

# **THE WILSON REPORT: MOMS, DADS, DAUGHTERS AND SPORTS**

**Presented by:  
Wilson Sporting Goods Co.  
in cooperation with  
The Women's Sports Foundation  
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**Wilson.**



**CONDUCTED BY:**  
**DIAGNOSTIC RESEARCH, INC.**

1480 Colorado Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90041

**Diagnostic Research, Inc.** is a full-service marketing research firm. Established in 1976, the company is headquartered in Los Angeles with offices in New York, Geneva and Paris.

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**Wilson Sporting Goods Co.**, the largest sporting goods company in the United States, is based in River Grove, IL. The company designs, manufactures and distributes sporting goods throughout the world. Wilson is a market leader in golf, racket and team sports.

in cooperation with

**Women's Sports Foundation**  
New York, NY

The **Women's Sports Foundation**, established in 1974, is a non-profit, educational organization dedicated to enhancing the sport experience for all girls and women. By encouraging participation in sport, the WSF seeks to improve the physical, mental and emotional well-being of all females. Representing a constituency of 37 million, the WSF actively advocates equal opportunities for women in sports.

# THE WILSON REPORT: MOMS, DADS, DAUGHTERS AND SPORTS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Wilson Sporting Goods Co. and the Women's Sports Foundation have commissioned a major nationwide survey to study the influence of parents and family factors on girls' participation in sports. *The Wilson Report: Moms, Dads, Daughters and Sports* marks the first large-scale, nationwide and inter-generational survey of the female sport experience.

Interviews were conducted by telephone in November and December, 1987, with a random sample of 1004 mothers and fathers, and 513 of their 7 to 18 year-old daughters. All interviews were completed by Diagnostic Research, Inc. The major findings of the study are:

- Eighty-seven percent (87%) of today's moms and dads generally accept the idea that sports are equally important for boys and girls. Parents show very little concern that sports may be "unladylike," and nearly all agree (97%) that sports and fitness activities provide important benefits to girls who participate.
- Eight out of ten girls (82%) currently participate in sports and fitness activities, and 89% plan to make sports a part of their adult lives.
- Girls play sports primarily because it's fun (58%).
- Eighty-seven percent (87%) of 7-10 year old girls and 84% of 11-14 year old girls are involved in sports, but this number drops to 75% of 15-18 year olds.
- Lack of opportunity (30%), skill (49%) and time (59%) pull girls out of sports. Interests in other activities (88%), and in boys in particular (39%) also distract girls from sports.
- Parents' own behavior influences their daughter's, since parents who play tend to have daughters who play—70% of daughters who currently participate have parents who also engage in sports or fitness activities.
- Forty-four percent (44%) of daughters say parents' participation in their sports activities is the encouragement they remember the most. However, while mothers encourage daughters of all ages, only 27% of young girls say their father is the one who primarily encourages them. This is in contrast to 44% of 15-18 year olds saying their father holds that role.
- Black and white girls are equally likely to be involved in sports, and for the same reasons. And if they quit they also tend to give the same reasons. But black girls are sometimes burdened by additional problems with transportation (41% versus 26% of white girls) and inadequate funds to pay for equipment and lessons (33% versus 18%). Black girls are also more likely to feel that "boys make fun of girls who play sports" (25% versus 11%); and more often have parents who feel sports are more important to boys than to girls (30% versus 11% of white parents).

## **SAMPLING AND TEST PROCEDURE**

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The interviewing process entailed telephone interviews with 702 mothers and 302 fathers (Total N = 1004), and 513 daughters aged 7 - 18.

Although no quotas were used, an attempt was made to achieve a representative distribution of daughters' ages. After completing the parent interview, respondents were asked if their daughter would also agree to be interviewed. A completion rate among daughters of 51% was achieved.

All interviews were conducted by telephone, in the afternoon, evening, and all day on weekends.

Phone numbers were selected at random from a list supplied by Survey Sampling, of Fairfield, Connecticut. The Survey Sampling list included numbers from every state in the continental United States (Hawaii and Alaska excluded).

Parent interviews took an average of 25 minutes to complete, while daughter interviews took about 10 minutes. Interviewing took place between November 2 and December 1, 1987.

An advisory panel was consulted at all stages of the research. The panel played a vital role in the development and refinement of issues, in questionnaire design and in the final report, and especially in ensuring that the questionnaire and final report are both comprehensive and non-biased. The completed report reflects contributions from all advisors.

## SUMMARY DISCUSSION

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### NEW ATTITUDES

A remarkable transformation in attitudes has occurred since today's parents were growing up. Perhaps the most startling finding of *The Wilson Report* is the degree to which parents support and encourage their daughters to play sports. Not only do parents perceive girls' sports and fitness participation as an important part of their daughter's development, but the vast majority of moms and dads today (87%) feel sports participation is as important for their daughters as it is for their sons. Apparently gone are the days when girls who played sports were laughed at, called names, or subtly steered to more "appropriate" activities.

Closely associated with changed attitudes, *The Wilson Report* discovered 82% of girls are currently involved in some form of sports or fitness activity, and the vast majority find it a pleasurable and beneficial experience. Their parents certainly agree, as nearly all are happy their daughters play, and those who expressed any dissatisfaction would prefer she be more involved (33%) rather than less (2%). The same is true of parents whose daughters opted out of sports -- only small percentages are glad their daughter dropped out of sports or never played at all.

Perhaps one reason for parents' supportive attitudes is found in their perceptions of the ways girls benefit from sports. More than any other advantage, parents value their daughter's sports experience because it contributes to her physical well-being; when asked how girls benefit from playing sports, 55% of parents mentioned physical and health factors. Sports and fitness activities also help build confidence and self esteem (41%); they promote teamwork, foster cooperation, and they encourage friendships (27%). As one parent summed it up, girls who play sports "become better coordinated, they are healthier, and they learn to get along with others. They learn to be part of the team."

Black and white parents differ somewhat in the benefits they associate with girls' sports participation. For example, white parents more often mention health-related benefits (58% versus 37%), character benefits (42% versus 31%) and social factors (29% versus 17%). The only benefits mentioned more frequently by black parents are the career and travel opportunities that sports sometimes present (18% versus 7% of white parents.)

Daughters also see the benefits of sports participation, but their focus is on a much simpler concept: regardless of race, they play sports because it's fun. So fun, in fact, that 89% of girls today say they plan to play sports throughout their adult lives.

## SUMMARY DISCUSSION

### ATTITUDES TURN TO ACTION

Most parents are not content to merely *hold* generous attitudes towards girls participating in sports. Rather, most actively *encourage* their daughters to play sports, and many help their daughters by playing sports with them.

Moms more consistently act as primary encourager of their daughter's sports involvement: just under half of girls in all three age groups say they've received most of their encouragement from their mothers. By and large, dads step in and encourage their daughter only as she gets older: only 27% of 7 - 10 year old girls say their father is the one who most encourages them to play sports, but 44% of 15 - 18 year olds say their father holds that role. Yet one reason why girls give up sports is that they feel they're not skilled enough. Perhaps this is one area where parents -- fathers in particular -- could make a real difference.

If fathers stepped in sooner, as mothers often do, and made an effort to encourage their daughters through their own participation as coach, team member, or opponent, girls would not only develop their skills sooner and therefore more thoroughly, but they would surely benefit in other ways as well. In fact, 44% of girls say that more than any other form of encouragement, the personal participation of parents or others in their sporting lives is the encouragement they remember most. Indeed, it may be the development of skills and parental encouragement, given earlier and more consistently, which keeps girls involved.

There is strong evidence that parents' own involvement in sports influences their daughter's athletic choices in other ways. Girls who play sports are more likely than non-participants to come from families where mom and dad played sports when they were growing up (90%), and continued their regular sports involvement into their adult lives (70%). In short, moms and dads who value sports in their own lives have daughters who do the same.

### TO PLAY OR NOT TO PLAY

As mentioned above, 82% of girls today play sports or are active in other fitness activities -- that's the good news. The bad news is that they tend to drop out of sports in increasing numbers as they get older: 87% of 7 - 10 year olds are involved, but only 75% of 15 - 18 year olds are. This relatively sharp drop-off represents a "puberty barrier." The barrier underscores the importance of intervening during the pre-high school years in an attempt to heighten and *maintain* girls' interest in sports so they will continue to reap the benefits of sports participation throughout their lives.

## SUMMARY DISCUSSION

Girls play sports because it's fun (58%). They opt out of sports when they lack the opportunity to play (30%), when they feel their skills are inadequate (49%), or when they just don't have enough time (59%). But most importantly, other interests (88%) -- primarily an interest in boys (39% overall and 47% of older girls) -- pull girls, especially high school girls, off the playing field.

Black girls are as likely to be involved in sports today as are white girls, but where economics come into play they face additional challenges -- particularly, money for equipment and lessons (33% versus 18% of white girls) and transportation to practices and games (41% versus only 26% of white girls). They also are more likely to have experienced instances where "boys make fun of girls who play sports" (25% versus only 11% of white girls).

Clear majorities of black and white girls believe sports are important for boys and girls equally. But black girls more often face traditional attitudes at home, since 30% of black parents say sports are more important for boys than for girls.

Another difference is that white girls are three times as likely as black girls to be involved in sports through a private organization (21% versus 7%), while black girls more often participate through their school (65% versus 50%).

These findings point to the conclusion that for black and white children today the sport experience may be in some ways very different, and the increased challenges faced by some black girls may make enjoyment of the experience more difficult as a result.

## PARENTS YESTERDAY AND TODAY

For many moms involvement in sports is more important now than when they were growing up -- only 54% of moms who call sports participation very important to them today also rated it very important when they were growing up. For dads, on the other hand, who tend to have been active athletically throughout their youth, sports are often less important today: 58% of dads called sports involvement very important to them when growing up, but only 32% call it very important today. The net result is that moms now are nearly as likely as dads to be involved in sports and fitness activities (64% versus 73%).

Many parents find there just isn't enough time for sports. Indeed, of the parents who say sports participation is *less* important to them now than when growing up, 65% mention limited time as the reason. Furthermore, traditional roles prevail, since fathers often cite conflicting career responsibilities (26%), while mothers most often mention family responsibilities (35%) which take up time. The unfortunate result is that their daughters do not benefit from the role models parents could provide by their own involvement in sports.

## SUMMARY DISCUSSION

Of parents who do play, however, there are some important and obvious differences. Dads play for the same reasons that their daughters play -- because it's fun -- but also because it's good for them. Moms play almost exclusively for the benefits to their physical health and appearance. Indeed, nearly three-quarters (73%) of mothers and 53% of the fathers who indicated that sports are more important to them now than when growing up mentioned keeping in shape, that participation is good for you, or other physical benefits. On the other hand, dads are significantly more likely than moms to mention personal enjoyment as the reason (20% versus 7% of moms).

Perhaps because they had less experience with sports than their husbands did when growing up, moms tend to be involved in fitness activities which are often done individually and require little skill -- aerobics (18%), walking (14%), swimming (12%) and bicycling (9%). Dads, on the other hand, are more often involved in team sports or competing against one another in baseball (19%), basketball (14%), or racket sports (13%).

We find, then, a very different situation for moms and dads. Moms take part in *fitness* activities for health reasons; dads play *sports* for health but also because it's fun. Perhaps dads have more fun playing sports because they've developed better skills and feel satisfaction in their performance, and also because the types of sports they play involve more opportunities for social interaction.

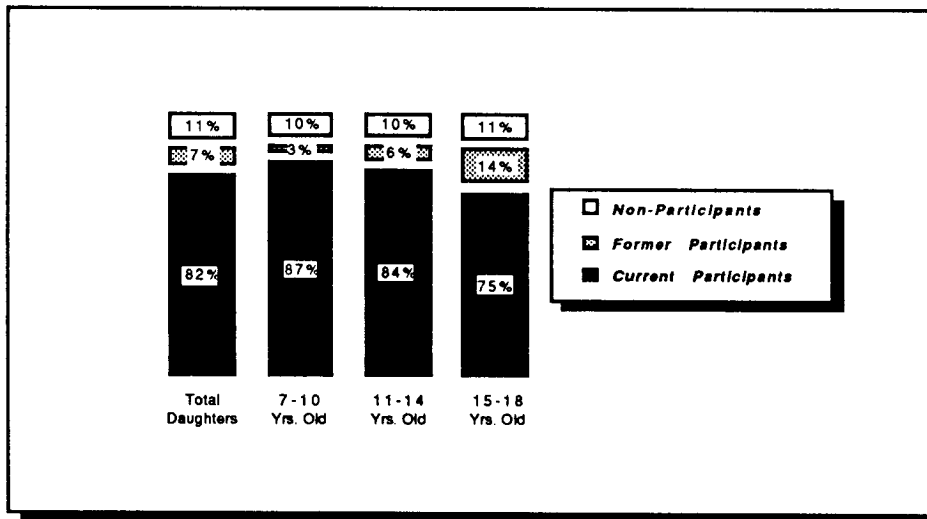
Ultimately, an activity that's fun is an activity we're more likely to continue. So the challenge to parents who would like their daughter to make sports a continuing part of her life is to enhance her *enjoyment* of sports. If parents involve themselves early on in their daughter's sports development, and incorporate the important benefits of fitness activities with the fun and skills of sports activities, daughters will enjoy the experience even more and will find it easier to reap the benefits a lifelong commitment to sports makes possible.



## DAUGHTERS WHO PLAY SPORTS

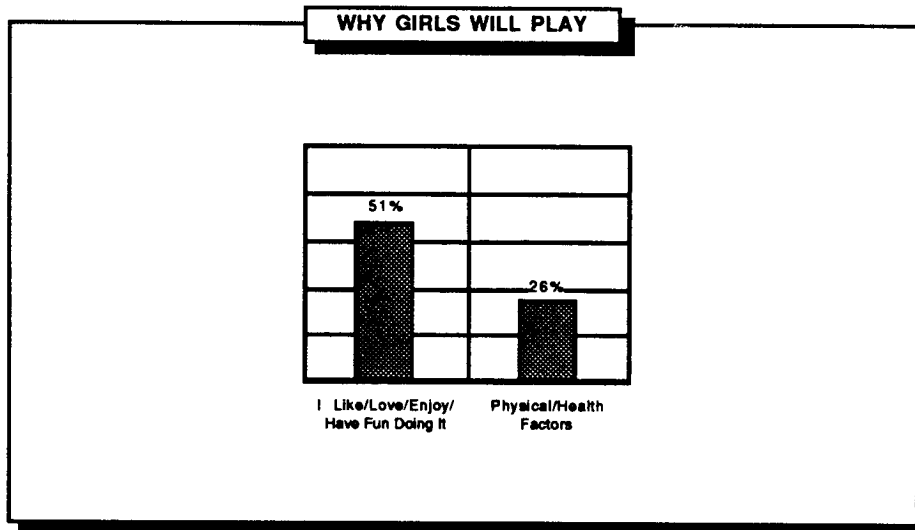
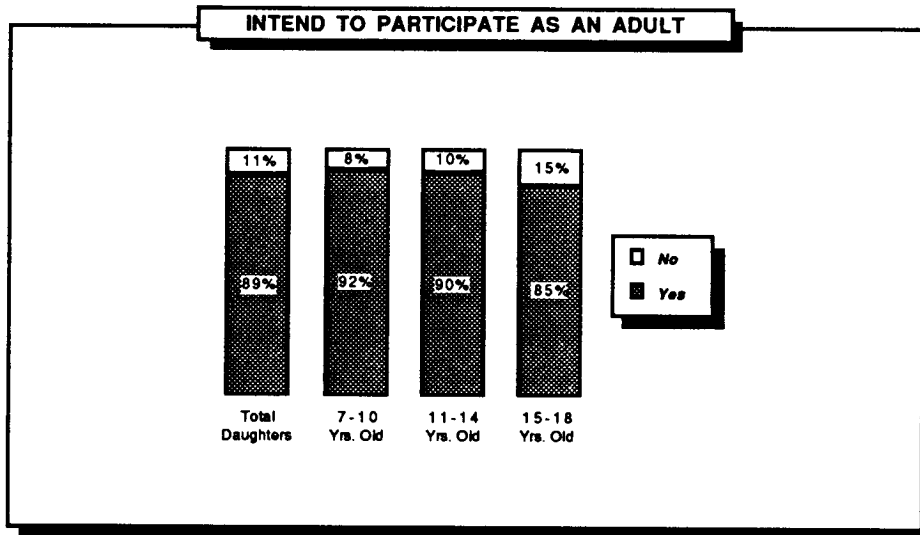
Eighty-two percent (82%) of daughters are currently involved in some sports and fitness activities. This decreases with age: 87% of 7-10 year olds and 84% of 11-14 year olds, but only 75% of 15-18 year olds currently play sports.

Regardless of age, around 10% of daughters have never participated in sports. Also, the older the girl, the more likely she is to stop participating.



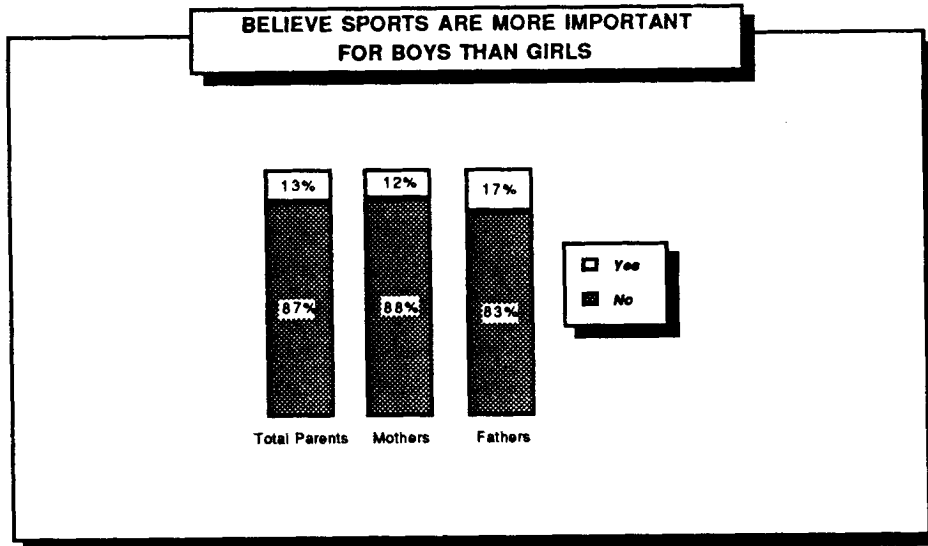
## INTEND TO PARTICIPATE AS AN ADULT

Most girls (89%) intend to continue their sports involvement as adults, mainly because they find it enjoyable (51%). Physical/health factors are another frequently mentioned reason to stay involved.

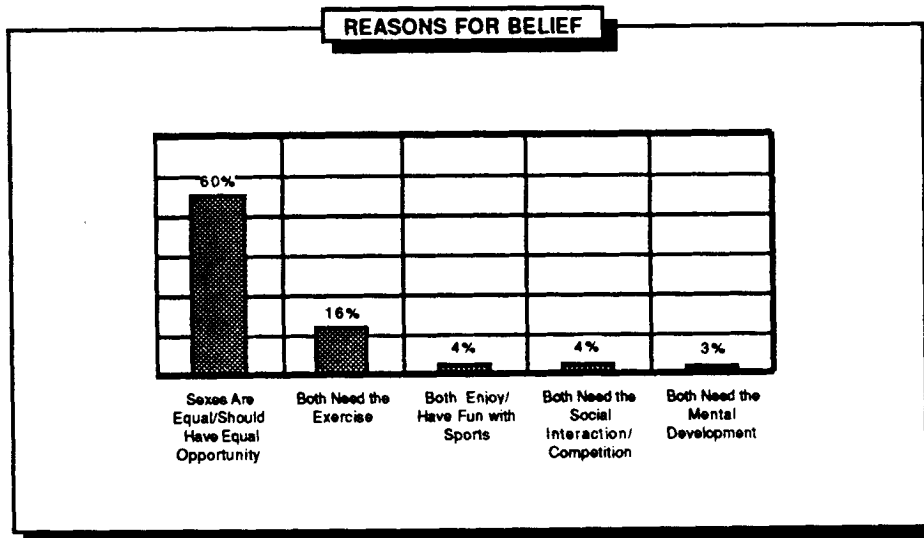


## PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SPORTS' IMPORTANCE FOR BOYS vs GIRLS

Only a small percentage of parents (13%) say they feel that sports are more important for boys than girls, but fathers are more likely than mothers to feel that way (17% versus 12%).

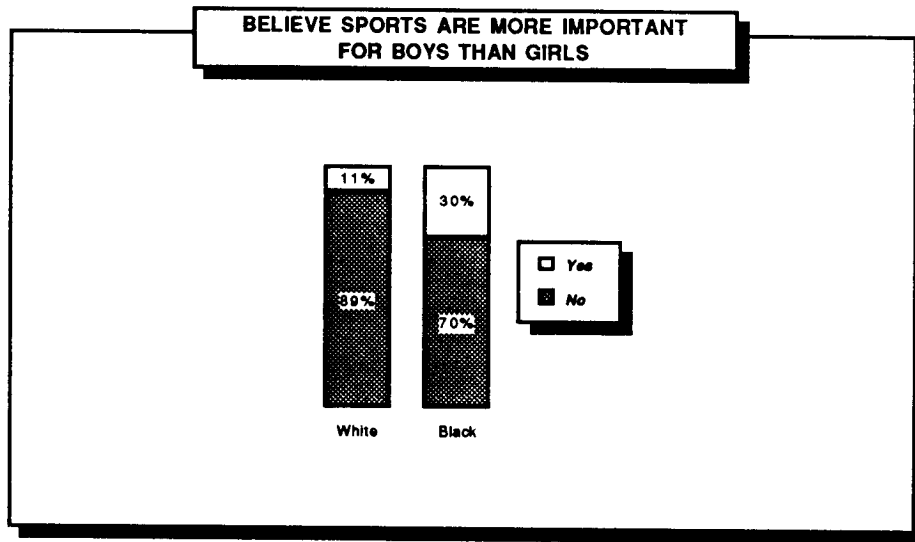


The majority of parents who gave a reason for their opinion say that the sexes are equal and that boys and girls should have equal opportunities in sports. Sixteen percent (16%) agree that sports participation is equally important to boys and girls because they both need the exercise for their physical development.



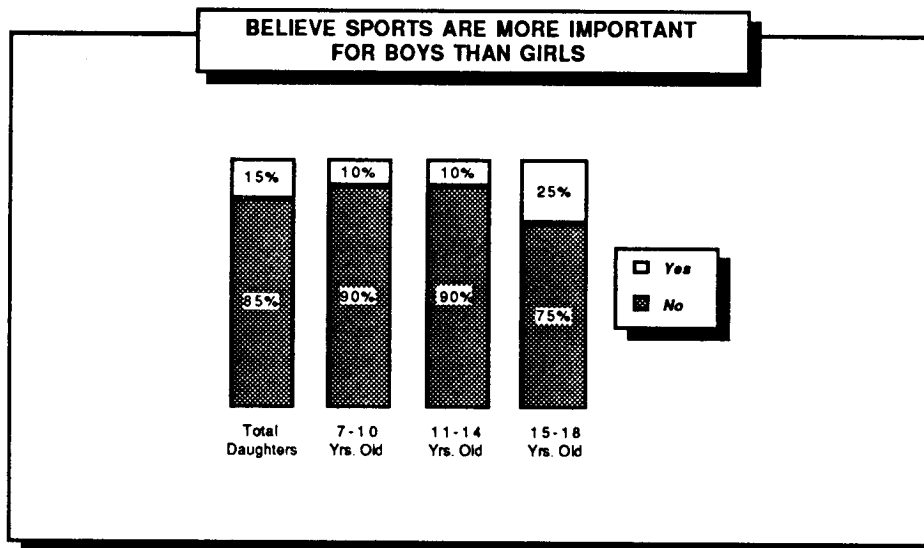
# PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SPORTS' IMPORTANCE FOR BOYS vs GIRLS (Cont'd.)

Black parents are significantly more likely than their white counterparts to hold the more "traditional" attitude -- that sports participation is more important for boys than for girls.

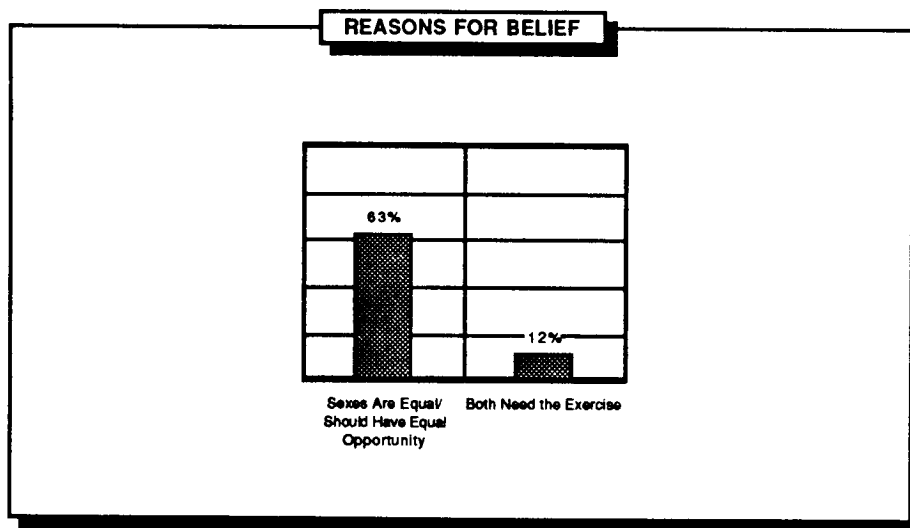


## DAUGHTERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SPORTS' IMPORTANCE FOR BOYS vs GIRLS

Most girls (85%) feel it is no more important for boys to play sports than it is for girls, but older girls are more likely than those 7-10 or 11-14 years old to feel sports are more important for boys (25% versus 10% of the younger girls).

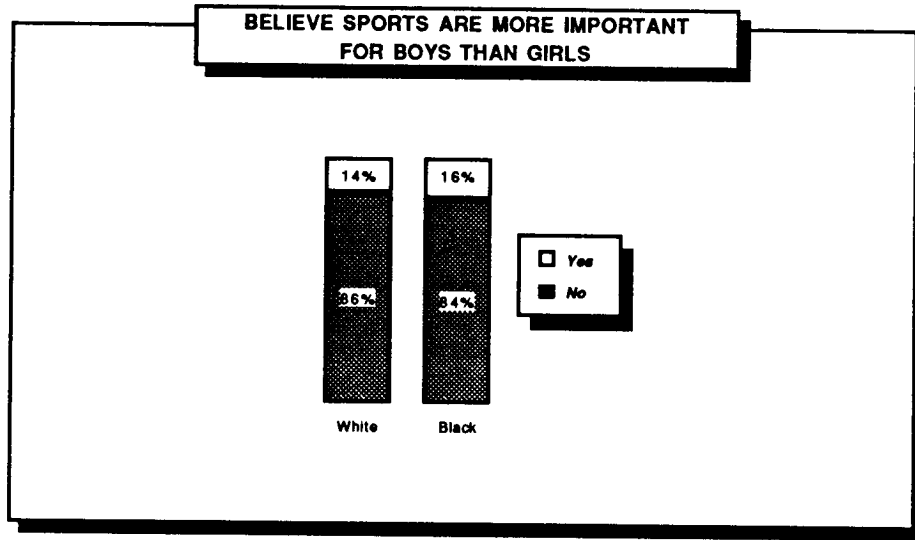


Like their parents, girls most often say that the reason sports is as important for girls as it is for boys is that the sexes are equal and that boys and girls should have equal opportunities to participate.

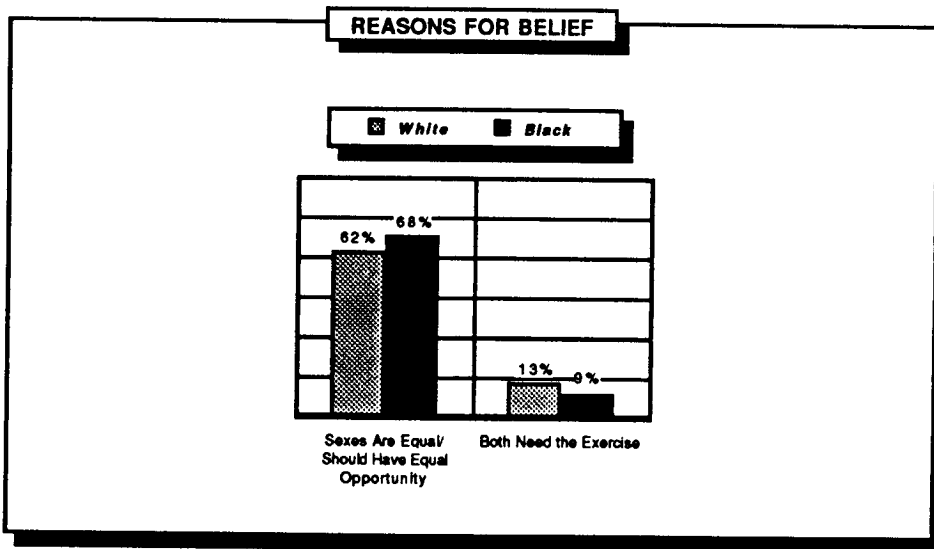


# DAUGHTERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SPORTS' IMPORTANCE FOR BOYS vs GIRLS (Cont'd.)

Despite some differences in opinion between white and black girls with regard to the popularity of girls who play sports, the two groups are largely in agreement that sports participation is as important for girls as it is for boys.

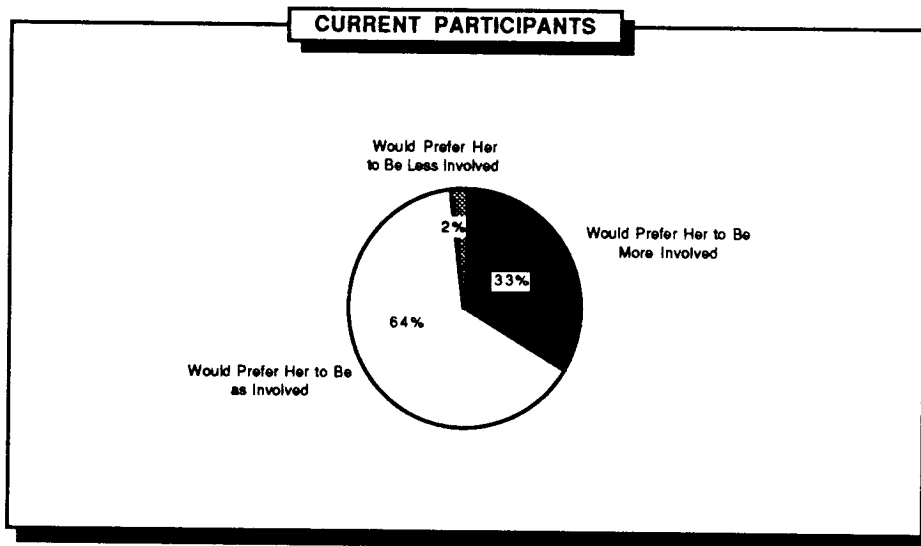


Both groups name the equality of the sexes as their reason for this view.

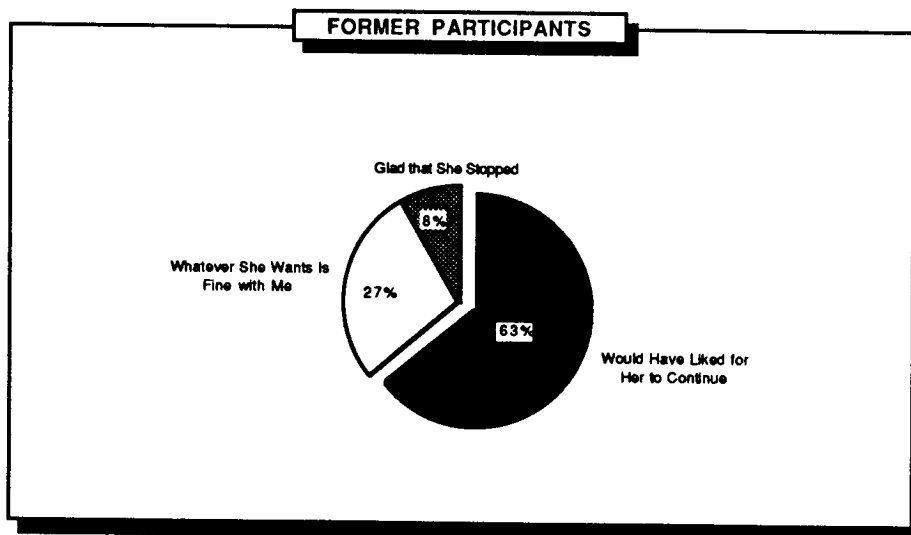


## PARENTS WANT DAUGHTERS TO PLAY SPORTS

Parents of participants appear to be satisfied with their daughter's level of sports involvement, and around one-in-three would like her to be more involved than she already is. Only 2% would like her to be less involved.

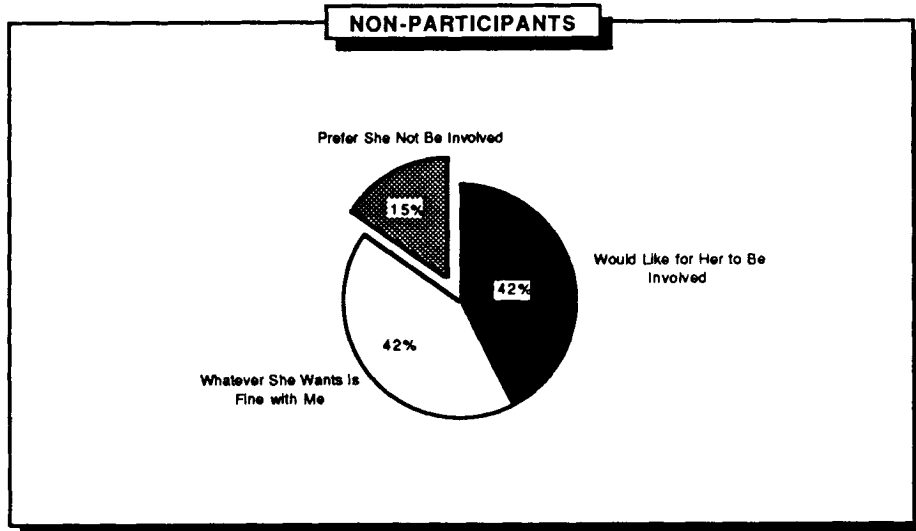


Only 8% of those whose daughter stopped participating in sports say they are glad that she did so; 63% would have preferred that she continue playing sports.



## PARENTS WANT DAUGHTERS TO PLAY SPORTS (Cont'd.)

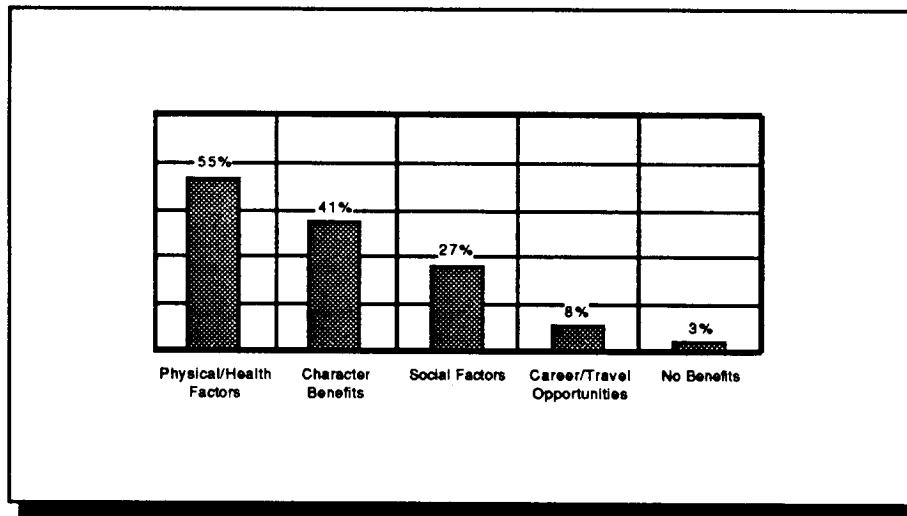
Only 15% of those whose daughter never participated prefer she not be involved.



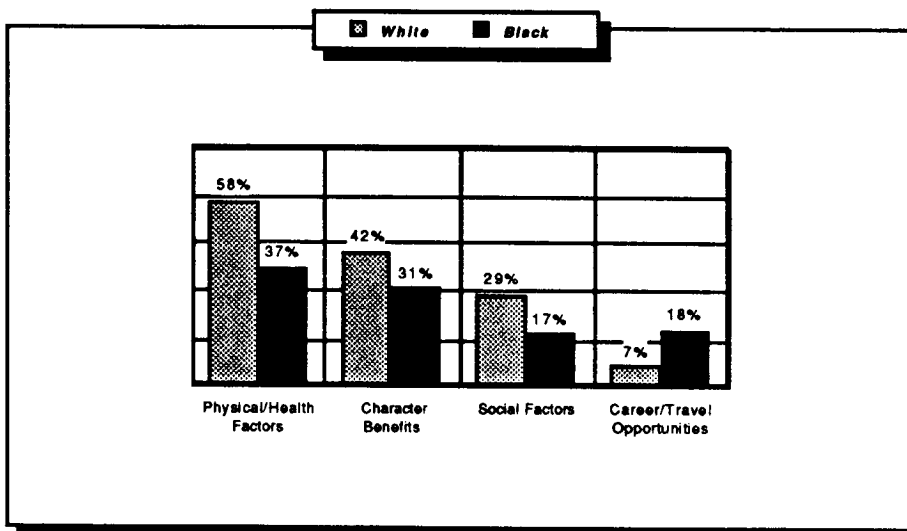


## HOW DAUGHTERS BENEFIT FROM SPORTS

Parents most often mention the fitness, health and related physical benefits of their daughter's participation in sports. Character benefits -- building confidence, promoting sportsmanship, self-discipline, and mental health -- are also important ways daughters benefit from their sports involvement, as are the social benefits of learning teamwork and making friends. Only three percent (3%) say there are no benefits to girls participating in sports.

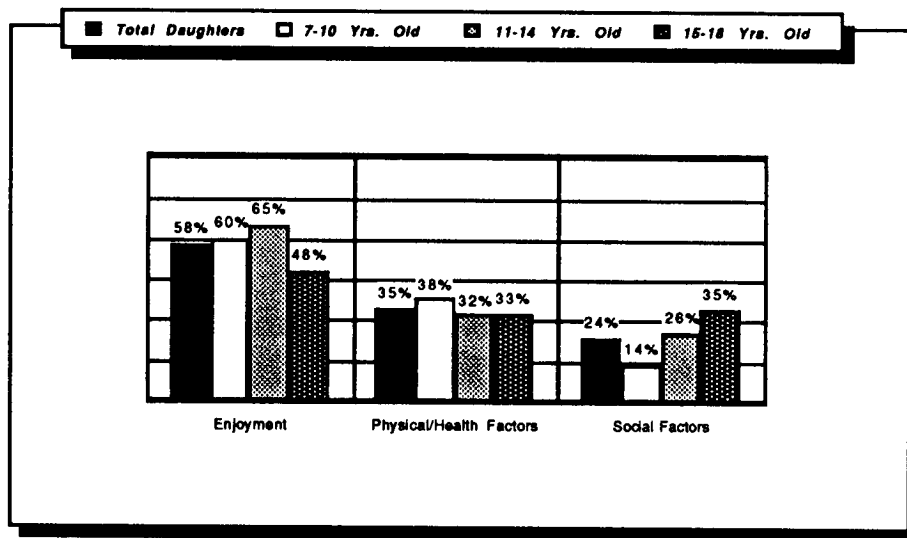


When asked what they perceive to be the benefits to girls participating in sports, some important differences appear between black and white parents. For example, white parents more often mention health-related benefits, as well as social and character benefits. The only benefits mentioned more frequently by black parents, albeit at low levels, are the career and travel opportunities that sports sometimes present.



## WHAT DAUGHTERS LIKE ABOUT SPORTS

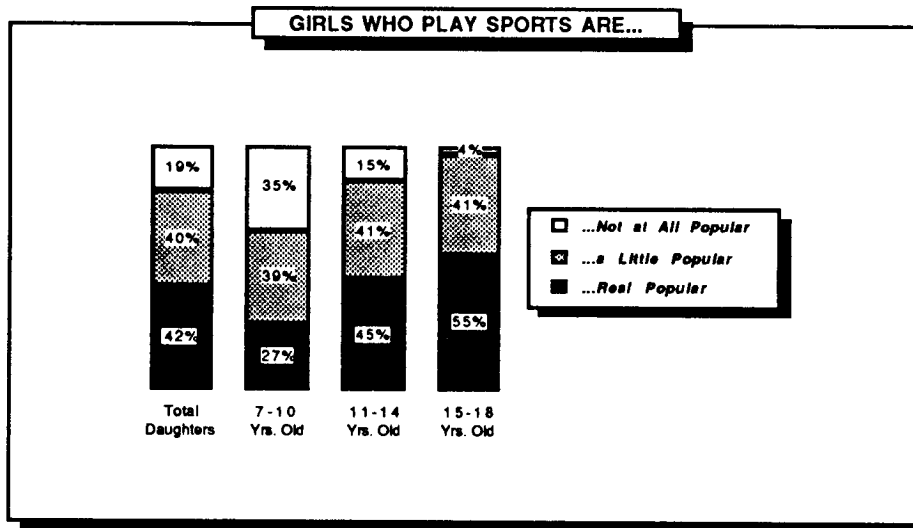
Girls who participate in sports most often say the thing they like about sports is that it is fun: they just enjoy doing it. Physical and health factors are somewhat important, and are mentioned by one in three girls. Social factors are more important to older girls than to younger girls -- they enjoy playing sports with their friends, or meeting new friends, or they like being part of a team.



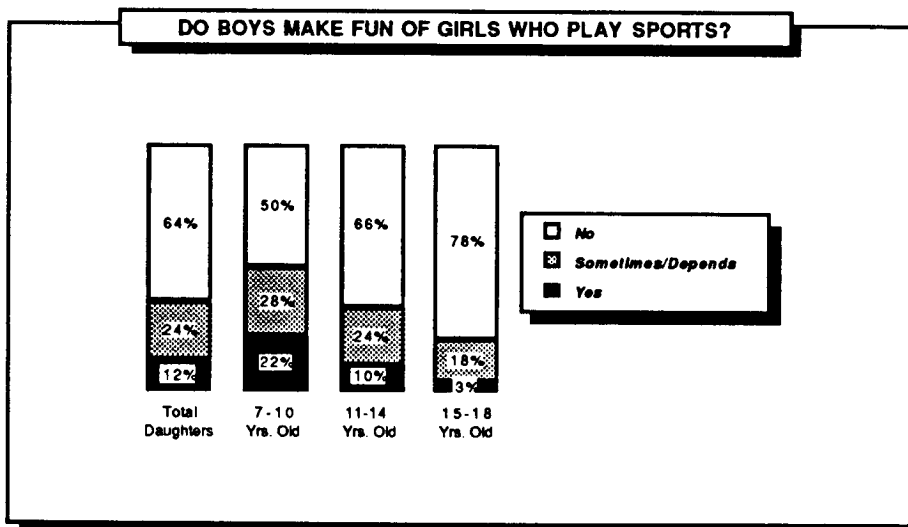
## SPORTS AND POPULARITY

An examination of girls' attitudes toward sports and popularity reveal overall positive opinions on girls who play sports.

Some interesting differences between older and younger girls appear. Younger girls, especially those aged 7-10 years old, tend to think that girls who play sports are not particularly popular: 35% say they are not at all popular, compared to only 4% of the oldest girls.

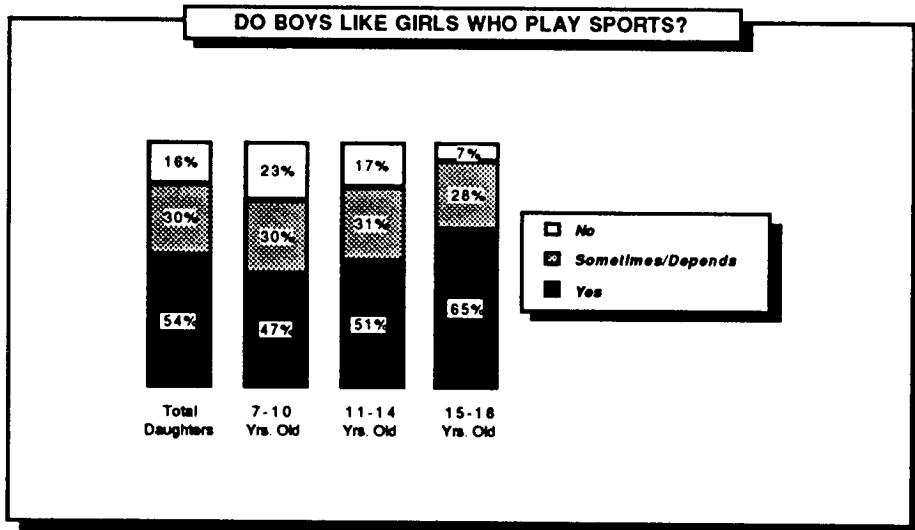
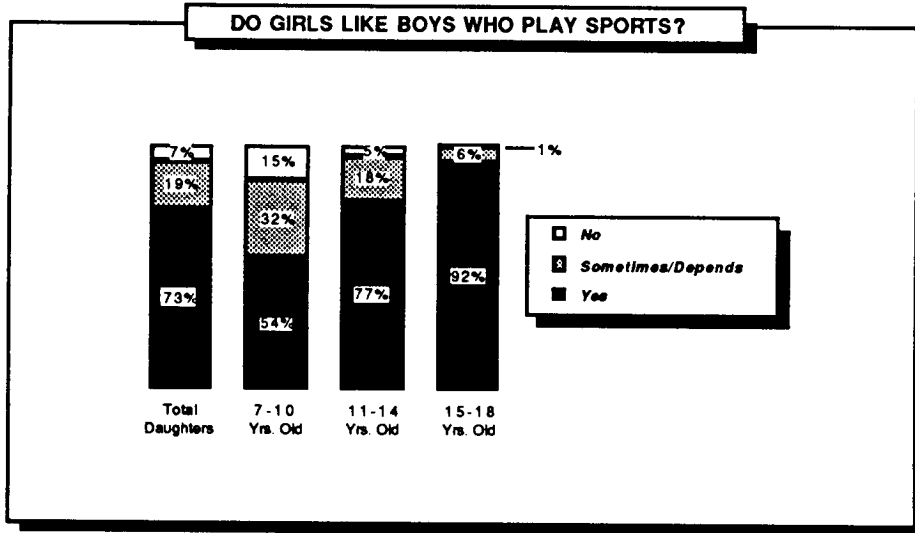


Perhaps the most disturbing difference comes in the finding that nearly one in four girls aged 7-10 say that boys make fun of girls who play sports. Only 3% of the older girls respond this way, however.



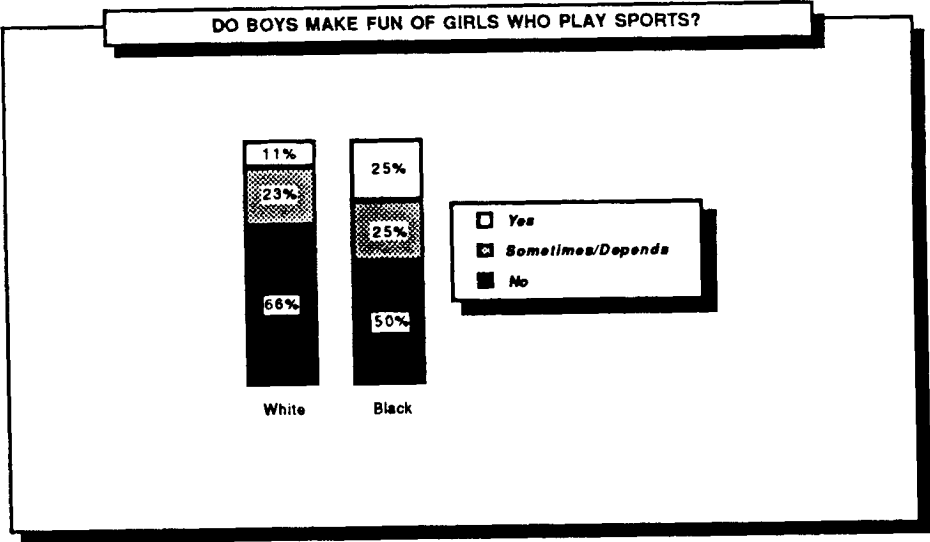
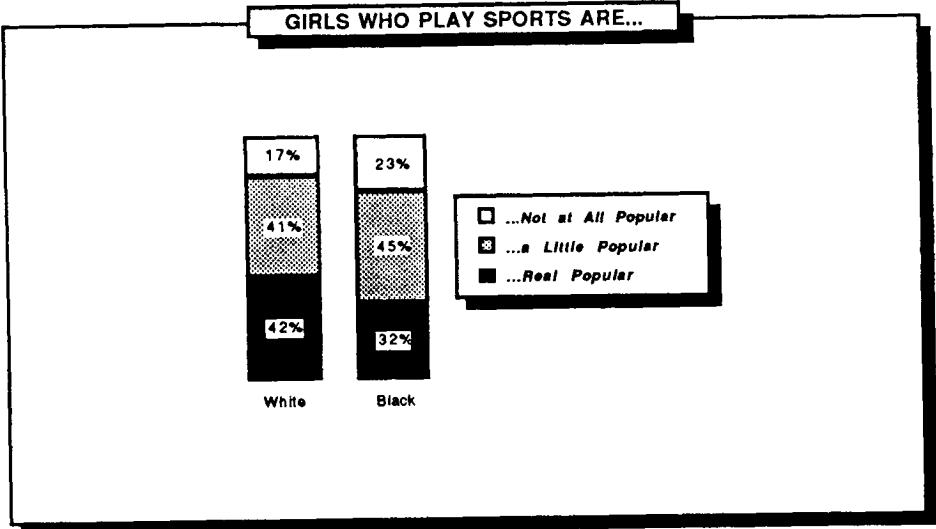
## SPORTS AND POPULARITY (Cont'd.)

Also, older girls tend to agree that girls like boys who play sports and vice versa.



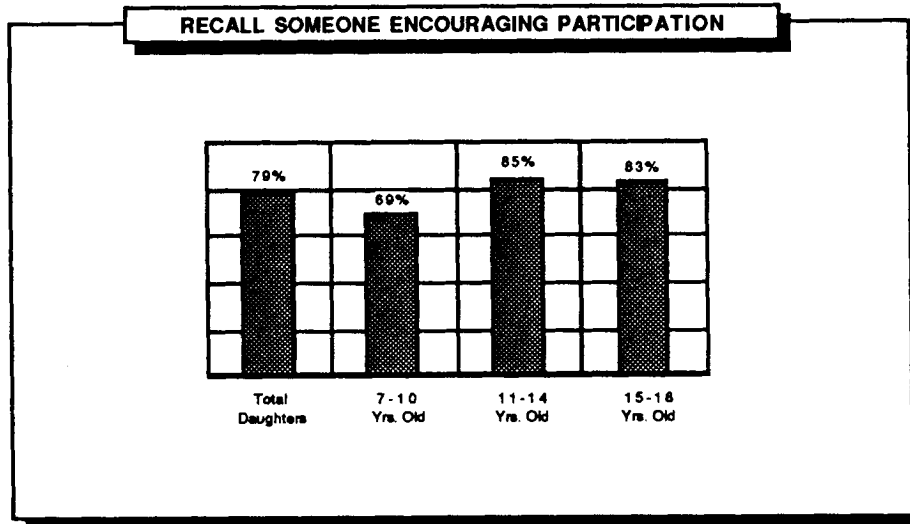
# SPORTS AND POPULARITY (Cont'd.)

Black girls less often feel girls who play sports are "real popular." A clue to their feelings comes from the finding that black girls more often than white girls feel boys make fun of girls who play sports -- one in four black girls feel this way, versus only about one in ten white girls.

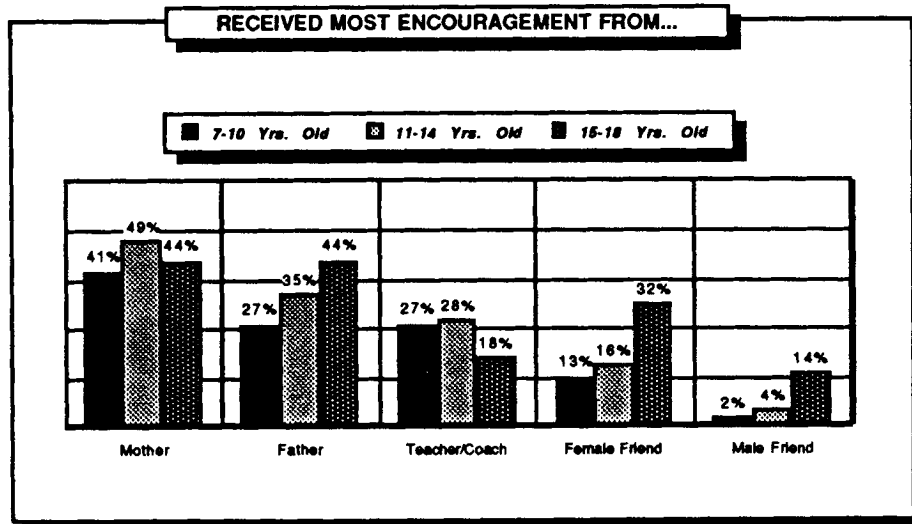


## ENCOURAGEMENT OF DAUGHTERS' SPORTS PARTICIPATION

Three out of four girls say they have been encouraged to participate in sports; those 11 and older are significantly more likely than 7-10 year olds to have been encouraged.



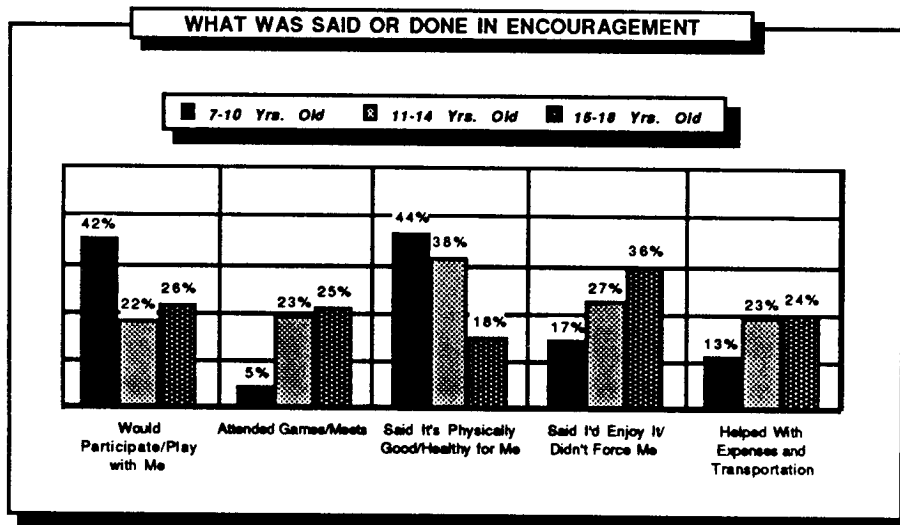
Younger girls only rarely received most of their encouragement from their fathers (27%), but those aged 15-18 are equally likely to name their mother or father (44%). Similarly, older girls are significantly more likely to name a female friend as the source of that encouragement (32% versus only 13% of the younger girls).



## ENCOURAGEMENT OF DAUGHTERS' SPORTS PARTICIPATION (Cont'd.)

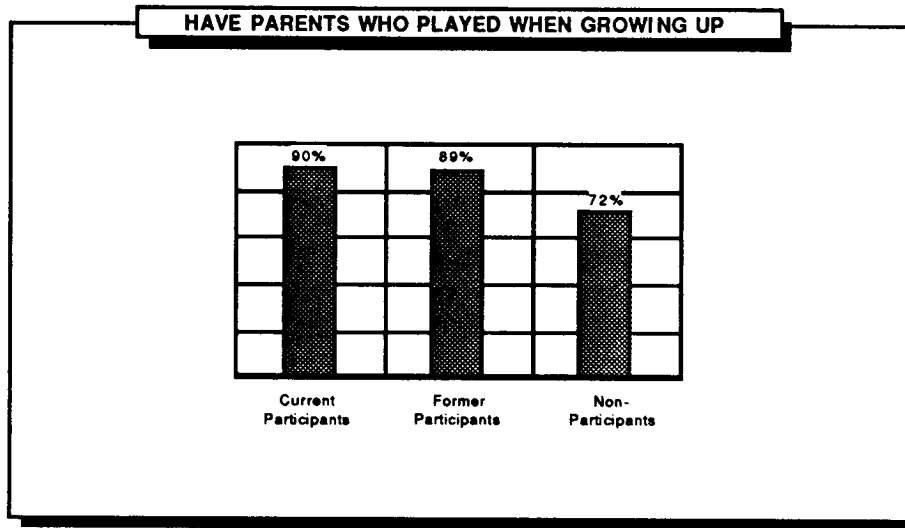
Another difference is the ways the girls have been encouraged. Girls aged 7-10 are significantly more likely to say they have been encouraged by someone playing sports with them or coaching them (42% versus only around 25% of the older girls), but less likely to say they have been encouraged by someone attending their games (5% versus around 24% of the older girls).

Physical and health-related factors are mentioned more frequently by those 14 and younger versus those in the older age group, but older girls are significantly more likely to say that they were encouraged by someone telling them they would enjoy it.

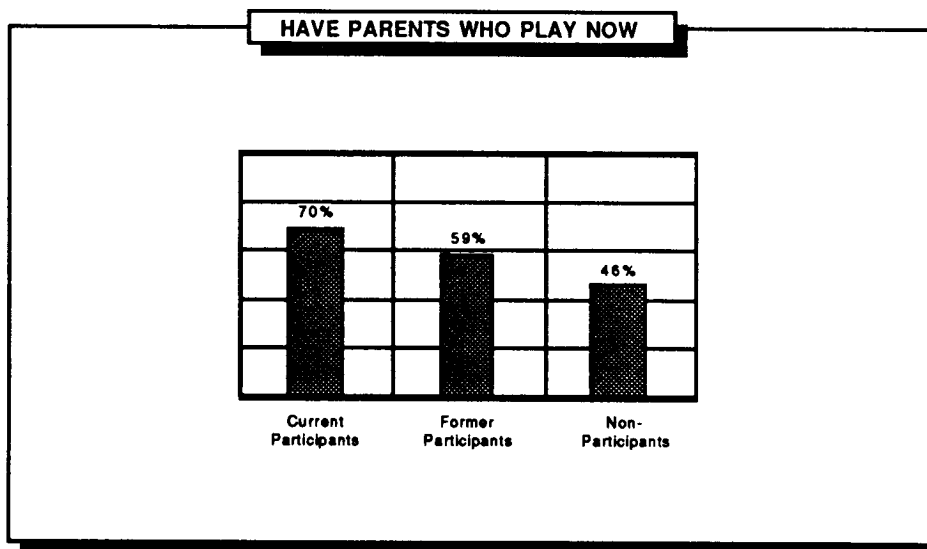


## DAUGHTERS WHO PLAY HAVE PARENTS WHO PLAY

Parents' involvement with sports while growing up appears to have a positive correlation with daughters' current participation: 90% of girls who play sports have parents who played when they were growing up.



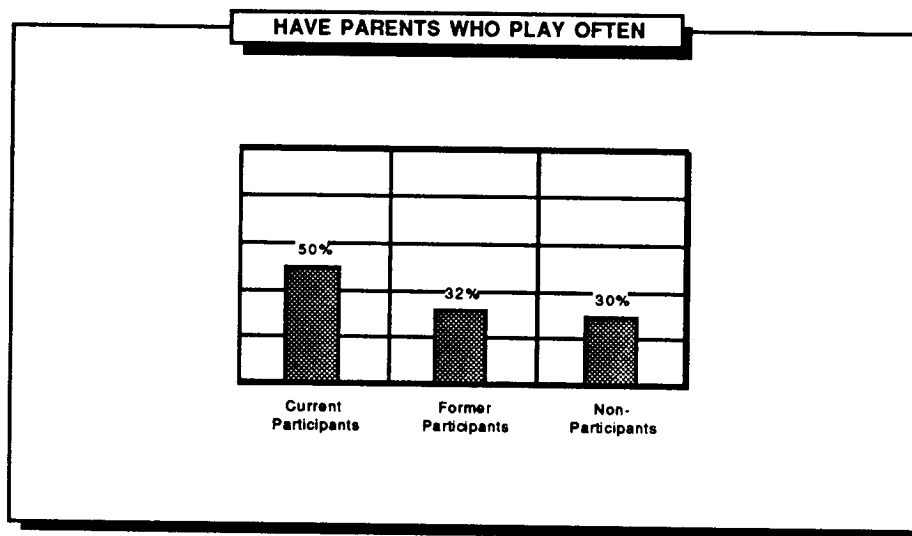
Parents' current participation is even more strongly correlated with their daughter's status: current participants are more likely to come from families with participating parents (70%), and non-participants are especially unlikely to have parents who are involved (46%).





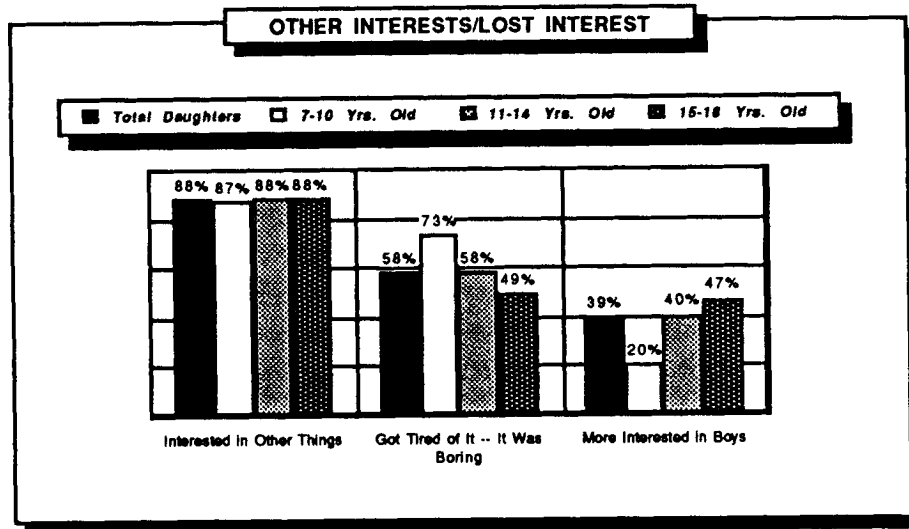
## DAUGHTERS WHO PLAY HAVE PARENTS WHO PLAY (Cont'd.)

And finally, the frequency with which parents participate also has a positive effect on the probability that their daughter is involved with sports: 50% of currently participating daughters have parents who play sports three or more times a week, but only one in three non-participants have parents who are so actively involved.

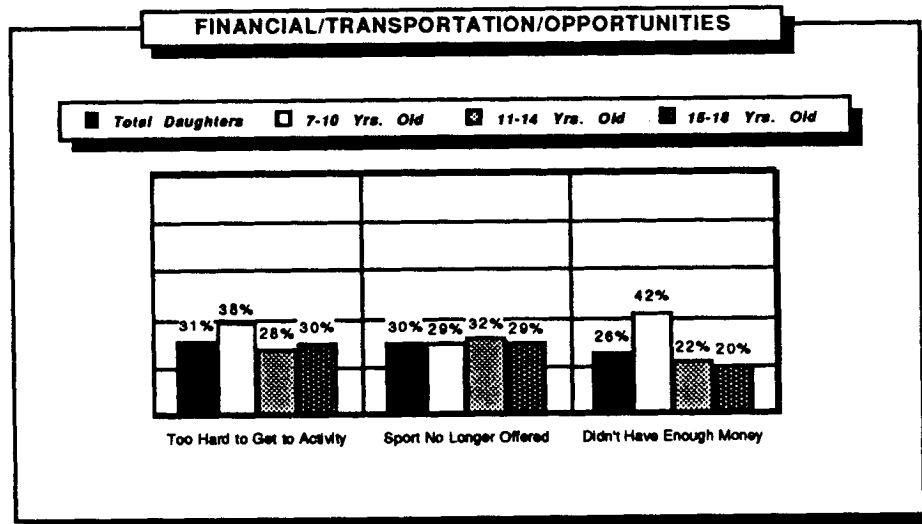


## DAUGHTERS' REASONS FOR DISCONTINUING SPORTS PARTICIPATION

When presented with predetermined "reasons," competing interests are cited most often by girls as the reason for discontinuing or never participating in sports. Among those other interests, 39% called their interest in boys at least somewhat important in the decision.

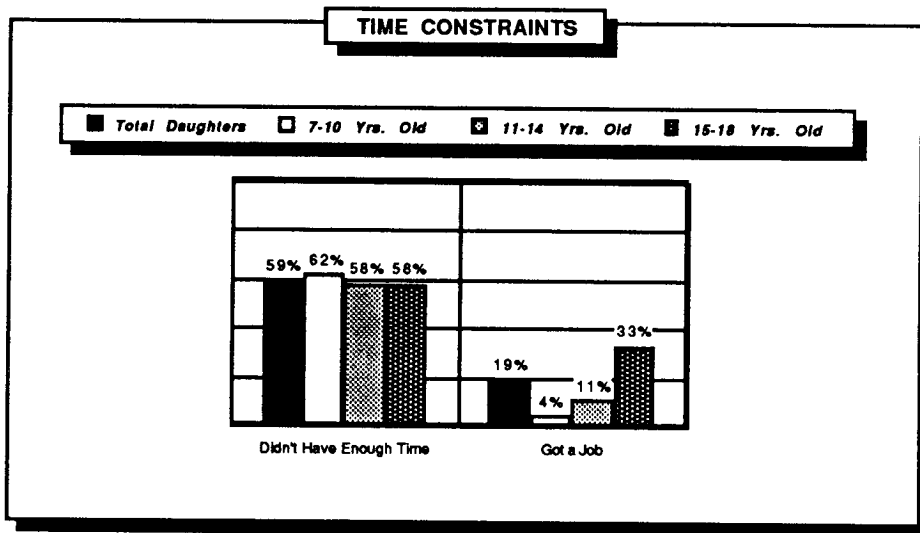


External circumstances -- transportation problems, sports programs that were discontinued, and insufficient funds -- each discourage about one in three girls from participating in sports.

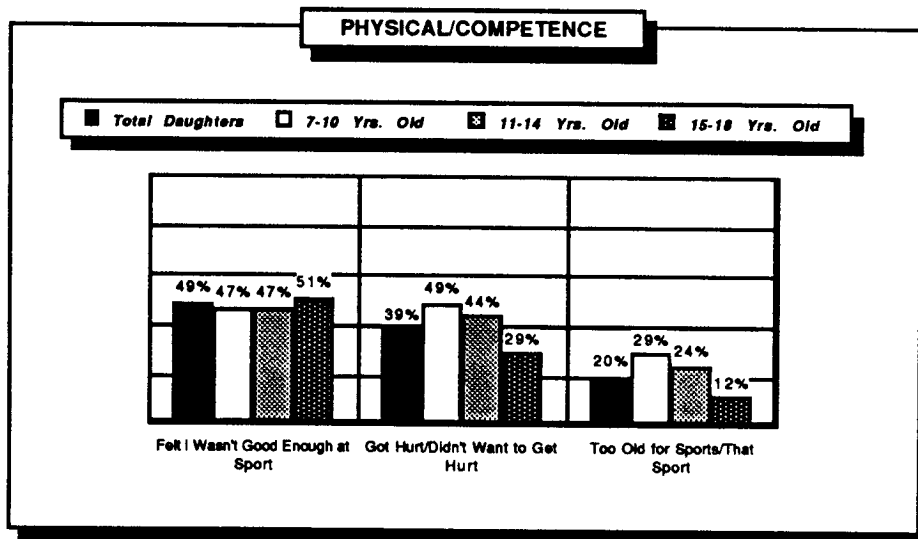


## DAUGHTERS' REASONS FOR DISCONTINUING SPORTS PARTICIPATION (Cont'd.)

With regard to time availability, 59% called not having enough time at least somewhat important, but only 19% (33% of the older girls) said the time constraints of their job influenced their decision.

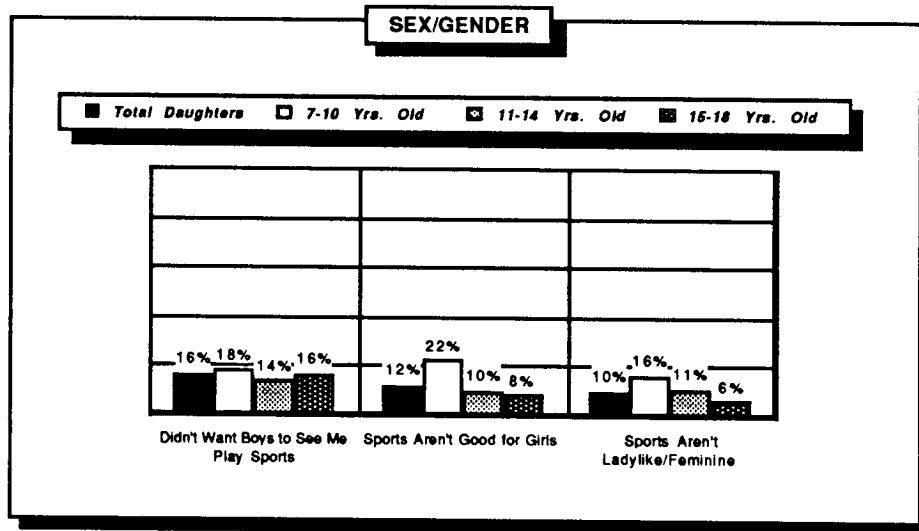


Around half of non-participating girls say they don't play sports because they lack the necessary skills. Also, around half of young girls (but only 29% of older girls) say they don't play because of injuries or fear of injuries.

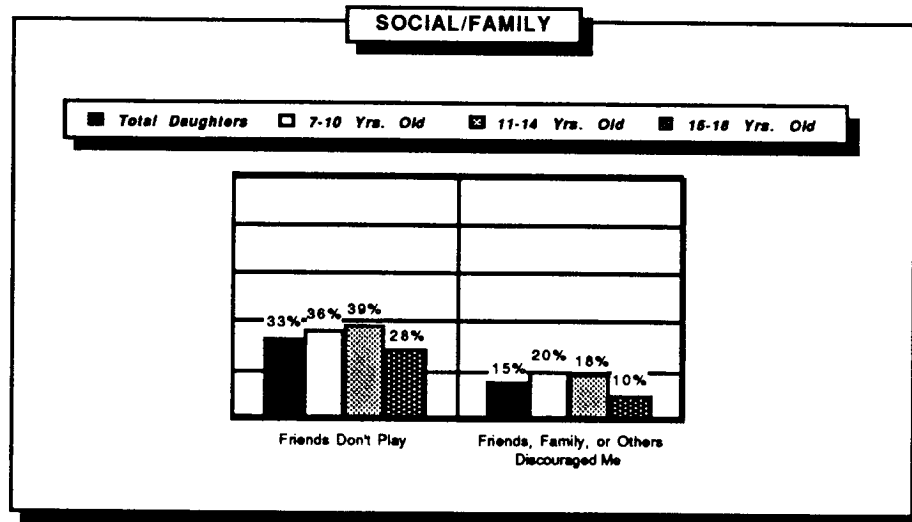


## DAUGHTERS' REASONS FOR DISCONTINUING SPORTS PARTICIPATION (Cont'd.)

Sex/gender did not appear to be a major stumbling block, but younger girls, especially those 7-10 years old, were particularly likely to reflect more "traditional" attitudes (eg. "Sports aren't good for girls" (22%) or "Sports aren't ladylike" (16%)).

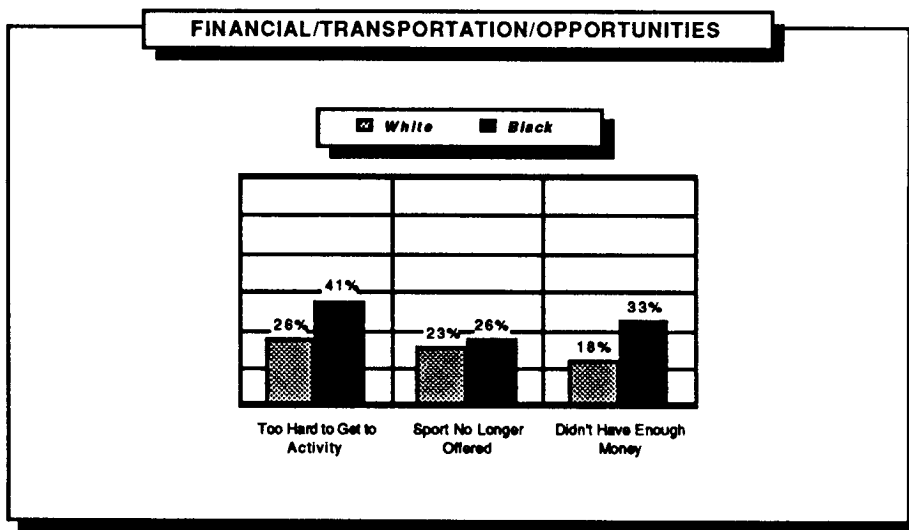
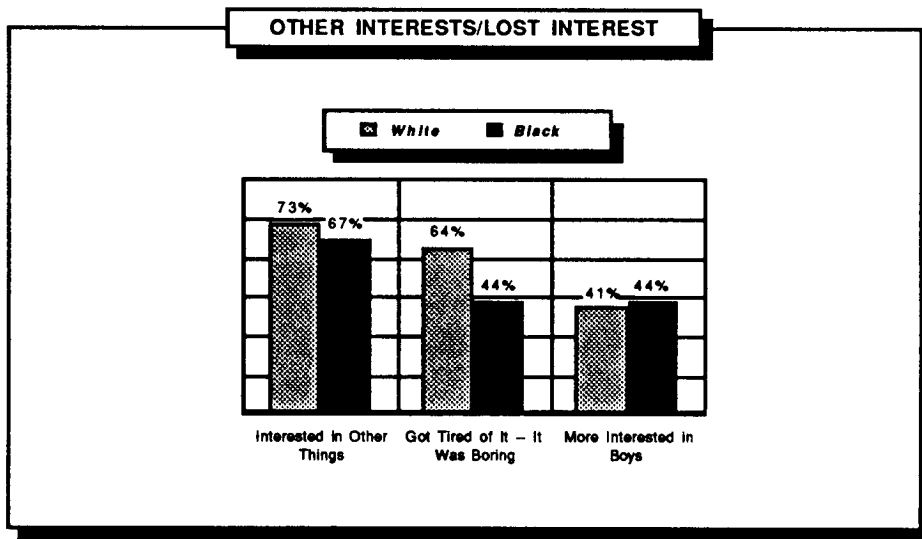


Social pressures (friends don't play) played an important role to about one in three girls (33%), but discouragement from family or friends played only a minor role (15%).

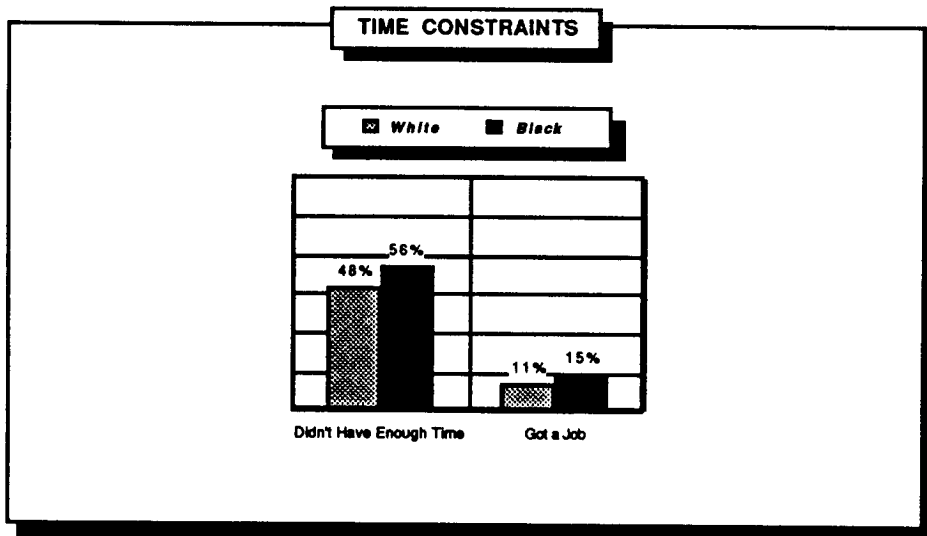
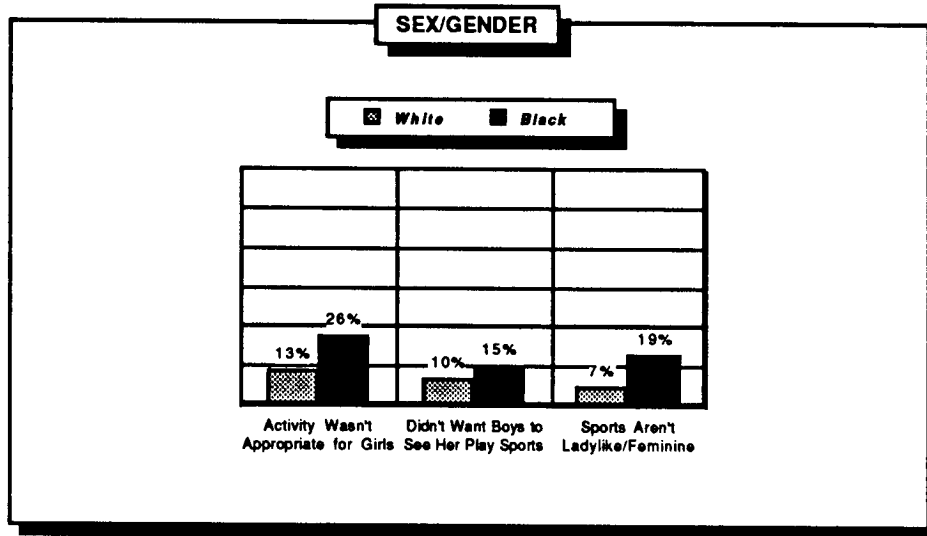


## PARENTS' REASONS FOR DAUGHTERS' DISCONTINUING/ NEVER PARTICIPATING IN SPORTS

Both black and white parents most often say that competing interests were the most important reasons why their daughter never participated in sports or discontinued her involvement. White parents more often than black parents say the reason is that she simply is not interested or lost interest. Black parents, on the other hand, more often note other difficulties -- transportation, money, or a perception that sports are not appropriate for girls.



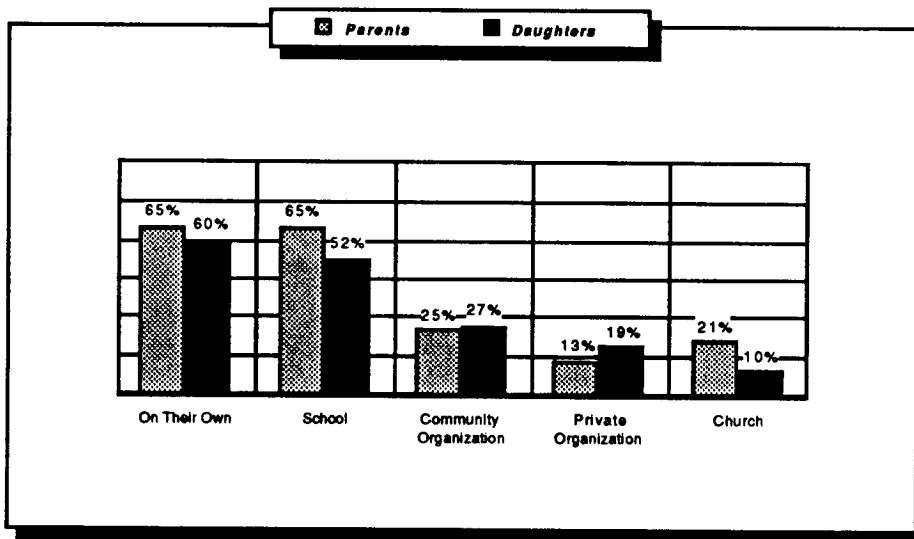
# PARENTS' REASONS FOR DAUGHTERS' DISCONTINUING/ NEVER PARTICIPATING IN SPORTS (Cont'd.)



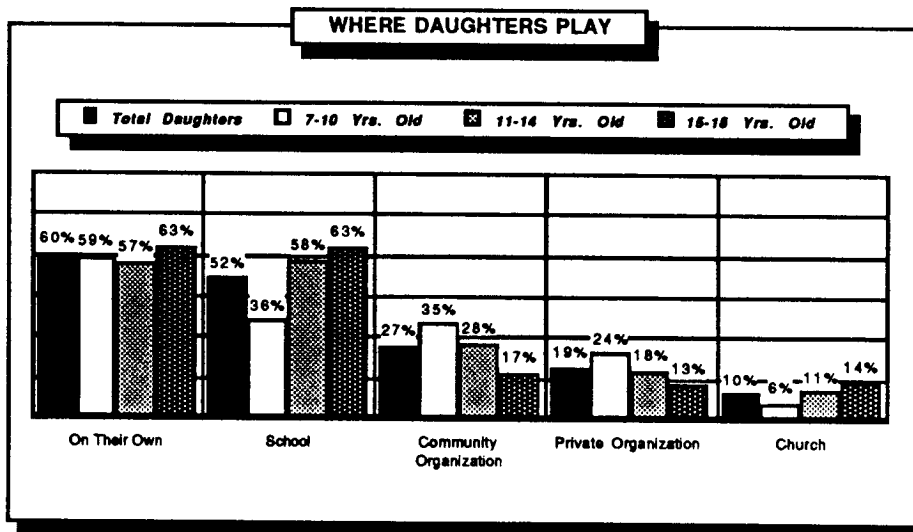
## SPORTS AND ORGANIZATIONS

School is the most popular organizational affiliation for daughters' sports participation, and was also the most popular among parents when they were growing up.

Involvement through church has declined for the current generation, as 21% of parents say they were involved through church, but only 10% of their daughters are today.

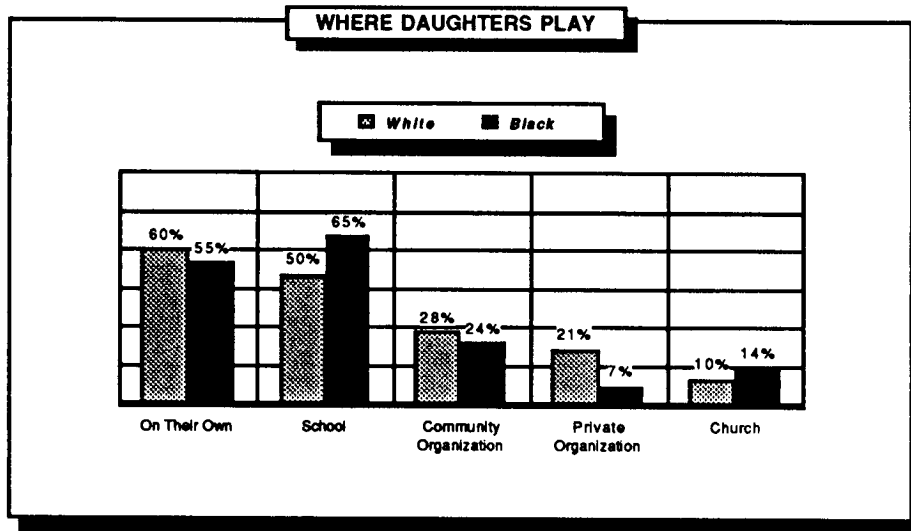


Participation through school becomes more important as daughters get older, while community and private organizational involvement declines.



## SPORTS AND ORGANIZATIONS (Cont'd.)

Another indication that the sports experience may differ for white and black girls today is that black girls are more likely to participate through school, and much less likely to be involved through activities at a private organization.





## **SPORTS IMPORTANCE: THEN AND NOW**

If today's parents are interested in sports, they tended also to be interested as children. However, many of today's mothers developed their interests in sports -- or realized its importance -- as they got older: only 54% of those who say playing sports is very important to them now also rated it very important when they were growing up. For fathers, the comparable number is 77%.

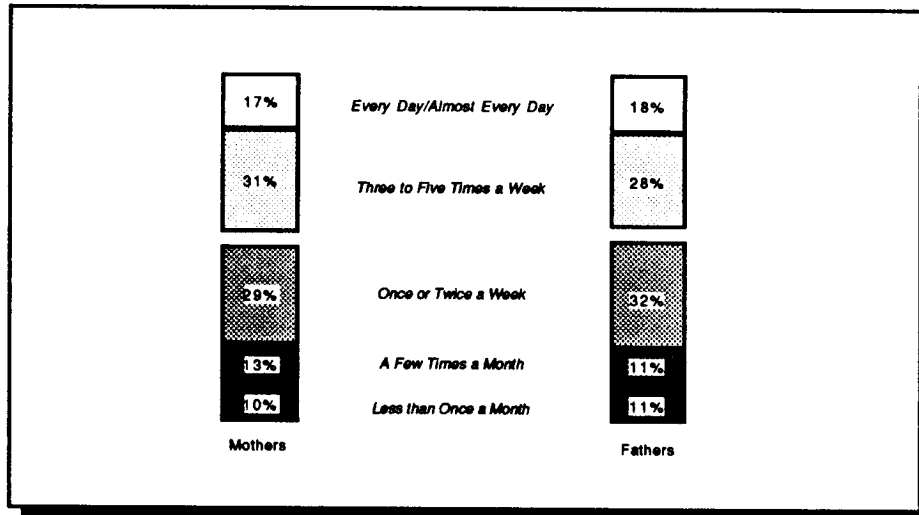
**Rated Sports "Very Important"  
When Growing Up and Today**

**Mothers: 54%**

**Fathers: 77%**

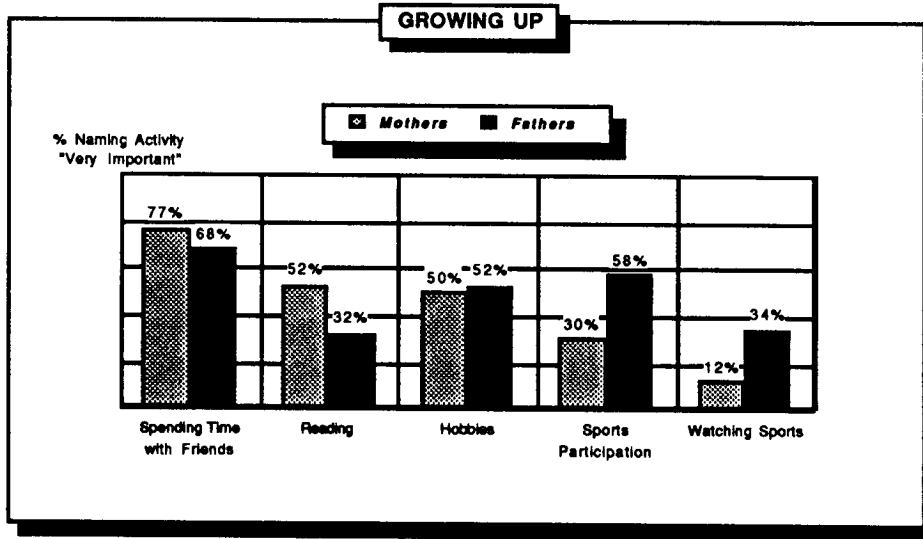
## PARENTS' CURRENT PARTICIPATION FREQUENCY

Among parents who currently participate in sports, mothers participate as frequently as fathers, with around half of each group engaged in sports and fitness activities three or more days per week.

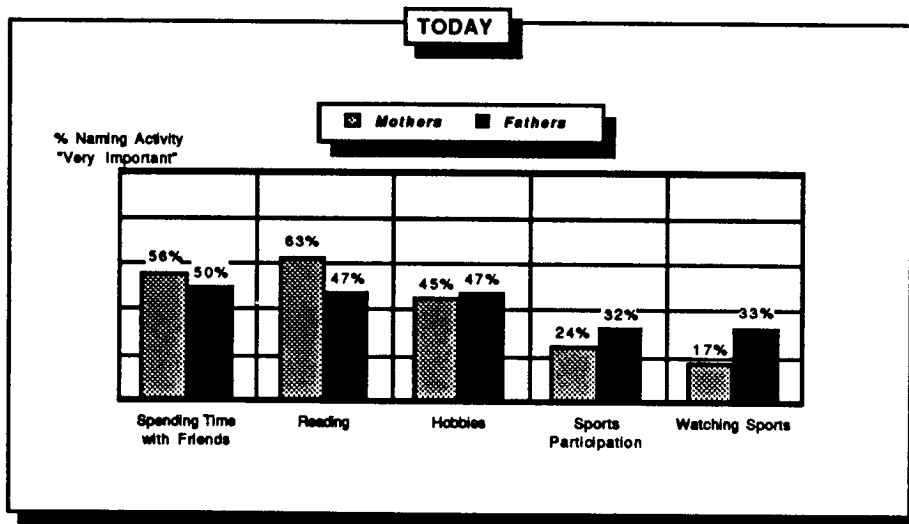


# PARENTS' PRIORITIES

When compared to spending time with friends, hobbies, and reading, sports participation was less often named "very important" to mothers when they were growing up. Among fathers, sports was second only to spending time with friends.

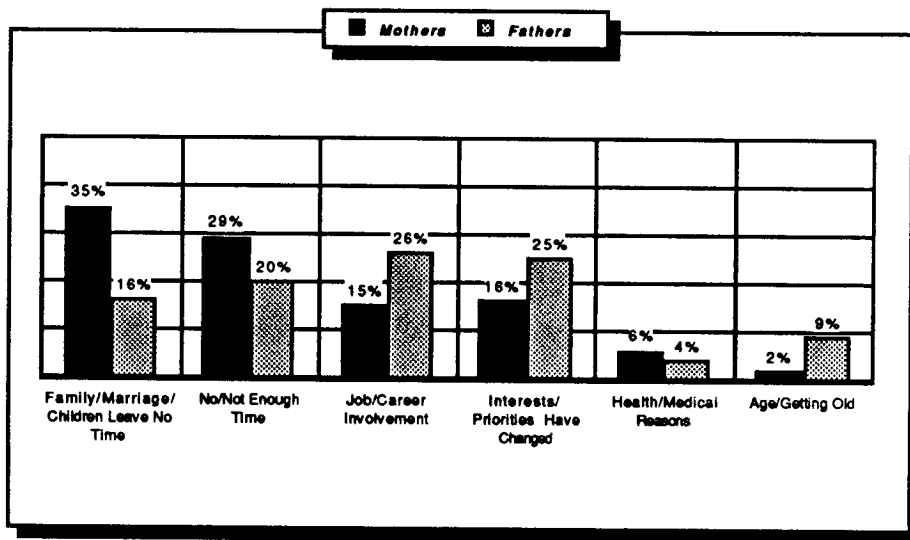


However, sports became significantly less important to the men in our sample as they got older, with only 32% naming sports participation "very important" today, down from 58% when they were growing up. For women, on the other hand, sports participation today was rated "very important" by 24%, down from only 30%. This change makes sports participation today only slightly less important to adult mothers than to adult fathers.



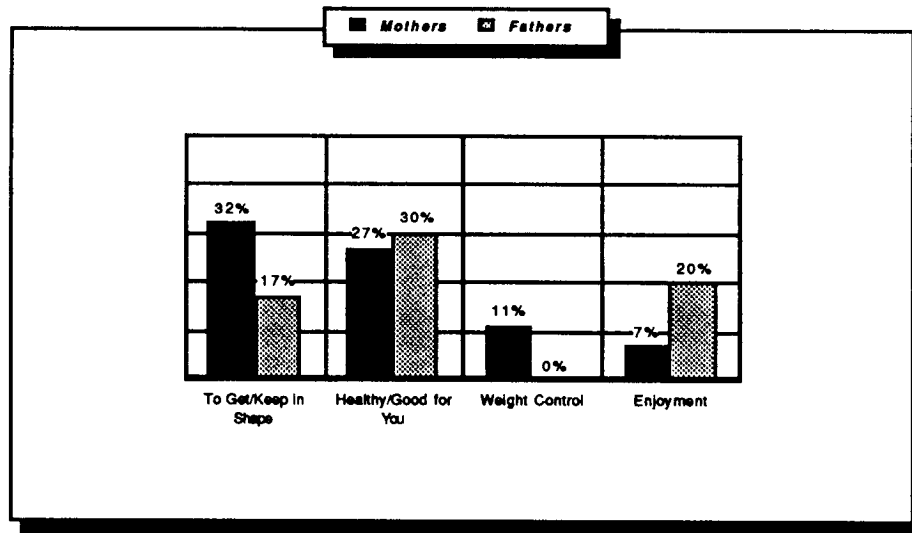
## WHY SPORTS BECOMES LESS IMPORTANT TO PARENTS

Sports becomes less important to moms because of family responsibilities, while dads more often cite career responsibilities which take up time. In short, although the specific reasons differ for moms and dads, the common factor is limited time more than a lack of interest. While it could be argued that career and family choices reflect a change in priorities and interests, it would seem that many of these parents would spend more time with sports if the time were available.



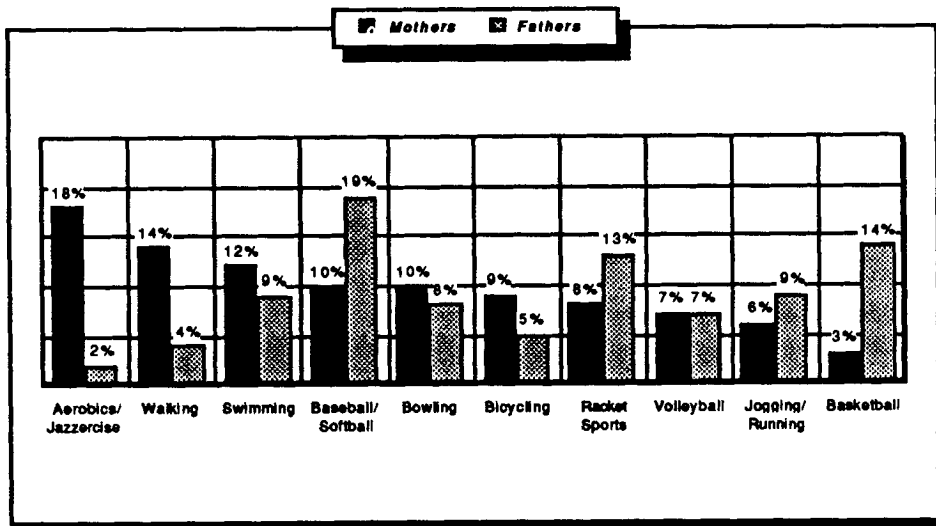
## WHY SPORTS BECOMES MORE IMPORTANT TO PARENTS

By far, the most frequently given responses to the question of why sports have become more important involved physical and health factors. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of the mothers and 53% of the fathers who indicated that sports are more important to them now than when growing up mentioned keeping in shape, that participation is good for you, or other physical benefits. On the other hand, dads are significantly more likely than moms to mention personal enjoyment as the reason (20% versus 7%).



## PARENTS' CURRENT SPORTS PARTICIPATION -- Major Mentions --

Almost two out of three mothers (64%) and 73% of fathers say they are currently involved with sports on a personal basis. Significant percentages of mothers and fathers say they are engaged in activities involving a measurable cardiovascular benefit, but those activities tend to differ for men and women. Whereas women are more likely to be involved in aerobics/jazzercise, walking and bicycling, among others, men more often report involvement with racket sports, basketball, baseball or softball, and others. Involvement with these types of activities reflects the importance participants place on health and fitness benefits as reasons for sports participation. These differences also highlight the competitive nature of men's involvement versus women's.



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