

Triad Relationships and the Development of Junior Tennis Players

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Bachelor of Exercise Science and Human Movement

Bachelor of Applied Science (Honours)

Thesis submitted for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Applied Science

Victoria University, Australia

March 2022

Abstract

Introduction: Sport is a domain that can promote physical, psychological, social, and cognitive development in children. There are three main factors that can influence children's developmental outcomes: distal ecological system (e.g., community, culture, policy), sport program design (e.g., personal and social life skill building activities), and positive youth development climate created by children's relationships with peers (e.g., teammates), adults (e.g., coaching staff), and parents. A great number of studies have investigated the influences and processes of key relationships within youth sport. However, previous studies have usually investigated those relationships in dyads (e.g., coach-athlete relationship), and not in triads (e.g., athlete-coach-parent). To further our understanding of interpersonal relationships in youth sport and their impact on youth athlete development the key relationships should be investigated as triads. This approach would provide a holistic understanding of the relationships associated in youth sport.

Research question and aim: This study was conducted based on research question: what is the nature of the athlete-parent-coach triad relationship in junior tennis? Accordingly, the aim of this study was to identify the themes and commonalities that characterise the nature of the triad relationship in junior tennis.

Methodology: The current study employed a qualitative methodology and methods to collect and analyse the data. Interpretive Description was selected as the methodological orientation in designing the study, and the collection and analysis of data. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data. Six competitive junior tennis players aged between 12-15, six parents, and seven coaches were invited to participate in the interview. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was employed to generate the common themes across interview data.

Results: Three overarching themes were developed: communication, sacrifice, and boundaries, as well as, six themes specific to dyad relationships: fun, mentorship, creating a team, interactions at tournaments, tennis tips from the parent, and adjusting the involvement were identified.

Conclusion: It appeared that maintaining open communication channels between each member of the triad is an important nature of the athlete-parent-coach triad relationship. Especially, non-tennis related coach-

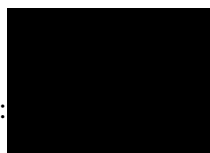
athlete communication subjects (e.g., hobbies) were identified to contribute in creating a fun climate within the coach-athlete relationship. Coaches and parents were found to establish boundaries between members of the triad to maintain appropriate closeness between the members. However, there was a gap in perceived closeness between the coach and athlete. Coaches appeared to maintain professional relationship with their players while players appeared to perceive their coach as a mentor. Coaches and parents were identified to make time and financial sacrifices in supporting the junior tennis player. The findings of current study can be included when educating sport coaches and parents regarding how to better manage relationships in youth sport.

Student Declaration

I, Raku Shimokawa, declare that the Master of Research thesis entitled *Triad Relationships and the Development of Junior Tennis Players* is no more than 50,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

I have conducted my research in alignment with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and Victoria University's Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedures. All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (HRE20-099).

Signature:



Date 18/02/2022

Acknowledgement

I began working on this study back in August 2019. A lot has changed since then, but after 5 semesters and 260 days in lockdown, I have finally completed this thesis. The past two years were certainly not easy. There were numerous ups and downs. However, I was able to take it one day at a time thanks to those who supported me throughout this journey.

Our first child Mila entered the world on 30th May 2021. I cannot be more grateful to have Mila and my wife Yumei by my side progressing through life as a family. This thesis is dedicated to you two. Yumei, thank you for your unconditional support. Because of you, I was able to push myself a little harder each day to complete this work. Love you always.

James, Paul, and Andrew. I feel like thanking you is not enough to show my appreciation for mentoring me through what turned out to be very challenging three years. Your knowledge and generosity were the major reason why I could complete this thesis. I was only able to see each of you in a small square on my laptop screen for the most part of the past two years. So, I'm really looking forward to freely meeting you in person again.

Our family back in Japan. I miss all of you very much. I cannot wait to fly to Japan and reunite as a family. Little Mila would be over the moon to meet you all for the first time! Anyhow, thank you for your support. As always, you encouraged me to go the extra mile. It was not possible for me to complete this thesis without your encouragement and support. Arigato.

I would also like to thank Victoria University and the Australian government for financially supporting my academic endeavor through the RTP stipend scholarship. The scholarship also helped us to stay in Australia in the midst of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. Thank you very much for the support.

Finally, I would like to thank all the junior tennis players, parents, and coaches who participated in this study. Your stories are the main ingredient of this thesis. So, thank you so much for participating and sharing your stories.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Sport is a popular extracurricular activity among Australian children. 87% of children aged between 9 to 11 participate in at least one organised extracurricular physical activity and/or sport program per week. Although the participation rate tends to decline as children enter their adolescence years (14-17 years old), 77% of children between 12 to 14 years old are still participating in at least one sport each week (Sport Australia, 2017). Organised youth sport is therefore one of the most popular extracurricular activities among Australian children.

Sport's potential to promote positive development in children may be a major contributor for the current popularity of extracurricular sport programs among Australian children (Weiss, 2016). Sport as a domain has been acknowledged by researchers to provide opportunities for children to achieve positive developmental outcomes such as learning of physical competencies, building confidence, developing character, and learning life skills (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Weiss, 2016). The notion that sports can promote positive development in children was coined Positive Youth Development (PYD) through sport and conceptualised within the discipline of sport psychology (Holt, 2016). According to the grounded theory of PYD through sport (Holt et al., 2017), children's overall sporting experience impacts their development.

One of important factors that influences children's overall sporting experience is their relationships with other members of the youth sport program (Holt et al., 2017). Key members of an organised youth sport program usually include youth athletes, parents, and coaching staff (Smoll et al., 2011). Numerous studies have been conducted to understand the nature and processes involved in the relationships between these key members (Harwood et al., 2019; Jowett, 2017; Knight et al., 2017; Lauer et al., 2010a; Wall et al., 2019; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). For example, through a series of studies on the coach-athlete relationship, the 3+1Cs model was developed (see Jowett, 2017 for review). This model features four major components; closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation. These components form the basis of the coach-athlete relationship quality. The model was further tested and applied in a study quantifying the coach-athlete relationship quality and the strategies to maintain the relationship quality.

Similarly, the athlete-parent relationship has been investigated through the lens of parental involvement and support from the last four decades has conceptualised this relationship as a crucial part of athlete development (Hellstedt, 1987; Knight et al., 2017). The coach-parent relationship has also been investigated however this area of study is still new and further conceptualisation is required (Wall et al., 2019). An overarching suggestion across the previous studies is the quality of those relationships is a major factor which impacts children's overall sporting experience and development (Holt et al., 2017).

Although previous studies have identified the relationships within youth sport as a key factor in shaping children's experience and development, coaches and parents are often unaware of the significant impact that can be caused by their relationship with each other and children. Breakdown of relationships between the child, parent, and coach could result in conflicts, separation, and although it is rare, abuses and violent incidents (Smoll et al., 2011). These negative outcomes would cause deleterious effects on the child's sporting experiences which may lead to an early drop out from the sport, burnout, and depression/anxiety (Lauer et al., 2010a). Consequently, coaches and parents should be equipped with information regarding the nature of relationships between the child, parent, and coach. Such information would help coaches and parents in prioritising the maintenance of positive relationships and may promote not only the children, but the coach and parent's experiences involving in youth sport.

A major limitation of previous studies is that they commonly investigated the key relationships in dyads. This is despite the notion that the interpersonal relationships within a youth sport program usually includes more than two members (Smoll et al., 2011). Key members of an organised youth sport program generally include youth athletes, parents, and coaches, and thus, researchers should investigate the relationships between all the key members (Hellstedt, 1987). Such an approach can help provide a more holistic understanding of the social systems within organised youth sport programs.

1.1. Research Question and Aims of the Study

This thesis aims to bridge the gap by investigating the nature of athlete-parent-coach triad relationships in Australian junior tennis. This study was conducted based on the following research

question: what is the nature of the athlete-parent-coach triad relationship in junior tennis? Accordingly, the aims of this thesis are to identify common themes across triad relationships that characterise the nature of the relationships in junior tennis and to provide practical implications of the identified themes for coaches and parents. Junior tennis was selected as the context for this investigation, because tennis is an individual sport with a tendency to have a great amount of parental involvement (Knight et al., 2010). Furthermore, we speculated that an individual sport like tennis may features unique processes within the coach-athlete and coach-parent relationships compared to team sports. Therefore, the context of junior tennis was deemed appropriate for this investigation.

This thesis will explore the nature of the triad relationship in junior tennis in the following order; Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature to highlight the gap in the current knowledge and explain the rationales behind this investigation. Methodology of the study will be explained in Chapter 3. Subsequently, results of the study are reported in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, findings of this study will be discussed in association with the current literature. Future study directions, as well as, the limitations of the current investigation will also be explained in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter aims to explain why interpersonal relationships are an important part of youth sport that influences children's overall sport experience and development, and to highlight the gaps in the current literature. This literature review comprises of three main parts. The first section will review the literature related to PYD through sport framework and how the interpersonal relationships within youth sport contributes to the positive development of children. The second part will review the literature related to key relationships within youth sport such as; athlete-parent, coach-athlete and coach-parent relationships. The final part of the chapter will summarise key concepts related to this investigation.

2.1. Positive Youth Development Through Sport

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is a concept which was initiated as a part of positive psychology movement (Holt, 2016). Positive psychology focuses on empowering and developing an individual's strengths as opposed to "fixing" individual's deficiencies (deficit-reduction perspective) (Snyder & Lopez, 2005). Deficit-reduction perspective has historically been a popular approach among psychologists when working with children. However, such approach's ability to foster children's developmental potential was questioned by researchers and psychologists (Damon, 2004). It was argued that focusing on "fixing" children's deficits may not be an appropriate approach to promote the positive development in children. Rather, psychologists should focus on promoting children's strengths in guiding their overall development. Consequently, the PYD approach was introduced as an alternative to the deficit-reduction perspective aiming to create opportunities for children to foster their developmental potential, and ultimately, to help them to develop into functional members of society (Damon, 2004).

Sport as a domain has been suggested by researchers to provide opportunities for children to achieve positive development. Positive development of a child includes; physical, psychological, social, and cognitive growth, as well as, building character and learning life skills (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). Although some of these PYD outcomes can occur as a consequence of sport participation alone, fostering

the PYD outcomes likely to require strategic implementation of pedagogical activities to specifically target such outcomes (Holt et al., 2017). Previous studies agree with this notion that the positive outcomes are, in fact, not automatic consequences of sport participation (Bruner et al., 2021; Holt et al., 2017; Weiss, 2016; Whitley et al., 2019). For example, a recent systematic review and meta-analysis of the previous PYD studies in youth sport concluded that sport-based PYD interventions are effective in promoting PYD outcomes in children (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). Thus, developmental opportunities should be designed and implemented as an intervention by the coaches and parents. In order to effectively deliver the PYD related activities in a youth sport program, coaches and parents should work as a team to set an appropriate learning climate (environment) for children (Holt et al., 2017). Moreover, positive relationship between the athlete, parent, and coach may also contribute in establishing a positive developmental climate (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005).

A recent study reviewed and synthesised the previous qualitative PYD studies in sport and developed a grounded theory of PYD through sport (Holt et al., 2017). The model explained the implicit and explicit processes involved in PYD through organised youth sport programs. Four main elements of PYD through sport were identified in the model such as; PYD outcomes, distal ecological system, life skill program focus, and PYD climate. Subsequent sections will further explain the processes of the PYD through sport and how interpersonal relationships within youth sport affect the development of children based on the grounded theory of PYD through sport (Holt et al., 2017).

2.1.1. PYD outcomes

There are several positive developmental outcomes a child can achieve through organised youth sport programs including development in personal, social, and physical domains (Holt et al., 2017). These outcomes can help prepare the child in becoming a functional member of larger society (Damon, 2004). Development related to the personal domain features the greatest number of developmental outcomes including; positive self-perceptions, academic benefits, independence and personal responsibilities, positive attitude, perseverance and working hard, stress management, problem solving skills, good life decisions,

respect, and goal setting (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Goudas & Giannoudis, 2010; Olushola et al., 2013). These outcomes are largely related to character building and psychological growth of children (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Developmental outcomes related to the social domain includes developing team work, leadership, and communication skills (e.g., Camiré et al., 2009; Gould et al., 2013; Harwood, 2008). Such outcomes are closely associated with a child's interpersonal relationship and social interactions with peers and adults of the sport program (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009). Physical domain of development features learning fundamental movement skills and knowledge to maintain a healthy active living (Fuller et al., 2013; Holt et al., 2013). PYD outcomes can be learnt and developed through implicit and explicit processes such as Bioecological systems, life skill program focus, and PYD climate (Holt et al., 2017).

2.1.2. Bioecological Systems Theory

Development of a child is influenced by the context and environment in which he/she is located (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The notion that a child's development is the result of their surrounding environment was first introduced in Bioecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). This theory views a child's development as a lasting change that occurs from the child's perspectives and the way they deal with the environment they are located in (Duerden & Witt, 2010). The environment is the product of complex relationships (systems) between the child and members of the environment. There are four systems in the bioecological systems theory; microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Microsystem includes a child's relationships with immediate members of the environment and context the child is located including immediate family members (e.g., father, mother, brother, and sister), and friends from school and sport program. Mesosystem refers to connections between the child's microsystem structure. For example, relationship between the parent and coach is a part of mesosystem. Exosystem explains the social environment which the child is not directly involved. For instance, parents' work place and siblings' school are considered as a part of the exosystem. Macrosystem is the most distal system within the Bioecological Systems Theory (distal ecological system). This system includes geographical location of the sport program, cultural background of the program participants

(children and adults), and the participants' beliefs and values (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Furthermore, individual factors such as gender, ethnicity, birth month and socio-economic status of the participants are also included in the distal ecological system (Ettetal & Mahoney, 2017). A child's development is influenced by the complex interactions between four bioecological systems (Holt et al., 2017).

Bioecological systems theory explains a child's development with a holistic view by considering distal environment (e.g., society, culture, beliefs) to the immediate environment created by a child's relationship with the parent and coach (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Although it may be difficult, such a holistic view could partially be applied to the studies investigating interpersonal relationships in organised youth sport programs. For example, investigating relationships in triads could provide a more holistic understanding of the processes involved in the relationship compared to investigating relationships in dyads (Harwood et al., 2019). Investigating relationships in triads may allow researchers to consider micro and meso systems of participants. This can potentially result in gaining more "real life" knowledge of relationships within a context (e.g., youth sport) which usually includes more than two members.

2.1.3. Life skill activities

Learning life skills through sport is an important PYD outcome (Holt et al., 2017). Life skills refer to the personal assets which can be learnt and/or refined and help an individual to succeed in different life situations (Martin & Camiré, 2020). For example, leadership is a life skill that can be learnt in sporting situations while it can be transferred to other life situations such as at work and school. In order for a child to learn life skills through sport, youth sport programs are required to implement implicit and explicit activities to optimise the child's learning. There are two types of life skill focused activities which can be implemented in a sport program; skill building activities and transfer activities (Holt et al., 2017). Skill building activities include; team building activities, volunteer work, mentoring, emphasising academic performance, and use of key words/phrases etc (e.g., Brown & Fry, 2011; Camiré et al., 2013; Flett et al., 2013; Harrist & Witt, 2012; Olushola et al., 2013). These activities use the pedagogical activities designed to explicitly teach life skills. Volunteer work, for instance can be strategically included in a youth sport

program where children participate in volunteer activities which promote their social skills and the sense of being functioning members of larger community and society (Damon, 2004). Transfer activities, on the other hand, aim to promote the transfer of psychological and social skills learnt through sport to other life situations. The life skill transfer from sporting situations to the situations outside of sport can occur without explicit pedagogical strategies (Holt et al., 2017). Transfer activities can be incorporated into a sport program by coaches taking advantage of in-the-moment situations to emphasise the application and importance of life skills to children (Goudas & Giannoudis, 2010). Since transfer activities rely on the implicit learning and input from the coach, effectiveness of the transfer activities can be impacted by the quality of the relationship between the coach and child (Jowett, 2017). Previous studies suggested an effective coach-athlete partnership likely to motivate, satisfy, comfort, and support the athlete towards their development (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Davis et al., 2019; Martin & Camiré, 2020). Therefore, a coach-athlete dyad with a high-quality relationship may be more likely to be effective in delivering life skill transfer activities than a coach-athlete relationship in conflicts (Jowett, 2017).

2.1.4. Positive youth development climate

Children's immediate relationships within a youth sport program including coach-athlete, coach-parent, and athlete-parent relationships contribute in creating the PYD climate (Holt et al., 2017). The PYD climate is contextual features of social environment within a youth sport program. The climate is created from children's relationships with and between peers (e.g., teammates, friends), adults (e.g., coaches, leaders, and teachers), and parents (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Jowett, 2017; Knight & Holt, 2014). Each relationship affects children's development differently. For instance, a positive child-peer relationship has been identified to promote the child's sense of belonging to a wider community and leadership (Olushola et al., 2013). Whilst positive relationships with adults seem to allow the child to interact and communicate without the adults being the "authority figures", contributing in creating a safe environment for the child to foster developmental potential (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Indeed, quality coach-athlete relationships were identified to promote athlete satisfaction towards the relationship, and in turn an overall

sporting experience of the athlete can be positively affected (Davis & Jowett, 2010; Jowett, 2017; Jowett & Poczwadowski, 2007; Rhind & Jowett, 2012). Another important feature of the PYD climate is children's relationship with parents, as well as the way parents interact with their children within the sporting endeavours of the children (Holt et al., 2017). Parents play an important role in promoting PYD outcomes of the children, as they are usually the closest members within the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Knight et al., 2017). For example, positive emotional climate (e.g., parent's empathy towards their child's experiences) created by parents was identified to help optimise the way parents involve in their children's sport, and hence, children's sporting experience can be impacted by the climate created by parents (Knight & Holt, 2014). Together, children's immediate relationships within a sport program influence each other and play a major role in setting the PYD climate (Holt et al., 2017).

Although previous studies have investigated how the relationship quality impacts a child's PYD outcomes and experiences, these studies commonly investigated the relationships in dyads. As the Bioecological systems theory explains, immediate (microsystem) and more distant (mesosystem) relationships are interrelatedly influencing the development of children (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Thus, to gain more holistic understanding of the processes and nature associated with key relationships within youth sport should be investigated as triads (Harwood et al., 2019).

2.2. Interpersonal Relationships in Youth Sport

Organised youth sports provide opportunities for children to socialise and establish life-long interpersonal relationships with peers and adults within a sport program. Some of important relationships within a youth sport program include; coach-athlete, coach-parent, and athlete-parent relationships (Jowett, 2017; Knight et al., 2017; Wall et al., 2019). Previous youth sport related studies have identified these relationships play a role in shaping a child's overall sport experiences, and ultimately development of the child (e.g., Holt et al., 2017; Jowett, 2017; Knight et al., 2017; Preston et al., 2020; Rouquette et al., 2020). Subsequent sections of the review aim to explain the processes of these relationships and how they influence children's sport experience and development.

2.2.1. Parental involvement

Parents play a variety of roles to support their child's sporting journey and development (Knight et al., 2017). Previous relationship related studies suggest the type and quality of parental support can have a significant influence on children's sport participation, experience, and overall development (Harwood et al., 2019). Family members' influences on children's sport experience and development was first highlighted in a study investigated the perceptions of Canadian elite athletes and their family members (Côté, 1999). The study identified that how family members involved in children's sport play an important part in shaping the athlete experience and the way they involved in sport changed as the athlete progresses in their sporting journey. This study created the foundation for the subsequent studies investigating the youth athletes' immediate relationships and their impact on athlete experience and development. Following the initial work (Côté, 1999), athletes' relationships were further investigated and conceptualised. One of subsequent studies interviewed junior tennis players, parents, and coaches and introduced six categories of parental support and influence (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). The categories include; emotional support, tangible support, informational support, sacrifices, pressure, and relationships with coaches (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Emotional support relates to the comfort and support from the parent during stressful times. Such support from the parent has been suggested to contribute in producing an understanding emotional climate (environment) promoting children's positive sport experience (Knight & Holt, 2014). Tangible support includes financial and transportation support such as paying for coaching programs and driving to and from practice sessions and competitions (Burgess, 2015). Informational support relates to providing technical and tactical information to the athlete. Although informational support should mainly be provided by the coach, it is common for parents to occasionally provide the informational support to children (Knight et al., 2010). Sacrifices explain the sacrifices made by parents to support their child's on-going sport participation and athletic development (Young & Pearce, 2011). For example, parents often sacrifice weekends and holidays to drive children to practice sessions and competitions (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Whilst parents provide support for their child, they can also become a source of pressure (Knight et al., 2010). Parents' over-involving behaviours (e.g., excessive informational support), for instance, have been

identified as a potential source of pressure for children (Hellstedt, 1987; Lauer et al., 2010b; Lisinskiene et al., 2019). A child may often perceive parental involvement as a source of stress when parents overstep boundaries and/or place unrealistic performance related expectations on the child (Knight et al., 2017). Parents' relationship with the coach can also impact the overall sporting experience and development of children. A recent study conducted in the junior hockey context supported this notion and reported the junior hockey players' PYD outcomes and objective performance measures (e.g., number of goals and assists) were negatively impacted when the coach and parent's perceptions regarding player performance were conflicted (Preston et al., 2020). These categories highlight the roles and support sport parents play and provide, and how these may affect overall sporting experiences and development of children (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Current parental involvement literature suggests appropriate amounts and type of parental support is required to make positive influences on sporting experiences of children (Knight et al., 2017). Conversely, experience of a child may be negatively impacted when parents over-involve in their children's sport (e.g., providing excessive informational support) and/or places unrealistic expectations on the sporting performance of children (Lauer et al., 2010a). Studies have suggested that a moderate amount of parental involvement is the most appropriate in promoting positive experiences in children. Parents' moderate involvement includes skills and behaviours such as; emotional intelligence (e.g., understanding children's feelings), encouraging and respecting children's autonomy, and keeping sport in perspective (Knight & Holt, 2014). Therefore, the amount and type of parental involvement in children's sport play a key role in shaping the sporting experience of children, and in turn, their development (Knight et al., 2010).

Parents' involvement in youth sport and their impact on children's sport experience and development have been researched for over three decades (Côté, 1999; Harwood et al., 2019; Hellstedt, 1987; Knight & Holt, 2014; Knight et al., 2010; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Many of the studies have focused on investigating the specific behaviours of sport-parents and their influences on their children (See Harwood et al., 2019 for review). Those studies typically suggested that over-involving behaviours of parents such as use of abusive languages towards child's opponent, arguing with the competition officials, providing excessive informational support, and excess focus on competition outcomes can contribute to

negative outcomes in children including burnout, depression, and early drop out from the sport (Hellstedt, 1987; Knight et al., 2010; Lauer et al., 2010a). In contrast, moderately involved parents have been suggested to promote positive sport experience in children (Hellstedt, 1987). Behaviours of moderately involved parents include; respecting children's autonomy, maintaining open communication, share goals with children, and keeping sport in perspective (Knight & Holt, 2014; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Parents can also be under-involved in children's sports. Under-involving parents often display minimal interest to their children's sport, and hence, the children may not receive appropriate parental (Hellstedt, 1987). Consequently, under-involvement of parents was suggested to potentially deteriorating to children's sport experiences (Lauer et al., 2010a). Together, previous studies investigated the parental involvement in youth sport generally suggest that over and under involving parents can negatively impact overall sport experience of children, while moderate involvement has the potential to promote positive experience (Hellstedt, 1987; Knight et al., 2017; Lauer et al., 2010a).

However, conceptualising the parental involvement by its amount (e.g., moderate-involvement = positive, and over and under involvement = negative) may not be an optimal approach in encouraging and empowering parents to actively involved in children's sporting journey (Knight & Holt, 2014). This is because the parental behaviour that is generally considered as over-involving (by researchers and coaches) may not be perceived by children as a negative experience (Knight et al., 2010). Previous studies investigated children's perceptions toward parental behaviours suggested the children's perception does not always align with the current notion of over-involving behaviours contribute to negative experience of children (Hellstedt, 1987). For example, a survey conducted on 226 families in the US identified that parents perceive their conflicts with their child as both pressurising and supportive suggesting that the child could also perceive the conflicts with their parents as supportive parental behaviour (Dorsch et al., 2016). Such finding highlights the gap between what is a "supposedly" a negative parental behaviour (e.g., over-involving behaviours) and how the behaviour is actually perceived by children. Therefore, quantifying the parental behaviour could be problematic in understanding the impact of the behaviour on children's sport experience.

One of factors that may influence children's perception towards parental behaviours is the relationship quality between them (Preston et al., 2020). That is, positive relationship may contribute children to perceive parental involvement as positive regardless of the amount of the involvement. For instance, quality coach-athlete relationship has been shown to associate with the athlete's positive sport participation satisfaction (Davis et al., 2019), while poor relationship quality was found to associate with negative outcomes such as interpersonal conflicts with the coach (Wachsmuth et al., 2018). Same may apply between athlete and parent. Athlete-parent relationship quality could also influence the athlete's perception towards the way their parents involve in sport. However, the nature and influences of the athlete-parent relationship currently unclear and require further conceptualisation (Rouquette et al., 2020).

2.2.2. Athlete-parent relationship

Influences that the parental involvement has on the athlete outcome have been investigated through a series of sport psychology studies (See Harwood et al., 2019; Knight et al., 2017; Rouquette et al., 2020 for review). However, how the athlete-parent relationship impacts the athlete experience and development is currently unclear (Rouquette et al., 2020). This is despite researchers suggesting the importance of athlete-parent relationship quality in constructing positive emotional and PYD climates (Holt et al., 2017; Knight & Holt, 2014; Knight et al., 2017). Consequently, a consensus definition for the athlete-parent relationship is yet to be developed. A recent publication by Rouquette et al. (2020) was the first publication to propose a definition based on the actor-partner interdependence model (Cook & Kenny, 2005). It defined the athlete-parent relationship as "an interdependent dyadic relationship that integrates the influences of the athlete, the influences of the parent, and the unique interactions that are created between them" (Rouquette et al., 2020). According to this definition, athlete-parent relationship quality depends on how an athlete and parent influences each other through their behaviours, perceptions, and interactions. Previous studies on the athlete-parent relationship have commonly investigated the relationship through the lens of parental involvement and support, examining specific behaviours of the parent in association with the perceptions and experiences of the athlete (Harwood et al., 2019; Knight et al., 2017). Since the main focus of the

previous studies have been parental behaviours and their impact on children's experience, further conceptualisation is required to understand the nature of athlete-parent relationships and its potential influences on the athlete outcomes. Such studies may consider including coaches' perceptions on the athlete-parent relationship as their view could help in gaining a more holistic view on the relationship between athletes and parents (Harwood et al., 2019).

Investigating the athlete-parent relationship with triangulation may help further unpack the nature of the athlete-parent relationship. Triangulation considers a relationship as a unit consists of three members. The concept of triangulation is a part of the family system theory (Bowen, 1966). The family system theory considers a triad (three members) as the smallest stable relationship unit. When there are conflicts or disagreements between two members within the triad, third member is brought in to stabilise the relationship (Bowen, 1966). In addition to the triangulation, family system theory introduced concept of boundaries (Minuchin, 1974). Boundaries is a concept which explains the emotions and behaviours between each member of a family unit in continuum from enmeshment to disengagement. Enmeshment refers to a dyad relationship with little emotional separation between the individuals, leading them to feel, think, and act as one person (Minuchin, 1974). Whereas the disengagement occurs when there is emotional distance between the individuals. Family system theory was first applied in a youth sport study by Hellstedt (1987) which investigated ski coaches' relationships with athletes and parents. Based on the observation, this study categorised the parental involvement into three continuums based on the amount of involvement; under, moderate, and over involvement (Hellstedt, 1987). Moderately involving parents were explained as the most supportive. These parents tend to be firm in directing their child while respecting and encouraging autonomy when the athlete is making decisions. Whereas over and under involving parents were considered not optimal in providing support for children. A model was also developed to explain three types of athlete-parent-coach interactions based on the amount of involvement and conflict between each member. The type of interactions include; moderate involvement between all three members of the triad, coach-athlete over-involvement with parent isolation, and coach-athlete over-involvement with parent conflict (Hellstedt, 1987). For example, the model suggested that if the parent is emotionally distant from the coach-athlete

dyad or having conflicts with the athlete or coach, relationship between the athlete and coach may become over-involved. Accordingly, setting appropriate boundaries between each member within a triad would help regulate the involvement of each member. Hellstedt's (1987) work was the first study to apply the family system theory in a sporting context and investigated the athlete-coach-parent triad relationship. It contributed in conceptualising how families are involved in their child's sport and how coaches should interact with them. However, conceptualising the parental involvement based on its quantity may not be the optimal way to produce new knowledge that empowers the parent's involvement (Rouquette et al., 2020). Rather, the type of parental involvement seems to be more important in understanding the relationship between athlete and parent and its impact on the athlete experience (Knight & Holt, 2014). An athletes' overall sporting experiences may depend more on the type of parental behaviours and not necessary the amount of parental involvement (Dohme et al., 2020; Elliott et al., 2018; Knight et al., 2010; Knight & Holt, 2013). Nevertheless, use of the family system theory in conceptualising the parental involvement certainly contributed in advancing our understanding on how the sport parent involves in children's sport. Conceptualising relationships in triads can help provide a holistic understanding of the type of behaviours from each member of a triad and perceptions of the members on those behaviours. However, to date, a paucity of studies has applied the triangulation approach to investigate the key relationships within youth sport.

2.2.3. Coach-parent relationship

Maintaining strong coach-parent relationship is an important role of the coach and parent in youth sport (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). In youth sport, coach and parent are required to work together to provide a safe environment that allows children to foster their developmental potential (Smoll et al., 2011). Hence, the coach-parent relationship quality plays a role in creating the environment (Smoll et al., 2011). However, only a small number of studies to date have investigated the experiences, perceptions, and processes within the coach-parent relationship (Knight & Gould, 2017). Wall et al. (2019) was one of first studies that provided insights to the coach-parent relationship within Canadian competitive figure skating. 12 coaches

and parents were interviewed regarding their experiences of being a member of the coach-parent dyad, three configurations; collaborative, contractual, and coach-athlete centric of parent-coach of the coach-parent relationship were identified (Wall et al., 2019). In a collaborative relationship, parent and coach maintain close communication with each other and share the support to promote athlete's performance and personal development. Whereas a contractual relationship operates on the business orientation where the coach view parent simply as their customer, and likewise the parent treats the coach as an employee (Silins, 1994). A coach-athlete centric relationship centres around the coach-athlete partnership where the parent may maintain certain emotional distance from the coach-athlete dyad. This type of relationship can potentially result in the parental under-involvement (Hellstedt, 1987). The type configuration a coach-parent dyad belongs may depend on the coach's philosophies on how they choose to interact with parents as some coaches perceive parents as a source of stress (Gould et al., 2008). Similarly, how a parent interact with the coach can vary based on the parent's expectations toward the coach, cultural background, and psychological and social states (Preston et al., 2020). Three configurations of the coach-parent relationship identified the unique dynamics within the coach-parent relationship. However, athletes' perceptions toward the coach-parent relationship were not included in in this study (Wall et al., 2019). Including athletes' perceptions would help identify more holistic information regarding the nature, processes, and influences of the coach-parent relationship.

2.2.4. Coach-athlete relationship

Importance of the coach-athlete relationship in optimising athlete development has been widely recognised among researchers and youth sport coaches (Jowett, 2017). An association between the coach-athlete relationship quality and the athlete's overall sport experience, athletic development, well-being, and PYD outcomes was previously identified (e.g., Davis et al., 2019; Holt et al., 2017; Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). Consequently, the coach-athlete relationship is often considered as the "heart of effective coaching" (Jowett, 2017). In conceptualising this important relationship, the 3+1Cs model was developed (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). The model aims to explain the coach-athlete relationship

quality with four factors; closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation as the +1 factor (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). Closeness concerns interpersonal feelings of coaches and athletes. These feelings are related to building mutual respect, trust, appreciation, and liking for one another. Commitment is the interpersonal thoughts of the coach and athlete which relate to a long-term maintenance of the relationship. Complementarity explains the leadership and co-operation shown by the coach and athlete to maintain a positive relationship. Co-orientation reflects the athlete and coach's perceptions toward the relationship quality (direct perception), and their beliefs on what the partner (athlete/coach) feels about the relationship (meta-perception). Closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation all reflect the athlete and coach's interpersonal beliefs (e.g., coaching philosophy, culture, society) (Yang & Jowett, 2012), a degree of understanding towards each other's needs and expectations (Rhind & Jowett, 2010), and the intrapersonal knowledge (e.g., knowledge of oneself) (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Together, these factors form the 3+1Cs model and explains the nature of the quality of the coach-athlete relationship.

To quantify and assess the quality of coach-athlete relationships, the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaires (CART-Q) was developed (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004). This questionnaire was designed based on the previous qualitative studies related to the interpersonal relationships and behaviours. The CART-Q contains 11 questions related to the 3Cs (closeness, commitment, complementarity) between a coach and athlete allowing a relationship to be assessed from the coach and athlete's perspectives (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004). In parallel with the direct CART-Q, the meta-perspective CART-Q was also developed specifically to measure the co-orientation between coaches and athletes (Jowett, 2009). Following the initial series of publications, validity and reliability of the CART-Q were tested across different cultures. For example, effectiveness of the CART-Q was assessed on the coach-athlete dyads in Brazil, Belgium, Britain, China, Greece, Japan, Spain, Sweden, and the US (Contreira et al., 2019; Kuribayashi & Sato, 2015; Yang & Jowett, 2012). Although there were small differences in the interpretation of some relationship factors across countries (e.g., closeness and respect), the questionnaire was found to be generally effective in quantifying and assessing the quality of the coach-athlete relationship across different cultures (Yang & Jowett, 2012). These studies further confirmed that the coach-athlete

relationship is established on the 3+1Cs regardless of the geographical location and cultural background of the coach-athlete dyad.

Following the introduction of the CART-Q, a study was conducted to investigate the relationship maintenance strategies used by the coach and athlete (Rhind & Jowett, 2010). Since the quality of the coach-athlete relationship was identified as a crucial element influencing the athlete development, understanding the relationship management strategies employed by coaches and athletes was important to expand the practical implications of the 3+1Cs model. Based on the interviews from 12 coaches and athletes (six coaches and six athletes) on their relationship management strategies, seven thematic categories were identified and the COMPASS model was introduced (Rhind & Jowett, 2010). COMPASS stands for seven identified themes such as; conflict management, openness, motivation, positivity, advice, support, and social network. Of the seven themes, motivation was the most frequently mentioned relationship maintenance measure. All 12 participants mentioned motivation as a maintenance strategy which accounted for a third of total comments from coaches (Rhind & Jowett, 2010). Conversely, the largest discrepancies between athletes and coaches' perspectives were found in the conflict management category. Only four of the six athletes (all individual sport athletes) mentioned conflict management in their interview while all six coaches mentioned regarding conflict management. This finding suggests that the individual sport athletes may experience more conflicts with their coach than team sport athletes. Thus, the relationship dynamics and relationship management strategies employed by the coach and athlete may differ depending on the type of sport (Rhind & Jowett, 2010).

Interpersonal communication strategies were identified as a key in maintaining quality coach-athlete relationship (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). Indeed, communication is an important part of maintaining any type of relationships (Cushman & Cahn, 1985; Harvey & Griffith, 2002). Individuals voluntarily or involuntarily employ communication strategies to nurture relationships with others. In the context of youth sport, two major strategies were found to be employed by the coach to establish relationships with athletes. The strategies include; maintaining open and honest communication related to sport and communicating things outside of sport with athletes (e.g., school, hobbies, holidays) (Rhind &

Jowett, 2010). Communication strategies of the coach and quality of the coach-athlete relationship were found to influence each other (Reis & Clark, 2013). A recent longitudinal study investigated the influences between the relationship quality and communication strategies used by coaches (Davis et al., 2019). The study assessed the effectiveness of coach-athlete relationship maintenance strategies, specifically, those related to communication. Three communication strategies; support, motivation, and conflict management were identified to help transfer the benefits of quality coach-athlete relationships on to the athletes' satisfaction for their overall sport experience and development (Davis et al., 2019). Thus, how athletes and coaches communicate with each other seem to impact the quality of the coach-athlete relationship, and conversely, existing coach-athlete relationship quality impacts how they communicate with each other. ADD a sentence or two explaining the CARM-Q.

2.3. Summary

Sport is a domain that can be a vehicle to promote positive development of children (Weiss, 2016). Positive developmental outcomes through sport include; improved sport performance, becoming physically competent, growth in psychological and social factors, learning life skills, improved academic performance, and gaining knowledge to maintain an active life style (Harwood et al., 2019; Holt et al., 2017; Weiss, 2016). Although some outcomes can occur as a consequence of sport participation alone, implicit and explicit strategies should be implemented within an organised sport program to create an appropriate environment for children to promote the positive development (Weiss, 2016). The environment in which a child is located has been suggested to influence the development of the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Holt et al., 2017). A key factor that influences the construction of such environment is the child's interpersonal relationships with peers and adults (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Holt et al., 2017; Knight & Holt, 2014). For example, the coach-athlete relationship has been identified as the key element of effective coaching, and it was suggested that the athlete development can depend on the quality of this relationship (Jowett, 2017). Furthermore, relationship between the coach and parent can also affect the child's PYD outcomes (Preston et al., 2020). Another key relationship that affects the development is the athlete-parent relationship.

Previous studies have commonly investigated this relationship in association with the parental involvement and support (Harwood et al., 2019). The amount of parental involvement (under, moderate, and over involvement) and the type of behaviours that parents display was suggested to impact the development through affecting the child's overall sporting experience (Knight et al., 2017). Together, coach-athlete, coach-parent, and athlete-parent dyad relationships have been identified to shape children's sporting experience, which in turn influence the children's developmental outcomes.

While there are considerable understandings on the key dyad relationships in youth sport currently exists, there is a lack of understanding on the nature, processes, and influences of the athlete-coach-parent triad relationship (Harwood et al., 2019). Despite researchers recognising the importance of investigating athlete-coach-parent triad to gain more holistic understanding of the interpersonal relationships influencing children's sporting experience and development (Harwood et al., 2019; Hellstedt, 1987; Preston et al., 2020; Smoll et al., 2011), a paucity of study to date has investigated the triad relationship in youth sport.

Chapter 3: Methodology of the Study

This chapter will explain the methodology used in the current study focusing on the study design, data collection and analysis. Guided by the previous studies that investigated relationships in youth sport (e.g., Knight & Holt, 2014; Wall et al., 2019; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005), a qualitative research methodology was selected as the main methodological orientation for this investigation. Specifically, Interpretive Description was chosen as the methodological framework for guiding the study design, data collection, and data analysis (Thorne, 2008). Interpretive Description is an inductive qualitative methodology originally developed for studies in the applied clinical context. With interpretive naturalistic orientation as its philosophical underpinning, an Interpretive Description study acknowledges that the shared social realities exist on the constructed and contextual nature of human experiences. That, the findings of an inquiry are created from the interplay between the investigator and participants' experiences, and hence, the researcher's prior experiences were acknowledged to influence the research processes (Thorne et al., 2004). Interpretive Description encourages researchers to seek for themes and patterns within participants' experiences (Thorne, 2008). Thus, semi-structured interview was selected as the data collection method and the thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.1. Researcher's background and experience in tennis

The researcher was born in Japan and began playing tennis when he was 7 years old, and started competing in tournaments at the age of 10. He moved to Australia when he was 16 years old and continued to compete in tennis tournaments until 18 years old. The highest level he achieved during these competitive years was the Australian state level representation. Since the end of his competitive career at the age of 18, he has still maintained a social interest in tennis playing with friends several times a year). While moving away from competitive tennis, he began coaching in 2015. In 2017, he moved to China to coach tennis, with the players experience ranging from recreational level to full-time competitive players. In 2018, he moved back to Japan and started coaching at his home tennis club. In August 2019, he moved to Australia to start this research project and has been coaching tennis in Melbourne since then. He now has coached

tennis for 6 years. It should be noted, while the researcher has experiences as a tennis player and coach, he has no experience of being a sport /tennis parent.

All interviews and the initial sections of the data analysis were conducted by the research student. Based on the author's past experience in tennis as an athlete and coach, there were considerable understandings on what the participating players and coaches were experiencing. Such understandings were utilised in establishing initial rapport with participants. Furthermore, the data were analysed through the lens of the author's experience in tennis.

3.2. Participants

Six nationally ranked competitive junior tennis players aged between 12 to 16 (4 males and 2 females), six parents (4 fathers and 2 mothers), and seven coaches (7 males) were invited for the current investigation. Players' age range was deemed appropriate as junior tennis players within this age bracket tend to begin specialising in tennis (Côté et al., 2007). Therefore, the relationships between the player, parent, and coach were thought to be more dynamic than the those of recreational players who are not specialised. A minimum sample size was set as four athlete-parent-coach triads at the initial stage of the investigation. This sample size was decided based on the sample size of a previous study investigate the relationships in junior tennis (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). However, the minimal sample size was increased to six players, parents, and coaches as we decided to recruit each member separately (not from the same triad) due to the difficulties we experienced in recruiting participants. Although it was not initially planned, the increased sample size can potentially improve the generalisability of the findings of this study as participants were not from the working triads. Eventually, a total of 19 participants were recruited and interviewed. This is within the sample size range suggested for an Interpretive Description study (5 to 30 participants) (Thorne, 2008).

Purposive sampling was used to recruit junior tennis players for this study. Purposive sampling refers to a sampling approach which recruits a group of people based on the researcher's judgement to select a cohort of people (Thorne, 2008). In the current study, players were specifically selected based on their

age, playing level, nationality, and geographical location (currently living in Australia). Whereas coaches were recruited using convenience sampling method. This method recruits a cohort of people who are “convenient” to the researcher. Thus, the researchers’ personal connections were utilised to recruit the coaches. Although purposive and convenience sampling methods may not be the most appropriate approach to capture a wide range of population, these methods can help gain information specific to the context and location of participants.

3.3. Procedures

Prior to the data collection, ethical approval for the current investigation was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Victoria University. Following the ethical approval from the institute, potential participants were contacted via emails and phone calls and the nature of the project was explained to the potential participants prior to the interview. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face or via a Zoom video call (Zoom Video Communication, inc.). The Zoom software was utilised due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. We decided that using the Zoom software would be the safest option for both the interviewee and interviewer eliminating the chance of contracting the Coronavirus. The type and location of the interview were organised for the participant’s preference. Two participants preferred face-to-face interview, and 17 were interviewed via the Zoom video calls. Each interview type has its own strengths (e.g., a Zoom call might offer a greater anonymity and increased willingness to share sensitive information) and weaknesses (e.g., a video call may limit interviewer’s ability to detect subtleties associated with physical interactions) (Brown et al., 2018). To minimise the differences arising from two types of interview methods, a substantial emphasis was placed on establishing initial rapport between the researcher and participants. This was attempted by providing thorough background information of the study, as well as, sharing the researcher’s background and experience with each participant (Brown et al., 2018). Additionally, initial part of the interview was also designed to establish rapport with each participant by asking questions about their background and experience. A consent form was provided and signed by the participants prior to the interview. All participants under the age of 18 provided their informed consent

signed by them and their parent/guardian. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured to all participants verbally and via the consent form. Each interview lasted from approximately 45 minutes up to 90 minutes. All interviews were digitally audio recorded using the Zoom software's audio recording function or a digital audio recorder. Obtained audio files were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist. Once the audio files were transcribed, the transcripts were emailed to each participant (audio data were not sent to participants) for the member checking to strengthen the trustworthiness of the transcripts (Thorne et al., 2004). Member checking is a process commonly used in a qualitative study where a form of data was provided to the participant and they are instructed to review and make changes to the contents if the contents do not align with what the participant actually meant (Birt et al., 2016). Even if no correction were made by the participant, this process can help validate the contents of the transcript and the meaning of the contents. Eventually, no participant made corrections or changes to their transcript. Therefore, the contents and the meaning of the transcripts were considered as trustworthy.

3.4. Interview Questions

An initial set of interview questions were developed based on the aim of the current study and the questions used in previous studies which investigated the coach-athlete and athlete-parent relationship in youth sport (Knight & Holt, 2014; Wall et al., 2019; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). The questions were revised and edited as the data collection and analyses proceeded (Thorne et al., 2004). Introductory questions were related to the participant's experiences and journey in junior tennis aiming to get to know the participant and establish rapport. Subsequent parts of the questions are related to participants' perceptions on the relationships in junior tennis. The relationship questions were separated into four parts; coach-athlete relationship, athlete-parent relationship, parent-coach relationship, and triad relationship (See Appendix B, C, and D). Within each section of the interview, participants were asked to discuss their perceptions on how the relationship impact the athlete development, processes involved in the triad relationship, and strategies participants employ in establishing and maintaining quality relationships.

3.5. Reflexive thematic analysis

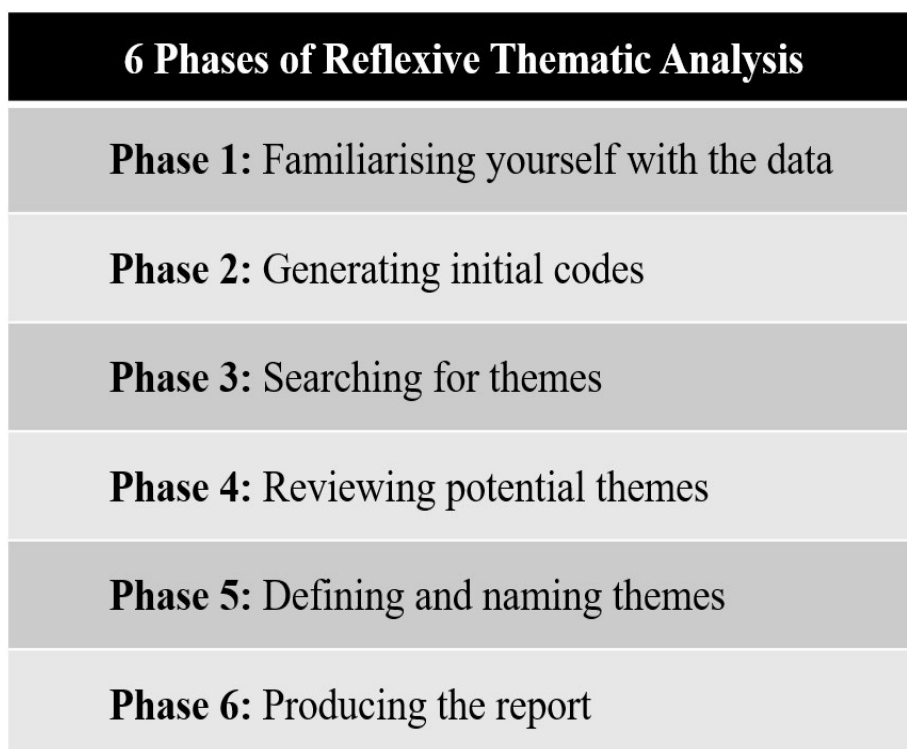
An Interpretive Description study seeks for themes and commonalities in human experiences (Thorne, 2008). In the current study, we utilised reflexive thematic analysis to generate themes from the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Thematic analysis allows researchers to systematically identify, organise, and provide insights into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thematic analysis also permits the researcher to identify and understand the collective or shared meanings and experiences of the interviewees. Thus, thematic analysis is an approach which helps researchers in identifying what is common within the way a topic is discussed by participants and making sense of those commonalities in relation to the research question.

Thematic analysis is typically conducted in six phases (Braun & Clarke, 2012) (Figure 1). First, interview transcripts were read multiple times by the researcher immersing and familiarising themselves with the data set. During this process, the researcher aims to read the transcripts actively, analytically, and critically paying attention to the overarching meanings across them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Notes were taken as the researcher read the transcripts which initiated the process of identifying the patterns of meanings. Following the familiarisation phase, systematic data analysis began by generating the initial set of codes. Codes in a data set included extracted words, phrases, or sentences that are relevant to the research question. Interpretive Description encourages researchers to avoid word to word coding or coding that is too specific during the initial stages of the analysis. It guided the researcher to search for broader perspectives and meanings to build preliminary theoretical scaffolding (Thorne et al., 2004). Thus, sentences, rather than a word or phrase, were sought out for the initial codes. Once the initial codes were identified and reviewed, themes were generated as the third phase of thematic analysis. A theme captures some level of patterned responses or meanings within the data set which were important in answering the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial codes generated in phase two became the building blocks of the themes. Codes were then clustered together with codes that share unifying features. Some of the initial codes may form a theme, and others may become subthemes. Subthemes come under overarching themes

that describe the meanings the overarching themes. Following the generation of the themes, all data were reviewed by the members of the research team. During this process, generated themes and subthemes were reviewed based on their relevance to the research question. Some themes were required to be merged together with other themes to form a new overarching theme, and some were discarded due to lack of relevance. Subsequently, all themes were defined and named. The definition and name of each theme helped to represent the broader overall “story” of the data set. Finally, phase six of thematic analysis involved reporting the findings from the analysis.

Figure 1

Six Phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

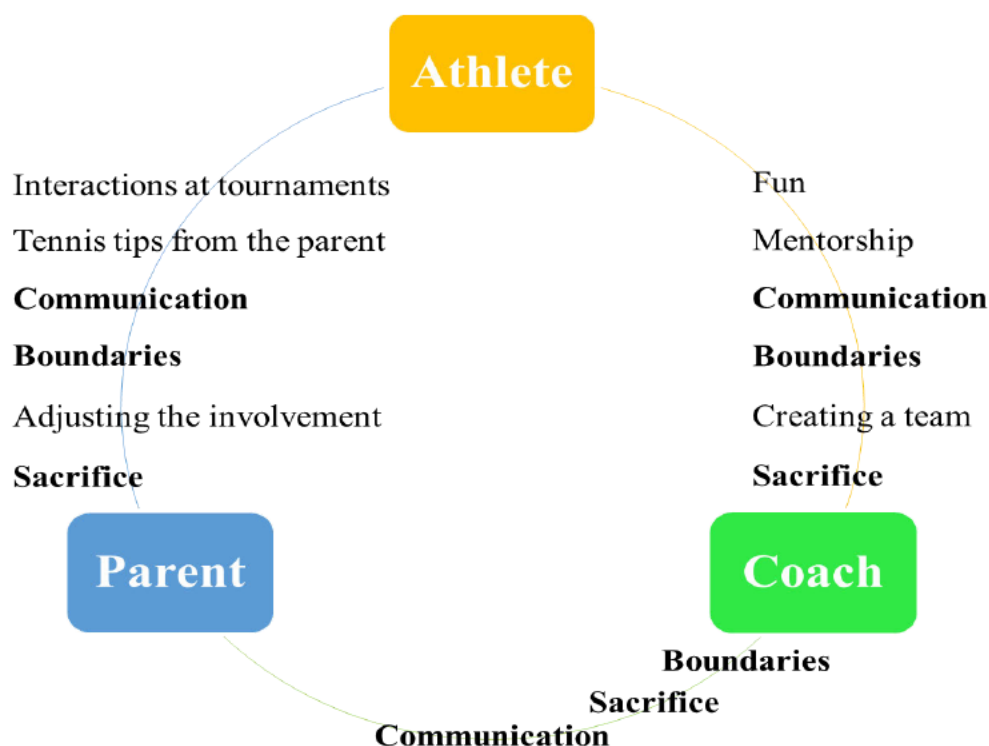


Chapter 4: Results

From thematic analysis, three overarching themes which describe the nature of the athlete-coach-parent triad relationship were generated (Figure 2). These themes include; communication, sacrifice, and boundaries. Six additional themes specific to each dyad relationship were also generated. These include; creating a team, fun, mentorship, interactions at the tournament, tennis tips from the parent, and adjusting the involvement. In figure 2, the athlete-parent-coach triad relationship was organised into three dyad relationships: coach-athlete; coach-parent; and athlete-parent relationships. Each overarching theme within the figure was allocated to a position most appropriate within the triad. For example, communication was frequently mentioned by the players, coaches, and parents as an important aspect within all three dyad relationships, and hence, positioned in the centre of each dyad relationship. The three overarching themes are written in bold and the themes specific to dyad relationships are written in non-bold (Figure 2). This chapter will report the results of current study in following order: 1) Three overarching themes describing the nature of the athlete-parent-coach triad relationship; 2) Themes specific to the coach-athlete relationship; and 3) Themes specific to the athlete-parent relationship.

Figure 2

Three Overarching Themes and Six Dyad Relationship Specific Themes



4.1. Overarching Themes: Communication, Sacrifice, and Boundaries

Communication, sacrifice, and boundaries were identified as the three overarching themes across athlete-parent, coach-athlete, and coach-parent dyad relationships. These themes were found to be common characteristics across those dyad relationships which help explain the nature of the athlete-parent-coach relationship.

Communication

Communication was a topic frequently discussed by participants of the current study when they were asked about perceptions on their relationships with other members of the triad and the relationships between the members. Open communication channels, in particular, was discussed by participants as an important aspect of communication. For example, a coach explained the importance of communication in a relationship: “So, communication, I try and maintain that and make that a key part of my relationship with them. And then, I think that's really important in that process” (Coach 4). Another coach explained how important it is to maintain an open and honest communication with the player and parent:

“You have to be very friendly and then try to get them to see it in that way. Sitting down, like say getting to ask any questions that they want, but also speak to them in a way where you can be honest with them.” (Coach 5)

Similarly, parents also mentioned that they perceive open communication channels are required to maintain a harmonic relationship with the child. A mother commented on the communication with her son: “So again, communication is everything. It's like, I try and make it positive for him. I still point out the bad things, because I think you still need to be honest about it, you know?” (Parent 3). Furthermore, the importance of communication between player and coach was also discussed by the participants. For example, a player described her communication with the coach:

“Yeah. I just tell him. I don't hold back from that because that's where the relationship can get unhealthy. And if I want to improve that, I need to be able to talk to my coach and I've always been able to do that very easily.” (Player 5)

It appears that players, parents, and coaches prioritise maintaining open communication channels within the triad when they are aiming establish or maintain positive relationships.

In relation to the coach-athlete communication, it was mentioned by coaches and players that communicating things which are not related to tennis (e.g., hobbies and other sports) make the coach-athlete relationship more enjoyable for the player. For example, a coach explained the importance of communicating things outside of tennis when building rapport with his player: “It's important to build that rapport, like get the banter going. So, find out what they're interested in outside of tennis. Don't just talk to them about tennis, tennis, tennis” (Coach 2). By talking about things outside of tennis, coaches try to get to know the player as a person, and not just a tennis player. Players also emphasised their preference for non-tennis related communication with their coach. They discussed that such communication makes coach-player interactions fun. A player explained his preference for the coach to be able to talk about topics outside of tennis:

“I think I expect a lot of communication, I think between the coach and myself. And I'd say just not tennis communication, like outside, so it's also a good environment, just not solely on tennis. We talk about like footy, basketball, everything. So, it's pretty fun.” (Player 4)

It appears the coach-athlete communication topic is not limited to athlete's sporting performance and development. In fact, topics which are not related to the sport seem to contribute in creating a fun environment between the coach and athlete.

Importance of communication between the coach and parent in maintaining quality coach-parent relationship was discussed by the participants. Coaches and parents seem to mainly communicate with each other regarding the development of the player. A father explained that his conversations with the coach usually centres around his son's tennis development: “I mean, the conversations that I would have with the

coach were really around the player's tennis and where he can take it next. It was really around his development" (Parent 4). It appears that the coach-parent communication is usually initiated and maintained by the coach, and parents seem to recognise the coach's effort in maintaining healthy coach-parent communication. A coach explained how parents tend to acknowledge the coach's effort in maintaining healthy communication: "I think communication's very important, and also recognizing that... And I think if you really care about a player the parents will see that" (Coach 7). Closely communicating with the parent can be a way for the coach to display their care for the player. Coaches also seem to utilise the coach-parent communication as a channel to deliver tennis related information to the player. For example, a coach explained his strategical use of the coach-parent communication in delivering tennis information to the player:

"If I want to get a message to that kid, I'll often use the parents to do it. If I can't be somewhere and I need the parent's chart, or support or, I give them all the resources to do it." (Coach 6)

Coach-parent communication can be a channel for the coaches to deliver tennis related messages to the player.

Sacrifice

Sacrifice was a frequently discussed topic mainly by coaches and parents. In order to support the player's development, coaches and parents appear to sacrifice their time, effort, and finance. Participants discussed sacrifices are a necessary part of tennis player development. For example, a father explained the financial input for his child's tennis:

"If we're going to do this, because it was a big financial change too, to suddenly have to start doing all that sort of stuff. It's not any easier now, but you become a little bit more used to it, because you've been doing it, I guess. But, the very first time rocking into like, what? \$80 for a private (lesson) back then, so it's for an hour it's a big commitment." (Parent 1)

As the father's comment highlights, financial input from parents seem to increase as the player pursues the competitive pathway, and hence, the financial sacrifice from the parent becomes a requirement for a junior tennis player to pursue their sporting endeavour. Parents' sacrifices are not only financial. Parents also invest a great amount of their time for children's tennis. For example, a player explained her father's time and financial sacrifices for her tennis: "He works early mornings and he still takes me to training. And he buys me all the tennis gear. Usually, I save up and I help him with that. But he's always giving." (Player 5). As she mentioned, parents sacrifice their time driving the player to practice sessions and tournaments, purchasing sporting equipment, and paying for the coaching sessions. The time investment from parents was also frequently mentioned by parents. A mother explained her sacrifices providing transportation to her daughter: "She's quite thankful, she knows we're really busy, and she's quite thankful when we take her to places, and she knows that we spent that extra time, so I feel like she's appreciative of that." (Parent 6). These comments from parents illustrate that the sacrifice made by parents seem to be an essential element for the player development and sport participation.

Sacrifices made by coaches for the player development were also discussed. Six of the seven coaches in the current study mentioned that they operate their own tennis coaching business. Consequently, coaches can only allocate a limited amount of time for their competitive players. Sacrifices mentioned by coaches in the current study generally centred around the balance between the time spent supporting the competitive players, who require a great amount of time from the coach, and other students (e.g., recreational players). A coach explained how much time a competitive tennis player requires from the coach:

"Sometimes hard for coaches is the level of focus on one player. Elite players are going to require more of your time because it means more to them. They're playing every day, they're playing the tournament, they're more results driven." (Coach 5)

Because a competitive player often plays tennis every day of the week, they require more attention from the coach than recreational players. Another coach explained the difficulties in balancing the amount of time he allocates to the competitive player and other players:

“And as the kids get older, I think that's more important as well because as a single coach you can't really give them the time that they need. Especially when you have a business and you're trying to pay bills and all that kind of stuff.” (Coach 7)

Coaches appeared to sacrifice their time for the development of competitive players which could be allocated on recreational players instead. Sacrifices from the coach were generally acknowledged by the parent. A father explained how much his child's coach sacrifices to support the player:

“We're very fortunate that, for example not only would the coach call the athlete after probably most matches at tournaments. She would also send me through like a schedule in terms of how his term should look, like training and everything as well. She really invested a lot of her own time in (his son) as well.” (Parent 4)

Boundaries

Coaches frequently discussed the importance of setting appropriate boundaries between members of the athlete-parent-coach triad. Coaches seem to try and establish boundaries with their player and parent at early stages of their relationship. A coach explained his strategies to establish boundaries with the parent:

“First of all, I go back to I normally meet with the parents first without the athlete there to build some boundaries...to know where they want me, what role they want me to play, and for them to understand my philosophy.” (Coach 1)

By establishing boundaries with the parent coaches aim to clarify the role of the coach and parent in the tennis player development. It was also mentioned by coaches that they usually establish boundaries with the player as well to maintain certain emotional distance from the player. Negative influences of the player becoming overly attached to the coach were explained by a coach:

“I’ve had times where I felt the player was too close to me, meaning relying on me way too much beyond professional expectation, whether it be needing phone calls every night, or crying on the phone. My message will not get through if my relationship is too close.” (Coach 6)

This comment illustrates the coaches’ need to establish boundaries when working with competitive players. If the boundaries are not clearly established, coaches may not be able to effectively provide support for the player. Importance of setting certain boundaries with the player was explained by another coach:

“And they can't help it, they're children they look up to you because they look at you as their friend in a way and someone that can guide them. So, when you do come across those kids, you don't reject it, you allow them to feel that, but at the same time, you also let them know that there is a certain level, a boundary that you can never cross.” (Coach 3)

Boundaries related topics were also discussed by the parents. Parents appeared to try and establish boundaries with their player. Through setting the boundaries, parents are searching for appropriate type and amount of involvement in their child’s tennis. However, the process of establishing boundaries with their own child can often be challenging. The challenging nature of establishing boundaries was explained by a father:

“Sometimes it's a challenge for me to separate out being a parent from what I know. Sometimes it's better not to know... And so sometimes I've got to try and remember to be just dad. And I don't always get that right.” (Parent 2)

Establishing boundaries with the player can be a challenge for the parents as they seem to adjust their involvement as the player’s needs change as they go through different stages of development. Another father explained the difficulties in understanding the player’s needs: “I’ll try not to get, give him ... Shake your head or whatever, but just ... It's also hard to work out what he wants” (Parent 1). It can be challenging for the parent to understand the player’s needs. However, it appears that to set appropriate boundaries between the parent and player, the parent is required to have certain understanding for the player’s needs.

A player explained how her father understands the boundary and adjusting his involvement according to her needs: “And I think that's because dad knows when to step back. He knows that he can't always be there when the coach is trying to talk to me. He lets the coach do what he does” (Player 5). Setting appropriate boundaries appears to be an important part of the parental involvement in children’s sport. It seems that the parents are adjusting the boundaries according to the player’s needs.

4.2. Themes Specific to the Coach-Athlete Relationship

Creating a team

Creating a team for the player is a theme that was frequently mentioned by the coaches. Coaches mentioned that they often recruit other coaches, physical trainers, or allied health professionals to create a team of professionals for the player. In the current study, coaches appeared to understand their own strengths, weaknesses, and how much time and effort they can invest for a competitive player. The coach would invite those professionals to the team to holistically develop the player. A coach commented about allocating a mentor for his player and creating a team:

“What my role also is, is to put people around the athlete for them to understand. As an example, every kid I've coached, I've aligned a mentor with that is already an elite athlete and create that... You talk about triangle. That's important, but there's a lot more stakeholders that can help create the team for that child to thrive.” (Coach 1)

In some cases, it seems beneficial for the player development to have team members who are specialised in the area outside of technical and tactical components of tennis. Another coach discussed about him not been territorial over his player and inviting other coaches to join the team:

“Always with my good players that I have I think I'm not territorial over them. Evidently, I just want them to be the best that they can be. So, if they go and see another coach for some serving practice, I'm all for that.” (Coach 7)

Players also seem to agree that working with multiple coaches can be beneficial as long as the messages from the coaches are consistent. A player commented on his team of coaches: “So it's kind of like one community and everyone's telling me the same thing. So, I really, I get the message” (Player 2). As this quote highlights, a consistency in each coach’s advice is essential in order for a coaching team to effectively develop a player.

Fun

When participants were asked about the coach-athlete relationship, they often discussed that the interaction between the coach and player should be fun to maintain a quality relationship. Players in particular appeared to prefer a fun atmosphere when working with their coach. A player explained how the coach balances fun and serious atmospheres during practice sessions:

“He's very strict, but I normally like kind of bring the, I guess the childish side out of him when we're on the court. So, he has a joke, but then he kind of gets all serious and then starts yelling to get me focused. And, I feel like that's a good, that's a good balance for me to help me progress my tennis.” (Player 2)

Balance between fun and serious atmospheres appeared to impact the player’s learning environment. Coaches seem to use jokes to create fun and positive learning environment for the player. Another approach coaches appeared to commonly utilise to create a fun atmosphere is to communicate with the player about the topics not related to tennis. For example, a player explained his usual conversations with the coach and said “We talk about like footy, basketball, everything. So, it's pretty fun” (Player 3). Players reported that talking about things not related to tennis with their coach is a fun experience. Parents also reported their perceptions on a fun atmosphere between the coach and player as positive. A father commented: “The coach is great that having fun with my son as well, it's really good. And they do have a bit of banter together with each other” (Parent 5). The balance between fun and serious atmospheres appeared to be important for the player to enjoy the coach-athlete relationship. Another player commented:

“He's very fun to be around. Always music going, and he makes you laugh, but he's also focused and stuff, so it's good.” (Player 6)

Mentorship

Players in the current study reported that they perceive their coach as more than just a tennis coach. Rather, they described the coach as a mentor, friend, and extended family member. A player described his coach as someone who is more than a tennis coach:

“I've known him for 7 years. I'd say my relationship is very good. He's kind of just like just a friend. And I don't really, I don't really see him as like a coach, I kind of see as like a hitting partner. That's like kind of a mentor to me.” (Player 2)

Another player also described his coach as “She was almost like an auntie figure” (Player 3). It appears that the player can perceive the coach as not only a tennis coach but as a mentor, friend, family member etc. Parents also reported their view on the player’s relationship with the coach commenting positively about the joy between the player and coach. A father described his son’s relationship with his coach as:

“They just have a huge mutual respect for each other. They both surf and that as well. And I think he sees that she's a great player as well. So of course, the kids want to see that your coach is a game player as well because it's a kid knows as well.” (Parent 4)

No coaches, however, reported their relationship with the player as more than the coach-athlete relationship.

4.3. Themes Specific to Athlete-Parent Relationship

Tennis tips from the parent

Players frequently discussed their perceptions for the tennis tips provided by their parent. Generally, providing technical and tactical information to the player is a role of the coach. In reality, however, parents seem to provide a small amount of informational support to the player. For example, a player commented on getting tennis tips from her mother who used to be a competitive tennis player: “Yeah. She always has tips, and then helps us out, and then talks about tennis. I talk to her about it too” (Player 6). In her case,

tennis tips provided by the mother seem to be appreciated by the player. In contrast, another player explained his dislike for receiving comments from his father immediately after a match: “It's probably the worst thing on the planet to be honest. The last thing you need is your dad just telling you everything that's wrong straight after” (Player 1). This player expressed his negative perception towards receiving tennis tips from his father. Two contrasting comments from the players highlight that the player’s perception towards tennis tips from the parent can differ significantly between individuals and depending on the timing of the tips.

Generally, coaches’ perceptions toward parents’ informational support were negative. For example, a coach commented on the parents’ informational support: “The kids getting one message from the coach, then the mom's hearing that message, as well. And then dad's like, "No, I know better." It just undermines what the coach is trying to do” (Coach 2). Another coach explained his experience related to negative impacts of informational support coming from the parent. He stated:

“We're working on things that are phenomenal, and the mom, who doesn't know anything about tennis, read every book under the sun, will go and just give one bit of feedback, and it will undo five hours of technical work.” (Coach 6)

Together, these quotes illustrate coaches’ negative perceptions toward tennis tips from the parent, and the importance of setting appropriate boundaries between the members of triad.

Adjusting the involvement

Parents have mentioned their effort in adjusting their involvement in children’s tennis. It appeared that parents are altering their involvement in order to provide support appropriate for a player’s needs in the moment. A player explained the changing nature of his father’s involvement:

“He's kind of in between, kind of like not involved and then he'll be super involved and then he will be like a second coach or he will be like a mentor. So, dad kind of waivers in between all of them, but he's mostly involved with my tennis.” (Player 2)

This comment highlights the parent's effort to adjust not only their role but the amount of involvement in their child's tennis. A father also made a comment on his effort to adjust the involvement based on his son's needs:

“Sometimes, it feels like, in the past, it has been like don't sit and watch me, and hassle me, and then why weren't you watching? You go from hiding in the bushes to, but I also figure that at some point in your age you don't want mom and dad sitting there watching every single thing you do.”

(Parent 1)

As illustrated in this quote, parents seem to face the challenge of adapting their involvement to meet child's needs. Accordingly, the type of parental involvement that a player looks for appears to change as the player matures.

Interactions at the tournament

When the participants were asked regarding the athlete-parent relationship, they frequently discussed the situations and events at tournaments. Consequently, interactions between the player and parent at tournaments seem to be a key nature of the athlete-parent relationship. A player explained his relationship with his father at tournaments saying: “My dad is very supportive when he comes to my tournaments. I like it how whenever I'm playing a match and it's really tight, he's always there” (Player 3). On the other hand, another player, expressed his preference for not having his parent watching the match. “I feel like I play better just by myself when I'm playing because I feel like there's a lot of pressure when someone else is watching me” (Player 4). These contrasting comments illustrate that each player's preferences for the parental involvement at tournaments can differ considerably. Similarly, parents' perceptions on their interactions with the player at the tournament can differ as well. A parent commented on how much he enjoys going to his child's tournament: “I truly believe that I'm a tennis parent in terms of yeah ... seem to have a good relationship for tournaments. So, when tournaments come around, I really enjoy that side of it” (Parent 4). Some parents seem to enjoy just watching their child play at the tournament and they perceive their relationship with the player at the tournament as positive. Conversely, other parents

appear to experience difficulties in understanding the player's needs at the tournament. A father explained the difficulties he's experienced in understanding the needs of his player at the tournament: "I'll try not to get, give him ... Shake your head or whatever, but just ... It's also hard to work out what he wants" (Parent 1). Although, in general, parents seem to enjoy accompanying their child to tournaments, understating the type of involvement the child prefer at the tournament may change depending on the child's age and other factors. This can be perceived by some parents as challenging.

Figure below demonstrates an example of thought processes involved in developing themes via thematic analysis. A theme "Boundaries" was used as an example in the figure. The processes include extracting quotes from interview transcripts and attaching codes (meaning of the quote), interpreting the meaning across the codes (potential theme), and name the theme.

Figure 3

An Example of the Thought Process Involved in Thematic Analysis

Extracted Quotes	Code(s)
First of all, I go back to I normally meet with the parents first without the athlete there to build some boundaries...to know where they want me, what role they want me to play, and for them to understand my philosophy. (Coach)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building boundaries • Communication
I don't expect them to be best mates. That's definitely not what a coach student thing should be, because, otherwise, there is going to be times when he needs to get serious and say things that the player might not like to hear, but he has to hear it. Obviously, everyone has to. (Parent)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coach and player should not be "best mates"
For example, I had to tell my dad not to come to training because they (coach and parent) talk so much. (Player)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coach and parent talking too much



Interpreted meaning across codes

Appropriate emotional distance and boundary seem to be required within a triad relationship.



Boundaries

Chapter 5: Discussion

This investigation was an in-depth exploration of the triad relationship between junior tennis players, parents, and coaches which contributes to the current literature by providing new insights into the nature of complex relationships between the members of junior tennis. A novel feature of this study was considering the athlete-parent-coach triad relationship through the perspectives from the coach-athlete, coach-parent, and athlete-parent dyad relationships. All participants reported their current triad relationship as positive and healthy, and no major conflicts between the members were reported. Main findings of the current study include three overarching themes which describe the nature of the triad relationship, and six specific themes pertinent to the dyad relationship. However, no themes specific to the coach-parent relationship were identified in the present study. Nature of the coach-parent relationship was explained by the overarching themes. Together, overarching and dyad specific themes provide key insights into the athlete-parent-coach triad relationship. Participants of the current investigation reported that maintaining open communication channels between the members is an important feature within the athlete-parent-coach relationship. Furthermore, coaches and parents explained their sacrifices in supporting the player development and to maintain quality relationships within the triad. While maintaining open communication channels between members of the triad, coaches and parents seemed to set boundaries within the triad to avoid dual relationship with the player and parent, and over-involvement in the sport. Three overarching themes along with the dyad relationship specific themes highlight the complexity of the athlete-parent-coach triad relationship. Subsequent sections of this chapter will explain the themes in more detail and propose possible practical implications of the findings.

5.1. Open Communication Channels

Communication was a theme frequently discussed by participants during the interview. Maintaining open communication channels between members of the triad, in particular, appeared to be a key process that contributes in maintaining and establishing quality relationships. For example, athletes in the current study mentioned that they are not hesitant to express their feelings including disagreements to the coach

and parent. It was also mentioned by coaches that creating a platform for players and parents to openly communicate opinions and feelings with the coach is important. Indeed, open communication channels was identified to be one of communication strategies utilised by athletes which associates with quality coach-athlete relationship (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Davis et al., 2019; Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007; Rhind & Jowett, 2010). Specifically, closeness within the coach-athlete relationship was found to associates with establishing open communication channels (Rhind & Jowett, 2012). Closeness is a part of 3+1Cs of the coach-athlete relationship and it refers to the interpersonal feelings of athletes and coaches which help build an affective bond via their trust, mutual respect, appreciation, and liking for one another (Jowett, 2017). Similarly in the athlete-parent relationship, openly sharing and discussing the athlete's sporting goals were also identified as characteristics of positive parental involvement that contribute in enhancing the athlete's sport experience (Knight & Holt, 2014). As for the coach-parent relationship, conflicts between the coach and parent regarding athlete performance was suggested to occur when they are not openly communicating. Conflicts between the coach and parent on the athlete performance was found to negatively impact PYD outcomes and performance of the athlete (Preston et al., 2020). Current findings related to communication were generally in line with the previous studies. It appeared that when the player can openly communicate with the coach regarding their opinions and feelings, the coach-athlete relationship is perceived as positive by both members. Likewise, establishing and maintaining open communication channels within the athlete-parent and coach-parent relationships were also identified as an important process in building quality relationships within the triad. Thus, open communication channels between the athlete-parent-coach triad appeared to play an important role in building positive triad relationship. Coaches can aim to create a platform for the player and parent to maintain open communication between each member of the triad. This may include effectively using social network platforms to communicate with the parent and player (e.g., WhatsApp). Parents can also strategically maintain open communication with their child by allocating time to discuss and evaluate the developmental goals (tennis and PYD related) with the child.

5.2. Contents of the Coaches' Communication

A novel finding from the current study was the coaches' strategy in which they communicated with their player about things outside of tennis (i.e., hobbies and other sports). Coaches explained that this strategy helps them to build rapport with the player and "get to know" him/her on a personal level. Based on the comments from players, non-tennis related subjects appear to associate with creating a fun climate within the coach-player relationship. Players expressed their preference for their coach to talk not only about tennis performance but things unrelated to tennis as well. Therefore, it seems that if a coach only communicates tennis related subjects with their player, player experience may not be optimised, and the coach-player relationship quality may be negatively influenced as a consequence (Wachsmuth et al., 2018). Indeed, the coach-athlete conversation was suggested to be able to motivate the athlete and positively influence the attitude towards their performance (Høigaard, 2008). In order to make positive influences, coaches are required to demonstrate their interest towards different parts of athlete's life. Non-tennis communication with the athlete seems to be able to help coaches to gain a holistic understanding of the athlete's life outside of their sport, and thus it helps demonstrate to the athlete that the coach is trying to understand what kind of person the athlete really is.

Contents of the coach-athlete communication (e.g., communication strategies) have been previously identified to associate with the coach-athlete relationship quality (Davis et al., 2019; Rhind & Jowett, 2012). However, no study to date has specifically investigated the influences of non-sport related communication subjects between the athlete and coach. Although a long-term positive effect of communication strategies on the coach-athlete relationships quality has been identified previously (Davis et al., 2019), ways in which conversation subjects between the coach and athlete affects the athlete experience and development is yet to be investigated. Based on the findings of the present study, communication contents that are not related to the athlete's sport may have a closer association with the relationship quality than a sport related topic. Future studies could aim to investigate the influences of specific communication subjects and their impact on the relationship quality.

5.3. Boundaries within the Coach-Athlete Relationship

Current findings highlighted coaches and parents' action to set certain boundaries within the triad as an important nature. Coaches frequently mentioned that they aim to establish boundaries to maintain a certain distance from the player and parent. One reason to explain such action from the coach is their effort to avoid a dual relationship with the player and parent. A dual relationship occurs when a secondary relationship develops within a professional-client relationship (Reamer, 2021). For example, a coach-athlete relationship may develop into more a family, friend, or romantic type of relationship if the boundaries between coach and athlete are not clearly established. Coaches in the current study mentioned that they need to avoid getting too close to their athletes in order to maintain the relationship professional and effective coaching. It was explained by a coach that becoming too close to the player may result in ineffective delivery of informational support (e.g., the player may not listen to the coach). More importantly, setting boundaries can create a safe environment for the player and coach as certain dual relationship such as romantic and/or sexual relationships are ethically inappropriate (Tam et al., 2021). It appeared the coaches in this study were aware of the risks associated with unclear boundaries. However, formerly educating coaches and parents regarding appropriate boundaries is still necessary in order to create a safe environment for athletes, parents, and coaches to work together in harmony (Gaedicke et al., 2021).

The current data suggests coaches' perceptions on their relationship with the player is centred around the professional-client relationship. This finding conflicts with the perceived coach-athlete closeness reported by players. When players were asked about their current relationship with the coach, all players described their coach as "someone more than a tennis coach". In fact, some players described their coach as a mentor. Despite such closeness described by the players, no coach described their relationship with the player as more than a coach-athlete relationship. A seminal finding from the current research suggested a clear gap between the closeness perceived by the coach and player. Perhaps, such a gap has resulted from differences in the type of relationship the player and coach seek to develop. The type of relationship which develops between a coach-athlete dyad can differ based on what the coach and player

desire to achieve or gain from the relationship (Bernard, 2008; Knight et al., 2010). For example, in the coach-parent relationship, three types of relationships were identified: collaborative (e.g., frequent communication between athlete, parent, and coach); coach-athlete centric (e.g., parent in background); and contractual (e.g., service provider and customer) (Wall et al., 2019). Accordingly, type of relationship the coach and player seek to develop may differ depending on the coaching philosophy of the coach and/or the type of relationship the player desire to develop with the coach (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Thus, it may be beneficial for coaches to understand different type of relationships that a coach can develop with a player. Such information can help coaches to better establish boundaries appropriate for the player's needs while maintaining the coaching philosophy. This could be achieved by providing coaches with theory-based information pertinent to children's relationship development and behavioural needs.

5.4. Coach and Parent's Sacrifice and Dedication

Sacrifice was another theme frequently mentioned especially by coaches and parents. They discussed how much time and money they have sacrificed to support the player's development and to maintain quality relationship with members of the triad. Sacrifices within a relationship can be described as the actions of an individual to give up one's self-interests for the benefit of the partner and/or the relationship (Kogan et al., 2010; Todd & Edwards, 2021). Sacrifices made by the coach and parent appear to function as the basis of the triad relationship. That is, a triad relationship may not function without sacrifices from the members (Konstam, 2019). Parents of current study reported that they sacrifice a great amount of time driving the player to practice sessions and tournaments, as well as, making financial sacrifices such as paying for the coach and equipment. These sacrifices are in line with the parental sacrifices identified in previous studies. For example, increased sacrifices from parents during the middle and elite years of junior tennis player development (the period when they start to invest more time in tennis) were highlighted by Lauer et al. (2010a). Similarly, parental sacrifices were also reported as a part of parental support in a study investigated the type of parental support in Canadian elite junior ice hockey (15-17 years old) (Todd & Edwards, 2021). These studies highlighted the necessity of parental sacrifices for

youth athletes to pursue competitive sporting journey. Consequently, how parents and athletes perceive sacrifices seem to play a pivotal role in the athlete-parent relationship. Although sacrifices are necessary, children may perceive parental sacrifices as a source of pressure if parents excessively talk with their child regarding the amount of sacrifice they are making and/or seek rewards for their sacrifices (Todd & Edwards, 2021). It was suggested that when parents' needs for their child to succeed becomes excessive, the child may lose the ownership for their sporting journey and begin to play to fulfill parents' needs (Lauer et al., 2010a). Parental sacrifices could become a contributor of the negative athlete outcomes as parents usually invest a great amount of time and finance for their child's sport. Naturally, parents may place excessive emphasis on child's competitive outcomes which could become a damaging factor for the child-parent relationship as it may pressurise the child. Therefore, equipping parents with the information regarding parental sacrifices can be beneficial in preparing parents to be better involved in youth sport (Smoll et al., 2011). Furthermore, coaches could work with parents to maintain children's sport in perspective for the parents. This can help parents to manage their expectations toward child's development and sporting performance (Knight & Holt, 2014).

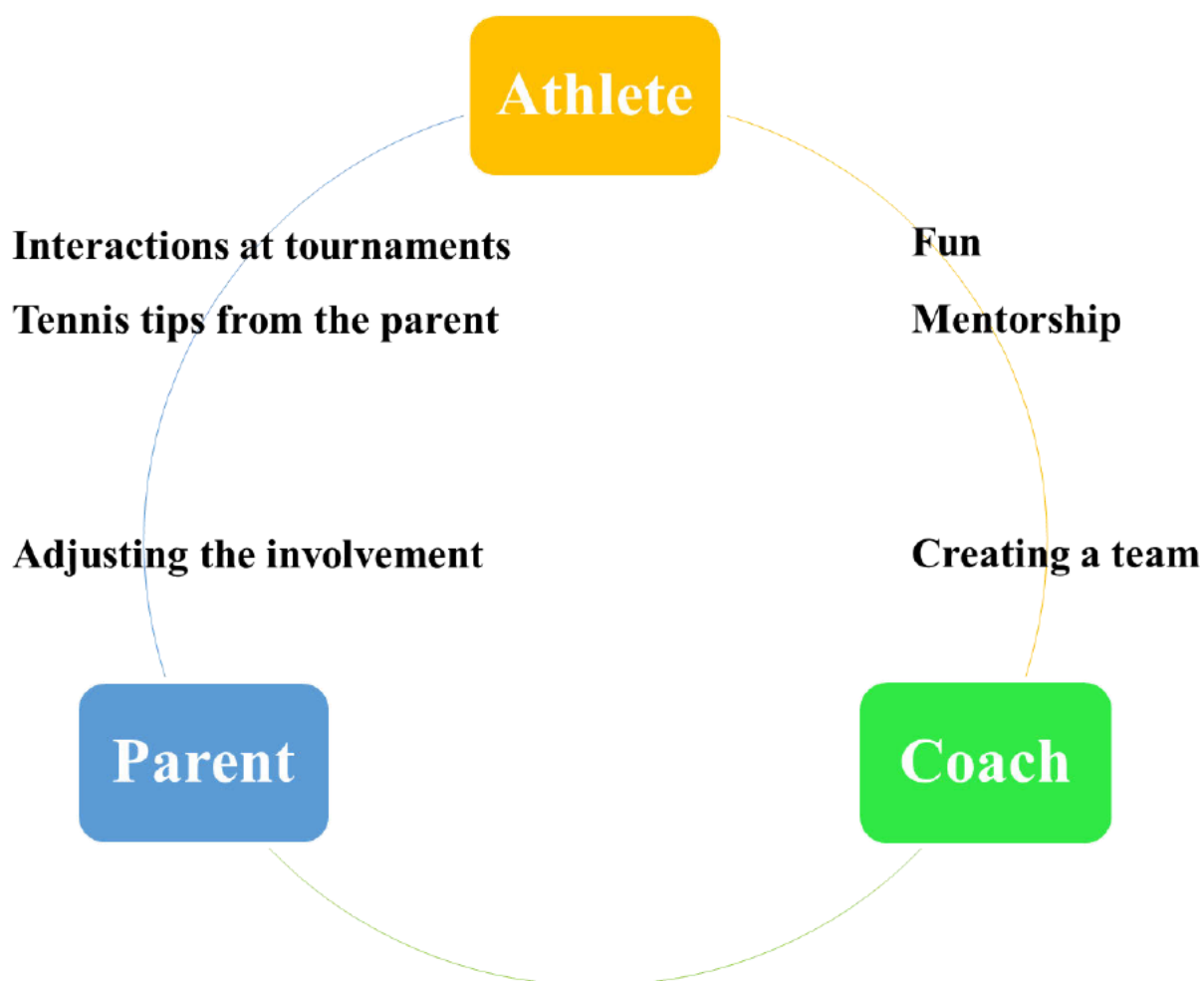
Coaches also mentioned that their sacrifices in maintaining effective communication with the player and parent. Coaches' sacrifice includes sending emails and text messages to the parent and player, and making phone calls early in the morning, late at night, and on their day off. Although current cohort of coaches did not specify whether those sacrifices were made solely for the benefit of the player development and/or for the relationship, their sacrifices seemed to be positively influencing the player and parent's satisfaction and experience (Kogan et al., 2010). Sacrifices of coaches can be explained as a part of their commitment and complementarity towards their relationship with the player and parent (Jowett, 2017). Commitment refers to interpersonal thoughts of coaches to maintain a long-term close relationship. While complementarity relates to interpersonal behaviours of coaches such as leadership and co-operation (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). Coaches' sacrifices can demonstrate their commitment to maintain a quality relationship with the player and parent while willing to complement the relationship by taking the lead and co-operating with the player and parent to support the player development. A coach in the current study

described coaching that “the coaching is a labour of love”. Indeed, current cohort of coaches mentioned their sacrifices to support the player’s development, as well as, to maintain quality relationships with the player and parent. Coaches should be aware that certain sacrifices are required to support their player development. Perhaps, the coach education programs could include a content explaining the potential sacrifices required from in the athlete development.

5.5. Themes Specific to Dyad Relationships

Figure 4

Six Themes Specific to Dyad Relationships



The current study generated six themes which are specific to each dyad relationship within the athlete-parent-coach triad (Figure 3). The themes include: fun, mentorship, creating a team, interactions at tournaments, tennis tips from the parent, and adjusting the involvement. The theme of fun, mentorship, and creating a team are related to the coach-athlete relationship, while interactions at tournaments, tennis tips from the parent, and adjusting the involvement belong to the coach-parent relationship. Together, these themes along with the three overarching themes help us better understand the nature of the athlete-parent-coach triad relationship in junior tennis.

The dyad relationship specific themes of present study support the findings of previous youth sport studies. For example, fun was identified in the fun integration theory as a key aspect within the coach-athlete relationship in junior soccer (Visek et al., 2015). The coach treats the player with respect, friendly coach-athlete interactions, and coaches who are easy to talk to were found to contribute to making the sport fun for the athletes. In the current study, communication between the coach and player which is not related to tennis was described by players as a fun aspect of the coach-athlete relationship. Thus, it supports the findings of the fun integration theory whereby certain coach-athlete interactions can create a fun climate for the athlete (Visek et al., 2015). Such interactions may include the coach-athlete communication regarding subjects that are not related to the athlete's sport. Players in the current study mentioned that they perceive communicating with their coach about non-tennis related subjects as fun. Possible process that explains the association between the non-tennis related communication and perceived fun is that the player feels less pressure when they talk about non-tennis subjects with the coach (Høigaard, 2008). As the player is more relaxed in communicating with the coach, coaches may have more opportunities to create a fun climate. This study supported the previous findings related to fun in youth sport (Visek et al., 2015), and highlighted that the content of the coach-athlete communication can influence the climate within the coach-athlete relationship.

The current study identified that the coaches often invite other professionals (e.g., another tennis coach and/or physical trainer) and create a team to better support the player. Although the current coach-athlete relationship literature has commonly focused on investigating only one coach and one athlete

relationship, there appear to be occasions where a player may have more than one coach working with him/her. This “team coaching” could potentially dilute the coach-athlete relationship quality. Having multiple coaches in a team may not help each coach-athlete relationship within the team. Together with the boundaries set by the coaches, athlete’s needs for mentorship and enjoyment may not be fulfilled by the coach, and hence the athlete experience may be negatively impacted. Perhaps, the 3+1Cs of coach-athlete relationship can be applied to the relationships between an athlete and a coaching team in describing the relationships (Jowett, 2017). Processes involved in the coach-athlete relationship within a team may significantly differ depending on the role of the coach. For example, relationship between an athlete and the leading coach of a team is likely to be different to the athlete’s relationship with other coach of the team. Nonetheless, further investigation is required to unpack the processes involved in the relationship between an athlete and his/her coaching team. It might be beneficial to investigate relationships between the coaching team and athlete as this type of relationship seems common in individual sports. To the author’s knowledge, no study has yet to investigate the relationships between an athlete and a team of coaches. Therefore, it is unclear whether the current understanding on the coach-athlete relationship can be applied to such relationship with multiple members.

A theme that did not support the previous findings was the tennis tips from the parent. In the current study, tennis tips from the parent were perceived negatively by all coaches and some players. Association between an excess amount of informational support from the parent and negative player experiences has been highlighted in the previous studies (Lauer et al., 2010a; Preston et al., 2020; Tamminen et al., 2022; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). However, although players in the current study reported some negative perceptions toward informational support from their parents, four of the six players mentioned that they generally perceive tennis related comments from the parent as positive and valuable. Such result may be explained by a few factors. First, the perceptions of the player for the informational support may change depend on the amount of parent’s sport knowledge (Preston et al., 2020). For example, one of the parents participated in the current study was an ex-competitive tennis player which may be a reason why the daughter (Player 6) described tennis tips from the parent as valuable. If the parent is knowledgeable in their

child's sport, the child may perceive the sporting information provided by the parent as beneficial to their development (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Second, the type of relationship the coach-parent dyad may have influenced how the player perceives sport related advices from their parent. For example, in the collaborative coach-parent relationship, coaches tend to allow parents to provide some sporting advices to the child. In contrast, within a coach-athlete centred relationship the coach tends to not allow parents to provide informational support (Wall et al., 2019). Such decisions from the coach could be made based on the amount of sport knowledge the parent has and/or the coaching philosophy of the coach. Third, the trustworthiness of the current player perceptions may not be true to what they are actually feeling. A recent study suggested that interviews as a data collection method could be limited in capturing true feelings of the participants, especially, when interviewing children (Sutcliffe et al., 2021). Although the researcher in the current study ensured that the interviewees were alone during the interview, it is probably natural for the players to make positive comments regarding their parent's behaviours. Thus, it is possible that the players' comments may not accurately captured what they were truly feeling.

5.6. Limitations and Future Study Direction

The current study made contributions to the literature by providing new understandings related to the key relationships in youth sport. However, there are some limitations which the readers should be aware of when contextualising this new knowledge. First, the current participants were not recruited from the same triads. Due to the global pandemic and the hard lockdowns in Australia, there was a great difficulty in recruiting participants. Consequently, we decided to recruit participants from separate triads. Findings of the current study are, therefore, generated through interpreting the stories told by the participants. This can also be advantageous as the participants may be more willing to honestly talk about the members of their triad compared to knowing that the other members are participating in the interview as well. Nonetheless, future studies may aim to collect the data from the player, parent, and coach of same triads which are current and active. This could provide more specific detail of the nature of the triad relationship. Second limitation relates to the use of video calls as a method to conduct the interviews. Although two

interviews were conducted face to face, the rest were completed via Zoom video calls. Prioritising the safety of the interviewees and the interviewer, participants were given the option between a face to face or video call interview. 17 of the 19 participants chose to participate via a video call. Use of the video call may have limited the interviewer's ability to build initial rapport with the participants, especially, when interviewing the players. Indeed, the data from players were not as rich in contents (interview length was considerably shorter for the players) compared to the coaches and parents' interview data. Players' interview data may have been richer in contents, if the interviews were conducted face to face. Therefore, future studies should either consider conducting interviews face to face or developing a protocol which allows interviewer to establish rapport with the interviewee prior to the video call. For example, the researcher could use two video calls, where the initial call functions as the introduction allowing the researcher to get to know the participant and build a rapport. Then, interview will be conducted in the second call.

The current study identified the descriptive nature of the athlete-parent-coach triad relationship in junior tennis provided a platform for the future studies. Future studies could investigate the effectiveness of interventions which aim to positively influence the relationships between athlete, parent, and coach. The interventions may include: coach and parent education programs and communication strategies. Intervention studies can provide further understandings of the nature and processes within the triad relationship and they also help introduce practical information for coaches and parents to better nurture their triad relationship. Additionally, future research should aim to employ a longitudinal study design. There is a lack of longitudinal studies conducted on key relationships in youth sport and athlete development (Harwood et al., 2019). The longitudinal study design allows researchers to empirically test the effectiveness of interventions in relation to children's long-term developmental outcomes. Finally, future studies could also employ observational research methods to investigate the triad relationship. Observational research methods include researchers to observe participants in their natural setting, rather than manipulating the participants assignment via randomisation (Carlson & Morrison, 2009). A longitudinal observation study would help researchers to identify the "real life" effectiveness and influences of applied interventions within the triad relationship.

Conclusion

This investigation was the first descriptive study to investigate the nature of athlete-parent-coach triad relationship in junior tennis. Semi-structured individual interviews were completed with seven coaches, six competitive junior tennis players and six parents. Through thematic analysis three overarching themes and six themes specific to dyad relationships describing the nature of the triad relationship were generated. Three overarching themes included: communication, sacrifice, and boundaries. While the themes specific to dyad relationship included: fun, mentorship, creating a team, interactions at tournaments, tennis tips from the parent, and adjusting the involvement. It appeared that the adult members of the triad facilitate relationships between each member by maintaining open communication channels, making time and financial sacrifices, and setting what they perceive as being “appropriate boundaries.” Open communication channels between the player, parent, and coach seems to be the key process that contributes in maintaining a harmonic triad relationship. Time sacrifice from the coach and parent, and the financial sacrifice from the parent appeared to affect their commitment and complementarity towards the relationship which, in turn, contribute to the maintenance of the relationship quality. Boundaries between coach-athlete and coach-parent dyads seem to help establish appropriate closeness between each member of the triad. Novel findings of this studies include the gap in the junior tennis players and coaches’ perception towards the coach-athlete relationship. Players in current study appeared to view their coach as someone “more than just a tennis coach”. Coaches, however, may not perceive their relationship with the player in such a way as coaches are identified to set certain boundary with their player. Coaches should be aware of the gap in perceptions as this may eventuate in disagreement, blurred boundaries, and ultimately could deteriorating to the coach-athlete relationship. Coaches could use this information and avoid the gap in their perceptions which in turn could lead to a positive coach-athlete relationship. Another unique finding of the current study is that the players perceive non-tennis related communication contents with their coach as fun. This finding is important as maintaining the coach-athlete relationship enjoyable for the athlete can positively influence athlete experiences which can potentially enhance the participation and development of the athlete. Thus,

coaches should aim to communicate with their athlete regarding not only the sport but subjects outside of the sport as well. This may help coaches in understanding the athlete more holistically, as well as, demonstrate to the athlete that the coach is interested to know the athlete on a personal level. One potential finding, although not directly investigated is the “team coaching” within junior tennis. Creating a team of coaches for an athlete may be diluting the coach-athlete relationship and lead to reduced enjoyment and mentoring capability of the coach as the quality of each coach-athlete relationship within a team may not be optimal. Moreover, the boundaries established by the coach could further dilute the coach-athlete relationship via contracting the athlete’s needs for the mentorship and enjoyment. The themes identified in the current study provided novel and holistic insights of the triad relationships. Findings of the current study can help coaches and parents to better understand the dynamic nature of the athlete-parent-coach relationship equipping them with new information for them to better nurture the relationships. By providing coaches and parents with new information, children’s sport experiences may be enhanced which could result in more participation and positive development of the children. Findings from this investigation also provides the basis for the future studies to explore in more detail the key relationships in youth sport. Practically, the current findings can be included in the coach education guideline to help provide new knowledge to coaches to understand how they can build relationships with children and parents. Sporting organisations should consider the findings of this research when crating coach education material to help maintain fun, enjoyment and fulfilling life experiences for children via their chosen sporting endeavours.

Practical Implications

The current study investigated the nature of the triad relationship between junior tennis players, parents, and coaches. Three overarching and six dyad relationship specific themes were developed to explain the nature of the triad relationship in the context of junior tennis. The findings of the current study can be utilised by the youth sport program organisers, coaches, and parents to better establish and maintain the triad relationship. Implications of current findings are summarised below.

- Establish open communication channels within the triad. All members of the triad should share common player goals. Thus, communication between the triad members is a crucial part in developing harmonic relationship. This could be achieved by setting up communication channels such as a group chat within a messaging application (e.g., WhatsApp).
- Coaches should strategically talk with the player regarding things outside of tennis. Such communication should be implemented in the coach-player interactions to establish a harmonic relationship, as well as, to create fun environment for the player.
- Coaches and parents should be aware of the boundaries between each member of the triad. Open communication between each member can also help establish healthy boundaries. Coaches and parents should aim to understand the player's needs.
- Coaches should organise parent meetings to explain possible sacrifices parents are required to make to support the player. Also, coach education courses should include a module explaining possible sacrifices of the coach and parent in the junior tennis player development.
- Coaches inform parents regarding how to better interact with the player at the tournament. Knowing the player's preferences for the player-parent interaction is important.

- Coaches should advise parents on how to provide tennis tips to the player. Some players prefer to not get any tips from their parents. Whereas the tips from parents who have competitive tennis experience may be valued more by the player. It might be a good idea for the coach to know the parent's sporting background.
- Educating coaches regarding how to create an effective team of supporting staff for the player. This can be achieved via including a module on this in the coach education course.

Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Form



CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:

We would like to invite you to be a part of a study called **Triad Relationships and the Development of Junior Tennis Players**.

The main aim of this study is to examine the nature of the relationships between junior tennis players, their parents and coaches. We invite you to participate in a semi-structured interview session. Some of interview questions in this project may be very personal, and may cause you to feel anxious or nervous. You have the right to withdraw from the interview/project anytime you wish to.

CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT

I, _____ of _____ certify that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study: **Triad Relationships and the Development of Junior Tennis Players** being conducted at Victoria University by Raku Shimokawa.

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by Raku Shimokawa and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures:

- Semi-structured interviews. Each participant will be asked to participate in one interview session. Duration of the interview session can vary from approximately 45 min to 1.5 hour.

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed:

Date:

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher
Dr. James Zois
Phone: 0413497090
Email: James.zois@vu.edu.au

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email Researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Appendix B: Interview Questions (Coach)

Interview questions (coach)

Experience

- How did you get involved in tennis?
- How did you start coaching?
 - What made you want to be a coach?
 - How many years have you been coaching for?

Coaching philosophies

- As a coach, how would you define success for the children you coach?

Relationships

Coach-player

- In your coaching, how important is the relationship with players?
- In what way does it influence your coaching?
- What do you believe has worked and hasn't worked in the player-coach relationship you have experienced so far?
- In your opinion, what are the things that establish a harmonic relationship with player?
- In your opinion, what are the things that prevent from establishing a harmonic relationship?
- How do you think the player feel when they are working with you?

Coach-parent

- In your coaching, how important is your relationship with players' parents?
- In what way does it affect your coaching?
- As a coach, what are your philosophies in working with parents?
- What do you believe has worked and hasn't worked in the parent-coach relationship you have experienced so far?
- In your opinion, what are the things that make a harmonic relationship with parent?
- In your opinion, what are the things that prevent from establishing a harmonic relationship?
- How do you think the parent feel about working with you?

Player-parent

- What role, if any, do you play in the player-parent relationship?
- In what way does players' relationship with parents influence their development?
- In what ways does player-parent relationship affect your coaching?
- Can you tell me about effective player-parent relationship you have experienced/witnessed in your coaching?

Triad

- In what way does the quality of triad relationship influence your coaching?
- In what ways does the triad relationship influence your experience as a coach?

Appendix C: Interview Questions (Parent)

Interview Questions (parents)

Experience

- What is your sport experience (e.g., former tennis player)?
- What is your tennis experience (e.g., a weekend player etc)?
- How did your child get involved in tennis?
- What do you think are your roles in your child's tennis?

Relationships

Player-parent

- What would you like your child to get out of tennis?
 - Tennis related? Personal development related?
- Has tennis impacted your relationship with your child?
 - Positive impact? Negative impact?
- In your child's tennis, is there anything you intentionally do/avoid to keep your relationship with your child harmonic?

Parent-coach

- What do you usually look for when choosing a coach?
 - What are your expectations?
- What type of information do you share with him/her (just tennis or things outside of tennis as well)?
- In what ways do you think your relationship with the coach impacts your child's tennis experience?
- What do you believe has worked and hasn't worked in the parent-coach relationship you have experienced so far?

Coach-player

- Can you describe the relationship between your child and the coach?
- In what ways do you think your child's relationship with his/her coach impact their tennis experience and development?
- If any, what are your roles in this relationship?

Triad

- Can you describe the current relationship between you, your child, and coach, and what are the major factors contributing in making this relationship the way currently is?

Appendix D: Interview Questions (Player)

- Are there anything you would like them to do differently to help your tennis better?
- How often do you communicate with your parents about your tennis?
- In what ways do you think your relationship your parent impact your tennis?

Coach-parent

- Do you think your parents and your current coach are getting along well?
 - Do you get involved in their conversation?
 - How do you feel about their relationship?
- What are the things you like when your coach and parent are working together to help your tennis?
- Are there things you would like them to change to help your tennis better?
- What sort of impact do you think the coach-parent relationship have on your tennis?

Triad

- In your opinion, what are the things that makes your current triad great?
- If any, what are the things that you would like to change in the current triad?

Relationship

- Can you describe your relationship with your coach? (Current and past)
- How does he/she make you feel when you are working with them?
- What are the things that makes your relationship with the coach great?
- What are the things that makes your relationship with the coach not so great?
- In what ways do you think your relationship with the coach impact your tennis?

Player-parent

- Can you tell me a little bit about your family?
 - Who do you live with?
 - How old are the brothers and sisters (if any)?
 - Do parents or siblings play tennis? or other sports? what standard?
- How do your parents involve in your tennis?
 - What are the things they do to help you with your tennis?
 - What are the things you like about their involvement?

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