

## Research Reports

# Transmitting Sport Values: The Importance of Parental Involvement in Children's Sport Activity

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## Abstract

The transmission of positive values between parents and children is generally considered to be the hallmark of successful socialization. As this issue has been widely discussed but surprisingly little researched - especially with reference to core sport values - in this study we aimed to: 1) analyze adolescent athletes' acceptance of the sport values their parents want to transmit to them (i.e., parental socialization values) and 2) examine the relationship between parental involvement in children's sportive activity and adolescents' acceptance of their parents' socialization values. One hundred and seventy-two Italian adolescents (48.3% male, 51.7% female) who regularly practice team sports were asked to fill out a questionnaire which included the Youth Sport Values Questionnaire – 2 and the Parental Involvement in Sport Questionnaire. The dyadic correlations revealed that young athletes are in general willing to accept their parents' socialization values in regards to sport. Moreover, from the relative weight analysis (a relatively new data analysis strategy), it emerged that parental involvement characterized by praise and understanding is the most important predictor of adolescents' willingness to accept their parents' sport values. Implications of these results and further expansion of the study are discussed.

**Keywords:** sport values, adolescents, parents, transmission, value acceptance

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In recent years, psychosocial research has shown a growing interest in the role of sport in the development not only of young athletes' physical abilities, but also of their life skills and human values. Plato stated that “the moral value of exercises and sports far outweigh the physical value” (as cited in Cubberley, 1920, p. 46); this sentiment is still highly relevant today. Indeed, a number of recent studies have shown that youth sport helps athletes to internalize the values of responsibility, honesty, conformity and perseverance (Camiré & Trudel, 2010; Danish, Forneris, Hodge, & Heke, 2004).

The purpose of our study was to analyze the values held by adolescent athletes in relation to their participation in sport. Since the sport environment, as a context of socialization for youth, interacts with other important agents of socialization – and, in particular, with the family (Prunelli, 2011) – this study also focused on the role of parents in the development of their children's sport values. We adopted Lee, Whitehead, Ntoumanis, & Hatzigeorgiadis' (2008) classification of sport values as moral values (e.g., contract maintenance and obedience), competence values (e.g., achievement and showing skill) and status values (e.g., public image and

winning). In studying core values within the sport context, [Lee et al. \(2008\)](#) in turn based their analysis on [Schwartz's \(1992\)](#) theory of basic human values, which defines values as trans-situational goals which guide people's behaviors across contexts and time. The link between sport values and Schwartz's value theory was also suggested by [Bardi and Schwartz \(2013\)](#), who view values specific to sport as expressions of basic values in the sport domain. Core values – namely, values that are more salient within a specific context such as sport, family or politics – differ from basic values (as defined above) in their level of “abstraction”, since, compared to the latter, the former are more anchored to a concrete context ([Schwartz, Caprara, & Vecchione, 2010](#)). While basic values appear to be goals that guide behavior ([Bardi & Schwartz, 2003](#); [Rosnati, Barni, & Uglia, 2014](#)), core values seem instead to mediate the relations between basic values and behaviors, for example mediating the impact basic personal values may have on voting ([Schwartz et al., 2010](#)).

## Values in Youth Sport

Children are introduced to values in the sport context as well as in other life domains through interaction with adults who are significant to their lives and who may reinforce different types of values ([Kremer-Sadlik & Kim, 2007](#)). Adolescence is the most critical phase in value development, as it is the time of identity formation, characterized by tension between an increasing need for autonomy and an increasing conformity to societal expectations, with the latter being essential for acquiring models of appropriate behavior. Thus, more than at any previous time in childhood, children become extremely vulnerable to value messages during this phase of the life cycle ([Barni, Knafo, Ben-Arieh, & Haj-Yahia, 2014](#); [Padilla-Walker, 2007](#)). Previous studies have highlighted the fact that parents provide their offspring with a context for socialization during adolescence ([Caputo, 2009](#)). Parents may transmit their values ([Murray & Mulvaney, 2012](#)) and passions to their adolescent children ([Donnat, 2004](#)) - passions such as an interest in music ([Mageau et al., 2009](#)) or in volunteering ([van Goethem, van Hoof, van Aken, Orobio de Castro, & Raaijmakers, 2014](#)) - which then become important in their children's lives.

In order to understand how young athletes make decisions regarding their behavior in sport contexts, the psychological literature has tried to identify which sport values adolescents practicing sports consider to be important to them. In their study involving adolescents faced with sport-specific moral dilemmas, [Lee and Cockman \(1995\)](#) identified 18 sport values which correspond in part to [Schwartz's \(1992\)](#) theory of values; some were specific to the sport domain (e.g., good game), while others worked well also in other life domains (e.g., enjoyment). The results of this qualitative study showed that the most consistent value of participating in sport is the personal pleasure that adolescents may gain from it: adolescents place a high value not only on enjoyment, but also on the pleasures they gain from participating (e.g., companionship). Further studies ([Lee, Whitehead, & Balchin, 2000](#); [Lee et al., 2008](#)) confirmed the existence of core values in sport – namely, moral values (e.g., contract maintenance and obedience), which emphasize respect for rules and for the others; competence values (e.g., achievement and showing skill), which highlight the pursuit of one's own objectives in the sport practice; and status values (e.g., public image and winning), which emphasize one's own image compared to others. These studies are consistent in showing that, when playing sport, adolescents give the greatest importance to competence and moral values and the weakest importance to status values ([Goggins, 2015](#); [Lee et al., 2008](#)).

## How Are Sport Values Acquired?

Despite the growing interest toward research into adolescents' sport values and the way in which sport teaches young athletes values and life skills (e.g., Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris, 2012; McCallister, Blinde, & Weiss, 2000), thus far, little research has focused on the ways these core sport values are shaped by peers and by significant adults such as coaches and parents. Previous studies are consistent in showing the influence of the team climate on the development of a young athlete's moral functioning and on his or her antisocial attitudes (Kavussanu, Roberts, & Ntoumanis, 2002; Ntoumanis, Taylor, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2012). In particular, a highly ego-involving climate fostered by the coach (that is, a motivational climate focused on one's abilities compared to others) is likely to facilitate moral dysfunction (Kavussanu et al., 2002) and the legitimization of injurious act scenarios (Miller, Roberts, & Ommundsen, 2004). When this same kind of motivational climate is fostered by peers, there is a clear link to young athletes' antisocial attitudes (Ntoumanis et al., 2012).

Also parents have been found to provide a major source of influence for their children within the sport context (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004): children tend to develop sport-related values systems based largely on the attitudes and behaviors of their parents, who recognize that competition and sport are vehicles for teaching children life skills and values (Gould, Dieffenbach, & Moffett, 2002; Welk, Babkes, & Schaben, 2004).

Although several studies have demonstrated that parents generally want their children to endorse what they – the parents – personally value for themselves (Knafo & Schwartz, 2001), value transmission cannot be reduced to a mere reproduction of parents' personal values by their children (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007). Transmission is, instead, a dynamic and bidirectional process, where both parents and children play an active role. Given this interactive nature, transmission may produce intergenerational change as well as intergenerational similarity. On the one hand, parents may in fact want to differentiate between their personal values and those they want their children to endorse (i.e., socialization values) (Knafo & Schwartz, 2003). This could happen, for instance, in a situation in which parents recognize that their children are growing up in a social context which is different from the one in which they themselves were reared (Alwin, 1988). On the other hand, children may not be accurate in their perception of their parents' socialization values or they may reject their parents' values. According to Grusec and Goodnow's (1994) two-step model of value acquisition, parent-child transmission occurs in two different phases. First, children perceive (more or less accurately) which values their parents want them to endorse. Second, children choose to accept or to reject the perceived values. If children perceive their parents' socialization values accurately and then accept them, value similarity should be high.

While children are generally moderately willing to accept perceived parental socialization values, several factors influence children's willingness to accept their parents' values, and therefore the degree of parent-child value similarity (e.g., Schönplflug, 2001). In particular, the parent-child relationship quality was found to be a relevant predictor of value acceptance: when the family context is characterized by support and parent-child closeness, by promotion of child's volitional functioning, by parental agreement as perceived by adolescents and by actual value agreement between parents, children are more ready to endorse their parents' socialization values (Barni, Ranieri, Scabini, & Rosnati, 2011). In the study carried out by White (2000) on 271 adolescents aged between 14 and 19 and their parents, positive communication between parents and their adolescent children was found to be strongly related to the extent to which parents and children agree on the degree of influence of the different sources of moral authority (i.e., self-interest, family expectations, educator expectations, society's welfare, and equality for individuals).

When considering adolescents' acceptance of the sport values their parents want them to endorse, it is therefore important to analyze the quality of the parent-child relationship and the parental involvement in their child's sport activity (Lee & MacLean, 1997; Wuerth, Lee, & Alfermann, 2004). The extent to which young athletes feel their parents to be involved in their sportive activity has significant consequences on the child's sport experience (Torregrosa et al., 2007). Hellstedt (1987) measured parental involvement in children's sport activity as a continuum that ranges from underinvolvement to overinvolvement. According to Hellstedt, both conditions may negatively influence the sport experience of adolescent athletes. The lack of emotional, financial or functional investment that characterizes parental underinvolvement may make it more difficult for young athletes to pursue a sport career, while parental overinvolvement may be harmful due to the possible consequences of perceived parental pressure.

In particular, what Lee and MacLean (1997) call active involvement, that is, the extent to which children consider their parents to be actively involved in their athletic experience, is generally a parental behavior to which young athletes react positively and about which they feel happy and satisfied (Hoyle & Leff, 1997; Wuerth et al., 2004). Directive behavior (Lee & MacLean, 1997), namely, the extent to which children feel controlled by their parents in athletics, promotes instead the perception of parental pressure (Wuerth et al., 2004). Parental pressure towards children's sport can cause lowered self-esteem (McElroy, 1982), feelings of distress and guilt (Donnelly, 1993), decrease of enjoyment (Anderson, Funk, Elliot, & Smith, 2003), and burnout (Udry, Gould, Bridges, & Tuffey, 1997) in young athletes. In contrast, parental participation characterized by praise and understanding (Lee & MacLean, 1997), which elicits parental encouragement characterized by children's perception of parental empathy displayed towards their sportive activity, promotes an increase of players' enjoyment of and motivation for sport (Sánchez-Miguel, Leo, Sánchez-Oliva, Amado, & García-Calvo, 2013).

But how do these different patterns of parental involvement in children's sport activity relate to parent-child transmission of sport values? So far, little is known about the extent to which parents contribute to their children's sport values. One of the few exceptions is Kremer-Sadlik and Kim's (2007) study, carried out on 32 American families with at least one child aged between 8 and 10 years old, which concluded that parents play a fundamental and active role in children's acquisition of values throughout sport participation. Using interviews and video-recording as research instruments, the study showed that parents perceived sport activities as an arena for socializing their children to important values and that the values their children were learning through sport (such as leadership, teamwork, loyalty, etc.) became useful principles in other life contexts (e.g., school, work, etc.). In particular, parent-child conversations yielded after either active (e.g., playing football) or passive (e.g., talking about sport that arises while watching games on the TV) participation was significant in the formation of the children's value system. Interestingly, parental engagement in this direction occurred more frequently when parents identified their children as exhibiting an undesirable behavior such as being non-competitive or adopting un-sportsmanship behavior; in this case, the parent-child interactions often turned into "moralizing lessons, in that parents are not only interested in modifying the child's behavior or attitude, but also in imparting moral stances and knowledge about how one should behave and feel" (p. 50).

Another interesting mix-method study, carried out by Goggins (2015) on 92 young athletes, found a strong correlation between children's competence, status, moral sport values and their perceptions of those same values in that parent (the father or the mother) they considered to be more involved in their sportive activity. In other words, the more importance children perceive parents, regardless of the gender, attributing to a specific

sport value, the more relevant the child considers it. The qualitative part of this same study, which used semi-structured interviews with six parents, highlighted the influential role of parents in shaping children's sport values and a substantial lack of parental awareness of the process of value transmission.

## This Study

In light of the above background, the principle aim of this study, which involved adolescents practicing a team sport, was twofold:

### Analyzing Adolescents' Sport Value Acceptance

Our first aim was to analyze adolescent athletes' sport values, that is, their perceptions of the sport values their fathers and their mothers would like them to endorse (i.e., socialization values), and the degree of adolescents' acceptance of their parental socialization values. We analyzed adolescents' perceptions of fathers' and mothers' socialization values separately, employing the assumption that both parents play an important role in the child's moral development.

According to the definitions outlined by [Lee et al. \(2008\)](#), we classified sport values into moral, competence and status values. In accordance with the results of previous studies ([Goggins, 2015](#); [Lee et al., 2008](#)), we expected competence values (e.g., achievement and showing skill) to be considered by adolescents as the most important, followed by moral values (e.g., contract maintenance and obedience) and then by status values (e.g., public image and winning) (H1). Although value acceptance has not been extensively investigated in the domain of sport contexts, previous research on basic values has shown that adolescents are moderately willing to accept perceived parental socialization values, reporting both intergenerational similarities and differences in value priorities ([Barni et al., 2011](#)). Accordingly, we expected adolescents to partially accept the sport values they believed their parents wanted them to endorse (H2).

### Analyzing the Effect of Parental Involvement on Adolescents' Sport Value Acceptance

Our second aim was to investigate the relationship between adolescents' perceptions of parental involvement in their children's sport activity and adolescent athletes' acceptance of their parents' sport values. We referred here to [Grusec and Goodnow's \(1994\)](#) model, which considers value transmission to be a two-step process (first, perception of parents' socialization values and, second, acceptance or rejection of perceived values), and focused on the factors that may influence this process. In order to describe unique patterns of characteristics within dyads – rather than drawing conclusions across participants – and to investigate the relation between adolescents' acceptance of parental values and parental involvement in children's sport activity, we adopted an idiographic approach ([Lutz-Zois, Bradley, Mihalik, & Moorman-Eavers, 2006](#)). As shown by previous research on basic values (e.g., [Barni et al., 2011](#)), a close and supportive family context increases children's willingness to endorse parental values. Thus, our hypothesis was that parental involvement characterized by support, understanding and empathy displayed towards children's sport activity (i.e., active involvement and praise and understanding) fostered value acceptance (H3). Moreover, we hypothesized that a lack of support, in terms of directive behavior and pressure, contributed to reducing adolescents' willing to endorse their parents' sport values (H4).

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

Participants were 172 adolescents (48.3% male, 51.7% female), from northern and central Italy, continuously practicing team sports. All were secondary school students, ranging from 13 to 19 years of age ( $M = 15.41$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ ). Ninety-seven percent were born in Italy, while 3% were born abroad (Albania, Ethiopia, France, Philippines). Eighty-nine percent of participating adolescents lived with both parents, while the remaining 11% lived with only one parent (in general, the mother). Most participants (86.6%) had at least one sibling ( $M = 1.31$ ,  $SD = .62$ ).

As far as adolescents' sport activity was concerned, they have been practicing sport on average for 9.21 years ( $SD = 2.57$ ) and their mean age at the beginning of their sport activity was 6.20 years ( $SD = 2.17$ ). The majority played volleyball (60.4%), followed by soccer (19.8%), basketball (12.2%) and rugby (7.6%) and trained with their team on average 3.1 times per week ( $SD = .66$ ), with a frequency varying from 1 to 4 times per week.

Recruited with the collaboration of their sport teams, participants were informed as to the main objectives of the study. Adolescents whose parents consented to their participation in the study then filled out a self-report questionnaire either before or after a regular training session, in the presence of their coach and of a research team member (response rate: 86%). The study was approved by the Scientific Committee of the Family Studies and Research University Centre and followed the standard ethical guidelines for research. The principal investigator of this study had previously completed the National Institute for Health training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

### Measures

#### Socio-Demographic Information

Participants were asked questions about their personal (age, gender, school attended) and family (family structure and number of siblings) characteristics, as well as their sportive activity (age of beginning of sportive activity, type of sport practiced, number of weekly trainings).

#### Adolescents' Sport Values

We used the Youth Sport Values Questionnaire-2 (YSVQ-2; Lee et al., 2008), composed of 13 items, to measure adolescent athletes' sport values. Using a 7-point Likert scale (from -1 = the opposite of what I believe to 5 = extremely important to me), respondents indicated the extent to which they considered each value as a guiding principle in their sportive activity. We computed three scores assessing the importance given to moral values (five items, e.g., "When I do sport it is important to me to show good sportsmanship",  $\alpha = .75$ ), competence values (four items, e.g., "When I do sport it is important to me to set my own targets",  $\alpha = .64$ ), and status values (four items, e.g., "When I do sport it is important to me to be a leader in the group",  $\alpha = .82$ ). The YSVQ-2 is considered to be a psychometrically sound instrument with good cross-cultural validity (Goggins, 2015); its three-factor structure was confirmed also in Italy using a CFA approach (Borraccino, 2011). This questionnaire has been used in eight nations outside the UK, including Italy, where the YSVQ-2 showed itself to be a statistically robust instrument for measuring sport values (Lucidi, Mallia, Nicolais, & Zelli, 2012).



### Adolescents' Perceptions of Parents' Sport Values

To assess adolescents' perceptions of those sport values their parents want them to endorse, the YSVQ-2 was again used. In this case, adolescents were asked to rate the degree of relevance they believed their fathers and mothers gave to each value (e.g., "How important is it for your father/mother that you show good sportsmanship?"), again on a 7-point Likert scale (from -1 = the opposite of what my father/my mother would like to 5 = extremely important to my father/my mother). As with the measurement of adolescent sport values, we computed three scores for perceived parents' sport values: moral values ( $\alpha = .85$  for fathers and  $\alpha = .88$  for mothers), competence values ( $\alpha = .74$  for fathers and  $\alpha = .80$  for mothers) and status values ( $\alpha = .83$  for fathers and  $\alpha = .81$  for mothers).

### Parental Involvement in Children's Sportive Activity

To measure how adolescents perceived their parents' involvement in their sportive activity, we used the Parental Involvement in Sport Questionnaire (PISQ). The cross-cultural validity of this questionnaire had already been established by several previous studies (e.g., Giannitsopoulou, Kosmidou, & Zisi, 2010; Torregrosa et al., 2007). Using a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = never to 5 = always), adolescents were asked to rate - separately for fathers and mothers- the frequency with which their parents behave as described. The scale allowed us to compute three scores to assess parents' active involvement (five items, e.g., "Does your father/mother discuss your progress with your coach?",  $\alpha = .67$  for fathers and  $\alpha = .62$  for mothers), praise and understanding (four items, e.g., "Does your father/mother show they understand how you are feeling about your sport?",  $\alpha = .68$  for fathers and  $\alpha = .75$  for mothers), and directive behavior (ten items, e.g., "Before a contest, does your father/mother tell you how to compete?",  $\alpha = .88$  for fathers and  $\alpha = .86$  for mothers). In addition, the item "Does your father/mother put pressure on you concerning your sport?" was intended to assess paternal and maternal pressure.

## Data Analysis

### Preliminary Analysis

We first described the study variables (i.e., adolescents' sport values, the sport values they perceived that their fathers and mothers would like them to endorse, and paternal and maternal involvement in their children's sport activity) in terms of means and standard deviations.

### Adolescents' Sport Value Acceptance

To measure the degree of adolescents' acceptance of parents' sport values, we computed the within-dyad correlations across values, by correlating the parent's 13 value ratings, as perceived by the adolescent, with the adolescent's 13 own sport values. This was done within each family separately for father-child dyad and for mother-child dyad. Within-dyad correlations (Kenny & Acitelli, 1994) allowed us to measure the congruence in the shape of each parent's value profile and his/her own child's value profile. Each value was treated as part of a broader system, and the interest was in the relative strength of the values in relation to one another. As with any other correlation coefficient, within-dyad correlation coefficients range from -1 (total opposition) to +1 (total congruence): according to Cohen (1988) coefficients whose absolute value is lower than .30 are deemed small, whereas those larger than .50 are deemed large.

## Parental Involvement in Children's Sportive Activity

Preliminarily, we calculated bivariate Pearson correlations between adolescent athletes' value acceptance and their perceptions of the different patterns of parental involvement (active involvement, praise understanding, directive behavior and pressure) in their children's sport activity. To assess whether and the extent to which the quality of paternal and maternal involvement in their children's sport activity was associated with the degree to which adolescents endorsed their parents' sport values, we performed both multiple regressions (MR) and relative weight analyses (RWA), separately for fathers and mothers. In these analyses, the patterns of parental involvement were the predictors, while adolescents' sport value acceptance (transformed to Z scores) was the criterion variable.

Throughout MR, we estimated the overall  $R^2$  and determined the statistical significance of individual regression coefficients. Regression coefficients inform us as to the extent to which the criterion variable would change based on a given increase in a predictor while the other predictors are held constant (i.e., unique contribution). However, when predictors are correlated – as is likely in the case of the four patterns of parental involvement – MR is not enough to adequately divide variance in the criterion among the predictors (Kraha, Turner, Nimon, Reichwein Zientek, & Henson, 2012). There is a growing consensus that, when faced with correlated predictors, researchers should combine MR with other techniques available for interpretation, such as RWA (Johnson, 2000). The primary concern of RWA is the impact of a particular predictor relative to others in the model: that is, the proportionate contribution each predictor makes to  $R^2$ , taking into account both the unique relationship with the criterion and its relation when combined with other predictors (i.e., relative contribution) (Barni, 2015). In our case, an example of this type of question might be, “What is the relative importance adolescents place on parents' active involvement, praise understanding, directive behavior and pressure in their willingness or not to accept parental sport values?” It is indeed likely that adolescents consider all the patterns of parental involvement simultaneously and implicitly weight each pattern relative to the others in their “decision” to acceptance or rejection of parents' sport values.

RWA addresses the problem of correlated predictors using a variable transformation approach, by creating a set of variables ( $Z_k$ ) that are strongly related to the original set of variables ( $X_j$ ), but are uncorrelated with each other. The criterion variable ( $Y$ ) can then be regressed on the new uncorrelated variables to approximate the relative weights of the original variables<sup>1</sup>. The importance weights can then be scaled in the metric of relative effect size by dividing the relative weights by the model  $R^2$  and then multiplying these values by 100. In this way, the rescaled weights are interpreted as the percentage of predicted criterion variance attributed to each predictor.

## Results

### Preliminary Analysis

Means and standard deviations of the study variables are reported in Table 1. Generally, adolescents rated competence values (e.g., achievement and showing skill) as being the most important values, followed by moral values (e.g., contract maintenance and obedience). Little importance was attributed to status values (e.g., public image and winning).



Table 1

Adolescents' Sport Values, Perceptions of Parents' Sport Values and of Parental Involvement in Sport

Statistics	Moral values			Competence values			Status values			Active involvement		Praise and Understanding		Directive behavior		Pressure	
	AD	FA	MO	AD	FA	MO	AD	FA	MO	FA	MO	FA	MO	FA	MO	FA	MO
<i>M</i>	3.79	3.66	3.58	4.14	3.51	3.26	2.17	1.75	1.45	2.74	2.58	3.64	3.47	2.67	2.20	1.81	1.57
Range	1.2-5.0	0.0-5.0	-1.0-5.0	1.3-5.0	0.0-5.0	-1.0-5.0	-0.8-5.0	-0.8-5.0	-1.0-5.0	1.0-5.0	1.0-5.0	1.0-5.0	1.0-5.0	1.0-5.0	1.0-4.6	1.0-5.0	1.0-5.0
<i>SD</i>	0.79	1.07	1.23	0.77	1.06	1.21	1.36	1.51	1.39	0.95	0.84	0.89	1.02	0.96	.85	1.18	0.98

Note. AD = Adolescents; FA = Fathers; MO = Mothers.

In regards to adolescents' perceptions of the sport values their parents wanted them to endorse, moral values were scored higher than both competence and status values. That is, as perceived by adolescents, both fathers and mothers gave great importance to values such as obedience and contract maintenance, but little importance to values such as being a leader, having a positive public image or winning.

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

### Adolescents' Sport Value Acceptance

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

### Parental Involvement in Children's Sportive Activity

Correlations between the study variables are reported in Table 2. They range from  $-.19$  ( $p = .015$ ) between father's pressure and children's sport value acceptance and a maximum of  $.54$  ( $p < .01$ ) between father's active involvement and praise and understanding.

Table 2

Correlations Between the Four Patterns of Parental Involvement in Sport Contexts and Adolescents' Sport Value Acceptance

	Active Involvement	Praise and Understanding	Directive Behavior	Pressure	Acceptance of paternal values	Acceptance of maternal values
Active Involvement	-	.54**	.53**	.24**	-.01	.14
Praise and Understanding	.49**	-	.30**	-.10	.19*	.28**
Directive Behavior	.51**	.37**	-	.42**	-.08	.12
Pressure	.28**	-.05	.38**	-	-.19*	-.16*

Note. Fathers' measures are reported above the diagonal, while mothers' measures are reported below the diagonal.

\*\* $p < .01$ . \* $p < .05$ .

Table 3 shows both the MR models and the RWA results. As previously mentioned, we conducted a preliminary MR separately for fathers and mothers, with the four patterns of parental involvement as predictors and adolescents' acceptance of parents' sport values as the criterion variable. Overall, the four predictors yielded a  $R^2$  of .073 for fathers and .113 for mothers. From the exploration of  $\beta$ , in both models - fathers and mothers - the praise and understanding pattern was a significant predictor: the more parental behavior towards their children's sportive activity was characterized by praise and understanding, the greater was adolescents' willingness to accept their parents' sport values. Moreover, but only for the mothers' model, maternal pressure was a negative predictor of the criterion variable: the more mothers were perceived by adolescents to exert pressure, the less adolescents were willing to accept the sport values coming from their mothers.

Comparing the MR results with those of RWA, it is possible to confirm the importance of parental praise and understanding as predictor, which indeed explained the largest portion of the variance of adolescents' acceptance of parental sport values (Table 3). More interestingly, RWA also pointed out the importance of parental pressure (in this case of both parents) in predicting value acceptance.

Table 3

*The Importance of Parental Involvement in Predicting Adolescents' Sport Value Acceptance*

	Multiple Regression		Relative Weight Analysis	
	$\beta$	$p$	Raw importance estimates	Rescaled estimates
<b>Fathers</b>				
Active Involvement	-.04	.556	.005	6.3%
Praise and Understanding	.14	.026	.037	50.4%
Directive Behavior	-.03	.624	.005	6.9%
Pressure	-.06	.159	.026	36.4%
Total $R^2 = .073$			.073	100.0%
<b>Mothers</b>				
Active Involvement	.05	.480	.011	9.4%
Praise and Understanding	.13	.025	.052	46.0%
Directive Behavior	.07	.311	.016	14.7%
Pressure	-.12	.027	.034	29.9%
Total $R^2 = .113$			.113	100.0%

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

## Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of our study was to analyze the sport values held by adolescents and adolescents' acceptance of those sport values their parents want them to endorse, as well as to investigate the impact parental involvement in their children's sportive activity has on value acceptance on the part of the adolescents. Despite the fact that the contribution of youth sport to the development of values in adolescents has been widely recognized (e.g., Camiré & Trudel, 2010), very little research thus far has focused on this topic and, in particular, on the way sport values are transmitted.

The findings of the current study showed that adolescent athletes gave great importance to competence values (e.g., achievement and showing skill) and moral values (e.g., contract maintenance and obedience), but

attributed little importance to status values (e.g., leadership and winning). This result, which is in line with our first hypothesis (H1) and with previous studies in the field (e.g., Goggins, 2015; Lee et al., 2008), suggests that, in a sport context, young athletes view being competent and fair as more important than being a leader of the group. This can be attributed to a number of factors: as they are engaged in the difficult task of differentiating and becoming autonomous from their families of origin, on the one hand adolescents may find the opportunity to demonstrate their own skills in the sport context as a means of differentiation. On the other hand, also teammates and coaches may influence the importance adolescents attribute to competence values: young athletes may in fact believe that proving their competence to both teammates and coaches could be a way to be accepted by the team. We can also speculate that the little importance given to status values is instead due to the fact that, within a team, there is one “leader” (the “captain”) who may be interested in showing his/her status, while for the other members of the group teamwork might instead be the main concern. Moreover, the lack of importance given to status values is in line with previous research on basic human values which demonstrated that adolescents do not consider self-enhancement values (e.g., power and achievement) to be true guiding principles in their lives (Barni, 2009).

Similarly, adolescents perceived their parents - both fathers and mothers - as giving the greatest importance to moral and competence values. Consistently with the second hypothesis (H2) and with previous studies on basic values (Barni et al., 2011), young athletes were willing to accept these parental values from a moderate to a high degree. Interestingly, adolescents' level of sport value acceptance seemed to be definitively higher than that showed by previous studies concerning basic values (Alfieri, Barni, Rosnati, & Marta, 2014; Barni et al., 2011; Barni, Ranieri, & Scabini, 2012). It is likely that sport is a powerful means through which parents can communicate their value messages to their offspring, as their sportive activity may be a topic children are particularly interested in discussing. Thus this important question emerges: Is transmitting core values (namely, values that are more salient in a specific context such as sport) easier than transmitting basic values, which are instead more abstract, trans-situational guiding principles of one's life? If yes, this would mean that the process of value transmission is influenced by the “level of abstraction” of the values. The transmission of core values, which are anchored to a concrete context and which refer to more specific actions and objects than basic values do (Schwartz et al., 2010), could make the parental value messages clearer, thereby reducing children's misperceptions of their parents' values, while simultaneously supporting parent-child value similarities. Further research is needed in order to be able to adequately address this question, with reference to this and to other core values (e.g., political values, family values, etc.). Moreover, it would be fruitful to study the relationship between the motivational structure of basic values and sport and other core values. Generally speaking, when studying value transmission it is essential to consider not only the content of values but also their level of abstraction.

Parental involvement in children's sportive activity turned out to be a significant predictor of adolescents' sport value acceptance. Parental involvement was mainly characterized by encouragement (namely, praise and understanding) and only moderately by a directive behavior or by active involvement. Moreover, adolescents did not strongly perceive their parents as exerting pressure on them to succeed in their sport activity. As we hypothesized (H3), multiple regression (MR) results showed that the stronger the adolescents' feeling of being understood by their parents regarding their sportive activity, the higher their willingness to accept their parents' sport values. Moreover, the higher the degree of the maternal pressure felt by adolescent athletes, the lower the degree of sport value acceptance (H4). In contrast to our third and fourth hypotheses, neither active involvement nor directive behavior contributed to explaining value acceptance. In other words, what allows a

successful value transmission in terms of value acceptance and similarity between the two generations is parental behavior characterized by empathy towards children's sportive activity, rather than active parental involvement (such as volunteering activities for the sport club or discussing their children's progress with the coach).

All in all, multiple regression (MR) results revealed that positive behavior towards children's sportive activity, specifically characterized by praise and understanding, and a low degree of pressure exerted by the parents is associated with adolescents' acceptance of parental sport values, regardless of the type of value considered. Both of these very different types of parental involvement in their children's sportive activity appear to be related – albeit in different directions – to the degree of sport value acceptance on the part of the adolescent. They are therefore the ones that need to be taken into consideration to greater degree whenever the aim is to transmit a specific value to the younger generation.

Relative weight analysis (RWA) results were consistent with those of MR, confirming the importance of praise and understanding in predicting adolescents' willingness to accept parents' sport values. This technique for analysis, whose primary concern is the impact of a particular predictor relative to others in the model, uses a variable transformation approach to address the problem of correlated predictors, as in the case of the different patterns of parental involvement. More interestingly, while regression results made it appear that maternal praise/understanding and pressure contributed similarly to predicting adolescents' value acceptance, RWA showed that the former explained a larger proportion of variance as compared to the latter. Additionally, RWA results reevaluated the role of fathers' pressure in predicting the criterion variable, which did not emerge from MR: paternal pressure (together with praise and understanding) was the most correlated predictor to fathers' value acceptance.

All in all, our findings suggest that the key to the transmission of sport values is the quality of interaction and the relationship between parents and adolescents, rather than the degree of parental involvement in the child's sport activity. For this reason, parental attitudes – characterized by praise and understanding, but also by pressure (examples of positive and negative involvement, respectively) – have more to do with adolescents' acceptance or rejection of parental values than does active parental involvement in the sport activity. On the one hand, it is likely that parental involvement characterized by praise and understanding, which comprises the children's perception of parental empathy displayed towards their sport activity, might be related to a more positive parent-child relationship with regard to the child's sport activity. On the other hand, when perceiving pressure, children might feel uncomfortable with talking with their parents about their thoughts or fears related to their sport, and thus establish a more negative parent-child relationship with regard to the child's sport activity. This result is in line with the available literature concerning transmission of basic values. Indeed, a number of factors are considered to be related to children's willingness to accept their parental values; most of these deal with the quality of the parent-child relationship (Barni et al., 2011; Schönplflug, 2001).

This study includes some strong points. First, to our knowledge, it is one of the few studies thus far undertaken that have focused on the topic of sport value transmission between parents and adolescent children. Together with the family and the school, sport is a major agent of socialization during adolescence (Prunelli, 2011), although its contribution to adolescents' value development has not so far been largely investigated. When studying adolescents' socialization, it is essential to take into account the complex system of social relationships occurring in adolescents' lives (Vandell, 2000). In this study, we connected sport and family,

analyzing one step of the parent-child transmission of values (i.e., adolescents' acceptance of perceived parental values) within the sport context. In particular, we examined the quality of parental involvement in their adolescent children's sportive activity in order to explore the reasons for adolescents' willingness to accept parental values.

Second, in order to estimate the contribution of each variable relative to others in the model, rather than simply look at the single contribution of each variable, we supplemented regression analysis with relative weight analysis, a relatively new data analysis strategy. As our predictors consisted of four patterns of parental involvement all of which were highly correlated, this strategy allowed us to reevaluate the role of the predictors of sport value acceptance, thus adding knowledge to our results.

In interpreting our results, some limitations must be kept in mind. First, the cross-sectional design of the study limited both causal inferences from the data and considerations regarding the bidirectionality of the links. Thus, a longitudinal development of the present research perspective would be informative. Second, the sample was one of convenience, as participants were selected according to the willingness of their sport team to take part in the study. Third, adolescents were our only informants; parental responses were not included in the study. Thus, while we considered adolescents' perceptions of parental involvement in their sportive activity, we did not consider their parents' actual involvement. Fourth, we used a single-item measure to assess adolescents' perception of pressure on the part of their parents.

Parents play a critical role in the development of adolescents' sport-related values. This study indicates that the transmission process of sport values can be affected by the quality of parents' involvement in their children's sport activities. Thus, parents should be made to understand that their children may benefit, in terms of value development, from an understanding behavior - that is, from a form of parental encouragement characterized by empathy towards the child's sport activity.

## Notes

- i) For example, if a criterion variable is regressed on three variables, the computation of the relative weight for  $X_1$  involves the following steps (Tonidandel & LeBreton, 2011): a) Derive a set of  $k$  orthogonal weights  $Z_{Xk}$  that are maximally related to the set of  $j$  original predictors  $X_j$  (see Johnson, 2000 for the process of obtaining the best-fitting set of orthogonal variables); b) obtain a set of standardized regression coefficients  $\beta_k$  by regressing the criterion variable  $Y$  on the set of the new orthogonal predictors  $Z_{Xk}$ ; c) obtain a set of standardized regression coefficients  $\lambda_{jk}$  by regressing  $X_j$  on the set of the new orthogonal predictors  $Z_{Xk}$ ; d) compute relative weights by summing the products of squared standardized regression coefficients  $\beta_k^2$  and  $\lambda_{jk}^2$  obtained at steps b and c. Thus, the relative weight for the first predictor ( $X_1$ ) can be calculated as  $\epsilon_1 = \lambda^2_{11}\beta^2_1 + \lambda^2_{12}\beta^2_2 + \lambda^2_{13}\beta^2_3$ . Relative weights for the other predictors in the model are calculated in the same manner.
- ii)  $r_{mean}$  were obtained transforming the  $r$  to  $Z$ , averaging, and then transforming back to  $r$ .

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