Keeping Girls in the Game:

Factors that Influence Sport Participation

Women's Sports
Foundation

We are the ally, advocate and catalyst for tomorrow's leaders. We exist to enable girls and women to reach their potential in sports and life.

Letter from the CEO

Founded by Billie Jean King in 1974, the Women's Sports Foundation is committed to ensuring that all girls and women have equal access to sports and physical activity and the tremendous life-long benefits they provide. While much progress has been made, there remain glaring disparities in sport participation across gender, race/ethnicity, geography, and socioeconomic status, leaving far too many girls on the sidelines. We know we can and must do better.

Keeping Girls in the Game: Factors that Influence Sports Participation, generously supported by Dick's Sporting Goods, provides new insight on how and why girls enter sports, why some girls drop out and why others persist. The report is a window into girls' lives, painting a picture of how they experience sport, including their attitudes, motivations concerns and interests. The study also includes a survey of parents to explore their perceptions around issues related to access, benefits, and impediments to their children's involvement in sports. As primary influencers and gatekeepers of their children's participation, these findings can lead to strategies that meet the needs of girls and their families more holistically.

We are continuously building a deeper understanding of how to help girls thrive in sport. With these new insights, the research can help parents, coaches, program leaders, and those working at the sport league levels to not only recruit and retain girls in sport, but also find effective ways to address disparities and forge new pathways for greater engagement.

The research also makes clear that all girls benefit from multiple champions for sport in their daily lives. Parents in particular can play a powerful role in supporting their daughters' love of sport, while also helping to break down the barriers they face. At the community level, we should continue celebrating and supporting the champion organizations that are increasing access and opportunity and ensuring that girls not only try sport, but also find joy, confidence, strength, and the sense of belonging that keeps them playing during their growing years and throughout their lifetimes.

The Women's Sports Foundation is proud to be at the forefront of research and practice, and we look forward to working with other leaders in the field to bring these new research findings into practice.

Deborah Antoine

Dr. Deborah Antoine, CEO, Women's Sports Foundation

Acknowledgments

About The DICK'S Sporting Goods Foundation

DICK'S Sporting Goods and The DICK'S Sporting Goods Foundation believe that participation in sports makes people better. Since 2014, DICK'S and The DICK'S Foundation have pledged more than $100 million to support youth sports teams and leagues in need. Through our Sports Matter initiative we strive to increase awareness for underfunded youth athletics nationwide and provide much-needed support through equipment, uniform and monetary donations. For more information on Sports Matter, visit SportsMatter.org.

About the Women's Sports Foundation

The Women's Sports Foundation exists to enable girls and women to reach their potential in sports and life. We are an ally, an advocate, and a catalyst. Founded by Billie Jean King in 1974, we strengthen and expand participation and leadership opportunities through research, advocacy, community programming, and a wide variety of collaborative partnerships. The Women's Sports Foundation has positively shaped the lives of millions of youth, high school and collegiate student-athletes, elite athletes, and coaches. We're building a future where every girl and woman can #KeepPlaying and unlock the lifelong benefits of sport participation. All girls. All women. All sports. To learn more about the Women's Sports Foundation, please visit www.WomensSportsFoundation.org

Preferred Citation: Zarrett, N., Veliz, P.T., & Sabo, D. (2020). *Keeping Girls in the Game: Factors that Influence Sport Participation.* New York, NY: Women's Sports Foundation.

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Executive Summary

Keeping Girls in the Game: Factors that Influence Sport Participation is one of the first studies of its kind to systematically examine social processes influencing youth entry, retention, and drop out from sports. To gain a greater understanding of these disparities in participation and drop out and identify areas to intervene, the current report explores how key characteristics of youth (intrapersonal), their social influences (e.g., interpersonal parent and peer factors), and experiences within the sport setting may vary by gender, age, race/ethnicity, family socioeconomic background, and region.

To accomplish this objective, the Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) commissioned a national survey about the participation and experiences of youth in sports to identify critical factors related to youth entrance into sport and those associated with dropping out of sports. The survey was administered to a nationally representative sample of boys and girls (*N*=3,041) between the ages of 7–17 and their parents (*N*=3,041) to inquire about child-related, sport-related, and systemic factors expected to influence youth access, experiences, and motivations for initial participation (entrance) and sustained/continued participation in sport. Based on their sport participation status at the time of the survey, children were categorized into one of three groups: Currently Playing Organized Sport(s) (*n*=1,207; 43%; 539 girls, 668 boys), Dropped Out of Sport (*n*=626; 17%; 312 girls, 314 boys) and Never Played (*n*=1,208; 40%; 666 girls, 542 boys). Although "dropped out" can be defined as ending participation in a specific sport (i.e., sport-specific attrition, where youth exit one sport but opt into participation in another sport), for the current report we are most interested in complete exit from sports and, thus, define "dropped out" as those who played a sport in the past but no longer engage in any type of sport (i.e., sport-general attrition). This assessment offers important insights on critical personal, social, and sport-level supports needed to recruit and retain youth in sport, and effective ways to address disparities observed in participation and rates of drop out by gender, race/ethnicity, family income, and location/urbanicity.

Key Findings

1. **Disparities persist.** Disparities in participation and in dropout by gender, race/ethnicity, household income, and urbanicity persist. Aligned with national participation statistics, girls in the study sample were more likely to have never played (43.1% girls vs. 34.5% boys) and less likely to be currently playing sports (36.4% girls vs. 45.6% boys) compared to boys, and sport drop-out rates within the sample were significantly higher among girls than boys (36% girls vs. 30% boys). African American youth and youth from low-income households were least likely to be current players and most likely to have never played sports compared to others, and these observed disparities were especially prominent for the girls within low-income homes and/or African American families. Likewise, sport drop-out rates were higher among youth from low-income households ($0–$49,999; 39.9%) compared to families of higher income ($100,000 or higher; 29%).

2. **Parents play multiple roles in supporting or hindering their girls' participation in sport.** Improving parents' engagement and support in their girls' sports participation can help reduce girls' higher rates of dropout in sport. Parents support children's participation in sport through imparting/relaying key beliefs and attitudes about sport to their youth, including that they are capable and belong in sport, providing exposure to role models that resonate with youth, and through direct provision of their children's sports experiences, including emotional supports (e.g., attending games, practicing with their child) and tangible supports (e.g., buying equipment, providing transportation). For boys, parent support does not vary much between current players and dropouts. However, for girls, parents of current athletes tend to provide greater supports across the majority of ways parents can be involved in their child's sports involvement, with particularly higher involvement in providing transportation, attending games, buying equipment, providing food for games, paying for opportunities to play throughout the year, and taking their daughters to watch sporting events, compared to parents of girls who have dropped out.

3. **Gender stereotypes in sport prevail.** Despite the powerful influence that parents and peers can play in supporting youth sports participation, gendered stereotypes about sports that inhibit girls' participation are still prominent. Alarmingly, a third of parents (32.2%) endorsed the belief that boys are better at sports than girls, and this does not vary by youth sport status. Parents of youth who have never played sports were also more likely than other parents to endorse that girls are not as competitive as boys and that sports are more important to boys than girls. Getting teased by peers, including being made fun of or made to feel uncomfortable while

Bridge the Gap

they play sport, was also a prominent issue identified by youth who dropped out of sport. However, even among current players, almost one-third reported experiencing being made fun of while playing sports. Although both boys and girls equally reported being teased, boys were more likely to experience this during the younger childhood years, whereas girls were increasingly more likely to experience this through the adolescent years during a peak time when we observe girls dropping out of sport.

The lack of support and teasing girls endure from their peers can result in heightened awareness of appearance and self-consciousness while playing sport. In the current study, girls who have dropped out of sport were significantly more likely to report being self-conscious about playing sports (e.g., they don't like the way they look in the uniforms) and were twice as likely to say they don't like playing sports because they don't like to get sweaty. Performance worries, such as not playing well, messing up during a game/competition, and losing, were also all significantly more prevalent concerns among girls who dropped out of sport than among current female athletes.

4. **"If you can see it, you can be it."** The provision of role models is particularly important for girls and other underrepresented youth in sport, acting as a powerful force to help youth see individuals like themselves in and around the game, that directly understand the unique experiences and challenges that they face in sport, and that they can aspire to become. Despite the importance of role models for girls and other underrepresented youth in sport, there continues to be a shortage of females on the coaching staffs as well as in other prominent administrative roles within

sport organizations. Two-thirds of current players and two-thirds of youth who have dropped out of sport in the current study have or had a male coach, and male assistant coaches were equally as prominent as male head coaches. Disparities in parents' provision of role modeling opportunities was also evident. Overall, parents provided minimal encouragement to their child to follow sports figures in the media (only 15% of parents of current players and 12% of those who dropped out), with parents of boys, as well as Hispanic and Black parents, more likely to provide this support. Likewise, only a third of parents of current players (and 26% of those who dropped out) reported they take their children to watch sporting events, and this was disproportionately a resource provided to youth from middle- to higher-income households, especially boys.

5. **Celebrate being strong: Sport can help build positive body image.** The majority of parents (across youth status) endorsed that sports promote positive body image, with parents of current players especially likely to endorse this belief and current players benefiting from sport in this way. Current players were much more likely than those who dropped out or those who have never played to say they feel confident about their bodies and that their bodies are getting healthier. They were also more likely to report feeling they are the right height and size, and most likely to perceive themselves as really coordinated. Ironically, poor body image can inhibit youth from participating in sport, with dropouts and those who have never played more likely to report feeling awkward about their bodies and not liking the way their bodies look. These differences were equivalent for boys and girls and were greatest among older youth. Moreover, when asked what they like about playing sports, current players were more likely than dropouts to report "being strong" (i.e., celebrating the capabilities of their bodies) as something they enjoy, while "losing or maintaining weight or to look better," a more appearance-based focus, was more of a factor for sport dropouts, especially older girls. Although poor body image appears to affect both boys' and girls' participation equally, appearance-related motivations for participation may be particularly detrimental to youth's continued participation, especially for females.

6. **Coaches shape the sport experience.** Coaches play a central role in getting and keeping youth involved in sports. Similarly, for both boys and girls, current players reported liking their coach more than sport dropouts do, and dropouts were more likely to have liked their coach only "a little" or "not at all." Parent evaluations of the coach also reflected these differences, with parents of current players more likely to report that their child's coach is excellent, and parents of sport dropouts more likely

to rate the coach less positively. Several coaching qualities differentiated current players' coaches from the coaches of those who dropped out of sport. Interestingly, in the current study, we found coaches of current players are slightly more competitive in nature than coaches of sport dropouts, with playing time more commonly determined by youth effort and skill than just equally distributed across players. Coaches of current players were also more likely to have an equal focus on both winning and having fun (not just having fun). Additionally, current players were more likely than dropouts to have a coach that sets team and individual goals. Together, these qualities may help impart/reinforce to players that their playing matters, that their efforts are paying off, and that the coach cares about their growth as athletes (i.e., takes it seriously).

7.   **Some girls live for the competition, and some girls are in it for the fun.** The desire for competition among current players increased with age, especially for girls, so that "competing" was identified as a critical component of enjoyment for older current players for both genders. However, for some youth, "too much" competitiveness (or a sole focus on winning without a focus on fun and skill development) may undermine youth motivations to participate in sport, with "too competitive an environment" making the top 10 reported reasons for dropping out or never playing sport for both boys and girls. Likewise, being a top player on the team (i.e., a major contributor) for current players was defined similarly for boys and girls and included some competitive goals such as being excited about making the winning play and being better than one's teammates. Youth who dropped out of sports were significantly less excited than current players about these goals, and this was especially true for girls who dropped out. Rather, the social experience of "being someone the team can rely on" was the only goal that girl dropouts were equally as excited about as boy dropouts. Multiple types of sport options need to be available, accessible, equally advertised and equally valued as competitive options in order to meet the needs of youth who have other motivations for playing. Additionally, developing strategies (e.g., marketing, information sessions, etc.) to help parents navigate these differing sport programs and identify the best match for their own child also would help support these efforts.

8.   **Cost, transportation, and lack of access keep youth out.** Some of the social inequalities observed in sport result simply from the costs that participation can incur. Among families with low household income and Hispanic families, cost of participating was identified as a primary barrier for why their child dropped out of sport, especially for Hispanic girls.

Cost also was provided as a cause for dropping out among working-class families, but only for girls who dropped out. For urban parents, a lack of access to programming and difficulty getting their child to practice were identified as key barriers. Likewise, youth from low-income households who never played sports identified the cost of sports, inability to get to practice (i.e., transportation), and safety, as the key deterrents to participation, with cost of sport disproportionately of greater concern to African American and Hispanic families. These findings not only support previous research that has shown money is a primary driver of entrance into sport but also emphasize the need to address the cost of sport to support retention in sport (prevent dropout). These efforts may be particularly fruitful for supporting the continued participation of African American and Hispanic girls, and girls from low-income and working-class families for which cultural assumptions intersect with race/ethnicity and social class to magnify these existing environmental barriers that these girls face in accessing sports.

9.   **Maintaining a love of sport (overcoming competing interests) is key to continued participation.** Current athletes reported a love for their sport, with significantly more teen girls endorsing this love of sports compared to boys (72% girls vs. 54.8% boys). Maintaining a love of sport is critical, especially in the face of multiple competing interests. Sport dropouts reported a loss of interest in sport and preference for other activities, especially increased interest in one's social life as they get older, as primary reasons for no longer participating in sport. Fostering youths' continued love of sport through building confidence, a sense of mastery, and connection to one's

WSF Founder Billie Jean King

teammates is critical. Additionally, building the sport experience to include community outreach, character education, academic supports, and other positive social experiences can help meet youths' varied developmental needs.

10. **There is a need to educate parents about the academic benefits of participation.** Sports participation has been consistently shown to support all aspects of academic achievement, including positive academic self-concepts, a positive attitude towards schoolwork, improved academic performance and higher grades, and higher educational aspirations and attainment. However, despite substantial evidence of the positive impact of sports participation on academics, the demands of academics ranked among the top five barriers to sports participation for both youth who never played and those who have dropped out of sport, with 30% of youth and their parents reporting a need to focus more on studying and grades as a primary reason to dropping out of sports, and well over half of sport dropouts and three-quarters of their parents indicating that sports can get in the way of academics. Academic demands were disproportionately an issue for older youth and an especially prominent deterrent for Hispanic youth and teen girls' participation. The more deliberate coupling of sport experiences with academic supports, especially as youth get older, can further bolster the academic benefits youth gain for their participation and help impart/reinforce to youth and their parents that sports is complimentary/supportive of youth academic achievement (not an antithesis to it).

Findings from this report provide important insights into the gender, race/ethnicity, and socio-economic disparities found in sports participation and dropout, and identify critical areas to intervene. First and foremost, more work needs to be done to improve access and inclusion in sport: an alarming 40% of girls and one-third of boys reported having never played sport in our sample, and over one-third dropped out of sport. The cost of sport not only remains a primary determinant of youth entrance into sport, but also plays a major role in determining who can stay in sport, disproportionately affecting girls' participation, especially girls of color.

Along with systemic issues concerning access, several social influences were also associated with these disparities, functioning to either support or deter girls' (and other under represented youth's) participation in sport. In particular, gendered cultural norms remain a major barrier for girls' participation in sport, influencing all aspects of girls' experiences in sport. Parents' socialization behaviors and stereotyped beliefs favor boys in sports, there is still a lack of female presence on the coaching staff and in other prominent administrative roles within sport organizations, and teen girls reported

experiencing greater amounts of teasing and bullying from peers while participating in sport. Together these social factors espouse messages to girls that they do not belong in sport and can lead to performance worries/anxiety and heightened awareness of appearance and self-consciousness when playing sports that put girls at greater risk of dropping out.

The report indicates a number of strategies that can be implemented to reduce the disproportionate drop-out rates among girls in sports. For girls and other underrepresented youth in sport, having multiple champions in their daily lives can be particularly beneficial, helping to counter the cultural and social barriers that they face in playing sport (e.g., teasing, exclusion, inequality, feeling less valued). Parent education and intervention to improve parental engagement and support in their girls' sports participation is needed to significantly reduce girls' higher rates of dropout in sport. There also needs to be increased resources allocated towards encouraging women to coach and widely accessibility training programs and clinics for coaches that address effective coaching strategies for recruitment and retention of girls. Additionally, tailoring the sport setting in various ways to nurture youth's varied development needs will help foster a continued love for sport. This may entail ensuring access to multiple types of sport options that map on to youth motivations for playing. These efforts will help us reach our ultimate goal of developing inclusive and safe sport settings for all youth.

Girls in the Game

Introduction

Keeping Girls in the Game: Factors that Influence Sport Participation is one of the first studies of its kind to systematically examine processes influencing youth entry, retention, and exit from sports. Unwavering evidence indicates that sports can be an important context to support the health and well-being of youth: Quality sports programming has been associated with physical and mental health, healthy lifestyle habits, motor/physical literacy, psychosocial well-being, and achievement (i.e., cognitive and academic benefits). Despite the developmental benefits of participation, national survey data (2017 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) data query) indicates that only 58% of youth ages 6–17 participate in team sports or have played sports after school or during the weekends in the past year. Participation rates are notably lower among girls and underserved populations, including racial and ethnic minorities and youth from lower-income households (USDHHS, 2019). Low participation rates and disparities in participation by gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status have recently been identified as a national issue. In response, a presidential executive order was issued on the President's Council on Sports, Fitness & Nutrition in 2018 to develop a national strategy on youth sports to increase youth engagement in communities with below-average sports participation and limited access to athletic facilities or recreational areas.

However, increasing sports participation among today's youth will require that we extend beyond just a focus on what it takes to make sports more available and recruit youth into sport, to one that also considers best practices for how to retain youth in sport. The consistent high rates of youth dropping out of sport after initial involvement has been a long-term concern, with, on average, over 30% of youth exiting sport each year (Balish et al., 2014; Sabo & Veliz, 2014). Gender disparities in dropout also exist so that not only do girls' participation rates lag behind those of boys at all ages (Craggs et al., 2011; Dumith et al., 2012), but also attrition rates in sport is two to three times greater for girls than for boys (Telama & Yang, 2000). Further variations exist in dropout by age, race/ethnicity, and family socioeconomic background. The first major declines in sports participation are observed around ages 12 to 13 for girls (Cooky, 2009; Shakib & Dunbar, 2002) but tend to occur somewhat later (and at less steep a decline) for boys. These declines impact African American and Hispanic girls (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002) and youth from low-income households (Sabo & Veliz, 2014) most greatly, who have been found to not only enter sport at

Southern California Golf Association Junior

a later average age but tend to drop out earlier than their counterparts, leaving an even narrower window of participation opportunities.

The current report set out to identify key factors and best practices for keeping youth in sport as well as preventable/modifiable factors that increase youth chances of dropping out of sport. We took a developmental ecological systems approach that considers the interplay between the multiple levels of influence on youth participation. This involved an in-depth exploration of the ways in which key characteristics of youth (intrapersonal), their social influences (e.g., interpersonal parent and peer factors), and experiences within the sport setting interact with one another to differentiate current players from those who have never played and from those who have dropped out of sport. Given disparities observed in both participation rates and rates of dropout, it is likely that these factors may differentially influence participation depending on the socio-demographic characteristics of youth and their families. Thus, the current report set out to examine how these factors may differ for boys and girls, as well as for youth at different ages and from different socioeconomic backgrounds, race/ethnicities, and regions.

Methodology

To accomplish this objective, the Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) commissioned a national survey about the participation and experiences of youth in sports to identify critical factors related to youth entrance into sport and those associated with exiting sports. The survey was administered to boys and girls between the ages of 7–17 and their parents/guardians to inquire about child-related, sport-related, and systemic factors expected to influence youth access, experiences and motivations for initial participation (entrance) and sustained/continued participation in organized sport. Organized sport was defined as participation in a sport/athletic activity that had a coach/instructor and regularly scheduled practices (or training) and competitions (e.g., interscholastic sports, out-of-school community or school programming, recreational organizations, travel team/clubs). A nationally representative sample of youth (N=3,041) and their parents (N=3,041) participated in the survey. If a family had more than one child that fell within the study's age range, then one child in the family was randomly selected by the survey software to be in the study. Based on their sport participation status at the time of the survey, children were categorized into one of three groups: Currently Playing Organized Sport(s) (n=1,207; 40%; 539 girls; 668 boys), Dropped Out/Exited Sport (n=626; 20%; 312 girls; 314 boys) and Never Played (n=1,208; 40%;

666 girls; 542 boys). Among youth who played more than one organized sport, the survey software would randomly select one sport for youth and their parents to report on. Although "dropped out/exited sport" can be defined as ending participation in a specific sport (i.e., sport-specific attrition, where youth exit one sport but opt into participation in another sport), for the current report we were most interested in complete dropout from sports and thus, define "dropouts" as those who played a sport in the past but no longer engage in any type of sport (i.e., sport-general attrition).

Among current players basketball, baseball/softball, and soccer were the three most popular sports overall for both boys and girls (played by nearly one-third of current players) (see Figure 1). Sport dropouts and those who have never played were significantly more likely to report enjoying tech activities (spending time online) than current players. Kids who never played sports more often reported enjoying other activities like playing outside, reading and art/drawing as well (see Figure 2 on following page). However, it should be noted that children who play sports were equally as involved in other organized activities (e.g., religious education, school clubs, music lessons, community service clubs, etc.) as sports dropouts and those who never played (see Figure 3 on page 12).

Figure 1. Most Popular Sports, Overall and by Gender
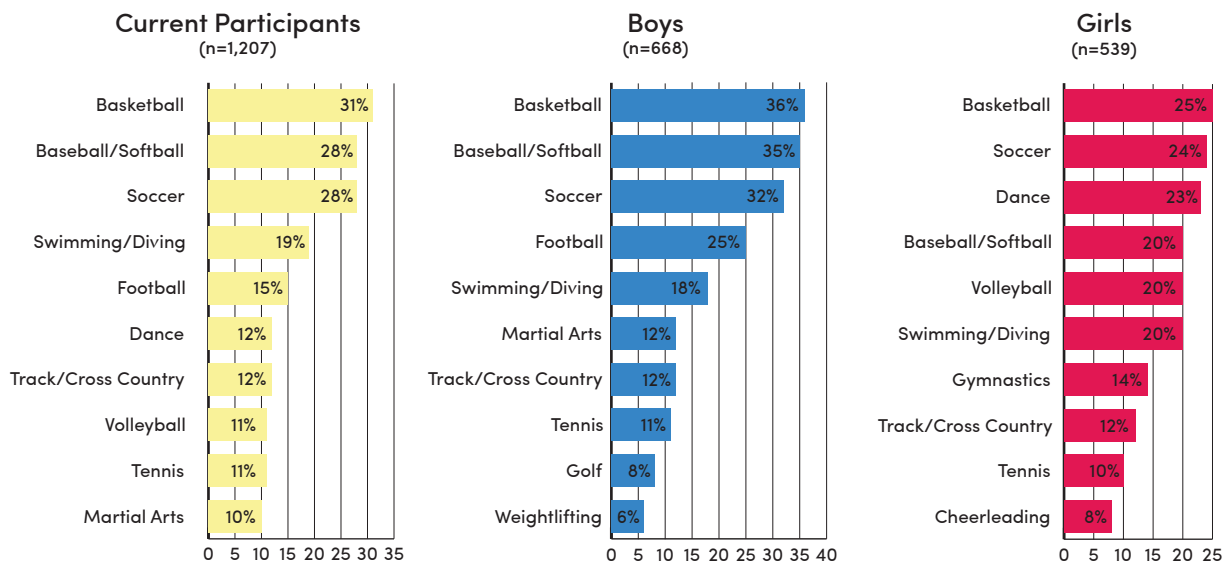
Figure 2. Children's Top 5 Favorite Things to Do
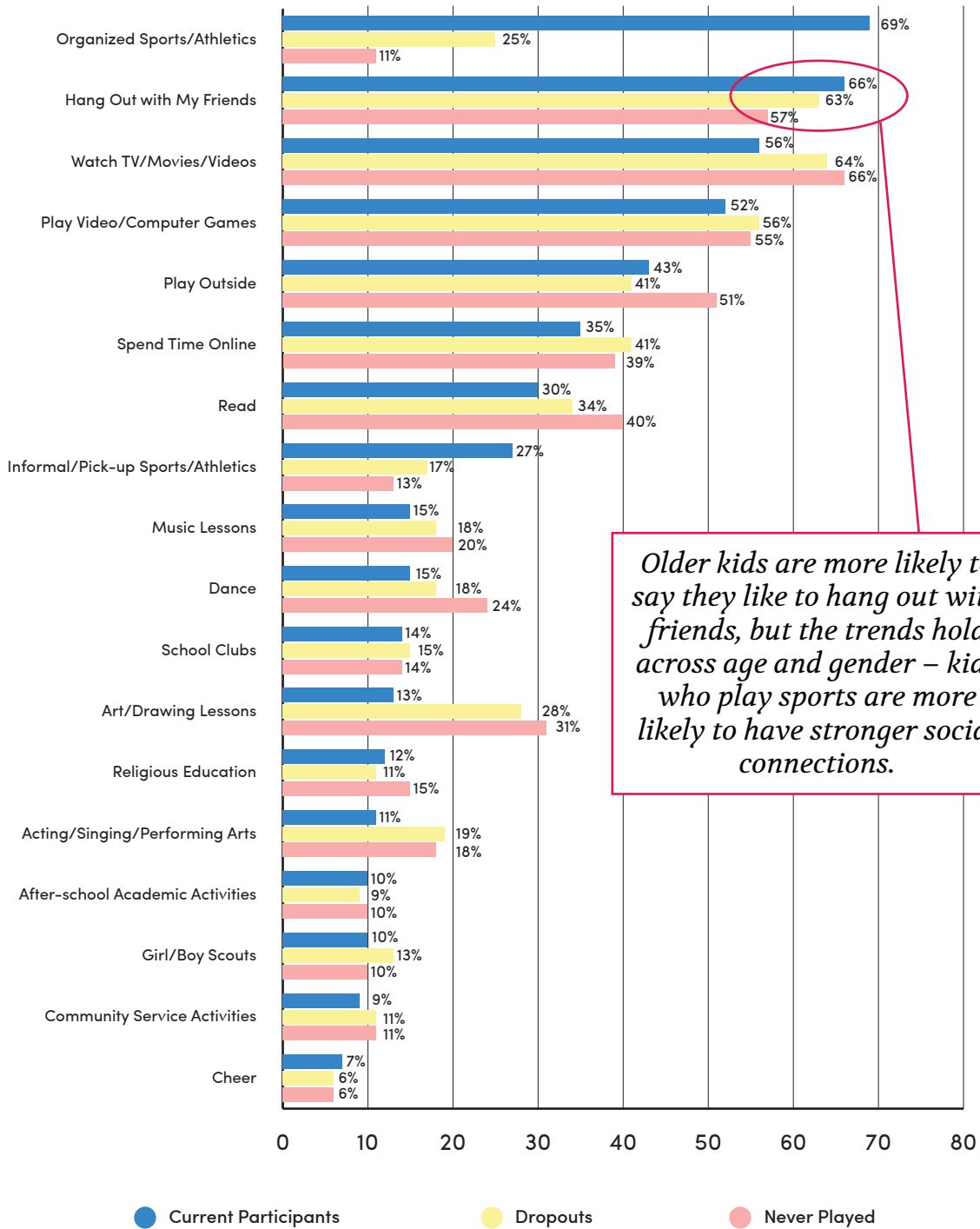
Older kids are more likely to say they like to hang out with friends, but the trends hold across age and gender – kids who play sports are more likely to have stronger social connections.

- Organized Sports/Athletics: 69% / 25% / 11%
- Hang Out with My Friends: 66% / 63% / 57%
- Watch TV/Movies/Videos: 56% / 64% / 66%
- Play Video/Computer Games: 52% / 56% / 55%
- Play Outside: 43% / 41% / 51%
- Spend Time Online: 35% / 41% / 39%
- Read: 30% / 34% / 40%
- Informal/Pick-up Sports/Athletics: 27% / 17% / 13%
- Music Lessons: 15% / 18% / 20%
- Dance: 15% / 18% / 24%
- School Clubs: 14% / 15% / 14%
- Art/Drawing Lessons: 13% / 28% / 31%
- Religious Education: 12% / 11% / 15%
- Acting/Singing/Performing Arts: 11% / 19% / 18%
- After-school Academic Activities: 10% / 9% / 10%
- Girl/Boy Scouts: 10% / 13% / 10%
- Community Service Activities: 9% / 11% / 11%
- Cheer: 7% / 6% / 6%

● Current Participants   ● Dropouts   ● Never Played

Figure 3. Activities Children Currently Participate In

Activity	Current Participants	Dropouts	Never Played
Organized Sports/Athletics	100%	15%	5%
Religious Education	30%	28%	24%
Music Lessons	28%	25%	21%
School Clubs	28%	25%	16%
Community Service Activities	26%	22%	15%
After-school Academic Activities	19%	20%	14%
Acting/Singing/Performing Arts	15%	19%	13%
Art/Drawing Lessons	14%	15%	16%
Dance	14%	14%	16%
Girl/Boy Scouts	16%	12%	10%

Legend: ● Current Participants ● Dropouts ● Never Played
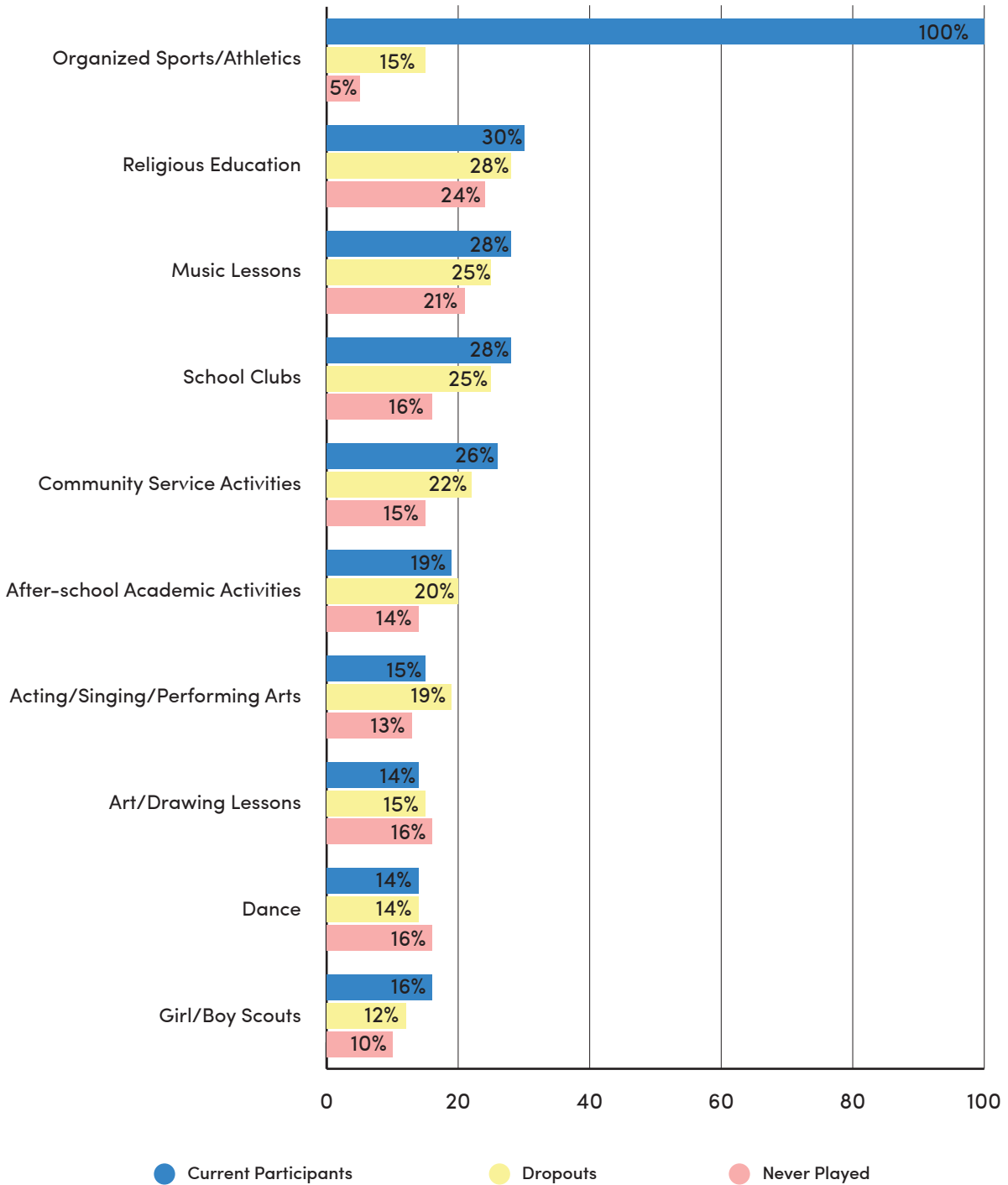
Youth Participation by Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Household Income, and Urbanicity

Aligned with national participation rates, girls in the study sample were significantly more likely to have never played (43.1% girls vs. 34.5% boys) and less likely to be currently playing (36.4% girls vs. 45.6% boys) compared to boys. Income, ethnicity, and urbanicity have an additional impact on whether children play organized sports. African American youth and youth from low-income households were significantly least likely to be current players and most likely to have never played sports compared to the other groups studied. These observed disparities were especially prominent for girls within low-income homes and/or African American families (see Figures 4 and 5). Living in a suburban location appears to give an advantage to youth (both boys and girls) for participating in sport. Although "a lack of programs" was a deterrent only reported by a small percentage of

Figure 4. Participation in Sports and Household Income, by Gender

Legend: $49,999 or Less · $50,000–$99,999 · $100,000 or More
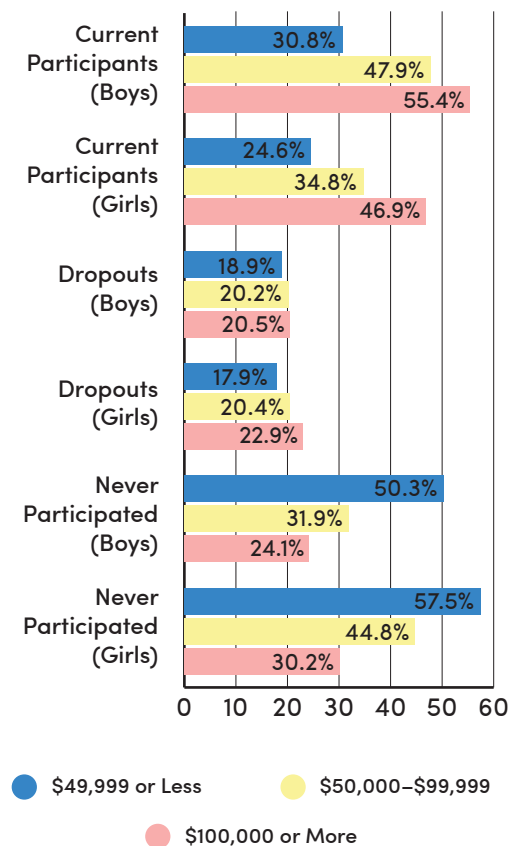
Figure 5. Participation in Sports and Race/Ethnicity, by Gender

Legend: Hispanic · Black · White · Other
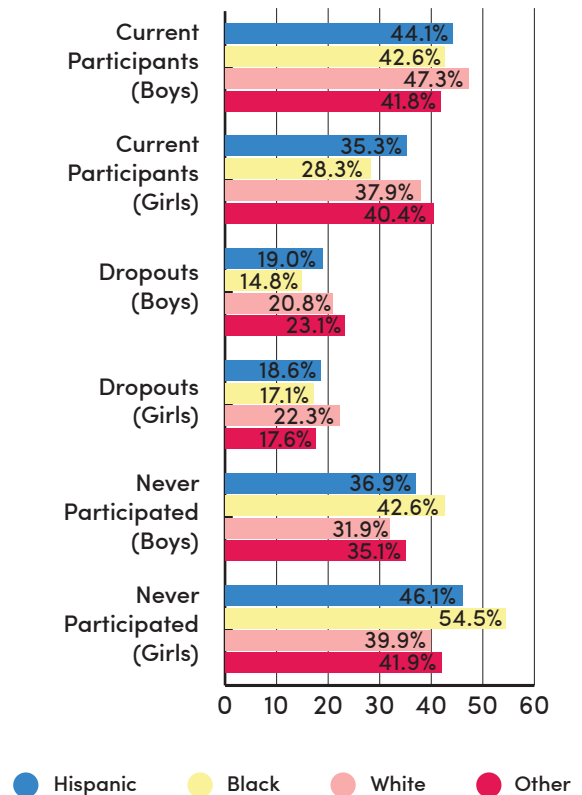
the sample who never played sports (1 out of every 10 parents) and equivalently experienced by parents across sociodemographics, the cost of sports, safety, and lack of access were primary factors driving gender, race/ethnic, and income-based disparities. For youth from low-income households (HHI <$50K) in particular, inability to get to practice, worries about safety (from both parent and child), and cost were identified as primary reasons for youth to have never played sports. These factors equally affected boys and girls as reasons for never participating in sports (see Figures 6 and 7 on following page). However, there were some differences in reasons for never playing sport by race/ethnicity. African American families were significantly more likely to report concern for both their boys' and girls' safety and reported the greatest difficulties in getting their boys, to practice (but were equivalent to other families in concerns for getting their

Figure 6. Top Reasons Parents Say Their Children Have Never Played Sports

Reason	Percentage
Not Interested in Sports	43%
Prefers to Participate in Other Types of Activities	34%
Not Athletic	23%
Wanted to Focus More on Studying and Grades	23%
The Cost of Participating Was Too High	23%
Does Not Think Sports or Physical Activity is Fun	19%
I Worry about Their Safety	15%
Does Not Like the Competitiveness of Organized Sports	14%
Got More Interested in Their School or Community	13%
Would Have a Problem Traveling to Practices	13%

Figure 7. Top Reasons Children Say They Have Never Played Sports

Reason	Percentage
I'm Not Interested in Sports	42%
I Have Another Activity I Like Better than Sports	28%
I Don't Think It Is Fun	23%
I Needed to Focus on Studying and Grades	21%
It Costs Too Much	20%
My Parent(s) Worry About My Safety	14%
I Worry About My Safety	14%
I'm Very Interested in My Social Life	13%
I Do Not Like to Compete (Too Competitive an Environment)	12%
I Wouldn't Be Able to Get to Practice	12%

Figure 8. Entry and Exit Among Dropouts

Past Participants

6.0 (Age of Entry)	11.1 (Age of Exit)

Window of Opportunity: 5.1

- Age of Entry
- Age of Exit
- Window of Opportunity

Boys

6.1 (Age of Entry)	11.2 (Age of Exit)

Window of Opportunity: 5.1

- Age of Entry
- Age of Exit
- Window of Opportunity

Girls

5.8 (Age of Entry)	11.0 (Age of Exit)

Window of Opportunity: 5.2

- Age of Entry
- Age of Exit
- Window of Opportunity
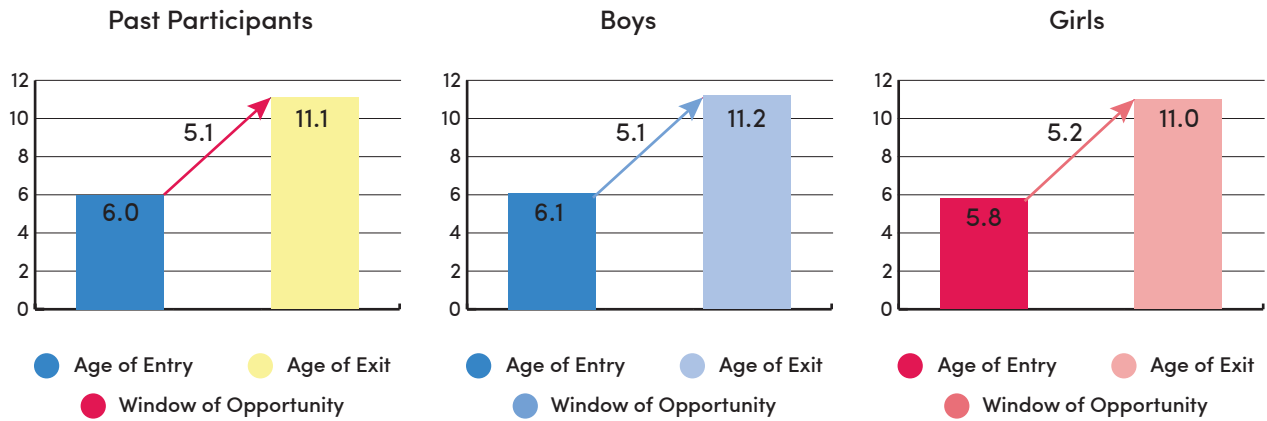
Figure 9. Window of Participation, by Gender

Total	Boys	Girls
5.1	5.1	5.2
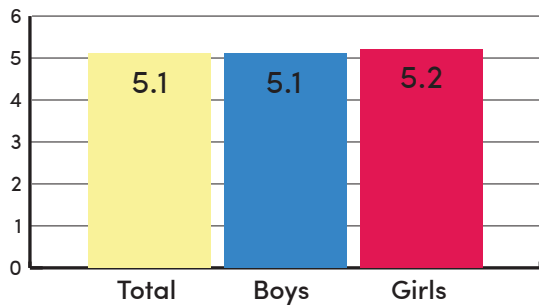
Figure 10. Window of Participation, by Household Income

$49,999 or less	$50,000–$99,999	$100,000 or more
4.5	5.0	5.6
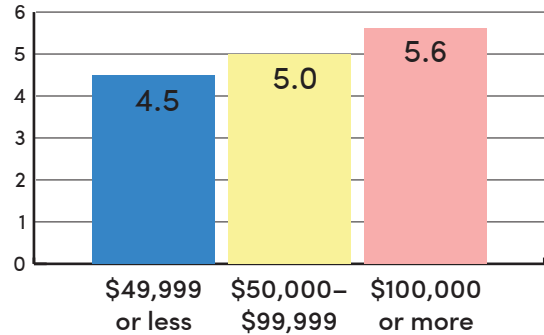
Figure 11. Window of Participation and Household Income, by Gender

	Boys			Girls		
$49,999 or less	4.7			4.3		
$50,000–$99,999		5.0			5.0	
$100,000 or more			5.4			5.8

- $49,999 or less
- $50,000–$99,999
- $100,000 or more
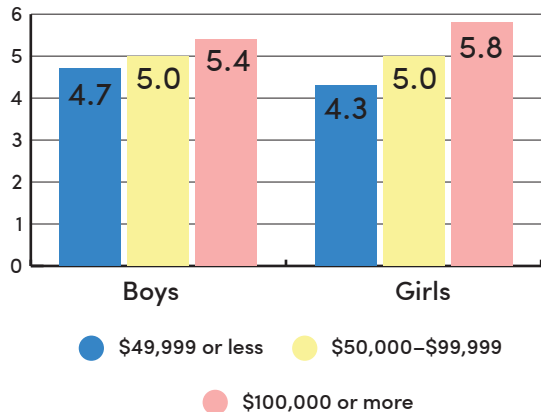
Figure 12. Entry and Exit, by Household Income

$49,999 or less

6.3 → 4.5 → 10.8

$50,000–$99,999

6.1 → 5.0 → 11.1

$100,000 or more

5.6 → 5.6 → 11.2

- Age of Entry
- Age of Exit
- Window of Opportunity
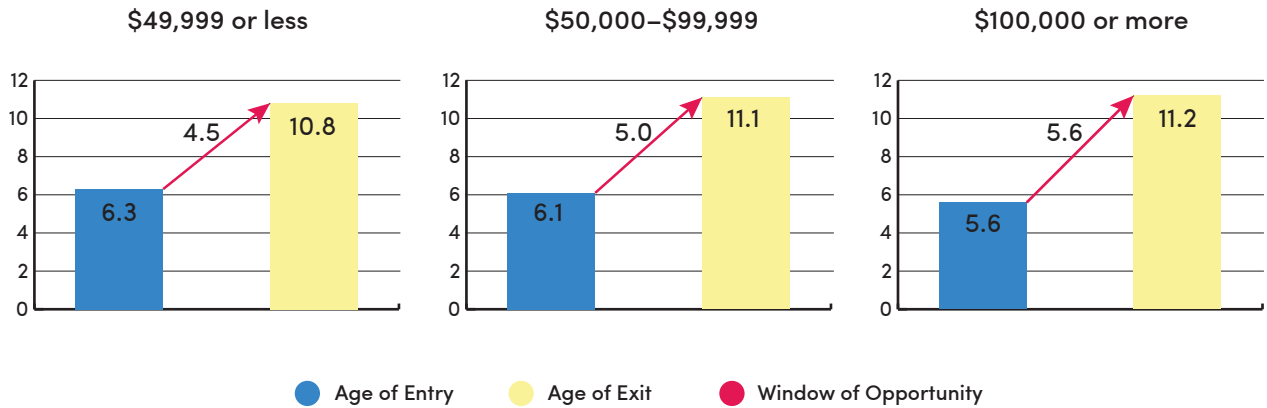
Figure 13. Window of Participation, by Race/Ethnicity

Hispanic	Black	White	Other
5.3	5.0	5.1	5.2
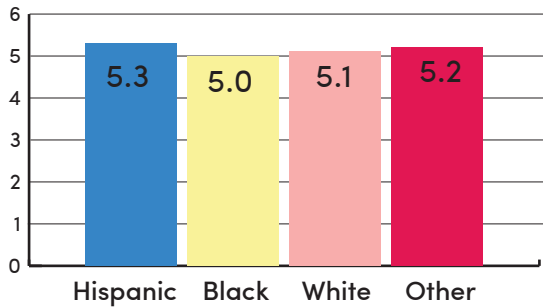
Figure 14. Window of Participation and Race/Ethnicity, by Gender

Boys: Hispanic 5.0, Black 3.8, White 5.2, Other 5.8
Girls: Hispanic 5.7, Black 5.9, White 5.0, Other 4.3

- Hispanic
- Black
- White
- Other

Figure 15. Entry and Exit, by Race/Ethnicity

White Children

5.9 → 5.1 → 11.0

Hispanic Children

5.6 → 5.3 → 10.8

Black Children

7.0 → 5.0 → 12.0

- Age of Entry
- Age of Exit
- Window of Opportunity

girls to practice). Cost of sport was also disproportionately of greater concern to families of color than white families.

Also aligned with national participation statistics, when considering all youth in the sample who ever participated in sports, the sport drop-out rates within the sample were significantly higher among girls (36.1%) than boys (30.4%), and among youth from low-income households ($0-$49,999; 39.9%) compared to families of higher income ($100,000 or higher; 29%). On average, youth started playing sports at about 6 years old, played for just over five years, and exited at age 11. Although little variation in this pattern was seen by gender, there were some differences by race/ethnicity and income (see Figures 8-15 on following pages).

African American children tended to enter sports later but also remain in sports later.[1] In contrast, children from lower-income households also entered sports later but exited sports earlier, resulting in significantly less time spent in sports (Over a one-year disparity in this window of opportunity compared to high-income households). This income disparity among youth who drop out was greater for girls (1.5 years) than it was for boys (0.7 year). Moreover, when parents of dropouts (and children who dropped out) were asked what were the primary factors for why their child stopped playing sport, cost of participating was identified as a primary barrier for Hispanic families, especially Hispanic girls (see Figures 16 and 17 on following page). As expected, families with low household income also reported cost as a reason for both girls and boys who dropped out of sport. However, interestingly, cost was also provided as a cause for dropping out among working-class families, but only for girls who dropped out. These findings not only support previous research that has shown cost is a primary driver of entrance into sport (Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) data for the Aspen Institute, 2013), but also emphasizes the need to address the cost of sport to support retention in sport (prevent dropout). These efforts may be particularly fruitful for supporting the continued participation of African American and Hispanic girls, and girls from low-income and working-class families. Interestingly, for urban parents and for minority youth, a lack of access to programming and difficulty getting their child to practice were identified as key barriers for both boys and girls who have dropped out of sport. These findings suggest that many parents in urban areas were having to go to great lengths to provide transportation for their child to participate in distant programs which can be difficult to sustain. Differences in participation and drop-out rates by these youth and family sociodemographic characteristics are indicative of various systemic issues concerning access.

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1   African American boys tend to have the smallest participation window. This may capture the consequences of entering sports later, when sports have increased in competitiveness and other youth have already developed a more advanced skill set specific to the sport.

Some of these social inequalities result simply from the costs that participation can incur. Participation can include program fees, equipment purchases, league donations and raffles, transportation costs, uniform purchases, consultant fees, medical bills (e.g., sport physicals), and special school taxes. School-based sports are no longer immune to these participation costs (Eyler et al., 2018), with communities that have fewer assets to expend on school-based sport programs incurring the highest costs for participation (Eyler et al., 2018; Sabo & Veliz, 2014). Likewise, families with more disposable income find it easier to support a child's athletic involvement than low-income families do. As pay-for-play sport opportunities grow increasingly more popular and as the expense of school- and community-based sports also increases, disparities in access to sports for lower-income and middle-income families have only increased in recent years (Eyl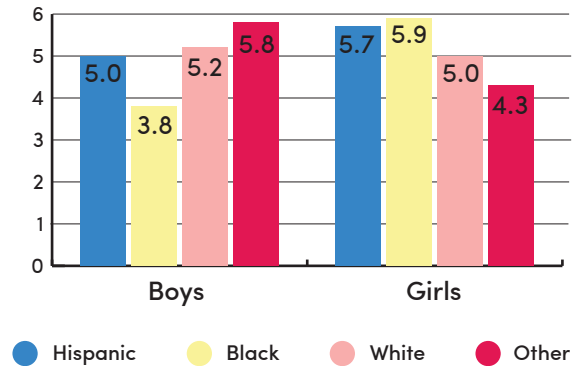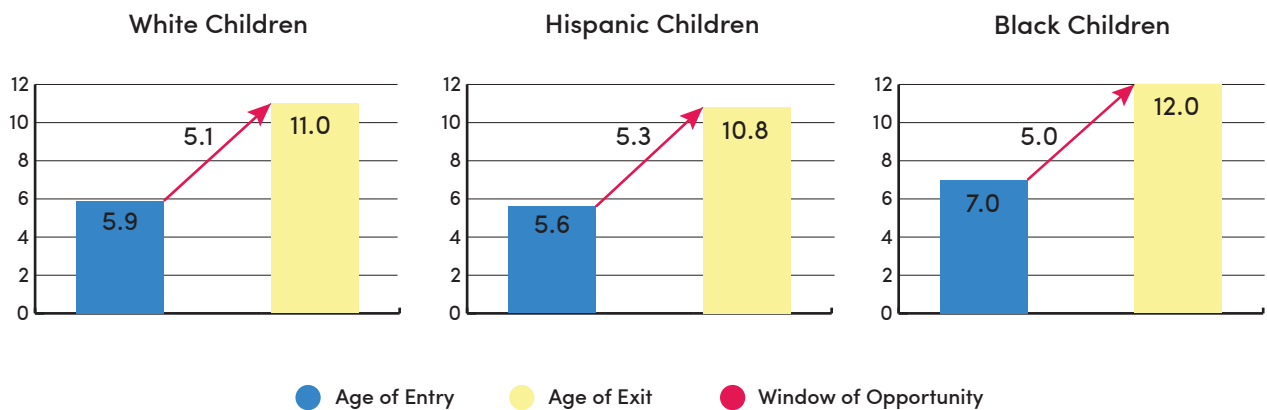er et al., 2018; Sabo & Veliz, 2014). Moreover, communities, school, and parents have been shown to devote more resources and invest more in supporting boys' participation (Amorose & Anderson-Butcher 2015; Keathley et al., 2013; McCallister et al., 2003). Thus, the increased costs for participation in public schools and community programs disproportionately affects girls' participation in sports, as parents who have limited finances prioritize their sons' participation over their daughters' (Kipp & Weiss, 2013; Zarrett et al., 2019).

Other disparities result from larger social-cultural and institutional forces that can influence youth options and access to sport as well as their interest, motivation, and the type of socialization and support they receive from parents, coaches, friends, and other important people in their lives (see Zarrett et al., 2019 for review). For example, gendered societal expectations and stereotypes about femininity, along with other cultural and religious norms, espouse messages of sport as masculine. In turn, these gendered cultural messages result in girls receiving less tangible and emotional support for participation, girls' increased likelihood of experiencing teasing and bullying from peers for playing sport, and girls' own feelings that they do not belong in sport. Barriers to initial and continued participation are even greater for girls of color, immigrant girls, and girls residing in urban regions, as cultural assumptions intersect with race/ethnicity and social class to magnify the existing environmental barriers that these girls face in accessing sports (Cooky, 2009; Sabo & Veliz, 2008). To gain a greater understanding of these disparities in participation and drop-out rates and identify areas to intervene, the current report explores how key characteristics of youth (intrapersonal), their social influences (e.g., interpersonal parent and peer factors), and experiences within the sport setting may vary by gender, age, race/ethnicity, family socioeconomic background, and region.

Figure 16. Top Reasons Parents Say Their Children Stopped Playing Sports

Reason	Percentage
No Longer Interested in Sports	35%
It Was No Longer Fun	20%
Found Another Activity They Liked Better Than Sports	19%
The Cost of Participating Was Too High	14%
Found Another Sport They Liked Better	12%
Wanted to Focus More on Studying and Grades	12%
Got More Interested in Their Social Life	10%
There Are No Programs in School or Community	10%
They Were Not A Good Enough Player	8%
Was Not Confident	8%

Figure 17. Top Reasons Children Say They Stopped Playing Sports

Reason	Percentage
No Longer Interested in Sports	37%
It Was No Longer Fun	27%
I Found Another Activity I Liked Better Than Sports	18%
I Got More Interested in My Social Life	15%
I Wanted to Focus More on Studying and Grades	14%
I Was Not A Good Enough Player	14%
It Costs Too Much	11%
I Found Another Sport I Liked Better	10%
There Are No Programs in My School or Community	9%
Did Not Like to Compete (Too Competitive an Environment)	8%

Youth Motivation and Social-Emotional (Intrapersonal) Factors

According to theory and previous research, intrapersonal motivation factors, such as how much youth find sport to be "fun," enjoy their participation, feel that they are good at it, and think their participation is valuable/important, all have substantial influence on youth choices to continue or opt out of sport (Eccles & Harold, 1991). Likewise, feeling comfortable with oneself in sport, as well as feeling connected to teammates, a sense of belonging to the group, and capable of making valuable contributions to shared team goals fuels motivation and engagement (Ames, 1992; Eccles & Harold, 1991; Nicholls, 1984; Ryan & Deci, 2000). These intrapersonal factors are influenced by youths' preconceived notions and previous personal experiences in sport, as well as by the attitudes and behaviors of important people in their lives and the cultural environment (Eccles & Harold, 1991; Zarrett & Eccles, 2009).

Enjoyment and Value

In the current study, current players were significantly much more likely to have positive feelings towards their sport ("love[d] it"). This love for the sport was steady across ages for boys (approximately half of current players across ages), but increased for girls by age, so that significantly more girls in the older age brackets reported a love of sports (72.1%) compared to boys (54.8%). These gender differences suggest that the love of sport is particularly important for girls' retention in sport. For girls, who must overcome a multitude of gendered barriers to participation, only those with the greatest love of the sport endure. Along with having a love for sport (i.e., enjoyment), youth perceptions of the importance or value of sports in their lives also differentiated current players from youth who dropped out. Not only did current players place significantly higher importance/value on playing sports than youth who dropped out, but also their parents placed greater value on sports participation (see Figure 18). In contrast, both dropouts and those who never

Figure 18. Perspectives on Playing Sports: Percentage of Parents and Children Who Thought Playing Sports Was Extremely or Very Important

Parents' Perspectives on Child Playing Sports

Children's Perspectives on Playing Sports

Legend: Current Participants | Dropouts | Never Played
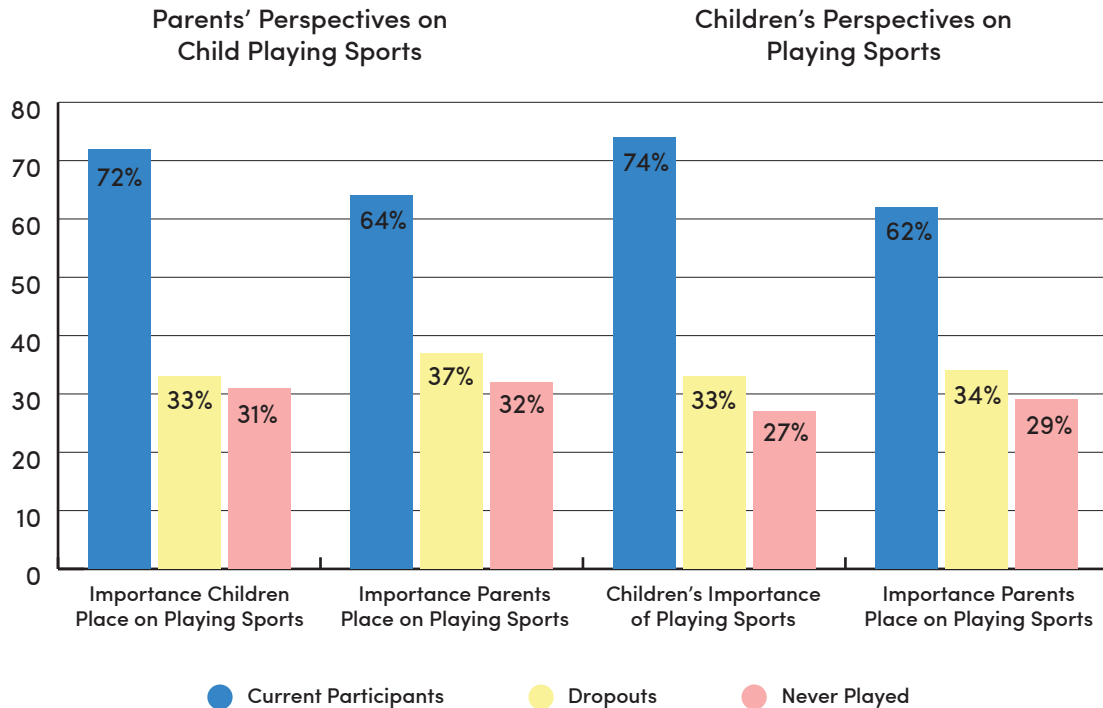
played reported they are "not/no longer interested in sports," do not think sport is fun, and "prefer other types of activities" — including "increased interest in one's social life" — as primary reasons for not participating in sport. Lack of interest was more of a barrier among older youth, who were also significantly more likely to report "greater focus on their social life" as another reason for not playing sport. This is a similar age trend for both boys and girls and more an issue in non-urban (rural, suburban) areas and for youth from higher-income households. (For youth from lower-income households and urban areas, primary deterrents had more to do with access to sport, including inability to get to practice, worries about safety, and cost) (see Figure 17 on page 18). Joining a sport or team to "be with a friend" was one of the most commonly reported reasons youth provide for initial entrance into a sport, and friendships and connection to the team were primary reasons youth provided for their enjoyment and continued participation in the sport (Blanchard et al., 2009; Weiss, 2013). As youth grow increasingly interested in their social lives during adolescence, maintaining a sport setting that supports positive social experiences within the setting and outside of sport (e.g., fun social events like team parties, excursions, etc.) where youth have opportunities to make friendships and feel connected to their team, can continue to help meet these developing social needs.

Youth and their parents also reported on the challenges of balancing time spent in sports with academic demands, with academics ranked among the top five barriers to playing sport for those who never played and youth who dropped out. However, previous research has consistently shown that sports participation supports all aspects of academic achievement, including positive academic self-concepts, a positive attitude towards schoolwork, improved academic performance and higher grades, and higher educational aspirations and attainment (Zarrett et al., 2018). Despite substantial evidence of the positive impact of sports participation on academics, a significant number of parents and youth espoused the belief that sports participation detract from youth academic achievement, and this was especially true for youth who dropped out, and youth who have never played sport. For instance, over a quarter of youth (29.6%) and their parents reported the need to focus more on studying and grades as a reason to drop out of sports or have never played (see Figures 6 and 7 on page 14 and 16 and 17 on page 18) and well over half of dropouts and three-quarters of their parents endorsed the belief that sports can get in the way of academics (see Figures 19 and 20 on following page). Academic demands were disproportionately an issue for older youth and an especially prominent deterrent for Hispanic youth and older/teen girls' participation. Parent and youth education (as well as teacher and coach education) focused on the benefits of sports participation, and ways to optimize on those benefits, is needed to change preconceived notions of sports as in competition with academic goals and outcomes to a greater understanding of all the ways

Harlem Lacrosse

participation can help support academic achievement and educational attainment. Moreover, building the sport experience to include additional academic supports, as well as community outreach, character education, and other positive social experiences can help meet youths' developing academic, physical, social, and psychological needs.

Self-Confidence, Mastery, Performance

Feeling confident and efficacious about playing and focused on mastering new skills over how well one performs in competition have been identified as key intrapersonal factors for supporting youth participation in sport (Nicholls, 1984). In the current study, when asked what they like about playing sports, current players were significantly more likely than youth who dropped out to report that they like "being good at the sports they play" and the confidence it gives them. In contrast, feeling "not good enough" and "lacking confidence" were among the top 10 reasons youth and their parents reported for dropping out of sport (see Figures 16 and 17 on page 18). Confidence may be particularly critical for girls' participation, with worries about "not playing well" and "messing up during a game/competition" significantly more prevalent among female players who dropped out of sport than among current female players (see Figure 21 on page 22). Current players also said they enjoy competing, winning, building new skills, and working to improve on those skills more so than youth who dropped out. While dropouts and those who have never played were significantly more likely to report that they "don't like to try a new skill/moves/plays because I am afraid of not being able to do it well," current players, boys and girls alike, were significantly much less likely to worry in this way. Moreover, although competition was less important

Figure 19. Children's Agreement that Participating in Sports Can Get in the Way of Academics

Strongly Agree   Agree
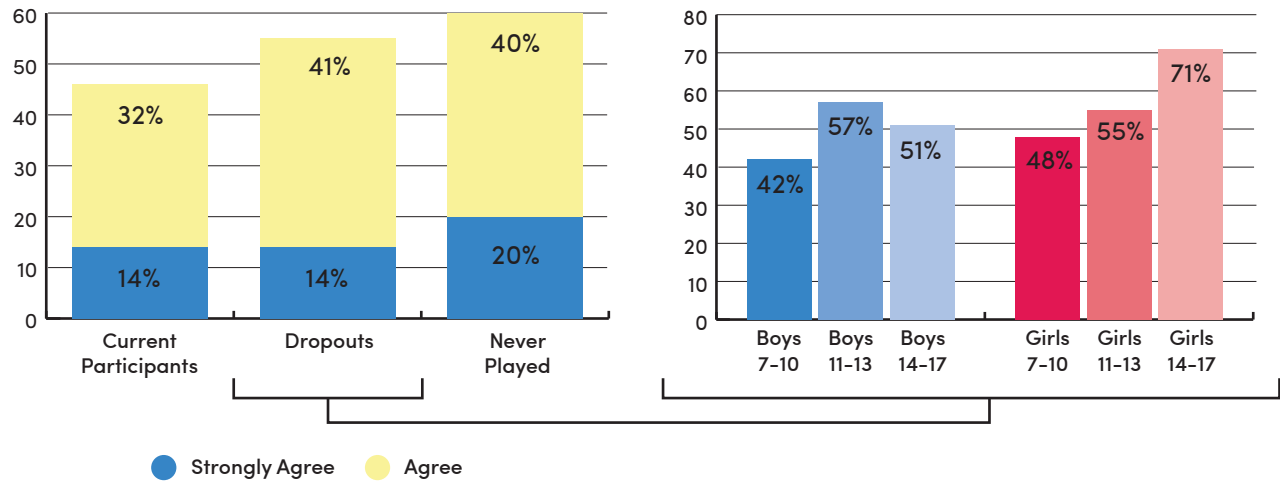
Figure 20. Parents' Agreement that Sports Can Get in the Way of Academics

Strongly Agree   Agree
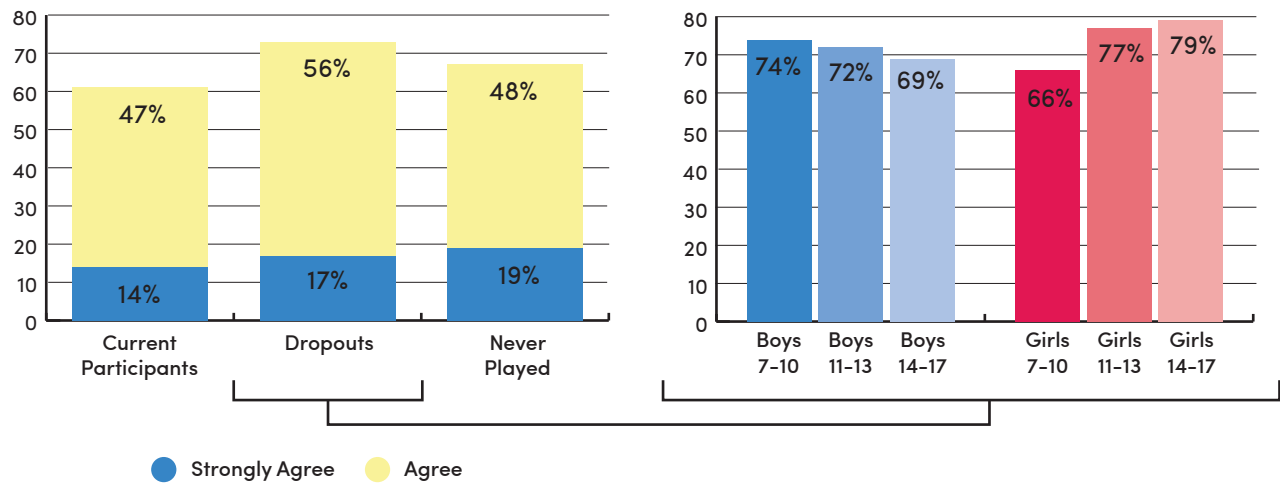
to younger girls than to younger boys, the desire for competition among current players increased with age, especially for girls, so that "competing" was identified as a critical component of enjoyment for older current players (ages 14–17) of both genders (see Figure 22 on following page). These findings, at least in part, likely reflect the increasingly competitive nature of youth sport as youth move into the teen years. The heightened competitiveness

of the sport setting leaves less-competitive youth more vulnerable to dropping out (or being selected out), and, given gender differences in competitiveness during the younger age group, this may disproportionately affect girls.

Figure 21. Things That Worry or Excite Children Who Play/Used to Play Sport

Things Children Worry About Related to Sport

	Current Participants		Dropouts	
	Pretty Worried	Very Worried	Pretty Worried	Very Worried
Not Playing Well	34%	14%	35%	15%
Messing Up During a Game or Competition	31%	16%	33%	19%
Letting My Teammates Down	31%	14%	31%	14%
Losing	24%	12%	26%	10%
Not Being as Good as My Teammates	26%	9%	30%	16%
Letting My Parent(s) Down	20%	8%	17%	9%

Things That Excite Children About Sport

	Current Participants		Dropouts	
	Pretty Excited	Very Excited	Pretty Excited	Very Excited
Playing Well	55%	41%	36%	52%
Making the Winning Play or Saving the Game or Competition	49%	40%	33%	42%
Being Someone My Teammates Can Rely On	45%	47%	29%	49%
Winning	55%	38%	38%	44%
Being Better than My Teammates	24%	45%	16%	40%
Having My Parent(s) Be Proud of Me	51%	43%	44%	44%

● ● Pretty Worried   ● ● Very Worried   ● ● Pretty Excited   ● ● Very Excited

● Current Participants   ● Dropouts

Figure 22. Agreement Among Current Sports Participants that Competing Against Others Is Enjoyable

Boys 7–10	Boys 11–13	Boys 14–17	Girls 7–10	Girls 11–13	Girls 14–17
35%	41%	47%	20%	32%	50%
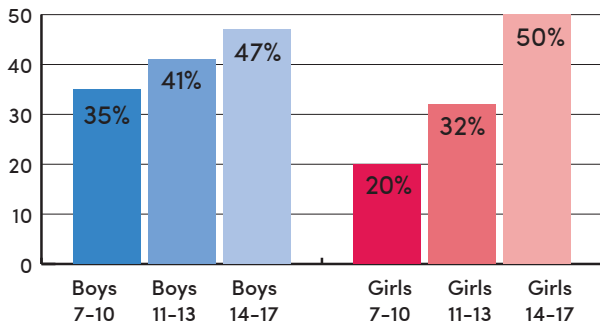
Friendship and Belonging

Research on participation motivation in sport, physical education, and exercise shows highly engaged youth report social reasons/goals as one of the primary motivations for their initial and sustained participation (Blanchard et al., 2009; Weiss, 2013). Feeling close to one's teammates, a sense of acceptance and group belonging, and having opportunities to build new friendship and to nurture existing friendships have been consistently shown to predict players' motivation and continued participation in sport (Blanchard et al., 2009; Weiss, 2013). Both current players and those who dropped out equally reported liking sport as a great way to make friends and spend time with friends. However, compared to sport dropouts, current players more often reported "feeling that they are part of a team" as a key reason

Natasha Watley Foundation

why they enjoy participating in sports (see Figure 23 on following page). The social aspects of sport may be particularly important for girls' continued participation in sport. For example, among current players, being a top player on the team (i.e., a major contributor) was defined similarly for boys and girls, and included being excited about making the winning play, being better than one's teammates, and being someone that the team can rely on. However, among youth who dropped out of sport, girls were significantly less excited than boys about making the winning play (79.2% boys vs. 70.5% girls) or being better than teammates (62.6% boys vs. 50.1% girls). Rather, the social experience of "being someone the team can rely on" was the only factor girl dropouts were equally excited about compared to boy dropouts (79.3% boys, 77.2% girls). Educating coaches and parents on these potential gender differences in how youth define their success/contributions in sport can help support girls' motivation and continued participation in sport.

Body Image/Self-Consciousness

Embedded within a culture that emphasizes to girls that physical appearance (e.g., "being pretty") is an important asset, and that being aggressive isn't "lady-like" (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; Cooky, 2009; Zarrett et al., 2019), girls have greater tendencies to be more self-conscious of their bodies, more self-critical, and compare themselves to others (Attie & Brooks-Gunn, 1989; APA Task Force, 2007; Jones et al., 2004; Jones, 2001; Roberts et al., 2018) all of which has been shown to negatively affect girls' participation in sport (Beltran-Carrillo et al., 2018). These concerns only become more pronounced with the multiple physical and psychosocial changes that occur with puberty during

adolescence (Attie & Brooks-Gunn, 1989; Beltran-Carrillo et al., 2018; James, 2000). Ironically, participation in sports has been shown to help protect youth from these negative self-assessments (e.g., Robinson & Ferraro, 2004). In fact, in the current study, the majority of parents (84%) across youth status stated that sports promote positive body image, with parents of current players especially likely to endorse this belief (93%) (see Figure 24 on page 25). Moreover, athletes appear to be benefiting from sport in this way with current players much more likely than sport dropouts and those who have never played sport to say they feel confident about their bodies (55% current players, 37% dropouts, 44% never played) and that their bodies are getting healthier (59% current players, 41% dropouts, 43% never played). They also were significantly more likely to report feeling they are the right height and size, and most likely to perceive themselves as really coordinated (49% current players, 31% dropouts, 26% never played). In contrast, dropouts and those who have never played were significantly more likely to report feeling awkward about their bodies and that they do not like the way their body looks (see Figure 25 on page 25). These differences were equivalent for boys and girls, and were greatest among older youth. Although poor body image appears to affect both boys' and girls' participation equally, self-consciousness and a focus on appearance disproportionately affects girls' participation. In particular, youth who dropped out of sport, especially girls who dropped out, reported being self-conscious about playing sports because they don't like the way they look in the uniforms, and were more likely to say they don't like playing sports because they don't like to get sweaty (see Figure 26 on page 26). Exercise/fitness was one of the top reasons both current players and dropouts (equal among boys and girls) said they like about playing sports, especially among the early and late teen group. However, when asked what they like about playing sports, current players were significantly more likely than sport dropouts to report "being strong" (i.e., celebrating the capabilities of their bodies) as something they enjoy (see Figure 23 on following page), while "losing or maintaining weight or to look better," a more appearance-based focus, was significantly more of a factor for teen dropouts (ages 14–17) compared to teens who are current players (25.4% dropouts vs. 19.8% current players), and this was especially true for teen girls who dropped out of sports (see Figure 27 on page 26). These findings support previous research, which has shown that appearance-based motivations can be detrimental to youth mental health and participation in sports and other physical activities (Taylor et al., 2019). Sport organizations for girls need to develop deliberate policy and practice to help overcome the social forces responsible for girls' heightened body awareness and appearance-based motivations. This will involve a consideration of everything from the proper fit and appearance of uniforms (e.g., too tight, skimpy, not made for females, or made for a female's growing body), to team names, to ways in which

Figure 23. Things Children Liked About Playing Sports

Category	Current Participants	Dropouts
It's a Way to Make Friends/Spend Time with Friends	51%	47%
I'm Good at the Sports I Play	50%	25%
Feeling Part of a Team	50%	41%
Running Around/Being Active	42%	37%
It's a Way to Get Exercise/Be Physically Fit	41%	36%
Winning	41%	29%
Being Physically Strong	39%	25%
Gives Me Confidence	39%	24%
I Want to Gain New Skills/Improve Existing Skills	38%	22%
Competing Against Other Teams/Individuals	37%	20%
I Have a Good Coach	35%	20%
Friendly Competition with My Teammates	31%	23%
Being Cheered On by Others	25%	23%
Wearing the Uniform and Having Team Swag	23%	17%
Cheering On the Other Members of My Team	22%	18%
Opens Doors to Play in High School or College	19%	8%
It Helps Me Lose or Maintain Weight	15%	17%
It Is Something to Do that Isn't Screen Time	12%	11%
Non-Practice/Game Activities	10%	9%

● Current Participants   ● Dropouts

Figure 24. Agreement that Sports Help Young People Develop a Positive Body Image
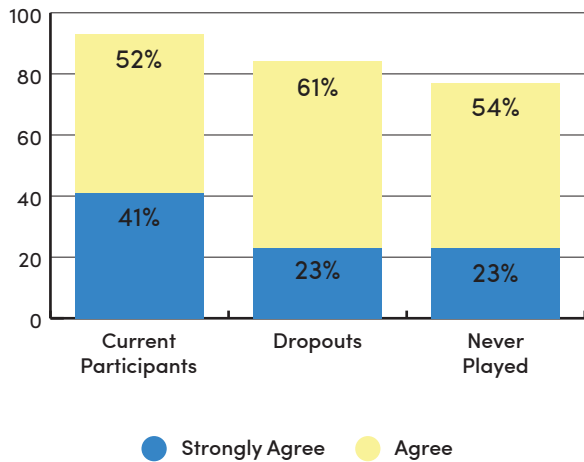
female athletes get evaluated in popular media. Although all sport settings can and should intervene in this way, particular sports identified as particularly susceptible to emphasizing girls' appearance (e.g., gymnastics, dance, volleyball) will need special attention (Crissey & Honea, 2006).

Current Participants: Strongly Agree 41%, Agree 52%
Dropouts: Strongly Agree 23%, Agree 61%
Never Played: Strongly Agree 23%, Agree 54%

Legend: Strongly Agree, Agree

Figure 25. Children's Agreement with Bodily Attitudes

I Feel Awkward About My Body
- Current Participants: Very True 9%, Sort of True 27%, Not at All True 64%
- Dropouts: Very True 14%, Sort of True 42%, Not at All True 44%
- Never Played: Very True 17%, Sort of True 33%, Not at All True 50%

I Don't Like the Way My Body Looks
- Current Participants: Very True 8%, Sort of True 23%, Not at All True 69%
- Dropouts: Very True 14%, Sort of True 35%, Not at All True 50%
- Never Played: Very True 13%, Sort of True 28%, Not at All True 59%

My Body Is Getting Healthier
- Current Participants: Very True 59%, Sort of True 38%, Not at All True 3%
- Dropouts: Very True 41%, Sort of True 53%, Not at All True 7%
- Never Played: Very True 43%, Sort of True 48%, Not at All True 9%

I Feel Confident About My Body
- Current Participants: Very True 55%, Sort of True 39%, Not at All True 6%
- Dropouts: Very True 37%, Sort of True 46%, Not at All True 17%
- Never Played: Very True 44%, Sort of True 41%, Not at All True 15%

Legend: Very True for Me, Sort of True for Me, Not at All True for Me
Current Participants, Dropouts, Never Played

Figure 26. Children's Agreement that They Don't Like to Get Sweaty

Left chart (stacked bar):

	Current Participants	Dropouts
Agree	10%	21%
Strongly Agree	6%	10%

Right chart:

Boys 7–10	Boys 11–13	Boys 14–17	Girls 7–10	Girls 11–13	Girls 14–17
23%	29%	22%	34%	38%	35%

● Strongly Agree ● Agree

Figure 27. Children's Agreement that They Play(ed) Sports Because They Want(ed) to Lose Weight or Look Better

Teens 14–17

Current Participants	Dropouts
19.8%	25.4%

Current Participants

Boys 7–10	Boys 11–13	Boys 14–17	Girls 7–10	Girls 11–13	Girls 14–17
27%	40%	41%	29%	37%	47%

Social Influences

Parents and peers have been identified as two primary socializers for promoting youth initial and continued participation in sport. For girls and other underrepresented youth in sport, having multiple champions in their daily lives can be particularly beneficial, helping to counter the cultural and social barriers that they face in playing sport (e.g., teasing, exclusion, inequality, feeling less valued).

Parent Socialization and Support
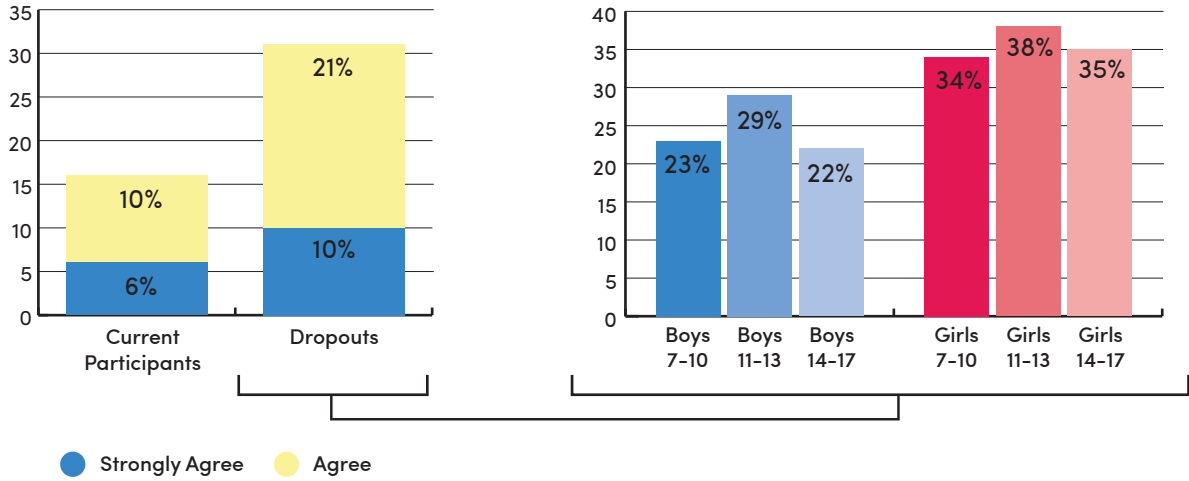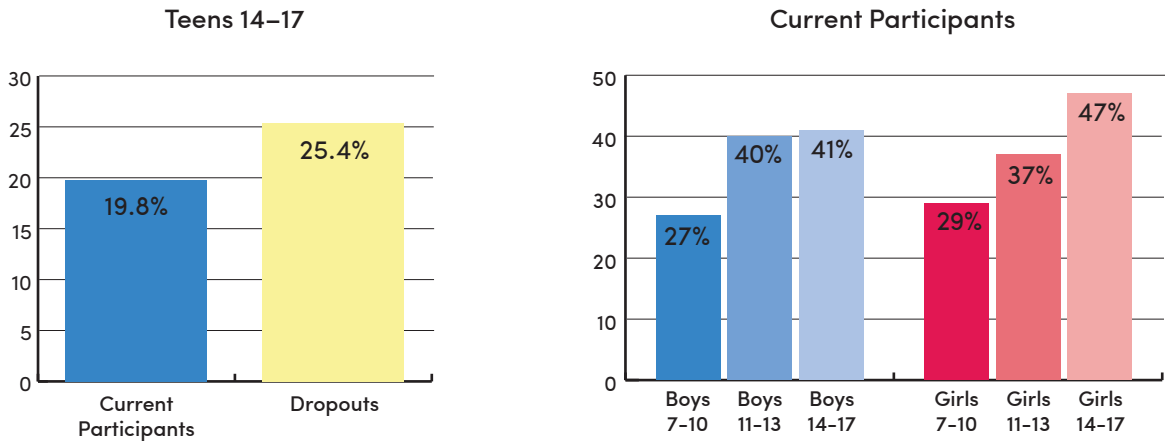
Parents have been shown to support children's participation in sport through imparting/relaying key beliefs and attitudes about sport to their children, providing exposure to role models that resonate with youth, and through direct provision of their children's sports experiences, including emotional supports (e.g., attending games, practicing with their child) and tangible supports (e.g., buying equipment, providing transportation).

Parents Beliefs and Values

Parents' perceptions of the importance/value of sports for their child as well as parents' perceived ability of their children, have been shown to be major predictors of both parents' proactive socialization of their children into sport and their children's own motivations (value and perceived ability) and engagement in sport (Eccles & Harold, 1991; Fredricks & Eccles, 2005; Bhalla & Weiss, 2010; Zarrett & Eccles, 2009).

Aligned with previous research, parents who place higher importance on playing sports in the current study were most likely to have kids who feel similarly, and who were currently playing sports (see Figure 18 on page 19). Parents of current players were also significantly more likely to view their children, both boys and girls, as one of the most skilled on their team (62% of parents), and virtually no parent reported that their child was one of the least skilled players. In contrast, parents of youth who have dropped out were significantly much less likely to view their child as one of the most skilled (only 23% of parents), and this was especially true for boys (38.6% of parents of boys compared to 47.8% of parents with girls) (see Figure 28 for age breakdown). Among current players, parents of boys tended to endorse their boys' skill similarly across age groups. However, parents of older girls were more likely to perceive their girls as particularly skilled (with much fewer parents of younger

Figure 28. Parents' View on Skill Level of Their Children vs. Teammates

Current Participants

Dropouts

- One of the Most Skilled
- About the Same as Most
- One of the Least Skilled
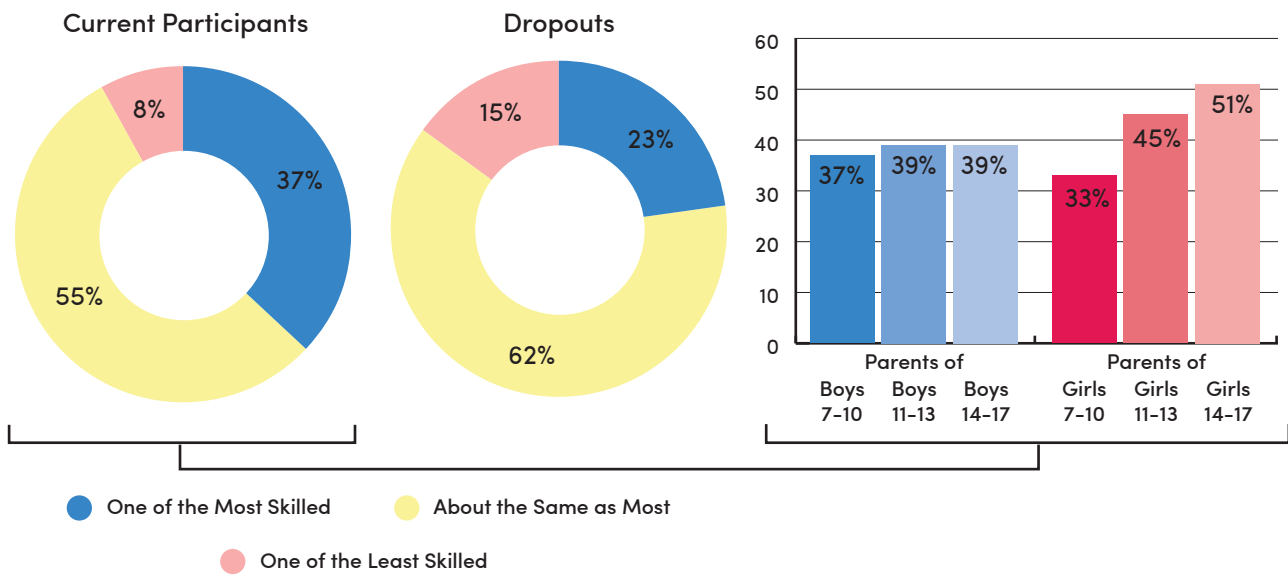
girls endorsing this). In fact, parents of teen girls were significantly more likely to perceive their girls as one of the most skilled compared to parents of boys, and th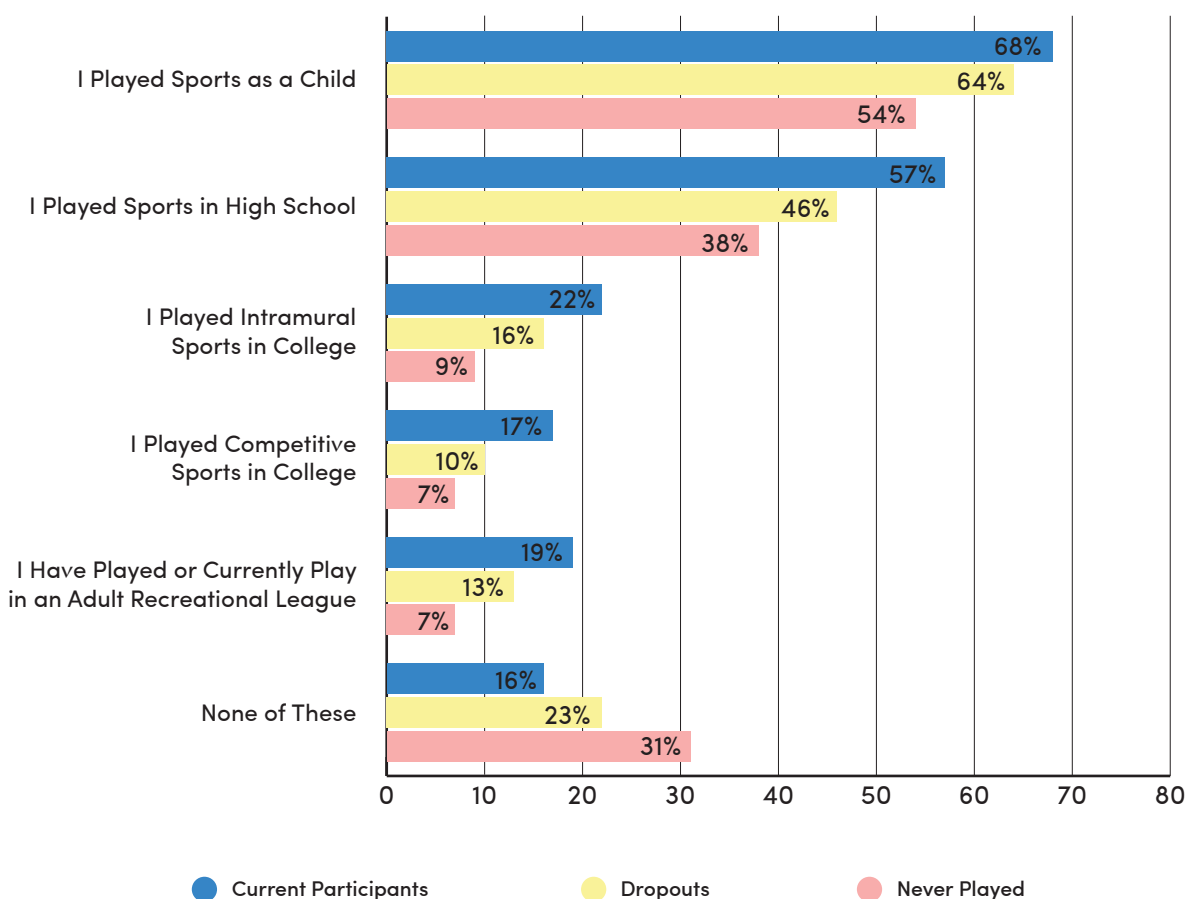is was true for both current players (58.8% of parents of boys, 69.8% of parents of girls) and dropouts (36% of parents of boys, 50% of parents of girls). Parents' perceptions of their own girls' abilities seems to be in complete juxtaposition to parents' endorsement of stereotypes about girls in sports. Alarmingly, a third of parents (32.2%) in the current study endorsed the belief that boys are better at sports than girls and this did not vary by whether their child was currently playing, dropped out, or never played sports. Parents of youth who have never played sports were also significantly more likely than other parents to endorse that girls are not as competitive as boys and that sports are more important to boys than girls. These findings highlight the dire consequences that parents' endorsement of gendered stereotypes can have on girls' entrance and experiences in sport.

Providing Role Models

Parents also support youth participation by being role models for youth and/or helping youth identify other role models within their sport by taking them to sporting events and following sports figures in the media. The provision of role models is particularly important for girls and other underrepresented youth in sport, acting as a powerful force to help youth see individuals like themselves in and around the game, that directly understand the unique experiences and challenges that they face in sport, and that they can aspire to become (Zarrett et al., 2019). In the current study, the impact of parent role modeling was evident, with parents who played sports in their youth and/or currently played sports significantly more likely to have a current player now (see Figure 29). There were some differences in parents' experiences/opportunities to be a role model in this way, with African American parents significantly less likely to have played a sport of their own, and high-income families most likely to have participated

Figure 29. Parents' Sports Experience

Legend:
- Current Participants (blue)
- Dropouts (yellow)
- Never Played (pink)

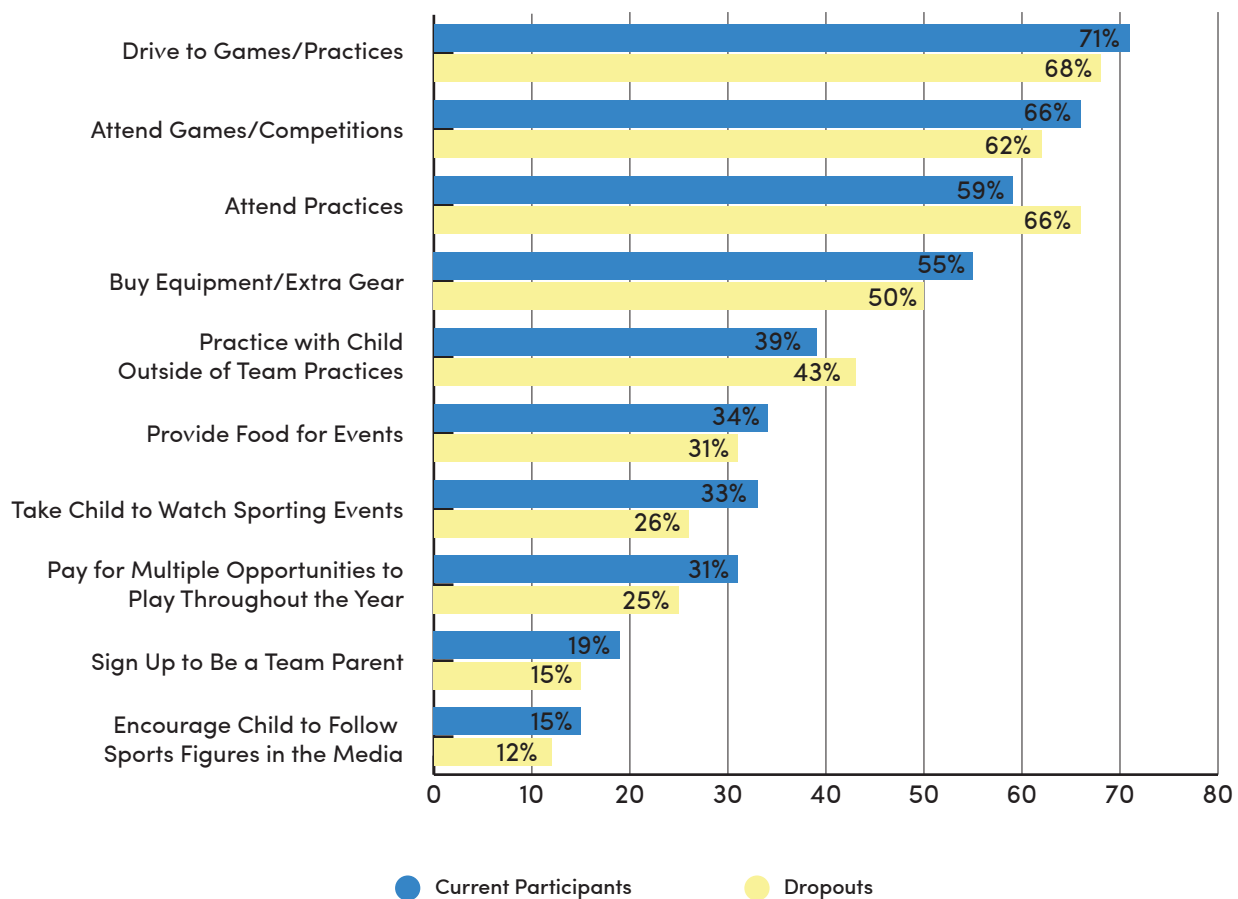| Category	Current Participants	Dropouts	Never Played
I Played Sports as a Child	68%	64%	54%
I Played Sports in High School	57%	46%	38%
I Played Intramural Sports in College	22%	16%	9%
I Played Competitive Sports in College	17%	10%	7%
I Have Played or Currently Play in an Adult Recreational League	19%	13%	7%
None of These	16%	23%	31%

throughout their childhood and currently. Parents residing in the suburbs were also significantly more likely to have more recent access/experience playing in local adult recreational leagues.

However, having previous/current experiences with sport is not the only way that parents can provide role models to their children. Providing opportunities to learn about athletes that they can identify with within their local communities (e.g., high school or college players), following sports figures in the media, attending sporting events or watching sporting events on television together are some of the ways that parents can help their child find individuals in sport that inspire them. In the current study, we found little evidence of parents supporting their youth in these ways, and gender, race/ethnic, and income disparities in parent provision of these other types of role modeling opportunities was also evident. Overall, parents provided minimal encouragement to their child to follow sports figures in the media (only 15% of parents

of current players and 12% of those of sport dropouts), with parents of boys, as well as Hispanic and African American parents, significantly more likely to provide this support (see Figure 30). Likewise, only a third of parents of current players (and 26% of parents of sport dropouts) reported taking their children to watch sporting events, and this was disproportionately a resource provided to boys and girls from middle- to higher-income households (23% among household incomes of $0-$49,999; 31.1% among household incomes of $50,000-$99,999; 33.7% among household incomes of 100,000 or higher). Among middle-income ($50,000-$99,999) households, boys were provided significantly more opportunities to watch sporting events than girls (34.7% of boys, 26.4% of girls).

Figure 30. Top Ways Parents Participate in Children's Sports

Way	Current Participants	Dropouts
Drive to Games/Practices	71%	68%
Attend Games/Competitions	66%	62%
Attend Practices	59%	66%
Buy Equipment/Extra Gear	55%	50%
Practice with Child Outside of Team Practices	39%	43%
Provide Food for Events	34%	31%
Take Child to Watch Sporting Events	33%	26%
Pay for Multiple Opportunities to Play Throughout the Year	31%	25%
Sign Up to Be a Team Parent	19%	15%
Encourage Child to Follow Sports Figures in the Media	15%	12%

● Current Participants   ● Dropouts

Parents' Tangible Supports

Although parents of current players and sport dropouts were quite similar in the types of tangible supports they have provided their children, a few key exceptions exist. In particular, parents of current players were significantly more likely to encourage involvement by paying for opportunities to play, buying equipment, and taking their child to watch sport events (see Figure 30 on previous page). These supports were differentiated by family income so that parents in higher household incomes were significantly more likely to provide these additional opportunities and supports. However, when girls' and boys' parenting experiences were examined separately, we found significant gender differences in parent involvement patterns for current players and dropouts (see Figure 31 on following page). For boys, parental support did not vary much between current players and those who dropped out. The only significant differences for boys were that parents of current players tended to bring their boys to more sporting events and to encourage following sports figures in the media and parents of dropouts reported attending their boys' practices more often. In contrast, for girls, parents of current athletes tended to provide greater supports across the majority of ways parents can be involved in

their child's sports involvement, with particularly higher involvement in providing transportation, attending games, buying equipment, providing food for games, paying for opportunities to play throughout the year, and taking their daughters to watch sporting events than parents of dropouts did. These findings highlight the powerful impact that parents can have on girls' continued participation in sport. Parent education and intervention to improve parent engagement and support in their girls' sports participation is needed to significantly reduce girls' higher rates of dropout in sport.

Peer Support

Along with building close friendships and a sense of cohesion with fellow teammates (reviewed above), the degree of support or criticism youth receive from peers in their wider social networks can also be highly influential on youth decisions to opt in or out of sport. Historically, support has been disproportionately provided to boys compared to girls, with substantial research showing that teasing and taunting (most commonly by boys) within the sport context is a frequently reported experience for girls and identified as a primary barrier to their continued participation in any physical activities (O'Dea, 2003; Slater & Tiggemann, 2010; Slater & Tiggemann, 2011; Vu

Bridge the Gap with WSF Past President Elana Meyers Taylor

Figure 31. Top Ways Parents Participate in Children's Sports, by Their Children's Gender

Drive to Games/Practices
- Current Participants, Boys: 71%
- Current Participants, Girls: 77%
- Dropouts, Boys: 69%
- Dropouts, Girls: 67%

Attend Games/Competitions
- Current Participants, Boys: 68%
- Current Participants, Girls: 69%
- Dropouts, Boys: 64%
- Dropouts, Girls: 61%

Attend Practices
- Current Participants, Boys: 61%
- Current Participants, Girls: 58%
- Dropouts, Boys: 70%
- Dropouts, Girls: 62%

Buy Equipment/Extra Gear
- Current Participants, Boys: 55%
- Current Participants, Girls: 62%
- Dropouts, Boys: 48%
- Dropouts, Girls: 52%

Practice with Child Outside of Team Practices
- Current Participants, Boys: 41%
- Current Participants, Girls: 42%
- Dropouts, Boys: 44%
- Dropouts, Girls: 41%

Provide Food for Events
- Current Participants, Boys: 36%
- Current Participants, Girls: 37%
- Dropouts, Boys: 36%
- Dropouts, Girls: 27%

Take Child to Watch Sporting Events
- Current Participants, Boys: 37%
- Current Participants, Girls: 32%
- Dropouts, Boys: 28%
- Dropouts, Girls: 25%

Pay for Multiple Opportunities to Play Throughout the Year
- Current Participants, Boys: 32%
- Current Participants, Girls: 38%
- Dropouts, Boys: 22%
- Dropouts, Girls: 28%

Sign Up to Be a Team Parent
- Current Participants, Boys: 20%
- Current Participants, Girls: 21%
- Dropouts, Boys: 14%
- Dropouts, Girls: 16%

Encourage Child to Follow Sports Figures in the Media
- Current Participants, Boys: 18%
- Current Participants, Girls: 13%
- Dropouts, Boys: 12%
- Dropouts, Girls: 11%

Legend:
- Current Participants, Boys
- Current Participants, Girls
- Dropouts, Boys
- Dropouts, Girls

et al., 2006). Compared to current players, youth who have dropped out of sports were significantly more likely to report that sometimes people make fun of them or make them feel uncomfortable while they play the sport (30% current players, 41% dropouts) (see Figure 32 below and Figure 33 on following page). However, even among current players, almost one–third reported experiencing being made fun of while playing sports. Overall, both boys and girls equally reported being teased, however boys were more likely to experience this during the younger childhood years, where girls were increasingly more likely to experience teasing through the adolescent years (see Figure 32). The lack of support and teasing teen girls endure from their peers is likely, at least in part, responsible for the heightened awareness of appearance, performance worries, and self–consciousness while playing sport that we found to be more prominent among female sport dropouts (noted above).

Woodcraft Rangers

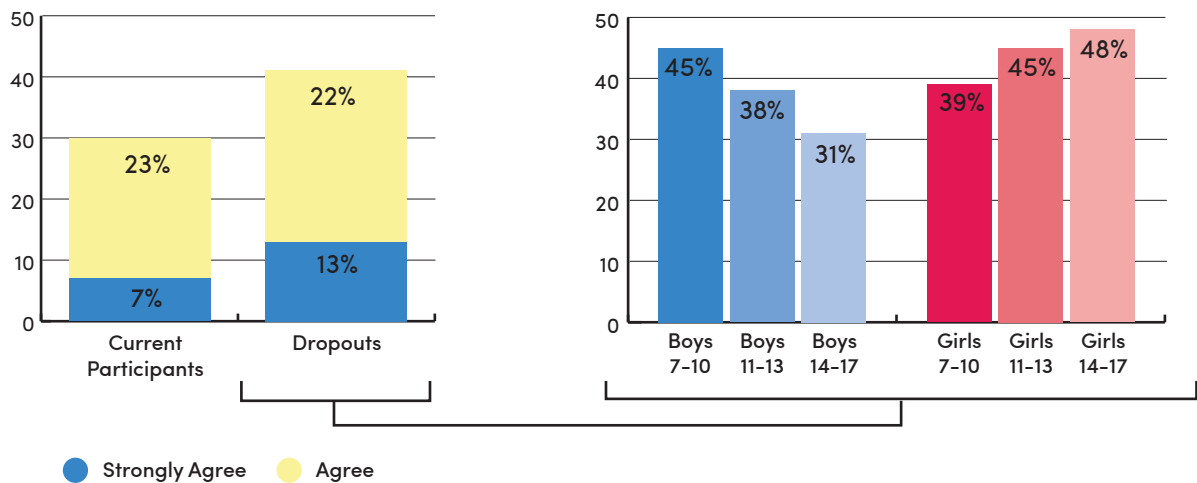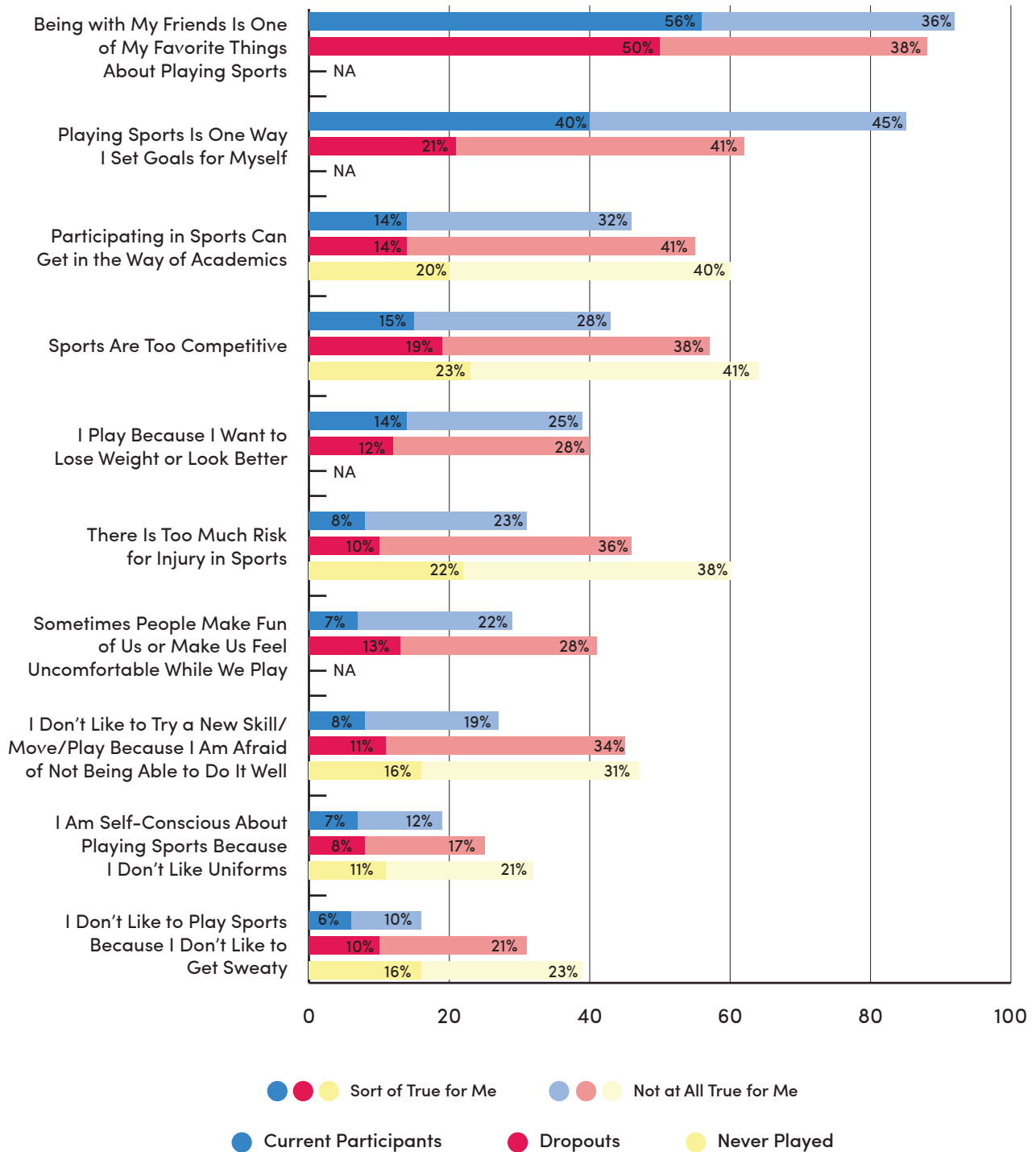**Figure 32. Children's Agreement that Sometimes People Make Fun of Then While They Play**

Legend: ● Strongly Agree ● Agree

Figure 33. Children's Agreement with Attitudinal Statements

Being with My Friends Is One of My Favorite Things About Playing Sports
- Current Participants: 56% | 36%
- Dropouts: 50% | 38%
- Never Played: NA

Playing Sports Is One Way I Set Goals for Myself
- Current Participants: 40% | 45%
- Dropouts: 21% | 41%
- Never Played: NA

Participating in Sports Can Get in the Way of Academics
- Current Participants: 14% | 32%
- Dropouts: 14% | 41%
- Never Played: 20% | 40%

Sports Are Too Competitive
- Current Participants: 15% | 28%
- Dropouts: 19% | 38%
- Never Played: 23% | 41%

I Play Because I Want to Lose Weight or Look Better
- Current Participants: 14% | 25%
- Dropouts: 12% | 28%
- Never Played: NA

There Is Too Much Risk for Injury in Sports
- Current Participants: 8% | 23%
- Dropouts: 10% | 36%
- Never Played: 22% | 38%

Sometimes People Make Fun of Us or Make Us Feel Uncomfortable While We Play
- Current Participants: 7% | 22%
- Dropouts: 13% | 28%
- Never Played: NA

I Don't Like to Try a New Skill/Move/Play Because I Am Afraid of Not Being Able to Do It Well
- Current Participants: 8% | 19%
- Dropouts: 11% | 34%
- Never Played: 16% | 31%

I Am Self-Conscious About Playing Sports Because I Don't Like Uniforms
- Current Participants: 7% | 12%
- Dropouts: 8% | 17%
- Never Played: 11% | 21%

I Don't Like to Play Sports Because I Don't Like to Get Sweaty
- Current Participants: 6% | 10%
- Dropouts: 10% | 21%
- Never Played: 16% | 23%

Legend:
- Sort of True for Me / Not at All True for Me
- Current Participants / Dropouts / Never Played

The Sports Setting (Culture of Sport and Quality of Experiences)

The quality of the sport setting is another key determinant of youth entrance and exit from sport. In particular, within the youth sport environment, coaches are a primary determinant of the nature and quality of the sport experience for players. For instance, the presence of females on the coaching staff as well as in other prominent administrative roles in the sport organization, as well as ensuring equal access to girls' sports teams/leagues and equal recruitment and playing time for girls on co-ed teams have been shown to be critical features for addressing some of the gender disparities found in youth sport (Ekholm et al., 2019; Messner & Bozada-Deas, 2009; Zarrett et al., 2019). Moreover, for all youth, the attitudes and values coaches transmit, the goals and priorities they promote, and the nature of their interactions with athletes (and their parents) can markedly influence players' enjoyment of the sport, perceived competence, and motivation and commitment towards long-term engagement (Kipp & Weiss, 2013; 2015; Weiss et al., 2009). Consequently, coaching problems or the dislike of a coach is a primary determinant of youth attrition in sport (Amarose & Smith, 2003; Anshel et al., 2009; Sirard et al., 2006), with girls more likely than boys to attribute the decision to leave sport on negative coaching experiences (Keathley et al., 2013).

Citywide Aquatics, New York City Department of Parks & Recreation with Paralympian Jessica Long
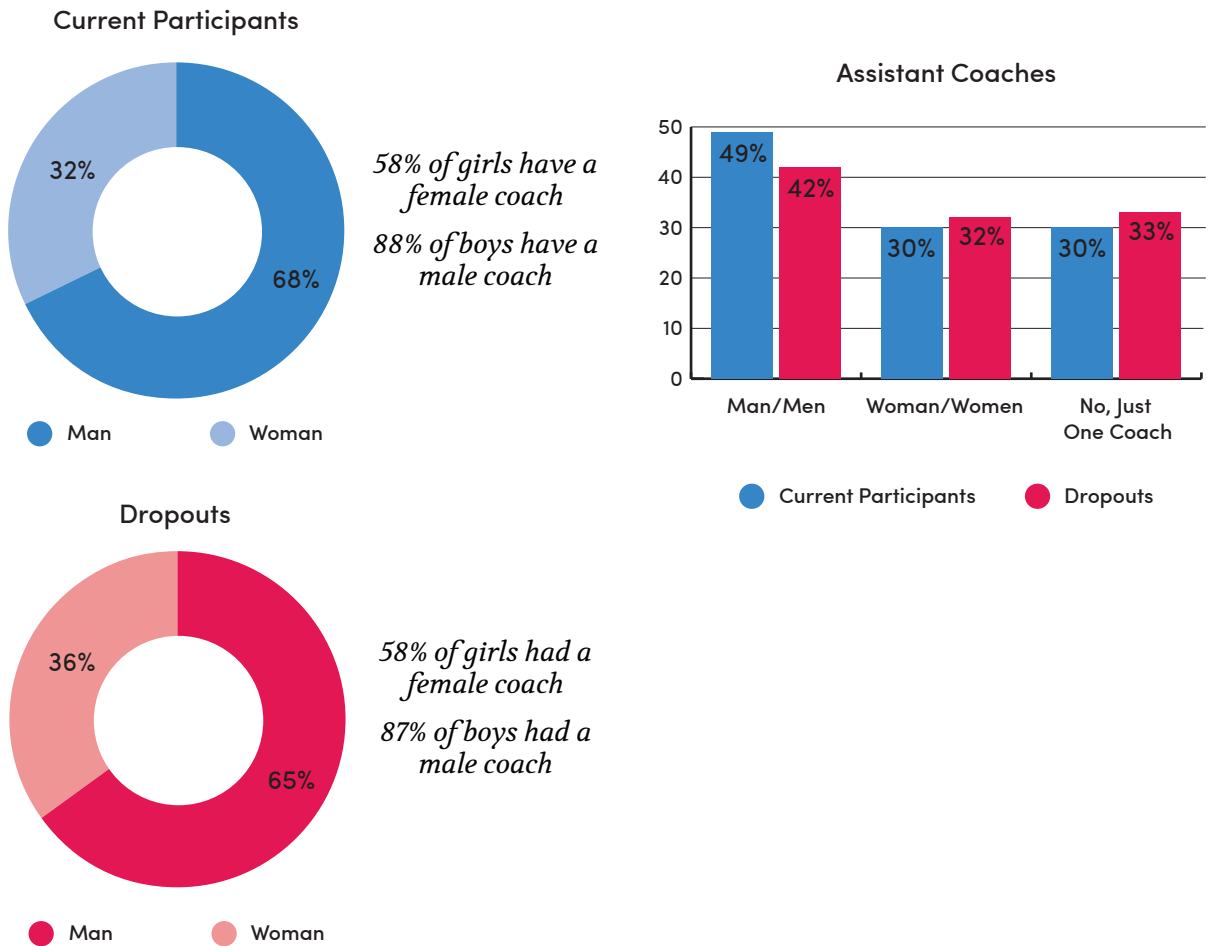
Female Role Models in the Sport Setting

Among both current players and dropouts, over two-thirds reported having coaches that were male (88% of boys' coaches were male; 42% of girls' coaches were male). Male assistant coaches were also significantly more common than female assistant coaches (see Figure 34 on following page). Despite the growing population of girls participating in sports, a 2015 survey conducted by the Sports and Fitness Industry Association reported that only 27% of the more than 6.5 million adults who coach youth teams up to age 14 are women (SFIA, 2018). Although current players, both boys and girls, report equally liking their male and female coaches, it is important for us to consider that female coaches in girls' sports have significant impact on girls' participation that goes beyond skill transfer. Female coaches are important role models for girls and enhance girls' feelings of social inclusion, offset cultural and environmental barriers, and challenges the negative cultural messages girls receive about their participation (Ekholm et al., 2019). Girls may more readily identify with and see a female coach as a mentor and/or as a role model "for what is possible," actively demonstrating to the girls that they belong and are valued in the space, which, in turn, can help girls boost their confidence and self-efficacy.

Competent (and Likable) Coaching

The nature of coaches' interactions with their players, as well as parent and youth perceptions of the competence of their coach, can markedly influence athletes' enjoyment of the sport, perceived competence, and motivation and commitment towards long-term engagement (Kipp & Weiss, 2013; 2015; Weiss et al., 2009). In turn, coaching problems or the dislike of a coach has been shown to be a primary determinant of youth attrition in sport (Amarose & Smith, 2003; Anshel et al., 2009; Sirard et al., 2006), with girls more likely than boys to attribute the decision to leave sport on negative coaching experiences (Keathley et al., 2013). The current study provides further support for the importance of coach competence and likability. Parents of current players were significantly more likely to rate their child's coach as excellent (35.8%), while more parents of sport dropouts rated the coach less positively (26.9%). Similarly, for both boys and girls, sport dropouts were significantly less likely than current players to really like their coach (57% dropouts vs. 75% current players) and more likely to have liked them only a little or not at all (17% dropouts vs. 7% current players) (see Figure 35 on page 36).

Figure 34. Gender of Coaches

Current Participants

32% Woman
68% Man

● Man ● Woman

58% of girls have a female coach

88% of boys have a male coach

Assistant Coaches

	Man/Men	Woman/Women	No, Just One Coach
Current Participants	49%	30%	30%
Dropouts	42%	32%	33%

● Current Participants ● Dropouts

Dropouts

36% Woman
65% Man

● Man ● Woman

58% of girls had a female coach

87% of boys had a male coach

Mastery-Based (Fun, Skill Development) Strategies

A developmental mastery–based approach, (Nicholls, 1984; Ames, 1992; Smith et al., 1978; Smoll et al., 1979), where coaches approach sport competition (and the competitiveness of sport, more generally) in a way that is positive and promotes (emphasizing, valuing) goals of fun, effort, dedication, and skill development alongside goals of winning, has been identified as a particularly supportive strategy related to youth achievement, enjoyment, intrinsic motivation, and long–term engagement in sport (Breiger et al., 2015; Duda & Whitehead, 1998; McArdle & Duda, 2002; Smith et al., 2008). Interestingly, in the current study, we found coaches of current players (both boys and girls) to be slightly more competitive in nature than coaches of sport dropouts, with playing time more commonly determined by youth effort and skill than just equally distributed

across players, and significantly more likely to have a equal focus on both winning and having fun (not just having fun/skill development) (see Figures 36 and 37 on page 37). Current players, both boys and girls, were significantly more likely than sport dropouts to have a coach that sets team and individual goals, and current players themselves were also significantly more likely than sport dropouts to agree that playing sports is one way they set goals for themselves (see Figure 38 on page 38).

## The Culture of Competitiveness and Performance-Based Strategies

Although a sole focus on "having fun/skill development" appears to be a deterrent for youth participation in our sample, our findings also indicate that an overly competitive environment that solely focuses on winning and player performance can also deter youth entry

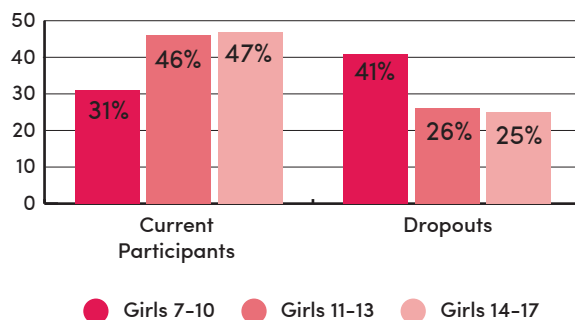## Figure 35. Children's Perspective on Coach

Boys Who "Really, Really" Like(d) Their Coach

● Boys 7–10   ● Boys 11–13   ● Boys 14–17

Girls Who "Really, Really" Like(d) Their Coach

● Girls 7–10   ● Girls 11–13   ● Girls 14–17
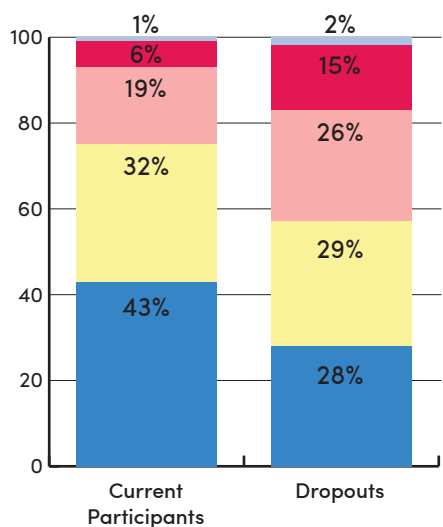
Legend:
● Really, Really Like(d) Them a Lot
● Really Like(d) Them a Lot
● Like(d) Them a Lot
● Like(d) Them a Little
● Don't/Didn't Like Them at All
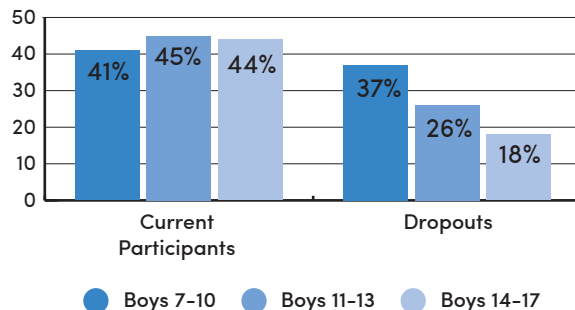
and retention in sport. This is consistent with previous research that show that when coaches are punitive for mistakes, practice favoritism (including more playing time) to athletes with the highest skill level (or those instrumental to winning), and only stress the importance of skill development in relation to the goal of winning, athletes develop high levels of performance anxiety/worry, lowered confidence/efficacy in the sport, and less enjoyment, and are at greater risk for dropping out of the sport (Duda & Whitehead, 1998; Smith et al., 2008; Roberts et al., 2007; Zarrett et al., 2019). This type of performance-based sport setting has been shown to have greater deleterious effects on girls' experiences, enjoyment, and continued participation in sport than boys'. Although boys were significantly more likely to experience a highly competitive sport setting (21.1% of boys vs. 15.2% of girls), overall prevalence rates were very low (i.e., less than one-in-five parents said their child's coach was more focused on winning games over anything else), and there were no differences in current players' and dropouts' experiences with a highly competitive sport setting (see

Figure 36 on following page). However, for both boys and girls, dropouts and those who have never played sports were significantly more likely than current players to endorse that sports are too competitive (see Figure 39 on page 38) and "too competitive an environment" made the top 10 reported reasons for dropping out or never playing sport (see Figures 6 and 7 on page 14 and Figures 16 and 17 on page 18). Our findings align with previous work that has shown that a sole emphasis on performance/winning can foster high levels of performance anxiety/worry, low levels of enjoyment, low self-esteem/confidence in the sport, and higher risk of dropout (Breiger et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2008; Duda & Whitehead, 1998; McArdle & Duda, 2002). However, given parent and youth reports of the low actual prevalence rates of coaches employing such an approach, our findings may reflect the broader cultural and social norms and assumptions around youth sport as being "highly competitive" that may deter some individuals from opting into sport. It is also possible that other socializers in the setting, like parents and peers, can heighten the competitive, performance-oriented nature

Figure 36. Parents' Perceptions of Coaches' Focus

Current Participants

- 19%
- 40%
- 41%

Dropouts

- 18%
- 50%
- 32%

- ● More Focused on Winning Games
- ● More Focused on Team Members Having Fun and Developing Skills
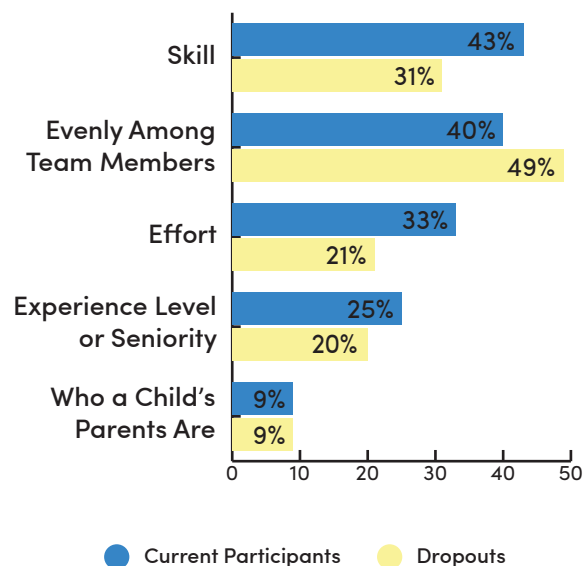- ● Equally Focused on Each
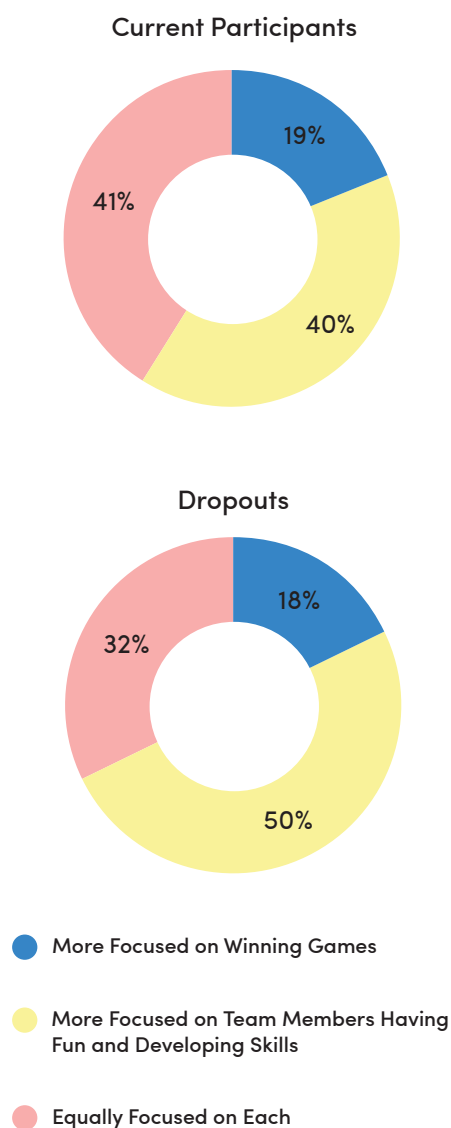
of the setting, resulting in youth experiencing too much competitive stress/pressure, even when coaches do not take this overtly competitive approach.

Safety

About a quarter of all U.S. public high school students — 7.5 million in total — participate in interscholastic sports (National Federation of State High School Associations (2012), leading to approximately 2 million high school athletic injuries to occur each year (Burt &

Figure 37. How Playing Time Is Divided

- Skill: 43% / 31%
- Evenly Among Team Members: 40% / 49%
- Effort: 33% / 21%
- Experience Level or Seniority: 25% / 20%
- Who a Child's Parents Are: 9% / 9%

● Current Participants ● Dropouts

Overpeck, 2001; Gotsch et al., 2002; National Youth Sports Foundation, 1993). We know less about prevalence rates of injury among youth prior to high school, however, about a quarter of emergency department visits by children and adolescents involve sports-related injuries. Accordingly, it should not be surprising that parents believe that sports come with a risk of injury. However, parents of sport dropouts and even more so, parents of those who have never played, were significantly much more likely to say sports come with a risk of injury than parents of current players (see Figure 40 on page 39).

Parents living in urban areas, from lower-income households, and parents of African American and Hispanic children report the most concern with the risk of injuries in sport. Although parents' concerns of safety were similar for boys and girls in the youngest and oldest age brackets, parents of boys age 11–13 tended to be disproportionately more likely to worry about their child's risk of injury compared to all others (see Figure 40 on page 39). Youth reports of concerns with safety directly resembled those of their parents, with dropouts and youth who never played most likely to express concerns about risk of injury, with disproportionate greater concern among Hispanic and African American youth, those from urban compared to rural/town or suburban areas, and youth from lower-income households (see Figure 41 on page 39).

Studies show that 20% of adolescent athletes (Veliz et al., 2017) and 28% of collegiate athletes (Katz et al., 2018) report at least one concussion during their lifetime (compared to roughly 10% of adolescent non-athletes)
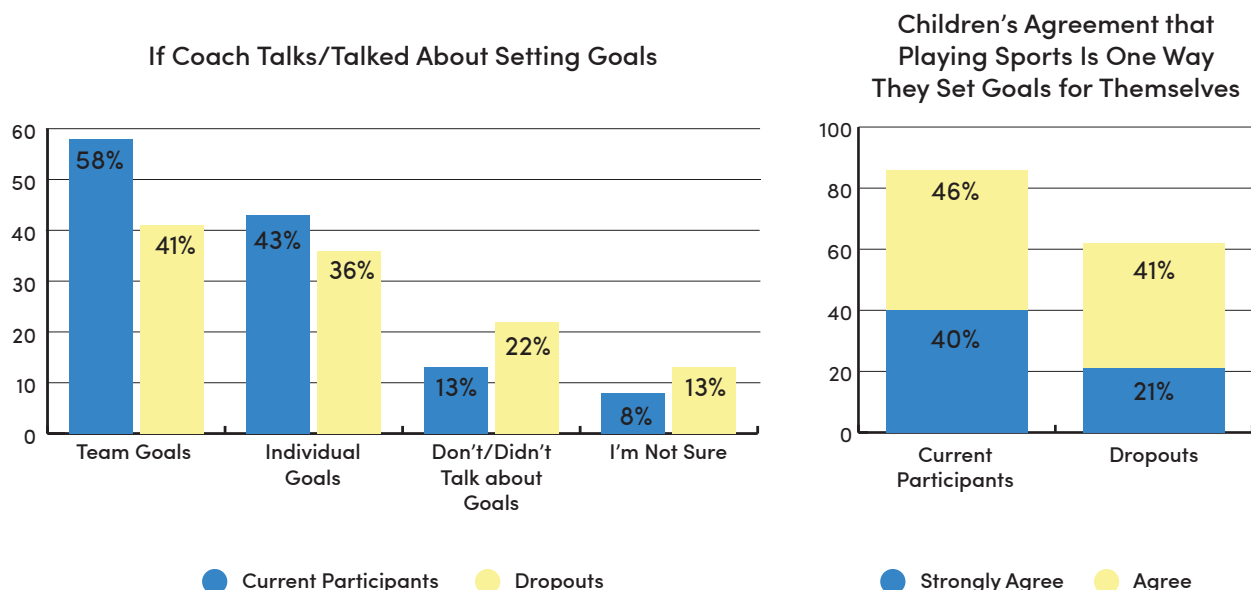
Figure 38. Children's Experiences with Goal Setting

If Coach Talks/Talked About Setting Goals

- **Current Participants**
- **Dropouts**

Children's Agreement that Playing Sports Is One Way They Set Goals for Themselves

- **Strongly Agree**
- **Agree**

Figure 39. Children's Agreement that Sports Are Too Competitive

Children Who Say Sports Are Too Competitive

- **Strongly Agree**
- **Agree**

Boys Who Say Sports Are Too Competitive

- **Boys 7–10**
- **Boys 11–13**
- **Boys 14–17**

Girls Who Say Sports Are Too Competitive

- **Girls 7–10**
- **Girls 11–13**
- **Girls 14–17**
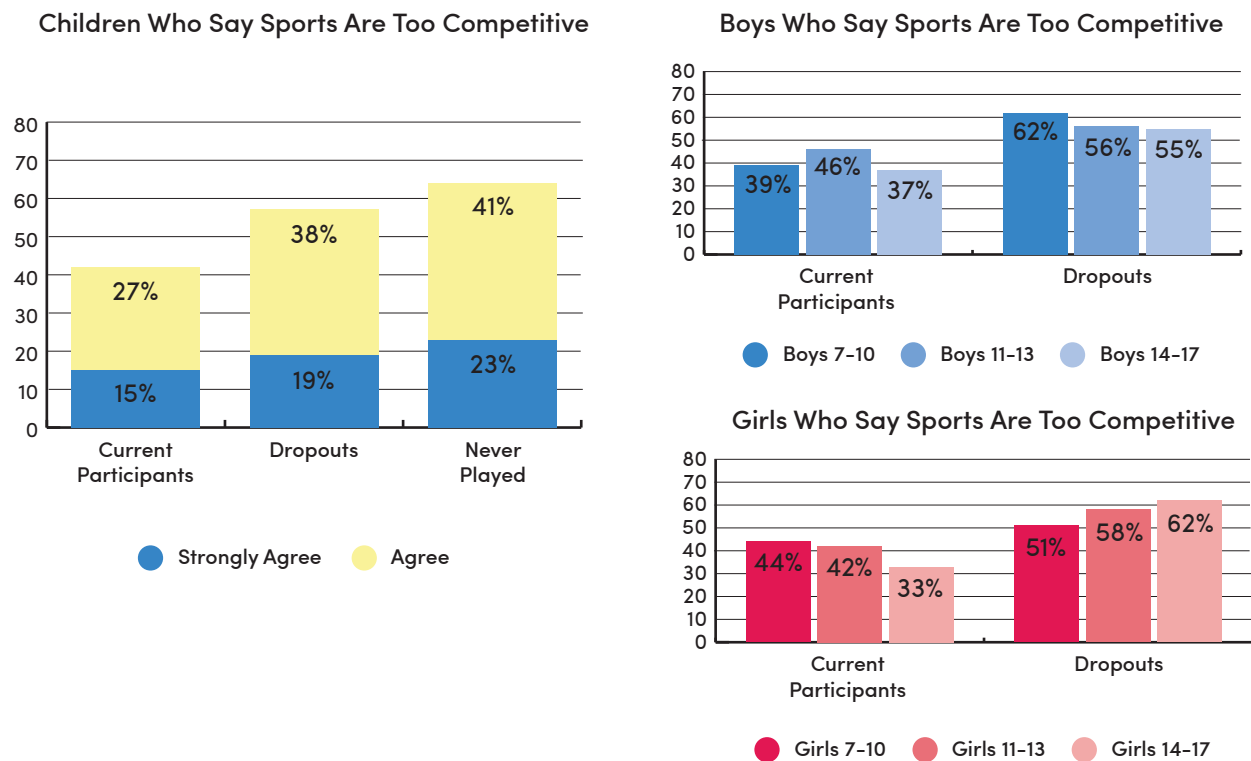
Figure 40. Parents' Agreement that Sports Have Too Much Risk for Injury

Legend: ● Strongly Agree ● Agree
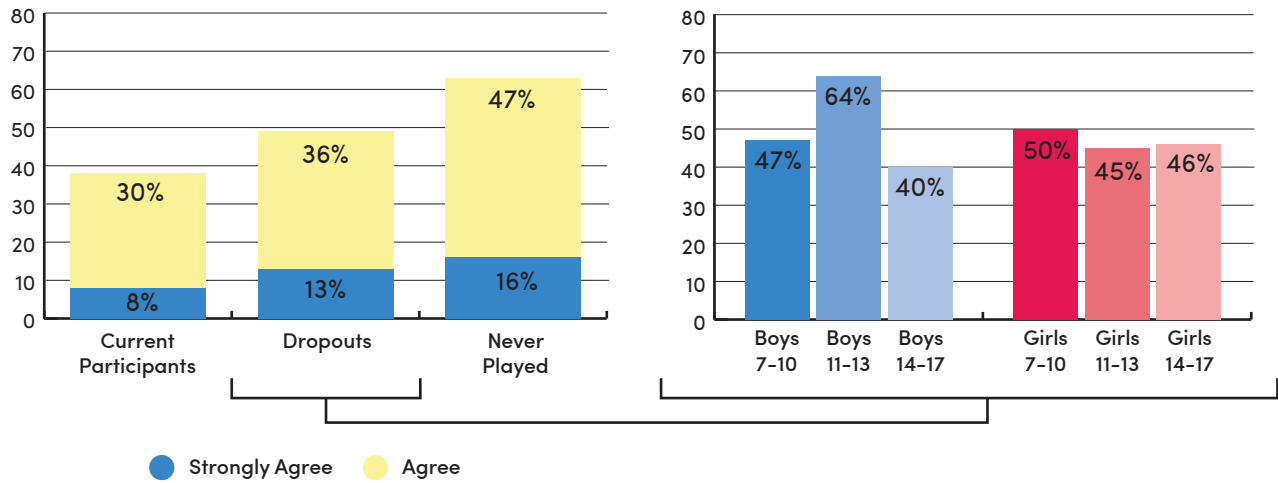
Figure 41. Children's Agreement that Sports Have Too Much Risk for Injury

Legend: ● Strongly Agree ● Agree
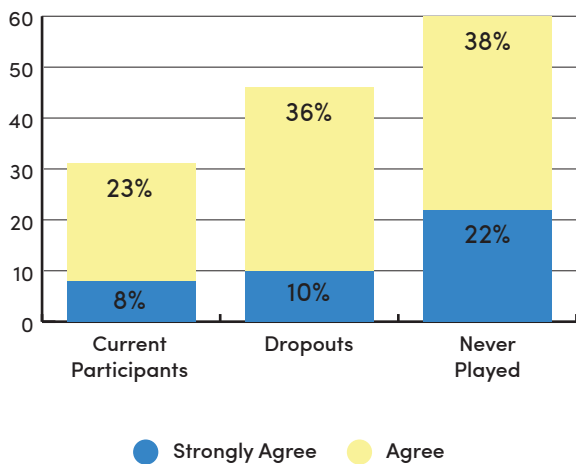
(Veliz et al., 2017). The existing literature also indicates that participation in contact sports increases the risk of a sport-related or non-sport-related concussion (Daneshvar et al., 2011; Gessel et al., 2007; Katz et al., 2018; Veliz et al., 2017). To date little is known regarding concussion rates across different competitive sports based on large-scale epidemiological surveys of adolescents. With respect to parent reports, incidence of concussion among current players and youth who dropped out of sport in our sample was low (approximately 5.2%) and similar across boys (5.9%) and girls (4.4%). Our data suggests that experiencing an injury, like a concussion, can have an impact on some kids' decisions to continue with sports. While injury was not reported as a top factor for leaving sports (only 2–3% of youth stopped sport due to injury, and current players and sport dropouts were equally likely to report having had a concussion in the past), the majority of youth athletes who sustain a concussion have either contemplated stopping or have stopped playing the sport altogether (see Figure 42 on following page).

Figure 42. Incidence and Results of Having a Concussion from Playing Sports

Incidence of Concussions from
Playing Sports

Results of Having a Concussion

Current Participants

38%
23%
39%

Dropouts

15%
26%
59%

- 🔵 Decided to Stop Playing
- 🟡 Thought of Stopping, Decided to Continue
- 🩷 Didn't Think About Stopping Playing
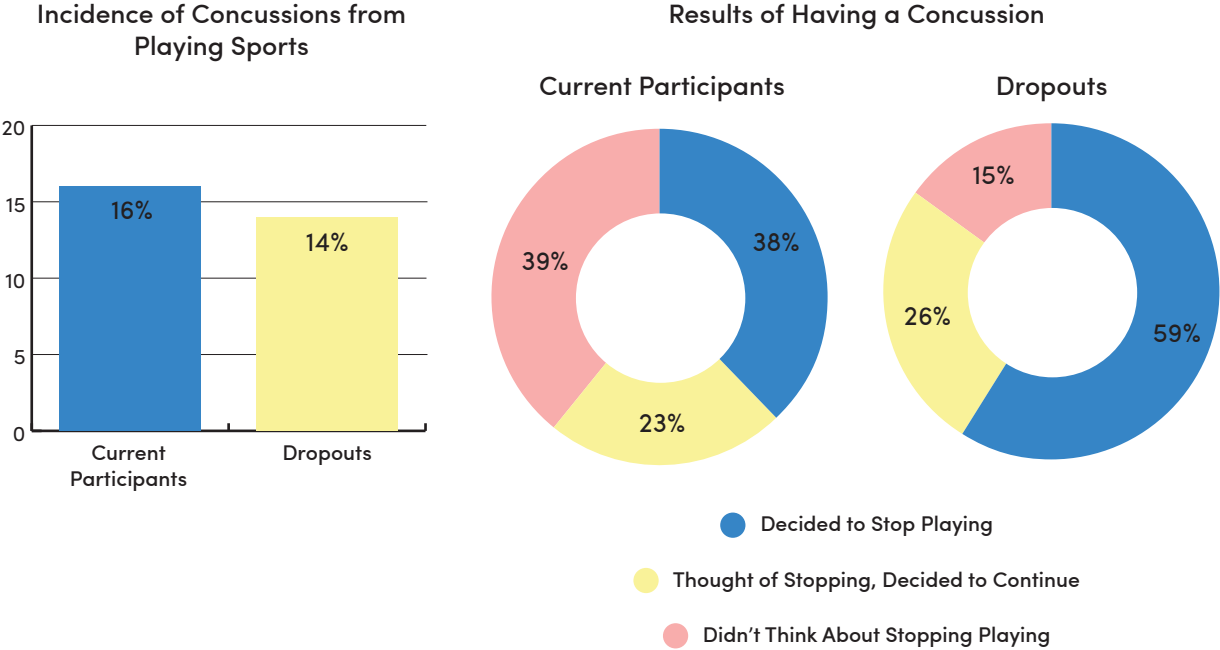
Natasha Watley Foundation

Conclusions

The current report is one of the first studies of its kind to systematically examine processes influencing youth entry, retention, and exit from sports. To gain a greater understanding of gender, race/ethnicity, and socio-economic disparities found in participation and dropout, and identify areas to intervene, the current report explores how key characteristics of youth (intrapersonal), their social influences (e.g., interpersonal parent and peer factors), and experiences within the sport setting may vary by gender, age, race/ethnicity, family socioeconomic background, and region. The study identified several key findings and areas to intervene.

First and foremost, more work needs to be done to improve access and inclusion in sport with an alarming 40% of girls and one-third of boys having never played sport in our sample, and over one-third dropping out of sport. The cost of sport not only remains a primary determinant of youth entrance into sport, but also plays a major role in determining who can stay in sport, disproportionately affecting girls' participation, especially girls of color. Gendered cultural norms are also still a major barrier for girls' participation in sport, influencing all aspects of girls' experiences in sport. Parents' endorsement of stereotyped beliefs that boys are better at sports than girls or sports are more important for boys than girls, and experiencing teasing and bullying from peers for playing sport can lead to heightened awareness of appearance and self-consciousness when playing sports and performance worries/anxiety that put girls at greater risk of dropping out. Coupling these experiences with a lack of female presence on the coaching staff and in other prominent administrative roles within sport organizations only further espouses messages to girls that they do not belong in sport.

For girls and other underrepresented youth in sport, having multiple champions for sport in their daily lives can be particularly effective for countering the cultural and social barriers that they face in playing sport. Findings from this report highlight the powerful impact that parents can have on girls' continued participation in sport in particular. There are clear distinctions between parents of current athletes and parents of dropouts in the quantity and quality of support they provide their girls in sport. Girls who stay in sport have parents who believe that it is important for their daughter to play sports and perceive that their daughter is good at sports. They also have parents who provide transportation, attend games, buy equipment, provide food for games, pay for opportunities to play throughout the year, watch sporting events with them, and act as role models in sport (i.e., playing sport themselves). Parent education and intervention to improve parental engagement and support in their girls' sports participation is needed to significantly reduce girls' higher rates of dropout in sport.

Coaches also play a central role in getting and keeping youth involved in sports. Liking one's coach and viewing them as competent is related to athletes' love for, and retention in, sport. Maintaining youth's love of sport is critical, especially in the face of multiple competing interests (e.g., social life) and demands (e.g., academics, paid work) that emerge through the childhood and adolescent years. Fostering youths' continued love of sport through building confidence, a sense of mastery, and connection to one's teammates is critical. Youth who stay in sport have coaches who set team and individual goals and place an equal focus on both winning and having fun (i.e., not just winning or not just having fun). Together, these qualities of a coach may help impart/reinforce to players that their playing matters, that their efforts are paying off, and that the coach cares about their growth as athletes. Moreover, designing female sports programs through the lens of gender interest (e.g., opportunities for social engagement) and building the sport experience to include community outreach, character education, academic supports, and other positive social experiences can help meet youth's varied developmental needs. For youth who are not as interested in the competitive aspects of sports, multiple types of sport options need to be available, accessible, equally advertised, and equally valued as competitive options in order to meet the needs of youth who have other motivations for playing.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current report provides an insightful snapshot into youth participation experiences and potential causes for dropout, prompting the need for further longitudinal exploration of the critical factors required to the keep youth in sport. Previous research has demonstrated that many youth who exit sport re-enter the same sport or a different sport later on (this included approximately 33% of youth who dropped out of sport in one study; Carlman et al., 2013). A longitudinal design will also enable researchers to determine what factors result in exiting sports permanently compared to a potential temporary lapse in participation. We likely did not address all of the correlates of sport attrition. For example, physical/biological factors like weight, height, and pubertal timing can likely have an impact on initial and continued participation (see Balish et al., 2014 for review), as well as community-level (e.g., number of and distance to recreational facilities) and policy-level factors (e.g., gender-equity policy, economic incentives). For some youth, dropping out of sport may have been a result of being "pushed out" or "cut" from the team. These factors will need to be further disentangled in future research. This report also did not address a comprehensive list of all disparities found in youth access/opportunities in sports. For example, gender and sexual minority youth have been shown to be significantly marginalized in sport (Anderson, 2013). Likewise, youth with physical, mental, or behavioral disability have significantly less access to quality sport programming and few resources to support their engagement (Shields & Synnot, 2016). Greater attention towards understanding and addressing the unique challenges of these marginalized groups is critical. Developing inclusive and safe sport settings for all youth should be our ultimate goal.

Nicole Ross and Nzingha Prescod

Policy and Practice Recommendations

Recommendations Directed Towards Parents and Caregivers of Athletes

1. Educate parents/guardians. Communicate regularly with these key influencers in children's lives. Highlight the value of sport participation through promotional and educational materials that emphasize the physical, emotional, social, and academic/career benefits. Make it easy for parents to access information about program availability, including scholarship opportunities and transportation. Program coordinators can set expectations and instill their philosophies by holding pre-season educational sessions with parents and caregivers.

2. Educate parents and caregivers about how they can support their daughters' sport participation. Strategies to do this include:

    a. Reinforcing that being active is important by the words you say and actions you display. For instance, taking action shots, rather than posed pictures, of your child and display them in your home. Be proud of your athlete!

    b. Emphasizing fun, fitness, and healthy competition when talking about the joys of sport participation.

    c. Not commenting on your child's body size or shape.

    d. Ensuring your child has the proper equipment by either purchasing it or finding programs that supply equipment to all participants.

    e. Making an effort to watch her games and considering volunteering for the team.

    f. Making sure she has safe transportation to and from practices and games.

    g. Being an active role model; intentionally setting aside time to be active with your child and helping them practice fundamental skills.

    h. Providing examples of active women by watching and attending women's sporting events, watching sport documentaries on female athletes, or reading sport books and media publications.

    i. Encouraging your child to follow media sites that cover women's sport such as espnW or The GIST (https://www.thegistnews.ca/)

Recommendations for Teams, Organizations, and Leagues

3. Start by performing a needs analysis to better understand specific barriers to participation and constraints. After conducting a needs analysis, consider the proposed sport program's level of inclusiveness. We can think of inclusive spaces on four domains (see Cunningham, 2019):

    a. **Physical:** the safety of the sport event (including traveling to and from the sport event), as well as provisions to ensure that people can participate fully while also wearing various kinds of attire.

    b. **Psychological:** the absence of psychological or emotional hardships to which participants might be exposed and the development of trust, sharing, engagement, and a common in-group identity.

    c. **Sociocultural and Political:** the acceptance that participants feel, as well as their ability to express openly social identities, beliefs, and attitudes important to them.

    d. **Experimental:** the participants' ability to take risks and experiment at the sporting event. This domain is likely to have both physical (e.g., learning and experimenting with new technical skills) and psychological (e.g., reaching out and communicating with other participants) elements.

4. When attempting to enhance inclusion and increase participation within communities that have higher dropout rates or instances where children have never played sport, work with leaders who live and work within the target community. These individuals are often the best source of information and can help build inclusive sport spaces.

5. In addition, be sure to train and empower coaches who are local to the area to help ensure the initiatives gain traction and are sustainable over time. Finally, systematically evaluate the effectiveness of the program by surveying and/or interviewing participants, volunteers, and support staff. Such feedback highlights points of pride and areas for improvements that will allow the program to meet the needs of the community.

Wendy Hilliard Gymnastics Foundation

6. Find new and creative ways to promote opportunities for girls to participate in a wide variety of sports, including non-traditional sport pathways, to encourage more adolescent girls to participate, regardless of their ability level or interest level in traditionally offered sport.

    a. For instance, quidditch— adapted from the fictional sport of the same name in the Happy Potter book series—is a mixed-gender sport that integrates aspects of dodgeball, rugby, tag, and capture-the-flag. More importantly, both the popular press and empirical research show how the sport promotes inclusivity, reduces gender stereotyping, and increases self-confidence and pride among female participants (Cohen et al., 2014).

    b. Another way to creatively increase participation in middle school and high school is by offering intramural programs and activity clubs. Activities can be based on students' choices and range from friendly competition in a variety of sports (e.g., kickball, quidditch, flag football, pickleball) to yoga, dance lessons, or fitness classes. If a school's budget is constrained, walking programs offer an easy, low-cost option. Additionally, programs can recruit parents, retired coaches, or high school/college athletes to supervise and officiate the intramural sports. For more information on how to start these initiatives, visit: https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/activity/intramural-programs-activity-clubs/

7. Evolve your program with the changes of youth sport needs and interests. A child's enjoyment, cost of participation, and safety will continue to be primary concerns for parents. Survey your participants and use publicly available resources to track what sports are most appealing. For instance, the Aspen Institute Sports & Society Project Play Healthy Sport Index can provide guidance on the health benefits and risks of popular youth sports.

8. Emphasize team building and inclusion when creating and strengthening girls' sport experiences while simultaneously remaining focused on the fitness benefits of sport. Organize activities with both fitness and sociability in mind in order to increase girls' motivation for participating in school sport specifically.

9. Educate girls on the synergy between sport participation and academic pursuits and how both can provide them opportunities in the future. Support girls' academic pursuits by teaching time management skills and supporting balanced relationships with both athletics and academics.

10. Foster a supportive climate for girls from marginalized groups by creating a welcoming, safe, and inclusive environment through policy and practice.

    a. Signal you provide a welcoming environment by including images of girls from all backgrounds in your promotional materials. Also, highlight video testimonials from participants who can talk about how they feel welcomed in the space. Women Win's digital storytelling project provides an example of how you can highlight girls' voices in print and media. See https://www.womenwin.org/stories/digital-storytelling-project

    b. Reduce bullying in sport and signal that your program is a safe space for girls by:

        •   Clearly stating the core values that are upheld in the space

        •   Setting norms and expectations that foster a safe space

        •   Implementing an anti-discrimination policy

        •   Teaching girls and parents how to identify and respond to bullying behaviors (https://www.stopbullying.gov/ provides comprehensive training materials on how to prevent and assess bullying).

    c. Eliminate instances of abuse

        •   Take responsibility for protecting girls against abuse. Many sport organizations, at all levels, do not have adequate policies or procedures. They need to work with experts from various fields to develop effective policies. At a base level, there must be a procedure for filing complaints and involving the police if necessary.

- Implement, evaluate, and continuously refine the policies you enact.

- Mandate training for all coaches, parents, and athletes associated with the sport organization. The U.S. Center for SPORTSAFE provides resources and training that can be found on their website, https://uscenterforsafesport.org/.

11. Embrace the power that positive mentors and role models have on participation through programming. Young girls seeing professional women athletes can increase aspirations in both participation and in professional sport careers. As such, hold free clinics that are run by top female athletes in the area. College and high school athletes who volunteer can use the clinics as a way to give back to the community and perhaps create new fans for their teams.

12. Given the importance of having female role models, make a concerted effort to recruit women to coach and lead your sport programs. For example, require that at least 50% of your teams are coached by women.

13. Through surveys or interviews, identify why girls enjoy (or are turned off by) sport. Using the data, provide sport programs that meet the participants needs and wants. However, all programming—traditional and innovative—should emphasize the physical, mental, social, and academic/career benefits of sport participation (discussed in the report). To close the participation gap among older high school girls, it might be particularly important to communicate the link between sport participation and academic/career success. For instance, draw from data that show 94% of women who hold C-suite level positions are former athletes and 52% played in college (Hinds, 2018).

14. Develop opportunities for girls to participate in mixed-gender teams and to work on policies to ensure positive participation environments to support girls and boys, and women and men, as they learn to play and compete together.

15. Develop more methods to help inform girls, coaches, teachers, and others about ways that they can get involved in sport not only as athletes but also as coaches, administrators, and executives, and in the full array of other roles they could play working in sport. Ensure that outreach is culturally and linguistically relevant and accessible.

16. Embrace the use of technology in sport through collaboration. As screen time continues to rise in importance for youth, it is important to find collaborative ways to incorporate the use of technology to drive sport and physical activity participation (Staiano et al., 2016).

17. Provide youth coaches with tools and resources that maximize girls' participation and retention, and address girls' needs, challenges, motivations, and strengths. Integrate best practices that includes striking a balance between fun, skill development, and competition (winning); viewing mistakes as opportunities to learn and adjust; and providing good technical instruction for improvement. Move past simplistic masculinized ways of defining competitiveness (winning at all costs, external outcomes) to definitions of healthy competition that involve skill development, growth, and progression in individual players and their goals. Finally, survey families who leave sport to understand how they can make improvements at the individual or organization level.

18. Make coach background checks, qualifications, and education a priority for your youth sport organization. For instance, U.S. Soccer offers both in-person and online youth coaching clinics (The Aspen Institute, 2018). Other sport organizations should follow the same formula, making education and training convenient for coaches to aid in completion. Offer trainings that not only relate to teaching skill development but also cover issues related to diversity and inclusion (e.g., gender stereotypes, implicit bias, cultural competency).

19. Seek out funding and programs in underserved communities. Given the inequities around access that girls face in underserved communities, there is a need for more funding to support advocacy efforts in those communities. As mentioned previously, sport organizations should engage stakeholders in the community to help partner in awareness, outreach

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and fundraising efforts. As articulated on the Olympic Games website, "Sport is one of the most powerful platforms for promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls (https://www.olympic.org/gender-equality). To gain support, it is helpful to show local companies how sponsoring girls' sports aligns with their commitment to gender equality. In addition, their support can help level the playing field for girls and women in the sport industry (for more information, see https://www.marketingweek.com/brands-level-playing-field-women-sport/)

Recommendations Geared Toward Enhancing Girls' Experiences

20. Although the onus for creating a safe and welcoming sports experience for girls should not be on the girls themselves, programs can help girls adopt positive behaviors and attitudes. Consider the Positive Space Network's Safer Space policy at the University of Victoria. Such a policy can help establish how girls within a group should interact. Recommendations include:

    a. Respect your own physical, mental, and emotional boundaries.

    b. Stay attuned to your own needs and remember that you are welcome to take time away from the group should you feel that you need time alone or away from the group.

    c. If something doesn't feel right to you, please speak up. You may not be the only one who feels that way.

    d. Be assertive if possible. If you have a concern with someone, be direct.

    e. Respect others' physical, mental, and emotional boundaries.

    f. Always ask for explicit verbal consent before engaging or touching someone. Never assume consent. It is important to remember that consent is not always implied, even with people that one is typically very close to.

    g. Don't assume the race, ethnicity, culture, sexuality, gender, history with violence, etc., of others. Instead, ask if someone is open to engaging in dialogue about identity. Don't take it personally if someone doesn't want to answer a question.

Coco Vendeweghe

h. If at all possible, find out what pronouns people prefer or use neutral pronouns such as they or ze.

i. Respect the confidentiality of others. Respect the privacy of information, narratives, and experiences that others share with you.

j. Respect diverse opinions, beliefs, and points of view. Share ideas rather than judgments.

Recommendations for the Sport Industry as a Whole

21. Commit to multi-year corporate partnership deals with girls' sport organizations and leagues to ensure they are financially sustainable. As mentioned above, from a financial standpoint, sponsoring girls' sports allow brands to reach and connect with new audiences (Kidd, 2018). In addition, financial support can signal an organization's support for gender equality. Corporations can also fund community and high school sports, which would help close the gap on "pay to play" model that is pervasive in youth sport.

Recommendations for the Media

The quantity and quality of media coverage of girls and women in sport could be vastly improved. Improved coverage would most likely lead girls to see their sports participation valued by society. These recommendations are from the Nieman Foundation at Harvard; Springer, 2019; and Cooky et al., 2015.

22. Commit to consistent media coverage of women's sports. While covering women's sports during sports mega-events is important, to build and sustain audiences and fan bases, sports media need to cover women's sports on an everyday basis. This allows readers and fans to build anticipation, understand strategies, and know players and teams. Focusing on lesser-known stories and backstories helps build and sustain a loyal fan base.

23. Deliver knowledgeable coverage: The more knowledgeable those in sports media are, the more information they will convey to readers/ viewers/ consumers. This will enhance the knowledge of audiences and fans, which will in turn create more interest in women's sports coverage. As it is, audiences need to invest more time, energy, and effort to find the detailed information that is readily accessible in men's sports content.

24. Improve the quality of women's sports coverage to mirror the coverage of men's sports. This requires moving beyond conventional narratives of female athletes and delving into complex understandings and nuanced narratives that reject gender stereotypes and roles (e.g., female athlete as "girl next door," mother balancing work and child-rearing,

Erica Wheeler, Basketball, WSF Athlete Ambassador

or object of men's sexual desire). Frame ideas and questions that are athlete-driven, rather than gender-driven, in order to avoid some of the issues that often plague women's sports coverage, like femininity, attractiveness, and biology.

25. Present women's sports stories in ways roughly equivalent in quality with the typical presentation of men's sports. This refers, of course, both to the technical quality—deploying ample game footage, graphics, music, and interviews to accompany a story—and to the quality of the sports anchor's verbal presentation, including amplifying the enthusiasm in reporting women's sports to a level on the excitement meter that is equivalent with the usual presentation of men's sports.

26. Hire, develop, and retain more women in sports media. Hire and retain on-camera sports anchors that are capable and willing to commit to gender-equitable quality and quantity of coverage. Sports media need to open the occupation to more women. Perhaps just as important, hiring and retention decisions should prioritize anchors and analysts— women and men—who are knowledgeable about and love women's sports.

Appendix: Survey of Girls and Their Parents

Parents' Screener

Thank you for your interest in this survey. We are talking to people across the country and are interested in your thoughts and opinions. Before we begin, we have a few questions to see if you qualify.

Are you male or female?

1. Male
2. Female

In what year were you born?

What is your age?

Are you of Spanish, Hispanic or Latino descent?

1. No, I am not
2. Yes

Please check one or more categories below to indicate which race(s) you consider yourself to be.

1. White
2. Black or African American
3. American Indian or Alaska Native
4. Asian/Pacific Islander
5. Two or more races or other

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

1. Did not graduate from high school
2. High school graduate
3. Some college, but no degree (yet)
4. 2-year college degree
5. 4-year college degree
6. Postgraduate degree (MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, etc.)

What is your marital status?

1. Married, living with spouse
2. Separated
3. Divorced
4. Widowed
5. Single, never married
6. Domestic partnership

What is your State of Residence?

What is your zip code?

How would you describe the place where you live?

1. City
2. Suburb
3. Town
4. Rural area
5. Other, Please Specify

In which census region do you live?

1. Northeast
2. Midwest
3. South
4. West

Thinking back over the last year, what was your family's annual income?

1. Less than $10,000
2. $10,000 – $19,999
3. $20,000 – $29,999
4. $30,000 – $39,999
5. $40,000 – $49,999
6. $50,000 – $59,999
7. $60,000 – $69,999
8. $70,000 – $79,999
9. $80,000 – $99,999
10. $100,000 – $119,999
11. $120,000 – $149,999
12. $150,000 or more
13. Prefer not to say
14. $150,000 – $199,999
15. $200,000 – $249,999
16. $250,000 – $349,999
17. $350,000 – $499,999
18. $500,000 or more

Are you the parent or guardian of any children under the age of 18?

1. Yes (How many children?)

2. No

If Yes, please specify

- Child's First name

- Child Gender (Male, Female)

- Child age

Activities Ever Played Among All Children in Household

S1a. Which activities have the children listed below participated in during their lifetime?

1. Music

2. Acting/singing/performing arts

3. Dance

4. Girl/Boy Scouts

5. Community service activities

6. Religious education

7. After-school academic tutoring/enrichment

8. Art/drawing lessons

9. School clubs (school government, chess club)

10. Sports/athletic activities

11. None of these

Current Activities Of All Children in Household

S1b. And in which activities does [CHILD] currently participate?

1. Music

2. Acting/singing/performing arts

3. Dance

4. Girl/Boy Scouts

5. Community service activities

6. Religious education

7. After-school academic tutoring/enrichment

8. Art/drawing lessons

9. School clubs (school government, chess club)

10. Sports/athletic activities

11. None of these

Whether Current Sports Are Organized
Base: All Children Currently Playing Sports

S2a. Are the sports or athletic activities that this child currently participates /these children currently participate in, organized, or are they informal sports or athletic activities?

1. Organized: there is a coach or instructor and there are regularly scheduled practices, training sessions or competitions

2. Informal: Pick up, at the playground, or in PE/ gym class

3. Participates in both organized and informal sports/ athletic activities

Whether Past Sports Were Organized
Base: All Children Not Currently Playing Organized Sports Who Played Any Sport in Past

S2b. Were any of the sports or athletic activities that this child participated in previously/these children participated in] organized or informal sports or athletic activities?

1. Organized: there is a coach or instructor and there are regularly scheduled practices, training sessions or competitions

2. Informal: Pick up, at the playground, or in PE/ gym class

3. Participates in both organized and informal sports/ athletic activities

Parents: Youth Sports Background

Thank you for answering some questions about you and your child. For this survey, we'd like to hear from both you and your child. Both your participation and your child's participation are extremely important to the success of this project.

In appreciation for you and your child's participation, you will receive X points upon completion. If you have more than one child in the qualifying age range, we will randomly select a child to participate. Only this child should participate in the children's section and they do not need to be available immediately upon completion of your section of the survey. The combined survey should take about 15 minutes to complete.

For the remainder of this survey, we'd like you to answer thinking about your [AGE] son/daughter [NAME].

First, to help us compare our survey respondents to the U.S. population, is [NAME] of Spanish, Hispanic or Latino descent?

1. No
2. Yes

And, please check one or more categories below to indicate which race(s) you consider [NAME] to be.

1. White
2. Black or African American
3. American Indian or Alaska Native
4. Asian/Pacific Islander
5. Two or more races or other

Q1a. How tall is [CHILD]? Please enter their height in inches below. Your best estimate is fine.

Q1b. Approximately how much does [CHILD] weigh? Please enter their weight in pounds below. Your best estimate is fine. As a reminder, all responses are anonymous, we just ask this to help with our analysis of groups of people.

Organized Sports Ever Played
Base: Assigned Child Ever Played Organized Sports

Q1. Which of the following organized sports or athletic activities has [INSERT CHILD] ever played? Again, when we say "organized sports or athletic activities," we are referring to an activity where there is a coach or instructor and there are regularly scheduled practices, training sessions or competitions. Please select all that apply.

1. Archery
2. Baseball/Softball
3. Basketball
4. Cheerleading
5. Crew
6. Dance
7. Equestrian
8. Field hockey
9. Football
10. Golf
11. Gymnastics
12. Ice Hockey
13. Ice Skating
14. Lacrosse
15. Martial arts (karate, taekwondo, etc.)
16. Rugby
17. Soccer
18. Swimming/diving
19. Tennis
20. Track/cross country
21. Weightlifting
22. Wrestling
23. Volleyball
24. Other (Specify)

Age Started/Stopped/Frequency of Playing Organized Sports Ever Played
Base: Assigned Child Ever Played Organized Sports

Q2. For each sport that [CHILD] has ever played, please enter how old they were when they started playing organized sports and when they stopped (if they stopped)]. Here we are not referring to a season ending, but to a decision being made that they would no longer play that sport. There is also a column to say how often they play or played. Regarding the frequency of playing or participating, please think only about your child's most recent, active season for the sport and please include practices along with games/competitions. Please enter your best estimate, using whole numbers.

1. Age Started
2. Age Stopped (or Currently Playing)
3. Playing Frequency During the Season
   - Every Day
   - 5–6 days per week
   - 3–4 days per week
   - 1–2 days per week
   - Less often

Whether Cheer Is Competitive
Base: Children Who Ever Participated in Organized Cheer

Q2a. Are the cheerleading activities that this child participated/participates in competitive in nature, or not?

1. Competitive, child/team participates in competitions
2. Not competitive, supports other teams only
3. Combination of both competitive and team support

Organization Through Which Child Plays Organized Sport
Base: Child Currently Plays Organized Sport

Q3. For each organized sport or activity that [CHILD] is involved in, please indicate where they play through. Select all that currently apply for each sport.

1. School
2. Church or house of worship
3. Community program
4. Private organization or club (including AAU or travel club)

Type of School Team Child Plays on
Base: Child Plays on Any School Team in Q3.

Q3a. For each sport below, does [child] play intramural or club, junior varsity or varsity? Select all that currently apply for each sport.

1. Intramural or school club (where students play against other students in the same school)
2. Middle school
3. Freshman/froshmore (freshman and sophomores)
4. Junior varsity (JV)
5. Varsity

Type of Non-School Team Child Plays On
Base: Child Plays on Any Team Outside of School in Q3

Q3b. For each sport below that [child] plays outside of school, how would you characterize the level of play?

1. Recreational
2. Competitive travel team
3. Premier/elite team

Parents: Views on Youth Sports, Sports Participation & Drop Out

Benefits Parents Want From Sports
Base: Child Ever Played Or Currently Plays Organized Sports

Q3c. What are the top five most important benefits that you want(ed) [CHILD] to get from playing sports?

I want(ed) [CHILD] to...

1. Be physically fit/healthy
2. Learn sport–specific skills (i.e., throwing, catching, hitting a ball, etc.)

3. Develop life skills (i.e. persistence, work ethic, etc.)
4. Have a sense of belonging and/or a way to make friends
5. Experience a competitive environment
6. Become more confident
7. Have the ability to play at a higher level in the future
8. Have fun
9. Have time away from screens (tablets, phones, TVs, etc.)
10. Develop leadership skills
11. Build connections to the community and/or the school
12. Have positive relationships with adults
13. Have the opportunity to earn a college scholarship/ help her get into college
14. Develop an appreciation for what their body can do

Parents' View on Child's Skill
Base: Child Ever Played or Currently Plays Organized Sports

Q4. How would you compare [CHILD]'s ability to that of her teammates for each of the sports she participates in? Select one response in each column.

1. One of the most skilled
2. About the same as most
3. One of the least skilled

Parents' Views on Importance Child Playing Sports

Q5. How important is it to you that [NAME] plays sports?

1. Extremely Important
2. Very Important
3. Somewhat Important
4. Not Very Important
5. Not Important at all

Parents' Views on Importance Child Places on Sports

Q6. How important is it to [NAME] that she plays sports?

1. Extremely Important
2. Very Important
3. Somewhat Important
4. Not Very Important
5. Not Important at all

Reasons Stopped Playing Sports

For this next section we are going to ask you about one specific sport that your child used to play, but no longer plays.

Q7. There are many reasons why some young people stop playing organized or team sports. Please tell me why [CHILD] stopped playing organized or team [SPORT]. Please select all that apply.

1. To care for younger brothers or sisters
2. [He/She/They] got a job
3. It was no longer fun
4. No longer interested
5. [He/She/They] had a problem traveling to practices
6. I worried about [his/her/their] safety
7. [He/She/They] worried about [his/her/their] safety
8. The cost of participating was too high
9. [He/She/They] did not like or get along with the coach
10. [He/She/They] [was/were] not a good enough player
11. [He/She/They] wanted to focus more on studying and grades
12. [He/She/They] got more interested [his/her/their] social life
13. There are no programs in [his/her/their] school or community
14. Didn't feel like [he/she/they] belonged on the team (did not feel [he/she/they] had any friends/connections)
15. Was not confident
16. Did not like to compete (too competitive an environment)
17. [He/She/They] found another sport [he/she/they] liked better
18. [He/She/They] found another activity they liked better than sports (e.g., theater)
19. [He/She/They] got injured playing the sport [specify injury]
20. [He/She/They] [was/were] bullied by team members
21. I didn't make the competitive school/travel team and do not want to continue playing on the local recreational team anymore
22. Other (Specify)

Parents' Feeling on Child's Exit from Sport
Base: Child Assigned to Does Not Currently Play Organized Sport, But Did in the Past

Q8. Which of the following best describes how you feel about your [CHILD] stopping [his/her/their] involvement with organized or team [SPORT]?

1. Very happy
2. Somewhat happy
3. Neither happy nor disappointed
4. Somewhat disappointed
5. Very disappointed

Parents' Sports Participation

Q9. Please select all statements that apply for you, personally.

1. I played sports as child
2. I played sports in high school
3. I played intramural sports in college
4. I played competitive sports in college
5. I have played or currently play in an adult recreational league
6. None of these

XS Tennis and Education Foundation

Parents' Attitudinal Statements on Sports

Q10. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each statement below.

COLUMNS

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree

3. Disagree

4. Strongly disagree

ROWS

1. Coaches should make having fun more of a priority

2. Sports are more important for boys than for girls

3. Participating in sports promotes leadership and teamwork skills that students may not necessarily be exposed to in the classroom

4. Participating in sport can get in the way of academics

5. Girls do not like to be as competitive as boys in sports

6. Playing sports has become too expensive

7. Playing sports has become too time-consuming

8. Please select "Agree" for this row

9. Boys tend to be better at sports than girls

10. There is too much risk for injury in sports

11. Playing sports helps young people develop a positive body image

Parents: Youth Sports Injuries

Whether Child Ever Had Sports Injury
Base: Child Ever Played or Currently Plays Organized Sports

Q11. Has [CHILD] ever had an injury occur as a result of playing or participating in an organized sport or athletic activity?

1. Yes

2. No

Type Of Sports Injury Child Had
Base: Child Had A Sports Injury

Q12. Which of the following types of injuries has [child] experienced as a result of playing or participating in an organized sport or athletic activity? Select all that apply.

1. Sprain or strain

2. Torn ligament/tendon

3. Serious bruising (contusion)

4. Any cut requiring stitches, staples or other closure by a medical professional

5. Broken bone (including fractures)

6. Head injury (including, but not limited to concussions)

7. Other (Specify)

Number of Head Injuries
Base: Head Injury Selected At Q12

Q13. How many head injuries has [child] experienced as a result of playing or participating in an organized sport or athletic activity?

Q14. Of those, how many were diagnosed by a medical professional as a concussion?

Parents: Ways Support Child's Sports

Parents' Participation in Child's Sports
Base: Child Ever Played or Currently Plays Organized Sports

Q15. Now we'd like to talk about the ways in which you might participate in [CHILD]'s participation in [SPORT]. Which of the following do/did you do?

1. Attend games/competitions

2. Attend practices

3. Drive him/her/them to games/practices

4. Practice with him/her/them outside of team practices

5. Provide food for events

6. Coach or instruct the team (in an official capacity)

7. Sponsor the team

8. Sign up to be a "Team Parent"

9. Take him/her/them to watch sporting events

10. Encourage him/her/them to follow sports figures in the media

11. Buy him/her/them books about women playing sports/written by athletes

12. Buy equipment/extra gear

13. Pay for multiple opportunities to play throughout the year

14. None of these

Frequency of Parents' Participation in Child's Sports
Base: Parent Participated in Items 1,2,3,4,5 In Q15

Q16. And how often do/did you do each of the activities listed below, during the time or season when [CHILD] is/was participating in [SPORT]?

COLUMNS

1. 3 or more times per week

2. Twice a week

3. Once a week

4. Several times a month

5. Once a month

6. Less often than monthly

ROWS

1. Attend games/competitions

2. Attend practices

3. Drive her to games/practices

4. Coach the team (in an official capacity)

5. Practice with her outside of team practices

6. Sponsor the team

7. Provide food for events

Parents: Views on Coaches

Parents' Rating of Coach
Base: Child Assigned to Ever Played or Currently Plays Organized Sport

Q17. Now we'd like to talk about [CHILD]'s [SPORT] coach. If [CHILD] has/had multiple coaches for [SPORT], please think about the head coach.

Please note: We use the word "coach" when referring to either a coach or an instructor. So if you think of the adult in charge of your child's sport or activity as an instructor, please answer thinking of that person, even if the question asks about a "coach."

Overall, how good of a coach do you think [CHILD]'s [SPORT] coach is/was?

1. Excellent

2. Very Good

3. Good

4. Fair

5. Poor

Wendy Hillard Gymnastics Foundation with WSF Past President Wendy Hillard

Parents' View on How Coach Determined Playing Time
Base: Child Assigned to Ever Played or Currently Plays Organized Sport

Q18. How does/did [CHILD]'s [SPORT] coach determine playing time? Please select all the factors that you think influence(d) their decision.

1. Skill

2. Effort

3. Experience level or seniority

4. Who a child's parents are

5. The coach distributes playing time evenly/equally among team members

Parents' View on Coach Orientation of Winning vs. Fun
Base: Child Assigned to Ever Played or Currently Plays Organized Sport

Q19. Do you think [CHILD]'s [SPORT] coach is/was...

1. More focused on winning games

2. More focused on team members having fun and/or developing their skills

3. Or equally focused on both

Parents: Reasons Child Never Played Sports

Reasons Child Never Played Sports
Base: Child Never Played Organized Sports

Q20. There are many reasons why some young people do not play an organized or team sport. Please select the reasons why [CHILD] has never played an organized or team sport?

1.   [He/She/They] had to care for younger brothers or sisters

2.   [He/She/They] had a job

3.   [He/She/They] [does/do] not think sports or physical activity is fun

4.   [He/She/They] would have a problem traveling to practices

5.   I worry about [his/her/their] safety

6.   [He/She/They] worried about [his/her/their] safety

7.   The cost of participating was too high

8.   [He/She/They] [is/are] not athletic

9.   [He/She/They] wanted to focus more on studying and grades

10. [He/She/They] got more interested in [his/her/their] social life

11. There are no programs in [his/her/their] school or community

12. He/She/They [is/are] not interested in sports

13. He/She/They [does/do] not like the competitiveness of organized sports

14. He/She/They [prefers/prefer] to participate in other types of activities (e.g., theater)

15. I did not know enough about sports to help [him/her/them] build the skill set to compete

16. Other (Specify)

The remainder of the questions are for [CHILD].

Do you consent to your child participating in a survey regarding sports?

1.   Yes

2.   No (I understand selecting this option will end the survey)

We ask that you remain with your child for the duration of the survey. [IF CHILD_AGE=7–9: Please feel free to help your child read any of the questions they need help with, but it is important that your child's responses be entered as she sees fit.]

Is [CHILD] currently available to take the survey?

1.   Yes

2.   No, but available at a later time

Please have [CHILD] take the survey as soon as possible. When your child is ready to take her portion of the survey, simply click on the link provided in the email sent to you. We highly recommend she uses the same computer or device you used to complete your portion of the survey. Remember, you cannot receive the X,000 points for your participation unless you and your child complete the survey!

Kids: Sports Background

Thank you for answering some questions for us today. We want you to know that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions we will ask you, and that no one will be linking your answers to who you are. We are interested in the different opinions of [kids/people] your age, so please give us honest answers!

Child's Favorite Things to Do

K1. Your parent has told us a little bit about some of the things you like to do. From the list below, what are your top 5 favorite things to do? You can drag and drop them in order, with #1 being your favorite thing to do.

1.   Music lessons

2.   Acting/singing/performing arts

3.   Dance

4.   Girl/Boy Scouts

5.   Community service activities

6.   Religious education

7.   After-school academic tutoring/enrichment

8.   Art/drawing lessons

9.   School clubs

10. Informal "pick-up" sports/athletic activities

11. Organized sports/athletic activities

12. Cheer

13. Read

14. Hang out with my friends

15. Watch TV/Movies/Stream videos

16. Play video/computer games

17. Spend time online (browsing, on social media, etc.)

18. Play outside

Meghan O'Leary and Ellen Tomek, WSF Travel & Training recipients, with participants of Row New York

Child's Importance of Playing Sports

K2. We'd like to talk some more about playing or participating in sports or athletic activities. When we talk about sports, we're going to be talking about "organized sports or athletic activities." By this we mean an activity where there is a coach or instructor and there are regularly scheduled practices, training sessions or competitions.

How important is it to you that you play sports?

1.   Extremely Important

2.   Very Important

3.   Somewhat Important

4.   Not Very Important

5.   Not Important at all

Child's View on Importance Parents Place on Playing Sports

K3 And, how important is it to your parents that you play sports?

1.   Extremely Important

2.   Very Important

3.   Somewhat Important

4.   Not Very Important

5.   Not Important at all

Things Child Likes About Sports

K4. What are some of the things, if any, that you like about playing sports?

1.   It is a way to get exercise/be physically fit (F)

2.   Competing against other teams/individuals (C) (con)

3.   Friendly competition with my teammates (C) (soc)

4.   Feeling part of a team (S) (soc)

5.   Gives me confidence (int)

6.   Opens doors to play in high school or college

7.   It is a way to make friends/spend time with friends (S) (soc)

8.   It is something to do that isn't screen time

9.   Winning (C) (con)

10. Running around/being active (F)

11. I'm good at the sports I play (int)

12. Cheering on the other members of my team (S) (soc)

13. Being cheered on by others (S) (ext)

14. Non practice/game activities (pre-game dinners, awards ceremonies, etc.) (S) (soc)

15. It helps me lose or maintain weight (A)

16. Being physically strong (F) (int)

17. I want to gain new skills/improve existing skills (C) (int)

18. I have a good coach (ext)

19. Wearing the uniform and having team swag (sweatshirts, water bottles, backpacks, etc.) (ext)

20. Another reason (Specify)

21. None of these – I do not like to play sports

Whether Child Has/Had Sports Goals
Base: Child Assigned to Ever Played or Currently Plays Sport

K9. Do/did you have goals related to playing sports? (This could be something like learning a new skill this season, or playing in the pros!)

1.   Yes

2.   No

Child's Attitudinal Statements About Sports

K5. Please say whether you agree a lot, agree a little, disagree a little, or disagree a lot with each of the following statements.

COLUMNS

1. Agree a lot

2. Agree a little

3. Disagree a little

4. Disagree a lot

ROWS

1. I am self-conscious about playing sports because I don't like the uniforms

2. I don't like to play sports because I don't like to get sweaty

3. Sports are too competitive

4. There is too much risk for injury in sports

5. I don't like to try a new skill/moves/plays because I am afraid of not being able to do it well

6. Participating in sports can get in the way of academics

[Ask the remaining items only if ever played or currently played]

7. I play sports because I want to lose weight or look better

8. Playing sports is one way I set goals for myself (like running faster, scoring a record number of points, etc.)

9. Being with my friends is one of my favorite things about playing sports

10. Sometimes people make fun of us or make us feel uncomfortable while we play

K5a. When playing sports, do you feel....? Select the spot on the scale that sounds most like you.

[Slider widgets (scale 1–10)

- Too tall

- Too short

- Too big

- Too small

- Really uncoordinated

- Really coordinated

K5b. For each of the next statements fill in the bubble that best describes what you are like.

COLUMNS

1. Very true for me

2. Sort of true for me

3. No at all true for me

ROWS

1. I feel awkward about my body

2. I don't like the way my body looks

3. My body is getting healthier

4. I feel confident about my body

Laila Ali, WSF Past President

Kids: Views of Children Who Dropped Sports

For this next section we are going to ask you about one specific sport that you used to play, but no longer play.

Reasons Child Dropped Sports
Base: Kids Who Used to Play Organized Sports

K6. There are many reasons why some young people stop playing organized or team sports. Please tell me why you stopped playing organized or team [SPORT] Please select all that apply.

1. To care for younger brothers or sisters
2. I got a job
3. It was no longer fun
4. No longer interested
5. I couldn't get to practice
6. My parent(s) worried about my safety
7. I worried about my safety
8. It cost too much
9. I did not like or get along with the coach
10. I was not a good enough player
11. I wanted to focus more on studying and grades
12. I got more interested in my social life
13. There are no programs in my school or community
14. I didn't feel like I belonged on the team (did not feel I had any friends/connections)
15. Was not confident
16. Did not like to compete (too competitive an environment)
17. I found another sport I liked better
18. I found another activity I liked better than sports (e.g., theater)
19. I got injured playing the sport (Specify injury)
20. My parent told me I couldn't play anymore
21. I was teased by others at school for playing the sport
22. I didn't make the competitive school/travel team and do not want to continue playing on the local recreational team anymore
23. Other (Specify)

Child's Feelings Towards Dropping Sports
Base: Kids Who Used to Play Organized Sports

K7. Which of the following best describes how you feel about stopping your involvement with organized or team [SPORT]?

1. I'm very happy
2. I'm somewhat happy
3. I'm neither happy nor disappointed
4. I'm somewhat disappointed
5. I'm very disappointed

Kids: Experiences and Views of Current & Past Players

Now we have some questions about [SPORT/the last season you played SPORT].

Gender Mix Of Sport Team
Base: Child Assigned to Ever Played or Currently Plays Sport

K10. Who is/was on your team?

1. Girls only
2. Boys only
3. Both boys and girls

Gender Mix of Sport Team
Base: Team Is/Was Mixed Gender

K11. Is/Was your team...?

1. Mostly girls
2. An equal amount of boys and girls
3. Mostly boys

Child's Liking of Sport Play
Base: Child Assigned to Ever Played or Currently Plays Sport

K12. How much [do/did] you like [SPORT]?

1. Love[d] it
2. Like[d] it a lot
3. Like[d] it a little
4. [Don't/Didn't] like it at all

Things Child Worries About Related to Sport
Base: Child Assigned to Ever Played or Currently Plays Sport

K13. Which of these are/were things you worry/worried about when it comes to participating in [SPORT]? Select all that apply.

COLUMNS

1. Very worried
2. Pretty worried
3. Not too worried
4. Not at all worried

ROWS

1. Not playing well
2. Letting my teammates down
3. Letting my parent(s) down
4. Losing
5. Messing up during a game or competition
6. Not being as good as my teammates

Things That Excite Child About Sport
Base: Child Assigned to Ever Played or Currently Plays Sport

K13a. Still thinking about participating in [SPORT], which of the following [do/did] you get excited about?

COLUMNS

1. Very excited
2. Pretty excited
3. Not too excited
4. Not at all excited

ROWS

1. Playing well
2. Being someone my teammates can rely on
3. Having my parent(s) be proud of me
4. Winning
5. Making the winning play or saving the game/competition
6. Being better than my teammates

Gender of Head Coach
Base: Child Assigned to Ever Played or Currently Plays Sport

K14. Now we have some questions about your [SPORT]

coach(es). If you [have/had] more than one [SPORT] coach, please answer thinking about the head coach. [Are/Were] they...

1. A man
2. A woman

Gender of Other Coaches
Base: Child Assigned to Ever Played or Currently Plays Sport

K15. In addition to the head coach, [are/were] there any assistant coaches? (If there [is/was] more than one assistant coach you can pick more than one answer.)

1. Yes, a man (or men)
2. Yes, a woman (or women)
3. No, I just [have/had] one [sport] coach

Child's Liking of Head Coach
Base: Child Assigned to Ever Played or Currently Plays Sport

K16. For the next few questions, please think only about your [SHOW IF K15 = 1,2: head][SPORT] coach.

How much [do/did] you like your coach?

1. Really, really like[d] them a lot
2. Really like[d] them a lot
3. Like[d] them a lot
4. Like[d] them a little
5. [Don't/Didn't] like them at all

Child's View on Coaching Orientation of Winning Vs. Fun
Base: Child Assigned to Ever Played or Currently Plays Sport

K17. [Do/did] you think your coach is/was...?

1. More focused on winning games
2. More focused on team members having fun and/or developing their skills
3. Or equally focused on both

Child's View on Coach's Goal Setting
Base: Child Assigned to Ever Played or Currently Plays Sport

K18. [Does/Did] your coach ever talk about setting goals? Here we are talking about things you might want to achieve or learn – not necessarily scoring goals! These could be things like no turnovers in a game, making new personal bests, or various other things, depending on the sport.

1. Yes, we [have/had] team goals that we set

2. Yes, we [have/had] individual goals that we set

3. No, we [don't/didn't] talk about goals

4. I'm not sure

Child's Likelihood of Continuing to Play
Base: Child Assigned to Currently Playing Sport

K19. Do you think you will keep playing or participating in [SPORT] as you get older?

1. I won't play after this season is over

2. I will probably play for another season or two

3. I want to play through high school

4. I want to play in college or professionally

Child Reported Head Injury
Base: Ever Played or Currently Play Sports and Ages 12-17

K8. Have you ever gotten a concussion as a result of playing or participating in an organized sport/athletic activity?

1. Yes

2. No

3. Not sure

Concussion Impact on Sports Participation
Base: Had a Concussion K8=1

K8a. When you got the concussion, did you think about stopping playing that sport?

1. I thought about stopping and decided to stop playing

2. I thought about stopping, but decided to continue playing

3. I didn't think about stopping playing

Anticipated Concussion Impact on Sports Participation
Base: Did Not/Not Sure If Had a Concussion K8 =2/3

K8b. If you ever got a concussion from playing or participating in an organized sport/athletic activity, would that make you think about stopping playing that sport?

1. I would definitely stop playing

2. I would think about stopping playing

3. I would not think about stopping playing

Reasons Child Never Played Sports
Base: Child Never Played Organized Sports

K20. There are many reasons why some young people don't play organized or team sports. Please tell me why you don't play organized or team sports. Please select all that apply.

1. I have to care for younger brothers or sisters

2. I have a job

3. I don't think it is fun

4. I'm not interested

5. I wouldn't be able to get to practice

6. My parent(s) worry about my safety

7. I worry about my safety

8. It costs too much

9. I needed to focus on studying and grades

10. I'm very interested in my social life

11. There are no programs in my school or community

12. I didn't feel like I would belong on the team (did not feel I would have any friends/connections)

13. Was not confident

14. I do not like to compete (too competitive an environment)

15. I have another activity I like better than sports (e.g., theater)

16. My parent told me I couldn't play

17. Other (Specify)

Thank you for sharing your opinions. Please click next to submit your answers.

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