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Parents' Motivations for Enrolling their Children in Recreational Sports

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Extensive literature covers reasons for participation in sports from the perspective of youth athletes. However, athletic involvement starts early and is determined in part by parental support. The purpose of this study was to learn more about parents' motivations for enrolling their children in sports. A parent motivational scale of reasons for enrolling child(ren) in sports was created as part of the study: first as a pilot, and later tested with 84 parent participants who had school-aged children enrolled in recreational sports. An open-ended item on primary reasons why parents enrolled their child in sports was also included. Exploratory factor analysis of the motivational scale indicated a four-component solution for types of reasons parents enrolled their children in sports: 1. Extrinsic/parent-focused; 2. Child growth and development; 3. Social benefits; and 4. Well-being. The scale was reduced to 27 items, as items with factor loadings lower than .450 were removed. Parents rated beneficial reasons for enrolling children in sports more highly than extrinsic/parent-focused ones and were more likely to list beneficial reasons for sports enrollment for the open-ended question. Scores on individual motivational items and some factors varied by child's gender, parent role (fathers compared with mothers), and parent's marital status. Implications are discussed for: (1) use of self-determination and expectancy-value theoretical perspectives; (2) understanding parents' motivations to encourage children's sports participation, while considering family structure and gender of child; and (3) study limitations with areas for future research.

The 1970s marked a movement in the growth of community-based sports for youth, partly as a function of the move toward two parents working outside the home with a need for children to have supervised, scheduled activities after school. Over the past four decades, participation in youth sports has skyrocketed (Messner, 2009). A study in the early 2000s found 54% of 6 to 17 year-olds in the U.S. reported playing on at least one organized sport team; five years later, 59% of 10 to 17-year-olds were participating in organized sports, indicating an increase in youth sport participation (Woods, 2011). Currently, 75% of families with school-aged children in the U.S. have at least one child participating in organized sports (Merkel, 2013).

Literature Review: Youth Motivations for Sports Involvement

Youth sports provide children with developmental benefits including learning physical skills, increasing fitness, and socializing with peers. Youth involvement in sports programs promotes physical activity, which improves physical health and functioning such as cardiovascular fitness and motor control. Youth sports also foster psychosocial development through opportunities to learn important life skills such as cooperation, discipline, leadership, taking initiative, citizenship, social-success, and self-control (Fraser-Thomas & Cote, 2006).

Motivations, or reasons why someone acts or behaves in a given way, are a means of understanding, and possibly explaining, behavior. The motivational climate is key to examining children's intentions to remain involved in sports (Atkins, Johnson, Force, & Petrie, 2013). Specific behaviors of coaches, parents and peers each influence an athlete's motivation (Keegan, Spray, Harwood, & Lavallee, 2010).

Most youth are initially attracted to sports because their friends are involved (Woods, 2011). Barber, Sukhi and White (1999), in reviewing available research on young athletes' motivations for sports involvement, suggest that initial reasons for participation are likely to differ from reasons for continued involvement. An accumulating body of evidence points to the importance of group socialization influences on the motivational patterns of young athletes (Allen, 2003). Socialization influences were linked to youth sport involvement as well as self-perceptions of ability (White, Kavussanu, Tank, & Wingate, 2004). The most important reason young people get involved with sports, according to Woods (2011), is for the purpose of having fun. In the midst of available research on athletes' reasons for involvement, little is known about parents' reasons for encouraging their child(ren)'s participation in organized recreational sports.

Parents' Influence

Parents hold prominent influence on their children's motivation, behavior, and psychological growth (Holt, Tamminen, Black, Mandigo, & Fox, 2009). When

parents fall short in modeling behaviors to promote physical activity, their adolescents are less likely to engage in sports activities (Sukys, Majauskiene, Cesnaitiene, & Karanauskiene, 2014), whereas athletes who reported that their parents were good athletic role models had higher perceptions of their own competence, enjoyment, and intrinsic motivation in sports (Fredericks & Eccles, 2005). Parents' supportive styles and practices (e.g., encouraging and monitoring participation) define the motivational climate and influence children's achievement-related behaviors in performance contexts (Atkins et al., 2013). Children reported higher levels of athletic competence and intrinsic motivation when they received frequent positive comments from their parents and perceived positive parental beliefs about their competencies (Holt et al., 2009).

Ultimately parents serve as the "gate keeper" to physical activity, controlling access to community activity and sport programs (Beets, Cardinal & Alderman, 2010, p. 622). Once youth get into the gate, coaches take on similar roles as parents to motivate youth participation in sports. Both coaches and parents use verbal feedback and behavioral reinforcement in response to performance, outcomes and effort/attitude (Keegan et al., 2010). Further, the emotional responses of coaches and parents (both real and anticipated by a youth) seem to be a key factor in influencing the young athlete's motivation (Keegan et al., 2010).

Although extensive research is available on reasons why youth participate in sports, we know far less about what motivates parents to encourage their children's sports participation. Although there are numerous reasons for youth to engage in sports (Barber, Sukhi & White, 1999), parents are considered primary influencers (LaVoi & Stellino, 2008). At the time of their publication, Barber and colleagues (1999) noted that "parental influence has not been examined in relation to motives for participation" (p. 164). Others (see Neely & Holt, 2014) posited that parents who valued sport participation and expected their young children to reap benefits from organized sports were highly likely to enroll them.

After Barber and colleagues made their point, some literature emerged covering parental influences on adolescent time use, leisure behavior, and extracurricular involvement (see Hutchinson, Baldwin, & Caldwell, 2003) and reasons why parents chose to have their child participate in select or travel baseball (Ogden & Warneke, 2010). In a study of parent-child agreement on parents' roles in youth sports, vague mention was made that "parents enroll their children in sport for a variety of reasons" (Kanters, Bocarro, & Casper, 2008, p. 65). Also, the findings of an unpublished doctoral dissertation pointed to a single motivator of parents enrolling their children in community-based recreational and competitive sports leagues in an effort to maintain or achieve good health (Buckley, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine possible motivations behind why parents enrolled their children in youth sports. Youth motivations for sports participation have been widely studied using self-determination as well as social learning theories. Specific to the study, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1990) and Eccles' expectancy-value model (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005) were applied to explain individual differences in parents' motivation and choice behaviors. Self-determination theory posits that an intrinsically motivated behavior for which there is no external reward, rather personal enjoyment, is more likely to persist over time (Deci & Ryan, 1990). Intrinsic motivations are driven by interest or enjoyment in the task itself, and exist within the individual, instead of requiring external pressures or rewards for a given behavior. Extrinsic motivations lead to the performance of an activity in order to attain a desired outcome such as rewards in the form of money, trophies, or the threat of punishment for misbehavior. Applying self-determination theory to parents' motivations to enroll their child(ren) in sports necessitates the division of reasons into extrinsically-motivated and intrinsically-motivated ones. Applying the expectancy-value model posits that parents influence their child's choices by providing differential levels of support for activities. It further proposes that the level of support is based on the expectations of the likelihood that their child will be successful in a given area, and the personal beliefs about the value of their success (Barber, Sukhi & White, 1999). As parental support continues over time, it is expected that children will take on parents' values and belief systems (Barber et al., 1999, p. 163).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research questions of the study, examining parents' motivations for enrolling their children in youth sports, were: (1) What were reasons parents enrolled their children in sports?; (2) Was there division between extrinsically and intrinsically motivated reasons?; (3) (a) Were parents' reasons for enrolling male children the same as female children in terms of ratings on reason items?; (3) (b) Did ratings of reasons for enrolling children in sports vary by parent's role (mother or father)?; and (3) (c) Did ratings of reasons for enrolling children in sports vary by marital status of parent? We expected that parents' motivations for enrolling children in sports, both self-generated open-ended and Likert-type items, would break down into at least two constructs of extrinsic and intrinsic influences. Another expectation was that parents who identify as male have different motivations, and ratings of such motivations, for enrolling children in sports. Moreover, parents were expected to have differing expectations based on the gender of their child enrolled in sports.

Research Design

This exploratory study used a cross-sectional design which has "three distinctive features: no time dimension; reliance on existing differences rather than change following intervention; and groups based on existing differences rather than random allocation" (deVaus, 2004, p. 170). Data were collected in the spring of 2017. Groups were not randomly allocated; rather, they were assigned based on parent self-reported classifications. Cross-sectional designs allow the researcher to examine differences between groups by analyzing multiple variables at the same time and are commonly used for studies where certain variables cannot be manipulated for ethical reasons (Bryman, 2004).

Data Collection

Procedure for Data Collection

First, the directors of the two athletic programs sent out a group notification email informing parents to expect an invitation to complete a survey. The principal researcher followed up directors' emails with an individual invitation email to each parent containing a link to the online survey. Parents were informed that their participation was voluntary and anonymous in accordance with university IRB approved regulations to conduct the study. Respondents who reported more than one child participating in sports were encouraged to complete the questionnaire for each child. Two weeks after the initial invite email was sent by the researcher, a follow-up email with the survey link was sent requesting that parents who had not yet completed it to please respond by the end of that week.

Population/Sampling Frame

The study population consisted of parents of school-aged youth who participate in recreational sports. The word 'parent' was used to represent the primary caregiver(s) of young athletes. The sample population for this study included parents, grandparents and guardians of male and female athletes, age 4 through 16 who participated in baseball, softball, basketball and volleyball in a suburban Southeastern community. Parent participants were a convenience sample, in other words, drawn from an easily accessible population (Israel, 2015). A total of 417 parents of children who played for a youth baseball league and volleyball at a girls' afterschool center were contacted by email and sent a link to participate in a Qualtrics online survey. The survey response rate was 21% (n=87) in which 3 surveys were incomplete (final n=84). To note a 95% confidence level with an interval of + or - 5% and a standard deviation of .5 would require 385 respondents (Smith, 2013). After approximating the population size for parents of youth involved in each organization at 500, with 87 respondents and a 95% confidence level, the calculated margin of error was less than ten percent (9.56%).

Most parent participants (n=61, 72.6%) were females with 22 (26.2%) males and a respondent who preferred not to answer. Fifty-five (65.5%) of

respondents were married, 14 (16.7%) were divorced, 4 (4.8%) reported they lived with the other parent but were not married, 2 (2.4%) were separated, and 9 (10.7%) reported as single/never married. The majority of parents (n=62, 73.8%) were mothers, with 15 (17.9%) fathers, 2 (2.4%) stepfathers, 2 (2.4%) grandmothers, 1 (1.2%) grandfather, and 1 (1.2%) indicated as "other." Parents answered the survey for 28 (33.3%) female athletes and 56 (66.7%) male athletes. Athletes ranged in age from 4 to 16 years old (M=9.1 years, SD=2.49). Most parents reported their child being involved in baseball/T-ball (n=47, 55.9%), 9 (10.7%) played volleyball, 7 (8.3%) played flag football/football, 8 (9.5%) played softball, 14 (16.7%) played basketball, 11 (13.1%) played soccer, 3 (3.6%) swam, 6 (7.1%) did gymnastics, 2 (2.4%) played tennis, 1 (1.2%) did cross-training, 1 (1.2%) did Tae Kwando, 1 (1.2%) did ballet, 4 (4.8%) ran track, 1 (1.2%) was a cheerleader, and 2 (2.4%) replies were miscellaneous and could not be categorized.

Instrumentation

The quantitative measure of parents' reasons for enrolling children in sports, created by the researchers and guided by expectancy value and self-determination theories, started with 88 possible reasons for why parents might enroll their children in sports. The instrument was reviewed by the researchers to eliminate items that appeared redundant or irrelevant to the study (i.e., items did not fit expectancy-value or self-determination theoretical perspectives). A total of 54 items were retained of which approximately one-third reflected extrinsically motivated reasons, one-third intrinsically motivated reasons, and one-third expectancy value-based reasons. Next, the 54 Likert-type items were pilot tested with a group of 12 parents and coaches who reported on length of time taken for completion (4 to 12 minutes) and gave suggestions on changes to be made. Following recommendations made by pilot participants, statements and questions on the survey were clarified and the measure of parents' motivations was reduced to 49 Likert-type items with response options ranging from 1 (Never true) to 5 (Always true).

The demographics section contained items measuring child's gender and age, parent's marital/living status, and the relationship of the respondent to the child (father, mother, stepparent, grandparent, guardian). Prior to the introduction of Likert-type item reasons, two open-ended items asked the parent to indicate what sport(s) their child plays and to describe in their own words why they enrolled their child in sports.

Data Analysis

All data analyses were conducted in SPSS (Version 24.0). Histograms and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic were calculated for each item, separated by child and parent gender, marital status and parent relationship to youth athlete, suggested violations of the assumption of normali-

ty. However, when the observed value for each item score was plotted against the expected value from the normal distribution, i.e. normal Q-Q plots, there was a reasonably straight line among most items suggesting a normal distribution.

Cross tabulations and a Chi-square test for independence indicated that proportion of responses for female and male youth athletes was significantly different. The cross tabulation with chi-squared statistic is in Table 1. Additional cross tabulations on: (1) parents' marital/living status and youth gender; and (2) parents' relationship to youth athlete and youth gender were non-significant.

Results

An exploratory factor analysis with principal axis (PA) and oblimin rotation, was used for the 49 Likert-type items due to high inter-item correlations, to see whether items fell into components that reflected theoretical perspectives of self-determination and expectancy-value theories. We expected factors to differentiate parents' intrinsic from extrinsic motivations for sports enrollment, as well as reflect parents' values and expectations for children's gains through sports. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was .634, exceeding the recommended value of .6 (Pallant, 2016). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($X2$=3119.525, Df=1176, p=.000) also indicated that factor analysis was appropriate. The PA exploratory factor analysis revealed twelve components with eigenvalues greater than 1 where four of the components explained 48.26% of the variance. The Scree plot showed a break at the fourth component, so a four-factor solution was retained. The exploratory factor analysis with Oblimin rotation ran at 50 iterations to produce similar pattern and structure matrices. Next, items in which highest factor loadings were less than .450 (22 items) were removed, or below a "fair" ranking (Comrey & Lee, 1992). The four components, dividing up the remaining 27 items, were named accordingly: (1) Extrinsic/Parent Focused Benefits; (2) Child Growth/Development Benefits; (3) Social Benefits; and (4) Well-being Benefits. Table 2 reports each set of items per component and factor loadings from structure matrices for the 27 items.

Table 1

Crosstab of parent gender and youth athlete gender

	Parent Gender		
	Female	Male	Prefer not to answer
Youth Gender			
Female	26	2	0
Male	35	20	1
Total	61	22	1

Pearson Chi-Square = 8.687, p = .013

Table 2

Structure Matrix Factor Loadings from Exploratory Factor Analysis Components, n=84

	Loadings on Factors					
Items	*F1	*F2	*F3	*F4	M	SD
So my child can succeed where I couldn't	.611				1.391	.881
Gets a college scholarship	.578				2.023	1.329
Becomes a professional player	.931				1.483	.938
Becomes a famous athlete	.891				1.402	.882
Will be a champion	.813				1.598	1.040
Makes good money when they are older	.760				1.575	1.063
Will support me when I'm older	.571				1.253	.781
Because I like to travel with my child	.599				1.471	.900
To take up time because I need a break	.701				1.264	.814
Because my child must start early enough to make a varsity team in High School	.607				1.483	1.109
Learns to accept to lose		.563			4.069	1.292
Learns to follow rules		.851			4.161	1.275
Gets help maturing		.852			4.012	1.342
Learns to set goals		.648			4.035	1.243
Learns self-discipline		.739			4.333	1.085
Learns how to perform under pressure		.538			4.046	1.311
Learns respect		.660			4.058	1.358
Learns responsibility		.543			4.356	1.191
Makes friends			0.633		4.046	1.229
Can play with his/her friends			0.693		3.552	1.429
Learns to get along with other children			0.761		3.816	1.351
Can relate to other children of different backgrounds			0.451		3.805	1.293
Uses up extra energy				-0.569	3.667	1.460
To keep my child busy				-0.816	2.713	1.517
So my child will stay out of trouble				-0.823	2.494	1.634
So my child has something to do				-0.799	2.931	1.453
Because my child needs structure				-0.643	2.540	1.561

* Component 1: Extrinsic/Parent-Focused Benefits, Component 2: Child Growth/Development Benefits,
* Component 3: Social Benefits, Component 4: Well-being Benefits

Next, items in each component were added and averaged into four subscales and internal consistency reliabilities were calculated (Table 3). Cronbach's alpha scores on the subscales were each above .76, indicating subscale reliability with a .91 alpha across the 27 items, indicating strong inter-item correlations.

The final steps in the analyses examined how ratings on each of the 27 motivational items for reasons parents enroll children in sports, as well as the four factors (average scores across respective items) items fell under, potentially varied by: (a) child gender; (b) role/relationship of parent to child; and (c) parent marital status.

Table 3

Internal Consistency Reliability of the 4 Components

Component	Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
1 Extrinsic/Parent Focused Benefits	0.915	10
2 Child Growth/Develop. Benefits	0.892	8
3 Social Benefits	0.764	4
4 Well-being Benefits	0.867	5

Child's Gender. Through use of independent sample t-tests, only 2 of 27 items indicated a significant difference for gender of child: (1) "Becomes a professional player" (extrinsic/parent-focused benefits component) and (2) "Learns to get along with other children" (social benefits component) with mean scores on both higher for male children. The social benefits factor, consisting of 4 items that were transformed into 1 averaged item, also differentiated males from females, with higher ratings for male over female children. See Table 4. for t-test results.

Parent's Role. Parent's relationship to child and whether their role was child's mother or father had significant differ-

Table 4

Significant t-test results by child's gender for select items and factor

Item or Factor	Male (n=56)		Female (n=28)				95% CI	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*(82)	*p*	*LL*	*UL*
Becomes a professional player	1.661	.978	1.286	.713	- 1.999*	.049	-.749	-.000
Learns to get along with other children	4.196	1.052	3.464	1.232	-2.839	.006	-1.245	-.219
F3 Social Benefits	4.107	.744	3.607	1.003	-2.576	.012	-.886	-.114

*Equal variances not assumed

Table 5

Significant t-test results by parent's relationship to child for select items and factor

Item or Factor	Father (n=15)		Mother (n=62)				95% CI	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*(75)	*p*	*LL*	*UL*
Will support me when I'm older	1.000	.000	1.355	.851	3.283*	.002	.139	.571
To take up time b/c I need a break	1.000	.000	1.387	.894	3.411*	.001	.160	.614
Uses up extra energy	3.067	1.223	4.000	1.268	2.576	.012	.212	1.655
So my child has something to do	2.333	1.047	3.177	1.409	2.175	.033	.071	1.617
F4 Well-being Benefits	2.387	1.068	3.097	1.173	2.139	.036	.049	1.372

*Equal variances not assumed

ences on 4 items (2 items in the extrinsic/parent benefits component items and 2 items in the well-being benefits component) and 1 factor of well-being benefits. Mothers consistently rated reasons higher than fathers across these items. See Table 5 for t-test results.

Parent's Marital Status. With the marital/living status of the parent, there was only a significant difference in t-test scores on one item that fell under social benefits: "I enroll my child in sports so he/she makes friends" which had a higher mean score for non-married parents. See Table 6 for t-test results.

For analysis of the open-ended question "In your own words, what is the one main reason why you enroll your child in sports?", the responses fell into ten researcher-determined categories. To note, the percentages of responses did not add up to 100% as some parents provided more than one reason in their answers. The top three reasons that parents gave for enrolling their child in sports were for teamwork/leadership (34.48%), health/exercise (27.60%), and because the child wants to play (22.99%). The results are shown in Table 7.

Table 6

Significant t-test results by parent's marital status for select item

Item or Factor	Married (n=55)		Not Married (n=29)				95% CI	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*(82)	*p*	*LL*	*UL*
Makes friends	4.036	1.036	4.483	.785	-2.032	.045	-.883	-.009

Table 7

(Open-ended item) What is the one main reason why you enrolled your child in sports?

	Frequency	Percent*
Teamwork/Leadership	30	34.48
Health/Exercise	24	27.60
Child wants to play	20	22.99
Discipline/Respect	17	19.54
For fun	10	11.49
Socialization	8	9.20
Keep busy	8	9.20
Responsibility	7	8.05
Other**	3	3.45
Scholarship	1	1.15

*Total percentage ≠ 100% some parents reported more than one reason.

** Other: Better the child all around, confidence, hand-eye coordination

Post-hoc analysis. Once exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was complete, researchers conducted a post-hoc confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with the four factors and the original 49 items, using AMOS version 25.0. Fit indices were subpar, most likely due to the small sample size and low ratio of sample size to total number of items (see Beavers et al., 2013). Fit indices improved slightly upon analysis of the 27 items selected in the exploratory factor analysis, based on item-factor loadings of .450 and higher, but remained unacceptably low. The issue of inadequate sample size to item number ratio presented problems in the initial exploratory factor analysis as well as post-hoc tests of confirmatory factor analysis. The future research section addresses how this issue can be addressed in future investigations.

Discussion

The expectation that possible reasons parents held for enrolling their children in sports would separate into extrinsic and intrinsic categories, according to self-determination theory, was supported in our initial findings. The first component or factor contained 10 items that reflected extrinsic reasons, in which parents enroll their children in sports for reasons that benefit them more than their children. The remaining three factors did not necessarily fit parents intrinsic motivations; rather, the three remaining categories of reasons benefited children and reflected parental values and expectations for children's success, in accordance with Eccles' (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005) expectancy-value model. Regardless of number of items falling into the first factor, parents consistently rated those reasons significantly lower than they rated rea-

sons that benefited children. These findings indicated parental motivations for children's sports participation were less likely to be extrinsically driven and more likely to reflect preferred values and skills to be imparted to their children through recreational sports.

Moreover, responses on the open-ended item for the primary reason parents enrolled their child in sports similarly reflected parents' concerns with child's gains in life skills, well-being and child's own intrinsic motivation to participate. The latter set of reasons, or children's intrinsic reasons for sports participation, were the most common answers by parents for the open-ended question. Only one parent stated that they enroll their child in sports for scholarships, which appeared to be the only extrinsically driven motivation provided out of all the responses to this item. The open-ended question responses further support the idea that parents enroll their child more with pro-child intrinsically and value-driven motivations than extrinsically, self-motivated reasons.

Relevance of Selected Theoretical Frameworks

Self-determination theory "provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the intrinsic and extrinsic motivators and their benefits resulted from sport" (Keshtidar & Behzadnia, 2017, p. 2). From the perspective of youth sports participants, intrinsic motivation is related to positive outcomes in the sport domain and is also positively associated with intentions to continue the sport in the future (Keshtidar & Behzadnia, 2017). These findings on parents' motivations indicated that extrinsic reasons put parents' desires and concerns over that of the child's and could thus be considered extrinsic from the perspective of the child. However, motivational items that possibly reflected child's intrinsic motivation for sports participation (e.g., "I enrolled my child because he/she asked me to") did not fit or factor into the current categories of reasons that emerged.

Within Eccles' expectancy-value model, parents influence their child's choices by providing differential levels of support for activities. When parents enroll their child in sports for development/growth, with social and well-being benefits, they are positively supporting their child. The expectancy-value model further proposes that parents' level of support is based on the expectations of the likelihood that their child will be successful in a given area (White, 1999). Our preliminary findings supported the utility of applying the expectancy-value model in further inquiry to understanding how parents enable their children's sports involvement. With limited research on parental motivations for enrolling children in sports, this study adds to our current knowledge base for encouraging further research.

Parent and Child Characteristics in Motivations

Overall, ratings on motivations were higher for parents of male children over female children whereas ratings on motivational items were higher by mothers as compared with fathers' average ratings. Differences based on child's gender might be more pronounced when examining parents who enroll their children in highly competitive sports or sports that are valued at collegiate and professional levels. It is also possible that scores might be higher for extrinsic/parent-benefit items than were found in this study with youth recreational sports.

Intuitively it made sense, given unequal opportunities in the U.S. for men and women to engage in professional team sports (Bodenner, 2015), that parents rate becoming a professional player more highly for males than females, although ratings by parents on this item was notably low. The passing of Title IX and work to decrease the gender-wage gap in professional sports, may move in a trend towards parents' increased regard for their daughters becoming professional players. Of interest is why parents rated social benefits of sports, such as learning to get along with others, more highly for male children than females. Sports clearly offer socialization opportunities that parents might consider male children to be at a disadvantage in this realm, as compared with females. Hence, parents of male children may look to sports for help with socialization and other social benefits such as relating to others with different backgrounds, which may be less likely to happen in one's own neighborhood or classrooms but is made possible out in the field. And, if males are regarded by parents as lacking or weaker in social skills and socialization, as compared with females, then parents would have primary concern for their male child to make social gains through sports. Also, parental perceptions of activities available to female and male children for socialization might minimize the role of sports for females, while making sports central for males' socialization. This might occur based on parents' familiarity with alternative non-sport social activities females have access to, as well as parents' knowledge of female children's current friendship groups.

Mothers and fathers reported differences in children's well-being benefits, in which mothers' ratings were higher across the board than fathers', might be explained by parental perspective, as well as gender-based expectations for activities. If mothers see their role as primary socializers of children and view sports as a means of socialization, then enrolling their child in sports is a means to an end. The higher scores mothers gave for extrinsic/parent-focused benefits such as "will support me when I'm older" and "to take up time because I needed a break" than fathers might be a function of maternal expectations. In general, and beyond sports, maternal expectations to have a caregiver when they are older are likely to be more salient than fathers' expectations. No questions were asked

about which parent does the primary amount of caregiving in the study. However, we surmise that mothers were more likely to enjoy the benefit of a needed break when their children participated in sports. Yet, this same item did not differentiate single from unmarried parents, so comes under question with respect to caregiving roles.

Last, we were interested in seeing whether single parents, regardless of their self-identified gender, enrolled their child(ren) in sports for potential opportunities as a trend. Only one motivational item, "I enroll my child in sports to make friends," indicated difference based on marital status, with a significantly higher score for non-married parents. This reflects the importance of social benefits of sports to single parents, as compared with married parents, which may be a function of familial social support network differences between single and married parents. There were no differences on extrinsically driven, self-benefiting motivations for single versus married parents. This finding was unexpected as we conjectured that single parents might be more likely to support "needing a break" timewise or "seeking scholarship opportunities for child" through sports as a possible single wage earner. From these findings we surmise that recreational sports may provide an opportunity for single parents to help their children with social benefits, above and beyond benefits perceived by parents residing in two-parent households.

Limitations

Initially, we anticipated receiving several hundred more parent email addresses from one of the organizations due to positive correspondence with the director. Due to the director's unexpected several-month absence and an interim director in place to provide the researchers with email contacts, our response from that organization was low (n=17). Another limitation was the number of responses received from the 413 requests that were sent out. A total of 87 parent responses, with 84 usable surveys, indicated a response rate of 21%. Since the survey was anonymous, it remains unknown as to who completed surveys. A comparison could not be made between respondents and the 326 parents who were invited but didn't respond.

Moreover, the low sample size affected the power of analyses conducted. The initial ratio of sample size to number of items (84:49 or 1.7) required for factor analysis was insufficient. Even when reducing items to 27, based on item-factor loadings of .450 and higher for the EFA, with a subject-to-variable (STV) ratio of 3.11, it was less than 5.0, as suggested by Suhr (2006) in a presentation on evaluating applicable conditions in which to conduct exploratory or confirmatory factor analyses.

Another sample-based limitation is that of a convenience sample from a small city population and two organizations that supported youth recreational sports. Knowing that working-class families are more likely to choose community

recreational sports due to cost and availability (Woods, 2011, p. 246), a question wasn't included about socio-economic status. The results of this study cannot be generalized to parents of youth athletes who play sports that are not typically considered recreational (e.g., tennis, golf or gymnastics). Parents' motivations for enrolling children in such sports are likely to differ. To note, some parents included cheerleading, tennis, gymnastics, ballet, Taekwondo, or cross training as sports their children were involved in. Further, even within recreational team sports such as baseball, there could be populations where respondents report higher scores on extrinsic motivators than intrinsic motivations. Recreational travel baseball, also referred to as elite baseball, travel ball, or pay-for-play, is an example in which parents may enroll their child in sports for the purpose of becoming a professional player, making money, or earning college scholarship opportunities. Last, it is difficult to generalize results from this study outside of a similar suburban Southeastern community population from which participants were recruited.

An additional operating challenge is possible response bias in which parents' self-reported responses could be distorted due to social desirability in responding. The possibility that "people may be concerned with socially desirable responses and may tend to answer with a motive or a tendency to seek approval or to avoid disapproval" (Schwartz, Verkasalo, Antonovsky, & Sagiv, 1997, p. 4) is not unlikely with this sample. For example, a parent participant may enroll their child in sports for more extrinsic and self-serving reasons, yet realize that it is less socially acceptable to respond in such a way so score such items lower than items assessing benefits to their child for sports participation.

And, finally, the cross-sectional design of this study is another limitation. Although correlations and relationships between variables can be identified, causation cannot be established. For example, a parent may have recently divorced and transitioned from married to single; in any case we cannot make the association between someone's becoming single with an increased likelihood of rating certain reasons for sports enrollment of children higher.

Future Research

In addition to further applications of the expectancy-value model and self-determination theory to understanding parents' reasons for enrolling their children in sports, future research can help answer additional questions that go beyond demographic variables such as gender and marital status to include more process-based variables in the analysis. For example, next steps might include examining how parenting behaviors (such as displays of warmth and control) are associated with extrinsic reasons for parents supporting youth sports involvement. Another idea might be including items asking about a parent's favorite sport and their own participation in sports

growing up. Additional questions about a parent's background such as socio-economic status (as it indicates process with potential linkages and comparisons with blue versus white collar values and sports involvement) could be considered when examining motivations. Also, it would be of interest to have more families represented in the study who have more than one child enrolled in sports in order to run within-family analyses. Understanding how parents' reasons may differ by child (could be based on gender, age, parent-child relationship) within families could add dimensionality in terms of understanding possible family dynamics at play.

The limitations of this study also call for future research to increase the population sample of parents with children enrolled in recreational sports across communities. The sample population could be widened to include parents of youth who are involved in both competitive and recreational sports, to give a broader perspective and means of comparison. A larger, more representative sample will help generalizability as well as statistical inference and enable the opportunity for comparisons to be made based on child's primary sport in which they are involved (e.g., comparing team with individual competitive sports). Larger samples may produce a wider range of scores for motivational items to allow further examination into the relationships among factors. And, most important to exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, a sample size in which the STV ratio is 5 or greater (or an $n \geq 135$ with 27 items, or $n \geq 245$ with the original 49 items) will be an effective way to test the current measure's utility for future study of parents' sports enrollment motivations.

In terms of validity in responses, an index for social desirability is "widely recommended for new instruments" (Schwartz, et al., 1997, p. 4) to detect when parents' responses seem 'too good to be true.' An additional suggestion with future research with larger, more representative samples would be to consider using additional terms in addition to parent, grandparent, step-parent, aunt or uncle, such as caregiver or guardian. In reflection, the researchers would have preferred to use greater cultural sensitivity with respect to family forms and roles, as well as in wording of motivational items.

An additional possibility of study involves adding to the theoretical basis of this work, as our survey only mentioned positive reasons for parents' supporting youth sports involvement. An inclusion of negative motivations or barriers to supporting children's participation, for example barriers included in the Health Belief Model, may add dimensionality to understanding parents' motivations and what might prevent them from supporting their child's sports involvement.

For a larger, longer-term picture, data could be collected at two or more time points within a given year in a given organization supporting youth sports. Such a study could be conducted in an after-

school program as well with intramural sports in schools. Longitudinal data analyses could tease out the potential effects of parental motivations on youth involvement in sports over time. This potentially supports greater inferences of causality and comparison than can be provided in a cross-sectional design.

Conclusion

The results of this unique study provide us with a preliminary measure and understanding of parents' reasons for enrolling their children in recreational sports. The measure was created to gauge the extent to which parents' primary motivations for enrolling children in sports was extrinsic, intrinsic and reflected parents' values as to what they felt were important gains for their children.

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