Parents’ Value of Sports for Their Children and Grandchildren

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Acknowledgements

This research was funded by grants from NIMH, NSF, and NICHD to Jacquelynne Eccles, and by grants from NSF, the Spencer Foundation and the W.T. Grant Foundation to Jacquelynne Eccles and Bonnie Barber. The author wants to thank Bonnie Barber, Margaret Stone, Laurie Meschke, Lisa Colarossi, Deborah Jozefowicz, and Andrew Fuligni for their role in study design, data collection, and data processing.
Previous studies have shown the benefits of youth participation in sports, ranging from better mental health to higher grades in school (DuBois, Tevendale, Burk-Braxton, Swenson, & Hardesty, 2000; Field, Diego, & Sanders, 2001). Children and adolescents often become involved in sports because their parents support and encourage such activities. Other researchers have noted the relations between parents’ support and children’s activity participation. Models of parental socialization suggest that parents may influence their children’s interests and values by modeling involvement in activities and conveying their perceptions of the importance of certain activities (Anderssen & Wold, 1992). Although evidence suggests that parents’ attitudes play a role in their own children’s choices, little research has investigated the intergenerational transmission of such values, especially in the area of sports activities.
Research Questions

- Are parents’ values for sports related to seventh graders’ participation in sports?
- How does parental value for sports differ by parent and child gender?
- Are parents’ values for sports continued for their children’s children?
- Do grandparents’ values differ by gender?
The data analyzed here come from the Michigan Study of Life Transitions (MSALT), a longitudinal study. Participants were primarily White, working or middle class, and lived near a large Midwestern city. Seventh graders and their parents participated in 1985. Approximately 15 years later, 263 of the original mothers and 170 of the original fathers continued in the study as grandparents.
Measures

- Amount of time spent participating in sports (by seventh graders)
- The following items were answered on a 7-point scale, with higher numbers indicating greater importance:
  - Parental importance of child sports achievement
  - Parental importance of athletics for grandchildren (2 items, alphas = .78 for mothers and .86 for fathers)
Results: Participation

- Seventh grade boys spent more time participating in sports than seventh grade girls, $t(296) = -3.644, p < .001$
- Mothers’ valuing of sports achievement was related to the amount of time children spent playing sports, but fathers’ valuing was not, $F(154) = 4.679, p < .05$
Boys’ and girls’ participation in sports

Mean amount of time spent participating in sports

- Boys: 3.4
- Girls: 2.8
Results: Gender

- Fathers valued their child’s achievement in sports more than mothers, $t(154) = -2.199$, $p < .05$
- Parental value of sports achievement did not differ by child gender
Mothers’ and fathers’ value of participation in sports

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Results: Grandparents

- Grandfathers and grandmothers did not differ in importance of athletics for their grandchildren.
- Grandparents’ importance of athletics did not vary by child gender.
- Grandparents’ importance of athletics for their grandchildren was higher for those who valued sports achievement for their own child, Moms $F(204) = 6.887, p < .01$, Dads $F(99) = 24.233, p < .001$. 
Importance of athletics for grandchildren

![Bar chart showing importance of athletics for mothers and fathers, with different values for low and high value for own child.](chart.png)
Conclusions

- Mothers’ valuing of sports achievement was related to seventh graders’ participation in sports.
- Contrary to previous findings, fathers’ values were not related to participation.
- Parental valuing of sports differed by parental gender, but not by child gender.
- Patterns of parental sports value continued for their grandchildren.
References

