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by Ramadhan Arifin

Submission date: 20-Sep-2022 10:37AM (UTC+0700)

Submission ID: 1904220749

File name: 14411-40075-1-SM.docx (28.49K)

Word count: 4134

Character count: 23622

I Don't Care about the Money": A Thematic Analysis of Parenting Practices of Youth Sport

Caly Setiawan
Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta

Corresponding author: *csetiawan@uny.ac.id*

2 **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to investigate practices of raising up young athletes from a sociological perspective. In particular, I looked at how parents enacted their capitals (i.e., economic, social, and cultural capitals) within the contexts of youth sport as a social field. From the stand point of social constructionism and interpretivism as the theoretical perspective underpinning the methodology, this qualitative study involved 6 participants who had experiences of parenting their children in youth sport for at least five years. Data were collected through in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis from Braun and Clarke (2006) was employed to facilitate inductive analysis toward the construction of themes from the data. A computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), namely ATLAS.ti 22, was utilized to help the researcher manage complex data set and achieve trustworthiness criteria. Three themes has been constructed through mainly inductive analysis with theoretical framework of social field and capitals. These were (1) the contextual practices of youth sport as social field, (2) economic, cultural and social capital at play in parenting practices of youth sport, and (3) capital exchange as practices within and beyond youth sport. The current study concludes that sociological thoughts on social field and capitals are advantageous to understand the social complexity of day-to-day parenting practices of youth sport. However, agenda for further studies would need to explore the field of youth sport utilizing other sociological framework.

Key words: *youth sport, young athletes, parenting, social field, capitals*

Introduction

Scholars from diverse academic backgrounds have long been studying youth sport providing rich information about what aspects have been depicted and how problems have methodologically been approached. These depictions include parents' involvement in youth sport through their parenting practices. Some studies, for example, focused on parents' socialization (Dorsch, Smith, & McDonough, 2014), parenting styles (Holt, Tamminen, Black, Mandigo, Fox, 2009), and the meaning and experiences of parenting youth sport (Elliott & Drummond, 2017; Park & Kwon, 2019). Literature has also been enriched by the uses of different approaches and theoretical frameworks allowing multiple perspectives in looking at sport in the lives of young people. Scholars have apparently approached the understanding of youth sport through the intersection of feminists' theories (Gottzén & Kremer-Sadlik, 2012; Jeanes & Magee, 2011), analysis of social class (Eriksen & Stefansen, 2021), and phenomenological perspectives (Clarke & Harwood, 2014). Despite this seemingly almost a complete picture, little is known about parenting youth sport from a specific a sociological lens that pays close attention to social fields involving family's habitus, social and cultural capitals. The current study was one attempt to use this sociological perspective.

But before moving forward, I would like to outline the theoretical framework used to examine parenting practices in this study. The ideas of social field and capital was firstly proposed by French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu's theory stems from three core ideas: habitus, capital, and field. Despite not being used in this study, the concept of habitus needs to be introduced along with the other two concepts. Derived from the word habit, habitus contains deep-rooted habits, tacit knowledge of know-how, and dispositions as its main qualities. Habitus is acquired gradually over time and well-explained through Crossley's (2001) analogy between habitus and the growth of fungi. He illustrated, "An agent's habitus is an active residue or sediment of his past that functions within his present, shaping his perception, thought, and action and thereby molding social practice in a regular way" (p. 83). Claringbould, Knoppers, and Jacobs (2015) studied how dispositions as part of habitus have developed as the youth participated in their study followed along the disciplinary process geared toward improvement, success, and winning in sport settings.

Another core concept that served as a corner stone of the current study includes the notion of capital defined as anything that contains exchange values. Social agents afford capitals and accumulate them as resources for action in a given field (Crossley, 2001). Bourdieu formulated forms of capital which consist of economic, social, and cultural capital

(Bourdieu, 1986). Economic capital refers to resources that are instantly exchangeable such as money or property rights. In the context of youth sport, parents as social agents may use their resources such as money for financing sport related expenses or vehicle to transport their children to competition events. Furthermore, social capital includes networking which is, under certain condition, valuable to be converted into other forms of capital. Parents of young athletes may take advantage of their acquaintances to access resources deemed necessary to facilitate the development of their athletes. For example, some parents may unify themselves to ensure quality training programs, bring in competent coaches, or try out their children in appropriate competition. Another form of capital is cultural capital that could be demonstrated in the forms of embodied state (e.g., sport skills, tactical knowledge), objectified state (e.g., sporting goods, equipment, jersey), and institutionalized state (e.g., educational qualifications). The embodied state was an important form of capital for this study, especially the one related to corporeality as the physical capital. Despite Bourdieu did not explicitly elaborate this notion, Shilling's work (2004) on physical capital has been helpful for the current study to look at how body (its size, shape, and appearance) was valued within youth sport contexts.

It is noteworthy that capital will not be effective for conversion into other resources until it interacts with a social field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In Bourdieu's account, society consists of fields (e.g., school, work place, peers, sport clubs) which of these are independent, but interlocking, of each other (Crossley, 2001; Shilling, 2004). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) argued that a social field contains rules of the game imposed on every person who enters the field. Within a given field, the interaction of social agents' habitus and capital with the forces and principles will dispose their position. Furthermore, these social agents chase after goals deemed to be valued in that specific field. For example, Swanson (2009) investigated parenting practices by mothers in pursuance of social status reproduction through soccer clubs.

Furthermore, some scholars have made efforts to elaborate and deepen Bourdieu's theory. Using a pragmatists' perspective, Shilling (2004) reexamined the notion of habitus which is limited by "overly reproductionist analysis of human behaviour" (p. 474). Resolving this limitation, Shilling offered the concept of situated action promising a social analysis the ability to illuminate complex social practices informed by not only the agents' habitual action but also the crisis informed action and its creative revelation. While this concept focuses more on scrutinizing Bourdieu's theory of habitus, it regards his other tenets (e.g., social and cultural capital, fields) to be contributive. My intention was certainly not to discuss this theoretical debate. I would rather take advantage

Bourdieuian thought along with its development. The purpose of this study was to examine the parenting practice within the context of youth sport utilizing elements of Bourdieu's ideas, particularly on field and capital.

Methods

The research paradigm underlying the current study was social constructionism suggesting that truth is not discovered, but constructed in relation to social world (Crotty, 1998). I have particularly framed by interpretivism through which the primary research process includes the act of interpreting qualitative data. The setting of this study was in one major city in Indonesia. Located in the island of Java, it is a home of 3.668.719 residents. A number of female (N = 3) and male (N = 3) participants were recruited to participate in this study. Criteria for recruitment included the experiences of parenting a biological child who has participated in youth sport for at least five years. Data were collected through in-depth interviews after informed consents were sought. However, I practiced process consent through which consent was informally negotiated with the participants during the course of study (Lahman, Geist, Rodriguez, Graglia, & DeRoche, 2010). Subsequent analysis was performed thematically through (1) familiarizing with the data, (2) generating codes, (3) developing and reviewing themes, and (4) defining and naming themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I used ATLAS.ti 22, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software, to help with analyzing the data as well as achieving trustworthiness criteria. For example, the analysis software allowed me to triangulate information from individual participant by comparing and corroborating it with overall data set. Other criteria such as dependability and confirmability were conveniently accomplished through the features that can automatically track all analytic actions provided by ATLAS.ti 22.

Results

Data analysis resulted into coding system with list of codes clustered around three major themes. These included (1) the contextual practices of youth sport as social field, (2) economic, cultural and social capital at play in parenting practices of youth sport, and (3) capital exchange as practices within and beyond youth sport. I describe these three themes in the following paragraphs.

The social field of youth sport

Data analysis focused on clubs with youth sport programming as social field in which participants' capital (and habitus) interacted with social forces and principles that socially positioned them in that given

field. The clubs also became arenas in which the parents chased after parenting goals being valued within youth sport contexts and beyond. All the participants of this study began their journey of parenting youth sport from different reasons. However, they tended to agree that sport was viewed as a magic box. This meant that sport was a place where individual and societal problems can be solved and quality of life can be improved. For Daniel, the social world around his family could be a bad influence for his teenage daughter. Like other parents participated in this study, he considered sport clubs could be a place where children could transform into good persons. He said, "My motivation to send her to the roller sport club was that, instead of wandering around in the neighbourhood with no sense of purpose, I would place her in sport so that she could get educated." Another example included Devon who lived by the sea. He wanted his child to have a certain competencies when it came to water safety. Data showed that youth sport attracted parents with promises the development of their children. As a social field, youth sport then offered something valuable and worth of pursuing.

Analysis also demonstrated that some parents strove for social positioning in the field of youth sport. Once they got socialized in youth sport contexts, some of them chased social positioning by facilitating skill development for their children. Various efforts were shown ranging from teaching the basic skills by themselves to attempting efforts to ensure high quality coaching delivery. For example, Daniel recounted the time he taught her 6-year-old daughter to just stand up on her rollerblades. Diane hired a private coach to ensure that her daughter acquired skills necessary to not being left behind in her club. These parents secured social positioning as decent parents being responsible for their children's skill acquisition. As they had become engrossed in youth sport, their parenting journey filled with endeavours to go beyond skill acquisition. They would do their best to help their children excel in their sports. This involved provision of transportation to the fields for practices or competitions, high-end sporting equipment, and consultation sessions with specialists such as nutritionists, medical doctors, and psychologists.

Parenting practices for youth sport: Capitals at play

Participants stated that their roles are critical in introducing, developing and maintaining their children's engagement in sport. They began their parenting sport with introduction of the sport without expectation that went beyond participation. Despite putting less emphasis on competition at the outset, they eventually found out that their children should be placed in competitive streams. This was especially true when their children had been identified as talented. Analysis showed that these parents brought their capitals for these efforts after learning the potentials

of their children. Parenting practices then tended to become efforts to facilitate elite sporting development in which economic, cultural, and social capitals would play a major role.

Analysis resulted into information about practices regarding economic capital at play. For example, at the time of socializing their children into the sports, the parents sent their children to free or low-paid youth sport programs. When they started to navigate their parenting toward more competitive sport, they then initiated to invest their resources. Some of parents like Diane preferred to stay in her old club but invest money in branded apparels and high-end sportswear to enhance her child's performance. Some other parents did not satisfy with their former clubs. As a result, they either sent their children to a more performed club or initiated their own clubs. Dylan, for example, mobilized other parents to establish a new club after getting dissatisfied with his former club. This effort undeniably required incredible amounts of funds. He said, "I know I spent great deals of money for this. But my girl likes this new way of training and her coach. I don't care about the money." Diane and Dylan, like other parents in this study, showed different practices of using economic capital to fund their children's sporting development. However, they essentially shared a similar pattern in which their expenditure got increased as they engaged more intensively in competitive streams. Further analysis also showed how parents enacted cultural and social capital within the field of youth sport. They informed that they made connection with other parents in their respective clubs. Even in Dylan's club, parents formed a group when they did not satisfy with the coaching performance and initiated a new club. This was enabled by the know-how knowledge (cultural capital) about running a club that these parents had acquired during their socialization into their sport. Dylan, more specifically, also contacted potential coaches and consultants in his network to be recruited for their efforts. He said, "I know ex-national athlete who had no coaching job at that time. So, I called him." Another parenting practice included the use of social capital to improve sport performance. Uliana's daughter was a synchronized swimmer. Her parenting included attempt to build networking with specialists such as high-level certified coach, nutritionist, medical doctor, and sport masseur. Having been friends with a child psychologist for years, Uliana had consulted tips to excel in youth sport for her daughter, in particular from the psychological perspective.

Capital Exchange within and beyond Youth Sport

The last theme revolved around information pattern in the data regarding what these parents acquired during their time in parenting sport. In particular, I developed a cluster of meaning on the exchange of

their capitals and other forms of capitals and how they used them into the transition beyond sports. Analysis showed parents strived various capitals ranging from social capital (e.g., parents' networking) to cultural capital (e.g., the symbol of good parents). Despite this apparent variety, a vital form of capital seemed to lay on the embodied capitals which is one form of cultural capital. Through youth sport, more specifically, parents facilitated physical and skill development which became important currency for exchanging it with other forms of capital. In other words, they placed their children into the stream of athlete development making them become elite in every stage of the development. This eventually played a major role in pursuing other capitals.

In the context of Indonesia, for example, the prize money was already competitive for athletes as early as ten years old. Consequently, the children of the parent in this study had made some amounts of money. Devon, a father of a swimmer, said "She won some of the games and saved the prize money. This eases me when she wants to buy the apparels she dreams of, or cell-phone. She'll buy those with her own money." Another parent also informed that his teenage daughter has bought a car even before she could drive. The exchange of embodied capital with economic capital continued throughout their children's athletic career which, in part, helped parents' spending on some of their children's expenses.

Another example included cultural capital in the form of institutionalized capital. More specifically, this type of capital was an access to the high quality education. In the context of the current study, there existed special programs or pathways to enrol young elite athletes into the best schools in town regardless of their academic performance. Some participants took advantage of the system by exchanging the embodied capital of their children (skilful athletes) with institutionalized capital (school enrolment). Their student athletes got accepted in the best schools without undergoing selection process. Some other parents who preferred to enrol their students in other schools enjoyed the privilege of skipping classes during the competition schedules. Daniel stated,

Whenever I showed up, the school administrators already knew. I don't have to say anything, just get my kid out of school. They would even wish us the best luck in the competition. If we won the games, we also brought the school's name too. We brought the school's flag and they can take advantage of it for school promotion.

This statement indicates the process within educational settings which facilitated the convenience of getting the institutionalized capital, such as educational credentials.

Despite various forms of capital that the parents acquired during their time in parenting sport, analysis noticed tones in the data regarding the enhanced symbolic capital as a good parent. This symbolic capital seemed to be the important goal of parenting youth sport. Furthermore, parents also use the identity of a good parent as symbolic capital beyond sport setting. As a result, youth sport programs appeared to be attractive for these parents to pursue symbolic capitals of being good parents. At the beginning of their parenting journey, it did not have to be oriented toward athlete development. Some parents began with as simply as caring with their children's health being diagnosed by physicians early on their lives. These included hyperactivity and other chronic diseases such as asthma. Rachel described her experience from the doctor's office,

Zack was diagnosed to have been hyperactive. So, we saw the doctor and she said he's hyperactive and needs medication to calm him down. He needs sedative to slow him down. But we didn't want to do it with his hyperactivity. We'd rather figure out the solution. That's why we came up with sending him to sport.

Her decision with her husband to send out Zack to sport clubs had been considered to be healthier and safer than taking the medication. For Rachel, this parenting action defined herself as a good mother. Later on, the identity of a good mother had switched from taking care of health to facilitating athleticism when Zack eventually became excelled in swimming and soccer.

Some other parents felt that they were responsible with facilitating the children's interest in sport at the outset. In the early developmental stages, these children showed interest in doing sport. They noticed these inclinations and made their ways to begin the journey of introducing sports. Randy mentioned that his daughter showed enthusiasm when she just looked at a poster of swimming events. He said, "from that poster, she was determined to participated. She was even five years old at that time." The participants believed that good parents were in charge of facilitating the children's interests then followed by making effort for athlete development.

Discussion

Analysis showed youth sport as a social field which, according to Bourdieusian line of thought (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), contained a set of rules that regulated parents as they enter it. In order to navigate social positioning within the field, parents brought with them the capitals they possessed. This was especially apparent regarding the economic capital as they began to strive position in competitive streams. As suggested by the literature, they pursued a status of good parent by

having their children excel in sport (Coakley, 2006, Park & Kwon, 2019) and they also simultaneously chased after the status of their children in other social fields (Swanson, 2009). Regardless of the participants' social class, their parenting practices in sporting contexts seemed to conform with the orientation toward parenting healthy life style and some degrees of parenting ethos (Eriksen & Stefansen, 2021).

Parenting youth sport is the experience of complex social action (Shilling, 2004). Participants also showed their complex experience of parenting their children of doing sport, in particular the athlete development. A phenomenological study by Clarke and Harwood (2014), however, provide an important insight that can be helpful to look at parents' experience. Their analysis resulted in three essences of experience aligned with the Bourdieusian analysis of the current study. They included parent socialization into sport that had gradually become elite, parental identity or social status of good parents, and parent responsibility of facilitate their children's athlete development. All of these essences involved variant meanings of the experience as they navigated their cultural and social capital within the field of youth sport. These meanings might become disposition for parental action which contributed to the social reproduction of parenting habitus. As Elliot and Drummond (2017) argued, the meanings of parental experience have eventually contributed to parents' social action within a larger context.

Conclusion

Results showed three themes including (1) youth sport as social field, (2) cultural and social capital at play, and (3) capital exchange within and beyond the context of youth sport. As social field, youth sport played roles in positioning the interaction of capitals that the parents brought into and the social forces and principles within that given field. Parents pursued parenting goals which could eventually be converted to other types of capitals being valued within (e.g., sport skills as embodied capital) and beyond this social field (e.g., prize money as economic capital and educational access as institutionalized capital). Sociological framework like Bourdieu's theory on field and capital are still promising to understand youth sport. This is especially obvious when researchers are interested in ways of sport club operate to dispose or limit social positioning as individuals within that given field interact along with their capitals at play.

Suggestion

Follow-up studies may take into consideration of the concept of habitus to provide a more complete picture of aspects that interacted within the field of youth sport. Since such field also consists of individuals with diverse roles (e.g., coaches, athletes, teachers, officials), future

research can be advanced by looking at their habitus and capitals being brought into play in the field of youth sport.

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