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*Manuscript title: Navigating the circles of social life: Understanding pathways to sport drop-
out among French teenagers*

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1

2 **Abstract**

3 Sports practice is a way to be physically active. Despite public health efforts to support
4 it, teenagers' sport participation is declining in some European countries. One reason
5 for the decline is drop-out from sports practice. Various analytical frameworks have
6 been applied to this issue but little is known about how teenagers understand their own
7 pathway in the social context, ending with a drop-out from sports practice. This study
8 aimed to identify reasons given by teenagers about sports practice drop-out situated
9 within the circles of their everyday lives, through 100 semi-structured interviews. The
10 results made it possible to classify the reasons for dropping out into five themes:
11 friendship, body, family, school, and sport. Two processes lead to drop-out: constraints
12 which prevent access to the circle of sports practice and/or a decision-making that
13 brings them out of it. The respondents could mention one or multiple reasons,
14 accumulating (snowball effect) or following one another (cascade effect). Depending on
15 the moment of drop-out, some circles of social life played a preponderant role. The
16 family seemed to be central in the decision to drop out during primary school, whereas
17 sport itself and school were influential in middle and high schools respectively. The
18 results showed that the more recent the drop-out, the more the teenagers planned to
19 resume sports practice. These data are relevant for health education policies to prevent
20 physical inactivity through sport. It is important not only to remove the constraints that
21 prevent access to the circle of sports practice, but also to promote the most pleasurable
22 sports experiences.

23 **Keywords:** sport; social life; drop-out; teenagers; public health

1

2 **Introduction**

3 Sports practice is a way to be physically active and is linked to numerous long-term
 4 health benefits (Bangsbo et al., 2016; Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee,
 5 2008; Telama et al., 2014): physical (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010) psychological and social
 6 (Bélanger et al., 2011; Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity, & Payne, 2013). The conclusions of
 7 these works about benefits are used in health education and sport promotion programs
 8 (Coakley, 2011). However, despite policies in favor of physical activity and sport
 9 participation, more and more teenagers (7-20 years old – Balish, McLaren, Rainham, &
 10 Blanchard, 2014) lose interest in sports practice in western countries (Adams, 2006; Martin,
 11 Dollman, Norton, & Robertson, 2005; Martins, Marques, Sarmento, & Carreiro da Costa,
 12 2015).

13 In France, the limited success of sport promotion campaigns – such as *Manger Bouger*
 14 [Eat – Move] and the *Programme National Nutrition Santé* [National Healthy Nutrition Plan]
 15 (Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Santé, 2011) – has been shown by national studies
 16 (Equipe de surveillance et d'épidémiologie nutritionnelle [ESEN], 2017; Gimbert & Nehmar,
 17 2018) and also by regional studies (Luiggi, Travert, & Griffet, 2018). This last study
 18 demonstrated that in the third most populous *département* (territorial and administrative
 19 division) of France (Bouches-du-Rhône, 2,016,622 inhabitants in 2015 (Institut national de la
 20 statistique et des études économiques [INSEE], 2018)), sport participation decreased between
 21 2001 and 2015. Teenagers' drop-out from sports practice is one reason for this decrease. We
 22 therefore aimed to understand this drop-out in this context.

23 The topic of drop-out from sports practice has been studied through different
 24 analytical frameworks. The ecological model of physical activity (PA) behavior (Spence &

Lee, 2003) classifies factors that influence PA and sport participation into three categories: intrapersonal (e.g. attitude, perception, motivation), social (e.g. friend, family, professionals), and environmental (e.g. opportunities, access) (Martins et al., 2015; Sallis & Owen, 1998). In an analytical perspective, these factors are identified as facilitators or barriers to sports practice (Eime et al., 2015; Humbert et al., 2008; Humbert et al., 2006; Martins et al., 2015; Spence & Lee, 2003). However, this approach addresses these barriers in isolation, without considering ‘the combination and interaction of factors’ (Bauman et al., 2012, p. 32).

Another approach uses the model of leisure constraints, described initially by Crawford and Godbey (1987), and then enriched several times (Crane & Temple, 2015; Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991; Godbey, Crawford, & Shen, 2010; McQuarrie & Jackson, 2002). It focuses on the study of constraints that affect the relationship between sports preferences and sports participation. Constraints are classified into three categories: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. This approach ‘recognize[s] that interactions exist between *factors* on the three levels’ (Godbey et al., 2010, p. 118) and recommends exploring ‘relationships between constraints’ (p. 128).

Finally, other researchers (de Bruyn & Bringé, 2006; Chevalier, 1998; Chevalier & Dussart, 2002; Forté, 2006; Joncheray, Laporte, & Tenèze, 2015; Lafabrière, 2001; Prévitali, 2013; Routier, 2013) situate the drop-out phenomenon in duration, using retrospective or longitudinal methods. In this perspective, the authors study continuities and breaks in individual trajectories. The issue is the interactions of domains of social life (Lahire, 1998) or ‘life contexts’ (Bidart, 2008, p. 560) that influence individual decisions. More specifically, they consider relationships between work and leisure (Chevalier & Dussart, 2002; Forté, 2006; Routier, 2013), sport and school (Forté, 2006), sport and family (Forté, 2006; Joncheray et al., 2015; Lafabrière, 2001), sport and friendship (Forté, 2006; Joncheray et al., 2015; Prévitali, 2013), sport and body (Joncheray et al., 2015; Routier, 2013), sport and romantic

relationships (Forté, 2006; Prévitali, 2013; Routier, 2013), sport participation and sports context (de Bruyn & Bringé, 2006; Chevalier, 1998; Joncheray et al., 2015; Prévitali, 2013). The process of drop-out is considered as a bifurcation in the ‘life course’ (Abbott, 2001; Bidart, 2012; de Coninck & Godard, 1990). When a domain disappears (e.g. sport), it modifies the structure of the social life.

In this way, we tried to understand how the participation ‘in sports [is] integrally tied to the way young people viewed themselves and their connection to the social world in which they lived’ (Coakley & White, 1992, p. 32). This approach is part of the more general phenomenological perspective of a sociology of knowledge, which ‘is concerned with the relationship between human thought and the social context within which it arises’ (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 4). Our study addressed the way teenagers understand their own pathway in the social context, ending with a drop-out from sports practice. We consider this pathway as a conjugation of human activities whose place and time allocated vary according to the respective meanings that teenagers give them. These activities occur in what Simmel (1890) calls ‘*Kreise*’ [circles] of social life. What characterizes modern culture is the possibility for an isolated individual to belong to as many circles as he wishes. The aim of our study was to identify the diversity of circles and to identify the processes that cause teenagers to drop-out the circle of sports practice.

Materials and methods

Participants

This article reports the results of a study conducted in 2017 in eight public schools (free, secular and compulsory until the age of 16, which account for 78.8% of students enrolled in middle and high schools in France – Ministère de l’Education nationale, 2018).

This study has been conducted in the third most populous *département* of France (INSEE, 2018) in which a decrease in sport participation has been observed between 2001 and 2015 (Luiggi, Travert, & Griffet, 2018). We selected four middle schools and four high schools, according to several criteria relating to the type of schools (classified as advantaged, disadvantaged or mixed) and their geography (in town and in the countryside). The study was authorized by the Rector of the regional school authority (*Académie*), the heads of the eight schools and the teachers of the classes in which we intervened. The students' parents were informed and had to give their written consent. We ensured the anonymity of the data.

A sample of 395 teenagers (Age=15.7, Range=13-20, 53.9% girls; 49.4% low socio-economic status (SES)) had to answer a short questionnaire: 185 pupils in the final grade of middle school level and 210 pupils in the two final grades of high school. This questionnaire allowed us to identify teenagers who did not practice a sports activity. 284 teenagers were active (50.7% girls; 46.8% low SES) and 111 inactive (62.2% girls; 35.1% low SES). In this group, girls practiced less sport than boys (diff=24.4%, $\chi^2=4.22$, $p < 0.05$), in line with the literature (ESEN, 2017; Luiggi, Travert, & Griffet, 2018; Toftegaard-Støckel, Nielsen, Ibsen, & Andersen, 2011). 100 teenagers declared having dropped out of sports practice (59 girls; 39 low SES) and 11 having never practiced a sport, outside compulsory physical education and sport lessons (10 girls; all low SES). Since this article is concerned with the drop-out from sports practice, the case of the 11 teenagers who declared having never practiced is not covered.

Data collection and procedure

The 100 teenagers agreed verbally to participate in a semi-structured individual interview, conducted individually by two authors of the article: one researcher interviewed

one teenager. After questions about his/her leisure activities, the researcher invited him/her to give and develop the reason(s) for dropping out of sports practice, and whether he/she wanted to resume.

Data analysis

The recorded interviews (Mean=7.57 min, Range=2.59 min – 18.00 min) were fully transcribed to facilitate their processing. The latter took place in four phases. The first step was to read the transcripts several times in order to become familiar with the data and to have an overview. Secondly, the reason(s) invoked for dropping out were identified for each respondent, as meaning units. The data were entered in an Excel® table. During this phase, no analytical framework was applied: all the meaning units were included in the table. Then, the data were repeatedly reviewed and continually coded (Kirk & McPhail, 2003), inductively (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008). We employed a thematic approach in analysis of the interviews (Riessman, 2008) to cluster common reasons for dropping out. The reasons mentioned were grouped in emerging themes and sub-themes independently by the three authors. Discussions led to a consensual classification of the data. The last phase examined the reasons for dropping out according to the moment it occurred: primary school (age 6-10), middle school (11-14) or high school (15-17).

Results

Five themes group the reasons for dropping out from sports practice

Table 1 shows the reasons for dropping out, rooted in five emerging themes, themselves divided into sub-themes. The number of teenagers who mentioned each theme is given.

[Table 1 near here]

Friendship

Friendship was mentioned by the teenagers as influencing drop-out. They could be influenced by friendships inside or outside sports practice.

Within sports practice, the drop-out of one or more friends provoked the respondent also to drop-out: *‘I was in a mountain bike club with a few friends. But when they stopped, I stopped too. They didn’t continue and I did the same as them’* (M9, boy, 16 years old (y/o), low SES, cross-country cycling, club, drop-out at 15 y/o).

The attraction of friendships outside sports practice could cause drop-out. K2 (boy, 17 y/o, low SES, boxing, club, drop-out at 11 y/o) described the attraction to *‘neighborhood’* as a progressive process: *‘While I was boxing, I was already a little more in the neighborhood, whereas before I wasn’t at all there. And when I wasn’t well focused on boxing, I went to the neighborhood, I missed training. I would do one training, then for two weeks I wouldn’t go.’* He ended up totally dropping out of boxing. N6 (girl, 18 y/o, high SES, dancing, club, drop-out at 15 y/o) declared she preferred reserving time to *‘go out’* with friends and so she dropped out.

Body

An injury could end sports practice. M12 (boy, 20 y/o, low SES, soccer, club, drop-out at 15 y/o) declared having stopped practicing soccer: *‘I had broken my ankle. It was for 3 or 4 months, I was wearing a cast.’* The fear of being hurt again is also an obstacle to practice. J4 (girl, 16 y/o, high SES, horse-riding, club, drop-out at 15 y/o) tried to resume riding after breaking her shin by falling off her horse: *‘After, I tried to start again and everything. But I was too scared, every time I was super stressed before starting a lesson or whatever, then I*

1 *thought it was useless.*’ A decrease in physical abilities was another reason. It included back
2 pains, growth pains, chronic infections, chronic fatigue, cigarette consumption or asthma. H4
3 (boy, 14 y/o, high-SES, athletics, club, drop-out at 12 y/o) said: *‘Sometimes, in action, I had*
4 *an asthma attack and all at once I had to stop, and so I preferred to give up athletics.’*

5 *Family*

6 The reasons given refer to mobility and control.

7 Regarding mobility, moving home was a reason: the absence of a club near the new
8 place of residence led to drop-out. *‘We moved home. We looked [for a club] in the area. We*
9 *couldn’t find one, so it was difficult’* (I5, boy, 14 y/o, low SES, judo, club, drop-out at 11 y/o).
10 The family’s availability to drive the teenager to training and competition venues was also
11 mentioned: *‘My parents didn’t want to [enroll me again], because they always had to take me*
12 *to the matches and so on, and sometimes it took a lot of time’* (R5, boy, 14 y/o, low SES,
13 soccer, club, drop-out at 11 y/o). Another teenager did not want to take up his parents’ time: *‘I*
14 *don’t have a driving license, and as I live far away [...], my parents were forced to take me*
15 *there, and it bothered me that they had to do that for me’* (J8, girl, 17 y/o, low-SES, dancing,
16 club, drop-out at 13 y/o).

17 The family could control the teenager, which led to drop-out. The family is afraid of
18 the risk of injury. H1 (boy, 14 y/o, low SES, karate, club, drop-out at 10 y/o) gave up karate:
19 *‘A small injury that I had, I didn’t want to stop, I wanted to carry on but my mother said... to*
20 *avoid hurting myself even more.’* N1 (girl, 16 y/o, low SES, basket-ball, club, drop-out at 14
21 y/o) explained that her family said: *‘You are the only girl.’* For other respondents, the family
22 priorities studies: *‘I was often tired, my mother was a bit fed up, so suddenly she told me to stop*
23 *and devote myself to my studies’* (T1, boy, 15 y/o, low SES, athletics, club, drop-out at 13
24 y/o). Sometimes, drop-out was a punishment: *‘My father didn’t want me to continue. I was*

1 *messing around too much in class. It was basically a punishment [...] so, he told me to stop*
2 *playing soccer'* (D1, boy, 16 y/o, low SES, soccer, club, drop-out at 13 y/o). Conversely,
3 drop-out was also the means to break away from the control of the family. M8 (boy, 17 y/o,
4 high SES, climbing, club, drop-out at 16 y/o) declared that he stopped climbing because he
5 *'wanted to break away from [his] father's influence.'*

6 *School*

7 This theme groups distance from school and the 'pupil's job' (Perrenoud, 1994).

8 Distance from school sometimes required becoming a boarder: *'I was a boarder in*
9 *seconde* [1st grade of high school], *so I couldn't go to training and I stopped'* (B1, boy, 18
10 y/o, low SES, soccer, club, drop-out at 16 y/o). Travelling time to school was another reason:
11 *'Because my high school is a long way from home, I don't have time. When I get back, it's*
12 *late and I don't have time to play sports'* (M5, girl, 17 y/o, low SES, swimming, club, drop-
13 out at 15 y/o).

14 School schedules are a constraint related to the 'pupil's job'. S4 (girl, 17 y/o, high
15 SES, badminton, club, drop-out at 14 y/o) explained: *'I don't have time, in fact. The schedules*
16 *don't match. Before, I did a lot of sport on Saturday mornings and Wednesday afternoons.*
17 *But now I have classes on Wednesday afternoons, it's done for.'* Time spent on schoolwork
18 was another reason. Two scenarios appeared: anticipation and regulation. On the one hand,
19 dropping out is seen as preventing a possible lack of time for schoolwork: *'I thought that with*
20 *the classes, I would not have time'* (A10, girl, 17 y/o, high-SES, handball, club, drop-out at 16
21 y/o). On the other hand, respondents dropped out because they had found they needed more
22 time to study: *'When I left [the sports club] at 7 pm, I didn't really have time to do my*
23 *homework and everything, so I stopped.'* (H2, boy, 14 y/o, low SES, taekwondo, club, drop-
24 out at 11 y/o).

1 *Sport*

2 Four sub-themes appeared: access, success, features of sports practice, and
3 interactions in it.

4 Accessibility was firstly financial: *'I preferred to stop because the sports license is*
5 *very expensive.'* (A6, girl, 17 y/o, low SES, BMX, club, drop-out at 11 y/o) Drop-out was also
6 due to the absence of a club or a team: *'I stopped boxing because I had no choice because the*
7 *club had closed'* (J1, girl, 15 y/o, high SES, boxing, club, drop-out at 14 y/o).

8 When teenagers had not had successful experiences and felt benefits, they might also
9 drop out. They did not succeed in acquiring skills: *'I couldn't perform the moves [in Krav-*
10 *Maga]. So I got fed up with it. And then I stopped'* (M1, girl, 15 y/o, low SES, krav-maga,
11 club, drop-out at 14 y/o). They did not succeed in reaching the same level as others: *'I was in*
12 *a group with boys only and because I did not have a good level and, in fact, I was just there to*
13 *pick up the balls'* (P2, girl, 17 y/o, high SES, tennis, club, 12 y/o). They did not experience
14 winning: *'We were always losing, and I stopped'* (A5, boy, 18 y/o, low SES, soccer, club,
15 drop-out at 16 y/o).

16 Encountering the features of a sports practice could lead to drop-out. Reasons turn on
17 the balance between the absence and the excess of competition: *'It was mainly because I*
18 *didn't do many competitions that I stopped, I think'* (N7, boy, 14 y/o, high-SES, judo, club,
19 drop-out at 11 y/o); *'After a year, I didn't like the atmosphere. It's too competitive'* (U1, boy,
20 16 y/o, high SES, gymnastics, club, drop-out at 13 y/o). The repetitive aspect in learning sport
21 was boring: *'Every week, when I went, I did 2 hours a week and every time we repeated the*
22 *same throw. We learned nothing new'* (J5, boy, 13 y/o, low SES, judo, club, drop-out at 11
23 y/o). The relationship with effort could lead to drop-out: *'I was too tired [...] Sometimes, I felt*
24 *pain everywhere'* (I4, girl, 17 y/o, low-SES, handball, club, drop-out at 14 y/o). Too serious

1 training was another reason: *'I went to have a good time, but it felt more like I was in a*
2 *competition'* (A3, girl, 20 y/o, low SES, swimming, club, 16 y/o, club). Obligations related to
3 organized sport (i.e. every week at the same time in the same place) were also mentioned:
4 *'It's just that I don't like, I dunno, the schedules'* (R6, boy, 14 y/o, low SES, multisport, club,
5 drop-out at 10 y/o). Some teenagers preferred to do another activity (play a musical
6 instrument, video games, do theater, 'hang out') more in line with the desires of the moment:
7 *'In the evening after school, I don't want to go somewhere, I want to be at home. So, I don't*
8 *want to be in a room with people'* (C5, girl, 17 y/o, high SES, horse-riding, self-organized
9 practice, drop-out at 12 y/o).

10 The last sub-theme concerns interactions between the teenager and others. The
11 departure of a coach could provoke drop-out: *'The coach changed. And I didn't like the new*
12 *coach'* (I1, girl, 17 y/o, low SES, gymnastic, club, drop-out at 13 y/o). The degradation of
13 relations with the coach was another reason: *'I didn't get along with my dance teacher. I*
14 *couldn't stand being given orders'* (M2, girl, 14 y/o, high SES, dancing, club, drop-out at 13
15 y/o). A bad atmosphere in the club/team could also favor drop-out: *'It's true that team*
16 *cohesion is important, and I didn't get along with them especially well, it wasn't the same*
17 *type of people and I didn't want to play in a team I didn't get on with'* (T5, boy, 17 y/o, high
18 SES, handball, club, drop-out at 16 y/o). The gaze of other people was sometimes mentioned:
19 *'Yeah, I didn't like to perform in front of people, and then, I was 10 times fatter. So, the*
20 *costumes, all that stuff, that wasn't my thing'* (P4, girl, 14 y/o, low SES, dancing, club, drop-
21 out at 10 y/o).

22 ***How the reasons for drop-out combine***

23 Three scenarios appeared.

In the first, only one reason was given to explain drop-out from sports practice. N2 (girl, 14 y/o, low SES, horse-riding, club, drop-out at 12 y/o) explained having dropped out ‘*because of [middle] school. [...], I have to work... for my studies*’ whereas participant T4 (boy, 17 y/o, high SES, tennis, club, drop-out at 15 y/o) said: ‘*It’s just that I wasn’t good enough and I didn’t want to go back any more.*’

Then, several reasons belonging to a single theme were given. A9 (girl, 19 y/o, low SES, dancing, club, drop-out at 13 y/o) dropped out of hip-hop for two reasons: a bad atmosphere in the group and the fact that it was ‘*too serious*’:

First, I was in a group where they were all younger than me. So, the year I stopped, that was one reason. And also because in fact our goal was to put on a show at the end of the year, and I didn’t like that because suddenly it became a constraint in the sense that you had to learn, and it wasn’t fun because you had to learn the routine, perform it well to do the show well.

For other respondents, several reasons belonging to several themes were invoked. Drop-out results from an accumulation or a sequence of reasons which follow one from another. M7 (boy, 16 y/o, low-SES, rugby, club, drop-out at 12 y/o) stopped playing rugby three years before the interview and explained: ‘*I broke my wrist and, also, I don’t know, I was a bit bored with rugby. In addition, I was in a team where I didn’t get on too well with everyone, some yes, some no. There was a bad atmosphere in the team.*’ In this case, there is an accumulation of reasons. A reason was given linked to the ‘body’ (an injury) to which is added a reason linked to the ‘sport’ (a bad atmosphere). A11 (boy, 15 y/o, high SES, taekwondo, club, drop-out at 15 y/o) identified his drop-out from taekwondo as resulting from a sequence of reasons:

1 *I stopped because I changed sports club in fact. I did a year in a club that I didn't like any*
2 *more, the club before. After that, in the next club, I didn't really know anyone, and I had a*
3 *hard time getting into the club. It was very competitive. And then I had a problem with my*
4 *leg. And that meant I was a bit behind the others. And when you fall behind in a competitive*
5 *club, you feel a bit sidelined. [...]* And I didn't have the time to fully motivate myself, since
6 *afterwards I also had a heavy workload because I had just started in high school.*

7 In this case, the participant explained that several reasons followed one after another
8 and ended up provoking his drop-out. A sequence of events and influences affected his way of
9 practicing a sport: the sports context, the decrease in physical abilities, and school pressure.

10 In both cases ('accumulation' or 'sequence'), the respondent sometimes identified one
11 reason as the main cause of his drop-out. In the previous example, the respondent hierarchized
12 the reasons for having dropped out: injury was the main reason.

13 ***Main themes at different stages of schooling***

14 The moment of drop-out could occur at different stages: primary school (age 6-10),
15 middle school (age 11-14) or high school (age 15-17). Figure 1 shows the number of reasons
16 given by theme for teenagers dropping out according to the stages of schooling. During
17 primary school, the number of drops-out was limited (9 respondents out of 100). However,
18 the themes of sport and family were primarily mentioned. Middle school was the moment
19 when the number of drops-out was greatest (56 respondents). The theme of sport was mainly
20 mentioned. Drop-out from sports practice during high school concerned 35 respondents. The
21 themes of sport and school were mainly mentioned. Reasons related to the body were given
22 for each moment of drop-out. The later the decision to drop out occurred, the less the theme
23 of family was underlined. On the other hand, the more the theme of friendship was
24 mentioned.

[Figure 1 near here]

Wish to resume sports practice

Among the 100 respondents, 18 did not want to resume, 35 remained uncertain, and 47 stated they would like to resume (47.5% of the girls and 46.3% of the boys; 38.5% of the high-SES respondents and 52.5% of the low-SES respondents). The more recent the drop-out was, the more the respondents wanted to resume: 22.2% of those who dropped out during primary school, 44.6% of those who dropped out during middle school, and 57.1% of those who dropped out during high school declared that they wanted to resume sports practice.

Discussion

In France, findings at national and regional levels have shown a decline in sports practice among teenagers. As sport is often a privileged leisure activity that allows people to be physically active, its drop-out can be problematic if it leads to a sedentary lifestyle. As PA and sports participation during adolescence are predictors of participation in adulthood (Telama et al., 2005), understanding the reasons why teenagers drop out assist the adjustment of public policies on health and/or the various sport education intervention strategies addressed to young people.

Drop-out manifests itself in two processes. In the first, the teenager is constrained to leave the circle of sports practice. The constraints are external, preventing access to the places of sports practice (e.g. no club/team, cost, distance) and internal, related to the body and physical capacities (e.g. injury) (Fokkema et al., 2018; Witt & Dangi, 2018). In the second case, the teenager decides to leave. The decision results from the tension between several circles (friends, family, school, sport), or within the same circle, in attraction-repulsion phenomenon (e.g. good friends in the club – poor relations with the coach). In this decision-

1 making situation, the advantages and disadvantages that specify the reason for pursuing or
2 stopping are equivalent and define an arbitrary field (Moles & Rohmer, 1976, p. 19). This
3 interpretation corresponds both to the different constraints models of drop-out (ecological
4 model of PA behavior and leisure constraints theory) and Simmel's social life circle model
5 (1890). It specifies the way in which human activities are combined.

6 Understanding drop-out is concerned with constraints and decisions. Two cases can be
7 considered. When only one reason is invoked, the problem consists in identifying whether it is
8 a constraint or a decision. When a set of reasons (within the same theme or related to different
9 themes) is underlined, drop-out appears as a more complex phenomenon (Coakley & White,
10 1992). What was previously called 'accumulation' of reasons is similar to a '*snowball effect*'
11 while the 'sequence' of reasons is a '*cascade effect*' (Dror, Morgan, Rando, & Nakhaeizadeh,
12 2017). In the cascade effect, one event causes another, which causes another, etc. This
13 process, also called '*chain effect*', ends with drop-out. The snowball effect is not only a
14 cascade from one reason to another, but the gradual addition of various reasons that integrate
15 with and influence one another. To stop the onset of a cascade or a snowball process, it would
16 be important to identify the first signs that suggest that drop-out may occur. Thus, sports
17 stakeholders (coaches, PE teachers, families, doctors, etc.) should listen carefully to
18 teenagers, regularly asking about what may prevent them from easily accessing the circle of
19 practice or push them out of it.

20 In the process leading to teenagers' drop-out, two circles of social life seem to be
21 particularly concerned: sport and school. Sport was mainly mentioned when they dropped out
22 during middle school (age 11-14). Sport is here itself at the origin of drop-out. But not just
23 any sport. In France, while studies on young people's sports show participation in different
24 contexts (in club, outside of a club, both) (Croutte & Müller, 2018), in our study, almost all of
25 the 100 adolescents interviewed dropped out of a club. Sport in a club could be considered as

1 ‘*serious*’ (Bale, 2002). Practitioners are constrained by rules set by others (Säfvenbom,
2 Wheaton, & Agans, 2018) and this frame could appear ‘too serious’, ‘too repetitive’, ‘too
3 competitive – or not enough’, etc. For them, an orientation towards a self-organized practice
4 could be appropriate. In this context, they can define an appropriate challenge (Caillois, 1958)
5 and adjust the rules themselves (Säfvenbom et al., 2018). Secondly, teenagers identified a
6 lack of skills, an insufficient level and absence of victories as reasons for dropping out. These
7 results are consistent with other studies on the influence of perception of sport competence
8 (Coakley & White, 1992; Crane & Temple, 2015; Humbert et al., 2006). Finally, they cited
9 the multiple interactions in the circle of sports practice. Notably, a bad atmosphere associated
10 with an age difference, a lack of cohesion, difficulties in integration or an absence of
11 conviviality was mentioned by several respondents, as underlined in other studies (Joncheray
12 et al., 2015; Lafabrègue, 2001; Prévitali, 2013). Setting up a ‘friendly framework’ (Gimbert &
13 Nehmar, 2018, p. 59) for sports practice (e.g. coach who listens, encourages and develops
14 empathy between practitioners) and maintaining a ‘club spirit’ (Prévitali, 2013, p. 184) close
15 to teenagers’ expectations could be solutions.

16 School is particularly invoked by teenagers who dropped out during high school. In
17 other studies it is mainly seen as a temporal constraint to sports practice because of the
18 schedules (Humbert et al., 2008; Bélanger et al., 2011; Martins et al., 2015). But the reason
19 most often invoked was school work (22 teenagers mentioned it). The ‘pupil’s job’
20 (Perrenoud, 1994) implies spending time travelling to and learning at school and a more or
21 less explicit pressure on teenagers to succeed academically (Knowles, Niven, & Fawcner,
22 2011; Bélanger et al., 2011; Martins et al., 2015). This need for academic success leads the
23 teenager to decide to increase school working time, to the detriment of leisure. However,
24 sports practice would improve achievement in school (Howie & Pate, 2012; Bangsbo et al.,
25 2016). Physical education and sport (PES) teachers in middle and high schools play a key

role. If one main objective of the PES discipline is that ‘the student experience the pleasure of practicing a reasoned and regular physical activity throughout life’ (Ministère de l’Education nationale et de la Jeunesse, 2019, p. 3), results linked to this objective need to be improved (Green, 2014; Taylor, 2017).

The two other circles – friends and family – were less invoked by the teenagers. The influence of friends in sports (non-)participation has already been shown in various studies (see Martins et al., 2015). The interviews allowed us to identify the influence of friends inside sports practice (Forté, 2006; Joncheray et al., 2015; Tannehil, 2015; Yungblut et al., 2012), as well as that of friends linked to other circles of social life (Devís-Devís, Beltrán-Carrillo, & Peiró-Velert, 2015; Forté, 2006). Likewise, the family was particularly invoked by teenagers who dropped out during primary school (age 6-10). It influences the initiation of sports commitment (Joncheray et al., 2015). This influence is implicit (e.g. parents who practice) or explicit (e.g. parents cannot drive or cannot afford it) (Bois et Sarrazin, 2006; Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes, & Pennisi, 2006, 2008; Mennesson, Bertrand, & Court, 2019; Romani, 2019; Timperio et al., 2013). Our results showed that the influence of family gradually diminished, whereas that of the friends increased (Pasquier, 2005), which is related to the socialization process (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Pot et al., 2016).

The fact that about half of the teenagers interviewed wish to resume sports practice is encouraging. This means that past sports experience has left a positive meaning in memory. However, the older the drop-out, the less likely they wanted to resume. So, it is necessary to take prompt action, before the practice disappears into oblivion.

Study limitations

The first limitation is due to the restricted area of the study, conducted in only one

1 *département* of France. It should be conducted in other places, as to examine cultural
2 variations (Balish et al., 2014). This would make it possible to identify common and local
3 reasons for dropping out and adapt public health intervention and health education strategies.

4 In this article, we have given more importance to the reasons invoked most frequently
5 by the teenagers interviewed. The nature of the circles of social life might change according
6 to the context and the ages of life, especially after ‘life course transitions’ (Bidart, 2012, p. 3)
7 such as entry to university or into the job market, starting a family or retirement.

8 No relevant differences were found between girls and boys or between low and high
9 SES. Some reasons for dropping-out are specific to certain populations (for e.g. Adams, 2006;
10 Bauman et al., 2012; Pot et al., 2016). For instance, the 11 teenagers who declared having
11 never practiced a sport had a low SES and 10 were girls. This specific population deserves
12 further and in-depth studies.

13 ***Conclusion***

14 Drop-out from sports practice means the disappearance of sport, which is one of the
15 circles in the social life of a teenager. It can be influenced by other circles (friends, family or
16 school). But sport also contains the conditions of its own drop-out. Combined with external
17 and internal constraints, decision-making processes leading to drop-out from the sports’ circle
18 must be considered. The negative aspects can be counterbalanced by strengthening what is
19 pleasurable in sport experiences (Luiggi, Maïano, & Griffet, 2019). The preferred forms of
20 practice (competition, performance, challenge) could be questioned and adjusted individually
21 to teenagers’ aspirations (more or less competitive, serious, difficult, etc.) to make sports
22 practice more open and inclusive.

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7 The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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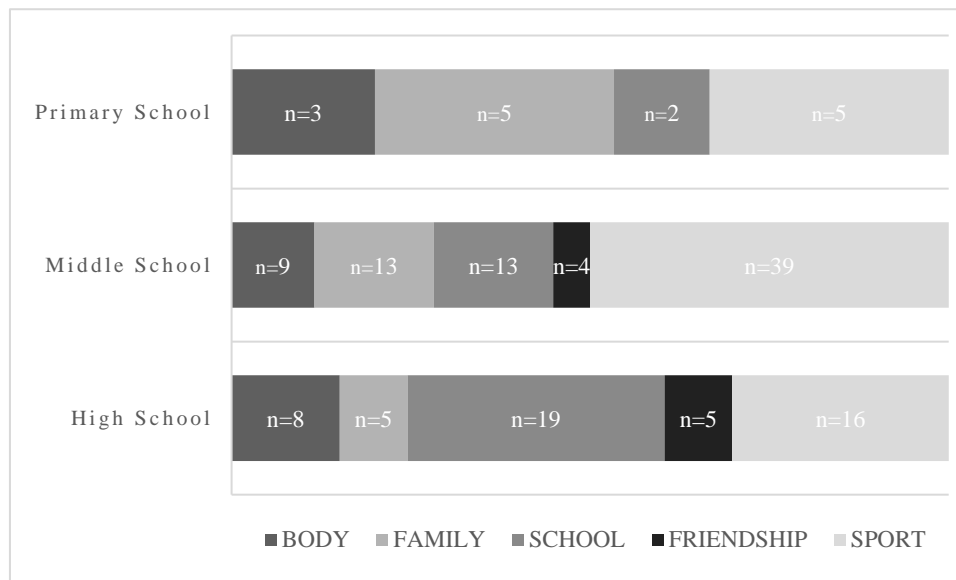
Table 1. Reasons invoked by teenagers to explain their drop-out from sports practice by theme

| Reasons invoked | Sub-themes | Themes | Number of respondents |
|---|---------------------------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Friends' drop-out | Friendship inside sport | Friendship | 9 |
| Attraction to the neighborhood Outings with friends | Friendship outside sport | | |
| Injury Fear of being hurt again Decrease in physical abilities | Physical capacity | Body | 20 |
| Moving home Family's availability | Family mobility | Family | 23 |
| Family's worry Priority in studies Punishment Break with the family's influence | Family control | | |
| Boarding school School transportation | Distance from school | | |
| Schedules School work | The "pupil's job" | | |
| Cost No club/team | Access to sports practice | School | 34 |
| Do not acquire skills Not at the others' level Never winning | Success in sports practice | | |
| Not enough/Too much competition Repetition Relationship with effort Too serious Too constraining Preference for another activity | Features of sports practice | | |
| Departure of the coach Degradation of relations with the coach Bad atmosphere Other people's gaze | Interactions in sports practice | Sport | 60 |

2

NAVIGATING THE CIRCLES OF SOCIAL LIFE

- 1 Figure 1. Number of reasons given by theme for teenagers dropping out of sports practice
2 according to the stages of schooling.



- 3
4 N.B. The whole group cited 146 reasons in total. 9 of the 100 teenagers had dropped out during
5 primary school, 56 during middle school and 35 during high school.