

Children's agency in sports socialization: The meaning of children's sport among the immigrant family triad

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This paper explored the perceived meaning of children's sports involvement among the father-mother-child triad in Chinese immigrant families in the U.S. The research project employed a multiple-case study design, and collected a variety of forms of data, including participant observations; face-to-face interviews; and parents' journals. 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. The findings of the study revealed that there were generational differences in the perceived meaning of children's sports participation. The agency and influence of children were found during the meaning construction process and supported by Chinese immigrant parents. Multiple factors, including gender, acculturation status, and age, were related to the perceived meaning of children's sports involvement.

KEY WORDS: Perceived Meaning of Sport, Sports Socialization, Children's Sport, Family Triads, Immigrant Family.

The importance of close relationships, such as those with parents, for a young child's personal development, has been widely acknowledged (Waters & Cummings, 2000). Socialization is the process through which individuals are socially guided to become competent members of the society and culture in which they reside (Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015). Research on sports socialization has mainly focused on two processes, namely: 1) the process of socialization into the sport, which entails assimilating the mental and physical characteristics that are requisite for participation in a certain sport, and 2)

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socialization through sport, where the interest is in the consequences and concomitants of sports participation for both the individuals and the society (Coakley, 2015). While studies have found that participation in sport is positively correlated with physical self-efficacy; high self-esteem; peer acceptance; and academic success for boys and girls (Coakley, 2011; Holt et al., 2017), it can also lead to unintended consequences, such as gender and racial discrimination, physical injuries, and burnout (e.g., Brown et al., 2003).

Sports psychologists have examined various cognitive and behavioral aspects of sport participation among youth to understand and improve young sports participants' experience and performance. The examinations have been made from the perspectives of children (e.g., Gould, Feltz, & Weiss, 1985), parents (e.g., Van Yperen, 1998), and parent-child dyads (e.g., Felber Charbonneau & Camiré, 2020). Evidence indicates preferences for sports activities developed during childhood greatly influence one's preferences in adulthood (Simpkins, Fredricks, Davis-Kean, & Eccles, 2006) and may be further transmitted to future generations. However, the knowledge base about the convergence and divergence in perspectives among the fathers, mothers, and children regarding pre-adolescent children's sports socialization and how the perceptions of sports are transmitted among inter-generational immigrant families is lacking.

Moreover, the majority of the existing literature on sports socialization has focused on middle-income, Western, European American parents and their children (Coakley, 2015). There have been few studies that explored the topic of socialization into sport for families immersed in more than one culture. Indeed, little research has simultaneously examined cultural influences at the child/individual level (e.g., a child's culture) *as well as* at the family/dyad level (e.g., parent-child differences in cultural values) concerning children's sport. There may be some universal benefits of sports participation, however, predicting the positive outcomes for children and promoting sports socialization practices that support them depend on a more precise knowledge of cultural beliefs and practices among both parents and children (Weinberg et al., 2000). More interdisciplinary research that includes a cultural dimension is needed to achieve a better understanding of the role that sports participation plays in pre-adolescent children's lives (Coakley, 2016). This study is designed to fill these gaps in research and to explore the meaning of children's sport among the father-mother-children triad in Chinese immigrant families in the U.S.

The study's focus on immigrants is especially timely as the U.S. and much of Western Europe are experiencing high rates of international migration (Arango, 2017). The 2020 U.S. Census Bureau data show that the nation's foreign-born population has grown to over 44 million, comprising 13.7% of the

entire U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). If immigration unfolds as expected by the Census Bureau, by 2060, immigrants will account for 95% of the U.S. population growth (Johnson, 2020). In particular, Asians have been the fastest-growing racial group in the U.S., and may grow by as much as 162% between 2016 and 2060, reaching 10.8% of the total U.S. population in 2060 (Johnson, 2020). By focusing on the topic of sports socialization among immigrant families, the present study responds to McSweeney and Nakamura's (2019) call for a greater scholarly examination of diaspora and sport. Moreover, since areas, such as Western Europe, Canada, and Australia, are also experiencing one of the greatest immigration flows in recent history (Fasani, Llull, & Tealdi, 2020), we expect that the findings of this study may have implications for immigrant families living in other countries as well.

Literature Review

We begin this section by describing the social relational theory, which serves as the theoretical framework for the study. Then, we turn to the cultural perspective on socialization, sport as an important context of socialization, and Chinese immigrant parents' cognitions and practices concerning sports socialization. We conclude by discussing the knowledge gap that the present study intended to fill.

The Social Relational Theory

Before the 1970s, theories of socialization believed it to be a linear, deterministic, and decontextualized process, guided by mechanistic ontology (e.g., Wrong, 1963). The social relational theory was developed based on over a decade of research by Kuczynski and colleagues (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007; Kuczynski, Pitman, & Mitchell, 2009) and introduced an open-ended, dialectical framework for studying socialization processes in the family in a more dynamic way than was possible under mechanistic assumptions. The underlying assumptions of socialization have changed from a unidirectional model of causality to a dialectical model of bidirectional causality. They also evolved from a model of unequal agency to a model that considers parents and children as equal agents. While previous models of socialization viewed parents and children as separate unrelated individuals, the new model considers culturally embedded relationships as a context for parent-child interactions. The new model also acknowledges interdependent power asymmetry in parent-child interactions instead of the power between parents and children being static and unequal (Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015).

According to the social relational theory (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007), parents and children are assumed to be human agents co-acting (although unequal in power) in a long-term relationship context. A guiding assumption is that to be human is to be an agent, since the foundations of agency emerge at birth. Moreover, agency could be understood from the aspects of autonomy, construction, and action, representing motivational, cognitive, and behavioral features, respectively (Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015). Autonomy, as a basic human need, refers to a person's need to feel that their behaviors are chosen, governed, and endorsed by himself/herself (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Construction refers to the ability to create meanings from experiences (Smetana, 2006). Action is characterized as "being able to intervene in the world or to refrain from such intervention, with the effect of influencing a specific process or state of affairs" (Giddens, 1984, p. 14).

Besides the concept of children's agency, another major component of the social relational theory is its emphasis on the cultural embeddedness of relationships (Kuczynski et al., 2009). Human beings across cultures may differ in multiple aspects of socioemotional and cognitive functioning. For example, compared to their Western counterparts, children and adolescents in some Asian societies are more cooperative toward people they know (Chen, Fu, & Zhao, 2015). Cultural meaning affects the nature of the bidirectional influence. Hence, the cultural meaning associated with the parent-child relationship may influence how the agency is experienced (Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015).

Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman (1981) introduced the concept of cultural transmission to explain how a cultural group can continue its traditions in subsequent generations. They distinguished three forms of cultural transmission: vertical (i.e., learning from parents); horizontal (i.e., learning from peers); and oblique (i.e., learning from other adults). When cultural transmission takes place entirely within one's own primary culture, socialization (and enculturation) should be the term used. Acculturation is more appropriate and should be employed if cultural transmission derives from contact with and influence from persons and institutions that belong to another culture (Berry, 2015). According to Berry (2015), acculturation is "the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members" (p. 520). The majority of the past studies examining sports socialization focused on one culture (Coakley, 2015), and few studies have examined whether cultural experiences, such as acculturation, may impact individuals' social and cognitive functioning related to sport, such as the perceived significance of sport to child's development. Guided by the social relational theory, the present study not only emphasized the role of children in their own

sports socialization by exploring their perspectives on the meaning of sports involvement, but also examined whether the process of acculturation may change parents' perceptions of children's sport.

SPORT AND SOCIALIZATION

Parents are considered the most crucial socialization agent for children's sports involvement (Boiché, Guillet, Bois, & Sarrazin, 2011). They sign their children up for sports activities (Howard & Madrigal, 1990); encourage children (Green & Chalip, 1997); teach and advise them (Holt, Tamminen, Black, Mandigo, & Fox, 2009); and serve as role models in sports contexts (Jambor, 1999). Parenting is demonstrated in parenting cognitions and parenting practices (Bornstein, 2015). Parenting cognitions related to children's sports socialization, which will be the focus of this study, include the goals, attitudes, expectations, perceptions, attributions, and actual knowledge of children's sports involvement (Bornstein, 2015).

To date, a substantial literature has focused on parental expectations and evaluations regarding sport. For example, Neely and Holt (2014) examined parents' perceptions regarding the benefits young children could gain from sports participation and reported that sports were believed to bring a range of personal, social, and physical benefits because they allowed children to explore their abilities and develop positive self-perceptions. Pracht, Houghton, Fogarty, and Sagas (2020) found that the primary reasons that motivated parents to enroll their children in sport included child growth and development, social benefits, and health/well-being. Only a few studies have included children's perspectives when examining sports socialization (e.g., Kanters, Bocarro, & Casper, 2008; Stein & Raedeke, 1999). In particular, Stein and Raedeke (1999) found that young athletes' perceptions of parents' involvement were related to the stress and enjoyment created by parents. Kanters et al. (2008) established that parents perceived that they imposed significantly less pressure on their children during sport participation than what was reported by the children themselves. Our study is designed to contribute to this literature by examining the perspectives of parents and children from a cultural minority group in the U.S.

CHINESE IMMIGRANT FAMILIES AND SPORTS SOCIALIZATION

Cross-cultural studies have found that Chinese and Western parents differ in their views on what is important for children. For instance, Huntsinger, Jose, Larson, Krieg, and Shaligram (2000) indicated that Chinese American

and Taiwanese American parents scheduled more time for children at the age of five to practice music and learn academic skills, whereas European American parents wanted their children to be more involved in sport and religious education. Lin and Chen (2016) explored the relationship between sports participation and the integration experiences of first-generation Chinese immigrants in the U.S. The participants revealed that although they had developed positive understandings of the concepts of sport after immigration, the value of sport remained secondary. As a result, sports activities were not prioritized in the participants' lives. According to Cheah, Leung, and Zhou (2013), even though Chinese immigrant parents provided less support for their children's sports participation compared to immigrant parents from Western countries, Chinese immigrant mothers adapted and adjusted their parenting beliefs and practices about sports participation to match the new cultural context. Cheah et al. (2013) found that Chinese immigrant mothers were positively influenced by the emphasis on and promotion of children's physical development and engagement in sport in American culture. They understood that participation in such activities would help children establish a balanced, healthy lifestyle.

To date, studies on sports participation among Chinese immigrants, and Chinese youth in particular, limited their unit of analysis to the individual level rather than examining the phenomenon at the family level (e.g., Cheah, Leung, & Zhou, 2013; Li, Sotiriadou, & Auld, 2015; Morela, Hatzigeorgiadis, Sanchez, & Eibe, 2016). Mothers' and fathers' parenting cognitions and practices with respect to sports among immigrant youth have been examined in isolation from each other (Cheah et al., 2013; Harrington, 2009), while the perspectives of second-generation Chinese immigrant youth have been conspicuously absent. This approach restricted our understanding of the family dynamics with respect to sports socialization of immigrant children. In our study, we argue that it is particularly important to incorporate children's perspectives into the studies of immigrant youth sport as children can socialize their parents into the sport, which may further enhance parents' support for children's sports participation.

In summary, there exists a significant amount of research on sports socialization. However, the extant sports socialization literature falls short of providing knowledge on the meaning of sports socialization among the father-mother-child triad in immigrant families. To address this knowledge gap, the current study was guided by two research questions: 1) What is the meaning of children's sports involvement for Chinese immigrant fathers, mothers, and children residing in the U.S.? 2) What are the factors associated with the meaning of children's sports involvement among Chinese immigrant families in the U.S.?

Methods

RESEARCH DESIGN

Every scientific work operates within a broad system of assumptions, principles, and rules. We conducted the study under the epistemic commitments to constructivism and believed that “knowledge is constructed rather than discovered” (Stake, 1995, p. 99). To address the two research questions, this study comprised a multiple-case study design (Stake, 2013). A case was defined as a Chinese immigrant family residing in a household where mothers, fathers, and one of their children aged 6-11 years old were the embedded units of analysis. The multiple-case study design was employed because it was most suitable for the study's theoretical framework and research questions. According to Stake (1995), the four defining characteristics of qualitative case studies are “holistic;” “empirical;” “interpretive;” and “emphatic.” In our study, each family was considered a bounded system (Merriam, 1998), having its own embedded family relationships and approaches to sports socialization. Hence, it needed to be studied as an individual case. Moreover, the case study approach allowed us to employ the social relational theory to direct our investigation as the method availed itself of “prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis” (Yin, 2003, p. 13-14). Furthermore, the case study approach offered breadth and diversity as it allowed us to incorporate multiple methods of data collection and analytical techniques with the added benefit of the triangulation of the results (Yin, 2003).

PARTICIPANTS AND RECRUITMENT

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the primary investigator's university. To carry out the study of sports socialization in the context of immigration, we confined the investigation to a small social unit – a community – to make sample families relatively homogeneous. The community chosen for the study was located in the south-east side of Sugar Land, a city within the Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land metropolitan area, located approximately 25 miles south-west of downtown Houston. Advertisements for the study were distributed to Chinese immigrant families through investigators' personal networks, social media, and posters circulated in the communities. Purposive sampling was used to select case families. Concerning the inclusion criteria of the study, the parents had to be first-generation immigrants who emigrated from Mainland China and have at least one child between the ages of 6-11 years old. The children had to be second-generation immigrants born in the U.S. and be enrolled in sports programs. The consent and assent forms introduced the study, disclosed the risks involved, the possible benefits of this study, participants' rights, and the data handling procedures. Informed consent forms signed by the parents and assent forms signed by the children were collected from participants who had agreed to take part in the study. Data saturation, defined as information redundancy when no new themes are detected (Braun & Clarke, 2019), was achieved with a total of 11 Chinese immigrant families. The background information on each participant is provided in Table I. All of the parents had either American citizenship or U.S. permanent resident status. Most of the parents had lived in the U.S. for more than 10 years and were of middle-class status. In total, 22 parents, 6 boys, and 5 girls participated in the study. Pseudonyms were used to refer to each individual.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

According to Yin (2003), a case study design is comprised of five components: research questions; research propositions; unit of analysis; the logic connecting the data to the propositions; and the criteria for interpreting the findings. Before entering the field, we reviewed the

TABLE I
The information of the family members of the participating families

Family	Mother	Occupation	Father	Occupation	Child	Gender	Age	Sports Activities Currently Participating
Ye Zhu	Qing Jia	Lawyer Chinese School Teacher	Rong Qi	Lawyer Medical Scientist	Benjamin Daniel	M M	10 7	Tennis Taekwondo
Sun	Shupai	Professor	Cheng	Professor	Jacob	M	7	Swimming Soccer
Ma	Ming	Data Engineer	Liang	Software Engineer	Liam	M	9	Soccer Baseball
Bao Li	Jing Ran	Beautician Banker	Peng Dong	Business Owner IT Manager	Mason William	M M	11 11	Tennis Golf
Wang	Yue	Biologist	Da	Software Engineer	Sabin	F	9	Volleyball Soccer
Ni	Yang	Stay at home mother	Lian	Biologist	Isabella	F	6	Swimming
Tao Qian	Xi Ting	Data Scientist Tax Professional	Chao Ji	Civil Servant Hardware Engineer	Mia Olivia	F F	10 9	Ice-skating Basketball
Fang	Sisi	Stay at home mother	Bai	Software Engineer	Sophia	F	7	Swimming Sports dance

relevant literature and developed theoretical propositions. As “the data collection procedures are not routinized” in a case study (Yin, 2003, p. 58), during the preparatory steps before data collection commenced, we completed training as case study investigators and developed protocols for investigation (including the interview and observation process, the interview guide for parents and children, the observation guide, and the parents’ journals). We also conducted a screening of the case study participants and carried out a pilot study to refine data collection plans concerning both the content of the instrument and the procedures to be followed. In the following sections, we will present the details regarding data collection, data analyses, and strategies used to increase the trustworthiness of findings.

DATA COLLECTION

Multiple forms of data were collected, including interviews with parents and children; participant observations; and parents’ journal. We conducted and recorded two rounds of semi-structured interviews. The interview protocol contained questions designed based on the literature that aligned with the research questions. We also included questions to prompt conversation about a particular topic (e.g., participants’ acculturative experiences). We checked the content validity of the interview protocol with a panel of four researchers whose expertise included child development, sports, immigration, and research designs (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

The first round of semi-structured interviews included conversations with each member of the family (the father, the mother, and the child), and the second round was a joint interview with the entire family. The interviews with parents were conducted in Chinese by the primary investigator at participants’ homes and lasted from 30 to 90 minutes, with a mean length

of 48 minutes. The parents were asked, for example: What kinds of things come to mind when you think of your child's sports participation? What is the meaning of sports involvement for your child? The interviews with children took place in a shared living space at their homes. The mean length of interviews with children was 22 minutes. The interviews with children were conducted in either English or Chinese depending on the participants' preferences. The questions asked of children included: How did you become involved in sport? Was it your idea, your mother's idea, your father's idea, or other people's idea? How much choice or control do you have over what sport to play? To minimize the power differential between a child and an adult researcher, the investigator was always attentive to her language and body gestures to make the children feel that their responses were accepted (Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, Baruchel, & Jones, 2008). Moreover, a child interview toolkit containing different small toys was brought to each child interview. The investigator offered the children to pick and play with a toy for a while to capture their attention at the beginning of the interview or redirect their focus when the conversations seemed to be off track (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

In addition, observation data were collected before, during, and after the child's sports activities. An observation checklist was completed during each visit to children's sports and physical activities. For example, we observed whether any guidance or expectations were given prior to children's sports sessions as well as parents' and children's reflections concerning children's sports performances. Observations took place in the car, during the walk to the sports field, or whenever there was direct interaction or communication between the parents and the child. During the observation, we embodied the observer-as-participant role and restrained from interacting with the participants to avoid interfering with what was happening naturally between the family members. Parents were also asked to keep a journal and record their children's activities during weekends for three consecutive weeks.

DATA ANALYSES

Each family's data were compiled as a case study narrative. The interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim and translated from Chinese to English. The analytical process started with generating detailed write-ups and summaries of each case to capture parents' immigration experiences, current living conditions, and their children's sports socialization experiences. We used ordinary and non-technical language to create a report for each family.

To conduct within-case analysis and comparative coding among individual cases, we followed Stake's (2013) highly structured analytic guidelines and worksheets. Only structural changes were made in the worksheets established by Stake (2013) without changing the content of the worksheets. For instance, the number of research questions on the worksheets was adapted to two for the current study. The first worksheet recorded the research questions (labeled as themes) of the study. During the within-case analysis, we completed the second worksheet, which documented the researcher's notes taken while reading each case report. Each note contained investigators' synopsis, descriptions of situational constraints, the uniqueness among other cases, the prominence of each theme within the case, and the utility (the richness of content) of the case for developing each theme.

A cross-case comparative coding and analysis were then performed (Stake, 2013). First, we considered the utility of each case report in further developing each theme. For example, when working on the first theme about parents' and children's perceived meaning of sports involvement, we reviewed all the case synopses and documented each case's utility for this particular theme. Next, we rated the utility of the cases as "high," "medium," and "low," and entered the ratings of the utility of each case for each theme in the third worksheet. Based on this worksheet, we identified the highly relevant cases for each theme. Then, we used the fourth worksheet to merge findings across cases. In particular, we copied findings from each case report from the second worksheet and printed the findings on a strip, thereby creating "finding strips." These "finding strips" were case-identified and numbered. We clustered "finding strips" based on their similarities in a topic, keeping those that were dissimilar apart.

After that, we reviewed the clusters and made modifications by adding or dropping strips based on their fit with the cluster. Afterward, we named each merged finding without paying attention to the themes, sequenced the merged findings by attaching a number to each of them, and entered each merged finding in the fourth worksheet. The fourth worksheet specified the cases that contributed to each merged finding. For example, if case A contributed three findings to the Merged Finding 1, the case letter was repeated that many times (e.g., AAA). A number of single findings emerged from the finding-merging process. Some of these single findings were deemed important enough to mention in the final report, and so they were entered as special findings into the fourth worksheet. Following that, if any case had contributed at least two times to a merged finding and if, from the second worksheet, we established that the theme was rated as prominent in that case, we put parentheses in the cell at the intersection of that finding and that theme. After we had completed the fourth worksheet, we shifted our attention back to the multi-case themes to pair the merged findings with the themes. We ranked the merged findings and special findings based on the order of their importance for understanding each theme. For example, after all the findings concerning parents' perceived meaning of children's sport were gathered, we developed a hierarchical model (see Figure 1) to illustrate the prevalence of the meaning of children's sports involvement for parents (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Greene, 2007). Finally, we discussed the meanings of each theme and moved on to writing the findings of the study. The findings were structured based on the themes and their associated findings.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

To increase the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed. First, the research team developed a number of research instruments. Second, the content validity of the research instruments was enhanced through a pilot study and a review by a panel of experts (Stake, 1995). Third, the principal investigator who shared similar cultural background as the studied population engaged in prolonged interactions with the participants and carried out persistent observations to achieve a sufficient understanding of their lives (Bassey, 2003). Fourth, multiple sources of data allowed sufficient triangulation to avoid generating premature findings (Yin, 2003). Fifth, we used the second round of interviews as a practical opportunity to explore with participants whether there existed gaps in the emerging findings and whether they shared with the research team the interpretations of the findings (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

Findings

In this section, we present the two themes central to the meaning of children's sports involvement among Chinese immigrant families. We begin by discussing the generational gaps found between Chinese immigrant children and parents. More specifically, we present the meaning of sports involvement from Chinese immigrant children's and parents' perspectives, and parents' attitudes toward children's agency concerning sports participation. We then discuss the findings regarding the factors related to the meaning of children's sports participation, which included parents' and children's gender, families' acculturation status, and children's age.

Generational Gaps Concerning the Perceived Meaning of Sport

THE MEANING OF SPORTS INVOLVEMENT FOR CHINESE IMMIGRANT CHILDREN

The meaning of sports involvement for Chinese immigrant children captured three themes: fun; social connections; and personal development.

Fun. "Fun" captured the essence of sport and was regarded as a key motivator for sports involvement among the Chinese-American children interviewed in this study. This sub-theme was brought up by every child, making it a universal finding among the young interviewees. Sophia, for example, shared: "Sport is play. It brings fun and joy to me. I keep doing it because it makes me happy." The majority of the participants argued that the meaning of sports participation was diminished when fun was not experienced. This idea was especially illustrated in Isabella words: "Swimming has no meaning. I did it only because my parents told me to. It was so boring."

Social Connections. Nearly all of the children attributed the meaning of sports involvement to the establishment or reinforcement of positive relationships with friends and/or parents. For example, Liam said: "My best school friends are the ones I meet at the soccer academy." Olivia shared how she strengthened the relationship with her father through playing sport together:

For other activities, my dad was not able to advise me, but for basketball, my dad and I can play together. My dad is always busy at work, and there are not many things we could do together. Playing basketball with my dad guarantees time for only him and me.

Personal development. The third sub-theme was related to the sense of achievement from sport, which was manifested in various forms. For some children, it was equivalent to winning sports contests. For example, Jacob said: "I was thrilled to win the soccer championship. I still remember every detail of the match." When we observed children play soccer, it was obvious that when a child was playing well or the team scored, the child became very excited and more active on the field, trying to attract others' attention. Some children also enjoyed the feeling of making progress in sport. For instance, Olivia said: "I like to challenge myself, making objectives to achieve. That's possibly why I enjoy swimming and painting." Many children also mentioned

the sense of achievement with reference to an enhanced physical condition. As Liam remarked: “I believe doing sport makes me healthy and strong.”

THE MEANING OF SPORTS SOCIALIZATION FOR CHINESE IMMIGRANT PARENTS

Compared to Chinese immigrant children, who emphasized pleasure and enjoyment, parents associated the meaning of children’s sport with developmental outcomes. For parents, there existed a hierarchy of meaning attached to children’s sports involvement. For example, the sub-themes of “promoting physical strength and health” and “developing positive character” were mentioned by each family and hence situated at the top of the hierarchy (see Figure 1). In terms of enhancing children’s physical condition, Xi said:

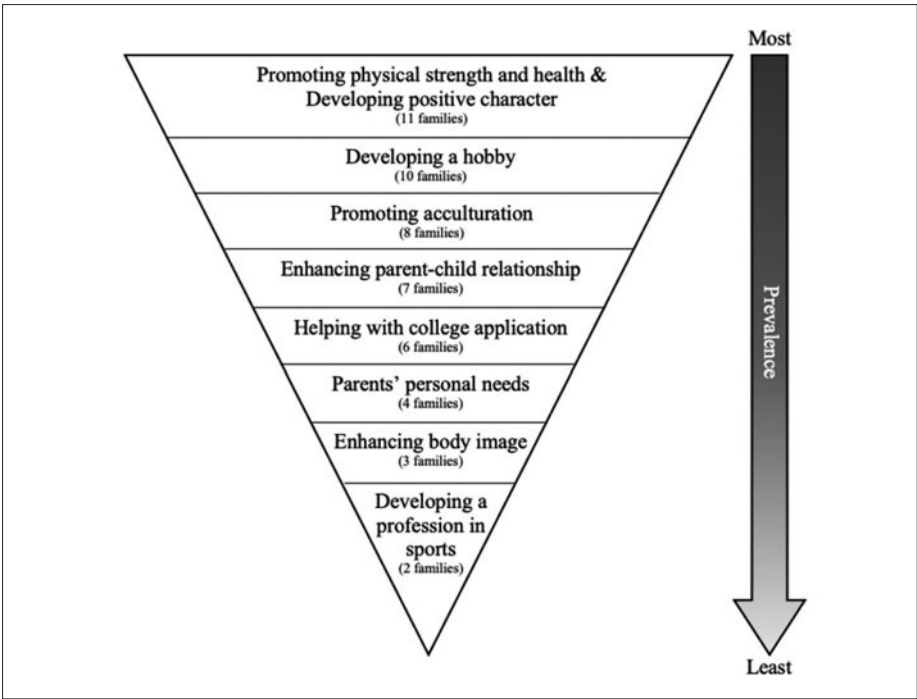


Fig. 1. - Hierarchy of the prevalence of the meanings of children’s sports involvement for parents.

I spent a lot of money investing in my daughter's sport. She did not get to the national level, but I think it's worth it. She is in good health. She likes all kinds of outdoor activities. She bikes every week. It's definitely better than watching TV at home, or drinking, playing video games.

To Chinese immigrant parents, the meaning of "promoting physical fitness and health" did not merely refer to building a strong body; it also contained an element of enhancing children's cognitive abilities, such as reaction time and alertness. For some parents, these skills were considered helpful for children's academic study.

The interviewed parents also spoke about sport helping children develop "positive character." Some parents equated positive character with a sense of competitiveness. As Ye indicated: "Sport involves the component of pursuing excellence and it forces you to compete." Others, on the other hand, described the character as perseverance and tolerance. For instance, Ting said: "It does not matter what sport she picked up or what level she has achieved. What is more meaningful to me is that she continues to swim by overcoming various difficulties along the way." Cheng mentioned: "It is especially meaningful to us when we saw him overcome some of his bad characters and behaviors in sport." Yue talked about the importance of building team spirit and understanding others: "It is a teamwork, she had learned how to think from others' perspectives," while Jia cared about open-mindedness: "Sport taught him to be open-minded and started accepting he was not the best."

Moreover, the meaning of children's sports involvement included developing a long-term hobby and was closely related to the family's immigrant status. Almost all of the parents perceived sport as something highly valued in American society. Hence, socializing their children into sports activities had a practical meaning for an immigrant family, as illustrated in Sisi's comment:

People value physical ability a lot in the U.S. You know, bullying happens pretty often in the school, especially to an immigrant student. Sport could make your kid become stronger and more popular. It may reduce the chance for your child being subjected to school violence.

Children's sports participation also taught valuable lessons about immigration for some families. For example, the Li family had invested in their children's sports activities for more than 10 years, and a professional sports career was their ultimate goal. Dong mentioned: "I value sport more than education. I have invested 95% of my free time to my son's sports activities." However, due to their high engage-

ment in their child's sport, the Li family had a chance to learn about some negative aspects of American society, such as racial discrimination. Dong said: "when good teams are scouting players, they had a bias against Asians. Even though his performance was good enough, he was never picked."

During the process of sports socialization, while some of the parents remained in the background, others experienced enjoyment and fun through their children's sports activities and became dedicated to and engaged in their children's sport. For the parents in the latter group, sport provided opportunities for interacting with their children, getting to know them better, and developing an interest in sport for themselves – something they have not had a chance to do in China. As Liang's told us:

When we were young, we did not have the time or money to play sport, although we may had some talents. I remember, even when I was in high school, I did not have much opportunity to do sport. My school often replaced the scheduled PE classes with academic classes. We were told by our parents and teachers that wealth and reputation could only be gained through diligent study, not through things, such as sport.

Dong added: "We had developed a common interest in golf. I became obsessed with it, and I am happy to spend a lot of time on it."

PARENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS CHILDREN'S AGENCY IN SPORTS PARTICIPATION

Almost all of the Chinese immigrant parents valued their children's thoughts and desires. Some of them shared that they changed their attitudes toward their children's involvement in extracurricular activities as their children matured and as they gained a better understanding of the cultural and societal expectations in the U.S. Ting expressed her thoughts:

We certainly cannot use our parents' methods to discipline our own children. We tried the old ways, but had lots of conflicts and problems. When they were little, it was easy to ask kids to follow what we said because they did not have their own thoughts. But after they got to elementary school, they suddenly had their own ideas. The kids were saying: "we need fair treatment." From then on, parents need to make adjustments and find out what kids truly want. We need to respect their personality, encourage them to do the things they like, and let them develop freely as long as they can complete their homework on time.

In particular, most Chinese immigrant parents respected and valued their child's opinions regarding sports activities. For the majority of participants, letting the child take the lead in determining what

sport to participate in (among the pool of sport deemed appropriate by the parents) was the precondition of sports socialization. For example, Rong said: "we would let him try all kinds of sport as well as the other extracurricular activities that he felt were interesting." Moreover, Jia shared: "if my child is interested in something, he usually discusses it a lot or would like to teach us. Through listening to what he usually talks about, we are able to figure out his interests."

FACTORS RELATED TO THE MEANING OF CHILDREN'S SPORTS INVOLVEMENT

We found that there were differences in how Chinese immigrant families understood sports socialization, and that these differences were related to a variety of factors, including parents' and children's gender, families' acculturation status, and children's age.

Gender and the Meaning of Children's Sports Involvement

How fathers and mothers perceived the meaning of sports socialization was closely related to their roles and responsibilities for children's sport. Our interviews and observations revealed that the Chinese immigrant fathers were more explicit in explaining the meaning of sport for children than were the mothers. Moreover, the majority of the couples agreed that the child's gender made a difference in how they viewed their sports involvement. Parents usually paid more attention to boys' sport and emphasized boys' sports performance. Fathers typically served the role of sports socializers for their sons, while mothers acted as supporters or assistants, providing transportation and financing children's sports programs. For instance, Liang said: "Watching him play, cheering for him during the sports contests, traveling out of town with him gave me many chances to interact with him." On the other hand, mothers seemed to be more engaged in girls' sport. In general, parents were more concerned with girls' personal and social benefits, such as obtaining a beautiful figure and an outgoing personality, rather than sports performance. For example, Sisi said:

My daughter started dancing when she was four or five years old. Three times a week. Sometimes when she has to prepare for a weekend or a holiday show, she practices the entire weekend. I watch her change from a shy little girl to a confident, healthy, and happy one. She is always surrounded by a bunch of friends.

Acculturation Status and the Meaning of Children's Sports Involvement

Differences in cultural values and attitudes were found among Chinese immigrant parents. It is plausible that the parents' perceptions of children's sports participation were impacted by their acculturation strategies (Berry, 1997). For instance, even though all of the Chinese immigrant parents were aware that sport was valued in American society, the Li's and Sun's were the only ones who ranked sports involvement as the top choice for their child's free time. These two families also had lived in the U.S. longer than the other interviewees and considered themselves more assimilated to U.S. culture. Cheng shared:

Because my kid is a boy, I would like to see him play sport. You know, in American society, your academic study is important, but not as crazily important as what people believe in China. At school, if you are a sports star, everyone recognizes you and you will be super popular among kids.

Parents who were less attached to U.S. culture had different opinions. For example, Rong said:

I told my wife, if our kids spend too much time on sport and miss the "right thing" or they take sport as their "right thing," how could they make a living? They are Asian, and it may be difficult for them to find a job as a coach. I always received fundraising letters from U.S. Olympic players. It is not rare in the U.S. that a person qualifies for competing for Olympic, but can't afford a flight ticket.

Despite varying levels of acculturation, all of the parents valued the importance of children's education. They believed that some values important in Chinese culture, such as hard work, could not be forgotten and that leisure activities, such as sports involvement, should not interfere with a child's time for study. For example, Ting said: "I teach her at home. I had to cancel several swimming lessons because I felt she needed some extra time to practice homework." Many parents, even after years of living in the U.S., accepted, but did not fully understand why so much value was attached to sport in American society.

The Age of the Child and the Meaning of Children's Sports Involvement

Most of the interviewed parents were aware of the potential for using sport to increase their children's chances for admission into good colleges. Hence, some parents invested in children's sport to seek a competitive advantage in college admission. They believed that dur-

ing childhood, children not only began to demonstrate their talents, but also had more time to practice sport. Preparing their children to be marketable for colleges through sport was a particularly important component in evaluating the meaning of sports participation for parents whose children were still young and had just begun to practice sport. For example, Lian said:

You know, the U.S. college entrance examination is not all about your grade. For example, there is no big difference between whether you are among the top 5 or top 10 in your class. Our oldest son had a very nice record of academic study, but he did not have much volunteering experience, and he did not participate in a lot of extracurricular activities. Hence, he did not have much chance to be admitted to top universities. Because of this experience, we are investing more in Isabella's after-school activities, and we hope it will work out.

On the other hand, developmental and social changes occurring between the ages 6 and 11 influenced how the meaning of sports participation was perceived by the participants. Many parents, especially mothers, who were supportive of their sons' and daughters' sports involvement when they were younger, believed more time needed to be devoted to academic study as the children grew older. As Ting said: "I would like to reduce her time in sport by one-third before she gets to the middle school." Jia also expressed her concern: "I've heard that the public high school in our district is very competitive. It has a high ratio of Asian students. He will need to spend more time on schoolwork."

Discussion

The current study aimed to examine the meaning of children's sports involvement for Chinese immigrant fathers, mothers, and children. The findings suggested that there existed generational differences between Chinese immigrant parents and children regarding the meaning of children's sport. Children's agency was acknowledged and supported by parents. Moreover, a number of factors were found to impact such meaning across Chinese immigrant families. The current study generated new knowledge regarding cultural experiences and their relation with immigrant families' perceptions of children's sport and the cultural variations in parents' and children's beliefs regarding sports participation. In this section, we elaborate on the major findings of the study and their contribution to the existing sports socialization literature.

CHILDREN'S AGENCY IN SPORTS SOCIALIZATION

The current study provided not only additional evidence of the generational differences in sport-related perceptions (e.g., Kanters et al., 2008), but also presented preliminary evidence in support of the notion of children's agency in the meaning construction process. By employing a qualitative multiple-case study design, the study was able to explore different ways children's agency was manifested during sports participation.

CONSTRUCTING THE MEANING OF SPORTS EXPERIENCE

To speak of cross-generational value transmission might imply that value is something static and encapsulated. Yet, children's judgments about the relevance of the parents' messages are related to their conceptual skills, which develop quickly during pre-adolescence (Thompson, 2006). In the current study, we found that sports socialization was not a one-way street, but rather that children were active co-creators of the sports socialization process and selective in what they accepted from their parents. For example, the findings revealed that, similar to "mainstream" American children (Vissek et al., 2015), having fun was a unilaterally valued meaning of sport among their Chinese immigrant counterparts. Children also reflected on their parents' sports socialization messages, as observation and interview data revealed that children critically analyzed parents' sport-related suggestions. For instance, we often observed that when a parent gave a specific suggestion to their child during a sports session, the child processed the instruction yet behaved differently from what parents suggested him or her to do.

SELF-UNDERSTANDING IN SPORTS SOCIALIZATION

The findings revealed that self-related processes, such as self-awareness and self-understanding, contributed to children's awareness of the self as a causal agent during sports involvement. The finding indicated that perceived freedom of choice was critical for a positive experience of sport for Chinese immigrant children. Children reported that they would still take part in activities to comply with par-

ents' expectations and requests, but they would not be motivated enough to continue their engagement in those activities if they continuously failed to experience meaning in them. This evidence of self-related processes underscored how much the efficacy of sports socialization depends on children's self-image. It also suggested that variations in children's self-concept may significantly moderate the influence of parents' sports socialization initiatives. The findings provide further support that individuals, including the Chinese immigrant children, pursue sports activities because they are intrinsically motivated to satisfy the three basic human psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2002): a sense of choice (autonomy), being able to connect to others (relatedness), and belief in one's ability in an activity (competence).

REVERSE SOCIALIZATION IN CHILDREN'S SPORT

We found that children's agency was broader than merely constructing the meaning of sports participation. They could elicit or even change some of the meaning that parents attached to their sports involvement. For instance, some of the parents confirmed that they learned the beauty and meaning of sport through their children. Some parents also learned the negative aspects of children's sports involvement in the context of American society, such as racial discrimination against Asian participants. Hence, by investigating the father-mother-child triad in immigrant families, the current study not only attested to the applicability of the social relational theory (Kuczynski et al., 2009) in the sports context, but also provided details regarding how immigrant children exerted agency during their meaning construction process concerning sports involvement. In the next section, we turn to the discussion of the factors associated with the meaning of children's sports involvement revealed in this study.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE MEANING OF CHILDREN'S SPORTS INVOLVEMENT

Culture is important in understanding the bidirectional nature of the sports socialization processes, as well as issues of agency and

power in parent-child interactions. The present study further contributed to the sports socialization literature by revealing the following new findings. *First*, while previous comparative studies (e.g., Chen et al., 2015) emphasized Chinese children's compliance with their parents' wishes, we discovered that acculturation may change immigrant parents' attitudes toward children's agency and how the agency of children is exerted. *Second*, unlike previous studies (e.g., Zhou & Kim, 2006) that overwhelmingly stressed Chinese immigrant parents' focus on academic studies, we found that a number of Chinese immigrant parents expected their children to excel in sport and even achieve sports success. *Third*, while a large portion of Chinese immigrant parents was found to emphasize academic study more than sport and other extracurricular activities (Huntsinger et al., 2000), children were empowered to make decisions regarding their sport participation to a much greater extent than in other domains of life. *Fourth*, the findings revealed that parents' perceptions of the meaning of children's sports involvement varied based on the children's age. According to the stage-environment fit theory (Eccles & Midgley, 1989), there is a match between the social context and individuals' developmental needs. The findings provide further support for the stage-environment fit perspective and explained why most Chinese immigrant parents reported a decline in the meaning of sport when children became older. When school environments changed from one level to the next, parents' expectations of children's achievement in different areas change accordingly. Hence, the findings extend the sports socialization literature by acknowledging that Chinese immigrant parents' perceptions of children's sports change throughout the life span, as children enter new social settings where new patterns of sports involvement are needed. *Fifth*, the findings suggested that the child's gender was one of the central child-level demographic characteristics that affected parents' perceived meaning of children's sport. This result is similar to previous findings that parents' perceived meaning differed based on whether it was their sons or daughters who participated in sport (Simpkins, Fredricks, & Eccles, 2012). In addition, the parents' gender also affected their involvement in children's sport. In particular, fathers were involved more in boys' sport, whereas mothers often took leadership roles for their daughters, who often participated in "feminine" sport, such as ice-skating. Thus, the findings provide

further support for Trussell and Shaw's (2012) study that gendered ideologies are extended into the domain of children's sports socialization.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Previous studies have revealed that low engagement in physical activity may be a major health issue among Chinese Americans (Diep, Leung, Thompson, Gor, & Baranowski, 2017). Moreover, studies have shown that immigrants experience daily hassles and chronic difficulties specific to the acculturation experience, leading to various types of stress that threatens their health and well-being (e.g., Abouguendia & Noels, 2001). On the other hand, sports participation has long been credited for its potential to help immigrants cope with various life stressors (Stodolska & Alexandris, 2004), and for promoting physical strength; social capital (Skinner, Zakus, & Cowell, 2008); and cultural understanding (Zhang, Zhou, & Stodolska, 2018). Hence, examining sports socialization among Chinese immigrant families has important practical implications for immigrant parents, their U.S.-born children, and youth sports clubs and organizations.

First, when children face less academic pressure during the pre-adolescent stage, parents should encourage them to try different sports, which will enable them to develop various skills and find a sport they really enjoy. Second, immigrant parents should foster a positive atmosphere that allows children to take the lead in sports-related decisions and to encourage them to engage in sports because they enjoy it, and not because of other extrinsic benefits. Third, immigrant parents should become more involved in children's sport and educate themselves about sports in which their children show interest. Fourth, immigrant parents should enroll their children in sports programs that have clear positive goals about sports experience, emphasizing fair play among children with different backgrounds. Fifth, coaches and sports organizations should make their programs more inclusive by mitigating racial bias in sports, implement bias trainings, and offering equal opportunities to all children. Sixth, coaches and sports organizations should communicate with immigrant parents and children to understand their expectations and experiences related to children's

sport. Seventh, coaches and sports organizations should assist immigrant parents to become more knowledgeable about and engaged in children's sport by providing educational information about the sport, referring parents to recourses that will help them learn more about the sport, and hosting events that would allow parents and children enjoy sports together.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the current study provided contributions to the existing literature on sports socialization, there are certain limitations that need to be acknowledged when evaluating the findings. First, we did not differentiate the types of sport Chinese immigrant children were involved in. Second, the "selection effects" might have been introduced as one of the inclusion criteria required children in the study to be sports participants. Hence, the Chinese immigrant parents recruited for the current study were already socializing their children into sport. Third, as the study was conducted at a single location and across two specific cultures, the findings and conclusions may not be applicable to immigrant families from other ethnic groups living elsewhere.

Future research should compare children's agency in multiple domains of socialization. Researchers could also examine the moderating influence of children's agency, such as self-awareness and self-concept, on sports socialization practices. Moreover, as sports socialization can be guided by a variety of individuals, including parents, siblings, coaches, teachers, and peers, future research should map the interrelationships among these different socialization agents and the meaning of children's sports involvement. Furthermore, in a time when massive immigration is the norm, future studies should conduct cross-cultural comparisons of the meanings of sports socialization between immigrant and non-immigrant families. Also, future research should explore the interaction of cultural and structural/contextual factors in explaining immigrant populations' sport-related cognitions and behaviors. In addition, cross-disciplinary efforts could examine how biological and sociocultural factors interact in a complex manner to adequately explain sports socialization.

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