Ronan (2006), which were discovered among individuals who were associated with greater degrees of sport participation.

A second study hypothesis formulated by the researchers was that of the belief that youth sports participants use effective coping strategies to cope with competitive stress. Having anticipated a desired outcome of identifying those particular coping strategies, the researchers discovered which strategies were most frequently used, and thereby deemed to be most effective in controlling stress. This hypothesis, as well, was found to be substantiated, as the data results revealed unexpected findings of three primary coping strategies used by all of the youths during a competition: that of blocking
out distractions; continuing to play hard regardless of the game situation; and complimenting a teammate so as to remain positive during the game.

These findings parallel study findings by Holt et al. (2005) indicating that, among adolescents, coping strategies that are found to be the most effective are ones that are positive in nature and have an optimistic focus. This parallel is further supported by the other coping strategies that were found to be used by the youths in our study, and which had positive overtones; such as thinking about winning, wanting to play well, only focusing on the positives, visualizing performing a play well before making it, and hearing positive praise from coaches or others. Additionally, our study findings are aligned with those presented by Fraser-Thomas and Côté (2009) which indicate that cognitive factors, such as resiliency and the abilities to relax, refocus, and control nerves, are protective factors that are associated with playing sports. This hypothesis is useful in providing information on the ways in which youth sports participants use coping strategies to effectively alleviate or deal with stress; and perhaps, can be useful in other areas of youth development.

The third study hypothesis formulated by the researchers asserted that the perceptions held by parents regarding the stress levels, confidence levels, and the use of coping strategies by the youth sports participants differ from actual levels of and use by the players. This hypothesis, like the others, was also proven to be true. The results indicating parental perceptions of confidence and anxieties, from competitive stress, in the youths revealed impressively close data numbers to those actually reported, and only
a slight difference between the parental perceptions of observed anxiety levels in youths prior to a game and the actual, reported levels experienced by the youths. Regardless, the overall closeness of the data results indicates an awareness and intuitiveness possessed by the parents, of these important variables that are exhibited and possessed by the youths.

Parental perceptions of the youth sports participants’ use of coping strategies and the actual, reported use by the youths, indicated statistically significant associations among almost all of the coping strategies. Additionally, despite what appeared to be a vast difference in the parental perceptions of a particular coping strategy (that of whether the child worries about what the coaches or others might say about his performance) versus the actual, reported use by the youths, Chi Square analysis revealed that a statistically significant association did exist between these data. These findings further support the researchers’ hypothesis and reinforce the finding of parental intuitiveness.

The fact that the study results revealed a strong congruence between parental perceptions and the youths’ reported levels of anxiety or stress, confidence, and coping strategies; the resultant strong association between the two (parental perceptions vs. youths’ self-reports) is of particular importance in light of the influence that Harwood et al. (2010) indicates is exerted by parents on the young athlete, due to the parental roles of support and facilitation. The keen insight that is possessed by the parents of the young players is mutually beneficial to both parent and child. Further, the void that exists in current literature, relative to parental perceptions of young athletes’ stress levels and coping strategies utilized, reinforces the importance of this study not only for the parent-
child relationship that exists on the sports field, but also for the larger relationships that exist between parents and young persons in the spaces beyond the field.

**Implications for Social Work**

The issues that were examined in this study and the resultant findings are of relevance and importance to social workers who work with youths in a variety of practice settings. These issues and findings may be of particular importance to school social workers, child welfare workers, or social work clinicians working directly with youths who are involved in athletics; or with other youths who stand to benefit from such involvement, such as at-risk youths. Social workers positioned to make a difference in terms of youth development within the community, or individual institutions, might be particularly interested in the issues and findings of this study, in terms of the opportunities that they may present for program development.

Social workers who work in school settings, whether public or private, would likely benefit from possessing knowledge and awareness of the findings presented in our study, which are critical to youths who participate in school sponsored or community based sports programs. Such social workers, therefore, may be better equipped to identify young persons who may be struggling with anxiety or stress, whether sport-related or not, and be better able to support the youth and his or her family. Further, in school environments in which sports programs are slated to be eliminated, so as to direct funding towards academics; drawing from this study, the argument can be made that youth sport participants possess effective coping strategies that allow them to effectively
deal with stressors, as well as possess high levels of self-confidence, both of which are important factors in positive youth development and reinforces the importance of maintaining athletic programs in schools.

Other potential social work implications include the fact that the information obtained from this study may be applied in agencies that serve the youth population, particularly at-risk youths; as well as may be useful to communities seeking to establish after-school programs that promote youth development. It is very feasible that such agencies and programs could utilize social workers, who might then partner with community recreation and youth sports programs, to assist in incorporating sports instruction and other skill-building activities into various aspects of their agency’s or program’s curricula. The goal of such programs being an emphasis on assisting at-risk youths and other identified youths in the development of particular coping strategies, so as to improve overall management of their stress and anxieties, while promoting positive attitudes and behaviors. Armed with the tenets of this study, the social worker practicing on the micro- and macro-levels can help to make the case that the physical element of sports participation provides for the overall well-being of the youth, not just physical health.

**Evaluation and Recommendations**

This study produced results that are both useful and noteworthy in terms of tangible findings. Such findings may prove to be beneficial to not only youth sports participants themselves, but also to their parents and guardians, coaches, individuals who
are responsible for youth development programs, and a myriad of others. The researchers found the youths to be enthusiastic participants in the survey process and exercised careful consideration in completing the 42 item questionnaire. The researchers also found that the parents who were interviewed were eager to discuss thoughts and perceptions that they held about their child’s participation in baseball and that most parents had considerable to share. The parents’ candidness and willingness to participate in this interview process, coupled with the cooperation of the youths, strengthened the integrity of this study. It is hoped that the parents will continue to spur their child’s communication with them, as they continue to support their child’s participation in the sport.

**Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research**

No study is without its limitations, and our study is no exception. The population for our study was adolescent male baseball players, ages 11-14 years old, selected solely from the Elk Grove, California area Hard 90 Baseball Academy and Laguna Youth Baseball-Cal Ripkin League. While our data results and findings are believed to be useful to the players and those associated with these teams, a limitation exists in the ability of this study to be generalized to larger populations.

Further, in analyzing and reporting on the significant confidence levels that were discovered to be possessed by the youths who were surveyed, it is important to note that herein lies a limitation of this aspect of the study; which is that of the inability of this study to determine if the reported confidence comes from playing sports or if the players,
who already are confident, are drawn to the game. An additional limitation is that of the inability of this study to determine whether this confidence is carried over to other areas of the players’ lives. These unknowns could be useful in promoting further beneficial research.

Additionally, in regards to the researchers’ efforts to better understand the coping strategies utilized by the young ball players, the researchers did not question the youths as to the practice of using any rituals (e.g., tapping or swinging the bat, etc.) that they may also employ during play. Rituals that ball players and other athletes often employ may be considered coping strategies in and of themselves. Not asking such questions may be a possible limitation of our study and could be an area of future research.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Coach’s Consent

Dear Coach ______________,

We are graduate social work students at California State University, Sacramento and are asking for your cooperation in a research project by Maureen Forbes and Tiffany Pulsipher. Our study aims to identify confidence levels and coping strategies used by youth sports participants. The study will also look into parental perceptions of confidence levels and perceived effectiveness of coping strategies in youth sports participants.

The data and information that we obtain will be beneficial in helping to build healthy and supportive youth sports programs and may also assist in community development of agencies and programs that promote youth development. Additionally, from a community organizing perspective, the information gained may be helpful in making sure these protective factors are monitored and magnified.

The population to be studied is male youth baseball players between the ages of 11-14 years and their parents or guardians. The study will consist of a survey to be completed by the youth sports participant and an interview of the parent or guardian. Participation in this research study is entirely voluntary, it is considered to have minimal risk of discomfort because the nature of the questions pertains to confidence and stress levels experienced in relation to competition. All information collected is confidential and will not be shared with anyone not directly related to the study.

This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Francis Yuen, professor in the division of social work at CSUS. He can be reached at (916) 278-7182, should you have any questions.

Thank you for your support of this research study and we wish you luck with your season.

___________________________________________ / _____________
Coach’s Signature                                Date

___________________________________________ / _____________
Researcher’s Signature                                Date

___________________________________________ / _____________
Researcher’s Signature                                Date
APPENDIX B

Parental Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant:

You and your child are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by Maureen Forbes and Tiffany Pulsipher, graduate social work students at California State University Sacramento (CSUS). This study aims to identify the level of social confidence and coping strategies utilized youth sports participants. This study will also look into parental perception of confidence levels and perceived effectiveness of coping strategies in youth sports participants. The population to be studied is male youth baseball players between the ages of 11-14 years of age and their parents or guardians. The study will consist of a survey to be completed by the youth sports participant and an interview of the parent or guardian.

The objective of this study is to better understand confidence levels associated with competitive sports participation and coping strategies used. This information will be beneficial to helping build healthy and supportive youth sports programs and can assist in community development of agencies and programs that promote youth development.

There is minimal risk if you decide to participate in this research study, and there is no cost for participating. This study is considered to have minimal risk of any discomfort because the nature of the questions are pertaining to confidence and stress levels experienced with relation to competition. All information collected will be kept confidential and not shared with anyone not directly related to the study. You may decide to stop at any time if any discomfort is experienced during your participation. If you experience any distress at any time after completing the survey or interview, please contact Sacramento County Mental Health Services at (916) 875-1055.

I understand that my child’s and my participation in this research is entirely voluntary. My child will be given a separate assent form and will have the option to accept or decline participation as well. I may decline to participate in any part of the study now, or at any time during the completion of the survey or interview. Otherwise, my child’s survey is submitted anonymously without any personal identifier. A copy of the questionnaire my child will be completing will be available upon request.

I understand that I will not receive compensation for participation in this study.

If you chose to participate, please return the survey and consent form using the separate self-addressed stamped envelopes provided. Participation in this study should take approximately 10-15 minutes of your time. You are not required to answer questions that make you feel uncomfortable. The study is to be completed by May 2012.
All surveys will be destroyed at the conclusion of this research study. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about completing the survey, being interviewed, or about being in this study you may contact us at [redacted] or at [redacted].

This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Francis Yuen, professor, in the division of social work at CSUS. He can be reached at [redacted].

___________________________________________ / _____________
Participant Signature/Name Date

___________________________________________ / _____________
Child’s Name Date
APPENDIX C

Informed Assent Form

Dear Sports Participant,

Our names are Maureen Forbes and Tiffany Pulsipher and we are college students at California State University, Sacramento. We are trying to learn about how participating in youth sports can create confidence, stress, or worry, and how you deal with this confidence, stress, or worry. This information can help give coaches, parents, and others working with youth a better understanding about how to help and teach children and teens to work through tough situations. If you would like, you can be in our study.

If you decide you want to be in our study, you will be asked to complete a form that will ask you some simple questions about both how you experience stress and how you deal with your stress while competing in a sport. We will also be asking questions about your confidence or belief in yourself. Participation in this study should take about 10-15 minutes of your time. The study is to be completed in May 2012.

Answering some of these questions may make you feel some discomfort because we will be asking about what happens during stressful situations. If you do feel uncomfortable, you may stop answering the questions or skip any question at any time.

Other people will not know if you are in our study. We will put things we learn about you together with things we learn about other sports participant, so no one can tell what things came from you. When we tell other people about our research, we will not use your name, so no one can tell whom we are talking about.

Your parents or guardian have to say it’s OK for you to be in the study. After they decide, you get to choose if you want to do it too. If you don’t want to be in the study, no one will be mad at you. If you want to be in the study now and change your mind later, that’s OK. You can stop at any time.

Reseacher Pulsipher’s telephone number is [redacted] You can call if you have questions about the study or if you decide you don’t want to be in the study any more.

This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Francis Yuen, professor, in the division of social work at CSUS. He can be reached at [redacted]

We will give you a copy of this form in case you want to ask questions later.
Agreement

I have decided to be in the study even though I know that I don’t have to do it. Maureen Forbes and Tiffany Pulsipher have answered all my questions.

______________________________  ______________________
Signature of Study Participant    Date

______________________________  ______________________
Signature of Researcher           Date
APPENDIX D

Youth Self-Assessment of Social Confidence, Competitive Stress, and Coping Strategies Questionnaire

Below are some statements about how individuals may feel when competing in a sports event and coping strategies used. Please read each statement and circle whether you have that experience “never”, “hardly ever”, “sometimes”, or “often. These questions should be answered describing how you are feeling either just before, or during a heavily competitive game.

Age: ___________  
Circle One: Male  Female
Circle One:  Travel Player  Recreational Player

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Hardly Ever</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) I worry that I might not be able to focus (on the game).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) When I play sports, I can block out distractions and focus my attention.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) During competition I feel comfortable.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Before I compete I get an upset feeling in my stomach.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) I have confidence that I will play well.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) During a competition my hands are sweaty.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) When I am playing, I say or repeat positive things to myself, so that I perform better.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) I worry about choking under pressure.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) I listen to music before a game to help calm me down before playing.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) During competition I am confident in my ability.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11) Thinking about winning helps me to play better.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Hardly Ever</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12) Before I compete I feel uneasy.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13) If I feel my body getting tense, I tell myself to relax so I can calm down.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14) When I compete I worry about not performing well.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15) I worry about losing.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16) I hum or sing to myself when I am playing.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17) I worry that others will be disappointed with my performance.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18) Before a competition I find it hard to sit still.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19) If a coach criticizes me, I try not to let it negatively affect my playing.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20) During a competition I feel calm.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21) I am worried about competing.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22) No matter how the game is going, I continue to play my best.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23) Before a competition I am confident about performing well.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24) When I compete I worry about making mistakes.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25) Wanting to play well makes me try harder.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26) Before I compete I feel nervous.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27) I worry that I may not do as well in a competition as I could.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28) I only focus on the positive; not the negative, when playing.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29) During a competition I am confident I can meet the challenge.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30) During a competition my heart beats faster than usual.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I do not worry about what others might say or think about my performance, which allows me to play better.</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Hardly Ever</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>During a competition I feel anxious.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am worried about meeting my athletic goals.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before making a play, I visualize performing it well.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>During competition I feel self-confident.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I compliment a teammate to keep myself positive during the game.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before I compete I feel relaxed.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>During competition my body feels tense.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hearing praise from a coach or others is more helpful to me than something negative that is said.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before I compete I feel worried.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I feel like the coaches treat me fairly.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The effort and work I put out is rewarded fairly with play time.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

Parent/Guardian Perception of Youth Social Confidence, Competitive Stress, and Coping Strategies - Interview Guide

1) Do you observe your child’s anxiety levels to increase prior to a game?
   Yes  No
   - If yes, what types of things to you notice?

2) What kinds of feelings and emotions do you believe that your child experiences during a game?

3) What kinds of feelings and emotions do you believe your child experiences after a game?

4) Does your child communicate with you about excitement or disappointment associated with the game?

5) Does your child feel anxious when competing?

6) Does your child compare his capabilities to other player’s?

7) Does your child get physical symptoms of stress before or during a game?

8) Does your child worry about what coaches or others say about his performance?

9) Does you child think he is capable of competing successfully?

10) Is winning important to your child?
11) Does your child feel pressure when competing?  Yes  No
   - If yes, does this pressure overwhelm him?
   - How does he deal with this pressure?
12) From the following checklist, please indicate which strategies you believe your child uses before, during, or after a game to help manage stress: (please check all that apply)

- Blocking out distractions
- Having self-confidence
- Positive self-talk
- Listening to music
- Visualizing positive outcomes (playing well or winning)
- Relaxation (breathing techniques, meditation, etc.)
- Rituals (i.e. doing the same thing before each game)
- Applying coach feedback positively (not taking it personally)
- Continuing to play hard regardless of game situation
- Desire to play well
- Not being distracted by criticism of others
- Keeping positive team spirit

12) Does your child play competitive tournament ball?  Yes  No
- If no, please rank the top three of the following reasons why you choose not to participate in tournament ball in order of significance:

- Child does not want to play
- Does not fit with family schedule/Time commitment is too great
- Cost is prohibitive
- Lack of knowledge about available teams, structure and process involved in getting child on team
- Skill level
- Other (please indicate) __________________________

- If yes, please rank the top three of the following factors that influenced your decision to play tournament ball:

- Higher competition level
Cost was reasonable for level of play
More opportunity to play
Opportunity to travel
Better instruction
Preparation for future competition levels
Other (please indicate)
REFERENCES


