

## **Young Athletes' Perceptions of Parental Support and Pressure**

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*Individual participation in athletics was examined as a representative achievement-oriented activity in which perceived parental support and pressure influence adolescents' perceptions of themselves and their performance. Adolescent tennis players attending one of the three regional tennis academies indicated their perceptions of the quality of their parents' involvement in their tennis participation, their enjoyment of tennis participation, their self-esteem, and their feelings of burnout associated with tennis participation. Both females and males perceived similar levels of support from their mother and father; however, females perceived greater support from both parents than did males. Males perceived higher levels of pressure from their father than from their mother, whereas females perceived similar levels of pressure from both their father and mother. For both females and males, perceived parental support was positively associated with enjoyment of tennis participation and self-esteem. The findings are discussed as evidence of a general association between adolescents' perceptions of their parents' involvement in their achievement-oriented activities and their enjoyment of such activities and self-perception of abilities associated with those activities.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Young adolescents are greatly influenced by their parents' interest in their endeavors. Their performance and achievement in varied activities are facilitated by positive parental involvement. For instance, research has revealed a positive association between parental involvement and children's performance in elementary school (e.g., Herman and Yeh, 1983; Reynolds, 1989), reading performance (Hewison, 1988), as well as academic attitudes and beliefs (e.g., Parsons *et al.*, 1982). Parental involvement is such a powerful influence that its effects may last for many years and may enhance children's participation and performance in many different areas. For instance, it has been found that children of elderly parents prefer activities as wide ranging as music, the arts, gardening, and sports, activities that are influenced by their parent's beliefs and attitudes (Weiss and Bailey, 1985). Thus, parental involvement is important for a child's development, participation, and performance in many varied domains.

Similarly, parental involvement affects both general and sport-relevant aspects of young athletes' adjustment. For instance, the less parental pressure perceived by young male and female basketball players, the greater their enjoyment of the sport (Brustad, 1988). Male age group wrestlers who reported enjoying their sport also reported more positive adult interactions, particularly with their mother, and greater parental satisfaction with their performance (Scanlan and Lewthwaite, 1986). Whereas parental support is associated with higher levels of self-esteem (Felker, 1968), parental pressure is associated with negative self-evaluation (Smith *et al.*, 1978). Taken together, those associations suggest that parental involvement in youth sport activities has implications for immediate and long-term attitudes toward sport and aspects of self-concept that refer to athletic participation.

Individual sports are representative of the many achievement-oriented settings in which young people are influenced by the support and/or pressure placed on them by their parents (e.g., Cohn, 1990; Dunlap and Berne, 1991; Hoyle and Leff, *in press*; Scanlan *et al.*, 1989, 1991). For instance, young athletes face considerable stress resulting from sport participation and competition, and parents are in a position to be either supportive by helping to lessen the stress the young athletes encounter, or to be an additional stressor by placing pressure to succeed on the young athlete. In the present research, we examined the impact of perceived parental involvement, both parental support and pressure, on young female and male athletes. We chose to study young tennis players because junior tennis is an individual sport in which parents play a major role in their child's participation, performance, and enjoyment (Dunlap and Berne, 1991; Hoyle

and Leff, in press; Nash, 1987), and a sport in which highly competitive players often experience physiological, psychological, and emotional pressures (Dunlap and Berne, 1991; Nash, 1987). Because junior tennis is such a competitive and complex individual achievement-oriented activity, we felt our results would generalize to other individual achievement-oriented domains in which parents also influence their children such as in art, music, or academics. Consistent with this expectation is Flohr's (1987) research on the role that parental encouragement and parental pressure play for young musically gifted children.

It is important to realize that the role of perceived parental support and pressure in the experience of competitive junior tennis players probably differs from the role of perceived parental involvement for tennis players who compete on the high school and collegiate level, where tennis is a team sport. For the latter group, the result of one's individual singles and doubles matches affects whether the team as a whole wins or loses. Perceived pressures are likely to be different in such situations, and may, in fact, focus more on teammate and peer expectations than on parental expectations and pressures. In fact, Simon and Martens (1979) found that young adolescents competing in individual sports actually experienced higher stress levels prior to competition than did young adolescent athletes competing in team sports.

Although parents may support their children in their athletic endeavors physically, emotionally, or financially, it is primarily emotional support with which we are concerned. Support and encouragement by family members, especially by parents, are important in young athletes' initial involvement in sport (Greendorfer and Lewko, 1978; Orlick and Botterill, 1975; Snyder and Spreitzer, 1976; Watson, 1975), as well as their continued participation and performance (Lewko and Ewing, 1980; McElroy and Kirkendall, 1981; Scanlan and Lewthwaite, 1986). Furthermore, parental support is associated with higher levels of enjoyment of sport (Hoyle and Leff, in press; Scanlan and Lewthwaite, 1986, self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967; Felker, 1968), evaluations of performance outcomes (Smith *et al.*, 1978), and the importance players ascribe to sport (Hoyle and Leff, in press).

On the other hand, pressure and stress are related to a number of negative outcomes for young athletes, including somatic complaints, fears of failure, feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and high dispositional anxiety (Feltz and Albrecht, 1986; Gould *et al.*, 1983; Scanlan *et al.*, 1991). In particular, parental pressure is associated with negative appraisals of self-worth (Smith *et al.*, 1978), unhappiness with sport involvement and participation (Smith, 1986), and negative evaluations of performance (McElroy, 1982; Ogilvie, 1979; Scanlan and Passer, 1979).

A considerable amount of research has been conducted on the role of parents in young athletes' sport participation (e.g., Greendorfer and Lewko, 1978; Hoyle and Leff, in press; Lewko and Ewing, 1980; McElroy, 1982, 1983). Yet it is not clear which parent has more influence on young athletes' sport decisions. For instance, some research has found that same-sex parents exert more influence than cross-sex parents on the young child's initial involvement in sport (Snyder and Spreitzer, 1973), whereas other research has found that fathers are the most influential in the sport socialization of both boys and girls (Greendorfer and Lewko, 1978). It has also been found that girls who are highly involved in sport receive more influence and encouragement from the whole family (parents and siblings) than do girls who are not highly involved in sport (Lewko and Ewing, 1980). In contrast, boys who are highly involved in sport receive more influence only from their fathers than do boys who are not highly involved in sport (Lewko and Ewing, 1980). Thus, it seems that to become highly involved in sport girls may require the support of both parents, whereas boys may require primarily the support of their father.

Although research has examined parental involvement in sport, it generally has not been conducted by focusing on the child's point of view. Moreover, much of the previous research concerning young athletes' involvement in sport has examined team sports, such as baseball or soccer (Fine, 1987; Wankel and Kreisel, 1985), the sport of wrestling, in which research has been conducted only on males (e.g., Burton and Martens, 1986; Gould *et al.*, 1983; Scanlan and Lewthwaite, 1986), or intramural sports (Savin-Williams, 1976). The sport of junior tennis differs from those more team-oriented sports because it is a sport in which the participants are not affected by support or pressure from team members, and as a result, the young competitive athlete is forced to deal solely with both performing well and handling parental pressures and expectations.

Thus, in the present study, our main objective was to examine perceived parental involvement in this unique sport context, and to examine the extent to which perceived parental involvement is associated with young female and male athletes' adjustment to and enjoyment of sport participation. We defined parental support as the young athlete's perception of his or her parents' behavior aimed at facilitating his or her involvement and participation in sport. Likewise, parental pressure was defined as behavior exhibited by parents that is perceived by their children as indicating high, unlikely or possibly even unattainable expectations. These nominal definitions are based on the child's perception of their parents' support or pressure, because parental support or pressure not perceived by the young athlete will likely have little impact on his or her behavior.

Because all participants in our study were tennis players who had coaches and who participated in competitive tennis camps, they can be considered youngsters highly involved in sport. The participants provided self-report data about their parents' involvement in their tennis game and different aspects of their experience of playing competitive junior tennis. It was hypothesized that males would receive more support from their fathers than from their mothers, whereas females would receive similarly high levels from both parents. Exploratory analyses were also conducted to look for additional sex differences. We further hypothesized that for both males and females perceived parental support would be positively associated with self-reported enjoyment of tennis and self-esteem, and negatively associated with self-reported levels of tennis burnout. In contrast, we hypothesized that perceived parental pressure would be positively associated with tennis burnout, and negatively associated with enjoyment of tennis and self-esteem. Finally, we were also interested in examining the interrelations among the adjustment variables. We predicted that enjoyment of tennis, tennis self-esteem, and global self-esteem would be positively intercorrelated. In addition, we predicted that tennis burnout would be negatively correlated with enjoyment of tennis, tennis self-esteem, and global self-esteem.

## METHOD

### Subjects

The participants in the study were 97 male and 57 female tennis players from among 200 players invited to participate. Players, between the ages of 6 and 18 ( $M = 12.5$ ,  $SD = 2.5$ ), were training at one of the three tennis academies located in the southeast. Two additional participants provided incomplete data and therefore were dropped from the sample.

Tennis academies were selected after conferring with local tennis professionals. Three tennis training centers in which many competitive adolescent tennis players trained year round were recommended. Directors of those centers were contacted, and all three agreed to participate in the study. Each participant obtained parental consent before participating in the study.

### Materials and Procedure

Participants completed a questionnaire booklet that contained self-report measures of parental involvement, tennis participation, enjoyment of tennis, and self-esteem. In addition, demographic information was provided by the participants.

### *Parental Involvement*

Participants responded to a number of questions concerning their perception of their parents' involvement in their tennis activity. Participants were asked to provide information for both their mother or stepmother and their father or stepfather on every question. We measured perceived *parental support* with six items that concerned participants' perceptions of the degree to which their parents watch their tennis matches, talk with them about their matches, support in general their tennis endeavors, contribute financially to their tennis if possible, are proud of their tennis participation regardless of match outcomes, and help them feel better after losing matches. We measured participants' perceived *parental pressure* with five items that dealt with participants' perceptions of their parents' expectations, how critical their parents are, their parents' response to participants' losses, their parents' concerns about the participant winning matches, and the pressure their parents' put on them to succeed in matches. Participants responded on 4-point Likert scales anchored by *not at all like me* and *very much like me*. The mean of the responses to these items formed our measures of parental support and parental pressure. Coefficient alpha for the resultant scales were as follows: .75 for support—mother, .73 for support—father, .69 for pressure—mother, and .77 for pressure—father.

### *Enjoyment*

Participants responded to five items designed to measure their enjoyment of tennis. The items concerned participants' excitement about tennis practices, enjoyment of tennis presently as compared to in the past, wishes that they had chosen another sport other than tennis, prediction of continued play throughout one's life, and thoughts as to whether the time put into their tennis game is time well spent. Participants responded on 4-point Likert scales anchored by *not at all like me* and *very much like me*. The mean of these responses was used as our measure of participant's enjoyment of tennis. Coefficient alpha for the five items was .69.

### *Priority of Tennis*

Respondents rank-ordered eight items in terms of which held the most importance to them. The items were family, friends, girlfriend/boyfriend, tennis, other sports, hobbies, school, and church/temple. The rank order given tennis was used as a measure of the priority of tennis.

### *Other Variables*

We obtained information about three additional participant characteristics. In order to measure tennis burnout, participants were asked how much they enjoyed playing tennis this year as compared to a year ago. They provided responses on a 5-point Likert scale anchored by *much less* and *much more*. Participants also were asked to respond to two items, one measuring tennis self-esteem and the other measuring global self-esteem. They provided responses to the items "How do you feel about your tennis game right now?" and "How do you feel about yourself *in general* right now?" on 4-point Likert scales anchored by *very bad* and *very good*. Participants also indicated their sex and the age at which they first played tennis.

### *Participant's Comprehension*

In order to detect whether all participants understood the questions asked of them, we included the question, "Did you understand the questions in this booklet?" Participants provided responses on a 4-point Likert scale anchored by *none of them* and *all of them*. The overall mean was 3.63, ranging from 3.0 for 8-year-olds to 3.92 for 15-year olds. We also asked children whether they understood how to mark their answers, and 96% of them responded affirmatively. The few that indicated that they did not understand fully how to respond were scattered across the age range. Thus, we decided that no subjects would be excluded for any analyses based on responses to these items.

## RESULTS

### **Levels of Parental Support and Pressure**

We analyzed perceived support and perceived pressure means in a 2 (sex of player)  $\times$  2 (parent) analysis of variance with repeated measures on the second factor. The analysis of perceived support means produced a significant main effect for sex of player,  $F(1, 151) = 9.75, p < .01$ . Inspection of the means, displayed in top half of Table I, reveals that female players indicated greater perceived support from both parents ( $M = 3.34$ ) than did male players ( $M = 3.07$ ). The analysis of perceived pressure means produced a significant main effect of parent,  $F(1, 151) = 5.76, p < .02$ , and a marginally significant main effect for sex of

**Table I.** Mean Perceived Support and Perceived Pressure as a Function of Parent and Sex of Player<sup>a</sup>

| Parent             | Sex of player       |                   |
|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
|                    | Female <sup>b</sup> | Male <sup>c</sup> |
| Perceived support  |                     |                   |
| Mother             |                     |                   |
| <i>M</i>           | 3.34                | 3.05              |
| <i>SD</i>          | .58                 | .59               |
| Father             |                     |                   |
| <i>M</i>           | 3.33                | 3.10              |
| <i>SD</i>          | .54                 | .58               |
| Perceived pressure |                     |                   |
| Mother             |                     |                   |
| <i>M</i>           | 1.57                | 1.68              |
| <i>SD</i>          | .51                 | .59               |
| Father             |                     |                   |
| <i>M</i>           | 1.65                | 1.85              |
| <i>SD</i>          | .62                 | .69               |

<sup>a</sup> Scores could range from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*very much*).

<sup>b</sup> *n* = 57.

<sup>c</sup> *n* = 97.

player,  $F(1, 151) = 3.03, p = .08$ . Inspection of the means, displayed in the bottom half of Table I, reveals that players indicated greater perceived pressure from father ( $M = 1.77$ ) than from mother ( $M = 1.64$ ). Male players indicated slightly greater perceived pressure from both parents ( $M = 1.76$ ) than did female players ( $M = 1.60$ ). Exploratory post hoc comparisons of perceived pressure means revealed that male players reported greater perceived pressure from father than from mother  $t = 2.73, p < .01$ , whereas female players reported equivalent pressure from mother and father,  $t < 1$ ; however, the interaction effect failed to reach significance,  $F(1, 151) = 1.11, p = .29$ . No other comparisons were significant.



**Table II.** Results of Canonical Correlation Analysis of Association Between Perceived Parental Involvement and Adjustment to Sport Participation<sup>a</sup>

| Variable                          | Females <sup>b</sup> |      | Males <sup>c</sup> |      |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|------|--------------------|------|
|                                   | I                    | II   | I                  | II   |
| Canonical structure               |                      |      |                    |      |
| Perceived parental involvement    |                      |      |                    |      |
| Mother support                    | .88                  | .06  | .87                | .22  |
| Father support                    | .92                  | .22  | .82                | .37  |
| Mother pressure                   | -.44                 | .74  | -.09               | .75  |
| Father pressure                   | -.49                 | .75  | -.31               | .91  |
| Adjustment to sport participation |                      |      |                    |      |
| Enjoyment                         | .82                  | -.42 | .66                | -.03 |
| Burnout                           | -.84                 | -.32 | -.31               | -.07 |
| Global self-esteem                | .48                  | .06  | .71                | -.11 |
| Tennis self-esteem                | .54                  | -.11 | .81                | .08  |
| Priority of tennis                | -.17                 | -.56 | -.23               | -.94 |
| Statistical results               |                      |      |                    |      |
| Canonical correlation coefficient | .70                  | .39  | .55                | .45  |
| <i>F</i>                          | 2.36                 | 0.94 | 2.90               | 2.02 |
| <i>p</i>                          | <.01                 | .51  | <.001              | .02  |

<sup>a</sup> Salient loadings (> |.50|) are italicized.

<sup>b</sup> *n* = 57.

<sup>c</sup> *n* = 97.

### General Association Between Parental Involvement and Adjustment to Sport

Table II displays the results of a canonical correlation analysis of the association between the group of parental involvement variables and the group of adjustment variables.<sup>3</sup> Although parallel analyses for females and males revealed similar canonical structures, only one pair of canonical variables was statistically significant in the sample of females, whereas two pairs of canonical variables were statistically significant in the sample of males.

<sup>3</sup>We used canonical correlation analysis rather than multiple regression analysis or only zero-order correlations for two reasons. First, we were interested in the general association between the perceived involvement variables and the adjustment-to-sport variables. Second, we were concerned with protecting the experimentwise Type I error rate and felt that significance in the context of a single, omnibus analysis like canonical correlation analysis would increase confidence in the integrity of tests of zero-order coefficients. In addition, we selected canonical correlation analysis over multiple regression analysis because, consistent with the manner in which our data were collected, no direction of causality is implied in the former.

Inspection of the coefficients in Table II reveals that the structure of the first and second canonical variables corresponding to perceived parental involvement was similar for females and males, though in the sample of females the first canonical variable was moderately negatively related to perceived pressure, whereas in the sample of males the first canonical variable was virtually unrelated to perceived pressure. The structure of the first and second canonical variables corresponding to adjustment differed considerably for the two samples. In the sample of females the first canonical variable was strongly correlated with enjoyment and burnout, and moderately correlated with tennis self-esteem. On the other hand, in the sample of males the first canonical variable was strongly correlated with global and tennis self-esteem, and moderately correlated with enjoyment. Although the general structure of the second canonical variable corresponding to adjustment was similar for the two samples, the magnitude of the loadings was different. In the sample of females, the second canonical variable was moderately negatively correlated with priority of tennis and somewhat negatively correlated with enjoyment and burnout. On the other hand, in the sample of males the second canonical variable was strongly negatively correlated with priority of tennis and virtually uncorrelated with the other adjustment variables.

### **Specific Associations Between Parental Involvement and Adjustment to Sport**

Zero-order correlations among the involvement and adjustment variables are displayed in Table III. We first describe the pattern of correlations among involvement variables, then the pattern among adjustment variables, then the pattern between individual involvement and adjustment variables.

#### *Perceived Involvement*

The pattern of zero-order correlations among perceived involvement variables corroborates the findings of the canonical correlation analysis. The correlations between perceived support from mother and perceived support from father were substantial for both females and males ( $r$ s were .67 and .61, respectively). Likewise, the correlations between perceived pressure from mother and perceived pressure from father were substantial for both females and males (both  $r$ s were .57). In the female sample perceived support from mother and father were moderately negatively correlated with perceived pressure from mother and father ( $r$ s ranged from

**Table III.** Correlations Among Perceived Parental Involvement and Adjustment to Sport Participation<sup>a</sup>

| Variable              | 1                | 2                 | 3                         | 4                                      | 5                                      | 6                                      | 7                                    | 8                                    | 9            |
|-----------------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|--|--|--|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Support</b>        |                  |                   |                           |  |  |  |                                      |                                      |              |
| 1. Mother             |                  |                   |                           |  |  |  |                                      |                                      |              |
| 2. Father             | .61 <sup>d</sup> | .67 <sup>d</sup>  | -.23<br>-.36 <sup>c</sup> | -.38 <sup>c</sup><br>-.27 <sup>b</sup> | .49 <sup>d</sup><br>.47 <sup>d</sup>   | -.53 <sup>d</sup><br>-.56 <sup>d</sup> | .31 <sup>b</sup><br>.31 <sup>b</sup> | .33 <sup>b</sup><br>.32 <sup>b</sup> | -.11<br>-.20 |
| <b>Pressure</b>       |                  |                   |                           |  |  |  |                                      |                                      |              |
| 3. Mother             | .19              | .13               |                           | .57 <sup>d</sup>                       |  | .15                                    |                                      |                                      |              |
| 4. Father             | -.12             | .17               | .57 <sup>d</sup>          |  | -.35 <sup>c</sup><br>-.35 <sup>c</sup> | .22                                    | -.12<br>-.16                         | -.11<br>-.29 <sup>b</sup>            | -.06<br>-.10 |
| <b>Adjustment</b>     |                  |                   |                           |  |  |  |                                      |                                      |              |
| 5. Enjoyment          | .27 <sup>c</sup> | .30 <sup>c</sup>  | -.08                      | -.10                                   |  | -.46 <sup>d</sup>                      | .29 <sup>b</sup>                     | .57 <sup>d</sup>                     | -.19         |
| 6. Burnout            | -.15             | -.15              | .08                       | -.02                                   | -.35 <sup>d</sup>                      |  | -.19                                 | -.32 <sup>b</sup>                    | .11          |
| 7. Global self-esteem | .31 <sup>c</sup> | .29 <sup>c</sup>  | -.04                      | -.15                                   | .05                                    | -.16                                   |                                      | .31 <sup>b</sup>                     | .01          |
| 8. Tennis self-esteem | .40 <sup>d</sup> | .32 <sup>c</sup>  | -.02                      | -.11                                   | .47 <sup>d</sup>                       | -.45 <sup>d</sup>                      | .30 <sup>c</sup>                     |                                      | .02          |
| 9. Priority           | -.18             | -.25 <sup>b</sup> | -.24 <sup>b</sup>         | -.31 <sup>c</sup>                      | -.31 <sup>c</sup>                      | .20                                    | .05                                  | -.21 <sup>b</sup>                    |              |

<sup>a</sup> Entries above the main diagonal are for female players ( $n = 57$ ); entries below the main diagonal are for male players ( $n = 97$ ).

<sup>b</sup>  $p < .05$ .

<sup>c</sup>  $p < .01$ .

<sup>d</sup>  $p < .001$ .

-.23 to -.38), a result consistent with the moderate negative loadings of perceived pressure from mother and father on the first canonical variable for females (Column 1 in Table II). In the male sample perceived support from mother and father were virtually uncorrelated with perceived pressure from mother and father ( $r$ s ranged from -.12 to .19), a result consistent with the sharp distinction between the support and pressure variables on the first and second canonical variables for males (Columns 3 and 4 in Table II).

Formal statistical comparisons between parallel coefficients for females and males revealed three significant differences.<sup>4</sup> The correlation between perceived support and pressure from mother was moderately negative for females ( $r = -.23, p < .10$ ), but weakly positive for males ( $r = .17, p = ns; z = 2.49, p < .05$ ). Likewise, the correlation between perceived support and pressure from father was moderately negative for females ( $r = -.27, p < .05$ ), but weakly positive for males ( $r = .17, p = ns; z = 2.50, p < .05$ ). The correlation between perceived support from father and perceived pressure from mother was moderately negative for females ( $r = -.36, p < .01$ ), but weakly positive for males ( $r = .13, p = ns; z = 2.83, p < .01$ ). Otherwise, the coefficients for females and males were not significantly different.

### *Adjustment to Sport*

For both females and males, enjoyment was moderately negatively correlated with burnout. Enjoyment was moderately positively correlated with tennis self-esteem for both females and males. Burnout was significantly negatively correlated with tennis self-esteem for both females and males, but not significantly correlated with global self-esteem. The correlation between tennis self-esteem and global self-esteem was moderate for both females and males. As reflected in the canonical correlation analysis, players' ratings of the relative importance of tennis was not strongly correlated with the other indicators of adjustment. For females, priority was not significantly correlated with any of the remaining adjustment variables; for males, priority was weakly negatively correlated with enjoyment and tennis self-esteem. Statistical comparisons between parallel correlation coefficients for females and males revealed no statistically significant differences.

<sup>4</sup>All comparisons involved conducting Fisher's  $r$ -to- $z$  transformation of the correlation coefficients and carrying out the statistical test for the difference between independent coefficients using two-tailed critical values.

*Involvement and Adjustment*

With one exception, coefficients corresponding to the relations between perceived support from mother and adjustment variables and those corresponding to the relations between perceived support from father and adjustment variables were virtually identical. In the male sample the correlation between perceived support from father and priority was significant ( $r = -.25, p < .05$ ), whereas the correlation between perceived support from mother and priority was nonsignificant ( $r = -.18, p = ns$ ); however, the two coefficients were not statistically different. Similarly, the coefficients corresponding to the relations between perceived pressure from mother and adjustment variables and those corresponding to the relations between perceived pressure from father and adjustment variables were similar. The lone departure from this pattern involved the correlation between pressure and tennis self-esteem among females. In the female sample the correlation between perceived pressure from father and tennis self-esteem was significant ( $r = -.29, p < .05$ ), whereas the correlation between perceived pressure from mother and tennis self-esteem was nonsignificant ( $r = -.11, p = ns$ ); however, the two coefficients were not statistically different.

The pattern of correlations between individual involvement variables and adjustment variables generally corresponds to the structure revealed by the canonical correlation analysis. In the female sample, perceived support from mother and father were correlated with enjoyment, burnout, global self-esteem, and tennis self-esteem. In the male sample, perceived support from mother and father were correlated with enjoyment, global self-esteem, and tennis self-esteem. Statistical comparisons of the coefficients corresponding to the relation between support and burnout revealed a significant difference in the coefficients for females ( $r_s = -.53$  and  $-.56$  for mother and father support, respectively) and those for males ( $r_s = -.15$  for both mother and father support;  $z_s = 2.52$  and  $2.83$  for mother and father support, respectively; both  $p_s < .01$ ). Perceived pressure from mother and father were negatively correlated with enjoyment among females (both  $r_s = -.35$ ), but uncorrelated with enjoyment among males (both  $r_s \leq -.10$ ). Statistical comparisons revealed that the differences were marginally significant ( $z_s = 1.66, p = .10$  and  $1.56, p = .12$  for mother and father pressure, respectively). Perceived pressure from mother and father and priority were negatively correlated among males ( $r_s = -.24$  and  $-.31$ ) and uncorrelated among females (both  $r_s \leq -.10$ ); however, the coefficients were not significantly different.

## DISCUSSION

A number of interesting findings emerged from our investigation of young male and female athletes' perceptions of parental involvement in their sport. With regard to perceived parental support, we found, as hypothesized, that for females both mothers and fathers were perceived as providing similar levels of support. Likewise for males, and contrary to our original expectation, mothers and fathers were perceived as providing similar levels of support. We also found that females perceived significantly higher levels of support from both of their parents than did males. With regard to perceived parental pressure, we found that males perceived more pressure from their fathers than from their mothers, whereas females perceived similar levels of pressure from both parents.

One implication of the findings is that neither parent seems to play a larger role than the other in young females athletes' sport participation, whereas the contribution of father and mother is not as clear cut for young male athletes. For instance, the fact that fathers are perceived as putting more pressure on males than are mothers could mean that fathers are the parent most influential in the sport decisions of young male athletes. Yet males rated perceived support from their fathers and mothers similarly. Thus, it may be that both parents are involved and supportive of young male athletes, but that fathers put more pressure on males than do mothers when their sons decide whether to continue participating in sport.

Yet, regardless of this difference in perceived parental pressure as reported by males, the present study found that parental support is important in both young males' and females' adjustment to sport. For instance, we found that support from both mother and father are related to enjoyment of tennis, tennis self-esteem, and global self-esteem for both males and females. That finding is consistent with the literature showing that positive parental support or encouragement plays an important role in the young athlete's early sport participation (e.g., Brown *et al.*, 1989; Greendorfer, 1976; Orlick, 1972; Snyder and Spreitzer, 1976) and his or her enjoyment of that participation experience (Hoyle and Leff, in press; Scanlan and Lewthwaite, 1986).

Perhaps the most important finding was that for females, perceived parental support (support from both father and mother) seems to be the opposite of perceived parental pressure (pressure from both father and mother). This pattern of relations did not emerge for males.

This finding may be explained in two ways. First, because young females generally display lower self-confidence than young males in achievement situations (e.g., Corbin and Nix, 1979; Hoffman, 1972), it may be that males require less support than do females. This would also make sense, given the public's more favorable view toward males participating in sport. Alternatively, it may be that males receive more support than females outside the family. In partial support of this idea is Greendorfer and Lewko's (1978) finding that for boys, peers were the most significant socializing agent.

Another sex difference, one that may be interpreted similarly, is that females' perceived support from their parents was inversely associated with self-reported tennis burnout, whereas for males, perceived support from parents was not related to self-reported tennis burnout. The explanation for this result may also be that females need more direct encouragement from their families than do males, who may acquire this encouragement elsewhere. Future research should utilize a measure of peer support and pressure, in order to further evaluate these results.

Other findings emerged concerning enjoyment of sport, self-esteem, and feelings of tennis burnout. For example, as hypothesized, we found that self-reported enjoyment of tennis was associated with tennis self-esteem, and that enjoyment of tennis was negatively associated with self-reported feelings of tennis burnout. These findings are consistent with the literature showing that a lack of enjoyment of sport participation is one of the reasons youngsters generally give for dropping out of sport (e.g., Gill *et al.*, 1985; Sapp and Haubenstricker, 1978; Passer, 1982).

Taken together, the findings contribute to the literature on children's experience and performance in achievement domains. The findings contribute most directly to our understanding of the influence of the family on children's and adolescent's participation in and adjustment to individual achievement-oriented activities. Also, the results suggest that boys and girls perceive parental involvement somewhat differently. Our research lays the groundwork for future investigations of the role of parental involvement in adolescent's experience of achievement-oriented activities.

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