The Role of an Educational Intervention In Addressing Parent Spectator Behaviors in Louisiana Youth Sports

Jerry F. Reynolds II

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THE ROLE OF AN EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION IN ADDRESSING PARENT SPECTATOR BEHAVIORS IN LOUISIANA YOUTH SPORTS

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

The School of Social Work

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary youth sports environments present significant psychosocial challenges to the family system. Among the greatest challenges to address are spectator behaviors of parents, which in the public eye has deteriorated and is out of control. Spectator behaviors and their impact upon the sports environment and family system is the topic of investigation in this study. Within the state of Louisiana, the advent of Act 355 extends the consequences of parent behavior and presents challenges to families, referees, and sports organizations. To better understand how legislation impacts parent perceptions of their spectator behaviors, the author examined spectator behaviors parents are observing, their personal behaviors, and how perceptions of these behaviors change through an educational intervention. This study evaluated parent behavior through a lens of background anger and previously identified risky spectator behaviors. Current and former referees in Louisiana also shared their thoughts on the youth sport environment in light of this new legislation. The intent was to better understand parent behaviors and inform interventions to assist parents and sports organizations as they navigate the youth sport landscape.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Youth sports in America face ongoing challenges, especially with parent and spectator behavior. Historically, parent behaviors in this context are overlooked due to apriori assumptions that engagement in youth sports inherently supports positive outcomes (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2011, 2016; Coalter, 2007; Dorsch et al., 2017; Harwood et al., 2019). Sports participation promotes physical and relational development, along with opportunities for life skill acquisition. Unfortunately, problem spectator behaviors can interrupt these positive experiences for all participants. A critical part of the US Youth Sports Strategy adopted in 2019 is to promote positive parent engagement in sideline behavior, appropriate role modeling, and respect for coaches and officials across all sectors of youth sports (HHS, 2019). This dissertation promotes a better understanding of parent spectator behaviors.

The presence of youth sports is significant, as 90% of American children will participate in a sports activity before the age of 18 (Turman, 2007). Estimates on participation rates vary ranging from 36 million youth participants annually (Bogage, 2017, September 6), 45 million participants (Langhorst, 2016) and top out at 60 million (Visek et al., 2015). Parents and caregivers are primary supporters of the youth sports experience (Hellstedt, 1987, 2005; Tafuri & Priore, 2020), leading their children in sports roles, shaping the educational value and benefits of participation. In addition, this intervention study will focus on the spectator behaviors, and approaching it as a growing familial and social problem, (Tafuri & Priore, 2020; Dorsch et al., 2015). The study will examine behaviors observed, along with their personal behaviors and the impact of an educational intervention to address problematic parent actions in youth sports.
Problem Statement

Spectator behaviors are complex phenomena. Spectators can add excitement or conversely, be a detriment to both the youth and family sports experience (HHS, 2019). There is a gap between parental expectations and their sideline interactions with their children (Dorsch et al., 2015). Displays of inappropriate physical and verbal spectator behavior usually too conflict with the ascribed values of sports. In the United States, an increasing number of individuals view sport-based spectator violence as normal and “part of the game.” The criminal justice system loathes the criminalization of such behavior (Fields et al., 2007), largely because it is driven by perception. Spectator behaviors command attention, as they take place in public spaces at athletic complexes or fields. The rise of inappropriate spectator behavior is laden with anecdotal assumptions concerning the causes and practical, limited evidence based solutions (Docheff & Conn, 2004).

Youth sport often involves intense interactions between youth participants, adults, spectators, and their parents (Blom et al., 2013). Sometimes, these interactions can be verbally abusive or violent. Coakley (1998) suggested spectator aggression is rooted in physical behaviors, such as seeking to cause physical harm or destroying property. Goldstein and Iso-Ahola (2008) later describe spectator aggression as not just physical, but verbal and just as harmful to children. Studies have shown when parents as spectators act aggressively and exhibit poor sportsmanship; their children are more likely to exhibit similar behaviors (Arthur-Banning et al., 2009; Shields et al., 2007). Observing conflict between spectators that does not directly involve them can have a negative impact on children (HHS, 2019; Omli & Lavoi, 2009). Because of extensive mass and social media, spectator behaviors too are more visible to the public and can be learned about almost instantaneously. Mass media often does not reflect the
reality or contribute to a better understanding of how parents should act in these settings (Bass, 2014; Omli & Wiese-Bjornstad, 2011). There is debate concerning spectator behavior deterioration as a myth or a reality and limited research on the prevalence of problem behaviors amongst parents and spectators (Heinzmann, 2002; Fiore, 2003; Blom & Drane, 2008; Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008).

Wann (2012) suggested the relationship between parent and youth sports participation is paradoxical, as parents enroll children in sports activities with good intentions, yet displays of aggressive and abusive behavior are frequent. One study found 76% of parents have reported feeling uncomfortable due to the spectator behaviors of others, yet simultaneously, 82% of parents believe they should be educated on the effect their behavior can have on youth sports, and 97% indicated youth sports organizations should outline consequences of inappropriate or unruly behavior (Bach, 2006).

Hostile parent spectator interactions can negatively influence a youth’s desire to participate in sports (Gould et al., 2006; HHS, 2019). Parents in these settings struggle to balance their parental instincts with a hunger for victory (Docheff & Conn, 2004). Shields, Lavoi, Bredemeier, and Power (2005) found approximately 13% of parents get angry with children when they do not perform well and in the same survey, 15% of their children reported similar behaviors. Goldstein and Iso-Ahola (2008) found 28% of parents attributed their anger to their child or child’s teammates. Parents often demonstrate disparate levels of support and pressure as perceived by their children (Kanters et al., 2008) and there is a misalignment of parent goals and spectator communication (Blom & Drane, 2008; Dorsch et al., 2015). As cited in Wann et al (2015), Pallerino (2003) stated 84% of youth sports parents had witnessed an episode of violent behavior. Parental involvement specifically focuses upon how not only parents influence their
child’s beliefs, but also their participation behaviors (Tafuri & Priore, 2020). Three key behaviors of parents are acting role models, demonstrating and sharing their beliefs about sports with children and other spectators, and provide emotional support to the participants (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; Tafuri & Priore, 2020).

**State of American Youth Sports**

Sport settings are regarded as a place where anti-social and violent behavior should not occur (Perton & Gaskell, 1981) and a safe haven for children (Docheff & Conn, 2004). Schuette (2001) suggested the structure of youth sports, generated and maintained by parents, consequently leads to problematic actions and violence. “Sadly, parents and other adults have become too involved in youth sports, making them more structured, competitive, and violent, rather than carefree, recreational, and fun.” (Fiore, 2003, p. 104). According to the Aspen Institute (2015), the United States does not keep official numbers on sports participation, but between the years 2008-13, U.S. sports participation in six popular youth sports in the United States saw a collective decrease of 2.6 million children in the age 6-12 age bracket. Soccer lost over 600,000 participants and softball lost over 400,000 participants. Baseball saw a decrease in over 800,000 participants. An estimated 70% of children are dropping out of sports before the age of 12, and increasing costs, and professionalization of youth sports has marginalized many low-income children (Aspen Institute 2015, 2019). While a neighborhood-based and unstructured play model of youth sports was common in the past, today, the youth sports model emphasizes high levels of organization and specialization. Within these settings, the athlete participates in intense training in one sport in hopes of reaching elite levels (Jayanthi et al., 2013) and this type of behavior increases the potential for sports to evade the perceived positive character development attributes of participation, along with overuse injuries. Conversely, there
is a burgeoning movement of organizations focused upon sport as a tool for positive youth development and this has been spurred by policy work, which demonstrates a need for changed approaches to the current norms of American sport (Aspen Institute, 2015). These organizations seek to maximize positive youth development outcomes and maximize not only the youth, but the family experience through engagement in sport.

The paradox of youth sports stretches beyond spectator behavior. Hidden factors influence who is excluded from participation (Kelley & Carchia, 2013). Participation rates remain high, yet declining youth participation rates amongst American youth and increased burnout\(^1\) (Aspen Institute, 2015; Dorsch et al., 2017) over the last decade have been noted. Children’s participation in sports depends on parent financial contributions, as well as their need to serve the dual role of volunteer coaches and league officials. Family financial status is the number one driver of participation rates (Aspen Institute, 2015) and financial barriers to participation are a catalyst for declining participation rates. Nationally, parents spend about $700.00 on sports annually and this can vary significantly by sports and level of participation (TD Ameritrade, 2019). Expectations of parents to contribute to sports have increased, as national funds and neighborhood-based programs with minimal costs to families have diminished. Cultural norms seem to link the success of children on the athletic field to success in parenting (Coakley, 2006). In many communities, participation in sport is viewed as family entrée into a life of upward mobility. Excluding these children from participation has other psychosocial consequences.

\(^1\) Burnout, as defined by DiFiori et al. (2014) is a spectrum of conditions such as overreaching and overtraining, often occurring because of chronic physiological and psychological stress that causes a young person to cease participation in a sport previously considered enjoyable by the participant.
The consequences of minority children not participating in sports activities are impactful. Participation has been shown to have physical, psychological, and psychosocial benefits. These include, healthier eating habits (Taliaferro et al., 2010), higher grades and levels of academic achievement (Knifsend & Graham, 2012), lower rates of depression (Babiss & Gangswich, 2009; Kremer et al., 2014), lower rates of obesity (Zarrett & Bell, 2014), and enhanced levels of maturity (Fletcher et al., 2003). Through these activities, children are provided opportunities to learn tangible skills, and enhancing personal relationships, not only with peers, but also with adults. Not participating in physical activities as a child can also lead to less likelihood of participating as an adult (Aspen Institute, 2015). The National Youth Sports Strategy has made addressing these barriers a focus of their strategic work, which includes addressing current national norms (HHS, 2019).

Part of understanding barriers to participation must involve better understanding parental spectator behaviors. Spectator behavior is important to appropriate family engagement in youth sport activities and promoting positive outcomes for all children.

Extensive family investment in sports has become a national norm. Docheff and Conn (2004) suggest several factors contribute to rising parent investment and spectator behavioral challenges. Some of these include:

- Living vicariously through the child
- Dreams of superstardom or a college scholarship for athletics
- Sport behavior as an expression of family values
- The behavioral norms of professional athletes
- Increased emphasis upon winning.

American youth sports is a $16 billion-dollar industry and increased investment has led to added stress, especially amongst parents who invest larger portions of their income in sports (Dorsch et al., 2009). According to a recent TD Ameritrade (2019) study, nearly three-quarters of parents (74%) reported financial investment in sports is delaying parents’ ability to save for
retirement. 10% of parents surveyed spent $500 or more a month on their child’s sports activities and 8% spent more than $1,000 a month. This investment has an impact on family life, as 36% of families report taking fewer vacations and 19% report it has been necessary to work a second job to foot the sports bill. Additionally, low-income children are less likely to play sports than those with higher incomes (Aspen Institute, 2019).

Financial status guides several facets of youth sports participation. In poor households, the average start age is approximately eight years of age, almost two years later than wealthier children, and more than one in five children in the United States do not participate due to financial reasons (Aspen Institute, 2015; Flanagan (2017, September 28)). In 2013, suburban children had the highest rate of sports participation for both boys and girls. The peak school grade levels of participation are grades 3-5, where nearly 9 of 10 boys and 8 of 10 girls participate in at least one organized sport. For urban children, approximately 6 of 10 girls and 8 of 10 boys participate and in rural communities, 7 of 10 boys and girls participate in sports (Aspen Institute, 2019). Additionally, recent reports contend nearly 2 of 3 low-income children do not participate in sports and only 22% of children from economically disadvantaged homes (incomes less than $25,000 annually) participate in sports on a regular basis; and suburban children are retaining the highest level of access to sports (Aspen Institute, 2019). Additionally, reports also claim low-income children are three times less likely to have not played a sport in the past year Flanagan (2017, September 28).

Research Problem

At present, the National Youth Sports Strategy (HHS, 2019) lacks specific guidance and evidence-based strategies to address parent spectator behaviors. Lacking are intervention studies examining how parent education programs influence parent behaviors and ultimately, family
behavior (Bach, 2006; Docheff & Conn, 2004; Knight, 2019). Given 90% of children participate in sports during their childhood (Turman, 2007) and their chance of being exposed to inappropriate spectator behavior in a presumed pro-social environment is high, additional steps should be taken to understand the problem in greater detail. Evidence has shown children seek supportive sports parents that provide limited sideline coaching, and positive spectator role (Omli & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011, Tafure & Priore, 2020).

Clarke and Harwood (2014) suggested additional research should explore specific contributors to parent behavior, as research to date has overlooked the social and cultural context of such behavior (Knight et al., 2019). The development of appropriate educational programs to address coping and psychosocial skills at all levels of competition and for all stakeholders, whether they are coaches, parents, sports organization leaders should be an integral part of youth sports programs (Bach, 2006; Docheff & Conn, 2004 Bergeron et al., 2015). There remains a lack of empirical evidence to guide and the design parent education programs (Dorsch et al., 2016; Tafuri & Priore, 2020). The state of Louisiana presents many opportunities for this scholarship.

**Louisiana Context of Issues**

The state of Louisiana struggles with quality of life issues for children. One example where the state lags behind the nation in terms of parental protective factor behaviors is the quality of parental engagement in activities. Approximately, 7.6% of Louisiana parents surveyed meet this standard, compared to a national average of 12.2% (United Health Foundation, 2016). Given sports are widespread, parent spectator challenges are becoming increasingly recognized in Louisiana and need to be treated as a potential contributor to impaired family functioning.
Within the state, parent spectator volatility has been a source of concern, impeding both family functioning and the sports experience. In 2019, the National Federation of High Schools sent out a memo to the Louisiana High School Athletic Association urging parents to “cool it” (Newman, 2019). During a month-long period in 2019, four high school basketball games were terminated due to student/spectator misconduct, and multiple incidents, as many as nineteen student-athletes were ejected during a bench-clearing brawl, a fan assaulted an official, which resulted in criminal charges (Niehoff & Bonine, 2019). According to officials from the Louisiana High School Athletic Association (LHSAA), incidents are not limited to specific school types (public or private), sports or socioeconomic brackets (L. Sanders, personal communication, May 16, 2019), thus indicating the problem is not confined to specific parent populations.

Verbal abuse and direct threats have caused sports officials to quit in rapid numbers. In Louisiana, approximately 78% of officials quit within three years, due to threats against them (L. Sanders, personal communication, May 16, 2019). In response to declining numbers of officials and parent behaviors, there has been relatively swift legislative action to address the problem. Without officials, it is difficult to have sports games, as referees maintain an increasingly important role in enforcement of in game and appropriate spectator activities (Walters et al., 2016).

The establishment of Act 355 in Louisiana spurs opportunities to examine spectator behaviors more closely. This law is among the first in the nation to look beyond known parameters of existing spectator laws, which largely focus merely upon assault of officials and applies to all sanctioned competitive and recreational contests in the state. It addresses the harassment of both school and sports officials, further prohibits re-entry to an athletic facility after a request is made they leave, and outline penalties for these types of actions, whether
physical or verbal towards all participants, including spectators and coaches (State of Louisiana, 2019).

Act 355 unanimously passed both chambers of the legislature in 2019 and signed into law by current Governor John Bel Edwards. The law took effect on August 1, 2019 and violators are subject to fines, up to 90 days in jail, or imprisonment without hard labor, and up to 40 hours of community service. (LHSAA, 2019a; LHSAA, 2019b). The Louisiana High School Athletic Association (LHSAA) and Louisiana High School Officials Association (LHSOA) reports that advocacy for this bill was necessary to improve spectator behavior and supporting higher sportsmanship standards. The law:

- Does not prohibit criticizing or disagreeing with officials
- Prohibits harassment under the law, both verbal or non-verbal behavior that would place a person fear of receiving bodily harm
- Further obligates schools to enact safety protocols for both spectators and officials
- Establishes protocols when spectators refuse to leave
  (LHSAA 2019a; LHSAA, 2019b)

There are questions concerning Act 355’s enforcement, impact on parent sports behaviors, and educational programs to inform parents about the law. At present, school athletic directors and principals have the charge of providing education to their constituents. In recreational contexts, it is the responsibility of league officials to implement these programs. To date, the LHSAA has produced resource documents with talking points for schools, but only minimal educational programs target parents. An understanding of how education regarding this legislation will influence parent behavior will provide guidance concerning proper implementation. In this study, parents will report the frequency and the nature of sideline behaviors they are observing, which behaviors they have personally participated, and participate in an educational program to observe how knowledge of Act 355 may influence their behavior as spectators. To further guide future policymaking, Louisiana can serve as a frame of reference for
other states grappling with similar laws and the development of educational programs related to problem spectator behaviors.

Significance

Given the popularity and far reach of youth sports and high levels of participation, the potential for this study to influence behaviors and inform needs concerning parent behavior is immense. Recent reports have encouraged policymakers to take several courses of action to improve both access and participation amongst youth sports participants. Driven by a notable decline in organized youth sports participation from 2008-13, the Aspen Institute published a report entitled “Sports for All, Play for Life: A Playbook to Get Every Kid in the Game” which provided several recommendations to for policymakers (Aspen Institute, 2015; Jones et al., 2018; Ryan Dunn et al., 2016). This report also noted policy should be the vehicle to promote outcomes such as sustained participation in physical activity and have access to appropriate facilities and programs. An understanding of the parent interface with spectator laws is important in order to promote appropriate parent engagement in youth sports. Sports represent an important place for families to take advantage of healing resources and a nurturing environment.

“Learning, remembering, trusting, or managing your feelings and actions can be a painful challenge for a child who has experienced violence or other adversity” (Cole et al., 2013, p. 10). Essentially, one cannot ignore the behaviors of parents.

Specific Focus of Author

The dissertation explored spectator observations of parents; the personal spectator behaviors of parents; and how educational interventions influence parent perceptions of spectator behavior, especially in light of new laws passed to address these concerns in Louisiana.
Research Questions

Three research questions are fundamental to this research:

R1: To what extent do educational interventions influence parent spectator behaviors?
   H1: Parents will not exhibit a change in spectator behaviors post-intervention

R2: How might demographic variables influence parent spectator behaviors in Louisiana?
   H2: There will be no difference in spectator behaviors amongst grouping variables.

R3: What spectator behaviors are parents observing on the sidelines and how do those vary from those in which they are personally participating?
   H3: There will be no difference in BA Personal and BA Observed scores

Social Work Role in Youth Sports Research

This study will advance the role of social work research in sports-based settings. Social work’s person-in-environment (PIE) perspective and focus on vulnerable populations provide a unique lens and framework for the study of sports-based problems. Despite misconceptions, sports-based interventions were part of the early history of social work (Reynolds, 2017) and have emerged in recent years as areas of important study (Moore & Gummelt, 2018). Lawson and Anderson-Butcher (2000) championed the profession having an ever-increasing role in promoting the wellbeing of all people and social work values were concurrent with the aims of sports. Additionally, a growing national movement, which began in 2015, called the Alliance of Social Workers in Sports, works to support practitioners, and researchers who work in sports contexts. Hanna (1993) contended social work has a place in working with the vulnerable athlete spurred the social work re-entry into a sports-based context. Within the context of college athletics, Dean and Rowan (2014) and Gill (2008, 2014) advocated for social workers to be more engaged in these settings, due to various psychosocial vulnerabilities, such as mental health

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challenges and concerns over college sports taking precedence over academics in college settings. This research expands the reach of sport-based social work research to parents, in light of legislation seeking to protect all participants from harm and positively promote collective goals of youth sports for all children.
CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

The impetus of research on parent spectator behavior in youth sports is well documented within multiple disciplines. This review addresses the history of social work involvement in sports-based capacities, broader challenges identified in youth sports and general problems in youth sports research. Examined is research concerning parent-child interactions in youth sports, fan/spectator behavior, and educational interventions used in youth sports to address parent behavior.

Social Work Role in Youth Sports Research

Psychosocial and social challenges experienced by children who participate in youth sports have gained the attention of several academic disciplines, including social work. Sports-based interventions were part of the early history of social work (Reynolds, 2017). In a modern context, Hanna (1993) was among the first to highlight the unique contribution that professions with a clinical orientation could make in working in athletic capacities. He described social work practice in this area as an unusual, yet innovative approach to providing services to this population. The initial focus of social work practice was to assist athletes with performance-based psychological barriers and blockades to optimal on the field performance in competition and family-based issues such as sibling rivalry. He concluded the most effective way to enhance athletic performance was to equip athletic coaches with appropriate skills, which stemmed from research on collegiate, Olympic, or professional level competitors. Lawton (1977) articulated that a psychodynamic approach was necessary working with athletes and Martens (1987) suggested that two divergent disciplines of sports psychology had emerged, one that focused upon research and one with a clinical orientation. Hartmann (2003) contended sport-based approaches to address social problems are widespread, yet lacking in theoretical orientation.
“Although less exciting, the future of our country is much more dependent upon helping our youth reach their goals than it is on helping elite athletes win gold” (Danish & Nellen, 1997, p.112). Social work, because of its historical foundation and orientation towards vulnerable populations can supplement current efforts of other disciplines.

**Early Social Work and Sports-Based Interventions**

Sports-based interventions have over 100 years of documented history within social work practice (Azzarito et al., 2004; Moore & Gummelt, 2018; Reynolds, 2017). Rooted in a systems-based and strengths-based framework, the discipline fills an important niche in understanding the individual athlete and the athlete’s family system (Dean & Rowan, 2014; Moore & Gummelt, 2018). Reynolds (2017) articulated social work foundress; Jane Addams played the role of defacto athletic director. Her work occurred in the context of the settlement house movement, where she worked with immigrant and poverty-stricken communities. Arguably, consistent with Massey and Whitley (2016) who have written on the role of sports for those facing trauma, Addams and her team performed micro, mezzo, and macro-level interventions as a quality of life enhancer, largely aimed at mitigating poverty and integrating children into American society.

Because of Addams’s overseas study, sports-based interventions were an integral part of her early work to address conditions in the community and positively engage young people in both physical activity and intentional social interactions. In advance of establishing Hull House in the 1880s, she spent time at Toynbee Hall in East London, England, to observe sports-based interventions (Begum, 2012). Over several years, she worked with community leaders to build an onsite gymnasium and construct playgrounds near the site of Hull House. Physical spaces were built in advance of the turn of the century and symbolic of both community spaces and a commitment to athletic programming Athletic activities were most prominent on Saturdays,
where Hull House boys club served about 1,500 youth engaged in athletic competitions (Schwendener, 2001). Athletics at Hull House were recognized by Dr. James Naismith (Vincent, 1994), who publicly celebrated the accomplishments of both the boys and girls basketball programs. Other sports offered included baseball, boxing, gymnastics, and wrestling. The success of the athletic and recreation offerings and their ability to engage young people also spurred Hull House leaders to be engaged in policy advocacy and development activities (Azzarito et al., 2004; Gems et al., 2008, 2017).

Addams was largely engaged in efforts to expand the reach of sports-based interventions. Through the Playground Association of America, Addams helped facilitate rapid expansion of both parks and recreation departments and facilities around the country (Gems et al., 2017). In the late 1910s through the efforts of Addams and Hull House staffers taught sport-based intervention skills at the University of Chicago’s social work program. These courses were tailored towards recreation and sports professionals seeking to earn a certificate or teach technical aspects of sports activities to practitioners, especially in a secular capacity (Chicago School of Civics & Philanthropy, 1918). Courses mimicked modern coaching programs, yet came with a professional responsibility focused on the care of the immigrant, marginalized, vulnerable, and others suffering from adjustment issues to American society or exploitation by the child labor market. Addams died in 1935 and had limited commentary concerning the structure of American youth sports, but the work of staffers, such as Rose Marie Gyles would extend to the advancement of high school sports in the Chicago suburbs.

Simultaneously as schools were integrating sports activities into their curriculum, competitive adult sports leagues became more robust (Berryman, 1975; Wiggins, 2013). Inherently, these programs had a pro-adult orientation and philosophy, were often ran by
businesspersons who sponsored these activities and had a competition-based, professional approach in mind (Brower, 1979; Ogilvie, 1979). When elementary schools first resisted competitive leagues, adults and non-trained professionals stepped in to create “mini-adult” sports leagues for children. These leagues gave children opportunities to compete in sports, but were not youth-development centric capacities, as they had an orientation towards professionalization. Businessmen too would often step in to sponsor these leagues, often resulting in the commodification of sports activities. Limited governmental funds and resources were dedicated to the advancement of these organizations.

Since the 1930’s, there has been recognition of challenges to the design of the American youth sports system (Berryman, 1975). Prior to the 1930s, youth sports activities were largely a function of community recreation departments and community organizations, such as the YMCA and settlement houses (Wiggins, 2013). There was little to no parent involvement in the execution of such activities (Berryman, 1975; Coakley, 2006) and at the elementary school level, there were not competitive sports (Overman, 2014). Competitive activities, physical education scholars in general thought should be preserved for the teen and high school years. However, other perspectives viewed athletics at younger ages important to the advancement of American sports on a global stage, taking on a more adult-oriented framework (Berryman, 1975; Ogilvie, 1979; Wiggins, 2013).

The Shifting Landscape of Youth Sports

During the 1950s, a shift in the youth sports climate shaped the next generation of participants. After World War II, adults accepted the primary role of leading sports organizations. Adults utilized their own social networks to maintain the viability of such leagues, which often were sustained through private funding. Federal priorities prioritized physical
fitness, through the establishment of the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports by Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956 (Weiss, 2000). The 1960s saw the outgrowth of the National Youth Sports Program, in response to mass urban riots of the era. This program provided collaborative funding for National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) member institutions to execute youth programs throughout the United States (Brown-Bray, Theibe, & Wiedow, n.d.). The goal was to serve low-income children, expose them to multiple sports, and integrate life skills training into the curriculum. Sports organizations often excluded minority children from participation, as Little League baseball was not considered fully integrated until 1972, long after professional baseball was integrated by Jackie Robinson in the 1940s (Berryman, 1975; Brower, 1979).

Since the 1970s, youth sports have continued and escalated a professional, rather than youth-development focus (Ogilvie, 1979). Coakley (2006, 2010, 2011) further characterized the role of parents in sports as one of great expectations and one in which the parents both initiate and maintain the child’s involvement in sports. Some have deemed American youth sports as in crisis (Overman, 2014), validated by a culture lacking physical activity, climbing obesity rates, and a poor youth development focus in sport program designs (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2016).

Youth Sport Program Design

Scholarly attention to issues in youth sports design is not new, as Berryman (1975), Overman (2014), Ogilvie (1979), and Walker (1993) contend professionalized approaches to youth sports pose several risks to children and their psychosocial well-being (Bean et al., 2014). The concerns acknowledged by Ogilvie extended into the 1980s and deconstructed collective responsibility reinforced the idea of parents solely being responsible for the behavior of their children both on and off the field of play. There continue to be directives to implement
substantive policy changes to protect the welfare of child participants and to provide guidance to parents who both participate in and run youth sports organizations in the United States (Aspen Institute, 2015), which continue to encounter implementation barriers. Frequent barriers to the implementation of such youth-focused policies are the neoliberal perspective, which Bourdieu (1978) argued that with the glorification of sports as a sole avenue for character building and youth development could spark reason for concern. When there is a repetition of sporting behavior, it becomes part of normal behavior patterns, which Bourdieu labeled the habitus (1978). Maintenance of these disparities reflects greater challenges in sports and reflect societal norms.

Funding for progressive sports programs such as the National Youth Sports program virtually eliminated in the 2000s, but some institutions such as Ohio State University continue to use this model to sponsor their Learning in Fitness Education (LiFE) Sports program under this model. LiFE Sports too remains a recognized model for both participant and leader growth through sports-based interventions, as many of the college student leaders are engaged in research on study participants (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2016). There has been a recent surge in federal funding available to promote youth sports programming, as the Trump administration is seeking to raise $100 million to expand opportunities and the reach of youth sports in the United States (HHS, 2019). This research will promote an understanding of parent as spectator experience and help address parental behavior concerns.

Family Role In Youth Sports

Embedded in the fabric of American culture since the 1950’s are assumptions youth sports typically are positive learning environments, fostering child well-being and a significant source of family interaction (Dorsch et al., 2015). Anticipated and somewhat expected outcomes...
from child participation are, but not limited to the promotion of physical fitness, physical skills, social interaction, and life skills application (Anderson-Butcher, et al 2011; Anderson-Butcher et al., 2016; Hedstrom & Gould, 2004; HHS, 2019). Several scholars have asserted the family is the greatest influence upon a youth’s sports experience and continued participation (Hellstedt, 2005; Holt et al., 2008). Expertise in parenting in youth sports settings does not link to performance alone and is tied to other factors. (Harwood & Knight, 2015). These factors include, but are not exclusively limited to the facilitation of a positive psychosocial experience aiding skill development and is applicable in off the field settings.

Parents extend multiple forms of support to children in sports settings. In addition to financial and in-kind contributions, parents are expected to provide emotional support, as well as approval or disapproval of sports behaviors and performance (Cote & Hay, 2002; HHS, 2019). The success of a child’s performance in the sports may influence parent identity and represent a form of parental success (Clarke & Harwood, 2014). Parent behavior shapes the extent of family sacrifice necessary to maintain participation and support provided, and multiple emotional connections to the sports and child (Dorsch et al, 2009). In addition, sports may change the parent-child relationship, as parents report greater engagement in their child’s life, their peer group, and a larger social network that either expands or concurrently terminates with the association with their child’s team (Dorsch et al., 2009). Sports expectations shape parental identity as well as the parent’s value system. Shields et al (2005) found in their survey that approximately 13% of parents get angry with children when they do not perform well and in the same survey, 15% of their children reported similar behaviors. Parents demonstrate disparate levels of support and pressure as perceived by their children (Kanters et al., 2008) and there is a misalignment of parent goals and spectator communication (Dorsch et al., 2015).
There are various contributors to the parent’s value system concerning expectations of sports behaviors. Eccles (as cited in Horn & Horn, 2007) suggested four major components informing the “parent sports value system.” These four components are the usefulness of sports participation to the family, how the parent perceives the child will value playing sports, attainment value, or the emphasis on performing well, and the consequences/costs of participation.

**Parent Characteristics/Patterns of Involvement**

Efforts to characterize sports parents have been present in the literature over the last few decades. Hellstedt (1987) characterized parent involvement as fitting one of three general categories: overinvolved, moderately involved, and uninvolved. Overinvolved parents invest heavily in the athletic careers of their children, often creating conflict with coaches, officials, and put much pressure on their child to perform at a high level. Moderately involved parents allow their children to be part of the decision-making process concerning sports activities and the child’s interests are primary. Conversely, uninvolved parents exhibit apathy towards their child’s sports experience and lack of investment, regardless of whether that is emotional, financial, or overall support. Dorsch et al (2018) expanded this range of categories using a case study approach and suggested four categories of parents. Underinvolved parents lack attendance and support for their children, such as not providing adequate or appropriate equipment, are disrespectful of coaches, and lack both an emotional and physical presence for their children. Appropriately, involved parents, as being emotionally and physically present, providing encouragement, act appropriately towards all participants, are helpful, and have realistic expectations of their child’s involvement. Overinvolved parents are characterized by micromanaging their child’s athletic activities, trying to tell the coach how to coach, and often
blind support in the form of money, resources, and social connections. These parents are helicopter parents who meddle in the coach’s affairs, focusing more so on the negative than the positive, often as a way to live vicariously through their child. Extreme involvement is characterized by believing their child is the best athlete, focused largely only on outcomes such as an athletic scholarship, perfectionism, and over competitiveness. They too are vocal and often embarrass their children because of their behavior. Tafuri & Priore (2020) elaborated further on the involvement of parents, adapting a model developed by Brackenridge et al (2005) and known as the *Activation States Model*. This model seeks to explain the various forces influencing parenting in the sports context.

**Parent-child interactions.** Brackenridge et al (2005) asserted parents and child athletes’ interactions should be shaped by behavior in which the child’s satisfaction in sports and subsequent parent interaction should meet. This model, developed through extensive qualitative data, describes how parent’s words, their knowledge of the sports, their feelings, and their actions both intersect and interact. In this framework, parents have one of several behavioral states ranging from inactive, reactive, active, proactive, opposed and hyperactive. The thoughts, knowledge level, feelings, and actions present differently in each one of these states. Examples of extremes present in the following manner. Regarding parent thoughts, a parent who is opposed to parental participation might think participation is a “waste of time”, whereas the hyperactive parent will dwell on reasons for poor performance or is thinking if they did something to put their child in a position to lose a game. Parental knowledge in these extremes will range from verbalizing prejudices or indifference, and at the extreme, parents will use knowledge as a weapon to gain a competitive edge, with limited consideration of the child’s well-being. This can include enrolling them and making extensive commitments to very specialized training.
programs. Regarding feelings, parents may exhibit apathy or resistance to participation, or on the extreme end, will only look outcomes with a hyper focus upon winning. Concerning parental actions, those may range from active opposition to participation through refusal to provide financial support, overemphasizes failures, and on the other end, parents may scream and shout from the sidelines or breach codes of conduct. Dorsch et al (2015) used a qualitative approach to examine family interactions and parent socialization in the first year of sports participation. In this approach, the researchers observed participants, parents journaled their experience across an entire year of sports, and conducted semi-structured interviews. The research concluded that parents assimilate into the roles expected of parents around them. Additionally, Dorsch et al (2015) used this same group of parents to look at expectations over the same period and concluded that sideline behaviors often did not align with the goals parents had established for their children’s participation in sports.

**Family conflict.** Coakley (2006, 2011), Fiore (2003), Omli and Wiese-Bjornstal (2011), and Siegenthaler, and Gonzalez (1997) suggested certain sports environments can strain family relationships. Increased financial spending and family pressure to perform causes a strain on autonomy support (Joussemet et al., 2008), or the child’s level of participation in sports decisions and how parents meet the needs of their children in a sports context. The level of parent involvement and appropriate parent-child boundaries are instrumental in fostering appropriate youth development. This can extend to a misalignment of perceptions of a child’s athletic abilities and necessary training required to be more than a recreational athlete. The risks associated with early specialization and youth travel-based environments saw increased recognition in the 1970s (Brower, 1979; Cote, 1999; Ogilvie, 1979; Overman, 2014; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). In these settings, children are spending increased amounts of time on sports,
especially in select/travel environments where it is not outside of the norm to spend twenty or more hours per week on sports activities (Overman) and families are omitting time spent on non-sports activities for their children. There too are increased potential for physical hazards due to overuse injuries, poor emotional regulation skills, and an overemphasis upon performance (Callender, 2010; Jayanthi et al., 2013). Managing and negotiating the various roles a parent plays in the sports context has prompted scholars to explore family dynamics in the context of youth sports.

Despite national outcries against early specialization, research demonstrates most specialization negatively influences overall sports participation rates by increasing the potential for burnout, yet, specialization is beginning at earlier ages (Jayanthi et al., 2013; Russell & Limle, 2013). According to Crane and Temple (2015), a lack of enjoyment, competing priorities, too much parental pressure and physical factors such as injury all contribute to burnout. In travel-based sports environments, youth often spend excessive amounts of time (an average of 20 hours per week) on one athletic activity. In such settings, there is potential for physical health hazards, poor emotional regulation, and enter an environment where high performance and winning are the expectation (HHS, 2019; Overman, 2014). Notable conflict also occurs when parents place excessive emphasis on winning and often lose sight of the developmental interests of their young athlete (Smoll et al., 2011). When excessive emphasis on winning and development is pushed, the “professionalization” of youth sports occurs and parents put their children at risk for antisocial outcomes (Holt et al., 2009). Positive outcomes reported from quasi-professional youth sports include increased sports skill development (Livingston et al., 2016), but may lead to family enmeshment in such environments.
Wann, et al (2015) investigated the role of team identification in verbally and physically aggressive baseball parents. Their findings suggested that a psychological connection to the team (strength of connection) was a significant predictor of a person’s willingness to participate in verbally aggressive, not physical acts of aggression in youth sports settings. The authors built upon previous research of Hennessy and Schwartz (2007) who found that gender, levels of anger, vengeance, and hostility were predictors of aggressive spectator behavior. The sample of 80 participants consisted of 60% parents whose children participated in both recreational and travel baseball leagues and their youth athletes ranged in age from 6-16 years.

Recognition of Spectator Challenges

The climate of youth sports has presented challenges for several decades and spectator violence has ignited a need for legislation (Frankl, 2007). Unfortunately, sports-related violence occurs at all levels of sport and there are severe physical and psychological repercussions (Fields et al., 2007). Recognition of adult controlled organized sports having potential for violence and physical education organizations continually denounced overly competitive sports programs has been existed for decades. To counteract such behaviors, the earliest spectator laws date back to the 1950s. They stemmed from New Jersey soapbox derby events designed to avert potential danger to all participants, whether they were participating in events or spectating (Appenzeller, 2000). Early spectator based legislation held that sports organizations were liable for failing to protect the safety of all sporting event participants. Three key elements of sports spectator law according to Wong (2010) (a) the ability to protect spectators from elements and products that may cause injury (b) a duty to provide routine maintenance of facilities (c) a duty to protect spectators from harm. Other changes occurred during this time.
Child Preferences of Spectators

Scholars have explored child preferences of spectator behaviors. Using a grounded theory approach, Omli and Wiese-Bjornstal (2011) documented the preferred behaviors children expected of their parents in the youth sports context. This research was conducted in response to the argument there was limited empirical evidence to support how parents should act in the youth sports context (Omli & Lavoi, 2009). Omli and Wiese-Bjornstal (2011) developed three categories of parents based upon the responses of 58 child sports participants ages 7-14 in their study. Youth participants prefer parents, offer praise and encouragement, limited sideline coaching and should avoid acting as ‘crazed’ fans, such as criticizing officials or other players, arguing with other fans, and disruptive cheering (Omli & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011). Docheff and Conn (2004) offered several practical suggestions to address spectator behaviors. Sports organizations should emphasize harm reduction strategies through:

- Offering sportsmanship courses
- Parent codes of conduct
- Zero-tolerance policies
- Establishing days where sideline silence is required
- Fining offenders
- Elimination of scoring keeping from games

Research Problem

There are minimal tools to guide parents regarding spectator behavior (Bach, 2006; Dochett & Conn, 2004; Dorsch et al., 2016) and a paucity of literature to identify appropriate interventions to address these behaviors (Omli & Lavoi, 2009; Omli & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011). There is limited examination of parent behavior in sports and risk factors associated with poor spectator behavior (Bach, 2006; Dochett & Conn, 2004; Livingston et al., 2016). Dorsch et al (2017) pilot study demonstrated evidenced-based parent education programs in a youth soccer
context have a positive impact on parent involvement, parent/child relationships concerning sports, and promote positive participation outcomes for those who utilize evidence-based materials. Additionally, existing studies lack racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity in research samples (Dorsch et al., 2017; Knight, 2019).

Research concerning spectator laws, related educational programs and the intersection of parent behavior are limited (Bean et al., 2014; Harwood & Knight, 2015; 2016; Horn & Horn, 2007; Knight, 2017). Similar challenges have been acknowledged in Canada, where parent education programs such as the “Respect in Sports” program have been effective in reaching over one million participants, but substantive evaluation of the program has been limited (Bean et al.; Respect Group, Inc., 2018).

The National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS) created national standards for youth sports. These provide guidance to parents, volunteers, and youth sports leaders concerning appropriate development and standards for organizations. A working group of certified youth sports administrators from the United States administrators developed the 2017 standards. Driving this policy development is a set of four core standards. Key components are the development of child-centered philosophies and policies that work in the best interest of child participants, volunteers, parents, and in turn, create a psychologically and physically safe environment for all participants. Recommendations included sports organizations work with parents to establish organizational goals and behavioral expectations, sign codes of conduct documents and provide a positive environment for all participants (NAYS, 2017). In addition, there are also expectations outlined concerning open lines of communication between parents and organizations with mutual goals of providing constructive feedback about both the child,
Comprehensive Reviews of Parental Involvement

Lindstrom-Bremer (2012) highlighted research concerning parental involvement, support, and pressure exerted towards young athletes in the context of youth sports. Noted are a lack of studies for meta-analysis, yet sufficient data to direct research. Examined were studies focused on children in the context of sports (ages 3-19) and parent behavior in a family systems theory context published from 1990-2009. Of note were several studies as cited in Lindstrom-Bremer (2012) were Holt et al (2008); Hoyle and Leff (1997); Kanters et al (2008); Lee & McLean (1997); Leff and Hoyle (1995); Wolfenden & Holt (2005); and Wuerth et al (2004). A sports culture and landscape gravitating towards, professional, rather than youth sports models of development (Hellstedt, 2005; Lindstrom-Bremer, 2012) exacerbates research challenges. Few studies explore how youth sports parent education programs impact family systems (Dorsch et al., 2017).

Family and parents are strong influences upon individual decisions to engage in or discontinue sports participation (Cote & Hay, 2002; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; HHS, 2019; Hellstedt 1987; 2005). In American society, parents have a significant role in the sports experience of the child (Coakley, 2010) and this has increased (Stefansen et al., 2018). American culture views youth sports as a tool for positive development, mitigation and reformation of bad behavior, and fostering social capital (Coakley, 2011). Neoliberal ideas connect success in parenting directly links to successful performance on the field. From this perspective, parents are solely responsible for controlling, and shaping the development of their children exacerbate dominant cultural values (Coakley, 2006, 2010). Sports has become part of the American
habitus, or what Bourdieu (1978) describes as family norms, and these norms root in the parent’s personal experience with sports (Wheeler, 2012). These norms are reinforced at home, as parents provide emotional, informational, and tangible support, as part of child participation (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). A lack of engagement or over engagement from parents can put a child at risk of terminating participation (Cote & Hay, 2002) and specific parenting skills are required to mitigate these challenges or minimize damage (Clarke & Harwood, 2015; Dorsch et al., 2018). Limited research directly addresses parent challenges (Dorsch et al., 2017; Knight et al., 2019). Family systems theory is an important framework to explore the intersection of sports and the family.

**Family Systems-General Overview**

Family systems theory is applicable for both social work theory and practice. This theory is important to consider in a sports context, given the cross-cultural interaction of families and sports in American culture. This framework evolved in the 1950s and links individual’s success in therapy to the strength of family relationships (Kerr, 1981). Interestingly, the family systems approach germinated from research concerning the interaction of individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia and their families (Bowen, 1960). Bowen (1966) argued a family systems approach was a part of a healthy, yet a chaotic movement, which recognized the need to treat more intense emotional problems. Therapeutic approaches evolved from perspectives that focused more on how the individual view themselves within the context of the family rather than direct observation of family dynamics and interactions.

Minuchin (1985) elaborated further and stated the family is an organized system in which individuals contribute to behaviors and patterns that regulate behavior. Bowen (1966) argued full appreciation for the family approach comes through experience. Three assumptions driving this
theoretical framework are the recognition of co-dependency of members, functioning in a circular manner, and seek obtain homeostasis (Minuchin, 1985). Within the family system, there are substructures, comprised of relationships between members and interactions from those outside the system. Barnhill (1975) (as cited in Barnhill, 1979) claims tension between pathological characteristics is the mark of normal family functioning. These eight areas of tension as described by Barnhill are (1) individuation v. enmeshment; (2) mutuality v. isolation; (3) flexibility v. rigidity; (4) stability v. disorganization; (5) clear v. distorted perceptions; (6) clear v. distorted communication; (7) role reciprocity v. role conflict; and (8) clear or breached generational boundaries. Spectators reveal public displays of family behavior and cultural context is an important consideration.

**Family Systems Theory-Sports Context**

Stainback and Lamarche (1998) advocated the use of family systems theory as both a comprehensive and interactive framework to work with athletes. In a sport context, the family system refers to all of the individuals who influence the athlete’s behavior and relationships with those individuals whom they interact within the context of sports (Stainback & Lamarche, 1998; Zimmerman & Protinsky, 1993). This included parents, coaches, immediate family members, teachers, and other relatives. Prior to Hanna (1993), social work interventions for athletes came from sports psychology, and emphasized athletic performance, rather than the overall functioning of their athlete. Zimmerman and Protinsky (1993) advocated utilizing a family systems therapy approach with coaches and their athletic teams. In this approach, the team is empowered to generate their own solutions and exhibit collective problem-solving behaviors. Family systems-based approaches lead to improved relationships among team members, and
improved confidence of sports participants and collective team climate. Hellstedt (2005) further elaborated the behavior of families in the athletic realm by focusing on family systems.

Scholars have continually identified two key forces that shape the functioning of the family sports system (Dorsch et al., 2017; Kanters et al., 2008; Neely & Holt, 2014). The first of these functions is to provide support to the child participant. As discussed, providing support included providing financial resources to initiate and maintain participation, proper equipment to promote safety and optimal performance, and emotional support in the form of feedback regarding performance expectations. The second force affecting family functioning in the sports realm is that of pressure. Pressure, is defined as both expectations and perceptions of the individual athlete and their family within the context of the team environment and the broader community (Dorsch et al., 2016; Kanters et al., 2008; Leff & Hoyle, 1995). The broader community can extend across the school, local, and state levels and in rare cases, national levels.

To develop a theoretical framework, which seeks to understand the influence of parent youth sports education upon spectator behavior, social exchange theory is important to consider.

**Social Exchange Theory**

Social exchange theory can help explain parent spectator behavior. Parental roles in sports intertwine with complex, multifaceted roles and processes (Cote & Hay, 2002; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, several scholars posited this theory could explain burnout, dropout, and enjoyment in the context of sports (Fender, 1989; Hill & Simons, 1989; Ogilvie, 1979; Rosenberg, 1981; Schlossberg, 1981). Thibaut and Kelley (as cited in Schmidt & Stein, 1991) asserted sports participants continually grapple with perceived outcomes, expectations, and consider alternatives before terminating participation. Parent decision-making drives interaction with the sports system, as engagement requires rearrangement.
of social networks and activities (Lavallee, 2000). There too is recognition of increased intensity of involvement by parents and the expectations of parenting they both encounter and negotiate as adults (Stefansen et al., 2018).

Social exchange theory is especially present in the athletic retirement literature (Park et al., 2013). Researchers such as Rosenberg (1981) suggested the retiring athlete negotiates many processes in order to successfully transition to the next phase of life. When the sports career is over and the former athlete becomes a parent, the parent must continually evaluate the role sports may play within the family system. Critiques of the social exchange theory framework are assumptions that transitions are inherently a negative event (Lavallee, 2000). Parents have created a sports environment where managing demands of sports on the family system presents difficulties (Brower, 1979; Coakley, 2010; Gould, 2009; Ogilvie, 1979; Overman, 2014). When a more professional system of youth sports serves as a guide, parents encounter and must negotiate a sports environment with a “high risk, high reward” mentality. In this environment, the child may advance to an elite athlete at the risk of early burnout and early termination of participation, and estimated 70% of children drop out of youth sports by the age of twelve (Coakley, 2010; Aspen Institute, 2015; Stefansen et al., 2018).

Several research-based design principles can shape how children benefit from participation. Anderson-Butcher et al (2011, 2016) describe these principles in detail and inform theories of youth development using a positive youth development approach (Cote & Hay, 2002; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Sports programs that are both autonomy-supportive and mastery-motivated have a positive impact upon children (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2011, 2016; Holt et al., 2009). Autonomy supportive programs allow children to develop their own independence and derive/reinforce their own personal motivations for participation exterior to
their parents. In these types of environments, youth participate in activities that are enjoyable and fun, they create a sense of belonging and connectedness as a result of participating in activities with others, feel emotionally, physically, and psychologically safe, and foster initiative and an independent desire for continued participation (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2011, 2016).

A mastery-motivated climate is one that allows children to focus on learning the skills associated with an activity or sports and the ability to try different sports activities and derive a sense of accomplishment from learning a new skill. In addition, research has shown children are often driven to sports because they enjoy the activity and their level of enjoyment is predicted by positive perceptions of the own sports experience (Russell & Limle, 2013). In positive sports environments, children are motivated to learn new activities, and enjoy the opportunity to develop or further friendships (Aspen Institute, 2015; Neely & Holt, 2014). Sports offer opportunities for the enhancement of relationships with siblings (Bean et al., 2014). Winning too has been found to not be a primary driver of participation (Aspen Institute, 2015; Visek et al., 2015), but the commitment to the activity is an important contributor to whether the child continues or terminates participation (Schmidt & Stein, 1991). Given the family’s influence on the child’s continued and sustained participation, reinforcing these autonomy-supportive and mastery-motivated principles is important (Russell & Limle, 2013).

**Contemporary Challenges**

Youth sports are increasingly commodified, commercialized, privatized, and professionalized (Aspen Institute, 2015; Jones et al., 2018). They too provide challenges to low-income families on the periphery of participation (HHS, 2019). When one takes race and culture into account, playing sports may not have the returns promised in popular culture (Eitle & Eitle, 2002). At the crux of a social justice perspective concerning youth sports policy is to observe
who is being marginalized from participation. Across the most popular sports in the United States, from 2008-2013, there were declining participation rates and a dropout rate of approximately 70% from organized youth sports by the age of twelve and increased numbers for minority children (Aspen Institute, 2015).

Children are terminating participation largely because of a lack of fun, overly competitive environments, and an inability of families to manage demands of sports upon the family system (Aspen Institute, 2015; Visek et al., 2015). In addition to declining participation rates, which are greater amongst low-income and minority children, those who have less access to both public and private facilities for participation are being left out. Public priorities, funding for local recreation centers in low-income communities have become increasingly limited, and schools have decreased resources for children to participate (Aspen Institute, 2015). Conversely, participation in decentralized, privately-run and privately funded youth sports organizations have seen a dramatic increase in popularity (Jones et al. 2018). There remains an impetus to study factors contributing to declining participation (HHS, 2019).

Despite the risks associated with the design of American youth sports, limited educational resources exist to guide parents in their sports decision-making (Clarke & Harwood, 2015, 2016; Fields et al., 2007; Knight, 2019). There is a lack of communication across disciplines to identify evidence-based intervention strategies (Fields et al.). Recent actions concerning policy surrounding the importance of youth development and physical activity have entered the fold (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2011, 2016). A social justice focused framework allows the researcher to observe whom current policy benefits and the costs of inaction and impact upon the marginalized and who is experiencing burnout and dropout in youth sports.
Dropout and Burnout

Several systematic reviews inform various aspects associated with challenges in youth sports for participants. The first of these issues is burnout and dropout. Crane and Temple (2015) conducted a systematic review of factors associated with burnout and dropout from sports. The review synthesizes information from 35 studies, which were largely quantitative in nature and focus on burnout issues in adolescent males. The review concludes both intrapersonal, interpersonal, rather than structural factors have the strongest influence on sports burnout and recommended future studies focus on mixed methods approaches (Crane & Temple, 2015). According to these scholars, the most significant factors that contribute to burnout are “lack of enjoyment, perceptions of competence, social pressures, competing priorities and physical factors (maturation and injuries)” (Crane & Temple, 2015, p. 114). Of note within the literature concerning how to increase parent engagement are gaps in research concerning conceptual models that inform how both children and parents interact to promote physical activity within the family system (O’Connor et al., 2009). Spectator behaviors and should support, rather than impede participation. Sports officials and referees offer valuable perspectives concerning the nature of spectator behavior.

Referee Perspective

Sports referees provide an important perspective to include regarding spectator behavior. They have proximal access to spectators, and have the charge of enforcing rules and regulations of such behavior at almost all contests. There is a paucity of literature involving their perspectives (Walters et al., 2016) Sports officials are quitting at alarming rates, thus making it increasingly difficult to find and recruit officials to manage games. According to the National Association of Sports Officials (NASO), 70% of officials are quitting within three years of
learning the job and 21 states have legislation regarding consequences for inappropriate behavior towards officials. Most existing law, which has passed since 1984, addresses behavior such as assault and battery. In 2017, the NASO surveyed over 17,000 officials from around the country and 39% of officials felt that parents, more so than coaches, fans, and players, cause the greatest problems with sports behavior. In addition, 57% of officials felt sportsmanship is getting worse. Survey participants also felt that parents (23%) and coaches (54%) were the most important role in improving sportsmanship. The greatest sports environment contributing to sportsmanship issues on a national level were youth competitive sports, identified by 36% of study participants, adult recreational sports (21%) and high school sports (14%).

A total of 192 officials from Louisiana participated in this survey. Some findings were consistent with the national averages, as 33% of participants felt parents were the greatest challenge to sportsmanship, yet there was an equal contribution from coaches to the problem (33%), which exceeded study averages. Sports fans were the largest problem, according to 22% of participants, which was higher than the study average of 18%. Furthermore, 59% of participants from Louisiana felt sportsmanship was getting worse, which was above the average (56%). There too are high expectations concerning the role of coaches as being the most responsible for improving sportsmanship (51%), followed by parents at 21%, both lower than the study averages. Previous research has shown when asked about the frequency of inappropriate spectators behaviors, referees report such events at greater rates than coaches (Walters et al., 2016) and future studies be inclusive of this front line perspective on youth sports.

Findings from the NASO (2017) survey illustrate perceptions of decreased responsibility of parents and coaches to improve sportsmanship in Louisiana in comparison to the rest of the country, yet the greater perception that fans are greater contributors to the problem. In Louisiana,
68% of participants reported removing a spectator from a game, compared to 65% of national participants. At the time of writing, Kentucky and Arkansas were grappling with the establishment of similar laws (L. Sanders, personal communication, May 16, 2019)

Parent Education Programs

In recent years, in the context of sports-based interventions, published work has examined the important and potential role of parent education programs. Dorsch et al. (2017) relied upon 89 evidence-based sources to develop a parent education manual. Beyond this study, there are limited intervention studies, but other pieces of literature make valuable contributions. Harwood and Knight (2016) elaborate on the many skills required of parents to assist their children in sports. These are important given both the increased levels of engagement in youth sports by parents and recognition of the need to understand parent behavior to create optimal sports outcomes (Stefansen et al., 2018). Also important are generational changes related to parenting practices in sports (Wheeler & Green, 2014), which also warrant understanding parents’ role in sports through interventions (Bean et al., 2014). The emphasis upon parent involvement at its core supports that athletic performance should not be a determinate of wellbeing and spectator behaviors have an important role (HHS, 2019).

Spectator Behavior Research

Fiore (2003) contends the parent experience of youth sports should be just as enjoyable for parents as it is for young people. When parents become overly involved in sports, making them more competitive and structured, the potential for violence increases. Goldstein and Iso-Ahola (2008) compared the anger parents as spectators to road rage. The episodes of anger stemmed from a disagreement with an official or disappointing results; lasting just a few minutes at a time. In their study, parents were asked during the course of a soccer game to self-report
their behaviors immediately following the event. Most parents were mad only for a few minutes and only a small percentage had anger lasting longer than 10 minutes. Their sample of 425 soccer parents was homogenous and representative of the community in which the research was conducted and drew several conclusions. Nearly half of the parents in the study (47.5%) reported no anger causing events. The remainder of the participants reported displaying angry behaviors that were mild to moderate in nature and not long lasting. Nearly two-thirds of the anger reported anger with the referees (18.9%) and being upset with the play of their own child (15%). Other factors contributing to anger were discourteous opponents (6.8%), inappropriate remarks (5.1%), coaches (4.7%), and illegal play (3.3%). Other types of angering events that were not categorized constituted the remaining seven percent of issues. They concluded that parents who sought greater amounts of control over their child’s sports careers and the greater one perceived that those actions that made them mad were a personal attack against them. They recommended more research on interventions to help parents better manage their anger and should consider the impact that anger of parents has on children, including sports participants that are not their own children. According to Walters et al (2016), future studies should consider the role of gender in spectator behavior in sports.

Blom and Drane’s (2008) study of 110 observing parents and recording comments is useful in understanding the nature of conflicting sideline statements. They qualitatively examined parents in a low income Gulf Coast community during baseball, basketball, and soccer games for children ages 6-14. In total, 30 boys games and 21 boys games were observed and the study revealed 50% of comments were positive, one third were negative, and the remainder were neutral. Gender differences were a notable finding, as girls receive more positive comments than boys do, however, parent gender did not account for differences in comments. Parents make
comments about once a minute during the course of a game for boys and about every 1.6 minutes for girls. About 80% of the total comments were reinforcing (31.3%), correcting (28.3%), and directed towards effort (hustle) (20.4%). Direct scolding accounted for 3.4% of comments overheard. The authors suggest the frequency of corrective comments is troubling, because previous research has indicated children may experience delays in skill development, as the content may not be accurate and the timing may not be appropriate (Blom & Drane, 2008). Other studies took on a different approach to spectator behavior.

Omli and Lavoi (2009) studied the topic of parent behavior in spectator settings through a lens of background anger and responded to calls in the research community that sport-based assessments of parent behavior lacked scientific rigor. Background anger involves verbal, non-verbal or physical interactions between two people, does not directly involve the observer, and is potentially distressing to children. In a sport-based setting, this involves parents who have an exchange with other adults that may stem from a conflict over a call made by a referee or a disagreement over a coach’s decision or behavior. In order to examine the presence of this behavior amongst parents, Omli and Lavoi (2009) developed a background anger scale adapted to a sports-based audience. The ten survey items looked at behaviors that met their definition of background anger. These behaviors included interactions with other parents, referees, their own children, and their child’s teammates. A 5 point Likert scale was used to assess the frequency of behaviors and the study found that amongst parents, coaching from the sidelines and yelling at the referees were the most commonly reported behaviors by parents, confirming past research as (Hennessey & Schwartz, 2007; Shields et al 2005; Shields et al., 2007).

Omli and Lavoi’s (2012) grounded theory study noted such behaviors were motivated by anger, perceptions of unjust, uncaring, and incompetence on the part of officials, other
spectators, and coaches. In a sample of 773 parents and 982 responses, 59% of which was female, participants were asked to respond to an open-ended question concerning events that made them angry at youth sporting events. Future research and program development should aim to reduce levels of background anger and lead to positive experiences in youth sports for officials, parents, spectators, and the youth participants. Also important was to examine triggers for background anger to facilitate interventions seeking to build parent self-awareness, consistent with Blom and Drane (2008).

**Intervention Research in Social Work and Sports**

This intervention research study targeted youth sports parents and spectator behaviors. Social work continues to have a growing focus on intervention research. As a profession dedicated to promoting change in communities and empowering individuals, intervention research uses scientific principles to understand behavioral, community, and social problems (Fraser, 2004). The focus of social work intervention research is to provide a systematic study of purposive strategies through which change occurs (Fraser & Galinsky, 2010).

There are limited intervention studies involving youth sport parents (Dorsch et al., 2015a; Dorsch et al., 2015b; Harwood et al., 2019; Omli & Lavoi, 2009; 2011). Harwood et al (2019) and Knight (2019) have identified some methodological issues and urged scholars to diversify their focus in order to have a more in-depth focus upon parenting behaviors. These include an oversimplification of the types of “sports parents”, homogeneous samples of parents, a limited understanding of cultural and developmental influences upon the child and family, and a limited focus upon the family structure and its role in influencing parental behavior, as the majority of research has engaged heterosexual families.

There are other important considerations. In their review of relevant literature, Harwood et al (2019) concluded less than 15% of known studies actively engage parents in the research
process. Studies have focused on the parent relationship to youth sports, but have limited focus on parent behavior (Bean et al., 2014; Hellstedt, 1990; Holt et al., 2008; Holt et al., 2009; Leff & Hoyle, 1995, 1997; Lindstrom & Bremer, 2012; Neely & Holt, 2014; Wheeler, 2012; Dorsch et al., 2018). The referenced studies utilize qualitative methods, whereas, studies that focus on support and pressure in youth sports utilize qualitative and quantitative approaches. The increased role of parents in sports is also a stimulating area of study (Wheeler & Green, 2014; Stefansen et al., 2018). Over the last seven years, scholars such as Lindstrom-Bremer (2012) and Bean et al (2014) have authored reviews concerning the intersection of parents and youth sports. Harwood and Knight (2016) also highlight studies in a special edition of *Sports, Exercise, and Performance Psychology* dedicated to summarizing research concerning sports parent behavior and the role of parents in sports. Bean et al. (2014) focus on negative consequences and challenges associated with youth sports. The parent role in sports is one of great importance and Harwood and Knight (2016) and describe this as such:

Parenting in sports is not a static task but rather one that is fluid and responsive to the different needs of children and sports organizational systems. By definition, this also places changing demands on parents, as they are required to transition as their child transitions through sports (p. 86).

Harwood and Knight (2015) argued parenting expertise in the context of sports requires demonstrating competencies that require intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational skills allowing them to effectively support their child and operate within the sometimes (and increasingly) pressure-filled environment of youth sports. They asserted more intervention research be conducted to explore how to better assist parents in their roles as a sports parent. Harwood and Swain (2002) and Smith et al (2007) offered similar suggestions. Knight et al (2017) recommended research delve into strategies to address multifaceted challenges associated
with parenting young athletes. Answering the call to further this research, the author will expand on and integrate existing approaches to the study of parent behavior in youth sports.

**Recommendations for intervention research in youth sports.** There have been several calls to expand intervention research concerning parents and youth sports (Harwood & Knight, 2015, 2016; Knight et al., 2019). However, this call is not without challenges. A small amount of research examines parents in a case study or systematic manner (Harwood & Knight, 2016). Conversely, scholars such as Lindstrom-Bremer (2012) and Harwood and Knight (2015, 2016) and Knight, Berrow, and Harwood (2017) note few qualitative studies support the importance of parents in youth sports that inform known intervention studies (Blom & Drane; Harwood & Swain, 2002; Smith et al., 2007). The author seeks to answer this call by expanding intervention research directly involving parents. Specifically, the author sought to expand upon research evaluating how parent education influences parent behavior in the context of youth sports (Dorsch et al., 2017; Lafferty & Triggs, 2014; Vincent & Christensen, 2015).

**Parent intervention programs.** Parent education programs offer benefits to participants (Christofferson & Strand, 2016). A growing body of evidence-based interventions has led to an increasing number of parent education programs (Dorsch et al., 2017). Dorsch et al (2017) study involved parents from 81 families whose children were ages 6-10, competed in soccer and examined how participation in a youth sports parent education program influenced parent behaviors, concerning perceptions of over-involvement, negative communication, a lack of support, and excessive pressure. The “Youth Sports Parent Guide” as developed by Dorsch et al was the educational resource for the intervention. Parent participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups; one with a 45-minute in-person educational session, one group who examined the manual at their leisure, and the third group, or control group, did not receive the
educational resources. The study demonstrated significant differences in perceived child support and variance amongst the subgroups (21% of variance), and saw statistically significant differences in perceived levels of pressure exerted by parents (32% of group variance). Decreases in the perceived conflict between parents were also statistically significant, explaining 32% of group variance. The evaluation measures in this study had acceptable levels of reliability and validity.

A brief intervention program used the sports setting as the context and physical location of the intervention, which sought to influence mental health literacy [Hurley et al., 2018]. The intervention was a pilot study, and had two comparison groups. Rather than utilizing a simple pre-test post design, a time series design was chosen. The assessment of participants occurred before the intervention, immediately following the intervention and one month after the intervention occurred. The authors found the sport setting useful in promoting mental health. A qualitative study conducted by prefaced this intervention and examined how parents sought to receive information about mental health (Hurley et al., 2018). Parents desired brief information relevant to their role as a parent. Additionally, they desired specific actions they could take to address problems in multiple formats. The researchers noted parents found the sports setting provided a safe space and an effective social networking environment for stimulating discussion. Parents received a one-hour workshop, which included ample time for discussion and supplemental materials, in online and print format. Dorsch et al (2018) also found the format of a 1-2 hour educational program was appropriate for parents.
Models to guide intervention design. Vincent and Christensen (2015) educational materials assisted parents in both managing and understanding their role in the child’s sports activities. The program sought to increase self-awareness and promote better control of behavior and promotion of emotional intelligence (Vincent & Christensen). The intervention involved four one-hour long workshops, conducted on parents whose children participate in soccer ranging from ages 11-17. The workshops were interactive and designed to be collaborative, not exceeding 30 parents. Challenges included consistent attendance at the workshop, due to assumptions that it strictly focuses upon “parenting” and logistics. Much of the benefits were parent-to-parent interactions and sometimes this created disagreements in a setting where cohesion amongst parents was necessary to be engaging and effective. The evaluation process also proved a challenge, since the workshops were all independent sessions, lacking points of progression. Informal feedback drove program evaluation.

Lafferty and Triggs (2014) “Working with Parents in Sports” (WWPS) model serves as a guide practitioners in the development of support programs. The program, developed for parents of elite junior athletes, assisted in the development of expectations of their child’s athletic in national teams or elite professional clubs. The principal goals were empower parents to be proactive supporters of their athlete. Given social work’s focus upon empowerment, the authors note the empowerment process relies on parents having several skills. These include the ability to make informed decisions concerning their child, as parents tend to gravitate to the most vocal of other parents or those who many perceive to have an expert type persona that in actuality is limited. Key components of the model were understanding the structure of the sports organization, and emotional regulation; especially concerning success and failures of the athlete.
WWPS has limitations. Minimal guidance concerning how to deliver information to parents. Limited information is provided concerning potential research or intervention designs, instead choosing to offer suggestions on points in time for evaluation or intervention, reinforcing the findings of Vincent & Christensen (2015). This model was constructed in the United Kingdom and potential differences in conceptions of elite athletes and the influence of private club and travel teams may differ. Educational models require adaptation to the context, reinforcing an important consideration in research (Bean et al., 2014; Harwood & Knight, 2015, 2016; Knight et al., 2017; Lindstrom Bremer, 2012).

Figure 1. Conceptual Model for Parent and Youth Sport Education
Conceptual Model for Parent and Youth Sport Education

Dorsch et al (2018) provide an important conceptual framework which describes the interaction between parent education programs and the youth sports environment. Through qualitative interviews of coaches, parents, and league administrators in one community in the United States, a model was developed. This study used an adaptation of this model in implementing the parent intervention program (See Figure 2).

State of organized youth sports. The first component of the model is the current state of organized youth sports and the attempt to address the problem of parent spectator behaviors in youth sports in a Louisiana context. It is important to consider context and culture of the environment influencing perceptions about youth sports (Dorsch et al., 2018). The author has chosen his focus on Louisiana to explore cultural elements, which shape spectator behaviors within the state.

Parental goals. Educational programs should consider the various goals of parents in having their children participate in sports, which include, but are not limited to achievement, developmental, health, and social goals. Because of these interactions, parents develop patterns of involvement in sports (Dorsch et al., 2018). Brackenridge’s research (2005) urges careful consideration of how these goals align not only within family dynamics, but also within their children’s relationship to sports.

Patterns of involvement. Dorsch et al (2018) classified four main types of parents (1) under involved; (2) appropriately involved; (3) overinvolved; and (4) extreme levels of involvement. The patterns of involvement affected not only their children and their children’s beliefs, relationships, and development, but also affect their parental interactions with peers, coaches, and children. It is important for parents to understand how their behavior affects both
their children and personally, thus creating a need for parent education programs in the context of youth sports. Previous research has noted these conceptualizations of parent involvement are limited, because they are based upon research, which has limited archetypes of parents. Blom and Drane (2008) and Omli and Lavoi (2009, 2011) highlight the nature of parent spectator behaviors, which are based upon direct reporting of behaviors, along with observational data. This study will document observed and personal behaviors of parents in light of Act 355 and the author will seek a sample that is reflective of the state of Louisiana at large.

**Parent education barriers.** Dorsch et al. (2018) also reported barriers to engagement in educational programs that are both family and program related. Within these programs, there is a desire for content, which emphasizes either technical knowledge of the sports or developmentally appropriate practices for parenting based upon the child’s age and level of competition. Important to consider also is the desirability of the program delivery, such as elements of timing, who presents the information, and the format of the presentation. The author’s research will be centered in Louisiana and explore the parent-sports interaction environment in Louisiana, a state plagued by challenges related to parent behavior. There are plentiful opportunities to explore this area and limited education programs being conducted at present related to the new law. In a conversation with the LHSAA Director of Officiating, the state has released handouts for member schools, athletic directors provided an educational workshop about the law, and member schools had the responsibility to educate parents. The aim of this dissertation is to also explore how this law intersects with parents in all demographics. Limited sports educational research concerning spectator behavior has been conducted in low-income communities (Blom & Drane, 2008). Income should be factored as a variable, to further explore how low-income children and their families are being marginalized from youth sports.
Summary

This literature review highlights challenges in addressing parent spectator behavior and the delivery of educational programs in the context of youth sports. Social work has an important role in sports-based interventions, from not only an historical, but also a more contemporary perspective. Also addressed are cultural and systematic challenges affecting youth sports participation, family engagement, and parent behavior. These include but are not limited to poor program design, an overemphasis upon professionalization, and the marginalization of minority and low-income youth and their families from participation and research on educational interventions. A lack of historical studies directly addressing parent behaviors and the need to diversify samples to enhance understanding of the challenges faced by parents in the context of sports. Through addressing parent challenges through a lens of spectator behaviors, perhaps further discussion of factors to consider in the design of future educational programs.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This study explores the influence of an educational intervention upon parent spectator behavior in youth sports. Louisiana is a fertile environment for such research, due to the dominance of sports in state culture and the omnipresent professional athlete (Kleinpeter, 23 Feb 2017). The passage of Act 355 provides an opportunity to examine how knowledge of this law will influence spectator behaviors and document what parents are observing. Outlined are issues of design, measurement, and data analysis that relate to research in these areas.

Research Design

This study had a mixed method approach. The quantitative portion of the study, which involved parents, and caregivers of team sports participants had an exploratory, pre-experimental one group pre-test, post-test intervention design. It was exploratory in nature, due to limited studies concerning the impact of educational programs upon parent behaviors. Developed was a brief intervention designed to explore the influence of educational programming upon parent behaviors. The author considered several theoretical frameworks when developing this intervention-based study. The qualitative portion of the study involved five referees from the state of Louisiana. The purpose of engaging these participants was to supplement the NASO (2017) study and gain insight concerning the climate of youth sports from their perspective.

Online and in-person methodology. In pre-experimental portion of the study, two approaches were used to reach parent participants. The study had an online and in-person approach and used an adaptation of previous research involving parents in sports-based context. Online platforms to recruit subjects have several benefits to the researcher. The author developed a web-based online educational program developed using Google Forms software. Advantages of this approach as outlined by Cleland et al (2019) are allowing participants to complete the survey at their own
time and discretion. When shared through social media, online surveys have potential to reach a broad range of participants in a short period.

The in-person intervention had a one hour program length, consistent with the recommendations of similar programs (Dorsch et al., 2018; Hurley et al., 2018; Knight, 2019). Since this study was conducted in Louisiana, there was a section of the educational program focused upon spectator behavior and components of Act 355. Spectator behaviors were evaluated before and after the workshop, a pre/post-test design.

Per the recommendations and requirements of the Institutional Review Board at LSU, all questionnaires and consent forms were adapted and specific to the appropriate audience and modality of presentation. For example, participants who attended in person sessions were required to sign their name and date it, whereas in electronic format, participants were required to provide their email as a signature and consent to participate in the research. Study consents can be found in Appendices A, B, & C.

After submitting the dissertation proposal, the research team encouraged the author to include qualitative data from referees (both current and former). The intent was to supplement existing quantitative studies conducted by the NASO and provide insight concerning the youth sports climate in Louisiana. The author and dissertation chair established open ended questions which examined trends in youth sports and opinions regarding appropriate action steps for sports leaders to take concerning to spectator behavior (See Appendix B for full list of survey items).

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Important research questions to be addressed in this study are as follows:

- **R1:** To what extent do educational interventions influence parent spectator behaviors?
- **H1:** Parents will not exhibit a change in spectator behaviors post-intervention
R2: How might demographic variables influence parent spectator behaviors in Louisiana?
H2: There will be no difference in spectator behaviors amongst grouping variables.
R3: What spectator behaviors are parents observing on the sidelines and how do those vary from those in which they are personally participating?
H3: There will be no difference in BA Personal and BA Observed scores.

Hypotheses

This study is exploratory in nature and due to limited youth sports interventions that specifically address the impact of sports policy and laws on behavior, the author has elected to have non-directional hypotheses for all research questions to mitigate any potential for statistical and research bias.

Research Timeline

Problem identification and conceptualization (May-August 2019). The study was completed from initial conception to final analysis over a ten month period. Initial problem identification and conceptualization evolved after speaking with stakeholders at the state level. The idea for the study began after reaching out to the Director of Officiating at the LHSAA. Members of the research team met with him and challenges in youth sports were reviewed extensively. He shared information about HB 184, which was pending at the time of the meeting and would later go into effect in August 2019. During this time, the LHSAA was considering sanctions for member schools who over the past year where spectator incidents had occurred. At this meeting, it was suggested the research team possibly develop an educational intervention to work with parents at these member schools facing sanctions, such as reduced competition time or suspension from playoffs. The aim of the potential intervention was to educate parents on appropriate spectator behaviors and prohibit further sanctions. This study design was contingent
upon the member school principals agreeing to participate. In June 2019, the LHSAA informed the research team this approach was not desired from member schools facing sanctions; however, the LHSAA would continue to explore ways to conduct support research in other approaches.

The passage of Act 355 led to consideration of ways to educate parents about this law. In July of 2019, the researchers contacted a parish school system in the Acadiana region of the state. After receiving initial approval from the district superintendent and the supervisor of athletics, permission was given to directly contact middle school and high school principals about conducting onsite research. Execution of the study was contingent upon study approval by the dissertation committee and Institutional Review Board at LSU and principals agreeing to allow the research team to conduct an educational program on campus.

**Study development and approval (August 2019-November 2019).** Over a three-month period, a plan to conduct the research was drafted and the proposed dissertation study was approved. During this time, several designs were considered and measurement scales were examined. Additionally, the LHSAA shared educational materials about the new law provided to schools throughout the state with the research team. These materials were included in the development of the educational program. The lead author met with officials from another school district in Acadiana and obtained permission to reach out to individual coaches in the school district. In November 2019, the author’s dissertation committee approved the proposed dissertation and it was suggested a qualitative study of referees be included to supplement the study, to gain a better sense of the sport climate in Louisiana.

**Implementation and data collection (November 2019-March 2019).** After receiving approval from the Dissertation Committee, the study next transitioned to implementation/execution phase. The author completed the necessary research ethics coursework
as required by LSU. All participant consents and study materials were drafted and approved by the LSU IRB. Follow up emails were sent to school officials and due to limited responses from schools, it was suggested an online component be developed and using social media to reach the target parent audience. All consents for both the parent and referee components of the study were adapted to an online audience and approved by the IRB. In December 2019, the author began posting the online link to his study on his personal Facebook, requesting parent participation in the study. During this time, youth sports organizations throughout the Acadiana region, state, and individual schools in the region were contacted and granted permission to post information about the study on organizational Facebook pages. Recruitment of referee participants began in February 2019 and data collection was completed in early March 2019. Information about the study was distributed to personal contacts of the LHSAA Director of Officiating via and posted on the lead author’s personal Facebook page. Throughout the data collection period, power analysis was conducted evaluate the ongoing need for additional participants. In February 2019, the author was invited to two schools to speak with parents at a “Parent Night” activity and individuals chose to participate in the study.

Data analysis and defense (February 2020-May 2020). Next, the study transitioned to the data analysis portion of the study, in preparation for the final defense. Conducted were appropriate and relevant statistical techniques for each research question and hypotheses’ were tested. From February-April 2020, the data analysis and discussion portions of the dissertation were drafted and shared with members of the dissertation committee. The dissertation was successfully defended in May 2020.
Participants

The author obtained data from a purposive and diversified sample of sports parents, grandparents, and caregivers who are Louisiana residents (ages 18-64) and have children ages 6-18 participating in team sports within the past year in the state. The author conducted his research largely in Iberia Parish, but recruited participants statewide. Iberia parish mirrors the state at large, with approximately 23.8% of the 71,000 residents living below the poverty line. The parish is comprised largely of those who identify as white (62%) and African-American (32%) and other minority groups making up the remaining six percent, including a concentration of Laotian and Vietnamese residents. There are differences in poverty rates, as approximately 23% of Iberia Parish residents compared to 20% of the state residents at large live below the poverty line. Iberia Parish features densely populated urban areas and sparsely populated rural areas. Public nor private schools in the parish have documented sanctions from the LHSAA resultant from spectator behaviors. Based upon an apriori power analysis using GPower and parameters set at \( \alpha=0.05 \), a small to medium effect size for paired samples t-test (0.2-0.5), a Cronbach alpha value of 0.80, consistent with standards of Tabachnick and Fidell (2014) and a two tailed analysis, the target sample size ranged from 33-199. The mean target for sample size was 106 participants.

The parish features robust youth athletics leagues. While there are no official records documenting the actual number of participants, there are opportunities available for participants in both recreational and travel capacities. Many participants also choose to participate in sports opportunities which are based either in nearby Lafayette, St. Mary, or Vermilion parishes. Other sports offered in the parish are organized youth basketball, American football, and soccer.
Eligible participants were required to have children in the 6-18 age years age bracket, the ages where youth team sports are offered to participants in the parish.

To supplement parent data, the study include current and former sports referees. Given the influence of the NASO survey in 2017 to shape policy and perspectives on youth sports, referees insight into the parent experience, due to their interactions with both activities taking place within games and with spectators. Limited studies to date have involved referees and they tend to report inappropriate spectator behaviors at greater frequencies than coaches (Walters et al., 2016).

**Instrument Used**

The instrument used to examine spectator behavior was an adaptation of Omli and Lavoi’s (2009) background anger scale. Omli and Lavoi’s (2009) instrument has ten survey items and explores background anger in the context of spectator behaviors in youth sports. The scale, evolved from an integration of several studies (Kidman et al., 1999; Shields et al., 2005, 2007; Wuerth et al., 2004). The original scale was used on a sample of 415 participants (177 male, 213 females, and 25 who did not disclose their gender) who identified as coaches, parents, and youth sports participants. They explored how parents interfaced with their children in the presence of verbal, nonverbal, or physical interaction in relation to the family sport experience and levels of background anger.

Because the variables are ordinal, ANOVA techniques were used in examining variances in these groups. Levels of background anger varied by stakeholder groups. While the study did not specifically examine gender variances, the study looked at parent responses through the gender of the child athlete. The gender of the athlete did not inform variances in background anger, but the age of the child was an important variable in looking at levels of background
anger. Background anger was shown to peak around the age that most sport participants drop out of sports (ages 12-13) and decrease until the late teen years (Omli & Lavoi, 2009). The instrument contained ten items and used a five point Likert scale (1-Never, 2-Almost Never, 3-Sometimes, 4-A lot of the time, 5-All of the time) with responses documenting the frequency by which parents exhibited certain spectator behaviors. Six of the items were direct and more explicit examples of background anger (focused upon direct conflict), and the remaining four less explicit examples of background anger exhibited potential to escalate into problematic behaviors. The scale had a $\alpha=0.87$, an acceptable level of reliability (Tabachnick & Fiddell, 2014). Demographics of the study included a sample that was 93% Caucasian and 7% minorities, and 82% of the adult study participants had a bachelor’s degree. Participants were able to complete the scale online or prior to participation to a parent educational workshop.

In consultation with the research team, minor adaptations to the questions were made to frame them appropriately for the context. (See Appendix D). As an example, one of the survey items addresses the frequency of how often parents yell at their children on the sidelines. Parents may interpret this as cheering for them or offering encouragement, rather than negative reinforcement of behaviors. After consulting with the committee, the term (in a demeaning manner) was added to the end of some survey items. Language was modified to fit each of the three points of measurement. Participants were first asked to document behaviors using Omli and Lavoi (2009) that they had observed in the past year on the sidelines (BA Observed). Next, in advance of the educational intervention, participants were presented with the same items, and language was modified to capture the frequency by which parents had personally participated in spectator behaviors over the past year (BA Personal). The third point of measurement was
immediately after the brief educational intervention about Act 355 was completed (BA Intervention). No documented studies involving this scale have involved repeated measures.

**Referee study instrument.** After the author submitted his initial proposal, the author and his research team decided that included some qualitative data from referees, (both current and former) would supplement existing quantitative studies conducted by the NASO and further establish the context for the study. The author and dissertation chair established open ended questions that would look at trends in youth sports and opinions regarding appropriate action steps for sports leaders to take concerning to spectator behavior (See Appendix B for full list of survey items). The author also chose to use a Google Forms template and solicited interest through social media, similar to the parent-based study. Participants were given a secure internet link and answered questions using this modality. Google forms automatically generates a summary of responses for the researcher to review and is password protected. In addition to social media, the LHSAA Director of Officiating agreed to circulate the survey to personal contacts in the industry through email. Questions asked addressed the duration of the time officiating, the sports officiated, notable changes in youth sports during their time as an official, if/why they terminated officiating, the sports settings with the greatest difficulties in manage spectator behavior, and their familiarity with new laws in Louisiana.

**Study Variables**

The author will examine several variables in this intervention study. Key dependent variables are the BA Observed, BA Personal, and BA Intervention scores. Each of these scores is a sum of all 10 items. Total scores in each category range from a low of 10 to a maximum of 50. Independent variables included were parent role, parent gender, family structure, race/ethnicity, family income, and knowledge of the law in advance of participating in the study.
Independent variables. The role of the individual participating was collected and participants had the option to select, parent, primary caregiver (not biological parent), grandparent, or an open category. Participants documented knowledge of the law in advance of the study and were able to select yes or no. Annual family income before taxes was included and increments of $0-24,999, $25,000-49,999, $50,000-74,999, $75,000-99,999, and 100,000+. This was consistent with the format of the Aspen Institute (2015, 2019) research on income disparities in youth sport. For ethnicity, participants had the option to document if they were Hispanic or Latinx or Non-Hispanic/Latinx. Race was another variable and participants were able to select Caucasian (predominantly of European descent), African-American or Black, Asian or Pacific Islander, and an open column was available for those outside identifying outside of those parameters. For gender, participants were able to classify themselves as Male, Female, or respond to the open category. Marital status was included and parents were able to identify the following categories, married, single, domestic partnership or an open category to document if they chose. Demographic variables were collected after the completion of the intervention.

Procedure

The author drafted parent and referee surveys and then shared them with the research team. Reviewed were all necessary consent forms for both online and in person formats, the three sets of questions (observed behaviors), the pre-test and post-test of the intervention. The Institutional Review Board at the Louisiana State University (LSU), study #E12008, approved all components. After IRB approval was obtained, all consents and items in the survey instrument into a secure and password protected Google Form document. Educational materials were integrated into the Google Form survey. The educational component included a nine-slide PowerPoint presentation, which provided a general overview of issues in youth sports, both on a
national and state level and the history and development of Act 355 in Louisiana. The second educational component was an Act 355 one-page information sheet provided by the Louisiana High School Association, which the author had obtained from the organization and was given permission to distribute. This same resource was distributed to all school principals and athletic directors affiliated with the LHSAA. The third component of the educational intervention was a copy of the full text of the Act 355 legislation. These documents, if participants took the entire time to review all of the documents, would take an estimated 20-30 minutes for participants to complete. Both the author and his research supervisor signed the LSU internet security for research documents. Once these documents were placed into a Google form, the document was posted on the author’s personal Facebook page and subjects were solicited using this method in early December 2019.

Social media played a large role in the successful recruitment of the majority of participants of this study. The author used snowball-sampling techniques, encouraging participants to forward the survey to other social media contacts who may meet the eligibility requirement. After participants completed the first five surveys, the author contacted the participants by email to identify any concerns related to the instrument, such as technical difficulties or issues with the educational materials. In addition to posting the survey on his personal Facebook page, the author reached out to several youth sports organizations in the state and some sports organizations posted a link to the study on organizational Facebook pages. The author obtained participants through this source. The author continued to repost and share the survey through social media outlets. The survey was shared on a local National Association of page and was distributed throughout the regional social work community.
Outreach to schools began in advance of the study. In late July of 2019, the author obtained written permission from school district administrators, contingent upon the permission of the principals of individual schools and the approval of the research by the IRB at LSU. Follow up emails were sent to school administrators shortly after IRB approval. After a lack of response from the first email to principals, a month later, a follow up email was sent to school principals requesting to perform research at their schools. After a week of no response, the author made personal contact with an administrator of the district and a follow up email was sent from this administrator to the principals. Within a day, an appointment was made with a local middle school and subjects were recruited from a middle school parent meeting. Through a school-based initiative at a school in another area, the author was referred to a Title I public elementary school in a major Louisiana city and the author was able to present the information and involve parents from this school in the research. After participants completed the online survey, data was automatically loaded and organized into a spreadsheet format and Google forms automatically generated pie graphs detailing the nature of the responses to both individual and demographic variables.

Referee study. All components of the survey were reviewed by the author’s dissertation chair and approved by the IRB. Survey components were put into an online survey format using Google Forms. The survey contained items asking participants about perceptions of their officiating experience, their time as an official, and how they felt new laws would influence spectator behaviors. (See Appendix E for full list of survey items).
Recruitment of Participants

The author used multiple approaches to recruit participants for the study. First, since the author recruited parents of school-aged athletes, he used a school-based approach. One high school, one middle school, and one elementary school in the targeted parish allowed the researcher to share information about the study on the school Facebook page. In addition to the public schools, the author reached out to private schools in the area, which comprise about 20% of the parish’s total student enrollment. One private school in Iberia Parish allowed the researcher to post the survey on their Facebook page. The author was invited to two schools, where he was able to directly interact with parents and recruit study participants. For the referee study, the author used his personal social media page and the study was shared with contacts of the current Louisiana High School Athletic Association Director of Officiating.

The author’s area of interest presents several challenges pertaining to sampling. In general, previous studies have utilized samples from a similar demographic, a predominantly white and middle/upper class audience (Knight, 2019). While this may help with generalizability, it may prompt questions within the general social work community concerning the need to target vulnerable populations when conducting research. Given social work’s emphasis upon working with vulnerable populations, this study sought to obtain a sample reflective of the state at large.

General Issues of Research Design

Lindstrom Bremer (2012) offered several considerations for researchers interested in pursuing studies involving sports parents. Consistent with those recommendations, this study did not restrain participants to a particular sport or level of competition and focused on mixed method approaches. “Such studies can lead to a more complete understanding of the complex,
dynamic relationships in families in which one or more children compete in sports” (p. 246). As it relates to methodological approaches, observational, longitudinal, and examining interactions are appropriate. Clarke and Harwood (2016) advocated the need for more intervention research to inform challenges that relate to parent behavior in youth sports. Given these recommendation and both the design and findings of Dorsch et al. (2017), it seems appropriate to reference several quantitative studies to develop an appropriate research design, concerning data analysis.

**Quantitative Data Analysis References**

Several studies have used quantitative approaches in research on sport parents. Hoyle and Leff (1997) use both canonical and zero order correlation in measuring perceived pressure as it pertained to parent gender. Kanters et al. (2008) use a modified version of the Leff and Hoyle (1995) survey instrument and used Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation statistics to understand the relationship between how children and parents perceive pressure. Responses concerning pressure and support were not statistically significant between mothers and fathers of the individual athletes. Leff and Hoyle also used regression to compare the relationships between child and parent perceptions of pressure and support. They also find differences in perceptions were greatest between athlete and father. Dorsch et al. (2017), using a pre-test/post-test design, employ repeated measures ANOVA to explore the relationship between variables at the beginning and end of the season (two points of measurement). Interestingly, Dorsch et al. (2017) evaluated child perceptions as the subjects of analysis, yet parent behavior pertaining to pressure and support as mediated by participation in an education program was the focus of the intervention.
Implementation Issues

The largest barrier to implementation of the chosen methodology appears to be limited existing research focused upon reactions to a public law involving spectator behavior and its influence upon spectator behavior. Outside of coaching education in the state of Louisiana, the LHSAA has executed limited public education efforts about Act 355. The Iberia Parish school system officials provided permission to conduct an educational program, yet left it to the individual school principals to participate. Very few responses came outside of social media, despite extensive recruitment efforts to reach families through the Iberia Parish school system and neighboring school systems. The social media pages of sports organizations also generated minimal responses.

Validity Threats

There are multiple concerns regarding the internal validity of my study. Within the context of my research, there are some variables, which are controllable and others where steps will be taken to minimize the impact of uncontrollable variables. Three examples of threats to internal validity controlled were maturation, testing effects, and the reduction of selection bias. Before discussing uncontrollable threats, it is appropriate to expound upon steps taken to minimize threats to internal validity.

Maturation

Maturation, or how time affects the results, is an important consideration (Schutt, 2014). To address maturation in my study, (Dorsch et al., 2017, Hurley et al., 2018) the time window between intervention and post-test was minimal. Participants completed the BA Intervention portion of the study immediately upon completion of the educational program. This reduced potential for maturation to occur and consider how their behaviors will change because of
increased knowledge of parent behaviors and new laws. Previous interventions had eight weeks between the intervention and post-test period (Dorsch et al. 2017).

Testing Effects

It is important to consider how exposing the subject to the same measurement instrument more than once affects behavior (Schutt, 2014). Testing effects can occur as a result of participant recognition of how they responded to the pre-test survey items and their level of familiarity with those items (and subsequently responding in a different way) at the time of post-test. To control this threat, the survey instrument was adapted to fit the context at each point of measurement.

Reduction of Selection Bias

It is important to account for selection bias, which can affect the generalizability of the study, especially if there is no randomization the sample (Rubin & Babbie, 2014). Given there are limited studies involving parent-based interventions in youth sports, there are limited examples which demonstrate how selection bias affects studies. For many years, the author has been a coach in local sports activities. Additionally, many parents are also familiar with the author is a doctoral student and one of only a few in the community. In order to reduce the potential for selection bias, the author standardized the presentation format, consistent with other studies. This will strengthen the internal validity of the study and increase potential for a representative sample. Extensive efforts were made to recruit a diverse sample. The study will look at several independent variables for group comparisons.

Uncontrollable Threats

History effect. The history effect is an uncontrollable threat to validity and is characterized by external events that occur during the intervention (Rubin & Babbie, 2014). As part of local culture and the strength of relationships between sports parents, there was discussion of my
intervention between participants. In addition, a large portion of study participants were married. Since the study was completed online, there was potential for participants to compare notes and the researcher had minimal ability to track if this occurred. In order to minimize this uncontrollable threat, the study was conducted online. Previous studies such as Dorsch et al (2017) also took into account some of the threats described and maintained acceptable levels of reliability and validity according to those outlined by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007).

**Data Analysis Plan**

After data was collected from study participants through the online survey, it was automatically entered into a Google forms spreadsheet by the software. After this, it was copied into SPSS v26 and organized by individual items in the instrument. Outside of the original items, the author added three columns, one for the total Observed Background Anger Score (BA-Observed), the Personal Behaviors Background Anger Score (BA-Personal), and the total post-intervention Background anger score. (BA-Intervention). For in-person participants, data from the paper surveys was manually loaded into SPSS by the researcher and was converted from nominal responses to ratio responses with numbers. Throughout the data collection period of December 2019-February 2020, the author was able to look at summary information from the survey automatically generated by the Google forms software, which offers summaries of both individual and collective responses. The data generated was reviewed almost daily to assess trends and for ways to identify a diverse pool of applicants and gaps in information. Email notifications were received from Google each time surveys were completed.

**Analysis plan for R1.** The first research question sought to better understand how educational interventions, such as the one designed in this research study influence parent spectator behaviors, in light of new legislation passed in the state of Louisiana. After reviewing
all consents, study participants completed an adapted 10-item Background Anger in Youth Sports (Omli & Lavoi, 2009) questionnaire and parents were measured using the same scale for three separate contexts. First participants completed the observed behaviors version of the survey. Next, participants completed the background anger survey of 10 items that addressed behaviors in which they had personally participated over the last year. After completing this survey, the participants participated in the online intervention (educational) program and following the program, they immediately completed the same 10-item survey. Frequency tables were developed and changes in responses because of the intervention were noted. To analyze the intervention, the author took the total Background Anger Score from the Personal Behavior and compared the differences between this score and the Background Anger score for the intervention, both which were self-reported by the study participant immediately following completion of the educational program. Statistical techniques used were the paired samples t-test, which offers researchers the ability to compare variances occurring because of participation in the intervention amongst dependent samples.

**Analysis plan for R2.** The second research question sought to understand how variables such as income, race, gender, marital status, and parental role influenced Background Anger scores. When examining group level variances, it is appropriate to use ANOVA statistical techniques. The used this statistical technique to review this data, looked at key assumptions of ANOVA, and checked for discrepancies in those assumptions and look at group differences.

**Analysis plan for R3.** The third research question sought to understand the variances between observed and personally reported background anger scores. Descriptive statistics from BA Observed and BA Personal will be compared and differences will be discussed to compare potential discrepancies in these variables.
Analysis of qualitative referee responses. Upon completion of the referee survey, the author conducted a content analysis of all the responses to survey questions in the study. Google forms software automatically generated summaries of the raw data associated with each question. The author shared the data with the dissertation chair to look at agreed-upon relevant themes. Themes from each question were grouped, and then clustered for drawing conclusions (Miles et al., 2014). After this, the author then looked at relevant responses, according to targeted areas of evaluation.
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

The current study addressed three research questions examining parent and spectator behaviors in the context of youth sports. In this chapter, the author will present relevant research findings in response to the research questions posed in this dissertation study.

Study Results

Parent Participant Demographics

The study had one-hundred six (N=106) participants (ages 18-64) in the parent portion of the study. While the exact place of residence was not included in the study as a variable, about 80% of participants resided in Iberia Parish, Louisiana. The remaining participants represented other metropolitan areas in the state such as Baton Rouge, Monroe and New Orleans. Additionally, two current and three former referees from Louisiana were also recruited to document their youth sports experience.

Demographic variables were collected for group comparisons. 40.6% of participants (n=43) reported being familiar with Act 355 in advance of study and 59.4% (n=63) lacked familiarity with Act 355. Gender identity was an included variable and 76.4% (n=81) of participants identified as female, 23.6 % (n=25) identified as male. The option to identify outside of these categories was not selected by any study participants. The vast majority of study participants 96.2 % (n=102) identified as parents to the participants. 3.8% (n=4) identified as either as grandparents, godparents, or caregivers. Ethnicity and Race were also considered as variables. 99.1% (n=105) of participants identified as Non-Hispanic or Latinx and 0.9% (n=1) identified as Hispanic or Latinx. Participants who identified as Caucasian (primarily of European descent) constituted 73.6 % (n=78), African-American or Black 23.8% (n=25) or Asian or Pacific Islander 2.8% (n=3). To reduce the number of groups, the groups were reclassified.
Caucasian (1) and Non-Caucasian (0) (Black and Asian or Pacific Islander) in the analysis. Regarding marital status, 79.2% (n=78) identified as married, 20.8% (n=28) identified as single, divorced, non-married (in a domestic partnership) or separated. These groups were reclassified in the analysis as non-married (1) married (2). Family annual income (before taxes) was also a variable. Participants incomes at 0-$24,999, 4.7% (n=5), 14.2% (n=14), $25,000-$49,999, 18.9% (n=20) $50,000-$74,999, 17.9% (n=19) $75,000-$99,999, and 45.3% (n=47) reported a family income greater than $100,000. In order make the income groups more equitable, the author condensed the first four income categories into one (labeled 1) and established a separate group for those within incomes over $100,000 (labeled 2).

**Referee Study Participant Demographics**

Referee participants were all over the age of 18. Demographic data collected was years of officiating experience and sports officiated. Their years of experience ranged from 10-35 years. Three of the five refereed multiple sports. (See Table 1 for the Referee Participants Sports Officiated).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sports Officiated</th>
<th># of Participants who Officiated Sports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Softball</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Referee Sports Officiated (N=5)
Parent Survey Items and Instrument

Parent participants were asked in a Google Forms survey to document spectator behaviors at three points of measurement. The same set of ten survey items were framed according to the context (observed, pre-intervention, post-intervention) and used a five-point Likert scale, which ranged from 1 (Never), 2 (Almost Never), 3 (Sometimes), 4 (A lot of the time), 5 (All of the time). Results are presented in Tables 2, 3, & 5. First, participants were asked 10 questions regarding the frequency with which they observed spectators (BA Observed) in the past year at their child (ren)’s sporting events. In advance of the educational intervention, participants were asked 10 questions about the frequency with which they engaged in behaviors prior to the intervention over the past year (BA Personal). BA Personal served as the pre-test portion of the study. After completing the BA Personal items, participants were provided with a brief educational intervention. After completing the educational intervention, participants were immediately asked to complete a post-intervention survey (BA Intervention) of 10 survey items similar to those they were asked in advance of the educational intervention.

Table 2. Frequency of BA Observed Reported (N=106)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the past year, how often in the past year (from the sidelines) has another spectator…..</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Almost Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>A lot of the time</th>
<th>All of the time</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yelled at You (in a demeaning manner)</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>106</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yelled at your own child (in a demeaning manner)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>106</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yelled at their own child (in a demeaning manner)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yelled at the referee (in a demeaning manner)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acted in a way that was embarrassing (table cont’d.)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past year, how often in the past year (from the sidelines) has another spectator…..</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Almost Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>A lot of the time</td>
<td>All of the time</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cussed loud enough for athletes to hear</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got into it with someone</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coached from the sidelines</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged athletes to play rough</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged athletes to play outside the rules</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Frequency of Pre-Test Behaviors (BA Personal) Report (N=106)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Over the past year you…</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Almost Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>A lot of the time</th>
<th>All of the time</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yelled at another spectator (in a demeaning manner)</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yelled at your own child (in a demeaning manner)</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yelled at your child’s teammate (in a demeaning manner)</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got into it with someone (physical or near physical altercation)</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yelled at the referee (in a demeaning manner)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cussed loud enough for athletes to hear</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acted in a way that was embarrassing</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coached from the sidelines</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged athletes to play rough</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table cont’d.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Over the past year how often have you…</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Almost Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>A lot of the time</th>
<th>All of the time</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged athletes to play outside the rules</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Post-Test Behaviors (BA Intervention) Reported (N=106)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>After learning about Act 355, how often do you plan to participate in the following behaviors at sporting events</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Almost Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>A lot of the time</th>
<th>All of the time</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yell at another spectator (in a demeaning manner)</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yell at my own child (in a demeaning manner)</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yell at child’s teammate</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yell at the referee (in a demeaning manner)</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acted in a way that was embarrassing</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cussed loud enough for athletes to hear</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got into it with someone</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coached from the sidelines</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged athletes to play rough</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged athletes to play outside the rules</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 5. Changes in Responses BA Personal to BA Intervention (N=106)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sideline Behavior</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Almost Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>A lot of the time</th>
<th>All of the time</th>
<th>Total Changes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yell at another spectator (in a demeaning manner)</td>
<td>+9</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>+6</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yell at my own child (in a demeaning manner)</td>
<td>+21</td>
<td>+7</td>
<td>+12</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yell at child’s teammate</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yell at the referee (in a demeaning manner)</td>
<td>+19</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>+16</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acted in a way that was embarrassing</td>
<td>+24</td>
<td>+20</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td></td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cussed loud enough for athletes to hear</td>
<td>+10</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>+6</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got into it with someone</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coached from the sidelines</td>
<td>+27</td>
<td>+6</td>
<td>+25</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged athletes to play rough</td>
<td>+14</td>
<td>+12</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged athletes to play outside the rules</td>
<td>+9</td>
<td>+10</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Dependent Variables (N=106)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min-Max</th>
<th>Sk</th>
<th>Ku</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA Personal</td>
<td>14.75</td>
<td>.531</td>
<td>5.465</td>
<td>10-40</td>
<td>2.268</td>
<td>6.631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA Intervention</td>
<td>12.41</td>
<td>.448</td>
<td>4.612</td>
<td>10-39</td>
<td>3.660</td>
<td>15.813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA Observed</td>
<td>23.87</td>
<td>.610</td>
<td>6.282</td>
<td>10-41</td>
<td>.112</td>
<td>-.145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion of BA Observed, BA Personal, and BA Intervention

**BA Observed**

The results of observed behaviors is summarized in Table 2. There were ten BA Observed items in which participants were asked to report on spectator behaviors observed at youth sporting events in the past year. The mean total score for BA Observed was 23.87 (SE=.610, SD=6.282) and ranged from 10-40. The five least frequent behaviors reported with a Never (1), or Almost Never (2) were: Yelling at another spectator (n=86, 81.1%), Getting into it with someone (n=85, 80.2%), encouraging athletes to play outside the rules (n=84, 79.2%), yelled at your own child (n=81, 76.4%), and encouraging athletes to play rough (n=57, 53.8%). This suggests spectator behaviors in which they are directly interacting with another spectator or encouraging athletes to take actions, which involve going against the “public” norms, were uncommon in the sample. The behaviors most frequently observed with a score of (3 to 5) were: Coacching from the sidelines (n=90, 84.9%), Yelling at the referee (n=86, 81.1%), acting in a way that was embarrassing (n=72, 67.9%), yelling at their own child (in a demeaning manner) (n=70, 66%), and cussing loud enough for athletes to hear (n=50, 47.2%). These actions taken suggest that the majority of participants have witnessed behaviors that attempt to provide direct instruction to athletes on the field and are not coming from the coach. Anger directed towards officials, and yelling at the own children in a demeaning manner were common for at least 50% of those surveyed.

**BA Personal**

Participants were asked to report the frequency by which they personally participated in those behaviors. The mean total BA Personal score was 14.75 (SE=.531, SD=5.465) and ranged from 10-40. Items study participants reported they had “Never or Almost” or reported a score of
1 or 2 in the past year Got into it with someone (physical or near physical altercation) with another spectator (n=103, 97.2%), yelling at a child’s teammate (in a demeaning manner =100, 94.3%), encouraging athletes to play outside of the rules (n=104, 98.1%), cussed loud enough for athletes to hear (n=94, 88.7%), and encouraging athletes to play rough (n=95, 89.6%). The five most frequent behaviors participated in sometimes (3), a lot of the time (4), or all of the time (5) were: coaching from the sidelines (n=48, 45.2%), yelling at the referee in a demeaning manner (n=23, 21.7%), yelling at your own child (n=19, 17.9%), yelling at another spectator (n=13, 12.3%), and cussing loud enough for athletes to hear (n=12, 11.3%). See Table 3 for full results.

**BA Intervention**

There were ten BA Intervention items participants were asked to report on their anticipated spectator behaviors after completing the educational intervention. The mean total score for BA Intervention was 12.41 (SE=.448, SD=4.612) and ranged from 10-39. The five least frequent behaviors that participants reported they would partake in after the intervention either never (1) or almost never (2) were: get into it with someone (n=103, 97.2%), yelling at a child’s teammate (n=102, 96.2%), cussing loud enough for athletes to hear (n=103, 97.2%), encouraging athletes to play outside the rules (n=103, 97.2%), and both yelling at other spectators, and yelling at their own child in a demeaning manner (each n=101, 95.3%). The behaviors participants anticipated engaging in sometimes or greater (rated 3 or greater) were: Coaching from the sidelines (n=15, 14.2%), encouraging athletes to play rough (n=9, 8.5%), yelling at the referee (in a demeaning manner) (n=7, 6.6%), acting in a way that was embarrassing (N=7, 6.6%), and both yelling at another spectator and yelling at my child (each N=5, 4.7%). See Table 4 for full results.
Examined were changes in individual variables because of the intervention. With the exception of “Got into it with someone”, which only had two total changes in responses because of the intervention and “Yell at your child’s teammate” having 10 changes, eight of the ten survey items had 17 or greater changes in scores as a result of the intervention. There were 66 total changes (62.2% of participants) in responses to “Coaching from the sidelines”, 48 (45.3%) for “Act in a way that was embarrassing”, 42 (39.6%) for “Yelling at my own child,” and 38 (35.8%) for “Yelling at the referee.” The following results suggest participants intend to modify their spectator behaviors because of learning about Act 355 and the area where the largest change in behavior was in “Coaching from the sidelines.” Additionally, 8 of the 66 changes in “Coaching from the sidelines” were noted in the “Most of the time” and “All of the time” level of response in this category. See Table 5 for full results.

**Qualitative Study Survey Instrument**

Interviews with referees sought to supplement information concerning the sports climate in the state and provide qualitative support for national-level surveys and referees opinions concerning spectator behavior. Referees who participated in the study responding to open ended questions in a Google forms survey developed by the author and his research advisors, which were categorized and deduced from the raw data. Participants were asked open-ended questions regarding the following topics:

- Changes noticed in youth sports over the course of their officiating career
- Reasons for termination of officiating, if applicable
- The levels of competition where managing spectators is the most challenging
- Challenging incidents with spectators
- Direct threats, if any that were made to them by spectators
- Their knowledge of the new law and their perceptions of the law
Discussion of Findings

Research Question #1 Results

The first research question sought to understand the influence of an educational intervention upon spectator behaviors. In advance of the educational intervention, participants completed an inventory of spectator behaviors they both observed and personally participated over the past year. After completing this task, participants were asked to review a nine-slide PowerPoint presentation and two documents, which provided education about Act 355. Immediately upon completing the educational program, participants completed the post-test scale, which featured similar items as the personal behaviors test, and asked participants to consider how they anticipated participating in sideline behaviors after learning about Act 355. Paired-samples t-test was used to evaluate differences in results. This test was chosen due to the two samples being dependent upon one another, and similar scales being used for both the pre-test and post-test portions of the study. The results of the intervention can be found in Table 5.

BA Personal Scores had a mean of 14.75 (SD=5.465, SE=.531) and skewness of 2.268 and kurtosis of 6.631, suggesting a leptokurtic distribution of the scores. Values ranged from 10-40. BA Intervention scores had a mean of 12.41 (SD=4.612, SE=.448) and skewness of 3.660 and kurtosis of 15.813, suggesting a more leptokurtic distribution than BA Personal scores. Values of BA Intervention ranged from 10-39. The educational intervention (resultant from the paired samples t-test) yielded a mean decrease of 2.349 BA points (SD=3.333, SE=.324). The paired samples test generated a correlational value of 0.794, suggesting that approximately 79\% of the variance in results was contained within the survey variables and a medium-high correlation. To determine the effect size, Cohen’s d was calculated by examining the mean difference of the paired samples t-test and the standard deviation (2.349/3.333)=0.70, yielding a
medium to large effect size. The results suggested a statistically significant relationship between the results of the BA Personal Scores (pre-test) and BA Intervention Scores (post-test). The intervention had statistical significance $t=7.257$ df=105, $p<.001$ for a two-tailed test. Each observation was obtained independently; however, the skewness and kurtosis of both BA Personal and BA Intervention suggested a non-normal distribution. Normality was examined through the K-S and S-W tests for the variables BA Personal and BA Intervention (See Table 7 for full results). Both tests resulted in a rejection of the null hypothesis that the variables were equally distributed across means ($p<.05$).

| Table 7. BA Personal/BA Intervention/BA Observed Tests of Normality (N=106) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                                 | Kolmogorov-Smirnov$^a$ | Shapiro-Wilk |
|                                 | Statistic | Df   | Sig. | Statistic | Df   | Sig. |
| BA Personal                      | .201      | 106  | .000 | .766      | 106  | .000 |
| BA Intervention                  | .263      | 106  | .000 | .548      | 106  | .000 |
| BA Observed                      | .072      | 106  | .200 | .989      | 106  | .564 |

**Non-parametric tests.** To examine issues of normality, appropriate nonparametric tests were conducted. Since the samples are dependent and had a non-normal distribution, the Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Signed Ranks test was conducted. The results revealed a statistically significant difference in background anger scores. The standardized $T=-7.085$ and the test statistic was $124.00$ SE=199.940 $p<.001$). The sum of the ranked decreases totaled 199.40 points. Five scores saw an increase in BA after the intervention (4.7%), twenty-eight scores saw no change (26.4%), and 73 participants had decreased BA scores (68.8%). Approximately seven out of ten
participants had decreased levels of background anger because of participating in the educational intervention. A histogram of the Wilcoxon test is below.

![Figure 2. Histogram for Non-Parametric Tests](image)

Research Question #2 Results

The second research question explored how background anger scores at each measurement were influenced by demographic variables. Demographic variables collected were annual income, gender identity, marital status and race. One way ANOVAs were chosen to analyze the relationship between variables. Assumptions appropriate to consider are (1) Independence of observations (2) Normality in distribution (3) Homogeneity of variance. Each observation was collected at three, independent periods. Normality was examined through the skewness and kurtosis values of each demographic variable. All skewness and kurtosis values greater than two, suggesting a normal distribution around the mean for the demographic variables (See Table 8 for results). Due to normality issues in the dependent variables, the nonparametric Mann Whitney Test was conducted.
and all dependent variables lacked statistical significance. Error variances for each variable are in Table 9. The null hypothesis that all group values are equal to those in another group across dependent variables failed to be rejected. Results are in Table 11.

Table 8. Skewness and Kurtosis of Demographic Variables (N=106)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Skewness Statistic</th>
<th>Skewness Std. Error</th>
<th>Kurtosis Statistic</th>
<th>Kurtosis Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>-1.085</td>
<td>.235</td>
<td>- .838</td>
<td>.465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>-1.463</td>
<td>.235</td>
<td>.143</td>
<td>.465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate Annual Household Income (before taxes)</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>.231</td>
<td>.235</td>
<td>-1.984</td>
<td>.465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Identity</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>1.262</td>
<td>.235</td>
<td>-.415</td>
<td>.465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>106</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9. Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances (N=106)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Levene Statistic</th>
<th>df1</th>
<th>df2</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA Personal</td>
<td>2.341</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>1.210</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>.298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA Intervention</td>
<td>4.078</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA Observed</td>
<td>.856</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>.567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>4.161</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10. Heteroskedasticity (N=106)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df1</th>
<th>df2</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA Personal</td>
<td>6.559</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA Intervention</td>
<td>12.736</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA Observed</td>
<td>.662</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>.418</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11. Nonparametric Test Statistics (N=106)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>BA Observed</th>
<th>BA Personal</th>
<th>BA Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>1029.500</td>
<td>915.500</td>
<td>1074.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilcoxon W</td>
<td>1435.500</td>
<td>3996.500</td>
<td>4155.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-.449</td>
<td>-1.274</td>
<td>-.131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.654</td>
<td>.203</td>
<td>.895</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>BA Observed</th>
<th>BA Personal</th>
<th>BA Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>915.500</td>
<td>907.500</td>
<td>792.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilcoxon W</td>
<td>1168.500</td>
<td>4477.500</td>
<td>1045.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-.066</td>
<td>-.129</td>
<td>-1.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.947</td>
<td>.897</td>
<td>.283</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual Income</th>
<th>BA Observed</th>
<th>BA Personal</th>
<th>BA Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>1310.500</td>
<td>1238.500</td>
<td>1385.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilcoxon W</td>
<td>2438.500</td>
<td>2366.500</td>
<td>2513.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-.484</td>
<td>-.948</td>
<td>-.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.628</td>
<td>.343</td>
<td>.992</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>BA Observed</th>
<th>BA Personal</th>
<th>BA Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>947.500</td>
<td>937.500</td>
<td>816.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilcoxon W</td>
<td>4268.500</td>
<td>1262.500</td>
<td>4137.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-.485</td>
<td>-.562</td>
<td>-1.533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.628</td>
<td>.574</td>
<td>.125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Race.** In order to examine group differences, a one-way ANOVA test was conducted with race as the independent variable and BA Observed, BA Personal, and BA Intervention as dependent variables. The mean group differences were found not to have statistical significance for BA Observed, $F(1,105) = .250$ and ($p = .618$); BA Intervention $F(1,105) = 3.125 (p = .080)$ points of measurement. BA Personal had statistical significance at the 0.05 level, $F(1,105) = 5.280$, ($p = .024$). This suggests group differences amongst the Caucasian and Non-Caucasian for BA
Personal were statistically significant. For homogeneity of variance for BA Observed F (1,104) = 6.932 (p=.010), BA Personal F (1,104) = 13.382 (p<.001), BA Intervention F (1,104) = 13.933 (p<.001), suggesting there was not equal error variances for across each of the race group for dependent variables.

**Marital status.** For marital status, a one-way ANOVA test was conducted to measure differences between groups, with marital status serving as the independent variable. All three dependent variables were found to lack statistical significance. For BA Observed F (1,105) = .014, p=.907, BA Personal F (1,105) = .293, p=.589, BA Intervention F (1,105) = .003, p=.956. For homogeneity of variance, all variables were also shown to lack statistical significance.

**Annual income.** For the annual income one way ANOVA, all three dependent variables lacked statistical significance. For BA Observed F (1,105) = .157, p=.693, BA Personal F (1,105) = 2.452, p=.120, BA Intervention F (1,105) = 1.747, p=.189. BA Personal and BA Intervention for homogeneity of variance were shown to have statistical significance at the 0.05 alpha level when the tests evaluated variances based upon means, BA Intervention F (1,104)=6.067 (p=0.015), BA Personal F(1,104)=5.061, (p=.027), suggesting across the income groups, there was not an equal distribution of variances.

**Gender identity.** For the variable gender identity ANOVA test, none of the dependent variables had statistical significance when comparing group differences. For BA Observed F (1,105) = .140, p=.709, BA Personal F(1,105)=.169, p=.682, BA Intervention F(1,105)=.008, p=.927. In addition, all three tests of homogeneity of variance lacked statistical significance, suggesting equal variances between groups.
**Heteroskedasticity and Between Subject Effects**

In order to examine the heteroskedasticity for each of the dependent variables (BA Observed, BA Personal, and BA Intervention), an omnibus F test was conducted, and included the independent variables, annual income, gender, marital status, and race. Full results can be found in Table 10. For BA Observed F(1,104)=.662, (p=.418). For BA Personal, F(1,104)=6.559, (p=.012) suggesting variance of errors was dependent upon the values of the independent variables. When looking more closely at the between subjects effects for BA Personal, race*marital status F(1, 104) =6.402 (p=.013) was statistically significant, suggesting race and marital status were the largest contributors to variances in BA Personal scores of variables included in the model. For BA Intervention F(1,104)=12.736 (p<.001), none of the interactions between independent variables were found to have statistical significance at the 0.05 alpha level. Each dependent variable had differences in the proportion of variance explained by the independent variables. In the collective model of four independent variables, BA Personal had an $R^2=.164$ (adjusted 0.066), BA Intervention $R^2=.093$ (adjusted = .013), and BA Observed $R^2=.080$ (adjusted = -0.027). Cumulatively, approximately one-third of the variance was explained by the independent variables, with the strongest relationship with the independent variables within BA Personal.

**Research Question #3 Results**

The third research question explored differences between BA Observed and BA Personal to examine differences between observed behaviors, versus the behaviors in which they are personally participating. A frequency table of all of all observed behaviors reported can be seen in Table 2. The most frequently observed behavior reported by at the “A lot of the time” (4) or “All of the time” (5) level were parents coaching from the sidelines and yelling at the referees. This is consistent with previous studies, which have demonstrated these are the most common
behaviors reported by parents have been coaching from the sidelines and yelling at referees (Blom & Drane, 2008; Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2012; Omlí & Lavoi, 2009).

This portion of the study yielded some interesting findings. The mean score was close to 24. On average, parents are reporting observing behaviors listed at minimum between, “almost never to sometimes.” There was almost a 10-point difference in the total between BA Observed and BA Personal and participants reported an almost one Likert category of difference between their observations and personal behaviors. After comparing the frequency tables of the variables, these findings suggest the most frequent BA Personal behaviors are also the most frequently observed by other spectators. Spectators may be over-reporting their observations and underreporting the frequency of their own personal behaviors.

**Qualitative Study Results**

**Changes in youth sports.** When asked about notable changes in youth sports during their time as an official, there were varied responses. Verbalized by referees as contributors were less respect and authority dedicated to officials by spectators, a sense of entitlement/lack of effort amongst youth participants, excessive parental engagement in games, due to increased pressure to coach in the non-school sports seasons, and the presence of social media to broadcast officiating decisions almost instantaneously. One participant noted increased amounts of parental pressure upon participants and parents being very intrusive in all aspects of youth sports. This is consistent with Stefansen et al. (2018) who noted parents play an increased role in the sporting lives of their children.

**Reasons for termination.** Two of the five participants were active sports officials and three participants reported no longer being in this role. Two of the three former participants reported no longer officiating due to regular work demands and one reported he stopped
officiating to coach his own children. Officials did not report a specific experience that made them terminate officiating. Additionally, each of the officials who participated in the study refereed longer than three years, surpassing the window in which officials are typically quitting according to the LHSAA.

**Difficulty in managing youth sports.** The participants were asked to document what area of youth sports was the most difficult to officiate. One participant reported an inability to answer the question accurately because he only officiated at the high school level, but reported “We are seeing increased spectator misconduct in high school games,” and an additional participant reported seeing difficulty at all levels of competition. The most frequently cited area of difficulty was in the youth travel setting (3 participants) and the noted challenges were unrealistic and high parent expectations and blaming of the officials if something does not go their child’s way. Referee participant, Jeff said, “Unfortunately the parents of these kids think their kid is going to Division 1 or professional levels. Therefore, they can't make mistakes and it must be the official’s fault. These kids are also entitled and their parents act accordingly.”

Referee participant, Mark noted, “Parents get better as kids get older. When they are young, every parent believes their kid is the star of the team”. When asked about the nature of spectator behavior, specifically whether that behavior had worsened, stayed the same, or improved during their time as an official, the consensus amongst study participants was that conditions have deteriorated. Referee participant, John, reported that laws have curbed physical violence, but the level of complaining has gotten worse. Also noted were reported increases in verbally aggressive behavior, hostility and adversarial behavior, along with potential for violence as the level of competition increases. Referee participant, Alisha, reported the behavior has gotten “Significantly worse. The vast majority of this behavior is
from ill-advised parents.” This finding suggests that in addition to sports being more of an emotional investment, frustration results from a lack of knowledge of rules and emotional, rather than rational behavior guiding parent actions.

**Direct threats to officials.** Three of the five officials surveyed reported they experience direct harassment from parents at competitions in Louisiana. Below are descriptions of their memorable encounters with parent spectators.

Mark: Too many times to count. "We are gunna meet you in the parking lot" "I can take care of you later” most are laced with profanity.

John: A dad shoved me and spit on me as I left a field for ejecting his son after he threw his bat and helmet at his own coach.

Brian: It was a Catholic league Middle school game; the players were approximately 12 years old. One coach was incredibly abusive verbally to his players from the opening whistle. He would berate players, and yell. At one point, I called a foul against one of his players, which resulted in a red card ejection due to the severity of the foul. The player to whom I issued a red card turned out to be the verbally abusive coach’s son. This only escalated the agitation of the parents. Another point in the game, my co-official stopped play, and began to lecture the parents about their behavior. At the conclusion of the match, we were approached many of the parents of the team with the aggressive coach, threatening us, requesting our badge numbers, and stating that they would report us to the state.

These comments suggest officials are experiencing harassment directly from coaches, parents, and as responses to consequences directly tied to their decisions regarding the on field actions and offenses committed during contests. Each of these officials also reported that a direct threat to harm or injure someone occurred as a response to decisions they made on the field of play. As previously noted, a particular incident did not force referees to terminate officiating.

**Perceptions of new law.** Study participants were asked about their familiarity with Act 355 and whether it would make a difference in parent behavior and the greatest challenges with its implementation. Forty percent of the participants believed the law would make a difference in
Louisiana’s youth sports climate. One participant lacked familiarity with the law, but reported being hopeful, it would make a difference. The remainder of participants had mixed reviews, as one participant noted that he had seen a difference in parent behavior since the implementation of the law, and reported some presence of education and potential enforcement at the high school level, where there is often law enforcement at games. Mark stated:

I don't think it will make much difference. If law enforcement is present they don't want to enforce this law. I believe it will only be implemented if there is some kind of brawl. So unless there is security or game management present and will to enforce the Act 355 it is just hollow words.

Others felt it is difficult to enforce the law at the recreational and travel levels due to the lack of law enforcement presence at games. One noted the greatest challenge has been “educating the public about this new legislation.” Another participant reported, “Yes. It will better protect officials because some parents just don't get it. The parents may have to pay a fine or bail out of a facility to completely understand.” The implementation of the law has varying perspectives. Two of the five (40%) referees reported they believe that the law will actually make a difference in curtailing inappropriate spectator behaviors.

**Necessary educational programming.** Officials who participated in the survey were asked for ideas concerning the best way to educate parents about the new law. All agreed that education would help and made the following suggestions:

- Signage in gymnasiums and other sports facilities
- Annual parent education
- Sticking to the goals of youth sports as a character-building tool and how parents are models for their children

In order for the law to be enforced, parents needed to witness consequences of inappropriate behavior.
One participant fervently stated:

Until the spectators are removed from the premises of the athletic contest and not allowed to return, the behavior will continue. Game management and law enforcement will have to step up and take care of mild or moderate harassment. Unfortunately, most youth events are not monitored very well with game management or law enforcement. So inappropriate behavior is not addressed until it is way out of hand.

**Conclusions from Qualitative Research**

Current and former referees from the state of Louisiana included in this study provided valuable contributions. They supplemented quantitative data from the NASO by providing. Sports officials involved in this study had varied experience at different levels and sports contexts. They verified notable changes during their time as officials, especially concerning the level of parent engagement. Parents of today are over engaged and placing unrealistic expectations upon officials, consistent with existing studies (Stefansen et al., 2018) and aggressive behavior is somewhat normalized (Walters et al., 2016). All memorable incidents discussed cited a male figure. While 3 of 5 were no longer officials, none stated a specific incident forced them to quit officiating. The duration of officiating was greater than three years, outside of the window where approximately 8 of 10 officials are quitting in the state (L. Sanders, Personal Interview, 5/16/2019). Participants indicated officiating contests at the select/travel level of competition presented the most difficulty in managing parents. 60% of the officials surveyed also reported a memorable incident(s) when they had a difficult encounter with a spectator or parent. In general, they were knowledgeable of Act 355, but felt it difficult to enforce and additional steps beyond those already taken needed to happen and that both parent education and appropriate engagement of law enforcement at athletic contests was essential to enforcement.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

This study had several purposes. The overarching purpose of the study was to examine parent spectator behaviors in three main contexts in light of new legislation in the state of Louisiana. The author examined behaviors parents are observing at youth sporting events (BA Observed), personal spectator behaviors (BA Personal), and perceptions of their spectator behaviors after learning about new laws in Louisiana (BA Intervention). The study made several original contributions to the sports parent spectator literature.

Several gaps in the literature were addressed by this study. General contributions were documentation of observed spectator behaviors and the youth sports climate in the state as observed by referees, documented personal behaviors, and change, which occurred because of an educational intervention. This study answered a call for more diverse samples of participants in sport-based studies (Knight, 2019). The study provides a footprint for future research as the laws in Louisiana will replicate in other states around the country (L. Sanders, personal communication, 5/16/2019). Lastly, this research represents another contribution to the discipline of social work, extending a long-standing tradition of the profession’s largely unrecognized work in sports-based settings.

Problem Summary

The reach of youth sports in the United States is large, impacting millions of children, as nearly 90% of children will participate before the age of 18 (Turman, 2007). Given many view sport activities as a primary instrument of youth development, the investment is also significant for parents. As Omlie and Lavoi (2011) describe, the parent experience in the sports-based setting is driven by the on the field engagement with their child or their child’s team, interaction with coaches, other parents, spectators, and referees who are there to ensure fair play and appropriate
management of the game. Parents are the primary facilitators of the youth sports experience and their interactions as spectators are public displays of behavior. Over time, officials note spectators display a lack of respect for other spectators, officials, and at times, anger outbursts and violence occur.

New laws enacted in Louisiana were established to govern spectator behavior, but little is known about how they may impact parent behaviors. Examination of these challenges for parents can assist researchers, social work practitioners and other sports officials with an understanding of behaviors, potentially mitigating incidents, which now have legal consequences. Additionally, this study provided an impetus to look at demographic variables and nuances related to culturally appropriate programming in communities and sports leagues within the state of Louisiana.

Each research question had a unique focus. The first research question explored how an educational intervention about spectator behavior influenced parent behaviors through the lens of background anger. The second research question addressed how differences in-group variables were influenced by participation in the intervention. The third research question examined differences in observed behaviors and behaviors in which parents participated. Each area of study yielded unique findings.

**Research Question #1 Results**

This study used an intervention-based approach and examined how parent levels of background anger in spectator settings changed as a result of a brief educational program. This was the first known use of the Omli and Lavoi (2009) scale to evaluate behavior changes as a result of an educational intervention. The educational intervention produced statistically significant results, demonstrating the intervention prompted participants to consider how Act 355 influenced their own behaviors. They were less likely to exhibit behaviors that constituted
background anger, or in a more practical sense, what could be labeled as risky spectator behaviors. The educational intervention did not provide specific tips for parents; rather its focused was general information about the law and documented the nature of spectator behaviors. Consistent with other studies, such as Omli and Lavoi (2009), the study affirmed (a) Coaching from the sidelines and (b) Yelling at the referees remain among the most common sideline behaviors. Over 85% of participants reported coaching from the sidelines at least sometimes or greater. The educational program demonstrated increasing knowledge of laws and information about the youth sports climate does prompt parents to consider their behaviors. This study made an original contribution by exclusively involving parents and not coaches or youth participants, as past studies like Dorsch et al. (2017) and Omli and Lavoi (2009). The study revealed most participants report low levels of background anger behaviors, confirming similar findings of Goldstein and Iso-Ahola (2008), where 48% of parents reported they do not participate in inappropriate spectator activities. High scores of background anger were rare amongst participants, confirming parents with high levels of BA are memorable, constituting a small percentage of spectators. The study also confirmed findings of Omli and Lavoi (2012) who discovered the most frequent triggers for parent anger were referee incompetence, unsportsmanlike conduct of other athletes, incompetence of coaches and unsportsmanlike parent conduct. Future studies should examine these triggers more closely; however, this intervention did not target specific behaviors, but rather aimed to provide general education.

The intervention demonstrated that BA behaviors could be reduced and the greatest changes in behavior were found in coaching from the sidelines and yelling at both their own children and referees. Approximately 85% of participants in this study reported in the BA Personal survey that they coached from the sidelines sometimes (3) or greater. Post-intervention,
the results were reversed, as 86% reported they would coach from the sidelines never (1) or almost never (2). Other items did not create large differences in behaviors, because of the intervention, as the majority of those items directly involved confrontation with other spectators, parents, or youth participants. Next, the author looked at group differences between participants.

**Research Question #2 Results**

This study was amongst the first to look at how demographic variables shaped background anger behaviors of youth sport parents. Previous studies from Omli and Lavoi (2009) used a homogeneous sample of participants in one community, whereas this study pulled participants from several regions of Louisiana. The second research question explored group differences by demographic variables in this study, which were annual income, familiarity with the new law, gender, marital status, and race. All group differences were not found to have statistical significance for the dependent variables BA Observed, BA Personal, and BA Intervention. Overall, these findings are consistent with general comments from the LHSAA Director of Officiating who stated challenges in spectator behavior are not confined to certain demographics of parents (L. Sanders, personal communication, May 16, 2019). This may prompt researchers to examine spectator behaviors more closely in future research or in the future, as some inconsistencies were discovered.

**Annual income.** While existing studies on background anger in sports have not closely examined the role of family income in family behavior, the proportion of family income spent on youth sports has been examined in relation to family and parental stress (Dorsch et al., 2009). This study did capture family income and showed minimal variance in BA scores between families earning less than or greater than $100,000 annually. While there is not any Louisiana-specific data related to the percentage of family income spent on sports, national estimates reveal
an average family spends approximately $700 annually on sport-related activities (TD Ameritrade, 2019). In certain sport environments that are more competitive and require more travel, spending extends into the thousands of dollars annually. Continuing to include this variable and diversifying income related variables may reveal more nuanced data in relation to BA and family income.

Gender. In previous studies, gender of the child was considered as a BA variable and parents were not found to have statistically significant differences in BA scores (Omli & Lavoi, 2009). Blom and Drane (2008) did confirm parents provide different and more frequent forms of feedback to boys, rather than female participants and previous studies from referees confirm that males were more likely to act aggressively as spectators than females (Walters et al., 2016). This finding contradicts findings of Hennessey & Schwartz (2007) which stated gender, levels of anger, vengeance, and hostility are predictors of aggressive youth sport behaviors. Omli and Lavoi’s (2012) study involved approximately 60% females of 773 participants and this study’s sample involved was 80% female, consistent with Shields et al (2005) whose parent sample of 189 parents was 78% female. This study did not specifically target parents of a certain gender, however, given the memorable examples of poor spectator behavior exhibited largely by men in previous studies; this behavior prompts questions concerning the role of the male as a youth sport spectator. In American culture, involved fathers often take on the role of coach, rather than youth sport spectator. This study did not document whether parents served as coaches in the past or present, which prompts questions for sport and social work researchers to consider if male or father figure participants are being marginalized in sport-based research. Researchers may not actively promote their involvement, or they see their role differently than female parents. The role of coach may serve as a protective factor in answering questions from a coach-based, rather
than spectator/parent-based perspective. Cultural norms, as identified by the NASO (2017) survey of referees in Louisiana (n=192) also placed the majority of responsibility for addressing sportsmanship issues and behaviors on coaches establishing teams behavioral norms. The expectations of parents from the referee perspective to address sportsmanship related behaviors are much reduced. This cultural expectation needs to be explored further, as documented research places a prime importance on the role of parents to shape the youth sport experience and the coach has more of a supplementary, rather than primary role in shaping family sport behavior.

**Marital status.** Participants predominantly reported being married and raising children in a traditional two-parent environment. Future studies should capture the role of fathers and mothers as either a coach or non-coach to examine whether a father as coach role is shielding male parents from sharing their perspective, because they view their role as coach, rather than a spectator. The interaction of marital status and race in BA personal was statistically significant. It is possible that participants who listed their marital status as single exhibited higher BA scores due to larger perceptions of investment in sports as a protective factor for their children or a protective factor that supports the collective interests of the family. This study provides an impetus to explore the intersection of demographic variables further.

**Race.** This study’s sample included a greater percentage of minorities than previous studies. 26% (n=27) of study participants identified as members of minority groups and reported minimal fluctuations in BA scores to be labeled as statistically significant and different from those identifying as Caucasian. The sub sample perhaps may not have affected the overall scores, in the same way gender was found to not to have significance. In the same way family dynamics are different, cultural expectations for minority families, youth sport participants may vary, and
future research should further explore these norms. As discussed in the literature, there is an increased normalization of violence in youth sports and when many view this behavior as “part of the game” the frequency of it or a potential need to reduce it may lessen. Future studies should consider how spectator norms and expectations regarding parent behavior intersect with cultural identity.

**Research Question #3 Results**

Research question #3 examined differences between observed and personal spectator behaviors and yielded some unique findings. This portion of the study mimicked the original BA study by Omli and Lavoi (2009), as that study largely focused upon observed behaviors. Unlike the intervention portion of the study, BA Observed did not have challenges with normality or homogeneity of variance. Behaviors personally reported by participants are also the behaviors they most frequently observed. BA Observed and BA Personal had a collective difference of almost 10 points and increasingly so, when you take into account large standard deviations. These findings have practical significance; given the average disparity was one Likert value per item. There appears to be a large gap between parent observations and their personal behavior. This discrepancy presents opportunities for future research, particularly in regards to reasons why discrepancies between what is being observed and behavior in which one personally engages exists. The reasons for this gap merit further scholarly examination, as previous research has suggested parents take little responsibility for reinforcing sportsmanship and monitoring appropriate spectator behaviors (NASO, 2017). Future research should delve into factors that further address this gap between observations and personal behaviors and the dimensions of this gap. The establishment of Act 355 in Louisiana represents an important opportunity for parents and sports organizations to examine this discrepancy and appropriate
steps to address spectator behavior. At this time, there are minimal documented legal cases to conduct a systematic analysis. Inappropriate sideline actions can yield tremendous consequences for both parents and youth spectators, including potential for burnout.

**Burnout.** A great challenge in the youth sport environment are issues associated with burnout and dropout. Burnout stems from consistent exposure to psychosocial and other stressors, such as overtraining (Jayanthi et al., 2013). In the context of spectator behaviors, prolonged exposure to stressors associated with spectator behaviors may prompt a young person to either burnout or dropout from sports participation. The young athlete may enjoy participation, but may be negatively influenced by external factors and avoidance of these external factors such as parent spectators either within or outside their family system may prompt them to stop playing. This study identifies potential BA factors, which are the most frequently exhibited and reported by parents. Parents and scholars should play close attention to parent participation in the sport setting, as their intent is to enhance the youth sports experience without recognition of how it might be contributing to psychosocial stressors on both the individual athlete and the family system. Past studies have revealed levels of background anger increase as a child gets older and peak around the age of 12-13, but drop off in subsequent years (Omli & Lavoi, 2009).

**Important** to consider is the potential for parent actions to accelerate this process. This study provides some important areas for researchers to consider, especially concerning demographic variables. Sport within family culture can vary greatly and this study demonstrates parents are observing large variances between their personal spectators and those behaviors they observe from others. In some cultures and communities, involvement in sport is viewed as a potential path out of poverty for a family and in other cultures; involvement in sports is primarily spurred by the development of social capital. Parent norms will vary, but the *Activation States*
Model (Brackenridge et al., 2005; Tafuri & Priore, 2020) states in order for sustained participation in a sport, parents and children must be on the same page with their level of enthusiasm and interest. New laws such as Act 355 may challenge families to reshape their norms and behaviors, so they can continue participating in sports, and the entire family benefits from the experience.

Cultural variances in sport behaviors should be examined more closely, especially in relation to burnout and dropout. The integration of family behaviors into an organization/team culture may prompt a parent to remove himself or herself from a team culture or behave differently to meet perceived expectations based upon what they observe from other parents. Pressure to conform to team/organizational norms has potential to create undue stress for parents and can change family dynamics and relationships. Inability to conform to expectations may cause the family to remove their families from sport activities. This study provided a brief educational intervention and saw a reduction in levels of background anger, and educational programs can serve as a prevention tool assisting parents and others in creating a positive family sports experience. Additionally, findings from this study indicate parents are attune to observations of those around them. These nuances should be examined more closely to understand the magnitude of how they influence sport behavior and how observed behaviors can prompt or not family sport behaviors to be shaped by others. Future research should examine parents of children near or at this age group to discover how their behaviors either inhibit or support continued participation.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research can build upon this study. First, this study has provided a methodological framework for looking at spectator behaviors in the three capacities (BA Observed, BA Personal,

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& BA Intervention). Findings from this inquiry highlight observed behaviors, personal spectator actions, and how an intervention can influence parental behaviors. This study suggests parents are observing more risky spectators than they are personally participating in and educational programs can reduce the frequency of risky spectator behaviors. The study only documents the frequency of negative behaviors, and does not include positive behaviors. Blom & Drane (2008) included more observational data, such as differences in the gender orientation of the athletes and the frequency of both negative and positive comments observed in sport settings. The current study did not include the child’s gender, level of sport participation, community (low-income or wealthy), or specific sport context as a variable. Referees included in this study demonstrated spectator behaviors changed across sports settings. Further research could control for a specific sports, specific settings (recreational, travel, high school), and specific communities and further support differences across settings.

Second, this study demonstrated coaching from the sidelines, yelling at child participants and yelling at referees continue are frequently observed and common personal behaviors of parents. This affirms past studies (Blom & Drane, 2008; Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008; Omli & Lavoi, 2009, 2011; Shields et al., 2005) and suggests educational programs may establish norms and expectations. Educational programs for parents may offer limited tools for parents to modify those behaviors or to examine how they could or are detrimental to their athlete’s psychosocial growth. To better align with goals of the National Youth Sports Strategy, research should delve more into exploring how interventions can focus upon modifying specific behaviors and providing education explicitly connecting parent behaviors to potential psychosocial challenges for children. Context and culture should also be considered.
This study yielded interesting findings concerning demographic variables and their influence upon BA scores. Of particular note are the findings related to gender differences. The current study found no statistically significant differences in all BA scores when accounting for gender, confirming findings from Blom and Drane (2008) that gender did not account for significant differences in the nature of parent sideline comments. However, this contradicts the findings of Walters et al (2016) who found gender differences in both the frequency and perceptions of inappropriate spectator behaviors. The referee survey in this study reported memorable incidents involving male spectators or coaches. Furthermore, future research should explore demographic variables more closely, especially in relation to specific problematic spectator behaviors. This study demonstrated statistically significant differences in BA Personal across races and marital status, but not in BA Observed and BA Intervention scores. Income was shown not to be a contributor to differences in BA scores and this contradicts past research exploring the role of income in family stress. Future research should explore these nuances in order to develop culturally appropriate interventions furthering exploring demographics as contributors to differences in spectator behaviors. This study provides a framework for other states considering the execution of such laws. It provides a lens to examine how educational programs influence spectator behavior and insight concerning future social work roles in these settings, concerning interventions to promote positive family engagement and spur policy development.

**Family Systems Perspective**

The family systems perspective is an important lens to use in evaluating this study. As noted in the literature, participation in youth sports is not just a source of participation of young athletes; it is a vehicle for engaging the entire family system. In addition to parents,
grandparents, friends, neighbors, and siblings can often be found at games there to watch and support their youth participant. Youth sports are also identified as a common tool for not just individual youth socialization and an is an emotional experience for the family (Omli & Lavoi, 2011; Omli & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011; Shields et al., 2005) and a significant financial investment (TD Ameritrade, Dorsch et al., 2009) for families. When a child drops out or experiences burnout, the family system’s relationship with sports changes. Parents must consider how these types of events impact all members of the family. Another notable change occurs when parents misbehave at a sporting event and face consequences (either social isolation or legal) that impact the family system.

Act 355 has potential consequences to the family system. If a parent acts inappropriately and faces consequences under this new law (in a public setting), the potential impact can be devastating. Due to almost instantaneous sharing of events on social media, the potential for many to learn about the event quickly is likely. Parent actions have potential to lead to young people being barred from participation in certain leagues, or even facing jail time as a result of their spectator behavior. Time spent in jail can lead to poor outcomes for the family, such as job loss or family conflict. It can happen without the child acting inappropriately. More limited income as a result of job loss from spectator behaviors will also limit the amount of money families can spend on youth sport and promoting positive psychosocial experiences for their child. While the study did not look at the age of parent’s child participants, previous research by Omli and Lavoi (2009) found background anger increases as the age of sports participation increases, peaking about the age of 12-13 years old. Most children are discontinuing sports at this time, due to a lack of interest, too intense of a commitment (familial or financial), or poor experiences which can stem from multiple sources (Aspen Institute, 2015). This study

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demonstrates participation in a brief educational program about laws impacting spectator behavior in Louisiana can reduce background anger. More evidence based research concerning how parents may often unknowingly accelerate the development of the burnout and dropout process appears warranted. Therefore, it is appropriate to compare findings to areas of tension within family systems as identified by Barnhill (1975).

**Individuation v. enmeshment.** Observations from this dataset further reinforce Barnhill’s (1975) idea that family systems experience areas of tension. Parents must negotiate their role as a spectator and can either promote their own experience of individuation or enmeshment. Higher levels of background anger, as measured in this study demonstrate parents may be overinvolved in their child’s sports career. Participants reported observing higher levels of background anger, as seen in a nearly ten-point difference in BA Observed scores, compared to BA Personal scores. Perhaps parents are underreporting their own behaviors or not accurately reporting the frequency of behaviors they are observing. Consistent with Coakley’s (2006) ideas about success in parenting being connected to the on the field performance of their children, they may be more enmeshed in what they are observing and less cognizant of their own behaviors. This problem is exacerbated by financial priorities, which have increased spending on sports nationally, along with the professionalization of youth sports.

**Mutuality v. isolation.** This study documented the frequency of coaching from the sidelines, as an ongoing challenge. Through these behaviors, parents could be fostering a simultaneous sense of codependence and isolation. By coaching from the sidelines, they may believe their helping the child, yet they in fact could be isolating children from their coaches and the behavior in itself could be isolating them from a stronger bond with their parents. Additionally, behaviors such as criticizing referees could serve as an isolating function, in that
such behaviors may lead a child they cannot function in a sport setting after a disagreement or controversial call from a referee.

**Clear v. distorted communication.** Another area of family systems tension identifiable from this study is clear v. distorted communication. Youth sports are a complex and multifaceted entity and a common source of communication within the family is spectator behavior. Spectator behavior is an extension of family sport behavior. The intervention portion produced notable changes concerning how parents will adapt and communicate their thoughts and emotions during sports contests. Follow up is important, especially as the law progresses. The study provided evidence that similar challenges of parents stretch across gender, income, marital status and race when it comes to spectator behavior. Perhaps engagement in the study provided parents with an opportunity to reflect upon the messages their spectator behavior conveys both within and exterior to their families. Spectator behaviors are also public behaviors and the discrepancy between observations and personal behaviors is wide.

**Role reciprocity v. role conflict.** The increased level of financial investment and family financial decisions related to sports can generate family tension concerning the role of parents and the appropriate role of children in these settings. The role of sport parent is both emotional and financial. This study demonstrated evidence that through frequent coaching on the sidelines and verbally attacking officials that parent sporting behaviors can create boundaries issues with roles. On the sidelines, there is a breach of roles, in that coaches, who are often parents themselves, are often not commanded the same level of respect as parents. Parents can create role conflicts by merely pointing out observations and either not acknowledging their own behaviors, or taking appropriate “adult-based” steps to intervene and address spectator behavioral problems before they get out of hand and do not require the enforcement of statutes,
such as Act 355. Parents want to protect their children from harm, but may have unrealistic expectations concerning who is responsible for protecting spectators and youth sport participants once they arrive at a ballpark or there is an incident. Unfortunately, in Louisiana, this burden is largely being placed upon law enforcement.

**Clear v. breached generational boundaries.** The American youth sport system is based upon professional models an intended for “mini-adults.” In addition to gaining life skills from sports participation, there is increased societal pressure for young athletes to perform at a higher level, regardless of the context, whether it be recreational or a travel/more competitive environment. Because of this level of investment, parents and children are emotionally invested in the activity. This study affirms that parents can have varying levels of emotional investment in sports and this may cause parents to not act as adults. Parents may often struggle to reach a happy medium, where the athlete and the family have a similar level of investment. This study identified what parents are not just observing, but the types both adult and public displays of behavior they are exposing their children to in the youth sports setting. They rely upon their own youth sport experience as a frame of reference, rather than the current sport environment. Sports are often lauded as a family friendly gathering place, yet due to the presence of background anger, both children and parents may often leave a youth sporting event in distress. This study suggests that parents may not have a positive experience or impression of the benefits of sports given the nature of what they are observing from other spectators. Common spectator behavior such overriding the authority of the assigned coach and yelling at referees, who may fail to make an appropriate judgment about a game situation may also give authority to young people to act in a similar manner.
Adults in contemporary youth sports culture have established more adult-based, rather than youth development focused norms. This study documents parents are observing, and their personal spectator behaviors. Through the study’s educational intervention, it is important to observe how education about laws can shape various behaviors. In addition, this study allows researchers to observe what spectator behaviors present modification challenges, especially in light of new Louisiana laws. Through this type of understanding, program developers can develop interventions that are more targeted to address and or promote modification of specific behaviors and potentially improve family interactions as a result, thus improving the overall youth sports climate. Parents may need to be equipped with tools based upon more evidence-based research to guide their sports-based spectator behaviors and interactions within their family.

Limited group differences in BA scores across each area of measurement was surprising. The study sample (N=106) was more racially diverse than previous samples, but differences in BA scores were limited, as was the case with more homogeneous samples. Additionally, there were similar findings when comparing the scores of males and females. This contradicts those of Blom and Drane (2008) who found the frequency of sideline comments varied when the gender of the athlete was taken into consideration. Differences in BA scores based upon income and marital status lacked statistical significance. This finding is surprising, given previous research has found the greater the portion of income a family spends on sports, the greater the amount of perceived family stress. This type of stress in a sports context can be demonstrated through background anger, as the greater the frequency of actions, the greater the perceived stress upon families. Additionally, this study revealed 69% of study participants (n=73) saw decreases in background anger because of the intervention. Arguably, the educational program presented
about the new law was an effective tool in reducing background anger for study participants. Only five participants (4.7%) demonstrated increases in background anger and the remainder of the sample (n=28, 26.4%) saw no changes in behavior as a result of the intervention and were minimally impacted by new knowledge of the law.

Social Exchange Theory

Youth sports present opportunities for complex interactions between multiple groups of stakeholders, such as athletes, coaches, parents, and referees. This theoretical framework suggests parents often negotiate relationships with multiple forces that influence their behaviors. There is an extensive negotiation process where parents weigh their options, not just in a broader sports context, but also in their sideline actions. This study’s findings suggest spectators are influenced by educational interventions and interactions within the sports environment. Parents are also choosing to partake in certain behaviors in hopes that it will enhance not only the experience of their own child, but also for their own personal experience as a parent. In a social exchange context, parents are busy paying attention to their own behavior or hyper focused on their own children, or other aspects of the sports, but parents often expect that someone else will address risky spectator behaviors. This study did capture some outliers, as background anger scores ranged from as low as 10 to a high of 40. Intervention scores ranged from 10-39. This demonstrates some parents may difficulties experience negotiating between the management of their own behaviors and the influence of other stakeholders, such as coaches and other parents. Due to external factors, they may experience challenge within their own family systems. It is important for families to consider how the exchanges which take place between coaches, other parents, referees, and spectators in light of Act 355. One exchange resultant from an inappropriate call or a physical or verbal confrontation could end up having tremendous
consequences for the family. Many often view sports as a positive outlet for children and families, but potential legal action, which results from missteps, may result in more than being disallowed from participation in a particular activity. Parents must consider events recorded on social media can be shared with thousands in a very short period. A future intervention could focus on conflict resolution or bystander interventions to address potential conflicts before they escalate. Furthermore, as enforcement of this law continues, parents may believe that actively supporting engagement in the dissemination of this law could create more buy in and perhaps be more meaningful for them to support.

This research also demonstrates parents may gain value from how they participate in their child’s activities, through behaviors such as coaching from the sidelines and yelling at the referees. Future research should aim to seek how these behaviors add or detract from both the youth and parent experience of youth sports. Furthermore, knowledge of laws can also alter their sense of priorities in terms of the spectator behavior decisions they make. In the context of youth sports, parents will often choose what they believe has the greatest functionality in terms of meeting their goals for participation and what they feel is best for their children. As was observed in the results of research question #3, the spectator behaviors parents are most frequently reporting are also the behaviors in which there is the greatest disparity between those in which they are participating and observing. This reinforces previous research, which has shown that understanding the true nature and frequency of parent spectator behaviors is a difficult and complex issue to study. With further study and adjustments to the research design, there can be a more extensive examination of the context of observed behaviors. Additional variables, such as the sports context and a greater consideration of what is contributing to these observed behaviors would also be important to examine.
These results promote understanding of the referee experience. Referees who participated in the qualitative portion of the provided concrete examples of exchanges with stakeholders at youth sports events. Much of the burden to provide initial enforcement of Act 355 is placed upon the referee. This may prompt referees to discontinue participation because they do not want to bear this burden or it may improve the referee experience, because parents because of Act 355 may choose to reduce background anger in their spectator exchanges. When this is reduced, there may be a possibility of the referee experience improving. This should be examined more closely, as past research has shown referees tend to over-report negative behaviors. At this time, there is limited case law to use as examples in training referees how to act appropriately in the enforcement of this law, from not only a legal, but also a broader perspective that reinforces the ascribed values of youth sports.

**Covid-19 pandemic implications.** This study was completed almost immediately before the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to altering or disrupting lives of millions as a result of potential for the virus to cause death, the virus has caused sports organizations at all levels across the nation to halt youth sports activities in the Spring of 2020. Consequently, millions of children are not able to participate in sports activities in the immediate future. There are implications for future sports activities because of infection control and social distancing measures for both youth participants and spectators. Due to stay at home orders, many families have resorted to online training programs and more unstructured and “free play” sports activities, rather than organized recreational or travel activities. Due to reduction in incomes, many families may have more limited funds to expend on sports, this may negatively affect financially stable families, and those financially challenged before the pandemic. Reports have shown efforts to curb regional tournaments, in favor of more localized competitions, as a way to contain the spread of the
coronavirus (Schad, 20 May 2020). The Little League World Series and many multi-state and national competitions have canceled. Spectators may also have to modify their role in youth sporting events. The potential changes in behavior are unknown and warrant further scholarly examination.

The role of spectators will potentially change because of the protocols required of youth sports organizations in accordance with state and national public health guidelines. As of this dissertation, some sports organizations are re-starting practices and having shortened seasons. Competitive games for many have yet to resume, but the role of spectators will change, especially as social distancing measures are implemented. In one Louisiana community as an example, parents are not allowed to sit in the bleachers and are expected to sit in their own provided lawn chairs. Parents must sign updated organizational waivers, stating they understand and will follow organizational guidelines. There has been little to no discussion of the potential implications for spectator behaviors. Because of having to expend more income on implementing new safety and social distancing guidelines, this may cause organizations to compromise the implementation and enforcement of spectator behavior laws. This study provides support for brief parent education programs and their ability to influence parent behaviors and provide a valuable reference for how to implement such programs, especially in communities where there are known spectator behavior challenges. Going forward, scholars must consider the intersection of demographics, the emotional investment of parents, financial status, and geographic location in relation to the impact of COVID-19. This research outlines a platform to provide education in relation to parent spectator behaviors.

Limitations
This study is not without limitations. The first set of limitations to discuss are those with the methodological approach used in this study. Second, the study has limitations regarding the intersection of demographic variables used to evaluate parent behavior.

**Challenges with methodology.** The study primarily used an online methodology and had several benefits, but also revealed some potential challenges for researchers in the future. First, in a two-month period and with minimal costs, over 100 participants were recruited for this study. Additionally, participants were able to complete the study on their own time and participants did not report to the author any issues associated with a lack of comfort or concerns regarding confidentiality. A lack of visual anonymity provided safety to those being studied. This benefited researcher, as parents were asked to provide insight concerning their exposure and engagement in behaviors that are not always considered appropriate for youth sports spectators (Cleland et al., 2019). Simultaneously, the online approach had some limitations.

The online approach exposed some potential limitations in this methodological approach. It is difficult to assume whether participants were truthful in their responses, as there was greater variance in the difference between the observed and personal behaviors, rather than when considering personal and their anticipated behaviors post-intervention (BA Intervention). Also unknown is whether there was communication about the survey amongst participants, either in person or through social media outlets. Participants could have been influenced by the opinions of others. On several occasions, snowball sampling seemed to be very effective in the recruitment of participants, yet, the software did not track how much time the participant spent completing the study.

**Intervention time frame.** The post-intervention survey immediately followed the completion of the educational program. A more longitudinal approach may have yielded
different results. Previous studies involving parent education programs in youth sports had more
time for parents to process how participation influenced their behavior or family dynamics (i.e.
the beginning and end of a sports season. This study, like Hurley et al. (2017) adopted a brief
intervention approach. This approach was chosen because Act 355 went into effect in advance of
the study and the intent was to provide information to participants that examined an immediate
reaction to a law impacting the youth sport spectator experience. Future research should consider
how the duration between pre and post-test can impact results and the costs, not only financially,
but involving participants a second time for follow up. Participants took approximately 15-30
minutes to complete and did not require participants to return for future study or follow up.

**Geography and local culture.** The study emphasized spectator laws specific to the state
of Louisiana and respondents were concentrated largely in one region of the state. A broader
sample may have yielded more diverse findings, had it been conducted in other parts of the
United States. In many of the small communities of South Louisiana, the online approach may
have mitigated the potential for a participant to be influenced by the presence of others at school-
based sessions. The researcher’s school based-approach surprisingly provided limited direct
access to middle and lower income participants. The author conducted very limited in person
research at two schools, despite administrative support from one of the larger districts in the state
of Louisiana. School district administration left participation and outreach to potential
participants to the discretion of individual school principals. Several schools and youth sports
organizations in the state allowed the researcher to post information about the study on their
organizational Facebook page, but only a small percentage of participants were obtained in this
manner. Some areas of the community where the survey was distributed through Facebook to
parents on school pages often lacked home internet access. The author provided a tablet for a
parent to participate in the study at a school and internet difficulties prevented the subject’s responses from being recorded.

There did not appear to be extensive school-based education mandates regarding this law. When considering his methodology, the author had proposed to do more of a case-based approach, but without broad-based school support, it appears this approach may be limited. The LHSAA Director of Officiating approached schools in this situation on my behalf. The overall reaction to the study was positive, but engagement in the study at this time from the school-based perspective was limited outside of posting the information on school Facebook pages and invitations to parent night activities with limited attendance. Pro-active school based support or a mandate for parents of athletes may have yielded difference results and a more inclusive sample. In future research, it seems as though a school or sports-organization based may not be the most appropriate way to reach participants. The sports organizations and schools reported they often had trouble getting parents to come to extraneous events or meetings outside of sports organization practices and school “Parent Night” activities.

**Limited knowledge of law.** Nearly 60% of participants were unaware of Act 355 in advance of the study, despite its passage in the previous legislative session. There is limited exposure in the media and legal precedent in the state at this time. Surprisingly, as this study was being conducted, a local case tried under Act 355 in the target community stayed away from mainstream media. This was the first known local case in the six months since the advent of the new law. The author received a call from the official involved in the incident, but after several attempts, the official refused to complete the qualitative portion of the study. Direct threats were made to this official by a parent and the case was tried in local city court, rather than in a regional court, which may have attracted a larger audience and greater media attention. Mass or
social media could have attracted additional participants. Demographic findings also revealed some limitations and areas of further consideration.

**Demographic Variable Limitations**

**Annual income.** This study revealed no statistically significant differences in BA scores across all three points of measurement (BA Observed, BA Personal, & BA Intervention) when comparing income of participants. There were limited participants who identified as having an annual family income of less than $25,000 and lower than the median poverty guidelines. Perhaps a restructuring of the income structure in the survey would have yielded different results. For example, the income structure could have based upon poverty guidelines of the state, rather than brackets used from previous data from the Aspen Institute. Participants who identified as having an income less than $25,000 were obtained largely from in-person school-based sessions, rather than the online survey. Future studies focusing upon income differences should consider potential avenues to approach the intersection of annual income and spectator behavior differently. Obtaining data from a more income diverse crowd may require further entrée into school systems or from youth sports games or mandatory youth sport parent meetings. The majority of participants in this study identified as families being married and given trends in American society, it is possible they were a two income household. This question was not asked in the survey and would have allowed for further consideration of the role of this variable in spectator behavior. 47 of 106 participants identified as having a family income greater than $100,000 annually and is not reflective of the state at large. Previous research which examined family income as a variable found greater levels of stress in families when the portion of family income spent on youth sports increased (Dorsch et al., 2009). The study did not explore the portion of family income or estimated amount spent annually on sports activities. Future
studies should examine the role of income more closely, given documented increased spending on youth sports nationally and further document the level of financial commitment to sport and its role in spectator behavior.

**Gender.** Over 80% of study participants identified as female. The lack of balance in comparison groups may have contributed to limited differences in levels of BA. Previous studies have revealed gender differences in spectator behaviors, especially concerning levels of aggression exhibited on the sidelines. Future studies should seek to focus more exclusively on males to gain more insight into differences in spectator behaviors. More gender diversity in studies could prompt a closer examination of gender expectations and roles both within the context of families and the male parent as spectator. This study affirmed that female parents of youth athletes were willing to share their observations and provide personal input about their spectator behaviors.

**Marital status.** Participants in this study overwhelmingly identified as married and this presents limitations to the study’s findings, as they are not reflective of Louisiana’s demographic composition. According to 2018 estimates, 467,000 Louisiana children reside in single parent families, which is approximately 46% of the state’s youth population. Amongst African-Americas, 73% or 264,000 live in single parent families (Kids Count Data Center, 2020). The number of participants who identified as single in this study was limited. Future efforts should focus upon how youth sport dynamics are influenced by the presence of a parent or two parents in the home and the intersection of parental expectations as a result of family composition. This study had limited engagement of single sex couples or grandparents who are the primary caregivers of children, a common arrangement in the state of Louisiana.
Race. The racial composition of the obtained sample did not reflect the state at large, but the racial diversity of this sample was more inclusive than previous studies involving sports parents. Future studies which consider race as a variable should examine how race and culture contribute to spectator behavior. In many communities, race informs both expectations and the role of sports, not just in youth development, but also the nature of both the emotional and financial investment in youth sports. This study was also completed in advance of the murder of George Floyd an event, which escalated challenges between citizens and police across our nation. This is particularly notable amongst African-Americans, which comprise approximately 1/3 of the state population. Act 355 represents a potential avenue where there will be more policing and increased consequences for these families. Unfortunately, this study did not consider participant perceptions of policing at sporting events, but revealed differences in observations of others, versus personal spectator behaviors. The study also did not allow participants the opportunity to reflect upon a particular incident or discuss with others and this may have revealed differences in spectator behaviors by race. Future studies should consider how perceptions of policing perceptions and spectator behaviors intersect. The presence of police may cause spectators to act differently in these settings and those implementing these laws should thoughtfully consider how culture and race may serve as barriers or support collaboration between law enforcement in youth sport settings. Future studies must consider this dimension, especially as activism taking place is aggressively advocating for in policing.

Conclusion

The study explored the dynamics of parent spectator behavior in relation to new laws passed in the state of Louisiana. In this study, parents were asked to document observed, personal, and post-intervention spectator behaviors. Background anger was the lens through
which parent behavior was evaluated, as these types of behaviors are those that are enacted by parents and can cause distress to children and other spectators at sporting events. The intervention involved an educational program designed to raise awareness about a new law in Louisiana, which addresses spectator behaviors. Evaluated were differences between behaviors in which parents participated and the differences in behaviors in which they are participating, compared to what they are observing. This study included a sample of sports parents whose children were ages 6-18 and participated in team-oriented sports. Additionally, the study had a diversified sample compared to previous studies involving youth sports parents. Demographic variables had limited differences between groups of participants, yet the study revealed a greater discrepancy between observed and personal behaviors. Interestingly, the behaviors with the greatest differences in opinions of observed behavior were the behaviors most frequently cited as personal spectator behaviors.

This study also represented one of only a few existing social work-based dissertations which focus upon sports-based challenges within families. Both family systems theory and social exchange theory were supported in various ways as explanations of parent behaviors and shed light upon how sports-based behavior has potential to provide insight about family based dynamics. Future research should look more closely at interventions designed to address well-documented problematic spectator behaviors, such as coaching from the sidelines and yelling at the referees. Social work too should continue to use this study as a basis for future intervention in sports-based settings especially in the parent education and sports-based policy realms. It is expected the dynamics of spectator behaviors will continue to change, especially as laws governing behaviors are passed (as expected) in other states outside of Louisiana. This study validates the potential of intervention-based work in this realm, with the goal of supporting
youth, parents, and sports organizations in creating a positive experience for all engaged in these activities. It also extends social work’s examination of parent behavior within youth sports and outlines a path for future family and policy-based intervention research concerning spectator behaviors.
APPENDIX A. CONSENT FORM FOR IN PERSON PARENT PARTICIPANTS

CONSENT FORM

“THE ROLE OF AN EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION TO ADDRESS PARENT AND SPECTATOR BEHAVIORS IN LOUISIANA YOUTH SPORTS”

1. Study Title: The Role of an Educational Intervention to Address Parent and Spectator Behaviors in Louisiana Youth Sports

2. The purpose of this research project is to explore how youth sport parent and caregiver personal behaviors are influenced by knowledge regarding a new law passed in the State of Louisiana, Act 355, which creates parent behavioral expectations at all sanctioned sports contest in the state. Your expected time in the study will be six months, as the study will be completed in June 2019. Parents and grandparents of youth sport participants will participate in an online educational program or an in-person information session at a local school or library that will last approximately 30 minutes. Before the educational program, participants will complete an inventory of observed and personal spectator behaviors. After the educational program, participants will complete a post-test of personal spectator behaviors, which will take a few minutes. Beyond completion of the pretest, the intervention program and the posttest, the principal investigator may contact you with follow up questions or ask you to participate in a future study.

3. Risks: The only study risk is the inadvertent release of your responses. Every survey will be denitrified to insure confidentiality. However, every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your study records. Files will be kept in secure cabinets to which only the Principal Investigator has access (Jerry F. Reynolds, II) and in secure internet locations, which will also be protected by Jerry F. Reynolds, II, the Principal Investigator of the study.

4. Benefits: Due to their participation in the study, individuals will gain knowledge concerning Act 355. Additionally, the study may yield valuable information about the practical implications of implementing sport parent behavior laws as well as the development of educational programs to address parent and spectator behaviors in youth sports.

5. Alternatives (if applicable): Participation in the study is voluntary and participants may wish to have their information excluded at any time.

6. Investigators: The following investigators are available for questions about this study, M-F, 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., Jerry F. Reynolds II, LMSW PhD Candidate, LSU 251-654-5886

7. Performance Site: Online and sites throughout the state of Louisiana, such as schools and public libraries.
8. Number of subjects: 150

9. Participant Inclusion: Individuals between the ages of 18 and 65 who are parents or caregivers of team youth sport participants and both the participant and caregiver resides in the State of Louisiana. To participate in this study you must meet the requirements of both the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

10. Right to Refuse: Subjects may choose not to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.

11. Privacy: Results of the study may be published, but participant names or identifying information will not be included in the publication. Participant identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

12. Signatures: The study has been discussed with me and all questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions or concerns regarding my rights as a participant, I can contact Dennis Landin, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, or www.lsu.edu/research. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Participant Signature: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

The study participant has indicated to me that he/she is unable to read. I certify that I have read this consent form to the participant and explained that by completing the participant signature line above, the participant has agreed to participate.

Signature of Reader: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________
APPENDIX B. ONLINE CONSENT FORM-PARENT PARTICIPANTS

CONSENT FORM FOR ONLINE SURVEY

“The Role of An Educational Intervention to Address Parent and Spectator Behaviors in Louisiana Youth Sports”

Thank you for considering being part of this important study.

1. Study Title: The Role of An Educational Intervention to Address Parent and Spectator Behaviors in Louisiana Youth Sports

2. The purpose of this research project is to explore how youth sport parent and caregiver personal behaviors are influenced by knowledge about a new law passed in the State of Louisiana, Act 355, which creates parent behavioral expectations at all sanctioned sports contests in the state. Your expected time in the study will be approximately 6-8 months, as the study will be completed in June 2019.

To participate in this study you must meet the requirements of both the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

To be included in the study you must meet the following requirements:

- Be between the ages of 18-64 and reside in Louisiana
- Be the parent, grandparent, and/or primary caregiver of young person ages 6-18, who currently resides in Louisiana and participates in an organized youth team sport within the state of Louisiana or has done so in the past year

Those not meeting the above requirements and/or have a young person who has not competed in organized youth team sport in the past year are also not eligible for this study.

Parents, grandparents, and caregivers of youth sport participants will participate in an online educational program or an in-person information session at a local school or library that will last approximately 30 minutes and this includes the time to review all necessary consent forms, the time to participate in both the online or in person educational program, and to complete the study pre-tests and post-tests. Before the educational program, participants are asked to complete an inventory of observed and personal spectator behaviors. After the educational program, participants will complete a post-test of personal spectator behaviors, which will take a few minutes to complete. Beyond completion of the pretest, the intervention program and the posttest, the principal investigator may contact you with follow up questions or ask you to participate in a future study.

3. Risks: The only study risk is the inadvertent release of your responses. Every survey will be de-identified to insure confidentiality. However, every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your study records. Files will be kept in secure cabinets to which only the
investigator has access and in secure internet locations and secured and password protected by both investigators.

4. Investigators: The following investigators are available for questions about this study, M-F, 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Jerry F. Reynolds II, LMSW PhD Candidate, LSU School of Social Work, 251-654-5886; Co-Principal Investigator, Dr. Cassandra Chaney, Professor, LSU School of Social Work, 225-578-1159, cchaney@lsu.edu

5. Participant Rights: Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled. If you choose to withdraw from the study at any time, please notify either of the investigators at the contact information above. This study has been approved by the LSU IRB. For questions concerning participant rights, please contact the IRB Chair, Dr. Dennis Landin, 578-8692, or irb@lsu.edu.

6. Privacy Protection: In order to preserve the confidentiality of study participants, every survey will be deidentified both during the research process and in any published reports. Files will be kept in secure cabinets to which only the investigators will have access to and in secure internet locations and secured and password protected by both investigators. Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

7. Performance Site: Online and sites throughout the state of Louisiana, such as schools and public libraries

8. Your information collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, may be used or distributed for future research.
   _____ Yes, I give permission
   _____ No, I do not give permission

By continuing this survey, you are giving consent to participate in this study.

Email Signature: _______________________________ Date:______________
APPENDIX C. REFEREE ONLINE CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM FOR ONLINE SURVEY OF FORMER REFEREES

“THE ROLE OF AN EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION TO ADDRESS PARENT AND SPECTATOR BEHAVIORS IN LOUISIANA YOUTH SPORTS”

Thank you for considering being part of this important study.

1. Study Title: The Role of An Educational Intervention to Address Parent and Spectator Behaviors in Louisiana Youth Sports

2. The purpose of this research project is to explore how youth sport parent and caregiver personal behaviors are influenced by knowledge about a new law passed in the State of Louisiana, Act 355, which creates parent behavioral expectations at all sanctioned sports contest in the state. Additionally, to supplement known information, former referees and sports officials will be invited to participate to share their insight concerning youth sport challenges. Your expected time in the study will be approximately 6-8 months, as the study will be completed in June 2020.

To participate in this study you must meet the requirements of both the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

To be included in the study you must meet the following requirements:
- Be a current or former referee, sports official or umpire of a team sport and reside in the state of Louisiana (ages 18+)
- If you have quit officiating, you must have done so within the last 10 years.

Exclusion Criteria: Those not meeting the above requirements are not eligible for this study.

Current or former referees will participate in an open-ended online questionnaire which will ask questions concerning their opinions concerning spectator behaviors, whose responses will help inform a parent education program.

3. Risks: The only study risk is the inadvertent release of your responses. Every survey will be deidentified to insure confidentiality. Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your study records. Files will be kept in secure cabinets to which only the investigator has access, in secure internet locations, and secured and password protected by both investigators.

4. Investigators: The following investigators are available for questions about this study, M-F, 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Jerry F. Reynolds II, LMSW PhD Candidate, LSU School of Social Work, 251-654-5886; Co-Principal Investigator, Dr. Cassandra Chaney, Professor, LSU School of Social Work, 225-578-1159, cchaney@lsu.edu
5. Participant Rights: Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled. If you choose to withdraw from the study at any time, please notify either of the investigators at the contact information above. This study has been approved by the LSU IRB. For questions concerning participant rights, please contact the IRB Chair, Dr. Dennis Landin, 578-8692, or irb@lsu.edu.

6. Privacy Protection: In order to preserve the confidentiality of study participants, every survey will be deidentified both during the research process and in any published reports. Files will be kept in secure cabinets to which only the investigators will have access to and in secure internet locations and secured and password protected by both investigators. Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

7. Performance Site: Online.

8. Your information collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, may be used or distributed for future research.
   _____ Yes, I give permission
   _____ No, I do not give permission

By continuing this survey, you are giving consent to participate in this study.

(Participant email signature)
APPENDIX D. PARENT SURVEY QUESTIONS

The first set of questions focus upon observed spectator behaviors. Please select the most appropriate answer given the frequency you have observed the listed behaviors.

In the past year, how often have other spectators (from the sidelines):

- Yelled at you (in a demeaning manner)
  1) Never  2) Almost Never  3) Sometimes  4) A lot of the time  5) All the time

- Yelled at another spectator (in a demeaning manner)
  1) Never  2) Almost Never  3) Sometimes  4) A lot of the time  5) All the time

- Yelled at your child (in a demeaning manner)
  1) Never  2) Almost Never  3) Sometimes  4) A lot of the time  5) All the time

- Yelled at a child’s teammate (in a demeaning manner)
  1) Never  2) Almost Never  3) Sometimes  4) A lot of the time  5) All the time

- Yelled at the referee (in a demeaning manner)
  1) Never  2) Almost Never  3) Sometimes  4) A lot of the time  5) All the time

- Cussed loud enough for athletes to hear
  1) Never  2) Almost Never  3) Sometimes  4) A lot of the time  5) All the time

- Got into it with someone [had a physical altercation with another parent/spectator]
  1) Never  2) Almost Never  3) Sometimes  4) A lot of the time  5) All the time

- Acted in a way that may have been embarrassing to the child athlete’s, their family, other spectators, or the sports organization
  1) Never  2) Almost Never  3) Sometimes  4) A lot of the time  5) All the time

- Coached from the sidelines (not as a paid or volunteer coach)
  1) Never  2) Almost Never  3) Sometimes  4) A lot of the time  5) All the time

- Encouraged athletes to play rough
PRE TEST- PERSONAL BEHAVIORS: This set of questions focuses upon how often you have personally participated in these behaviors at a youth sporting event in the past year. The choices are:

1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time

In the past year, how often have you:

- Encouraged athletes to play outside the rules

1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time

- Yelled at another spectator (In a demeaning manner)

1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time

- Yelled at your child (in a demeaning manner)

1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time

- Yelled at a child’s teammate (in a demeaning manner)

1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time

- Yelled at the referee (in a demeaning manner)

1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time

- Cussed loud enough for athletes to hear

1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time

- Got into it with someone [had a physical altercation with another parent/spectator]

1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time

- Acted in a way that may have been embarrassing to the child athlete’s, their family, other spectators, or the sports organization

1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time

- Coached from the sidelines (not as a paid or volunteer coach)

1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time
• Encouraged athletes to play rough
  1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time
• Encouraged athletes to play outside the rules
  1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time

Now that you have learned about Act 355, please select the most appropriate answer and how often you expect to participate in the following behaviors at youth sporting events:

• Yell at another spectator (In a demeaning manner)
  1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time
• Yell at your child (in a demeaning manner)
  1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time
• Yell at a child’s teammate (in a demeaning manner)
  1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time
• Yell at the referee (in a demeaning manner)
  1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time
• Cuss loud enough for athletes to hear
  1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time
• Get into it with someone [had a physical altercation with another parent/spectator]
  1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time
• Act in a way that might be embarrassing to the child athlete’s, their family, other spectators, or the sports organization
  1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time
• Coach from the sidelines (not as a paid or volunteer coach)
  1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time
• Encourage athletes to play rough
1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time

- Encourage athletes to play outside the rules
1) Never 2) Almost Never 3) Sometimes 4) A lot of the time 5) All the time
APPENDIX E. SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR FORMER OR CURRENT REFEREES IN THE STATE OF LOUISIANA

THE ROLE OF AN EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION TO ADDRESS PARENT AND SPECTATOR BEHAVIORS IN LOUISIANA YOUTH SPORTS

Instructions: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study, which seeks to better understand how educational programming, especially about laws governing spectator behaviors in Louisiana at all sanctioned sporting events throughout the state. Please answer the questions below and return to Principal Investigator, Jerry Reynolds, PhD Candidate, Louisiana State University at jreyn33@lsu.edu. You may also contact him by phone at 251-654-5886.

Name (For Contact Purposes Only):
Email:

Number of Years as a Licensed Official:
Sports Officiated as a Licensed Official:

Reflecting upon your time as an official, what are some of the most notable changes in youth sports you noticed from the time you started as an official to the time you stopped serving as an official?

Why did you terminate serving as an official?

In your experience, what level of sport is parent and spectator the most difficult to manage as an official? Youth Recreational, Youth Travel/Competitive, High School? Why?

In your opinion, has parent and spectator behavior improved, stayed about the same, or has it become more violent and difficult for officials to manage? Why so?

Were you ever threatened either verbally or physically by a parent or spectator? If so, please describe the situation.

Are you familiar with Act 355, the new law passed in the state that governs spectator behavior and defines verbal and physical abuse experienced by anyone at sanctioned youth sport events in Louisiana? If so, in what ways, do you believe this law will help improve the sport experience? What do you anticipate as some of the greatest challenges of implementing this new law and parent education programs?

How do you believe this new law will change spectator behavior?

What types of information do you believe would be helpful to parents concerning this new law and improving the youth sport experience of children in our state?
APPENDIX F. STUDY #E12008 LSU IRB APPROVAL FORM

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

TO: Jerry Reynolds  
Social Work

FROM: Dennis Landin  
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: November 25, 2019

RE: IRB# E12008

TITLE: The Roles of An Educational Intervention in Addressing Parent and Spectator Behaviors in Louisiana Youth Sports


Review Date: 11/25/2019

Approved X Disapproved

Approval Date: 11/25/2019 Approval Expiration Date: 11/25/2022

Exemption Category/Paragraph: 2b, 3b

Signed Consent Waived?: Yes for online. No for in person.

Re-review frequency: Three years

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable): 

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman

________________________________________

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING -

Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:
1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects.*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining revised approval (or submit of a termination report) prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins), notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
8. SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.

*All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb
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Jerry Reynolds was born in Canton, MI, near Detroit. He obtained his undergraduate degree in Social Work from The National Catholic School of Social Service at The Catholic University of America. Upon graduation, he completed his MSW at The University of Michigan, near his hometown, fulfilling a childhood dream. Upon completion of his MSW, he moved to Mobile, AL, worked in higher education as a Campus Minister at Spring Hill College, and began his teaching career with The University of Alabama School of Social Work distance education program. After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, he worked for a community development credit union and was instrumental in assisting thousands of low-income families recover from the storm over a four-year period. He then became an Operations Manager at Housing First, Inc., participating with the implementation of several state and federal homeless prevention grants. He married his wife Jennifer in 2009 and they moved to New Iberia, LA in 2011. He worked at Catholic High School as Development and Admissions Director. He returned to traditional social work in 2013 as a Social Worker with Fresenius Kidney Care. In the fall of 2015, he enrolled at The University of South Carolina College of Social Work. While in South Carolina, he worked as a Research Assistant and as a PRN Social Worker in the Emergency Department at Lexington Medical Center. In 2017, he transferred to the Louisiana State University School of Social Work to complete his PhD studies. He taught several courses during his time at LSU. His academic career will begin as an Assistant Professor of Social Work at Ball State University in Muncie, IN.