U.S. Public Opinion about the Personal Development and Social Capital Benefits of Sport: An analysis of the Great Sport Myth

Evan Davis*

Ohio State University

Chris Knoester **

Ohio State University

Keywords: development through sport, sport involvement, sports values

*Please direct all correspondence to Evan Davis, A20 PAES Building, 205 Annie & John Glenn Ave, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210 (davis.5690@buckeyemail.osu.edu), Ph: 724-980-4631.

** Chris Knoester, 152 Townshend Hall, 1885 Neil Ave, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210 (knoester.1@osu.edu), Ph: 614-247-7261 (work), 614-725-0075 (home), fax: 614-292-6687.

Abstract

Beliefs that sport participation inherently leads to personal development and social capital benefits have been termed the Great Sport Myth (Coakley, 2015). The purpose of this study was to examine the extent that U.S. adults embrace the Great Sport Myth and the potential influence that their primary groups, social stratification indicators, and sport experiences have had on their beliefs in the personal development and social capital benefits of sport. Data was collected through a large national U.S. survey, the National Sports and Society Survey, and analyzed with multiple regression analyses. Findings suggest that most Americans endorse the Great Sport Myth. Furthermore, primary groups, stratification indicators, and positive sport experiences appear to consistently shape beliefs in the Great Sport Myth.

Keywords: Development through sport, sport involvement, sports values

U.S. Public Opinion about the Personal Development and Social Capital Benefits of Sport:
An analysis of the Great Sport Myth

Sport is often seen as enjoyable and transformational in American society, passing on its inherent benefits unto all who engage in it. Yet, scholars frequently argue that most Americans neglect to examine sport critically; instead, they view it in essentialist terms in which it is assumed to be overwhelmingly just, pure, and good (Coakley, 2011, 2015; Erdal, 2018; Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011). Coakley (2015) termed this belief in the inherent goodness and purity of sport as the Great Sport Myth (GSM). For those who believe in the GSM, sometimes referred to as sport evangelists, sport is believed to automatically produce positive personal development and social capital benefits such as the building of character, improving of health, boosting of academic performances, and enhancing of social statuses and connections. Especially among sport evangelists, the contexts under which sport may accomplish these purposes in uneven ways are generally ignored (Broh, 2002; Coakley, 2011; 2015; Erdal, 2018; Hartmann, 2016).

Research provides some support for the positive personal development and social capital benefits of sport. Most notably, sport involvement has been linked to positive character traits (Barber et al., 2001; Camiré & Trudel, 2010; Erdal, 2018; Gould & Carson, 2008), improved health (Donaldson & Finch, 2011; Edwards & Casper, 2012; Project Play, 2019), academic achievement (Broh, 2002; DeMeulenaere, 2010; Staurowsky et al., 2015), and social capital (Clopton, 2012; Erdal, 2018; Staurowsky et al., 2015). However, these findings do not address the complexity and contextuality of sport experiences. In fact, the implications of sport experiences are dependent on myriad factors such as their intensity, duration, structure, perceived value, cultural beliefs, and extensions from clearly stated, achievable goals (Coakley,

2011; 2015; Erdal, 2018; Hartmann, 2003a; Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011). When sport occurs spontaneously or haphazardly in different social contexts, is not accompanied with an endorsement of prosocial values, or has no thoughtful structure or established goals, then it may lead to either positive or negative outcomes (Coakley, 2011; 2015; Erdal, 2018).

Too often, sport evangelism leads individuals to neglect or minimize how sport experiences can produce negative outcomes. Thus, not enough consideration and action is devoted to implementing ways through which interactions, cultures, and structures within sport can and should be improved. Consequently, longstanding issues persist around inappropriate athlete development practices, access to sport, mistreatment, inclusion, health-compromising behaviors, and various other shortcomings that involve sport experiences (Coakley, 2010; Farrey, 2008; Project Play, 2019; Ridpath, 2018). Negative outcomes include athlete burnout (Sabo & Veliz, 2008; Staurowsky et al., 2015), overuse injuries (DiFiori et al., 2014; Staurowsky et al., 2015), identity foreclosure (Beamon, 2010; Erdal, 2018), miseducation (Beamon, 2010; Cooper, 2019), emotional abuse (Erdal, 2018; Stafford et al., 2015), the exclusion of individuals from minority (i.e., racial/ethnic, gender, sexuality, SES) groups in sport (Project Play, 2019; Sabo & Veliz, 2008), and a lack of diversity in leadership (Burton, 2015; Lapchick, 2019; Staurowsky et al., 2015). When individuals believe in the inherent goodness of sport, they become more apt to ignore that sport experiences can lead to diverse outcomes and often fail to advocate to improve sport experiences, for all (Coakley 2011; 2015; Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011). In sum, the mythologization of sport has made it difficult for progressive changes to be made to improve the structures, cultures, and interactions that surround sport.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to use new, national, large-scale data to assess and analyze the extent to which U.S. adults believe in the personal development and social capital

benefits of sport. In particular, we examine the extent to which adults believe that sports build character, improve health, lead to academic achievement, enhance popularity in school, and make one more well-known in the community—common assumptions of the GSM (Coakley, 2011; 2015; Erdal, 2018; Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011; Staurowsky et al., 2015). Then, we consider how social structural contexts (e.g., prominent ascribed and achieved statuses that are linked to inequalities, social group memberships and interactions) and more positive or negative sport-specific experiences and commitments (e.g., being a sports fan, participant, recipient of sports-related mistreatment) may encourage individuals to more readily embrace beliefs about the personal development and social capital benefits of sports—or not. Specifically, we analyze the extent to which dominant primary groups (e.g., family, religious groups, and community), stratification factors (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and SES), and sport experiences (e.g., fandom, participation, mistreatment) shape U.S. adults' beliefs about the personal development and social capital benefits of sports.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in traditional sociological understandings of how social interactions, culture, and social structure affect the beliefs and behaviors of individuals (Cooley, 1909; Messner, 2002; 2009; Mills, 1959). Messner (2002; 2009) offers a useful model and description of these processes in his sports and society research, which can be flexibly applied to understanding beliefs about the personal development and social capital benefits of sports in society. It suggests that the GSM is largely encouraged through a) social interactions (i.e., common social interactions, routine practices, and social group memberships), b) structures (i.e., institutions, organizational practices, and hierarchies in sport and other systems), and 3) cultures (i.e., dominant values, symbols, and ideologies).

As part of these processes, particular elements of social structural contexts—such as primary group memberships and social stratification indicators—are often especially salient in directing beliefs and behaviors. Also, personal life histories reflect and encourage unique experiences and beliefs (Cooley, 1909; Erdal, 2018; Messner, 2002; 2009; Mills, 1959; Sabo & Veliz, 2008). Thus, our conceptual framework further highlights that primary groups, social stratification, and sports-related experiences and commitments are instrumental in shaping beliefs about the personal development and social capital benefits of sports.

Nonetheless, these social forces are not purely determinative; individuals have agency in forming their beliefs about the benefits of sport. Also, it is instructive to remember that even within similar social contexts, individuals have unique understandings and experiences (Erdal, 2018; Messner, 2002; 2009; Mills, 1959). Below, we first elaborate on how social interactions, culture, and structures often encourage beliefs about the personal development and social capital benefits of sport. Then, we turn to considering how and why primary group memberships, social stratification indicators, and sport-specific experiences and commitments may be associated with beliefs that are indicative of an embrace of the GSM.

Beliefs in the Value of Sport

Social interactions, structures, and cultures largely encourage beliefs about the value of sport, among Americans. Sport interactions that involve playing, watching, or conversing are common and sports are institutionalized and celebrated throughout society. For example, children are typically introduced to sport at very young ages and sports subsequently blend into their peer, family, school, and community experiences (Erdal, 2018; Messner, 2002; Ridpath, 2018; Sabo & Veliz, 2008). Largely, this occurs through primary groups (e.g., family, religious, and community groups) and institutionalized structures (e.g., school, recreational, and

commercialized sport offerings). Significant others often emphasize sports' utility in improving health and building character, while also highlighting the social connections that can be formed through sport involvement (Dixon et al., 2008; Dorsch et al., 2015; Erdal, 2018; Fredrick & Eccles, 2004; Project Play, 2019). In fact, people of all ages and backgrounds embrace sports and they are typically viewed as appropriate and useful for everyone (Project Play, 2019; Sabo & Veliz, 2008).

Consequently, for many Americans, sport is a central part of one's upbringing and continued activities. Nearly 80% of youth participate in an organized sport while growing up and virtually all U.S. adults have had sport experiences through at least playing sport in PE class or informally (Erdal, 2018; Sabo & Veliz, 2008). In part, this is a function of adults' beliefs in the value of sport experiences for children. Americans' beliefs in the personal development and social capital benefits of sport stem from sports' European roots, where they were intentionally structured to instill desirable traits and to promote health (Erdal, 2018; Gould & Carson, 2008; Miracle & Rees, 1994; Ridpath, 2018). Yet, these intentions have expanded such that America has become a country full of sport fanatics and evangelists who see sport as worthy entertainment, a tool for personal development, and a means through which to foster social capital, too (Broh, 2002; Coakley, 2011; Erdal, 2018; Project Play, 2019; Sabo & Veliz, 2008; Staurowsky et al., 2015).

Scholars have assumed that the beliefs of sport evangelists are commonplace; however, the extent to which these beliefs are prevalent is unclear (Coakley, 2011, 2015; Eitzen, 2009; Miracle & Rees, 1994). Despite a lack of causal, but great correlational, evidence of the benefits of sport, numerous stakeholders (i.e., parents, coaches, athletes, sponsors, and fans) proselytize about the positive personal development and social capital benefits of sport. Frequently, they

promote and invest in sport as a place to build character (Camiré & Trudel, 2010; Jones & Lavallee, 2009; Erdal, 2018), improve health (Neely & Holt, 2014; Staurowsky et al., 2015; Project Play, 2019), boost academic performance (Broh, 2002; DeMeulenaere, 2010; Staurowsky et al., 2015), and obtain social capital (Clopton, 2012; Dorsch et al., 2015; Erdal, 2018). Some of these benefits are even thought to extend to sport fans—who report higher levels of social capital and a sense of belonging in their communities, compared to others (Wann et al., 2011).

Primary Group Influences

Typically, individuals begin to form their understandings of the world through their primary group interactions. Primary groups consist of significant others with whom one has regular, face-to-face interactions; they are particularly influential social groups (Cooley, 1909; Messner, 2002; 2009; Sabo & Veliz, 2008). Common primary groups include families, religious groups, and communities. Primary groups influence beliefs about the values of sport through everyday interactions that may reify or challenge cultural messaging and the structuring of sport experiences (Erdal, 2018; Messner, 2002; 2009; Project Play, 2019).

Parents commonly introduce their children to sport at very young ages. They often teach and reinforce the value of sport through casual conversations, the symbolic significance of their behaviors (e.g., coaching, actively participating or watching), and through explicitly encouraging participation and offering opportunities to do so (Dixon et al., 2008, Erdal, 2018; Fredrick & Eccles, 2002; 2004; Sabo & Veliz, 2008). In fact, nurturing and investing in family-based interactions and cultures around sport is often perceived as “good” parenting (Eckstein, 2017; Knoester & Fields, 2020; Knoester & Randolph, 2019; Wheeler, 2011). Yet, parents may also become immersed in sport interactions and come to embrace the perceived benefits of sport from their children’s own interests and activities (Dorsch et al., 2009, 2015; Hyatt et al., 2018;

Knoester & Fields, 2020; Knoester & Randolph, 2019). Consequently, having parents who are more passionate about sports and having children of one's own may encourage individuals to possess greater belief in the personal development and social capital benefits of sport.

Similarly, one's community may also offer and promote sport interactions and convey messages about the value of sport experiences. For example, communities offer differing amounts of sport-related resources, opportunities, and interests that can shape perceptions about the importance and value of sport and affect sport involvement levels (Holt, 2008; Humbert et al., 2006; Project Play, 2019). Greater passion for sports within a community may particularly encourage recognition of the value of sport (Bale, 2003; Davids & Baker, 2007; Project Play, 2019).

Further, research has suggested that religious groups may also draw a connection between the spiritual and physical realm, leading to the promotion of sport (Watson et al., 2005; Watson & Parker, 2014). Christianity has especially been shown to draw this connection, as the Muscular Christianity movement of the early 1900s endorsed sport as a vehicle to promote Christian values, enhance toughness and although character traits that were thought to be important, prove one's moral worth, and bring people closer to God through physical fitness (Miracle & Rees, 1994; Watson et al., 2005; Watson & Parker, 2014). Nowadays, Christian religious groups continue to promote the value of sport and use it to help create opportunities for building character, nurturing one's faith, enabling health and well-being, and strengthening social bonds (Watson et al., 2005; Watson & Parker, 2014). Christian religious groups seem to sacralize cultural messages about the benefits of sport, as they become infused with Christian values (i.e., self-sacrifice, morality, and discipline) and enhanced through religious group interactions (Krattenmaker, 2010; Putney, 2001; Watson & Parker, 2014). In fact, the Christian

promotion of sport is evident among athletes, sports media presentations, and sport fan interactions (Hawzen & Newman, 2017; Newman & Giardina, 2011). Thus, a Christian religious group affiliation may be positively associated with beliefs about the personal development and social capital benefits of sport.

Stratification Factors

Yet, society is stratified across prominent factors (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, SES) such that dominant groups (e.g., men, Whites, heterosexuals, and high SES) are advantaged—and disproportionately obtain preferential treatment and hold power and control—compared to minority groups (Cooper, 2019; Project Play, 2019; Sabo & Veliz, 2008). Within this system, stratification factors encourage different worldviews as well; typically, those with more power and resources tend to view the world as more just and fair—and themselves as deserving of their relatively advantaged statuses in the social hierarchies (Cooper, 2019; Staurowsky et al., 2015). In fact, groups often seek to maintain their power over others through the promotion of values and ideals that are self-serving to their statuses and to their members (Cooper, 2019; Gramsci, 1971). The maintenance of power perpetuates a system of inequalities in society, which is similarly reflected and enacted in sport (Cooper, 2019; Sabo & Veliz, 2008; Spaaij et al., 2015). Thus, stratification factors are linked to structures, cultures and interactions that encourage certain beliefs about the value of sport.

Sport stratification may be most apparent, structurally. Overwhelmingly, sport continues to be dominated and controlled by affluent straight White men (Burton, 2015; Cooper, 2019; Lapchick, 2019; Staurowsky et al., 2015). Not surprisingly, then, sport generally reflects and promotes their personal values and belief systems; it also recreates and justifies structures that tend to benefit those in power (Author Citation; Foley, 1990). For example, sport remains a

gendered space, despite continual challenges to this, that perpetuates gender inequalities (Allison, 2018; Author Citation; Messner, 2002; Spaij et al., 2015). This can be seen not only through disproportionate numbers of men in power, but also through the institutionalized trivializing of female athletes and women's sport (Allison, 2018; Fink, 2014; Staurowsky et al., 2015), the social construction (e.g., aggressive, competitive, powerful) and celebration of masculinity (Allison, 2018; Hartmann, 2003b; Staurowsky et al., 2015), and continued gender segregation in the offering of sport (Messner, 2002; Staurowsky et al., 2015). In addition, despite some indication of progress, sport remains a heterosexist institution; elite male athletes and leaders are assumed to be straight and sexual stigma and prejudice encourages sexual minorities to remain closeted (Allison, 2018; Author Citation; Denison & Kitchen, 2015). Also, sport remains not only highly dominated by wealthy Whites, but also segregated along racial/ethnic and social class lines (Cooper, 2019; Eckstein, 2017; Farrey, 2008). In the sports that are most frequently played by racial/ethnic minorities, especially Black males, current sport structures have been referred to as modern-day plantation systems, as Black athletes often generate profits for predominantly white power brokers, while serving as entertainment for predominantly white audiences (Author Citation; Cooper, 2019; Hawkins, 2010; Rhoden, 2006). Yet, the general commodification, corporatization, and commercialization of sport has also functioned to disproportionately allow higher SES, and other typically advantaged, individuals to determine the conditions under which sport is presented and offered—and for what purposes (Allison, 2018; Cooper, 2019; Eckstein, 2017). In addition, more affluent individuals have greater access and opportunities in sport; in fact, higher SES parents leverage these advantages to provide their children with greater exposure to the presumed personal development and social capital benefits

of sport, whereas less affluent families are often left without affordable sporting options, leading to their exclusion from sport (Eckstein, 2017; Project Play, 2019; White & McTeer, 2012).

These stratification dynamics that are embedded in sport structures, and society, influence the cultures and interactions that surround sport—with implications for beliefs about the value of sport. The primary messages that are upheld are not only promotions of the personal development and social capital benefits of sport, but also justifications of the emphasis and celebration of sport because of its presence as a relatively meritocratic pathway for obtaining said benefits (Coakley, 2011; 2015; Cooper, 2019). In fact, a critical perspective of this messaging suggests that this “success ideology” is not only more likely to be seen as valid by those who are privileged, but it is also used to justify their relative advantages in society; that is, they are advantaged because they have earned their stations and are deserving (Coakley, 2017; Cooper, 2019; Gramsci, 1971). Thus, on average, we anticipate that those who are more advantaged (i.e., men, Whites, heterosexuals, higher SES) will be more likely to endorse the personal development and social capital benefits of sport. In contrast, those who may be more disadvantaged in sport and society may be more critical and less optimistic about the personal development and social capital benefits of sport. Yet, related to these processes, one might anticipate that self-identified conservatives are more drawn to sport and its promised benefits, compared to liberals, because of their greater tendency to view both sport and society as meritocratic. That is, conservatives tend to be especially likely to view sport as a level playing field that allows anyone to succeed and that works to promote and instill key values and benefits to those who are involved with it (Author Citation; Hawzen & Newman, 2017; Newman & Giardina, 2011). That said, because sport has provided relatively unique and celebrated opportunities and successes for some numbers of Black and low SES individuals, one might also

expect that the value of sport may be recognized as particularly useful by members of these specific groups, too (Cooper, 2019; Eitzen, 2009; Hartmann, 2016; Shakib & Veliz, 2012; Smith, 2009).

Sport Experiences

Yet, positive interactions and messages of encouragement within sport are not evenly distributed—even after accounting for primary group and stratification factors. Opportunities and abilities to become involved in different sport contexts offer unique experiences, lessons, and beliefs about the value of sport. Also, different levels of commitments to playing, watching, and following sport are reflective of interests and approval of the values of sport; but, greater levels of commitment and exposure to sport interaction may also reinforce more positive messages about the personal development and social capital benefits of sport (Coakley, 2011; 2015; Erdal, 2018; Project Play, 2019; Sabo & Veliz, 2008).

For example, when individuals have opportunities to be involved in sport and have positive interactions in their sport experiences, they may become more prone to develop identities as athletes or fans, providing them with a greater affinity toward sport. They may also be more likely to continue playing, watching, and following sport more frequently and to receive overwhelmingly positive messages about the personal development and social capital benefits of sport, continually (Cooper, 2019; Denison & Kitchen, 2015; Project Play, 2019; Staurowsky et al., 2015; Wann et al., 2011). Thus, those who identify as more passionate sport fans and who are more involved in playing, watching, and following sport may be particularly likely to believe in the personal development and social capital benefits of sport.

Yet, many individuals are mistreated in their sport interactions (e.g., called names, bullied, discriminated against, or abused) due to cruel fans, unethical peers, problematic coaches,

out-of-control parents, and inappropriate behaviors by many others (Beltran-Carrillo et al., 2012; Denison & Kitchen, 2015; Holt, 2008; Stafford et al., 2015). Those who experience mistreatment may be especially likely to report negative feelings toward sport and become less likely to be involved with it in the future (Beltran-Carrillo et al., 2012; Denison & Kitchen, 2015; Stafford et al., 2015). In fact, those who suffer mistreatment in their sport experiences may be more likely to think critically about the perceived benefits of sport and understand how contextual factors shape experiences—with different implications for various outcomes (Cooper, 2019; Denison & Kitchen, 2015; Foley, 1990).

Hypotheses

Overall, based on our conceptual framework and previous research, we posit:

Hypothesis 1: The majority of U.S. adults will agree with the personal development and social capital benefits of sport. That is, they will report that sports build character, improve health, boost academic performance, increase popularity in school, and make one more well-known in the community.

Hypothesis 2: Primary groups such as families, communities, and religious groups will shape beliefs about the value of sport. Specifically, while growing up, having a parental figure(s) who was a more enthusiastic sports fan and being immersed within a community that was more passionate about sport are expected to have encouraged positive beliefs about the value of sport. Also, a Christian religious affiliation is expected to be positively associated with the extent to which one agrees with the personal development and social capital benefits of sport.

Hypothesis 3: Stratification dynamics will lead individuals in dominant groups (i.e., Whites, men, heterosexuals, high SES) to be more confident about the personal development and social capital benefits of sport than those in minority groups. Related to this, because of tendencies to

minimize the existence of stratification dynamics, self-identified conservatism will be positively associated with beliefs in the personal development and social capital benefits of sport.

Hypothesis 4: Positive sport experiences (i.e., no mistreatment) and greater investments (i.e., sport fandom, consumption, and participation) in sport will be positively associated with beliefs in the personal development and social capital benefits of sport.

Method

Data are drawn from the National Sports and Society Survey (NSASS), a large new national survey of U.S. adults ($N = 3,993$). The NSASS is a quota sample that was taken from the American Population Panel (APP), a panel of over 20,000 survey volunteers that was created by the Center for Human Resource Research (CHRR), a longstanding and respected survey research institution. APP members who reported their birth years as 21-65 years ago were periodically invited to take the NSASS in the Fall of 2018 through the Spring of 2019 until a quota of 4,000 respondents was reached, because of the budget and time-constraints for conducting the research.

The NSASS was administered online and respondents were compensated with \$35 for their efforts. Although the NSASS is disproportionately White, female, and Midwestern, its large sample size and comprehensive data allow for unique and rigorous inquiries into a variety of sports and society issues. Indeed, the NSASS is ideal for the present study because it gathers wide-ranging and detailed information about adults' public opinions about sports-related issues, sports involvement experiences, social patterns, demographic characteristics, and reports of well-being. As in other ongoing research that uses the NSASS, post-stratification weighting that is based on the 2018 American Community Survey is used to better approximate the beliefs of U.S. adults in the general population; in the present study, weights are used to better estimate beliefs

about whether or not sports tend to offer personal development and social capital benefits to individuals, in society.

We use unique sample sizes for descriptive and regression analyses, based on the extent of missing data (i.e., 1-5% of $N = 3,993$) for our dependent variables. For our regression analyses, we employ multiple imputation with chained equations over ten imputations to address missing data in our predictor variables. The patterns of reported findings are robust to the use of listwise deletion of missing data, as well.

Dependent Variables

Our dependent variables are created from responses (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 2 = *Somewhat disagree*; 3 = *Somewhat agree*; 4 = *Strongly agree*) to statements about the personal development and social capital benefits of sports. Each statement begins with: “In general., ... Fewer than five respondents refused to answer any one of these questions and “Don’t Know” responses were coded as missing for the purpose of this study. Beliefs about sports building character ($n = 3,948$ valid responses) indicate the extent of agreement that “...sports build positive character traits.” Beliefs about the health benefits of sports ($n = 3,964$) consist of responses to the statement: “...playing sports improves one’s health.” Beliefs about the academic benefits of sports ($n = 3,788$) indicate the extent of agreement that “...playing school sports leads to improved grades in school.” Beliefs about the school social capital benefits of sport ($n = 3,891$) are reflected by responses to the statement “...playing school sports makes one more popular in school.” Finally, beliefs about the community social capital benefits of sports ($n = 3,879$) are indicated by responses to “...playing sports leads one to become more well-known in a community.”

Predictor Variables

The primary predictor variables for this study consist of primary group, stratification, and sports involvement related indicators. We also include a small number of other variables as controls for our analyses. First, primary group indicators include measures of family characteristics, community's passion for sports, and religious affiliation. Family characteristics include adults' relationship status (coded with mutually exclusive dummies for being married, cohabiting, or single; single is used as the reference category), number of one's own and one's partner's resident minor children, and reports of parents' sports fandom. Reports of adults' parents' sports fandom are taken from their maximum rating of the extent which they identify each of up to two parental figures as having been sports fans (0 = *not at all*; 4 = *very much so*), while respondents were growing up. Community's sports passion indicates the extent to which adults believed that their high school community was passionate about sports (1 = *not at all*; 4 = *very passionate*), when they were growing up. Finally, religious affiliation is coded with mutually exclusive dummies for identifying as Christian, a member of another religion, or as religiously unaffiliated (used as the reference category).

Stratification related indicators include measures of gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and conservatism. Gender is self-reported as either male (used as the reference category), female, or nonbinary. Race/ethnicity is also coded with mutually exclusive dummies for White (reference category), Black, Latinx, or another race/ethnicity. Sexuality is self-identified as either a) heterosexual, b) gay or lesbian, c) bisexual, or d) another sexual identity. SES measures include education (coded with dummies for high school or less, some college, or a college education; college is used as the reference category) and household income (coded in \$10,000s, capped at 15+). Last, conservatism is self-reported (1 = *Very liberal*; 5 = *Very conservative*).

Sports involvement measures consist of sports fandom, sports consumption, sports participation, and mistreatment in sports. Sports fandom (0 = *Not at all*; 4 = *Very much so*) is based on responses to the question “Are you a sports fan?” Sports consumption indicates the number of months in the past year that adults reported watching or following sports. Sports participation reveals whether adults reported participating in a sport(s) regularly, regardless of whether or not this was done formally or informally, over the past year (1 = *yes*). Sports mistreatment (1 = *yes*) denotes affirmative responses to the question: “Have you ever been mistreated in your sports interactions (e.g., called names, been bullied, discriminated against, or abused)?”

Finally, we include indicators of age, employment status (1 = *employed*), and region as control variables. For region, we use West as the reference category.

Analytic Strategy

The analysis for this study consists of two stages. First, we scrutinize descriptive statistics to assess the extent to which U.S. adults agree with statements about the personal development and social capital benefits of sports. Then, use ordinal logistic regressions to examine the extent to which common primary groups, stratification processes, and sports involvement contexts shape individuals’ beliefs about the personal development and social capital benefits of sports. For the sake of parsimony, for each dependent variable, we present the regression results in a model without the sports involvement indicators and in a model that contains them all. To help understand the patterns and magnitude of our findings, we also discuss and present predicted probabilities based on marginal effects calculations.

Results

Our first hypothesis anticipated that the vast majority of U.S. adults endorse beliefs about the personal development and social capital benefits of sports. As shown in Table 1, NSASS respondents overwhelmingly endorse the personal development and social capital benefits of sports. In fact, in distributions that are not displayed, 93% (somewhat or strongly) agreed that sports build character (1% replied “don’t know”), 96% agreed that playing sports improve one’s health (< 1% replied “don’t know”), 67% agreed that playing sports leads to improved grades in school (5% replied “don’t know”), 84% agreed that playing sports makes one popular in school (2% replied “don’t know”), and 85% agreed that playing sports makes one more well-known in the community (3% replied “don’t know”).

(Table 1 about here)

To better estimate the public opinions of all U.S. adults ages 20-64, we weighted the NSASS findings according to 2018 American Community Survey characteristics. As shown in Figure 1, these weighted results are similar to the unweighted results. In fact, they typically represent a shift of < 3% of responses from “agree” to “strongly agree” about the existence of personal development and social capital benefits of sports, after weighting (results not shown). Thus, there is very strong and consistent support for our expectation that most U.S. adults believe that sports offer an array of personal development and social capital benefits.

(Figure 1 about here)

Next, we turn to our ordinal logistic regressions. As shown in Models 1 and 2 of Table 2, there is evidence of primary group, stratification, and sports involvement influences on beliefs about the effects of sports on building character, as expected. For example, as shown in Model 1, those who identify as nonbinary ($OR = .59, p < .05$) are 41% less likely than men to strongly support, as opposed to another level of support, the belief that sports build positive character

traits. Similarly, those who identify as bisexual ($OR = .81, p < .05$) or an other sexual identity ($OR = .61, p < .01$) are markedly less likely than heterosexuals to strongly agree that sports build positive character traits. Also, those who are Black ($OR = 1.78, p < .001$) are much more likely than those who are White to endorse the idea that sports build character. In addition, conservatism ($OR = 1.21, p < .001$) and the number of children in the household ($OR = 1.17, p < .001$) are positively associated with support for the idea that sports build character. Finally, Christians ($OR = 1.82, p < .001$) are much more likely than the religiously unaffiliated to believe that sports build positive character traits.

(Table 2 about here)

As shown in Model 2 of Table 2, sports involvement contexts further shape beliefs about the benefits of sports. Reports of a community's passion for sports ($OR = 1.11, p < .05$) are positively associated with adults' beliefs that sports builds character. Yet, having been mistreated in sports ($OR = 0.67, p < .001$) leads one to be less likely to endorse the belief that sports build character, as expected. Finally, adults' sports fandom ($OR = 1.86, p < .001$), sports consumption ($OR = 1.04, p < .01$), and regular sports participation ($OR = 1.42, p < .001$) are positively associated with support for the idea that sports build character, as anticipated.

In addition, as shown in Models 3 and 4 of Table 2, there is evidence of primary group, stratification, and sports involvement influences on adults' beliefs in the health benefits of sports. As indicated in Model 3, compared to males, females ($OR = .84, p < .05$) are less likely to suggest that sports participation improves health outcomes; also, compared to heterosexuals, those who identify as an other sexual identity ($OR = .59, p < .01$) are less likely to believe that sports participation improves health outcomes. Conservatism ($OR = 1.05, p < .001$), the number of children in the household ($OR = 1.15, p < .001$) and identifying as Christian ($OR = 1.40, p <$

.001) are also positively associated with the belief that sports participation leads to improved health.

As displayed in Model 4 of Table 2, sports involvement contexts also seem to affect beliefs about the health benefits of sports participation. That is, the sports passion of one's community ($OR = 1.13, p < .05$) while growing up is positively associated with beliefs about the health-promoting aspects of sports participation. Having been mistreated in sports ($OR = .72, p < .001$) is negatively associated with beliefs about the health-promoting aspects of sports participation. In addition, adults' sports fandom ($OR = 1.34, p < .001$), sports consumption ($OR = 1.04, p < .001$), and regular sports participation ($OR = 1.45, p < .001$) are positively associated with agreeing that sports participation leads to positive health outcomes.

Models 5 and 6 of Table 2 display the results from predicting the final personal development beliefs about sports. Again, there is evidence that primary group, stratification, and sports involvement influences are at work. As shown in Table 5, compared to males, those who identify as nonbinary ($OR = .65, p < .05$) are less likely to believe that sports participation leads to improved grades at school, as expected. Yet, females ($OR = 1.16, p < .05$) are surprisingly more likely than males to believe that sports participation leads to improved grades at school. This may reflect the fact that female athletes perform better in school than male athletes, on average (Southall, 2014). Regardless, there is also evidence that compared to those who identify as White, those who identify as Black ($OR = 1.54, p < .001$) or Latinx ($OR = 1.46, p < .001$) more strongly adhere to the belief that playing sports leads to improved grades in school. Conservatism ($OR = 1.21, p < .001$), the number of children in the household ($OR = 1.18, p < .001$) and identifying as Christian ($OR = 1.70, p < .001$) are also positively associated with beliefs in the academic benefits of sports participation.

Sports involvement contexts also seem to shape beliefs about whether or not playing sports leads to improved grades in school. As shown in Model 6 of Table 2, being mistreated in sports ($OR = .74, p < .001$) is negatively associated with agreement that playing sports lead to improved grades, as expected. Furthermore, sports fandom ($OR = 1.65, p < .001$, sports consumption ($OR = 1.03, p < .01$), and being a sports participant ($OR = 1.37, p < .001$) are positively associated with the belief that playing sports leads to improved grades in school, as anticipated.

In Table 3, we display the models that predict adults' beliefs about the social capital benefits of sports. Primary group, stratification, and sports involvement influences seem to be linked to beliefs about the extent to which playing sports makes one popular in school and makes one more well-known in the community, as hypothesized. For instance, as shown in Model 1 of Table 3, compared to males, females ($OR = 0.66, p < .001$) are markedly less likely to believe that sports participation makes one more popular at school. Also, compared to Whites, Blacks ($OR = 1.41, p < .01$) are much more likely to believe that sports participation makes one more popular at school. After sports involvement contexts are taken into account, as shown in Model 2, there is evidence that one's community's passion for sports and one's own sports consumption are positively associated with believing that playing sports makes one more popular in school, as expected. Surprisingly, there is a positively association between reports of being mistreated in sports interactions ($OR = 1.23, p < .01$) and beliefs in the popularity implications of sports participation. One interpretation of this finding is that those who have been mistreated in sports may realize and be especially critically of the social status hierarchies that elevate "jocks" in many schools (Barber et al., 2001; Bissinger, 1990; Foley, 1990).

(Table 3 about here)

As shown in Models 3 and 4 of Table 3, there is also evidence that primary group, stratification, and sports involvement influences shape beliefs about the extent to which sports participation makes one more well-known in a community. For example, as shown in Model 3, Black ($OR = 1.45, p < .01$) adults are significantly more likely than White adults to express this sentiment. Also, the number of children in the household ($OR = 1.09, p < .01$) and a Christian religious affiliation ($OR = 1.33, p < .001$), compared to having no religious affiliation, are positively associated with endorsing that sports build one's social capital in the community. As seen in Model 4, sports involvement contexts seem to influence these beliefs. That is, the passion for sports in one's community while growing up appears ($OR = 1.24, p < .001$) to encourage one to believe that sports participation makes one more well-known in a community as an adult, as anticipated. Also, adults' sports fandom ($OR = 1.20, p < .001$), sports consumption ($OR = 1.03, p < .01$), and regular sports participation ($OR = 1.16, p < .05$) are positively associated with believing in the community social capital benefits of sports participation. Again, unexpectedly, we find that being mistreated in sports interactions ($OR = 1.19, p < .05$) is positively associated with believing in the social capital benefits of sports.

Discussion

The present study sought to describe and then inquire about U.S. adults' beliefs about the personal development and social capital benefits of sports. In particular, we scrutinized beliefs about the character-building, health, academic, school popularity, and community recognition benefits of sports participation. We utilized new, large-scale data to first describe these beliefs among U.S. adults. Then, we used multiple regression analyses to consider the extent to which primary group, stratification, and sports involvement influences may have shaped adults' beliefs

about the personal development and social capital benefits of sports. Below, we revisit our hypotheses and the support that we found for them. Then, we contextualize our results.

First, we hypothesized that the vast majority of U.S. adults would endorse what Coakley (2011; 2015; 2017) has described as the GSM. That is, we anticipated that there would be very high levels of support for the beliefs that sports build character, improve health, lead to better grades in school, increase popularity among school-aged peers, and make one more well-known in a community. Indeed, over 90% of U.S. adults appear to believe that sports participation generally builds character and improves health; nearly 90% also believe that sports participation makes one more popular in school and more well-known in the community. There was less support for the claim that sports lead to improved grades; although, about 2/3 of adults agreed that sports participation leads to improved grades in school. Overall, it is clear that U.S. adults widely embrace the idea that sports offer many personal development and social capital benefits. These findings seem to offer the best evidence of this across multiple dimensions of personal development and social capital benefits (Miracle & Rees, 1994; Project Play, 2019; Sabo & Veliz, 2008).

Second, we hypothesized that primary group influences would shape beliefs about the personal development and social capital benefits of sports. Indeed, we did find evidence that families, communities, and religious groups appear to influence adults' sports-related beliefs. A summary of these findings is shown in Table 4. For example, while growing up, having a parental figure(s) that was more of a sports fan and living in a community that was more passionate about sports seemed to encourage adults' beliefs in the positive value of sports. Also, the number of young children in adults' household was consistently and positively associated with beliefs about the personal development and social capital benefits of sports. These findings

are consistent with research evidence that describes the links between the interactions, cultures, and structures of sports with those of families and communities (Messner, 2002; Newman & Giardina, 2011; Overman, 2011; Wheeler, 2011). Finally, compared to the religiously unaffiliated, Christians consistently reported stronger beliefs in the development and social capital benefits of sports. These findings align with longstanding as well as more recent findings that suggest that sports have been especially celebrated and promoted among Christians and within their churches (Hawzen & Newman, 2017; Miracle & Rees, 1994; Watson & Parker, 2014). To further unpack relationships between Christians' sport involvement and their beliefs in the value of sport, future work should look to recent calls from scholars that have sought to disentangle the sacred and secular components of sport in the lives of Christians (Gibbons & Braye, 2019; Shilling & Mellor, 2014).

(Table 4 about here)

Third, we hypothesized that stratification indicators and beliefs would influence beliefs about the positive development and social capital benefits of sports. That is, we anticipated that sports interactions, cultures, and structures that privilege men, Whites, heterosexuals, and those with higher levels of SES would encourage men, Whites, heterosexuals, and those with higher levels of SES to more strongly embrace the GSM (Foley, 1990; Griffin, 1998; Hartmann, 2016; Lapchick, 2019). We also expected that self-reported conservatism would be positively associated with beliefs about the personal development and social capital benefits of sports because of the disproportionate embrace of sports by conservatives as both reflective of, and a mechanism for instilling, meritocratic beliefs about status attainment in sports and society (Newman & Giardina, 2011). Although we did not formally pose a competing hypothesis in regards to race/ethnicity, in which we suggested that Blacks would be more supportive of the

GSM, because of the unique relative status and social mobility benefits of sports for particularly African Americans in the U.S., we were mindful of the theoretical and empirical support for this possibility (Bryant, 2018; Cooper, 2019; Smith, 2009).

As summarized in Table 3, compared to either women or those who identified as nonbinary, men were more likely to endorse the character-building, health, academic, and school popularity benefits of sports participation. There was also some evidence that heterosexuals are more likely to believe in the character-building and health-promoting aspects of sports participation, compared to some groups of individuals who identify as sexual minorities. In addition, self-reported conservatism was consistently and positively associated with beliefs in the personal development benefits of sports participation, as expected. Finally, in fact, there was very consistent evidence that Black adults more strongly endorsed the positive development and social capital benefits of sports, compared to White adults.

In sum, these findings suggest that the persons most frequently in charge of sports organizations, and most likely to identify as sports fanatics, also appear to be the people who most consistently endorse the GSM. The main exception, in terms of their likelihood of controlling sports organizations at least, is that Black individuals are more positive than White individuals about the personal development and social capital benefits of sports—which is nonetheless consistent with the history of sports acting, and being promoted, as a uniquely important pathway for social status and mobility for Black individuals (Bryant, 2018; Smith, 2009). Thus, these findings about the beliefs of the personal development and social capital benefits of sports are quite consistent with previous research about who is most likely to influence sports, celebrate sports, be immersed in sports, and use sports as a pathway to social

mobility (Cooper, 2019; Denison & Kitchen, 2015; Lapchick, 2019; Messner, 2002; Smith, 2009).

Finally, we hypothesized that beliefs about the personal development and social capital benefits of sports would be linked to positive sports involvement experiences. We did find consistent evidence that reporting personal mistreatment in sports interactions (i.e., being called names, bullied, discriminated against, or abuse) was negatively associated with agreeing that sports build character, produce positive health outcomes, and encourage academic achievements. Further, adults' sports fandom, sports consumption, and regular sports participation were consistently and positively associated with agreeing that sports offer a wide array of personal development and social capital benefits. Unexpectedly, we discovered that sports mistreatment was also positively associated with recognizing the social capital benefits of sports participation. One interpretation of this latter finding is that sports mistreatment leads one to be more critical of sports interactions and implications—including becoming both more aware and potentially critical of the social status boosts that sports participation offers to individuals within schools and communities (Bissinger, 1990; Foley, 1990). Regardless, overall, these results support previous research and theorizing about the likely tendency for institutional stakeholders, sports fanatics, and athletes themselves to be (overly) optimistic about the personal development and social capital benefits of sports (Coakley, 2011; 2015; Foley, 1990).

Because of the consistent and substantial associations between positive and invested sports involvement especially, including family and community exposures, and beliefs about the value of sports, we illustrate these patterns and strengths of associations with predicted probabilities at the representative values of all “high, positive investments” and all “low, negative investments” in sports involvement (i.e., every sport involvement indicator was set to

either the lowest or the highest value) with all other variables set to their mean values. These predicted probabilities derive from all of the full model estimates for each dependent variable, displayed in Table 2 and Table 3. For comparison purposes, we also include predicted probabilities with all predictors set to their mean values. These predicted probabilities are based on marginal effects calculations and are presented in Figure 2.

(Figure 2 about here)

In order to emphasize support for beliefs about the personal development and social capital benefits of sport, the predicted probabilities of strongly agreeing or somewhat agreeing are stacked on the bottom of each bar in Figure 2. Thus, one may interpret the predicted probability of endorsing that sports build character as being over .70 for those who exhibit low, negative sport involvement up to .99 for those who exhibit high, positive sport involvement. Furthermore, there is an enormous, more than 70 percentage point, difference in the predicted probability of “strongly agreeing” that sports build character between those who could be classified as low and high in sport involvement. Similar patterns exist in the predicted probabilities of endorsing that sports improve health, lead to better grades in school, make one more popular in school, and lead one to become more well-known in the community. There is more uniform agreement that sports improve health (although enormous predicted probability differences in strongly agreeing that range from .30 to .85) and less uniform agreement that sports lead to improved grades in school. Clearly, those who are highly involved in sports and have had positive experiences are much more supportive of positive beliefs about the value of sports, compared to those who are not involved in sports and have not had positive experiences. Of course, some of this is likely because of preferences about sports involvement connected to

the apparent benefits, or lack thereof, of sports. But the findings also suggest that sports cultures nurture the GSM, too.

In total, the results of this study provide empirical evidence of the extremely positive beliefs that U.S. adults have about the value of sports in society. Overwhelmingly, Americans believe that sports participation builds character, improves health outcomes, promotes academic achievement, boosts one's popularity in school, and makes one more well-known in a community. These beliefs are not necessarily wrong; there is evidence for these claims (Erdal, 2018; Sabo & Veliz, 2008; Staurowsky et al., 2015). However, the concern is that an overwhelmingly positive perception of the value of sports can lead individuals to stop thinking critically about how the contexts of sports interactions matter and neglect focusing on how the interactions, cultures, and structures of sports can be improved (Coakley, 2011; 2015; Project Play, 2019; Ridpath, 2018). Indeed, there are a host of problems in how sports are structured, offered, and celebrated. These include problems of access, safety, attrition, mistreatment, expense, and many more (Erdal, 2018; Project Play, 2019; Ridpath, 2018; Sabo & Veliz, 2008). Strikingly, as displayed in Figure 2, the persons most invested in sports seem to have particularly optimistic views about the personal development and social capital benefits of sports.

The findings from this study also reinforce the recognition that primary groups such as families, communities, and religious organizations shape our beliefs about the values—and shortcomings—of sports in society. Thus, these are important sites for realistic and educated messages about the positive and negative consequences of sports involvement to occur (Coakley, 2011; 2015; Ridpath, 2018; Smith, 2009; Staurowsky et al., 2015). Furthermore, it seems revelatory that stratification indicators and beliefs are associated with endorsements of the value of sports such that those who are more advantaged in sports and society (e.g., men,

heterosexuals) tend to be most optimistic about the value of sports—justifying the status quo of how sports are invested in, conducted, and celebrated (Foley, 1990; Griffin, 1998; Lapchick, 2019; Messner, 2002). Related to this, Black adults and conservatives seem to be particularly optimistic about the value of sports, presumably because of their historic experiences in sports and view of sports as relatively meritocratic (Bryant, 2018; Newman & Giardina, 2011; Smith, 2009). Finally, as one might suspect, we find evidence that seemingly positive sports interactions encourage individuals to hold more positive beliefs about the value of sports involvement. The relevance of this finding, to our minds, is that people who particularly love and are immersed in sports may become less willing or able to recognize the shortcomings in how sports interactions, cultures, and structures operate and be resistant or unsupportive in working to improve sports in society (Coakley, 2011; 2015; Messner, 2002; Project Play, 2019; Ridpath, 2018; Smith, 2009).

That said, there are limitations of the present study. We rely on responses to closed-ended survey questions instead of allowing the respondents to the NSASS to articulate their views of the positives and negatives of sports participation. Future research should seek to integrate our quantitative approach with more in-depth qualitative inquiries. In addition, there is a need to better understand how distinctions between the types of sports involvement (e.g., playing, watching, conversing) may differentially matter for beliefs about the value of sports; similarly, beliefs about the value of sports may depend on the nature of involvement and the conditions under which that involvement occurs. Another limitation of this study is that it draws from a sample of survey volunteers who are additionally not representative of the overall make-up of U.S. adults. We attempt to address these concern through post-stratification weighting techniques and the use of multiple regression analyses; however, it would be more ideal to institute stratified random selection procedures for the purposes of sample selection. In addition, some of the

validity of our findings may be comprised by recall error—particularly recollections about one’s upbringing. Thus, prospective research may be useful for pushing this research focus forward. Finally, of course, endogeneity concerns are especially present in the associations between sports involvement patterns and beliefs about the personal development and social capital benefits of sports. That is, it is not clear whether sports fans, consumers, and participants become especially reticent or unable to recognize the shortcomings of sports interactions, cultures, and structures; or, whether sports fans, consumers, and participants are particularly drawn to sports because of their beliefs about the positive consequence of sports interactions, cultures, and structures—including the consequences for personal development and social capital benefits. Thus, inquiries into these potential dynamics deserve further scrutiny in future research.

Nevertheless, this study offers many contributions to our understanding of sports and society issues. Sports do seem to offer numerous benefits to individuals, social groups, and society (Erdal, 2018; Sabo & Veliz, 2008; Staurowsky et al., 2015), but there is a need to a) recognize extant perceptions of the value of sports, b) be vigilante in critically assessing the strengths and shortcomings of sports interactions, cultures, and structures and how they may vary, and c) work to educate and advocate for more positive sports interactions, cultures, and structures (Erdal, 2018; Messner, 2002; Project Play, 2019; Ridpath, 2018; Sabo & Veliz, 2008). The present study offers an important step in assessing beliefs about the value of sports in society and the factors that shape those beliefs. Additional research is needed to better understand the origin of beliefs about sports in society and how those beliefs matter for sports interactions, cultures, and structures.

References

- Allison, R. (2018). *Kicking center: Gender and the selling of women's professional soccer*. Rutgers University Press.
- Bale, J. (2003). *Sport geography 2nd ed*. Routledge.
- Barber, B. L., Eccles, J. S., & Stone, M. R. (2001). Whatever happened to the Jock, the Brain, and the Princess? Young adult pathways linked to adolescent activity involvement and social identity. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 16*, 429–455.
- Beamon K. (2010). Are sports overemphasized in the socialization process of African American males? A qualitative analysis of former collegiate athletes' perception of sport socialization. *Journal of Black Studies, 41*(2), 281–300.
- Beltrán-Carrillo, B. J., Devís-Devís, J., Peiró-Velert, C., & Brown, David H. K. (2012). When Physical Activity Participation Promotes Inactivity: Negative Experiences of Spanish Adolescents in Physical Education and Sport. *Youth & Society, 44*(1), 3–27.
- Bissinger, H. G. (1990). *Friday night lights: A town, a team, and a dream*. Addison-Wesley
- Broh, B. A. (2002). Linking extracurricular programming to academic achievement: Who benefits and why? *Sociology of Education, 75*(1), 69–95.
- Bryant, H. (2018). *The heritage: Black athletes, a divided America, and the politics of patriotism*.
- Burton, L. J. (2015). Underrepresentation of women in sport leadership: A review of research. *Sport Management Review, 18*, 155–165.
- Camiré, M., & Trudel, P. (2010). High school athlete' perspectives on character development through sport participation. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy, 15*, 193–207.

- Clopton, A. W. (2012). Social capital, gender, and the student athlete. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 16(4), 272–288.
- Coakley, J. (2015). Assessing the sociology of sport: on cultural sensibilities and the great sport myth. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 50(4–5): 402–406.
- Coakley, J. (2017). *Sports in society: Issues and controversies* (12th ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Coakley, J. (2011). Youth sports: What counts as “Positive Development?” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 35(3), 306–324.
- Cooley, C. H. (1909). *Social organization: A study of the larger mind*. Charles Scribner’s Sons.
- Cooper, J. H. (2019). *From exploitation back to empowerment: Black male holistic (under)development through sport and (mis)education*. Peter Lang.
- Davids, K., & Baker, J. (2007). Genes, environment and sport performance: Why the nature-nurture dualism is no longer relevant. *Sports Medicine*, 37(11), 961–980.
- DeMeulenaere, E. (2010). Playing the game: Sports as a force for promoting improved academic performance for urban youth. *Journal of Cultural Diversity*, 17(4), 127–135.
- Denison E., & Kitchen A. (2015). Out on the Fields: The first international study on homophobia in sport. Nielsen, Bingham Cup Sydney 2014, Australian Sports Commission, Federation of Gay Games. Accessed through: www.outonthefields.com
- DiFiori, J. P., Benjamin, H. J., Brenner, J. S., Gregory, A., Jayanthi, N., Landry, G. L., & Luke, A. (2014). Overuse injuries and burnout in youth sports: A position statement from the American Medical Society for Sports Medicine. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 48(4), 287–288.

- Dixon M., Warner, S., & Bruening, J. (2008). More than just letting them play: Parental influence on women's lifetime sport involvement. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 25, 538–559.
- Donaldson, A., & Finch, C. F. (2011). Sport as a setting for promoting health. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 46(1), 4–5.
- Dorsch, T. E., Smith, A. L., & McDonough, M. H. (2015). Early socialization of parents through organized youth sport. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*, 4, 3–18.
- Dorsch, T. E., Smith, A. L., & McDonough, M. H. (2009). Parents' perceptions of child-to-parent socialization in organized youth sport. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 31, 444–468.
- Eckstein, R. (2017). *How College Athletics are Hurting Girls' Sports: The Pay-to-Play Pipeline*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Edwards, M. B., & Casper, J. M. (2012). Sport and health. In G. B. Cunningham, & J. N. Singer (Eds.), *Sociology of sport and physical activity* (pp. 69–98). Center for Sport Management Research and Education.
- Eitzen, D. (2009). *Fair and foul: Beyond the myths and paradoxes of sport*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Erdal, K. (2018). *The adulteration of children's sports: Waning health and well-being in the age of organized play*. Lexington Books.
- Farrey, T. (2008). *Game on: The all-american race to make champions of our children*. ESPN.
- Fink, J. S. (2014). Female athletes, women's sport, and the sport media commercial complex: Have we really “come a long way, baby”? *Sport Management Review*, 18, 331–342.

- Foley, D. (1990). The great American football ritual: reproducing race, class, and gender inequality. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 7, 111–134.
- Fredricks, J., & Eccles, J. (2002). Children's competence and value beliefs from childhood through adolescence: Growth trajectories in two male-sex-typed domains. *Developmental Psychology*, 38, 519–533.
- Fredricks, J., & Eccles, J. (2004). Parental influences on youth involvement in sports. In M.R. Weiss (Ed.), *Developmental sport and exercise psychology: A lifespan perspective* (pp. 145–164). Fitness Information Technology.
- Gould, D., & Carson, S. (2008). Life skills development through sport: current status and future directions. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 1, 58-78.
- Giulianotti, R. (2004). Human rights, globalization and sentimental education: The case of sport. *Sport in Society*, 7, 355-369.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. International Publishers
- Griffin, P. (1998). *Strong women, deep closets: Lesbians and homophobia in sport*. Human Kinetics
- Hartmann, D. (2016). *Midnight basketball: Race, sports, and neoliberal social policy*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Hartmann, D. (2003a). Theorizing sport as social intervention: A view from the grassroots. *Quest*, 55, 118–140.
- Hartmann, D. (2003b). The sanctity of Sunday football: Why men love sports. *Contexts*, 2, 13-19.
- Hartmann, D. & Kwauk, C. (2011). Sport and development: An overview, critique, and reconstruction. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 35(3), 284–305.

- Hawkins, B. J. (2010). *The new plantation: Black athletes, college sports, and predominantly white NCAA institutions*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hawzen, M. G., & Newman, J. I. (2017). The gospel according to Tim Tebow: Sporting celebrity, whiteness, and the cultural politics of Christian fundamentalism in America. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 34, 12–24.
- Holt, N. L., (2008). *Positive Youth Development Through Sport*. Routledge.
- Humbert, M. L., Chad, K. E., Spink, K. S., Muhajarine, N., Anderson, K. D., Bruner, M. W., Girolami, T. M., Odnokon, P., & Gryba, C. R. (2006). Factors that influence physical activity participation among high- and low-SES youth. *Quality Health Research* 16(4), 467–483.
- Hyatt, C. G., Kerwin, S., Hoeber, L., & Sveinson, K. (2018). The reverse socialization of sport fans: How children impact their parents' sport fandom. *Journal of Sport Management*, 32, 542–554.
- Jones, M. I., & Lavallee, D. (2009). Exploring perceived life skills development and participation in sport. *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise*, 1, 36–50.
- Knoester, C., & Fields, V. T. (2020). Mother–child engagement in sports and outdoor activities: Intensive mothering, purposive leisure, and implications for health and relationship closeness. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 55(7), 933–952.
- Knoester, C., & Randolph, T. (2019). Father-child sports participation and outdoor activities: Patterns and implications for health and father-child relationships. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 36, 322–329.
- Krattenmaker, T. (2010). *Onward Christian athletes: Turning ballparks into pulpits and players into preachers*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

- Lapchick, R. (2019). The 2018 Racial and Gender Report Card. Published by The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport. Retrieved from <https://www.tidesport.org/>
- Messner, M. A. (2009). *It's All for the Kids: Gender, Families, and Youth Sports*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press.
- Messner, M. A. (2002). *Taking the Field: Women, Men and Sports*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Mills, C. W. (1959). *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Miracle, A. W., & Rees, R. (1994). *Lessons of the locker room: The myth of school sports*. Prometheus Books.
- Neely, K. C., & Holt, N. L. (2014). Parents' perspectives on the benefits of sport participation for young children. *Sport Psychologist*, 28, 255–268.
- Newman, J. I., & Giardina, M. D. (2011). *Sport, spectacle, and NASCAR nation: Consumption and the cultural politics of neoliberalism*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Overman, S. (2011). *The protestant ethic and the spirit of sport*. Mercer University Press.
- Project Play. (2019). *State of play: 2019*. Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program Report. https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2019/10/2019_SOP_National_Final.pdf
- Putney, C. (2001). *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920*. Harvard University Press.
- Rhoden, W. (2006). *Forty million dollar slaves: The rise, fall, and redemption of the black athlete*. Three Rivers Press.
- Ridpath, B. D. (2018). *Alternative models of sport development in America: Solutions to a crisis in education and public health*. Ohio University Press.

- Sabo, D., & Veliz, P. (2008). *Go out and play: Youth sports in America*. Women's Sports Foundation.
- Smith, E. (2009). *Race, sport, and the American dream*. Carolina Academic Press.
- Southall, R. M. (2014). NCAA graduation rates: A quarter-century of re-branding academic success. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 7(2), 120–133.
- Spaaij, R., Farquharson, K., & Marjoribanks, T. (2015). Sport and social inequalities. *Sociology Compass*, 9(5), 400–411.
- Stafford, A., Alexander, K., & Fry, D. (2013). There was something that wasn't right because that was the only place I ever got treated like that: Children and young people's experiences of emotional harm in sport. *Childhood*, 22(1), 121–137.
- Staurowsky, E. J., DeSousa, M. J., Miller, K. E., Sabo, D., Shakib, S., Theberge, N., Veliz, P., Weaver, A., & Williams, N. (2015). *Her Life Depends On It III: Sport, Physical Activity, and the Health and Well-Being of American Girls and Women*. Women's Sports Foundation.
- Thorson, E. A., & Serazio, M. (2018). Sports fandom and political attitudes. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 82(2), 391–403.
- Wann, D., Waddill, P., Polk, J., & Weaver, S. (2011). The team identification–social psychological health model: Sport fans gaining connections to others via sport team identification. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 15, 75–89.
- Watson, N. J., & Parker, A. (2014). *Sport and the Christian religion: A systematic review of literature*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Watson, N. J., Weir, S., & Friend, S. (2005). The development of muscular Christianity in Victorian Britain and beyond. *Journal of Religion and Society*, 7(1), 1–25.

Wheeler, S. (2011). The significance of family culture for sports participation. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 1–18.

White, P., & McTeer, W. (2012). Socioeconomic status and sport participation at different developmental stages during childhood and youth: Multivariate analyses using Canadian. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 29, 186–209.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for all Variables used in the Analyses

	<u>M/%</u>	<u>(SD)</u>	<u>% Missing</u>
<i>Dependent Variables</i>			
Sports build positive character traits	3.46	(0.64)	1%
Playing sports improves health	3.62	(0.57)	1%
Playing sports leads to improved grades in school	2.84	(0.89)	5%
Playing sports makes one popular in school	3.17	(0.74)	3%
Playing sports makes one well-known in community	3.18	(0.71)	3%
<i>Predictor Variables</i>			
Female	72%		0%
Nonbinary	3%		0%
(Male)	26%		0%
Black	10%		1%
Latinx	9%		1%
Other race/ethnicity	8%		1%
(White)	73%		1%
Lesbian or gay	9%		2%
Bisexual	14%		2%
Other sexual identity	4%		2%
(Heterosexual)	73%		2%
High School or less	13%		0%
Some college	40%		0%
(College)	47%		0%
Household income	5.25	(4.01)	15%
Conservatism	2.44	(1.17)	10%
Married	38%		1%
Cohabiting	16%		1%
(Single)	46%		1%
Number of children	0.57	(1.02)	5%
Christian	48%		6%
Other religion	15%		6%
(No religious affiliation)	37%		6%
Age	41.0	(12.64)	0%
Works in paid labor	66%		2%
Northeast	14%		0%
Midwest	36%		0%
South	33%		0%
(West)	17%		0%
<i>Sports involvement contexts</i>			
Sports fandom	2.20	(1.28)	<.5%
Sports consumption	3.34	(0.77)	9%
Sports participant	59%	-	1%
Mistreated in sports	38%		4%
Parents' sports fandom	2.19	(1.42)	4%
Community's sports passion	3.34	(0.77)	7%

Note. N = 3,993; Reference categories in parentheses.

Table 2. Results from Ordinal Logistic Regressions Predicting Beliefs about the Personal Benefits of Sports

Variable	(1) <i>Character</i> OR	(2) <i>Character</i> OR	(3) <i>Health</i> OR	(4) <i>Health</i> OR	(5) <i>Grades</i> OR	(6) <i>Grades</i> OR
Female	0.99	1.36***	0.84*	1.00	1.16*	1.52***
Nonbinary	0.59*	0.95	0.67	0.93	0.65*	1.00
Black	1.78***	1.42**	1.24	1.04	1.54***	1.26*
Latinx	1.06	0.83	0.89	0.77*	1.46***	1.27*
Other race/ethnicity	1.27	1.23	1.07	1.04	1.04	0.96
Lesbian or gay	1.00	1.16	0.98	1.11	1.18	1.34*
Bisexual	0.81*	0.92	0.96	1.07	0.98	1.08
Other sexual identity	0.61**	0.88	0.59**	0.75	0.80	1.05
High School or less	1.12	1.17	0.82	0.84	1.09	1.13
Some college	0.97	1.03	0.87	0.90	0.96	1.01
Household income	1.01	1.00	1.00	0.99	1.00	0.99
Conservatism	1.21***	1.14**	1.05***	1.00	1.21***	1.15***
Married	0.81*	0.76**	0.87	0.86	0.99	0.98
Cohabiting	1.09	1.03	1.02	0.97	1.06	1.02
Number of children	1.17***	1.08*	1.15***	1.09*	1.18***	1.11**
Christian	1.82***	1.51***	1.40***	1.21*	1.70***	1.43***
Other religion	1.26*	1.24*	1.10	1.09	1.29**	1.26*
Age	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.01*	1.00
Works in paid labor	0.99	0.91	1.10	1.07	1.10	1.06
Northeast	1.08	1.01	1.11	1.07	0.98	0.90
Midwest	1.01	0.95	1.13	1.09	0.97	0.92
South	1.08	1.01	1.02	0.97	0.97	0.89
<i>Sports involvement contexts</i>						
Sports fandom		1.86***		1.34***		1.65***
Sports consumption		1.04**		1.04***		1.03**
Sports participant		1.42***		1.45***		1.37***
Mistreated in sports		0.67***		0.72***		0.74***
Parents' sports fandom		1.00		0.98		0.97
Community's sports passion		1.11*		1.13*		0.96

Note. OR signifies odds ratios; * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3. Results from Ordinal Logistic Regressions Predicting Beliefs about the Social Capital Benefits of Sports

Variable	(1) <i>School</i> OR	(2) <i>School</i> OR	(3) <i>Community</i> OR	(4) <i>Community</i> OR
Female	0.66***	0.73***	0.88	1.01
Nonbinary	0.73	0.82	0.67	0.83
Black	1.41**	1.37**	1.45**	1.35**
Latinx	1.10	1.08	1.06	1.00
Other race/ethnicity	0.98	0.98	1.03	1.01
Lesbian or gay	1.11	1.14	0.96	1.00
Bisexual	1.08	1.04	1.08	1.06
Other sexual identity	1.08	0.90	0.74	0.82
High School or less	1.04	1.11	1.12	1.21
Some college	0.97	0.99	1.05	1.08
Household income	0.99	0.99	0.99	0.99
Conservatism	1.03	1.02	1.06	1.04
Married	0.88	0.87	0.82*	0.80**
Cohabiting	1.03	1.00	1.04	1.00
Number of children	1.03	1.02	1.09**	1.07
Christian	1.17	1.11	1.33***	1.21*
Other religion	1.08	1.06	1.24*	1.20
Age	1.00	1.00	0.99***	0.99***
Works in paid labor	0.92	0.92	1.01	1.00
Northeast	1.12	1.10	1.47**	1.43**
Midwest	1.18	1.15	1.35**	1.29**
South	1.22*	1.20	1.45***	1.39**
<i>Sports involvement contexts</i>				
Sports fandom		1.07		1.20***
Sports consumption		1.04***		1.03**
Sports participant		1.04		1.16*
Mistreated in sports		1.23**		1.19*
Parents' sports fandom		0.98		0.99
Community's sports passion		1.17***		1.24***

Note. OR signifies odds ratios;

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4. Summary of Support for Study Hypotheses

Hypothesis	(1) <i>Character</i>	(2) <i>Character</i>	(3) <i>Health</i>	(4) <i>Health</i>	(5) <i>Grades</i>	(6) <i>Grades</i>	(7) <i>School</i>	(8) <i>School</i>	(9) <i>Community</i>	(10) <i>Community</i>
<i>H2: Primary Groups</i>										
Parents' sports fandom		(+)		(+)		(+)				(+)
Community's sports passion		(+)		(+)				(+)		(+)
Number of children	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)			(+)	
Christian	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)			(+)	(+)
<i>H3: Stratification</i>										
Female		(+) [#]	(-)		(+) [#]	(+) [#]	(-)	(-)		
Nonbinary	(-)				(-)					
Black	(+) [#]	(+) [#]			(+) [#]	(+) [#]	(+) [#]	(+) [#]	(+) [#]	(+) [#]
Latinx				(-)	(+) [#]	(+) [#]				
Lesbian or gay						(-)				
Bisexual	(-)									
Other sexual identity	(-)		(-)							
High School or less										
Some college										
Household income										
Conservatism	(+)	(+)	(+)		(+)	(+)				
<i>H4: Sport Contexts</i>										
Sports fandom		(+)		(+)		(+)				(+)
Sports consumption		(+)		(+)		(+)		(+)		(+)
Sports participant		(+)		(+)		(+)				(+)
Mistreated in sports		(-)		(-)		(-)		(+) [#]		(+) [#]

Note. (+) signifies positive correlation, (-) signifies negative correlation, [#] signifies hypothesis unsupported; significant coefficient in the opposite direction

Note. These NSASS estimates are weighted according to 2018 American Community Survey results for U.S. adults ages 20-64, based on age, gender, race, education, work status, marital status, income, and region.