

# “Transmission of Sport Values: The Importance of Parental Involvement in Children’s Sportive Activity”

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## INTRODUCTION

Value transmission between parents and children is generally considered the hallmark of successful socialization (Barni, Ranieri, Scabini & Rosnati, 2011). It has been widely discussed but surprisingly little researched especially with reference to core values, such as sport values.

Psychosocial research has shown a growing interest in the role of sport in the development of young athletes' life skills and human values (Camiré & Trudel, 2010). Previous studies dealing with this topic identified specific sport values, partly corresponding to Schwartz's theory of values (1992). Lee and colleagues (2000) confirmed the existence of sport core values, namely:

- moral values (e.g., contract maintenance and obedience), which emphasize the respect for the rules and for the others;
- competence values (e.g., achievement and showing skills), which highlight the pursuit of one's own objectives in the sport practice;
- status values (e.g., public image and winning), which emphasize one's own image compared to others.

Most research results are consistent in showing that, when playing sport, young athletes tend to give the greatest importance to competence and moral values and the weakest importance to status values (e.g., Goggins, 2015; Lee, Whitehead, Ntoumanis, & Hatzigeorgiadis, 2008).

## TRANSMISSION OF SPORT VALUES

Little research has focused on the ways sport values are shaped by parents, even if they provide a major source of influence for their children within the sport context (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). The extent to which young athletes feel their parents to be involved in their sportive activity has indeed significant consequences on the child's sport experience (Torregrosa et al., 2007).

In general, value transmission is a dynamic and bidirectional process, where both parents and children play an active role and, according to Grusec and Goodnow's two-step model of value acquisition (1994), it occurs in two different phases: first, children perceive (more or less accurately) which values their parents want them to endorse, namely their parents' socialization values. Second, children choose to accept or to reject the perceived values. If children perceive their parents' socialization values accurately and accept them, value similarity should be high. The parent-child relationship quality is a relevant predictor of value acceptance: when the family context is characterized by parent-child closeness and support, children are more ready to endorse their parents' socialization values (Barni et al., 2011).

When considering adolescents' acceptance of the sport values their parents want them to endorse, it is thus important to analyze the parent-child relationship quality and parental involvement in the children's sportive activity (Lee & MacLean, 1997). Hellstedt (1987) stated that parental involvement in children's sportive activity may be considered as a continuum that ranges from underinvolvement to overinvolvement. According to the author, both conditions may negatively influence the sport experience of young athletes; the lack of emotional, financial or functional investment that characterizes parental underinvolvement may make it more difficult for young athletes to pursue a sport career, while parental overinvolvement may be harmful because of the possible consequences of perceived parental pressure.

## THIS STUDY

In the light of the above background, by referring to Lee and colleagues' classification of sport values (2000), this study aimed at:

- 1) measuring adolescent athletes' willingness to accept the sport values their parents want them to endorse (i.e., parents' socialization values);
- 2) analyzing the association between parental involvement in their children's sportive activity and adolescent athletes' value acceptance.

### Participants

Participants were 172 adolescents (48.3% male, 51.7% female), aged between 13 and 19 years (mean age=15.41, s.d.=1.73). They lived in northern and central Italy, where practiced a team sport (volleyball: 60.4%; soccer: 19.8%; basketball: 12.2%; rugby: 7.6%).

### Measures

**Youth Sport Values Questionnaire-2 (YSVQ-2)**, Lee et al., 2008). The scale, which is composed of 13 items (e.g., "When I do sport it is important to me to show good sportsmanship"), assesses the importance given to moral, competence, and status values. Using a 7 point Likert scale (from -1= the opposite of what I believe to 5= extremely important to me), respondents indicated the extent to which they considered each value as a guiding principle in their sportive activity. We computed three scores assessing the importance adolescents give to moral values (five items,  $\alpha = .75$ ), competence values (four items,  $\alpha = .64$ ), and status values (four items,  $\alpha = .82$ ).

To assess adolescents' perceptions of those sport values their parents want them to endorse, the YSVQ-2 was once more used and adolescents were asked to rate the extent to which they believed each value was considered relevant by their fathers and mothers (e.g., "How important is it for your father/mother that you show good sportsmanship?"), again on a 7-point Likert scale (from -1= the opposite of what my father/my mother believes 5= extremely important to my father/my mother). We computed three scores for parents' sport values, namely moral values ( $\alpha = .85$  for fathers, and  $\alpha = .88$  for mothers), competence values ( $\alpha = .74$  for fathers and  $\alpha = .80$  for mothers) and status values ( $\alpha = .83$  for fathers and  $\alpha = .81$  for mothers).

**Parental Involvement in Sport Questionnaire (PISQ)**, Lee & MacLean, 1997). Using a 5 point Likert scale (from 1= never to 5=always) adolescents were asked to rate –separately for mothers and fathers- the frequency with which their parents behave as described (e.g., "Does your father/mother discuss your progress with your coach?"). The scale allowed us to assess parents' active involvement ( $\alpha = .67$  for fathers and  $\alpha = .62$  for mothers), that is the extent to which children consider their parents as actively involved in their athletic experience, praise and understanding ( $\alpha = .68$  for fathers and  $\alpha = .75$  for mothers), that is parental encouragement characterized by children's perception of parental empathy displayed towards their sportive activity, directive behavior ( $\alpha = .88$  for fathers and  $\alpha = .86$  for mothers), namely the extent to which children feel controlled by their parents in athletics, and pressure towards children sport activity, which was assessed through a single-item measure.

### Data analysis

To measure the degree of adolescents' acceptance of parents' sport values, we computed the within-dyad correlations across values, by correlating the parent's 13 value ratings, as perceived by the adolescent, with adolescent's 13 own sport values (Kenny & Acitelli, 1994). Within-dyad correlation coefficients can range from -1 (total rejection) to +1 (total acceptance).

To assess whether and the extent to which the quality of paternal and maternal involvement in their children's sportive activity was associated with the degree to which adolescents endorsed their parents' sport values, we performed both multiple regressions (MR) and relative weight analyses (RWA), separately for fathers and mothers. There is a growing consensus that when faced with correlated predictors – as likely in the case of the four patterns of parental involvement – researchers should combine MR with other techniques available for interpretation, such as RWA (see Johnson, 2000 for details). In the analyses, the patterns of parental involvement were the predictors while adolescents' sport value acceptance (transformed to Z scores) was the criterion variable.

## RESULTS

**Adolescents' sport values and their perceptions of their parents' sport socialization values and involvement in their sportive activity**  
In Figures 1 and 2 we reported the means of the study variables.

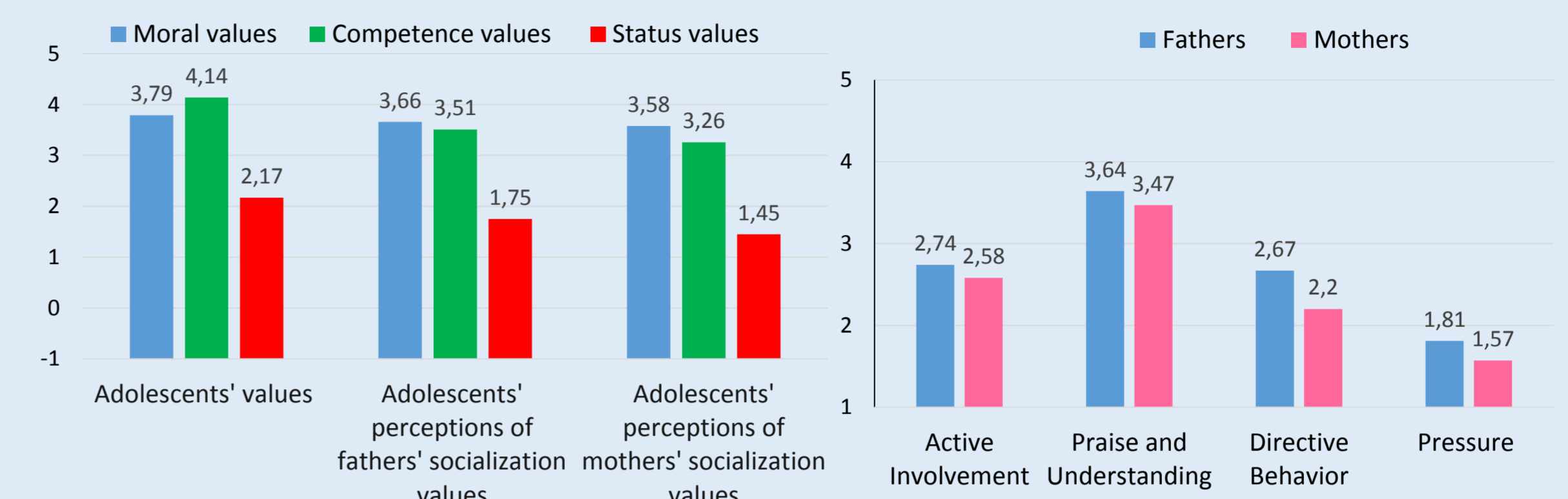


Figure 1. Adolescents' Sport Values and their Perceptions of Parents' Sport Values

Figure 2. Parental Involvement in Sport (as perceived by adolescents)

Adolescents rated competence values (e.g., achievement and showing skill) as being the most important values, followed by moral values (e.g., contract maintenance and obedience). Little importance was instead attributed to status values (e.g., public image and winning). As far as adolescents' perceptions of the sport values their parents wanted them to endorse were concerned, moral values were scored higher than both competence and status values (Figure 1).

In relation to their sportive activity, adolescents perceived both their parents as adopting behavior characterized by praise and understanding. Parents' involvement in children's sportive activity was moderately active and directive, and characterized by little pressure. Generally speaking, fathers were perceived by their children to be more involved in their children's sportive activity than mothers, and were rated higher on all patterns of involvement than mothers were (Figure 2).

**Adolescents athletes' acceptance of the sport values they perceive important for their parents.** Adolescents' acceptance of parents' sport values was high for both fathers and mothers, suggesting a strong congruence between adolescents' personal value profile and their perception of parents' socialization value profiles. This congruence measured  $r_{\text{mean}} = .63$  ( $SD = .36$ ; ranging from  $-.63$  to  $.95$ ) for father-child dyads and  $r_{\text{mean}} = .61$  ( $SD = .39$ ; ranging from  $-.82$  to  $.96$ ) for mother-child dyads.

**Associations between parental involvement in children's sport activity and sport value acceptance**  
Table 1 shows MR and RWA results.

Table 1. The Importance of Parental Involvement in Predicting Adolescents' Sport Value Acceptance

	Multiple Regression		Relative Weight Analysis	
	$\beta$	p	Raw importance estimates	Rescaled estimates
<b>Fathers</b>				
Active Involvement	-.04	.556	.00	6.0%
Praise and Understanding	.14	.026	.04	50.2%
Directive Behavior	-.03	.624	.01	9.4%
Pressure	-.06	.159	.03	34.3%
Total $R^2 = .07$			.07	100%
<b>Mothers</b>				
Active Involvement	.05	.480	.01	9.9%
Praise and Understanding	.13	.025	.05	48.3%
Directive Behavior	.07	.311	.01	11.7%
Pressure	-.12	.027	.03	30.0%
Total $R^2 = .11$			.11	100%

Note. Rescaled estimates (%) were computed by dividing the relative weights by the total  $R^2$  and multiplying by 100.

As shown in Table 1, the four predictors yielded a  $R^2$  of .07 for fathers and .11 for mothers. From the exploration of  $\beta$ , in both models, the praise and understanding pattern was a significant predictor. Moreover, but only for the mothers' model, maternal pressure was a negative predictor of the criterion variable. RWA confirmed the importance of parental praise and understanding as predictor, which indeed explained the largest portion of the variance of adolescents' acceptance of parental sport values. RWA also pointed out the importance of parental pressure (in this case of both parents) in predicting value acceptance.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed at analyzing adolescent athletes' sport values and their acceptance of those sport values their parents wanted them to endorse, while examining the impact of parental involvement in children's sportive activity on value acceptance.

Adolescent athletes gave **great importance to competence values** (e.g., self-direction) and **moral values** (e.g., helpfulness) while attributing **little importance to status values** (e.g., leadership). This result is in line with previous studies (Goggins, 2015; Lee et al., 2000), that show that **in sport context being competent and being fair is something considered more important by young athletes than being the leaders of their group**; adolescents may find in the sport context the attempt to show one's own skills as a way of differentiation. Moreover, the lack of importance given to status values is in line with previous research which illustrated that adolescents do not consider self-enhancement values to be true guiding principles in their lives (Barni, 2009).

According to our results, **young athletes were willing to accept parents' sport values from moderate to a high degree**. Interestingly, adolescents' level of sport value acceptance seemed to be definitively higher than that showed by previous studies concerning basic values (e.g., Barni et al., 2011). Thus the question emerges: Is transmitting sport values easier than transmitting basic values? Further research is needed in order to reply this important question, also with reference to other core values (e.g., political values, family values, etc.).

**Parental involvement in children's sportive activity turned out to be a significant predictor of adolescents' sport value acceptance.** Multiple regression (MR) highlighted that a positive behavior towards children sportive activity, specifically characterized by praise and understanding, and a low maternal pressure encourages adolescents' acceptance of parental sport values. The RWA results were consistent with those of regression analyses, confirming the importance of praise and understanding in predicting adolescents' willingness to accept parents' sport values and showed that praise/understanding explained a larger proportion of variance compared to pressure. Additionally, RWA results reevaluated the role of fathers' pressure in predicting the criterion variable, which did not emerge from MR, likely due to the high correlations between the four patterns of parental involvement.

Parents should be helped to understand that their children may benefit, in terms of value development, from an understanding behavior, that is from a form of parental encouragement characterized by empathy displayed towards the child's sport activity. Whether parents become aware that this kind of desirable involvement may make their children more willing to accept their value message could make them more willing to behave in a way that might positively influence this challenging process and the entire young athletes' sport experience.

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