

## Parental Insights from Three Elite-level Youth Sports: Implications for Family Life

Mona Mirehie, H. Gibson, S. Kang, H. Bell

### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine parental values associated with children's participation in organized sports, how these values are shaped by social class, race and age, and the influence of elite-level involvement in youth sport on family life. Data were collected by questionnaire in person from parents who were attending three youth sport events (Athletics (track and field)  $n = 102$ , Swimming  $n = 193$ , Synchronized Swimming  $n = 139$ ). ANOVA, multiple regression, and thematic analysis were used to analyze the data. Values associated with the child/youth's sport participation included fun, health, self-discipline, and competition. Multiple regression analysis showed that values differed by social class, age, and race, and child/youth's age. For example, fun and self-discipline were rated higher for younger children while competition was valued more highly for older children. In particular, African-American parents rated self-discipline and competition as significantly higher. Parents across all sports reported the need to organize family activities around sport schedules with swimming and synchronized swimming cited as the most influential. Suggestions as to how Leisure Studies' research foci on youth, family life, gender and time are well positioned to make valuable contributions to the study of youth sport in the context of family life are discussed.

*Keywords:* elite-level youth sport, family life, parental values, social class, race/ethnicity

---

This is the author's manuscript of the article published in final edited form as:

Mirehie, M., Gibson, H., Kang, S., & Bell, H. (2019). Parental insights from three elite-level youth sports: implications for family life. *World Leisure Journal*, 61(2), 98–112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16078055.2018.1550437>

## **Introduction**

In much of the western world participation in sport for youth and the associated involvement of their families has been described as “a way of life” (Bremer, 2012, p. 245). Indeed, Kelly (1978) noted almost 30 years ago in a study of leisure styles in three communities that the “new town” of Reston (USA) was largely organized around youth sport indicating that activities associated with youth sport may comprise a pervasive form of leisure for many families. Figures from Project Play, part of the Aspen Institute (2015), note that more than 26 million US children ages six to 17 years played team sports in 2014, and as such, youth sport is an important activity for many families with school age children.

Through the years scholars have raised a number of issues about the positive and negative impacts of sport participation on children/youth and families (e.g., Coakley & Donnelly, 2009; Kanters & Casper, 2008). Of particular interest to leisure researchers is the influence that an activity such as sport can have on individuals, especially in terms of time and life balance, concerns that also extend to the impact (both positive and negative) on family life (Trussell, 2009; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). Certainly, as children age and participate at higher levels of competition this often requires overnight travel, which means family involvement intensifies (Knight & Holt, 2013). In turn, such demands may necessitate changes in other family leisure activities (Trussell, 2009) and decisions over resources such as time and money in families (Hurtel & Lacassagne, 2013). Indeed, sociologists working in this area have raised the issue of access, particularly at the elite level of youth sport participation which necessitates parental investment not only in time, but also financially. Wheeler and Green (2014) noted that it is parents from the middle and upper-middle social classes who are more able to invest in their children’s sport participation, opportunities that then may translate to class advantage (Friedman,

2013; Lareau, 2002). Moreover, Sabo and Veliz (2008) in a project for the Women's Sports Foundation not only supported the contention that children from higher income families and communities with more resources tend to be the most involved in organized sport, but race also compounded this relationship with white children showing the highest levels of involvement in organized sport.

The purpose of this study was to examine participation in elite-level organized youth sport from the parents' point of view, and the influence of children's sport participation on family life across three sports, swimming, synchronized swimming and athletics (referred to as track and field in the US).

## **Literature Review**

### ***Family's role in youth sport participation***

Researchers have shown that family plays a crucial role in an individual's predisposition toward physical activity (Quarmby & Dagkas, 2010). Parental support and encouragement, availability of money, transportation, and parents' sport involvement have all been linked to children's sport participation (Haycock & Smith, 2014; Nunomura & Oliviera, 2013). Dunn, Kinney, and Hofferth (2003) found that parents associate a range of personal and interpersonal values with children's participation in extracurricular activities generally. They found that parents wanted their children to be happy and financially stable in their future lives and were particularly concerned that their children develop strong morals and be confident, competent, and responsible individuals. Such values have also been found to underpin parents' decisions to get their children involved in a sport program (Green & Chalip, 1998). Indeed, Neely and Holt (2014) not only identified a range of personal, social, and physical values associated with children's participation in youth sport, but that parents believed sport allowed children to explore

their abilities and build positive self-perceptions. In a similar study, Kurnik, Kajtna, Bedenik, and Kovac (2013) found that the most significant value attached by parents of gymnasts to their children's participation was health. However, they found that the values sought from the sport differed among parents based on their gender, age, level of education, and children's gender. Mothers were found to be the main agents socializing their children into gymnastics. Younger parents and also parents with lower levels of education placed more importance on competition as a value for children's participation. Also, they attached more importance to the social aspects of participation while more highly educated parents emphasized values such as health, spending free time in a useful way, and increasing self-confidence through sport.

While parents seeing value in youth sport is a necessary condition for children's participation, it does not ensure participation. An important issue in sociological studies has been the transmission of class advantages to children from participation in extracurricular activities (Friedman, 2013; Lareau, 2002). Participation in organized sports can be part of this class advantage as organized activities are more valued by middle-class parents than working-class parents mainly because they "view these activities as transmitting important life skills to children" (Lareau, 2002, p. 748). Indeed, Wheeler and Green (2014) found that middle-class parents were better able and more inclined to invest in their children generally, and in their children's sport participation in particular. Similarly, Trussell and McTeer (2007) examined children's participation in both organized and informal sports and found that household income was the strongest predictor of participation in organized sport, followed by parent's education, and children's gender. Children of families with higher income and higher levels of parental education (as indicators of social class) tended to have increased levels of participation in organized sports. Interestingly, almost half of the mothers had never participated in organized

sport themselves, yet social class appeared to be more influential in shaping their children's sport participation patterns. In fact, children who had parents with higher income and higher levels of education also tended to be more involved in informal sports.

In studies of lower social class families, researchers have found that while parents share similar views about the values of sport participation for their children, they also face challenges supporting this participation. For example, Holt, Kingsley, Tink, and Scherer (2011) found that while parents identified a range of personal and social developmental benefits; they found that parents reported constraints such as money and time as restricting the extent of their children's engagement in sport. In a similar study, Riley and Anderson-Butcher (2012) found that lower income parents, like their more affluent counterparts, generally identified a range of positive benefits associated with sport participation. These included physical, social, and individual development, positive changes in affect, parents' peace of mind due to child's involvement, improved family interactions, youth involvement in prosocial activities, and community interaction/support. Quarmby and Dagkas (2010) also studied low-income youth and found that as a result of structural constraints such as lack of transportation and parents' lack of time and money, young people in single parent families had diminished desires to engage in physical activity compared to those from intact families. Indeed, Dunn, Dorsch, King and Rothlisberger (2016) found that the costs associated with youth sport participation can result in more pressure placed on the child's participation and a related decrease in the child's enjoyment in sport. Of course, in families with less income, it is likely that such pressures may be exacerbated. Thus, it seems that social class, combined with family structure may be quite influential in shaping children's participation in youth sport.

### *Race relations in youth sports*

Race relations in sport have been a long-term topic of interest for social scientists (e.g., Edwards, 1986; Harris, 1994). Within these studies, concentration of particular racial groups in certain types of sport has been widely discussed. Different groups may associate different meanings with sport participation based on which type of sport they choose to participate in or have access to participate in (Edwards, Bocarro, Kanters, & Casper, 2011). For example, Harris (1994) found that black male high school students received more encouragement than their white peers to play basketball a sport noted as a potential route to a college scholarship. Similarly, Harrison and Harrison (2002) found that adolescents tend to choose activities that are more acceptable to their racial group and avoid those that are dominated by others. Goldsmith (2003) found that racial patterns were so prevalent in high school interscholastic programs that some sports (e.g., swimming, soccer, baseball, and softball) were labelled as 'White' sports and some others (e.g., basketball, football) as 'Black' sports. He argued that the higher level of participation by certain racial groups in particular types of sport can be due to structural factors such as socio-economic status (SES) or residential neighborhood. Children who live in lower SES neighborhoods have higher levels of participation in 'Black' sports and lower levels of participation in 'White' sports. However, while whites tend to have higher levels of participation in high status sports such as swimming and soccer they participate in 'Black' sports too. Thus, the author concluded that whites' advantage in swimming and soccer relates to the fact that they lived in more affluent neighborhoods, while blacks mostly lived in less affluent neighborhoods and had less access to organized, recreational activities that could explain their lower level of participation in these sports. Indeed, as Quarmby and Dagkas (2010) suggest, it appears that these distinct sport participation patterns are reinforced by access to cultural and economic

capital which is further compounded by racialized power differences (Edwards, 1986; Sabo & Veliz, 2008).

### ***The Influence of Youth Sport Involvement on Family Life***

Another issue that we need to consider in studying youth sports is the impact of children's involvement in organized sports on parents and the family unit as a whole. Wiersma and Fifer (2008) documented positive and negative aspects of parental involvement in youth sport and identified a number of parental joys (e.g., benefits for children, interaction with other parents) and challenges (e.g., providing support for children's participation, observing the pressures put on children). Indeed, Dorsch et al. (2009) found that the majority of the parents they studied mentioned the personal and family sacrifices made to facilitate their children's sport participation. In fact, many parents, particularly mothers, cease or minimize their own involvement in other activities to allow time and money for their children's sport participation (Dunn et al., 2003; Trussell, 2009). Harwood and Knight (2009) in a study of tennis parents found that parent's mental health may suffer as a result of the stress associated with the time, financial, travel, accommodation, training, and injury related demands accruing from their child's sport involvement. As might be expected, parents of elite level youth experienced greater time and family related stressors than others due to the increased training and competition load.

Dorsch et al. (2015a) found that family routines and interactions began to change as their children became more involved in sport. This supports research from within leisure studies showing that children's participation in organized sport not only affects the family unit as a whole in the dedication of financial, emotional and temporal resources as already noted, but in terms of the overall rhythm of life with little time for other family activities such as eating dinner together (Kay, 2000), attending church (Trussell, 2005), and taking family holidays (Trussell,

2009). Youth sport involvement may also impact other sibling's lives and result in perceived inequities among children within families (Hodge, 2014; Kay, 2000). Overall, it seems that youth sport participation can either improve parent-child relationships through providing opportunities for positive interactions (e.g., when driving to and from practice and games) (Trussell & McTeer, 2007; Trussell, 2009), or put too much demand on the family.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine factors that influence youth involvement in elite-level organized sport and the impact that participation has on family life from parents' point of view. Specifically, this study examined: a) the values attached to participation by parents and the influence of parents' social class, age and race/ethnicity, and child's age on these values, and b) the influence of sport on family life in terms of time commitment and parental perceptions.

## **Method**

### ***Data Collection***

Data were collected across three different elite level youth sport events in the US: Athletics (track and field), Swimming, and Synchronized Swimming. Athletics was a junior national Olympic qualifier; Swimming was a state level competition, but also drew participants from surrounding areas; and Synchronized Swimming (Synchro) was a national level age group competition. Data were collected as part of a larger study for the local sports commission that spanned over 18 months and included both youth and adult sporting events. All of the sports are classified as individual rather than team and necessitate that the youth participant compete against other individuals of similar ages (Parnell, 2014). For some races or competitions, the youth participants may compete as part of a team, for example, relays in Athletics or Swimming, or team exhibits in Synchro. All of the youth participating in each of these events would be



members of so called 'travel teams' which implies that they are 'elite' or 'select' in terms of their ability in that sport (Keown, 2011).

While watching their child(ren) compete, parents were approached and given a brief explanation about the study's purpose, what was involved and the expected time it would take to participate. The research team answered questions and asked if they were interested in participating. While seated in the bleachers or standing in viewing areas during the sport event, participants were given a clipboard with the survey on it and were instructed to take all the time they needed to fill it out. The participants who agreed to complete the questionnaire filled it out in multiple short stints, in between sport-related that they were interested in watching. The research team circulated and were available to answer questions participants had while completing the form. When participants were finished, they signaled to a member of the research team, who thanked them and took away the clipboard and completed survey. Having plenty of clipboards and the research team available and flexibility in questionnaire completion time appeared useful in keeping a relaxed and unobtrusive atmosphere, which may have resulted in improved response rates from a high of 85.8% for swimming, to 80.7% for synchro to 77.2% for athletics.

The self-administered questionnaire contained various measures of event evaluation such as travel and spending patterns, and of relevance to this study parents were asked about their child(ren)'s sport participation. Parental values associated with youth sport participation were measured by asking parents to rate four items identified in the related literature as pertinent to parents (e.g., Nealy & Holt, 2014): fun, physical health, self-discipline, and competition on a scale where 1 = the least important, 4 = the most important reason for their participation. To further investigate the reasons for child(ren)'s involvement in particular sports, parents were

asked to respond to an open-ended question asking why their child(ren) got involved in that particular sport. To measure the time per week devoted to youth sport, children's sport participation patterns were measured using an open-ended response format that asked the parents to indicate the number of hours during an average week that their child(ren) participated in practice and meets for their specialized sports and casual play. The influence of youth sport on family time was measured with one item asking parents to rate the extent of influence using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = not influential at all and 5 = extremely influential. In addition, an open-ended item asked parents to explain in what ways youth sport participation influenced their family time. Demographics were measured using nominal (i.e., gender, marital status, race and ethnicity modeled on the US Census Data measure), ordinal (i.e., income, education) or open-ended items (i.e., age; number of adults and children in household).

### *Sample*

The sample consisted of  $N = 434$  parents (Athletics  $n = 102$ ; Swimming  $n = 193$ ; Synchro  $n = 139$ ). Respondents across the three sports were mostly mothers of the youth sport participants (Athletics: 79.4%,  $n = 81$ ; Swimming: 69.4%,  $n = 134$ ; Synchro: 79.1%,  $n = 110$ ); the remainder were fathers (Athletics: 20.6%,  $n = 21$ ; Swimming: 30.6%,  $n = 89$ ; Synchro: 20.9%,  $n = 29$ ). Most of the parents were partnered/married (Athletics: 76.8%,  $n = 78$ ; Swimming: 93.6%,  $n = 180$ ; Synchro: 92%,  $n = 128$ ), and many were college educated (Athletics: 52%,  $n = 53$ ; Swimming: 55.1%,  $n = 106$ ; Synchro: 44.1%,  $n = 61$ ); or had earned an advanced degree (Athletics: 20.4%; Swimming 27.8%; Synchro 41.2%). The parents' mean age was: Athletics  $M = 40$  years ( $SD = 8.85$ ), Swimming  $M = 46$  years ( $SD = 7.4$ ), and Synchro  $M = 50$  years ( $SD = 9.6$ ). Two-thirds of the Athletics parents (75.3 %,  $n = 77$ ) were African-American, while 84% of Swimming ( $n = 162$ ) and 85.1% of Synchro ( $n = 118$ ) were white. More than half of the

Swimming and Synchro parents had an annual household income of \$80,000 or more (USD) which places them on the higher levels of the U.S. income scale, given that since 1990 the U.S. median household income has been consistently between \$50,000 and \$60,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Athletics' parents proportionately reported lower levels of annual income (\$60,001-80,000, 30.9%; \$40,001-60,000, 22.3%; and \$20,001-40,000, 12.8%).

The children' mean age was: Athletics  $M = 11.7$  years ( $SD = 3.1$ ), Swimming  $M = 12.5$  years ( $SD = 2.7$ ), and Synchro  $M = 14.3$  years ( $SD = 2.07$ ). The average length of involvement in their sport for the children and youth was: Athletics:  $M = 3.2$  years ( $SD = 2.6$ ), Swimming:  $M = 4.97$  years ( $SD = 2.96$ ), and Synchro:  $M = 5.9$  years ( $SD = 2.4$ ).

### ***Data Analysis***

Data analysis took place in several stages. First, descriptive statistics were used to assess parental values associated with sport participation and time per week devoted to sport and play. Second, multiple regression was conducted to assess the influence of social class (parents' annual income and education) age, and race and ethnicity on the values attached to sport participation by the parents. The categorical variables - type of sport participated in, and race and ethnicity - were treated as dummy variables. Athletics was used as a reference variable for the other types of youth sport and African-American was used as a reference variable for other racial and ethnic groups. Third, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze parents' perceptions about the influence of youth sport on family life across the three sports.

Open-ended responses were analyzed manually through thematic coding. The responses were read through in their entirety by the research team. The responses were inductively coded and the related codes were grouped together to create themes (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Themes were identified based on frequency of the responses (i.e., how many respondents wrote

something). Examples of these themes included ‘fun and enjoyment,’ and ‘being physically active’ as reasons for children’s involvement in sport. All members of the research team were involved in identifying the themes evident in the open-ended responses. This acted as a source of intersubjective reliability.

## **Results**

### ***Parental Values Associated with Sport Participation***

Thirty-nine percent of the Swimming parents rated fun as the most important reason for their child’s participation, compared to 18% of the Athletics parents. Health was rated most important by 31% of the Swimming parents compared to 18% of Athletics parents. Self-discipline was rated most important by 30% of the Swimming parents compared to 15% of the Synchro parents. Competition was rated as most important by 27% of the Swimming parents compared to 19% of the Synchro parents.

Multiple regression revealed that parents with younger children put more weight on the fun associated with participating in sport ( $\beta = -.23, p = .002$ )  $F(12.326) = 1.71, p = .043$  (Table 1). None of the socio-demographic characteristics were found to be a significant predictor of the value parents associated with physical health. Parents’ age, race and ethnicity, and child’s age were found to be indicators of the value associated with self-discipline  $F(4.380) = 4.09, p = .003$ . Older parents put significantly higher value on self-discipline ( $\beta = .17, p = .007$ ), African-American parents stressed self-discipline more than Hispanic parents ( $\beta = -.30, p = .026$ ), and parents with younger children put more importance on self-discipline ( $\beta = -.16, p = .030$ ). The child’s/youth’s age, type of sport, parents’ level of education, and race and ethnicity were found to be indicators of the value assigned to competition  $F(12.33) = 3.97, p = .000$ . Parents rated competition as more important for older children ( $\beta = .20, p = .004$ ). Also, parents with higher

levels of education attached less importance to competition ( $\beta = -.16, p = .004$ ). Athletics' parents valued competition more than Synchro parents ( $\beta = -.24, p = .038$ ). African-American parents put higher value on competition than Hispanic parents ( $\beta = -.26, p = .049$ ).

Thematic analysis of the open-ended responses regarding the reasons for choosing a particular type of sport (Table 2) identified four major themes the most popular of which was that parents had been involved in that sport ( $n = 115$ ). The other three themes were the child's/youth's love for the sport ( $n = 52$ ), family or friends were involved ( $n = 38$ ), and fun and enjoyment ( $n = 26$ ). For some as is the case for Athletics, the sport was seen as providing discipline for children and preparing them for other sports ( $n = 12$ ). There were also some unique statements such as "to fight obesity," "to see if the child can do it," or "because the local city has top team" were categorized as other ( $n = 27$ ).

### ***Influence of Youth Sport on Family Life***

Time was used as one indicator of the influence of youth sport on family life, notably time spent participating in sport per week (practice and competition); time spent by parents driving their children to practice and competition; and time that children spent in unstructured play/leisure per week (i.e., time not involved in organized sport).

ANOVA revealed that time spent on practice and competition per week for Synchro ( $M = 13$ ) was statistically significantly more than those of Swimming ( $M = 9.78$ ) and Athletics ( $M = 9.24$ )  $F(2,133) = 4.32, p = .015$ . Concerns have been raised about the lack of free-time that today's children have (Putnam, 2015) and so parents were asked to report the time their children had for unstructured play per week. The unstructured time varied from Swimming where  $M = 5.91$  hours were reported ( $SD = 4$ ) to Athletics with  $M = 7.8$  hours ( $SD = 11.5$ ), to Synchro with the most free time at  $M = 7.93$  hours ( $SD = 5.6$ ). Transportation to practice and competitions is

frequently provided by the parents in contemporary society and so becomes another responsibility and time issue for parents with children/youth who participate in sport, particularly at the elite levels where practice may be daily and competitions are scheduled for weekends. The parents reported the following amounts of time driving their children to practice and meets per week: Athletics was the highest with  $M = 7.63$  hours ( $SD = 4.6$ ), followed by Synchro with  $M = 5.66$  hours ( $SD = 3.4$ ) and Swimming with  $M = 5.51$  hours ( $SD = 5.3$ ). ANOVA revealed that the child's/youth's unstructured play time and parents' driving time per week were not statistically different across the three sports (Table 3).

Parents were asked to rate the influence of organized youth sport on time for other family activities (1 = not influential at all and 5 = extremely influential). LSD post-hoc results revealed that Synchro ( $M = 4.28$ ) and Swimming ( $M = 4.14$ ) were rated by the parents as influencing the time for other family activities significantly more than Athletics ( $M = 3.88$ )  $F(2,421) = 4.99, p = .007$ .

Thematic analysis of the open-ended answers revealed more details about how the parents perceived their children/youth's sport participation affecting their family life. The most reported issue was the need to *plan* other family activities around the sport schedule ( $n = 44$ ) especially in relation to family dinners, weekends and vacations ( $n = 13$ ). The second most cited issue was *prioritizing* children's sport over other activities ( $n = 31$ ) and missing other activities due to sport ( $n = 30$ ). The third most cited issue was dedicating family's *temporal and financial resources* to children's sport ( $n = 21$ ). Some parents reported that sport interfered with activities of other children in the family ( $n = 13$ ). Nonetheless, despite the reported issues, parents indicated they were willing to drive any distance to facilitate their child's participation ( $n = 26$ ).

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine participation in elite-level organized youth sport from parents' point of view with, a) a focus on values associated with children's/youth's sport participation contextualized by race/ethnicity, social class and child[ren]'s age; and b) a focus on time to evaluate the influence of children's sport participation on family life in general.

Results supported previous studies in that the parents attached a range of values to youth sport participation including fun, competition, health and physical activity (Neely & Holt, 2014). Values also differed across the parents in terms of their social class (particularly education level), race and ethnicity, type of sport, and children's age with the exception of health benefits. The health benefits associated with sport participation were valued highly by all of the parents which mirrored Kurnik et al.'s (2013) findings that health was the most significant value attached to children's sport participation and as such seems to be a universal value associated with sport participation. Parents of younger children emphasized fun and self-discipline as the most important values associated with sport participation. However, it seems that as sport became "more serious," parents rated competition as more important for older children. This change in values associated with sport is consistent with studies that have taken a career/developmental approach to sport participation (e.g., Côté's et al., 2009) in that as skill and competition increase with career stage, the consequences associated with sport change expectations and values. This seems to resonate with the parents in this study. Although interestingly, more highly educated parents de-emphasized competition (Coakley, 2006; Kurnik et al., 2013) whereas, parents with lower levels of education placed more importance on competition as a value for their children's participation. These findings are likely linked to differences in values associated with social class, with education level being one indicator of class. As Lareau (2002) noted participation in

organized sport is more valued by middle class parents as a context that transmits important life skills and class advantage, but they may also be more aware of the negative impacts associated with putting too much pressure on their children (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). Whereas for working class parents who may face more challenges and sacrifices associated with supporting their child's sport participation, especially cost (Holt et al., 2011), may result in a greater emphasis on competition and winning. Certainly, in the US context, sport is often seen as a way of obtaining a college scholarship and may be the only means of affording a college education for lower income families (Eitzen, 1999) and so, more pressure is placed on the child to compete and excel. We might suggest if parents from the team sports of basketball and American football were included we would have seen even more support for this contention, particularly as noted by Edwards (1986) among young African American males.

With many of the parents indicating that they had earned at least a college degree and the majority of the swimming and synchro parents reporting annual incomes of \$80,000 (USD) or more and the half of the athletics parents reporting incomes of \$60,000 (USD) and over, the contention that higher levels of household income and education are predictors of children's participation in organized sports seems to be supported among the participants of this study (Kurnik et al., 2013; Sabo & Veliz, 2008). Trussell and McTeer (2007) also found evidence for this. They suggested that the significant role of household income in children's participation in organized sport reveals the financially demanding nature of organized sport that tends to make it inaccessible for children from lower-social classes (Dunn et al., 2016). The sports of swimming and synchro in particular seem to have families that are more affluent than the children/youth participating in athletics and so on the one hand it does appear that social class (education and income level) appears to influence not only participation in youth sport in general, but the type of



sport. However, we would also suggest that the intersectionality of race and class is also at work as there is a significant racial difference between the participants in the water-based sports and athletics, with more African-American families participating in the later (Goldsmith, 2003).

In terms of the influence of race and ethnicity, the findings align with previous studies in that individuals from different racial groups in the US seem to hold different values about sport participation and the type of sports they choose to participate in (e.g., Edwards et al., 2011; Harris, 1994). In this study, African-American parents put higher value on self-discipline and competition than Hispanic parents. Also, as noted above most of the athletics' parents were African-American while swimming and synchronized swimming were predominantly white. This supported Goldsmith's (2003) findings in that swimming seemed to be predominantly a 'White' sport which may partly relate to the issue of accessibility as swimming and synchronized swimming parents noted that youth sport participation was a financial commitment for them.. Also, both groups of parents reported higher annual income than athletics' parents. The racial differences in choice of sport are likely also linked to strong social expectations about what sports are more acceptable for individuals from different races (Harrison & Harrison, 2002). Certainly, Quarmby and Dagkas (2010) argue using the Bourdieuan concept of habitus, that socio-structural factors such as social class and in this instance race, are very powerful in shaping the value system and opportunities available to families, which in turn will influence children's sport participation patterns. Relating this to Bourdieu's (1984) concept of intergenerational habitus, Quarmby and Dagkas suggested that in intact families where parents and children have more interactions through physical activity children are more likely to adopt and internalize parents' interests and values. This seems to reflect the experiences of the families in the current study.

In terms of the influence of youth sport participation on time and family life the results revealed that children and youth, with the support of their family members, spent a significant amount of time per week in practice or competition, particularly the water-based sports of swimming and synchronized swimming. To address the growing concerns over a lack of leisure time for young athletes (e.g., Putnam, 2015) the time spent on unstructured play was also measured. Interestingly, across the three sports there seemed to be a balance between children's/youth's time spent on organized sport and unstructured play. Synchronized swimmers, incidentally the sport in this study with highest-level competitors perhaps not surprisingly had the highest time commitment for practice and competition per week, but they also spent the most time on unstructured play. This may represent parents' attempts at maintaining some balance between children's time spent on organized sport and their free time, especially since as noted above parents with higher education levels tended to emphasize the fun of sport participation and the synchronized swimmers came from families with highly educated parents. While unstructured play was not investigated in more detail in the current study, it would be interesting to find out what activities constitute unstructured play to gain a better understanding of how contemporary children and youth use their time when not participating in organized sport. Certainly, there is growing concern over the use of electronic games, cell phones, and the Internet among youth (Rosen et al., 2014), but how this is balanced in what for these youngsters is an already busy sport schedule, along with the demands of school would be a valuable research focus.

When asked specifically about the influence of sport on family life, parents across all sports indicated that their child's participation impacted time available for other family activities (Kay, 2000), and also family financial resources (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009). Results indicated

support for themes evident in the literature such as the necessity of planning family dinners (Kay, 2000), weekends and vacations (Trussell, 2009), around the youth sports schedule. Also, parents stated that family or the children themselves miss other activities due to the sport schedule (Trussell, 2009), and that practice and meets interfere with activities of other children in the family (Kay, 2000). Time and cost were also mentioned as pertinent factors (Harwood & Knight, 2009; Kay, 2000; Trussell, 2009). However, parents reported they would prioritize their children's sport over other activities and would drive any distance to facilitate the child's participation. This, again, brings up the issue of the necessity of sacrificing other family activities to enable the children to participate in organized sports (Dorsch et al., 2009; 2015a). It is this influence of youth sport participation on family life that we will suggest is one area where leisure studies is well positioned to provide valuable insights.

In summary, our findings show that while parents from different social backgrounds have some similarities in the values they hold regarding youth sport such as fun and health, there were some differences by age, social class, type of sport, and race, namely parents with higher educational levels appeared to be less focused on competition as a value associated with their child's participation in sport, whereas by race, Black parents were more likely to emphasize discipline as a key value for participation in sport. In terms of child[ren]'s age, fun was rated higher for younger children while competition was rated higher for older children, also older parents put more emphasis on self-discipline. By type of sport, Athletics parents rated competition higher than Synchro parents. In reflecting upon the influence of youth sport on family life, parents were universal in their sentiments that both time and financial resources were devoted to facilitating their children/youth's sport participation. They also noted that family activities were affected by their children's sport schedule, but they also reported that they would

not begrudge these years of their children's lives.

As we reflect on these results, we would suggest, that as leisure studies grapples with the need to demonstrate its relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (e.g., Silk, Caudwell, & Gibson, 2017; Shaw, 2000), the world of youth sport, especially in relation to the family is one area of social significance that we have the knowledge to contribute to. For example, a number of authors have raised concerns about the plight of the American child and the pressures associated with their lives as they grow up in contemporary society (Putnam, 2015). Likewise, Friedman (2013) writes about the highly competitive world contemporary (upper middle class) children are being prepared for and the role of sport and other leisure activities (e.g., music, chess) in shaping these children. At the same time Friedman raises concerns about the growing inequality in access to these leisure activities among children of disadvantaged backgrounds. Meanwhile in sport sociology, Messner and Musto (2014) lament the lack of "children" in contemporary research. Thus, with our existing in-depth body of knowledge on leisure in relation to various facets of social life are we not well positioned to take on the task of bringing balance back to the lives of children and also advocating for social justice on their behalf? Moreover, our well-developed body of work on the family also positions us as a field to make a significant and relevant contribution to increasing quality of life among today's families, especially since having a child involved in youth sport can be stressful for the parents and other family members (e.g., Knight & Holt, 2013).

Continuing this theme, much of the early work of feminist scholars focused on the work women contributed in enabling family life and leisure (e.g., Henderson, 1991; Shaw, 1992). In the world of youth sports, it is well documented that mothers take a major role in facilitating sport participation for their children, doing such tasks as driving them to practice and meets,

laundering their sports clothing, while simultaneously balancing the needs of other family members (e.g., Thompson, 1999; Trussell & Shaw, 2012). The well-developed body of work on women's family roles from leisure studies contains a wealth of knowledge that could be applied to understanding the life of the modern family. Similarly, the focus on fatherhood and leisure (e.g., Kay, 2006) could also be used to understand the role of men in these athlete families; in fact, existing studies show that sport is often one of the major domains for fathers spending leisure with their children (e.g., Coakley, 2006; Such, 2006).

Thus, as the results of this study show, the family has an important role to play, and is in turn influenced by youth sport participation. We suggest that existing (and future) scholarship on leisure and the family can add unique insights to what has largely been scholarship on youth sport participation from outside of our field.

## References

- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. London: Roulledge/Kegan Paul.
- Bremer, K. L. (2012). Parental involvement, pressure and support in youth sport: A narrative literature review. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 4, 235-248.
- Coakley, J. (2006). The good father: Parental expectations and youth sports. *Leisure Studies*, 25, 153-163.
- Coakley, J., & Donnelly, P. (2009). *Sports in society: Issues and controversies*. Toronto, ON: McGraw-Hill Ryerson.
- Côté, J., Lidor, R., & Hackfort, D. (2009). ISSP position stand: To sample or to specialize: Seven postulates about youth sport activities that lead to continued participation and elite performance. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 7(1), 7-17.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2017). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage publications.
- Dorsch, T. E., Smith, A. L., & McDonough, M. H. (2009). Parents' perceptions of child-to-parent socialization in organized youth sport. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 31, 444-468.
- Dorsch, T. E., Smith, A. L., & McDonough, M. H. (2015a). Early socialization of parents through organized youth sport. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*, 4, 3-18.
- Dunn, C., Dorsch, T., King, M., & Rothlisberger, K. (2016). The impact of family financial investment on perceived parent pressure and child enjoyment and commitment in organized youth sport. *Family Relations*, 65, 287-299.
- Dunn, J. S., Kinney, D. A., & Hofferth, S. L. (2003). Parental ideologies and children's after-school activities. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 46, 1359-1386.

- Edwards, H. (1986). The collegiate athletics arms race. In R. Lapchick (Ed.). *Fractured focus: Sport as a reflection of society* (pp. 21-43). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Edwards, M. B., Bocarro, J. N., Kanters, M. A., & Casper, J. M. (2011). Participation in interscholastic and intramural sport programs in middle schools: An exploratory investigation of race and gender. *Recreational Sports Journal*, 35, 157-173.
- Eitzen, S. (1999). The path to success? Myth and Reality. In S. Eitzen, D. S. (1999). *Fair and foul: Beyond the myths and paradoxes of sport* (pp. 131-143). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Friedman, H. (2013). *Playing to win: Raising children in a competitive culture*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Goldsmith, P. A. (2003). Race relations and racial patterns in school sports participation. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 20, 147-171.
- Green, B. C., & Chalip, L. (1998). Antecedents and consequences of parental purchase decision involvement in youth sport. *Leisure Sciences*, 20, 95-109.
- Harris, O. (1994). Race, sport, and social support. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 11, 40-50.
- Harrison, L., & Harrison, C. (2002). African American racial identity: Theory and application to education, race, and sport in America. *African American Research Perspectives*, 8(1), 35-46.
- Harwood, C., & Knight, C. (2009). Stress in youth sport: A developmental investigation of tennis parents. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 10, 447-456.
- Haycock, D., & Smith, A. (2014). A family affair? Exploring the influence of childhood sport socialization on young adults' leisure-sport careers in north-west England. *Leisure Studies*, 33, 285-304.

- Henderson, K. (1991). The contribution of feminism to an understanding of leisure constraints. *Journal of Leisure Research, 23*, 363-377.
- Hodge, C. J. (2014). "Oh brother, where art thou?": An examination of family leisure, sibling relationships, and physical health (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of North Carolina, Raleigh, North Carolina.
- Holt, N. L., Kingsley, B. C., Tink, L. N., & Scherer, J. (2011). Benefits and challenges associated with sport participation by children and parents from low-income families. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 12*, 490-499.
- Hurtel, V., & Lacassagne, M. F. (2013). Development of the Parents' Perception of their Involvement in their Child's Tennis Activity Questionnaire (Q-PPICTA). *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports, 23*, e254-e262.
- Kanters, M. A., & Casper, J. (2008). Supported or pressured? An examination of agreement among parents and children on parent's role in youth sports. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 31*, 64-80.
- Kay, T. (2000). Sporting excellence: A family affair? *European Physical Education Review, 6*(2), 151-169.
- Kay T. (2006). Where's dad? Fatherhood in leisure studies. *Leisure Studies, 25*, 133-152.
- Kelly, J. R. (1978). Leisure styles and choices in three environments. *Pacific Sociological Review, 21*(2), 187-207.
- Keown, T. (August 24<sup>th</sup> 2011). Where the elite kids shouldn't meet.  
[http://espn.go.com/espn/commentary/story/\\_/page/keown-110823/elite-travel-baseball-basketball-teams-make-youth-sports-industrial-complex](http://espn.go.com/espn/commentary/story/_/page/keown-110823/elite-travel-baseball-basketball-teams-make-youth-sports-industrial-complex)



- Knight, C. J., & Holt, N. L. (2013). Strategies used and assistance required to facilitate children's involvement in tennis: Parents' perspectives. *Sport Psychologist, 27*, 281-291.
- Kurnik, J. F., Kajtna, T., Bedenik, K., & Kovač, M. (2013). Why parents enrol their children in recreational gymnastics programmes at the beginning of their education. *Science of Gymnastics Journal, 5*(2), 41-52.
- Lareau, A. (2002). Invisible inequality: Social class and childrearing in black families and white families. *American Sociological Review, 67*, 747-776.
- Messner, M. A., & Musto, M. (2014). Where are the kids?. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 31*, 102-122.
- Neely, K. C., & Holt, N. L. (2014). Parents' perspectives on the benefits of sport participation for young children. *Sport Psychologist, 28*, 255-268.
- Nunomura, M., & Oliveira, M. S. (2013). Parents' support in the sports career of young gymnasts. *Science of Gymnastics Journal, 5*(1), 5-18.
- Parnell, A. (May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014). The psychology of individual and team sports (basic).  
<http://sportsnscience.utah.edu/2014/05/11/team-psychology-basic/>
- Putnam, R. (2015). *Our kids: The American dream in crisis*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks.
- Quarmby, T., & Dagkas, S. (2010). Children's engagement in leisure time physical activity: Exploring family structure as a determinant. *Leisure Studies, 29*, 53-66.
- Riley, A., & Anderson-Butcher, D. (2012). Participation in a summer sport-based youth development program for disadvantaged youth: Getting the parent perspective. *Children and Youth Services Review, 34*, 1367-1377.

- Sabo, D., & Veliz, P. (2008). Go Out and Play: Youth Sports in America. *Women's Sports Foundation*.
- Shaw, S. (1992). De-reifying family leisure: An examination of women's and men's everyday experiences and perceptions of family time. *Leisure Sciences, 14*, 271-286.
- Shaw, S. (2000). If our research is so relevant, why is nobody listening? *Journal of Leisure Research, 32*, 147-151.
- Silk, M., Caudwell, J., & Gibson, H. (2017). Editorial: Views on leisure studies: Pasts, presents and future possibilities? *Leisure Studies, 36*, (2), 153-162, DOI: 10.1080/02614367.2017.1290130
- Such, E. (2006). Leisure and fatherhood in dual-earner families. *Leisure Studies, 25*, 185-199.
- The Aspen Institute Project Play. (2015). *Facts: Sports activity and children*. Retrieved from <http://www.aspenprojectplay.org/the-facts>
- Thompson, S. M. (1999). *Mother's taxi: Sport and women's labour*. SUNY Press.
- Trussell, D. (2005). *Family leisure in the rural context: Women's experiences of life on the family farm*. (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario.
- Trussell, D. E. (2009). *Organized youth sport, parenthood ideologies and gender relations: Parents' and children's experiences and the construction of "Team Family"* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation)., University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario.
- Trussell, D. E., & McTeer, W. (2007). Children's sport participation in Canada: Is it a level playing field? *International Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue Internationale d'études Canadiennes, 35*, 113-132.
- Trussell, D. E., & Shaw, S. M. (2012). Organized youth sport and parenting in public and private spaces. *Leisure Sciences, 34*, 377-394.

United States Census Bureau (2016). U.S. Income through the years. Retrieved from

<https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2016/comm/cb16->

[ff14\\_labor\\_day\\_income.html](https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2016/comm/cb16-ff14_labor_day_income.html)

Wiersma, L. D., & Fifer, A. M. (2008). "The schedule has been tough but we think it's worth it":

The joys, challenges, and recommendations of youth sport parents. *Journal of Leisure Research, 40*, 505-530.

Wheeler, S., & Green, K. (2014). Parenting in relation to children's sports participation:

generational changes and potential implications. *Leisure Studies, 33*, 267-284.

Table 1. The Relationship between Type of Sport and Demographics with Values Associated with Youth Sport Participation Multiple Regression

		Dependent variables							
		Fun		Health		Self-discipline		Competition	
		$\beta$	$t$	$\beta$	$t$	$\beta$	$t$	$\beta$	$t$
Athlete-related	Constant		6.32		6.61		6.41		4.31
	Age	-.23	-3.19**	-.11	-1.54	-.16	-2.18*	.20	2.90**
	Synchro <sup>1</sup>	.21	1.71	-.10	-.82	-.10	-.83	-.24	-2.09*
	Swimming <sup>2</sup>	.10	.81	.11	.87	.06	.52	.03	.28
	Participation Years	.04	.56	.04	.58	.12	1.75	.03	.46
Parents-related	Mother/Father	.06	1.03	-.06	-1.13	-.03	-.54	.07	1.38
	Age	-.02	-.28	.03	.54	.17	2.71*	-.04	-.68
	Income	.03	.48	-.10	-1.74	-.08	-1.33	.01	.17
	Education	.02	.32	.05	.82	-.05	-.85	-.16	-2.89**
	White <sup>3</sup>	-.07	-.58	-.01	-.06	-.23	-1.78	.08	.66
	Hispanic <sup>4</sup>	-.16	-1.09	-.14	-1.01	-.30	-2.24*	-.26	-1.98*
	Asian <sup>5</sup>	-.11	-1.36	.01	.12	.01	.13	-.00	-.04
Others <sup>6</sup>	.01	.06	-.06	-.90	-.04	-.56	-.11	-1.69	
R <sup>2</sup>		.059		.050		.106		.125	

Note: \*\* $p < .005$ , \*  $p < .05$ . 1.2. Youth sports (Athletics, Synchro, and Swimming) were treated as dummy variables. Athletics was used as a reference variable. 3.4.5.6 Race/ethnicity (White, Hispanic, Asian, African-American, other) were treated as dummy variables. African-American was used as a reference variable for other racial and ethnic groups. Values measured from 1 = the least important to 4 = the most important

Table 2. Reasons for Children's Involvement in Their Sport – Open Ended Questions

Reason	Frequency
Parents' involvement	115
Love it!	52
Family and friends' involvement	38
Fun and enjoyment	26
Tried and liked it	18
Physical activity	16
Discipline	12 (Athletics)
Being good at it	8 (Athletics)
Exhibition, TV, or flyer	7 (Synchro)
Other	27

Table 3. Time Spent by Children and Their Parents Participating in Aspects of Youth Sports ANOVA

	Athletics (A) ( <i>n</i> =102)	Swimming (Sw) ( <i>n</i> =193)	Synchro (Sy) ( <i>n</i> =139)	<i>F</i>	LSD
Practice & competition for a week	9.24 <sup>1</sup>	9.78	13.00	4.32*	A, Sw < Sy
Casual play time for a week	7.80	5.91	7.93	1.92	
Parent driving time for a week	7.63	5.51	5.66	1.37	
Influence on other family activities	3.88	4.14	4.28	4.99**	A<Sw, A<Sy

*Note:* \* $P < .05$ ; <sup>1</sup> = hours and minutes for all times shown. \*\* $P < .01$ ; Influence of sport participation on other Family activities was measured with one item where 1 = not influential at all to 5 = extremely influential.