

Go Out and Play: Interest in Sports and Physical Activity

Go Out and Play: Youth Sports in America is a comprehensive, 184-page research report, which covers a range of topics, including children's participation in organized sports, youth involvement with exercise, links between athletic participation and family life, gender and the frequency of physical education, associations between athletic participation and children's physical and emotional well-being, age of entry into sports and drop-out rates, how gender equity varies across communities (urban, suburban and rural), gender and interest in sports and physical activity, and sports involvement among understudied populations (children with disabilities, children in immigrant families).

The findings in Section Eight show that, overall, boys are more interested in sports and exercise than girls. But just as the gender gap in athletic participation and physical activity documented elsewhere in *Go Out and Play* does not stretch uniformly across all schools and communities in the United States, children's interest in sports and exercise also seems to be related to social opportunities. Differences also exist between children's reports of their interest in sports and physical activity and how parents characterize the interest levels of daughters and sons.

- Suburban and rural parents generally felt that their third-through eighth-grade daughters and sons have similar levels of interest in sports. But in urban communities, 63% of parents described their sons as “very interested” in sports, compared to 40% of parents of daughters.
- Both the student survey and the parent survey confirmed that the level of many children's interest in sports declines as they get older.
- Boys tend to overestimate their interest in sports, while girls lean toward underestimating their athletic interests. For example, 42% of third- through eighth-grade boys who are non-athletes said that sports “are a big part” of who they are, compared to 16% of non-athletic girls.
- African-American, Hispanic and Asian parents felt their sons were more interested in sports than their daughters. No significant differences accrued among white parents.

- Generally, more parents indicated that their sons were “very interested” in physical activity. But much of the overall gender difference in interest in exercise and physical activity by grade level is owed to how interest varies across urban, suburban and rural areas. Significant gender differences within suburban and rural communities as depicted did not issue. In contrast, 68% of third-through eighth-grade sons from urban areas were “very interested” in physical activity, compared with 44% of urban daughters.
- Female athletes are often involved with many clubs and organizations outside of sport, whereas male athletes focus more singly on sports.
- Among all U.S. third- through 12th-grade students, more athletes than non-athletes enjoy high levels of academic achievement.
- The positive links between athletic participation and academic performance often persist across school locations—especially for girls.

Conclusion: Girls' and boys' interest in sports and exercise varies by grade level, school location and income level. In some communities boys and girls show similar levels of interest in sport, while in other communities, boys' interest levels are higher than girls. Interest in sports can often vary more within genders than it does across genders. In short, these findings show that children's interest in athletics and physical activity is more about opportunity and encouragement, not biology.

To access the full report, go to www.WomensSportsFoundation.org/GoOutandPlay

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