
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Challenges and Opportunities for Latine Families in US Youth Sport

Melody Alanis Ph.D.

University of Idaho, Department of Movement Sciences, 875 Perimeter Drive, MS 2401, Moscow, ID 83844

Corresponding Author: Melody Alanis Ph.D., **E-mail:** malanis@uidaho.edu

| ABSTRACT

This study investigates Latine parents' perspectives on youth sport participation in the United States (US), with particular attention to perceived barriers, benefits, and recommendations for enhancing sport programming. The participants included 20 Latine parents; 12 Latina mothers and 8 Latino fathers, all of whom self-identified as being of Mexican descent. Participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling. This qualitative inquiry employed semi-structured interviews to elicit rich, narrative data. Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) guided the study, centering lived experiences and systemic inequities in sport access, while also attending to the intersections of race, socioeconomic class, and language that shape participation opportunities. Inductive thematic analysis identified themes across participant narratives, yielding three overarching themes. (1) Structural Barriers, reflecting financial constraints and limited institutional support; youth sport as a site for (2) Cultural and Social Expression, highlighting opportunities for family bonding, and social growth; and (3) "Mover Adelante:" More Accessible Outreach emphasizing parents' readiness to participate when youth sport programs are culturally relevant and community centered. Findings underscore the need for culturally responsive outreach to avoid limiting youth sport participation.

| KEYWORDS

Inclusion, Sports, Latino critical studies, accessibility, family engagement.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Sport is widely recognized as a tool for promoting physical health, social inclusion, and positive youth development (Cunningham, 2023; Delia et al., 2022; Whitley et al., 2019). Participation has been linked to enhanced academic achievement, emotional well-being, teamwork, and reduced engagement in risky behaviors (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Holt et al., 2016). Despite these benefits, access to organized sport in the United States (US) is not distributed equally (Alanis et al., 2024). Latine (a gender-neutral term for Latina/o) youth, in particular, face persistent participation gaps, with only 24% engaging in organized sports compared to 40% of non-Latinx white peers in the US (Aspen Institute Project Play, 2022). Financial barriers, lack of local facilities, and transportation challenges further limit opportunities, while underinvestment in community recreation disproportionately affects Latinx neighborhoods (Ramirez, 2019; Sansom, 2019).

Beyond structural obstacles, social dynamics further influence Latine families' participation in youth sport (McGovern, 2021b). Research suggests that while many parents value sport as a pathway for discipline, health, and upward mobility, they often confront environments that are linguistically and culturally exclusionary (Alanis et al., 2024). Limited bilingual outreach restricts communications (Ramos et al., 2023), while program marketing rarely reflects Latine families or communities. These barriers create conditions in which Latine youth are systematically underserved despite their families demonstrated interest and investment in sport (Hernandez et al., 2023; Wickes, 2023).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to critically examine Latine parents' perspectives on the barriers, benefits, and recommendations associated with youth sport participation in the US. Guided by Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), this

research employs a multidimensional framework to analyze how systemic inequities, cultural contexts, and intersecting factors such as race, language, and immigration status shape Latine families' engagement in youth sport (Espinoza & Harris, 1997). Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 Latine parents in a US Southern state. By centering parental voices, this study advances scholarship that has often overlooked Latine perspectives (Alanis et al., 2022; Hernandez et al., 2023) and provides actionable insights to guide the delivery and marketing of youth sport programs.

1.1 Positionality Statement

As a Latina athlete, my identity has been profoundly shaped by the lived experiences of navigating both the opportunities and systemic barriers within US sport. Growing up, I witnessed how access to youth sport was often mediated by language, cultural norms, and financial resources. Despite these challenges, the unwavering support of my Mexican family enabled me to engage meaningfully in these spaces and experience the transformative potential of sport participation. These formative experiences have deeply informed my approach to research. They allow me to build authentic rapport with participants and position myself within their in-group, fostering trust and mutual understanding. As Creswell and Poth (2023) notes, such positionality enhances the authenticity of data collection and enables researchers to more fully engage with participants lived realities.

Furthermore, my research is grounded in a pragmatic constructivist paradigm (Giacobbi et al., 2005), which acknowledges that knowledge is co-constructed through social interaction and shaped by context. This paradigm aligns with my commitment to centering participant voices and recognizing the dynamic interplay between Latin identity, culture, and sport. Moreover, it reinforces my belief that research should not only reflect lived realities but also drive meaningful change in sport policy and practice.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

Latin Critical Race Theory (Lat Crit) begins with a simple but urgent premise: racism and inequality are not accidental, but structural forces shaping the lives of Latine communities in the US (Bernal, 2002; Espinoza & Harris, 1997; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Specifically, LatCrit emphasizes that these inequities are embedded in the very institutions, such as education, law, and sport (Espinoza & Harris, 1997; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Although, they may appear neutral but, in practice, reproduce exclusion and marginalization for Latine populations (Birk 2022, Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2022). Drawing from Critical Race Theory (CRT), LatCrit underscores the permanence of racism, the critique of color-blindness, and the importance of centering the voices and counter-stories of marginalized groups (Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

CRT provides several foundational principles that LatCrit builds upon. First (1), racism is deeply ingrained in US systems, including education and sport (Birk, 2022; Crenshaw, 1991; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Second (2), institutional "neutrality" and color-blind policies often mask practices that reinforce White dominance (Crenshaw, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Third (3), dismantling racism requires continuous critical analysis because laws and policies intended to address inequity often reproduce it (Crenshaw, 1991; Singer, 2005). Fourth (4), the counter-stories of marginalized groups are vital for challenging dominant narratives (Delgado, 1996). While LatCrit affirms these principles, it further recognizes the distinct ways in which Latine identities intersect to shape lived realities in the US (Bernal, 2002).

Villalpando (2004) emphasized that the central distinction between CRT and LatCrit lies in LatCrit's focus on Latine identities, including "language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, and sexuality" (p. 43). This perspective positions LatCrit as a critical framework for analyzing how the multidimensional identities of Latine individuals intersect to produce varied forms of oppression, including restricted access to resources and barriers to sport participation (Alanis et al., 2024; Trucios-Haynes, 2000; Villalpando, 2004). Accordingly, LatCrit provides an appropriate foundation for this study, as it centers the narratives of Latine parents and examines their experiences within the US youth sport context.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Youth sport participation in the US

Youth sport participation has long been positioned as a cornerstone of child and adolescent development in the US (England, 2022; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). For instance, Jones (2024) highlighted that involvement in team sport provided youth with meaningful opportunities for positive social interaction and bonding. Moreover, Kokandakar et al. (2024) found that teenagers who participated in sport reported significantly better self-rated health and mental health outcomes in early adulthood. Similarly, Bengtsson et al. (2025) demonstrated that sport participation during childhood and adolescence is linked to greater physical activity, improved overall health, healthier body composition, and reduced mental ill-being over time when compared to nonparticipants.

In addition to the extensive scholarship documenting the developmental benefits of youth sport in the US, recent national data indicate consistently high rates of participation. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that just over half of US children ages 6–17 (54.1%) engaged in organized sport within the past year (Black et al., 2022). Complementing this, Aspen Institute Project Play (2022) reported that youth sport involvement increased steadily between 2013 and 2023, reflecting both the popularity and persistence of sport as a developmental context for youth. Specifically, data from the Sports and Fitness Industry Association (2025) revealed that 60.8% of children ages 6–17 participated in at least one day of team sport in 2023, compared to 55.0% in 2013. Collectively, these findings suggest that youth sport remains not only beneficial but also a highly valued component of childhood and adolescence in the US.

2.2 Latine families and US youth sport participation gaps

While youth sport involvement has risen across the US (Black et al., 2022), this trend is not equally reflected among Latine families. CDC data showed that Hispanic/Latine youth participate at lower rates (46.9%) compared to non-Hispanic White (60.4%) and non-Hispanic Asian youth (51.4%; Black et al., 2022). Regional disparities also persisted, with children and adolescents in the South reporting the lowest participation rates (48.7%) compared to peers in all other regions of the country (Black et al., 2022). In California, the LA84 Foundation (2024) reported that only 24% of Latino/a youth played sports four times per week, half the rate of White youth. Furthermore, socioeconomic factors compounded these inequities, as children of parents with higher levels of education were significantly more likely to participate in organized sport (Black et al., 2022).

Beyond these national statistics, Latine youth in the US face financial barriers, transportation challenges, and limited access to facilities that further constrain opportunities for sustained involvement in organized sport (Hernandez et al., 2023; Von Seggern et al., 2024). A report from Despres (2019) emphasized that nearly 21% of Latino parents indicated their middle- and high-school children did not participate in any school activities in 2018–2019 due to financial costs. Cultural and linguistic factors also contribute to low participation rates. According to Wickes (2023), the absence of bilingual outreach and tailored marketing approaches in many programs restricts Latine parents' awareness of and access to youth sport opportunities. She contends that providing information in both English and Spanish is essential for minimizing language barriers and fostering greater participation among Latine families (Wickes, 2023).

Taken together, Latine families face a constellation of structural and cultural barriers to sport participation (Alanis et al., 2024; McGovern, 2021b). Although parents frequently recognize sport as a pathway to social mobility and a source of physical, mental, and social well-being (England, 2022; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Jones, 2024), inequities tied to race, income, and geography nevertheless continue to restrict their Latines' children's access (McGovern, 2021a; Sosa, 2018). Addressing these disparities is critical for advancing youth sport. It is also essential for ensuring that opportunities for improved health, stronger community engagement, and more effective marketing outreach are accessible to Latine families.

2.3 Current Study

This study contributes to sport management and youth development scholarship by centering the experiences of Latine parents and their efforts to support their children's participation in US youth sport. Guided by LatCrit, it examines how barriers such as language, cost, and limited outreach intersect to shape parents' perspectives on opportunities for US youth sport involvement. Through LatCrit, the research underscores how parents' narratives not only reveal the challenges they encounter but also illuminate the strategies they envision for expanding sport opportunities. In this context, the present study was guided by three research question:

RQ1: What are the primary barriers to youth sport participation in the US, as perceived by Latine parents?

RQ2: To what extent do Latine parents recognize the benefits associated with their children's involvement in US youth sport?

RQ3: What strategies do Latine parents recommend that sport programs and community centers implement to better support Latine youth participation in US sport?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

This study adopted a qualitative phenomenological research design to critically examine interviews with 20 Latine parents whose children participated in youth sport programs in the US. Nine participants were initially recruited through convenience sampling. These individuals had previously participated in a 2022 community-based research initiative I facilitated, which helped build trust and rapport with local Latine families in a Southern US city (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Purposeful sampling, as described by Patton (2002), is commonly employed in qualitative research to identify and select cases that offer rich, relevant insights. This strategy entails selecting participants who possess substantial knowledge of, or direct experience with, the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The remaining 11 participants were recruited through snowball sampling, as initial

participants referred to other Latine parents within their networks (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2017). This combined sampling strategy supported the inclusion of diverse, yet contextually grounded perspectives.

The final participants included 20 Latine parents, 12 Latina mothers and 8 Latino fathers. All participants self-identified as either men or women, were of Mexican descent, and reported prior engagement with youth sport for their children in the US. To protect participant confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned in accordance with ethical research standards. Following guidance from Saunders et al. (2014), pseudonyms were selected to be culturally respectful and reflective of participants' identities, reinforcing the study's commitment to community-centered and ethically grounded research (*see Table 1*). Moreover, it is also important to note that none of the participants were married to one another or otherwise related. Each individual contributed a distinct perspective based on their own family experiences.

Table 1. Pseudonymous participant names and self-identified ethnicity

Pseudonymous Names	Ethnicity	Gender
Maria	Mexican	Woman
Guadalupe	Mexican	Woman
Rosa	Mexican	Woman
Carmen	Mexican	Woman
Ana	Mexican	Woman
Leticia	Mexican	Woman
Veronica	Mexican	Woman
Patricia	Mexican	Woman
Yolanda	Mexican	Woman
Silvia	Mexican	Woman
Beatriz	Mexican	Woman
Norma	Mexican	Woman
Jose	Mexican	Man
Miguel	Mexican	Man
Luis	Mexican	Man
Javier	Mexican	Man
Carlos	Mexican	Man
Ramon	Mexican	Man
Eduardo	Mexican	Man
Hector	Mexican	Man

Source: Created by the author.

3.2 Procedure

Engaging Latine parents of youth sport participants required culturally responsive strategies and sustained relational engagement. Trust was established through a prior community-based research initiative I facilitated, which fostered familiarity and credibility within the local community. This preexisting rapport served as a critical foundation for recruitment, enabling participants to feel comfortable sharing their experiences. As Glesne (2016) asserts, rapport is not merely a methodological convenience but a vital component of ethical qualitative inquiry, essential for eliciting rich, authentic data.

Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and followed a semi-structured format consisting of 10 open-ended questions. Creswell and Poth (2018) note that semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility in probing participant experiences while maintaining consistency across interviews. This format supported deeper exploration of specific themes related to youth sport participation.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data collection was guided by a phenomenological framework that prioritized the lived experiences of Latine parents navigating the US youth sport system. Interviews were conducted until thematic saturation was reached. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2017) state that this is the point at which no new insights or patterns emerged from participant responses. Therefore, a total of 20 semi-structured interviews were completed, each designed to elicit open-ended reflections on youth sport participation barriers, benefits and strategies for helping improve youth sport involvement.

Additionally, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns across the data, allowing themes to emerge inductively from participants' narratives (Terry et al., 2017). These emergent themes were then interpreted through the lens of LatCrit, which provided a critical framework for understanding how Latine parents' race and language intersect in the US youth sport context. This dual approach: grounded in participant voice and informed by theory, enabled a contextually rich analysis (Patton, 2002).

To enhance the study's trustworthiness, participants were given the option to select their preferred interview language. All 20 chose Spanish, and interviews were conducted accordingly. As Temple and Young (2004) emphasize, language choice in qualitative research is not a procedural detail but a critical element in honoring cultural identity and fostering relational trust. The interviewer, a native Spanish speaker, conducted the interviews with fluency and cultural sensitivity, facilitating open dialogue. This linguistic alignment enabled participants to articulate their experiences with clarity and authenticity, thereby enriching the integrity of the data (Squires, 2008).

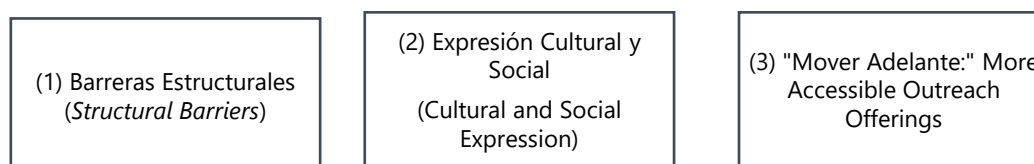
Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasized that member checking is a foundational strategy for enhancing credibility and trustworthiness in qualitative research. Therefore, in this study, emergent themes were shared with participants to solicit feedback and confirm that the analysis accurately reflected their lived experiences (Patton, 2002). To further support qualitative rigor, I maintained a reflexive stance throughout the data analysis process. I acknowledged my positionality as a Latina with prior involvement in US youth sport and familial ties to current participants. This shared identity positioned me as part of the cultural in-group, which offered relational proximity but also required careful attention to potential bias (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2017). To mitigate this, I limited disclosure of personal and familiar US youth sport experiences and maintained a reflexivity journal. As Dodgson (2019) notes that a reflexivity journal is especially important when "considering similarities between the research and participants" (p.20). Overall, this layered approach ensured that the findings remained grounded in participant voice and aligned with principles of qualitative trustworthiness.

4. Findings

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to examine Latine parents' perspectives on the barriers, benefits, and recommendations associated with youth sport participation in the US. Drawing on participants' responses and guided by LatCrit, this study foregrounds the voices of Latine families whose perspectives are often underrepresented in US sport research (Alanis et al., 2022). Findings revealed that parents described US youth sport as financially burdensome, difficult to access, and shaped by underinvestment in local infrastructure. Yet, they also articulated a deep belief in sport's value for fostering family cohesion, academic growth, and long-term career opportunities. Many expressed a desire to enroll their children in additional sport activities but noted that outreach and marketing efforts were rarely available in Spanish. This absence limited awareness of available programs and constrained informed participation, an issue with significant implications, given the robust body of research demonstrating the positive impact of youth sport environments on children's physical, emotional, and social development (Bengtsson et al., 2025; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Jones, 2024).

Through inductive coding, three overarching themes were identified (see Figure 1). The first theme, (1) "Barreras Estructurales (Structural Barriers)", reflects Latine parents' descriptions of financial constraints and systemic exclusion from youth sport environments. The second theme, (2) "Expresión Cultural y Social (Cultural and Social Expression)", highlights how youth sport functions as a space for family bonding and social growth, particularly in helping children navigate US norms while maintaining cultural identity. The third theme, (3) "Mover Adelante: More Accessible Outreach", captures parents' readiness to participate when outreach efforts and programming are culturally relevant, community-centered, and delivered in formats that reflect their language, values, and local context.

Figure 1. Overarching themes identified in the study findings.



Source: Created by the author.

4.1 Barreras Estructurales (Structural Barriers)

The first research question (RQ1) examined the barriers to youth sport participation in the US as perceived by Latine parents. Consistent with the theoretical framework of LatCrit, which underscores how classism, language oppression, and institutional neglect intersect to shape Latine experiences in the US; parents identified (1) **"Barreras Estructurales (Structural Barriers)"** as the most salient theme limiting participation in US youth sport. Guadalupe a participant in the study stated, *"Our neighborhood parks and sport spaces are not safe... go to the other [white] neighborhoods and you will see safe."* Likewise, Ana highlighted issues of limited availability within schools and community sport programs, *"It is hard for me to enroll my kids into youth sport clubs, there are limited spots available...compared to other programs...in nicer communities."* These accounts underscore how geographic disparities, institutional disinvestment, and exclusion combine to limit youth sport participation.

Financial barriers were also pervasive. Parents noted that costs associated with fees, equipment, and travel frequently excluded their families. Maria explained, *"It's too expensive when you add uniforms, travel, and registration fees. Sometimes we just can't afford for all of our kids to play."* This is consistent with existing research indicating that groups from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (i.e., Black and Indigenous) have historically faced exclusion from organized sport (Raw, 2020). Transportation, compounded by irregular work schedules, emerged as another barrier. Ramon noted, *"If the games are far, it's impossible to attend... due to my work schedule."* Collectively, these experiences illustrate how youth sport in the US often becomes a selective privilege rather than a universally accessible developmental opportunity (Alanis et al., 2024; McGovern, 2021b; Powers et al., 2020).

Language inaccessibility further compounded exclusion. Several parents described delayed or inaccessible communication about sport programs. Beatriz shared, *"We don't hear about the programs until it's too late, and everything is full."* Similarly, Patricia noted, *"All the flyers come in English, so many families just don't know what's going on."* Yolanda affirmed this saying, *"When everything is in English, it feels like the programs are not meant for us. Families are left out."* These findings reflect how language, socioeconomic status, and race intersect to create structural oppressions that limit Latine sport participation in the US (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001; McGovern, 2021b).

Taken together, these results demonstrate that financial constraints, transportation challenges, linguistic exclusion, and underinvestment in community infrastructure converge to restrict Latine youth sport participation in the US. From a LatCrit perspective, these intersecting inequities reveal how systemic exclusion is embedded within the structure of US youth sport, highlighting the need for intentional change.

4.2 Expresión Cultural y Social (Cultural and Social Expression)

The second research question (RQ2) explored the perceived benefits of youth sport participation. Despite the numerous structural challenges identified in RQ1, parents consistently emphasized the meaningful role of sport as a vehicle for cultural expression. Accordingly, the theme of (2) **"Expresión Cultural y Social (Cultural and Social Expression)"** emerged from the data. Many parents described youth sport as a vital site for their children to make friends, develop language skills, and cultivate a sense of belonging in their communities. For example, Javier explained, *"Sports help my children feel included...like they are part of the community here."* Similarly, Miguel reflected on how sport provided his children opportunities to engage across cultural lines, *"Through soccer, they meet kids who are different from them...and they learn to work together."* These accounts highlight the capacity of sport to foster both social connectedness and intercultural understanding, which parents viewed as essential to their children's development in US society.

Parents also described sport as an important avenue for their children's English-language learning and confidence building. Rosa noted, *"My son practices his English from talking to his teammates...he wants to understand and be part of them."* For families navigating communication barriers, youth sport becomes a unique site where language acquisition and socialization intersect. Leticia added, *"On the field, my daughter is not afraid to speak English. She tries, even if she makes mistakes, because she wants to communicate with her teammates...this has given her more confidence at school."* These experiences are consistent with prior scholarship demonstrating that youth sport can foster second-language learning, promote intercultural communication, and build confidence among immigrant youth (Doherty & Taylor, 2007; Lundkvist et al., 2020; Spaaij et al., 2015; Stodolska & Shinew, 2010).

Furthermore, parents emphasized the role of youth sport in preserving and celebrating cultural identity. Several described soccer in particular as a meaningful connection to their heritage and as a way of passing traditions to their children. Hector shared, *"Soccer is part of who we are. When my kids play, they don't just play...they learn about our culture and where we come from."* Similarly, Luis reflected, *"For us, soccer keeps our family close and grounded to our roots."* Norma added, *"When we go to my daughter's games, it feels like home...we bring food, play Spanish music, and share time with other families."* These narratives

illustrate what Sheng et al. (2025) described as sport functioning as a cultural bridge, enabling families to integrate into US society while maintaining strong ties to their cultural heritage.

This dual role of sport, as both a site of cultural and social expression echoes previous research highlighting how immigrant communities use sport to reinforce identity while navigating new contexts (Alanis et al., 2024; Allen et al., 2010; Stodolska & Shinew, 2010). For example, Smith et al. (2018) found that culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) migrants “maintain and enact their cultural heritage” by actively constructing “sporting spaces” that validate their existing cultural capital (p. 864). Viewed through a LatCrit lens, these findings reveal how Latine families position sport as a practice of counter-storytelling, a means of asserting presence in systems that often underrepresent them. In doing so, Latine families transform youth sport into a space where cultural identity is not lost but reimagined as sources of strength, pride, and agency for future generations.

4.3 “Mover Adelante:” More Accessible Outreach Offerings

The third research question (RQ3) examined Latine parents’ recommendations for how programs and community centers could better support youth sport participation in the US. Parents consistently emphasized the need for more accessible opportunities in their neighborhoods. As such, the theme of (3) ““Mover Adelante:” More Accessible Outreach” emerged. Carlos shared, *“If there are more opportunities for my kid to play youth sport in my community, I would make time to take my son to this... it’s important.”* Similarly, Silvia echoed, *“It is simple... have more events... let the community have so many events that people get tired of it. Right now, we don’t have that.”* For many families, the scarcity of sport programs represented a major barrier to sustained participation. As Veronica summarized, *“We need to “move adelante” and build more youth sport programs.”*

Stodolska et al. (2014) argued that it is essential to understand minority youth’s “social conditions,” including unique family circumstances and the “characteristics of the communities in which they reside,” as these factors may influence their sport participation (p. 628). This notion is echoed in the present data, as participants emphasized that outreach must be community-driven and embedded within trusted, familiar settings (e.g., schools, churches, and community centers). Eduardo explained, *“If they bring the programs to our neighborhood schools or church, more families will go. Not everyone can travel far.”* Moreover, Ramon highlighted the need for proximity and relevance, stating, *“...just make games closer to us.”*

Parents further stressed that outreach often relied on informal networks rather than systematic communication. Leticia reflected, *“We usually find out through word of mouth... other parents tell us what’s going on... I don’t hear anything from community leaders.”* Such accounts underscore how responsibility for navigating access is shifted onto families, perpetuating inequities and reinforcing LatCrit’s emphasis on institutional neglect as a mechanism of exclusion (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Overall, the overarching theme of ““Mover Adelante:” More Accessible Outreach” highlights that participation for Latine youth in sport requires not only the availability of programs, but also culturally attuned outreach efforts.

5. Discussion

This study elucidates how Latine parents navigate youth sport participation in the US. Consistent with prior scholarship, parents identified structural barriers such as; financial constraints, limited institutional support, and language exclusion as central obstacles to participation (Coakley, 2016; Eime et al., 2013; Wickes, 2023). These findings align with LatCrit’s emphasis on the intersection of race, socioeconomic class, and language as factors that limit access to sport opportunities (Alanis et al., 2024; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Addressing these barriers is essential to ensuring that youth sport operates as an inclusive domain for all families.

In addition to structural barriers, parents underscored youth sport’s role as a culturally and socially significant space. Blanco-Ayala et al. (2025) noted that “sport and physical activity” foster opportunities for social interaction among immigrant women, facilitating “a sense of belonging in host communities” (p.18). This dynamic was mirrored in the present study, where youth sport cultivated family cohesion, preserved cultural identity, and supported children’s navigation of US social norms. These findings reinforce previous work highlighting sport’s dual function as a site of cultural expression for immigrant and ethnic minority communities (Alanis et al., 2024; Smith et al., 2018; Murillo et al., 2021).

Finally, participants advocated for more accessible and culturally resonant outreach. They stressed that effective communication must be community-driven and embedded within trusted institutions (e.g., schools, churches, and community centers). In addition, parents highlighted the importance of language accessibility in youth sport marketing materials. Several explained that receiving information in their native language would make it easier to understand available opportunities and would signal that programs genuinely valued their participation. Consistent with LatCrit, these findings suggest that advancing Latine participation in youth sport requires not only expanding the availability of programs but also affirming culturally attuned outreach. Only by co-designing outreach with the communities they intend to serve can US youth sport organizations meaningfully advance participation.

6. Limitations and Future Directions

This study is subject to several limitations that warrant consideration. First, the modest sample size. While sufficient for achieving thematic saturation, it limits the generalizability of findings beyond the specific context examined. Future studies should aim to include a larger participant pool to enhance transferability and comparative insight (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Second, the study focused exclusively on Mexican-descent Latine parents whose children participated in youth sport programs within the US. While this targeted approach yielded culturally rich and contextually grounded data, it may not reflect the broader diversity of Latine experiences across ethnic groups. Future studies should expand to include a wider range of Latine populations.

Third, the use of convenience sampling may have introduced selection bias. As Maxwell (2013) notes, such bias can limit the diversity of perspectives and restrict the analytic range of qualitative findings. In this study, nine participants were primarily recruited through existing community networks, which may have excluded families with less institutional access. While these strategies were appropriate for accessing a trusted and relationally engaged population (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002), future research should broaden recruitment efforts to include Latine families from varied geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Doing so will provide a more comprehensive understanding of US youth sport related experiences.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the experiences of Latine parents with youth sport participation in the US. Findings revealed that structural barriers (e.g., costs, limited program availability, and language exclusion) consistently hindered families' ability to access youth sport. Despite these challenges, parents viewed sport as a powerful avenue for their children's social and cultural expression. The data also demonstrated that outreach and marketing practices serve as critical gatekeepers; Latine families frequently missed opportunities when program communications were not linguistically or culturally tailored to their needs.

To address these inequities, youth sport organizations must forge genuine partnerships with Latine communities and co-design outreach and marketing strategies that respond to specific cultural requirements. Such efforts are essential for transforming youth sport into an environment where all children can participate and thrive.

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