

Book Prospectus
**"Creating and Supporting Intense Youth Involvement
in Athletics and the Arts"**

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Introduction

The disengagement of talented youth from activities such as athletics, music, and the arts during adolescence has generated much concern among researchers and practitioners (e.g., Eccles, Blumenfeld, Wigfield & Harold, 1990; Huston, 1992). Why do some adolescents continue to develop their expertise, while others lose interest in the activities in which they are talented? The proposed book outlines findings from one single qualitative study with talented adolescents that examines the socialization and motivational that influence this trend towards declining commitment.

This disengagement, especially by those who showed promise in early childhood, is particularly troubling because of the potential loss of talent and skill for both the individual and society (Eccles & Alfeld-Liro, in press). Moreover, the evidence of the benefits of involvement in organized activities in adolescence further underscores the importance of understanding the motivational and socialization factors that influence decisions about involvement (Carnegie Council, 1992). However, despite these benefits, there is some concern over the effects on young people of too much involvement. For instance, recent media attention has focused on "super kids", who feel the need to participate and excel in multiple activities. Their school work, as well as mental and physical health, may be compromised by this level of involvement. Thus, there is a need for research on how young people can reap the benefits of participation in these activities without also incurring the costs.

This question is of both theoretical and practical interest because so many youth spend significant amounts of time and place considerable importance on these types of activities. Several scholars have begun to explore the constructs of commitment and engagement in an attempt to understand the antecedents and consequences of intense involvement in these settings and the factors that influence the disengagement process (e.g., Newmann, 1992; Scanlan, Carpenter, Schimdt, Simons & Keeler, 1993). Such work can provide insight into what factors support talented youths' persistence in developing their skills. An understanding of the factors that help youth to maintain commitment can also help practitioners to create environments that encourage greater involvement by youth.

This interest in intense involvement in non-academic domains has come from diverse quarters. Sports psychologists have focused on the factors that influence the development of commitment of elite-level athletes (Scanlan et al., 1993) and the factors that influence why youth withdraw from athletics (Gould, 1987). In addition, developmental and educational psychologists have examined the influence of involvement in an extracurricular activity on indicators of academic achievement and adjustment (e.g., Holland & Andre, 1987; Marsh, 1992). The final body of work that is applicable is the research on talent development. For example, Bloom (1985) conducted a retrospective study of Olympic swimmers, concert pianists, world famous artists, and eminent mathematicians to examine the development of elite talent. In addition, Czikszenmihalyi and his colleagues (1993) interviewed adolescents who showed exceptional promise in arts, athletics, mathematics, and music to examine how they spent their time and how they felt when participating in their activity.

Of these literatures, this latter research on talent development by Bloom ("Developing Talent in Young People") and Czikszenmihalyi ("Talented Teens") is the most comparable to our work. However, our sample is less restricted in the levels of talent considered and broader in its discussion of adolescents with a range of talent, not just at the elite level. Because of our broader discussion, the findings presented in our book would potentially be more relevant for policy as well as more interesting to the public at large. Further, while other studies have focused primarily on how individuals feel when participating in their talent activity, or how the family affects talent development, our study takes into account the larger social context. We acknowledge that talent is only one part of non-elite but highly involved adolescents' lives and that there may be both costs and benefits to participation. Therefore, we examine the reciprocal influences between adolescents' activity involvement and their developmental context, including school, family, peers, and other activities and interests. Finally, our work is different because it takes a longitudinal development of activity involvement from the early years to decisions about post-high school involvement.

Our study

This book will be based on work from a subsample of a large, longitudinal study of activity choice in childhood and adolescence, conducted by Jacquelynne Eccles and her colleagues at the University of Michigan. In this smaller study, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 41 adolescents who had exhibited talent in athletics, music, drama, dance, and the arts in early childhood, and their parents. We define talent as self-reports of high competence, value, and time involvement in middle childhood. The interviews covered issues about (1) how the young people became involved in their

activity, (2) why they continued, (3) what their plans were for the future, (4) how their involvement affected their families and vice-versa, (5) the role of significant others such as teachers, coaches, and peers on involvement, and (6) the reciprocal influence of extracurricular involvement and school.

Our findings suggest that adolescence is a critical period to examine the socialization and motivational factors that support intense involvement, because it is the time when many of the youth begin to question their commitment to these domains. We found that parents, teachers, and coaches needed to provide talented adolescents with appropriate levels of support and challenge that matched their developmental needs. Peers also played a positive function in supporting the continued involvement of talented adolescents in their talent activity, though there were differences in opportunities for peer relationships between in-school and out-of-school activities. Finally, we developed a model to explain the process by which adolescents decide whether or not and at what level to continue their activity in adolescence. This process seemed to be a dynamic interplay between the individual's motivation and the opportunities provided in the activity.

Audience

The proposed volume would be of considerable interest to a wide audience. For instance, scholars who do research on talent, positive youth development, time use, and the influence of peers, parents, and teachers on individual's motivation and skill development would find our report informative. Educational psychologists would also be interested in our discussion motivation theory and the information on the influence of extracurricular participation on school performance. Further, sports psychologists would be interested in the findings concerning why youth leave sports and the discussion regarding parents and coaches influence on persistence in sport.

In addition to being relevant to a research audience, we feel our book would also be of interest to parents, educators and youth leaders interested in promoting adolescents' involvement in structured activities. The style would be descriptive and non-technical, primarily because of the nature of qualitative research, and would therefore appeal to an educated lay audience. Practitioners who work with youth, such as secondary school teachers and administrators, athletic coaches, and music, drama, and art teachers, would be interested in the information on how to create more effective programs for talent development. Finally, we hope to convince policymakers that it is important to continue to fund youth programs in athletics and the arts both in and out of school.

Timeline

Because all of the contributing authors are our colleagues at University of Michigan, it will be easier to collect and edit all portions of the book than if the contributors

were scattered around the country. Although we have drafts of a good portion of the chapters in the proposed book because they have already been presented as conference papers (see attached), these will need to be revised in order to fit within the flow of a book. In addition, the new portions will need to be written. We anticipate that we will be able to forward all completed portions to the publisher by December 1, 1999.

Structure of the Book

The book will include 11 chapters, including an introduction chapter, a methods chapter, and a discussion/conclusions chapter, as well as 8 chapters (approximately 20-30 pages each), covering various themes in the results of our study. The total length of the book will be about 300-350 pages. This book will be divided into four sections. Section 1 will include the introduction to the study and a description of the methods of data collection and analysis. Section 2 will include various chapters on sources of influence on talent development. Section 3 will include case studies of interesting individuals and profiles that emerged during analysis. Finally, section 4 will outline the conclusions from our study and implications for policy.

In the outline below, we have placed an asterisk beside those chapters that we have included with this proposal in a draft (conference presentations) format that will need to be revised for this book.

[See outline on next page]

Conclusion

While there has been a tendency to focus on adolescence as a period of risk and negative outcomes, researchers have recently highlighted the need for work on contexts that promote positive youth development. This book will begin to open up discussions of how to encourage commitment to extracurricular activities as a way to promote successful development trajectories from childhood to adulthood. Finally, we believe that this book will provide researchers and practitioners with a valuable resource for understanding and implementing practices that support intense involvement.

Outline

Part 1: Overview

Introduction: The Benefits of Intense Youth Involvement in Athletics and the Arts
(Jacquelynne Eccles)

Method: Our Qualitative Interview Study*
(Corinne Alfeld-Liro, Jennifer Fredricks, and Helen Patrick)

Part 2: Sources of Influence

The Early Years: How Children Become Involved in Athletics and the Arts
(Ludmila Hruda and Jennifer Fredricks)

The Dynamic Between Adolescents' Motivation, Identity, and Opportunities*
(Jennifer Fredricks and Corinne Alfeld-Liro)

The Role of Peers in Commitment to Developing Talent in Adolescence*
(Helen Patrick and Allison Ryan)

Nurturing Talent: The Role of Parents*
(Corinne Alfeld-Liro and Ludmilla Hruday)

Nurturing Talent: The Role of Teachers and Coaches*
(Corinne Alfeld-Liro and Jennifer Fredricks)

Reciprocal Influences of School and Extracurricular Activities
(Ludmila Hruda and Jennifer Fredricks)

Part 3: Case-Centered Approach

Girls in Sports and Boys in the Arts: An Exploration of Gender Across Domains
(Jennifer Fredricks)

A Case Study of High and Low Commitment
(Corinne Alfeld-Liro)

Part 4: Conclusions /Implications for Policy

Creating and Supporting Intense Youth Involvement in Athletics and the Arts
(Jacquelynne Eccles)

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