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PREVIEW

**The Impact of Organized Sport Participation On Self Esteem
In Middle School Children**

Matthew A. Berger

**A Doctoral Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Psychology in the Department of Psychology
at Pace University
New York
1999**

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ABSTRACT

It has been estimated that over 7 million children between the ages of five and seventeen participate in organized school sports in the United States. Research on what influence sports has on a child's social, academic, and psychological development has become an area of increasing interest. Past research has evaluated the role of sport participation on various psychological variables, including self-esteem. Although research has shown there to be correlations between sports participation and self-esteem, critics have argued that many of these studies generalized the term sports participation to encompass all levels of participation and predominantly utilized male samples at the high-school level. Research has shown that self-esteem development tends to decrease during the transition from elementary to middle-school but becomes more variable as students move from seventh to eighth grades. Since organized school sports begin at the middle-school level, with increasing opportunities for both males and females to participate, there is a question as to what the impact of interscholastic athletic participation has on the increased variability of self-esteem development from one child to the next.

This study investigated the connection between interscholastic sports participation and self esteem, using a sample of 142 children in 7th and 8th grade at a heterogeneous suburban middle school. A demographic data sheet was used to provide descriptive information about gender, sports participation, extent of

participation; as measured by the number of sports played and the hours spent participating in a particular sport; quality of performance; as measured by the extent to which that child was a starter on an athletic team; and whether extraneous variables influenced one's ability to participate in an interscholastic sport. The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory School Form (CSEI) was completed by the children in order to provide total and subscale self-esteem scores.

Contrast analyses were calculated for pairings representing extent of participation and self-esteem subscales and did not reveal any significant differences across self-esteem subscales and extent of participation. Correlational coefficients were determined between the subscales of the CSEI and quality and extent of sports participation. There were no significant correlations present between the level of self-esteem and the quality and extent of participation. 2x2 ANOVA's were calculated for the self-esteem subscales as measured through areas of sports participation by gender and sports participation by level of constraint. Significant differences in self-esteem according to gender and sports participation were not present. A significant difference ($p < .05$) was present between those unable to participate in sports and those who did participate for the School-Academic Self-Esteem subscale. The restriction of range, and the resulting lack of variability among the self-esteem subtest scores for this sample was the most prevalent reason for the lack of significant findings in this study.

The rationale underlying this project was to determine whether a relationship exists between organized sports participation and self-esteem, and results of this study suggest that while the impact of sports on one's self-esteem is inconclusive, the presence of sports participation in one's life may serve as one of several components in healthy self-esteem development.

PREVIEW

**The Impact of Organized Sport Participation On Self-Esteem in Middle
School Children**

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

One need only look around in schools today to see children wearing their favorite team's or player's jersey, and talking about their favorite team and player to notice how much sports influences today's youth. In fact, participation in sport may be for many kids, as important as the degree of success attained in school if not more so. Stryer, Tofler, and Lapchick (1998) estimated that 7 million children in the United States alone between the ages of 5 and 17 participated in an organized school athletic program. Sport as both a physical activity and a social entity has undergone many fundamental changes. Athletes are looked at as being bigger, faster, and stronger, with increases in the realms of salaries, funding, and advertising. Female participation in many areas of sport, while at times seen as novelty (e.g. collegiate hockey, Women's National Basketball Association), is continually on the rise and gaining the respect of consumers. These increases have grown by leaps and bounds within the framework of modern society and have served to symbolize the modern athlete as a larger than life figure, looked at in many circles as serving as role models for today's youth.

The sporting experience has also expanded into the realm of research. Over the years, there has been a growing interest regarding the sporting experience and how it relates to or influences one's own emotional and psychological development. One such area that has been studied is how sports participation influences one's own self-esteem development. While the purpose of this study is to continue to explore this area, there are four characteristics of this study though that will uniquely contribute to the existing literature. These characteristics are, a sample specifically for middle school-age children, the inclusion of extent of participation and degree of involvement under the umbrella of "sports participation", the use of both males and females within the sample, and exploring whether there are self-esteem differences between those who have been constrained from sports participation and those who have not.

Over the years, research of sports participation has often included the use of adolescent or adult samples. This has often been the case when the research is focused on either recreational sports participation (e.g. YMCA, Club Sports) or interscholastic sports participation (e.g. high school and collegiate) However, self-esteem is a psychological attribute that can manifest from childhood. There is a limited research base regarding sports participation as it pertains to children, and specifically children who participate within an interscholastic athletic program. The middle-school is often a child's first exposure to interscholastic athletic competition, therefore, the purpose of this study is to look at how interscholastic

competition, therefore, the purpose of this study is to look at how interscholastic sports participation within the middle-school environment influences children's self-esteem development.

This study will also introduce two mediating factors of the influence of sports participation on self-esteem development. Sports participation will be specifically defined by the extent of participation and degree of involvement of child-athletes. The purpose of this is to expand upon the research available that tends to use sports participation as a general term, without specifying how much one participates in a sport, and what his or her role on the team is.

The research of sports participation and self-esteem development has tended to utilize samples that were homogenous. Although recently, more studies have focused on the female's sporting experience, there appears to be limited research regarding possible differences between males and females with regards to self-esteem development and sports participation. Therefore, this study will utilize a heterogeneous sample and evaluate whether self-esteem differences are apparent between males and females with respect to the influence of interscholastic sports participation within the middle-school environment.

Finally, this study will explore whether self-esteem differences exist between those who have been constrained from participating in school sports present and those who are not impeded from participating in school sports. This is an area that has not been utilized in existing research. Focusing on constraint with regards to sports participation may provide useful information with regards to how