

The Influence of Family Expectations on High School Basketball Athletes' Commitment Across Different Ethnic Backgrounds

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Literature Review

For many high school students, balancing the pressure of sports, such as basketball, with academic achievement is a constant struggle. Time management is only part of the problem as family expectations often influence whether an athlete continues to pursue sports or shifts their focus to academics. Families serve as a primary source of guidance, shaping the values, goals, and choices of their children. Research indicates that participation in high school sports can positively influence academic outcomes, particularly when parental support is present and expectations align with the student's goals (Dyer, 2015). However, the expectations vary from different cultural backgrounds. Some prioritize academic success over extracurricular activities, while others, sports are heavily spoken upon as a pathway to opportunities. Eitle (2002) explains that "cultural disadvantage contributes to an increased interest in and perhaps dependence on sports" (pg. 1), highlighting how some families may see athletics as a significant route to opportunity. "Understanding how different family expectations differ culturally and how they affect a high school basketball player's commitment provides proper insight on comparing academics with familial values.

Parental Influence on Motivation

Family expectations play a critical role in shaping a high school basketball player's choice of continuation in the sport. Research from many different specialists in *Handbook of Sport Psychology* (2007), parental behaviors can have both positive and negative impacts on children's motivation and persistence in sports. Parents that provide emotional and logistical support, such as encouragement, constructive criticism, and motivation create a likelihood of student athletes to perform well. However, excessive pressure to perform better or focus on winning can create stress and lead to burnout, causing youth athletes to reduce their performance or quit entirely. The PBSP comprises a version for parents and a version for athletes, composed of five dimensions: sports support, competition attendance, technical influence, performance pressure, and sports expectations.(Marie Lopes 1). Roy D'Andrade, a cultural anthropologist, focused his research on how culture shapes cognition and the way individuals think about the world. His work examined how shared cultural beliefs, values, and practices influence reasoning, decision-making, and behavior. As he notes "Even when an individual is not engaged in an individual activity, researchers have argued that the individual's cognition is still affected by the social network and cultural context within which the individual operates"(D'Andrade, 1981). Together, these perspectives suggest that an individual's decisions and behaviors are strongly influenced by the people around them and the ways their social and cultural environment communicates expectations and exerts pressure.



While *Handbook of Sport Psychology* (2007) provides theoretical framework for understanding how parent behaviors and goals impact a youth athletes motivation in a sport, a more recent article called *The Continued Importance of Family Sport Culture for Sport Participation During the Teenage Years* (2019) emphasizes the qualitative data they have collected and measured to create a stronger understanding. The article provides background information on how a Norwegian survey contributed to the overall research. “Three questions were combined into a measure of family sport culture in the present study: the importance of sport in the family, parents’ training habits, and whether parents would like their children to participate in sports.”(Strandbu, Bakken, & Stefansen, 2019) The researchers observed a clear correlation between family sport culture and participation of youth athletes in club sports in Norway. Norwegian people usually put their kids in competitive sports from an early age so they are able to create a family with their sport teams, involving them in society more (Fahlen, Ferry 2018) This highlights the importance of my research question to imply parental expectations and values in guiding a child’s athletic activities continuation. In comparison to the theoretical insights offered in the *Handbook of Sport Psychology*, this article provides concrete and solid data, demonstrating how family priorities influences youth athletes commitment to the sport across a cultural context.

While these findings establish a clear comparison between family expectations and youth sport participation, several gaps remain in existing literature. First, all the studies have a focus broadly on youth sports or general physical activity, rather than examining a specific sport or a teenager’s mind, leaving a gap in understanding sport-specific dynamics such as pressures unique to competitive basketball. Competitive basketball, in particular, is a year round conditioning and training, and scholarship expectations that may intensify family pressure compared to other sports. Second, although the handbook discusses parental influence, there is limited research comparing how these influences differ across cultures, particularly in families with distinct values regarding academics and athletics. Some ethnic groups emphasize academics as a primary way into success, while others see sports as a way to earn higher labels in the future. Still, the literature does not fully explain how these certain cultures shape familial expectations and how it impacts the choices of high school student athletes that play basketball and balance both school and important sport responsibilities. Addressing these gaps is important for understanding how family expectations interact with cultural norms to influence the decisions of student-athletes and highlights the need for further research in this topic.

Methods

This research paper will explore how family expectations affect high school basketball players’ commitment to the sport across different cultures. I theorize that the level of commitment to high school basketball will vary depending on the expectations placed on high school athletes by their families. Specifically, I predict that players who experience supportive family expectations, such as encouragement and balanced emphasis over academics and athletics, will highlight higher levels of commitment. Whereas, athletes who experience excessive pressure in order to perform well or a strong emphasis on academics over sports will show lower levels of commitment. I further hypothesize that these patterns will vary across different cultural backgrounds, as some might prioritize academics as a primary way of success,

while others see sports as a pathway into advancement. By analyzing these relationships, this research seeks to better understand how family influences and shapes student-athletes' involvement in long time sports. The independent variable is the amount of family expectations and the dependent variable is the athlete's commitment to the sport.

This research paper contained a cross-sectional design and it used a mixed method by including both correlational research and descriptive research. The correlational research was used to show the relationship between a high school basketball athlete's commitment to the sport and the expectation of parents regarding external topics. The descriptive method of research was used to summarize the patterns of my survey findings across expectations of different cultural backgrounds. My initial idea was to either do interviews or just collect and cross verify prior research to conclude my overall topic. I soon realized that interviews were very time consuming, considering my sample size is both girls and boys varsity teams in a public high school, which is approximately 25-30 athletes. I would have had to set aside time for each individual player and my personal schedule does not comply with that type of manner of time commitment. Additionally, people are less likely to respond truthfully and to full extent without the pressure of people recording them, since it is more anonymous there is more likely to answer without bias. Another way of gathering research was to cross verify and analyze prior research to surrounding topics, but when trying to find new information on student athletes with many different components relating to certain cultural groups. Therefore, surveys would be the least time consuming and most efficient research method, which still allows me to gather reliable and meaningful data.

To identify the patterns between commitment, family expectations, and different cultures around basketball athletes' lives, I collected data from boys and girls varsity teams at a public high school in the Illinois suburbs, using a survey. The survey was created using Google Forms and using the coaches I was able to give it out to the athletes to be answered.

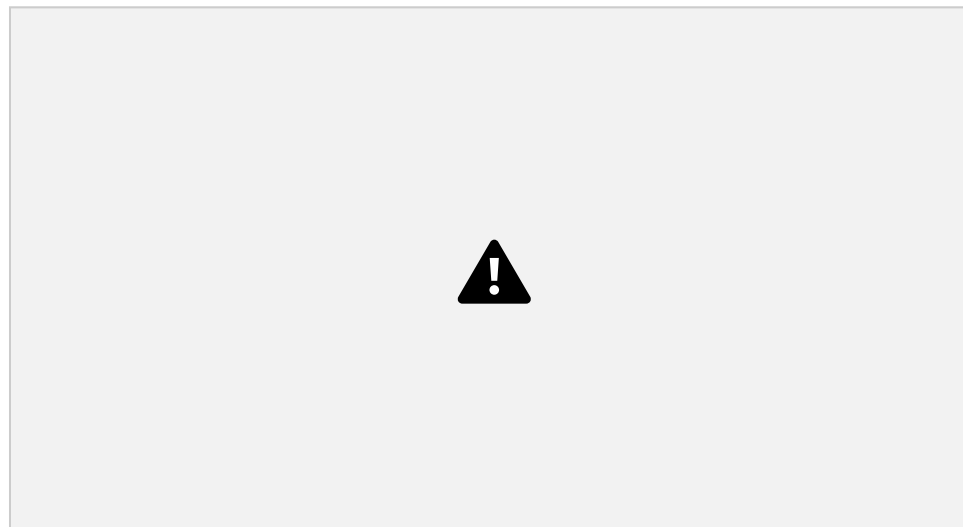
A total of 23 varsity athletes answered my survey with their insightful analysis. The survey had 6 questions: 4 multiple choice and 2 likert scale. The likert scale questions measured perceived family expectations and personal commitment to basketball. The likert scale only goes up to 4, so they will be biased to pick one side, which will help me analyze the data to a better extent. Each question was required in order to submit the form. The multiple choice questions varied from, "What is your ethnic/cultural background?" to "How many years of organized basketball have you played prior to this year?" All these questions have helped me evaluate my analysis of my research question by finding background but also present information relating to the topic of commitment.

Results and Findings

The survey was aimed to understand if there is a relationship between family expectations and the levels of commitment high school basketball players have towards basketball in different cultural backgrounds. A total of 25 people responded to my survey, but only 23 responses were used since some of the basketball managers took the survey, which is not part of my overall research question. Responses 24 and 25 were disregarded. 43% of the respondents were females and 57% were males. Each individual was given a set of 6 questions, asking about their age, commitments to basketball, cultural background, and external pressure

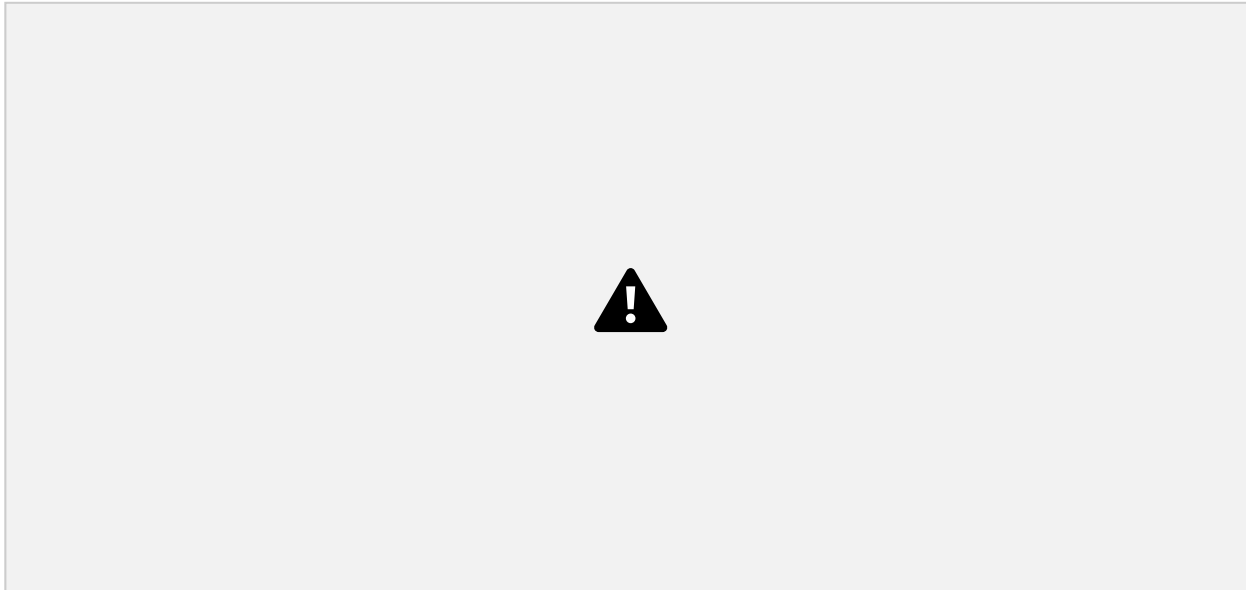
they feel while playing basketball. One question was geared towards how much time prior to this year organized basketball was played and what their parents expect them to focus more on: studies, sports, equal balance, or you don't know. The results of my background questions were 26.1% of the participants were freshman, 13% were sophomores, 30.4% were juniors, and 30.4 were seniors. The majority of the participants have played basketball in this Illinois public high school since they were freshman.

Figure 1



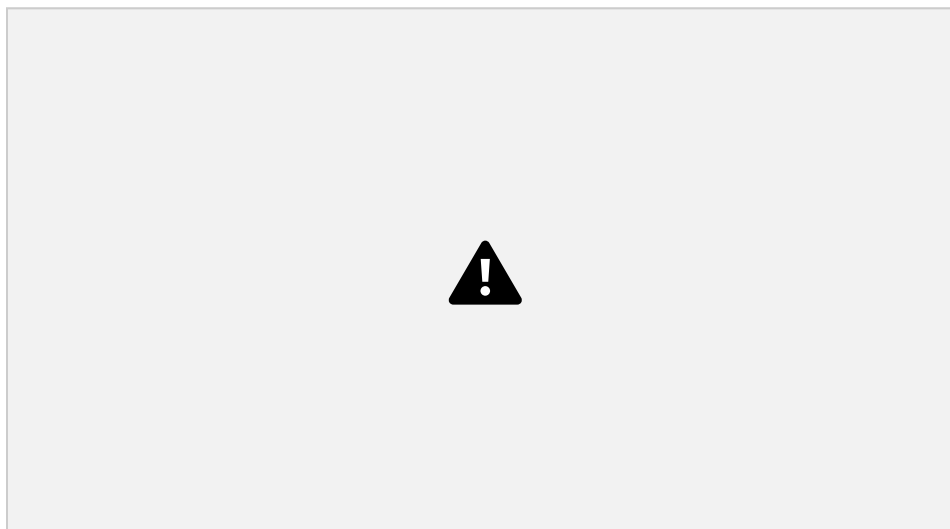
The second question of my survey asked the participants how many years prior to this year have they been playing organized basketball. For example, AAU, SAA, Feeder, etc. The question was included to understand how experienced certain players are with their skills. Basketball is based around making tough skills, just to name a few, ballhandling, layups, 3 pointers, and floaters, that take years to perfect, the more years spent the better they will get. A majority of the participants have played for over most of their lives, increasing their skills.

Figure 2



All the questions build off each other, so question three on my survey is continued with question two. This question explores how motivated the athletes are towards their sport, specifically to determine whether they are participating out of genuine passion and long-term commitment or simply out of force. On a scale of 1-4, 1 being not committed and 4 being very committed, 52.2% of the participants chose two, indicating that over half of the athletes are somewhat committed at this moment. On the other hand, 21.7% choose 3 and 26.1% choose 4. Only a certain number of participants are strongly committed to basketball overall. A part of the group are still strongly dedicated athletes, but a majority may be experiencing lower motivation about their involvement.

Figure 3



The third question of my survey was the most important. It implies what expectations families prioritize. This was the independent variable in my whole research paper so its significance will highlight the correlation between commitment to the sport. More than half the respondents answered academics as what their parents see as the most important (73..9%),

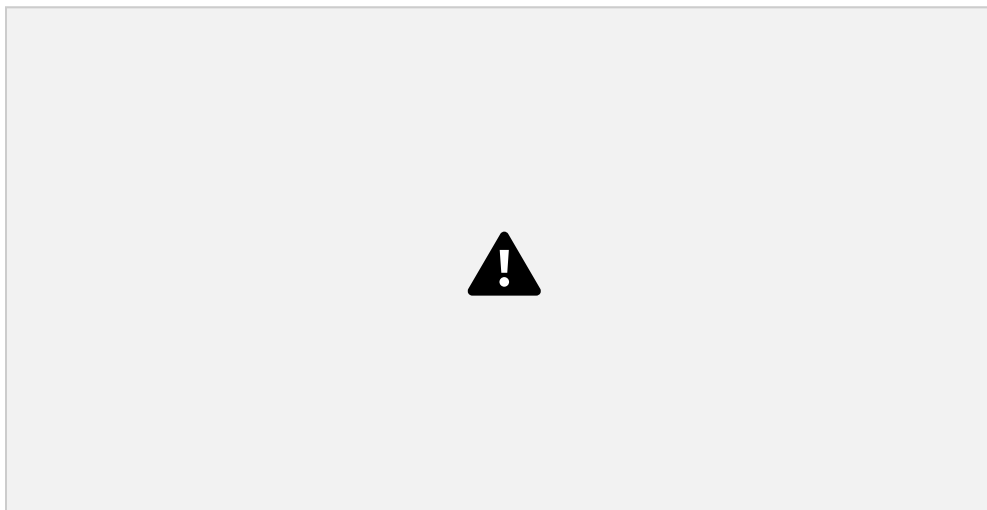
and the rest is an equal amount (21.7%). For sports only one person answered and it was such a low amount a percentage didn't even show up.

Figure 4



Participants of the survey were then asked about the amount of external pressure athletes receive when playing to perform well. The pressure could be anything that does not relate to the actual sport, such as family expectations regarding the athletes life. 1 being not much while 4 is very much. 18 out of the 23 people that took my survey said either 3 or 4 and the amount of pressure they are held upon. Implying that external pressure plays a role in how certain athletes play. The high percentage of athletes reporting elevated pressure levels could influence their overall performance.

Figure 5



This last question on this survey explored the different ethnic backgrounds of the athletes. The school that I attend has a spread of ethnicities, 10% Black, 28% Asian, 32% Latino, and 39% Caucasian. Just in the boys and girls varsity teams consisting of 23 people, there is a great diversity. This is the overview of cultural insights which allows the survey results with a variety of perspectives and experiences which broaden the understanding of different ethnic group pressures.



Discussion and Analysis

The problem that my research question was trying to address was how familial expectations create too much pressure for athletes to maintain commitment to basketball. There is an underlying amount of pressure given from parents to their kids to succeed in other aspects beyond just sports. The data from the survey was analyzed to suggest that commitment varies through each athlete because of the familial pressures and cultural expectations. The outside influences can affect how important it is to athletes when approaching their sport, how much time is dedicated to it, and the balance in athletic responsibilities and school.

The survey results helped me provide an insight into whether this pattern really existed. One major trend that appeared in the survey results was the level of external pressure the athletes reported feeling when playing basketball. A large portion (18 out of the 23) of the participants selected higher values on the likert scale when asked about pressure they experience to feel to perform well. I had two questions that go hand in hand with one another, one was “do your parents expect you to focus on... academics, sports, equally” and the other question being, “how committed are you to basketball?” When comparing responses, a pattern appeared. Many athletes that selected academics as the area their patterns want them to focus more on selected lower levels of commitment to basketball. The factors go hand in hand because parental expectations about academics may limit the amount of time and focus given to their dedicated sport.

The findings also connected back to the research discussed earlier in the literature review. The *Handbook of Sport Psychology* suggested that parent behaviors and expectations can highly influence a young athlete's motivation in sports. Similarly my survey results had supported this idea because the athletes reported high levels of pressure from their families. The pattern suggests that when families emphasize academic success over athletic participation, athletes may feel discouraged to continue working hard towards basketball. In the survey, 73.9% of the respondents reported that their parents prioritize academics and many of the same athletes reported lower commitment levels on the Likert scale. Family expectations play a significant role in shaping an athlete's sense of commitment. For example, excessive pressure to do well in academics will denature the athletes motivation to do sports because it would influence their mind to choose one or the other in priority.

The relationship occurs because athletes who feel strong academic expectations from their families may dedicate more time into studying, completing homework, and preparing for exams. Since the student athletes often have such limited time outside of school, academics can reduce the amount of time available to grow their basketball skills.

Another question on my survey was based on how much organized basketball was played prior to this following year. This question did not strongly affect my interpretation of familial expectations, but it did provide useful background information about the athletes' experience levels. A majority of the players responded to long-term connection to the sport. Specifically, 39.4% reported 7 or more years, and 30.9% reported 5 to 6 years. Together, these groups represent more than half of the participants in scale. Since many of the athletes have

had similar experience levels, it is unlikely that years of experience are the main reason for commitment levels. Additionally, the athletes with lower experience levels still had varied responses to the external pressure question suggesting that years of playing had no role in the influence of a student athlete's commitment. This further supports the idea that external influences may play a larger role in shaping an athlete's motivation.

Although my research question also aimed to gather information about whether different cultures affected and influenced these patterns of commitment. Culture can shape the expectations families put on their children, especially regarding education and extracurricular activities. My hypothesis was that some cultural backgrounds would show higher levels of academic expectations, which would lead to lower levels of commitment in basketball. My survey did not comply with this idea at all because even though the survey asked about ethnicities there was no clear relationship. On the team there were 6 different cultures present but the athletes from one culture did not show more or less commitment in basketball, it was a spread assortment. Some families may encourage their children to pursue both academics and athletics equally, allowing athletes to still stay motivated to basketball.

Although the data did not show a clear pattern with culture and sports commitment, this does not necessarily mean that there will never be a cultural influence. Instead, it suggests that cultural expectations may be more subtle and not fully captured by the survey the student athletes have taken. For instance, while athletes from different backgrounds reported similar patterns of commitment but their reasons could be more in depth.

Implications

These findings are significant because they express the challenges many student-athletes face when balancing both sports and academics. High schoolers regularly depend on their parents for guidance when making decisions on what to prioritize with their time. When parents place such a strong emphasis on academic success, the athletes will feel as if they have no choice in their own priorities, dedicating time into homework instead of improving their basketball skills. They might also see their sport as a secondary activity, not putting much time in for growth. Understanding this relationship can help coaches, schools, and families better support student athletes, with busy time schedules, and motivation. When families recognize the importance of both areas, the students will feel more motivated and supported in maintaining strong commitment to their sports while still succeeding academically.

Limitations

After addressing certain limitations, the research can be clearly comprehended. One limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size. Only twenty-three athletes participated in the survey, which limits how widely the results can be applied to other basketball or school teams in general. Due to participants being from a singular school, they are likely to have the same environment, coaching styles, and/or school expectations. Branching outwards to a larger scale, that includes athletes from multiple schools and teams, would provide more reliable and generalized results.



Additionally, the survey relied on self-reported responses from the athletes, which could introduce bias and also they could have their own interpretations of the question. The reliability of the responses could vary person to person.

The last limitation is that the paper used a Likert scale to measure commitment and pressure which simplified complex emotions and experiences into numerical values, which could not fully capture the actual reason for an athlete's motivation. While the survey provided valuable insight into general trends, these limitations suggest that the findings should be interpreted with caution.

Future Research

This leads to an important consideration of how this research can be improved in the future by addressing all the limitations and more. Firstly, making the sample size a lot bigger and branching out to other schools. This would have provided a broader range of experience among different athletes. Other athletes' perspectives will amplify the research to a future extent.

Since the research paper also focuses on familial expectations, collecting data directly from the athlete's parents could have provided the types of expectations set, and how they are formed and communicated. Comparing the difference in an athlete's response to their parents' response may reveal further differences in pressure and what priorities are perceived.

Lastly, the inclusion of interviews would allow researchers to gather more information about commitment. Asking questions in person would not have such bias as a survey. While a survey may provide general information, interviews will gather personal and detailed responses from the wide variety of participants. Additionally, interviews would bring up follow-up questions, which would clarify confusion and avoid misunderstanding that would occur in surveys. Athletes will also feel more comfortable speaking out in the open when they know it is monitored by a student with the same feelings as them.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine how familial expectations influence a high school basketball athlete's level of commitment to the sport. The results suggest that parental emphasis on academic priorities plays an important role in shaping an athlete's commitment to the extracurricular activities they have participated in. Athletes, who reported higher levels of academic expectations from their families often demonstrated the same lower levels of commitment to basketball, proving that priorities may limit the time and focus athletes can provide to one individual sport. Homework on average takes up half the athlete's time at home, the athlete will not be able to grow their skills for basketball. Furthermore, a decent amount of participants reported experiencing high levels of pressure, supporting the idea of family expectations impacting how athletes play on gameday. Communication beyond encouragement can influence performance and engagement. So it can be concluded that commitment to basketball is influenced by the growing pressure of academic work by parental figures.

However, cultural background was inferred as a potential factor but the results of the survey did not reveal a pattern linking to specific commitment level differences among a variety of cultures. Instead, the data suggests that each individual family's expectations, rather than one cultural identity together, have a significant impact on student athletes' commitment.



Connecting back to the literature review, these similar ideas were presented. In the *Handbook of Sport Psychology (2007)*, family expectations can significantly change an athlete's level of commitment, especially when the pressure is placed over academic completion instead of a balance. Since the Norwegian culture that was first explored had a significant pattern of parents putting children in sports, there was room to imply that other cultures also might have the same type of patterns. However this paper does not suggest that cultural background is a key role in shaping such commitment levels. This highlights the importance of familial expectations and while existing research provides a strong foundation, further and more in depth research will be needed to fully understand how these factors interact with different contexts.

Overall, this research paper is here to highlight the importance of balance between academics and athletics. Understanding how familial expectations affect student athletes' motivation and overall commitment can help families, coaches, and schools create environments that support both academic success and athletic development, allowing athletes to maintain motivation and long term commitment to their sport of choice.

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