Exploring the Influence of Parent-Child Socialization on Pre-Adolescent Children’s Sport Involvement in the Context of Family Acculturation

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Introduction
Given the importance of parents in a child’s life, a large body of research in the sport literature has examined the role of parents in children’s sport socialization. For example, parents sign their children up for sport and physical activities (Howard & Madrigal, 1990), encourage children (Green & Chalip, 1997), teach and advise them (DeKnop, Van Driessche, & Wylleman, 1993), and serve as role models for children in contexts involving physical activity (Jambor, 1999). However, there exists a shortage of research on how parents influence children’s sport participation before adolescence. Moreover, the existing literature on sport socialization typically adopted a deterministic and linear approach (Coakley, 2015), arguing that sport involvement functions as a vehicle for the transmission of values external to the sport world. Yet, few studies have emphasized the existence of diverse cultural values and demands in a society in the era of globalization. The purpose of the study was to explore the influence of parent-child socialization on pre-adolescent children’s sport involvement in the context of family acculturation. This study was guided by three research questions: (1) Through what paths do Chinese immigrant parents socialize their child into sport? (2) How do fathers and mothers differ in their ways of socializing their child into sport? (3) What is the role of children in the sport socialization process?

Methods
This study employed a multiple-case studies design (Stake, 2013), which involved an in-depth exploration of the parent-child sport socialization process within and across selected families. In the project, we utilized multiple forms of data collection, including participant observations, face-to-face interviews, and parents’ journals. The data were collected from the fathers, mothers, and pre-adolescent children from 11 Chinese immigrant families residing in the Houston metropolitan area. Each family’s data were compiled as a case study narrative, on which within-case and comparative coding and analyses were conducted (Yin, 2003).

Findings and Discussions
We identified three major themes and a number of sub-themes. First, the findings revealed six common types of sport socialization paths provided by parents. These formal and informal sport socialization paths varied between families due to the differences in parents’ sport socialization goals. Second, Chinese immigrant fathers and mothers usually took on complementary roles, and the gender of the child (along with their preferred sport) usually affected the responsibilities and the roles taken by fathers and mothers. Third, the findings demonstrated that parents’ sport socialization behaviors were often conditioned by the responses of the child. The relative power between parents and children varied due to factors such as children’s age, gender, sport performance, and parents’ socialization goals.

The findings of the study add to the existing sport literature by presenting how parent-child socialization influences pre-adolescent children’s sport involvement and by incorporating the father-mother-child triad to explore generational and gender differences. We believe that the findings have important practical implications for how to provide sport programs in areas with large populations of immigrant families and youth.