

2010

Grasshoppers in the Outfield: An Examination of the Effects of Sports on Children

Chelsea R. Baker
Claremont McKenna College

Recommended Citation

Baker, Chelsea R., "Grasshoppers in the Outfield: An Examination of the Effects of Sports on Children" (2010). *CMC Senior Theses*. Paper 85.
http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cmc_theses/85

This Open Access Senior Thesis is brought to you by Scholarship@Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in this collection by an authorized administrator. For more information, please contact scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu.

CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE

**GRASSHOPPERS IN THE OUTFIELD: AN EXAMINATION OF THE EFFECTS
OF SPORTS ON CHILDREN**

SUBMITTED TO

DR. KATHLEEN BROWN

AND

DEAN GREGORY HESS

BY

CHELSEA BAKER

FOR

SENIOR THESIS

FALL 2010

NOVEMBER 29, 2010

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Kathleen Brown for her wisdom and guidance during throughout the process of this paper. Thank you for being my teacher, thesis reader, friend and so much more! It is from your child development class that I learned the most about children and became truly inspired to be a teacher.

I would also like to thank my family. Dad, you have set a wonderful example for Ryan and I to follow. It is because of you that I want to become an Army Officer and learned to explore. Mom, you are a beacon for love and accomplishment, I hope one day I can be half the mother you are. Finally, Ryan, though you are younger, I still look up to you. You are a strong, smart young man and I am so excited to see you grow up. It is awesome to have you at school (and ROTC) with me. Without my family, I would not have become the young woman I am today. Thank you for supporting me through all I have done and will do. I love you!

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Friendships	6
Chapter 2: Self-Esteem	15
Chapter 3: Family	21
Chapter 4: Academics	29
Conclusion	35
References.....	38

Introduction

The topic of children and athletics for a senior thesis was not difficult to form because I am passionate both about athletics and child development. I have been an athlete for as long as I can remember and I have loved children for almost as long. My involvement with athletics began with swimming and I quickly picked up softball soon after that. Around that time, my little brother, Ryan, was born. I loved being the older sister and watching him grow up. As I got older and eventually went to college, I knew that I would want to combine these two topics somehow, and later I hope that the knowledge I gain from the research will help me as a teacher and coach.

In an introduction to a sports participation issue in *Developmental Psychology*, Theokas (2009) stated that since athletics is such a prominent activity in the United States, it is important to understand the effects it has on child development be it positive or negative. In 1991, Chambers reported that 45% of American children (ages 6-18) were involved in organized athletics, though this does not include participants who play sports only for their schools. This is a very significant number and he added that athletes are motivated to participate because they have a high perception of their ability. Chambers noted that children become interested in sports either with or without their parents' desire for them to play. Boys want to play sports because success and status are important to them, while girls play because sports are fun and they help develop friends. In most literature that explains why children participate in sports, the overwhelming reason is because they are fun. However, Theokas (2009) added that the importance of athletics is that it is more than physical activity—sports have an influence in many other

areas of a child's life. Chambers specified that children pick up qualities from athletics including: reduced anxiety and stress, self-esteem, moral development, and academic achievement. If children experience these positive effects from sports, it is safe to say that sports are one of the largest contributors to a child's development.

I can personally attest to this idea because I have been an athlete my whole life and I know that my involvement in these activities has only benefited me in a positive way. Additionally, I can say with confidence that my athletics was the number one domain that has affected my development and shaped who I am today. I have learned countless skills that have benefited me even to this day. Specifically, the topics in the current review are the areas I saw greatest effects.

Regarding friendships, I will say that most of my closest friends are athletes and specifically, athletes that I have played with on the same team. Currently, the women on my softball team at Claremont-Mudd-Scripps are my closest friends and I know they will be after leaving here. Athletics provides an opportunity for children to meet and share something in common. The more sports a child plays, the more people he or she will meet who share the same interests and passions as they do and the easiest way to make friends is to talk about or share in something that the two people have in common. Even for shy or reserved children, sports are the perfect place for children to meet other children because at school, the shy children may not try to make friends with others, but team practices force friendships. It was very easy for me to connect to fellow athletes because I had an instant team of friends. I also found that through interactions with teammates and even opponents, I learned about appropriate ways to engage with friends and how to resolve conflicts. The biggest lessons I learned were from sharing equipment,

taking turns, and supporting fellow teammates. To me, the friendships are the most influential and lasting effects of my participation in athletics.

Another key lesson I learned from sports involved becoming a strong individual. I gained self-confidence from sports that positively affected my self-esteem. I was not always the superstar of the team, but when I swam well or when I played well, I felt good about myself and I knew that I was good at something. My accomplishments in sports gave me a sense of self-worth and that I was valuable, not only to a team's success, but to other people and to myself. Conversely, I learned from losing and bad performances as well. When I did not do my best, or I did not win, I learned perseverance and I learned that setbacks made me want to work harder to do better next time. I learned how to accept defeat and that I would not always be the best at everything. Sports taught me failure, which can be a much more important lesson than confidence. I always saw more improvement after a bad showing than when I did well. Self-esteem is very important for children to have and develop, but they must also learn to lose gracefully.

One of the most surprising relationships I saw was that the busier I got with sports, the better my grades were in school. Having a busy lifestyle taught me how to manage my time and deal with difficult problems. I learned to control my emotions from sports and push through adversity even in my schoolwork. Being active kept me healthy both physically and mentally because sports kept me alert. I am so grateful for the fact that I was a student-athlete. Having that status made me much more interesting to colleges and to the ROTC program. Being strong physically will make children mentally strong as well and will have an impact on their future.

My family is very active. Both of my parents and my younger brother played sports and thoroughly enjoy sporting events. Athletics are a staple in our house and consume most of our time. My parents enrolled us in athletics at young ages and watched as we grew to love playing our sports. Most weekends were taken up by competitions and weekdays were busy with practices. Mom and Dad drove us to our practices and were proud of our accomplishments. I am certain that my brother and I were even more thrilled when we could see their approval and support. Values that were stressed by our parents were strengthened with participation in an active lifestyle. We learned to be tough and to fight through pain and we learned that quitting was never acceptable. Family interactions and sports have a strong relationship and it is important for children to experience this connection.

Overall, athletics has had a positive effect on my life and I would argue that it is the same for many other athletes. There is simply no substitute for the life lessons learned from participating in athletics as a young child. Even if the child does not participate through high school or college, an impact has already been made and skills and characteristics have already been imprinted on the child's future in a positive way.

The purpose of the current review is to examine the effects that participation in sports has on children in specific areas—friendships, self-esteem, academics, and family. The literature confirmed that sports help children make long-term friends and learn to work with other people. Children's positive experiences with others during sports increase their peer acceptance and their accomplishments strengthen their self-esteem. Also, they begin to build a sense of pride because of the success they have playing sports and making friends. Involvement in sports strengthens familial relations because they

provide and arena for discussing and practicing values that are important among families. Finally, athletics keep children busy and teach them how to persevere, which aid in children's academic achievement. The current review will cover these topics and show how sports have a positive effect on children.

Chapter 1: Friendships

Children develop patterns in their youth that they will transfer to adulthood. Physical activity is one such pattern, which happens to be essential to a healthy future. However, children learn more from being active than simply being healthy; they also develop social bonds with other young people. They are highly impressionable and many studies have found that a person's inclination toward physical activity is affected by their relationships with people of value in their lives, especially amongst young peer groups. Even at a young age, children have high expectations of their friends. This is because the social development that occurs in elementary and middle school-aged children is dominated by peer acceptance, which has been found to be especially true among young athletes. Thus, it can be argued that athletics has a positive effect on a child's friendships. Furthermore, Weiss and Smith (1999) argue that positive friendship experiences can alleviate the struggle for acceptance among peers because they give the individual a sense of value. In many situations these experiences occur in the interactions that children have during sport activities.

Early friendships and social development of children is not a rare topic in the field of psychology and is actually quite relevant in the attempt to understand meaningful social interaction. But little had been studied with regards to sports and friendship. Smith (2003) summarized the most relevant research relating to this topic, claiming that athletics is the ideal domain to research when studying friendships. He noted that the

people who are valuable to the youth athletes are social catalysts for the children. These people, parents, coaches and especially friends, are responsible for how the children benefit from physical activity. Smith argued that physical activity such as sports provides opportunities where children cooperate and develop socially. They are able to make new friends, compare and understand other people and their thoughts, opinions and feelings.

As is true with many aspects of life, experiences are made because of the people involved more so than what was actually done. Thinking back on early athletic experiences, most people would probably have a hard time remembering the score in the championship game, but they will remember the crazy coach who wore tie-dye and more importantly they will recall the boy who ate grasshoppers in the outfield. They will treasure the friendships they made on their first soccer team and it is these early friendships that shape much of the future. Athletics provides automatic bonds between people, especially children, because cooperation and teamwork is expected of all participants. Children make instant friends from sports and use skills from their athletic interactions to make friends in other domains.

In 1996, Weiss, Smith, and Theeboom conducted interviews of 38 young athletes (19 males and 19 females), aged 8-15, to determine traits of friendships that occurred in these athletes' physical interactions. They conducted studies on sports friendships because they were interested in the depth and quality of the friendships among young sports participants. They found twelve positive aspects of friendship: companionship, pleasant play/ association, self-esteem enhancement, help and guidance, prosocial behavior, intimacy, loyalty, things in common, attractive personal qualities, emotional support, absence of conflict and conflict resolution (Weiss et al., 1996). The four negative aspects that they found were: conflict, unattractive personal qualities, betrayal, and

inaccessibility. This study was a starting block for understanding the intricacies of sports and how it affects friendships among young people.

In 1999, Weiss and Smith furthered their research by examining friendships within the athletic domain. In the 1999 article, Weiss and Smith conducted three separate studies in order to develop a method to assess friendship. The first study questioned 82 female and 114 males aged 8-16 and aimed to determine whether or not sports friendships could be measured the same as any other friendship. This study asked children to answer the questions about their best friend in sports. The results of Study 1 showed that the questionnaire needed to be adjusted in order to measure sports friendships.

The goal of Study 2 was to define qualities that are specific to sport relationships among children. In this study, the 26 female and 168 male children (aged 8-12) answered items on a questionnaire regarding 16 dimensions of sport friendships. As a result of Study 2, four dimensions of friendship were taken out (attractive personal qualities, inaccessibility, prosocial behavior, and unattractive personal qualities) and the researchers adjusted their items to better test children in the sports domain. Nine of the twelve positive dimensions and two of the four negative qualities from the 1996 study were confirmed by this study.

In the third and final study, the researchers attempted to test the appropriateness of the questionnaire developed from the second study called the SFQS (the Sports Friendship Quality Scale). There were 66 females and 95 males who answered the questionnaire, all were 8-14 years old. This questionnaire had 33 items correlating to six friendship characteristics. The results from the study found difficulty determining its worth because children were not distinguishing between best friends and their friends,

which can often change. Weiss and Smith showed that their SFQS is valid and thus, their final questionnaire, which tested 22 items over dimensions, has proven effective in measuring the quality of friendships in sports.

Weiss and Smith's (1999) method of assessment discovered that children who are athletic are expected to have admirable character traits and higher self-esteem. However, these expectations are not associated with non-athletic children. It seems surprising that at the elementary school level, children form opinions about their friends' qualities based on how athletic they are and that the same standards are not held for non-athletic children. At later stages this would be viewed as superficial. But, this method of social acceptance among child peer groups has been proven to help children formulate their own ideas about their surroundings; it is a process for social development. Many psychologists have linked athletics to the development of positive personality traits among peers in athletics.

Physical activity among young children has been shown to have stronger implications than being in good shape and staying active. At young ages, children are not only learning to stay healthy, but they are also developing socially by learning how to make friends. Athletics provides an arena where children are forced to cooperate with others and make these friendships, which is actually one of the most prevalent reasons that children participate in sports. This domain also gives children opportunities to develop other important aspects of their social development including learning to resolve conflicts in a healthy manner and working with people who they may not agree with.

A study performed by Buchanan, Blankenbaker, and Cotten (1976) investigated the importance of athletics in childhood friendships. In this study, children in grades 4-6 were assessed via questionnaire (422 boys and 380 girls). They were asked what they

would most like to do at school, followed by naming the three boys and three girls who were best at making grades and who were the best at sports, and naming the most popular three boys and three girls in school. The final question asked the children to rank which quality would make them popular: good grades, having money, being good at sports, or being handsome or pretty. During data collection, the children's answers were separated according to what they said they wanted to do at school. Buchanan et al. (1976) claimed that their study demonstrates that athletic ability is a quality that determines popularity in male groups, though not in female groups. It was found that children, both boys and girls, ranked academic performance as the most important form of success for themselves. However, when asked about what they thought of their peers, boys answered that athletics was what determined who was the most popular among their friends. The children defined as athletes were those whose names occurred in at least 30% of the questionnaires as one of the three children who were the best at sports. Conversely, girls answered that being a student athlete was what determined popularity. Student-athletes were defined as those children who appeared in 30% of the questionnaires as one of the top three children most talented at sports as well as a top three ranked child who was best at getting good grades.

It is interesting that when ranking the characteristics involving sports and grades, children in general said that they preferred to be better at academics rather than athletics, but when asked what is important in their friends, they said something else—sports. Why would children hold themselves to a different standard than they would for themselves? Buchanan et al. (1976) suggested that parents might have an influence in this area, expressing, for example, that schoolwork is more important than athletics. However, it is also possible that the children may have answered with what they want to be successful at

in school rather than simply what they want to do. Overall, it is highly intriguing that children value certain aspects of their friends that seem to differ from what they are good at, which contradicts the idea in Weiss and Smith (1999) that children find friends based on similar interests.

Buchanan et al. (1976) is somewhat controversial because of its age; it is 30 years old. It is difficult to say with certainty whether or not this study absolutely applies today. However, with the high level of importance placed on physical activity in contemporary time, one could argue that it does have relevance now. Sports have become more organized, more intense and more valuable to children. Current studies, such as Dunn, Dunn, and Bayduza (2007) claim that children value athletics above other characteristics in their friends. They have also shown patterns that support the findings of Buchanan et al. in that boys find athletics important in their friends while girls find that either being a student or student-athlete is important.

Dunn et al. (2007) conducted a study of children and friendships from a different perspective—loneliness. Instead of looking at the positive effect of friendships, the researchers studied the negative effects of not having quality friendships in childhood and a lack of athletic competence, highlighting that children who are not athletically gifted (and low in sociometric status) are often rejected and criticized by their peers. Dunn et al. (2007) have linked athletic involvement and competence as one way to judge a child's loneliness. They determined that children who had more athletic abilities were found to be less lonely than those who did not. Loneliness seems to be the start (or end) to a vicious cycle defining a child's friendships in regards to sports. Beginning with loneliness, one can assume that it could lead to less physical activity because of a low level of confidence in one's own athletic ability. This would make a person not want to

participate, which could lead to fewer friendships since the child is not involved in an activity that is enjoyed and expected of children in their peer groups. And as a result of this, the child then becomes lonely.

Loneliness can have negative effects on anyone, but especially young children. Dunn et al. (2007) claimed that it could have a significant effect on a person's emotional and physical health, especially if loneliness is an ongoing cycle. They also stated that it is important to discover the scenarios that cause this unending cycle and identify ways to improve the situation and suggest that athletics may be an avenue to explore since it is highly valued among young children, as shown by many studies including Buchanan et al. (1976). If children have low confidence in their athletic abilities, then they will be less likely to be accepted by their peers and vice versa.

The goal of Dunn et al.'s (2007) study was to determine the correlation between loneliness and sociometric status with athletic competence in young kids (Dunn et al., 2007). The 99 boys and 109 girls in grades 4-6 performed self-reports to provide a status of loneliness and athletic competence in middle school-aged children. Children rated their friends' abilities and listed whom they liked most and least in the class. The loneliness was measured using Asher, Hymel, and Renshaw's (1984) Illinois Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale (ILSDS). In assessing athletic ability, the children ranked each classmates' abilities (including themselves) in regards to "how good they are at playing sports and doing physical skills during gym class" on a Likert scale (Dunn et al., 2007). Finally, in order to determine sociometric status, children were asked to list a few students who they would like to have in their group on a field trip as well as whom they would not.

The results showed that boys rated themselves higher in athletic ability than girls did and were also ranked higher by their classmates than girls were. Boys were found to have lower sociometric status scores than girls. Not surprisingly, both boys and girls who scored lower in loneliness had higher athletic and sociometric scores. Among girls only, high athletic self-ratings correlated to low levels of loneliness. So, the research supported the hypothesis that loneliness is related to athletic perception and sociometric status (Dunn et al., 2007). This was to be expected and strengthens the idea of the endless cycle created by loneliness. It makes sense that if a child has a low perception of his or her abilities then he or she will not participate in activities and make fewer friends, thus becoming lonely.

Many studies have supported the theory that athletic ability is one of the strongest attributes determining a child's friendships and peer acceptance because it is a characteristic that children themselves deem valuable amongst each other (Weiss & Smith, 1999). With the abundance of opportunities to interact with other children, sports have proven to be an important avenue for friendship. Additionally, athletics have been shown to have a generally positive effect on children not only in their peer groups, but also in other aspects of their lives such as identity and self-esteem. Physically active children begin to identify themselves as athletes and define themselves based on similar children they interact with (Weiss & Smith, 1999).

Chapter 2: Self-Esteem

Athletics not only strengthen a child's friendships, but also positively affect his or her self-esteem. Part of growing up involves self-discovery; it is a time where children develop rapidly, due to social, physical, and emotional changes (as well as other changes) in order to prepare for adolescence. Youth sports provide children with such an avenue to explore who they really are and what their identity is. During athletics, there are many

opportunities for children to succeed at certain tasks and gain skills where results are visible. This results in a sense of accomplishment, which gives children greater sense of self-esteem. Thus, for most physically active children, their self-esteem is dependent upon their athletic competence which contributes to their identity as an athlete.

Children begin to develop self-esteem at an early age. In her article *Emotional Development and the Self Esteem in Children*, Debbie Cluff mentioned that theorists argue that the most influential stages in a child's development are also the major stages in self-esteem. Children begin this development with their caregivers, and depending on the interactions with these caregivers, children build self-images and perceptions. These self-images are also known as competencies or self- concepts, an ideal that represents how people view their abilities (Slutzky & Simpkins, 2009). Cluff also stated that at young ages, self-esteem is measured by how loved ones' in their lives respond to them. High self-esteem comes from experience; it comes from successes and failures that have been building upon each other throughout the child's life. Emotions motivate children and reduce bad behavior, which increases learning and self-esteem (Cluff). Emotional development is essential not only for building self-esteem but also building a sense of identity.

LIVESTRONG.com made multiple references to children's self-esteem noting that low self-esteem makes children feel bad about themselves, which can affect their drive to meet new friends and get involved in peer groups. Young people with low self-esteem are more likely to be depressed and get into trouble. It is important that children develop positive self-esteem to avoid these issues. One way children can do this is to get involved in sports. During athletics, children meet friends and develop positive images of themselves (LIVESTRONG.com).

During Weiss and Smith's (1999) series of studies, it was found that athletic children are expected to have esteem-enhancing qualities from their sport friendships. This shows that playing sports not only raises self-esteem in itself, but the friendships made in the athletic domain also increase a child's self-esteem. Playing sports and building friendships provides kids with a feeling of acceptance and pride. They can see how their participation in sports provides more friends and a sense of accomplishment.

Extensive research has concluded that involvement in sports is important to children's self-esteem, especially at a young age. Self-esteem is the extent to which people value their worth and how much they like themselves. During the elementary and middle school years, it is important for children to develop these concepts. Slutsky and Simpkins (2009) continued this research in order to determine the relationship between the amount of time a child spends playing sports and his or her self-esteem when they are older, through the lens of the self-concept.

Emotional development in children concerns the adjusting view that children have of their abilities (their self-concept) in addition to the development of self-esteem. Self-esteem is one step farther than the self-concept in that it is the feeling of worth that comes from a child's attachment to his or her caregiver and his or her own feelings about worth (LIVESTRONG.com). The secondary goal of this study was to determine if there was a difference between a youth's participation in individual sports and team sports. These two types of athletics vary because the human interactions are different and can affect a child's self-esteem and sense of accomplishment. Slutsky and Simpkins (2009) expected that self-esteem and self-perceptions would both be affected positively by both team and individual sports. The researchers also predicted that time would also have an effect on a

child's self-esteem. If the child spends more time in the sport, then he or she would have a more positive sense of his or her abilities and their self-esteem will also increase.

In order to test the hypotheses, the researchers asked parents to provide information detailing each child's time commitment to the sport and whether it was individual or team-centered. They were also asked about their child's athletic abilities. The 897 children (502 girls and 485 boys) in the study were in kindergarten through fifth grade. They read questionnaires and were asked to report on their athletic abilities (self-concept) and how much they value sports. Next, they reported on their self-esteem. Finally, teachers from 12 public schools in the Midwestern area of the United States were asked to give information about the children's acceptance in their peer groups.

The data showed that children spent more time participating in team sports as opposed to individual sports. Also, those who spent more time in team sports had higher perceptions of their abilities and thus higher self-esteem. This finding displays how important physical activity is to a child's self-discovery. The more time children spent in team sports, the more positive their self-concept and self-esteem was. This showed that spending time around children in sports had a positive effect on how children viewed their abilities and it made them feel better about themselves. Playing with friends has a positive effect on children's emotional development. Overall, the findings show that sports are a catalyst for high self-esteem in children, through the perception of their athletic skills.

A study conducted by Cassidy and Conroy (2006) studied how self-esteem differed among school and sport perceptions of the self with relation to maternal involvement and autonomy support. Their study focused on more than just the dynamic of self-esteem and sports; they also studied the effect that mothers have on their

children's self-esteem in academics and athletics. As stated before, self-esteem involves a person's belief in their value and worth and in the sport domain; it can also involve a person's confidence (or lack thereof) in their abilities (also known as the self-concept). This study is extensive, and has a few focuses, but their research on self-esteem as a factor of sports is still significant because athletics is one of the primary domains in which children develop their sense of perceived competence and self-esteem.

The researchers hypothesized that maternal involvement and autonomy support would be associated with the children's perceived competence and thus their self-esteem and that the maternal involvement and autonomy support would directly affect their child's self-esteem. In order to conduct this study, Cassidy and Conroy (2006) surveyed 57 children and their parents, asking them to complete questionnaires regarding demographics, self-esteem, perceived competence and maternal autonomy. The questionnaire regarding self-esteem used the Dubois, Felner, Brand, Phillips, and Lease (1996) SEQ (Self-Esteem Questionnaire) global self-esteem subscale in order to measure the children's self-esteem. The questions were simple statements directed at the children's feelings of themselves as a person and their success. Perceived competence was measured using Harter's (1985) Self-Perception Profile for Children, the SPPC. This scale used a 4-point scale to which the children would identify how strongly the statements, which described other children, related to them.

Results showed that self-esteem was related to perceived competence. Interestingly, the other two variables (maternal involvement and autonomy support) did not have a direct effect on children's self-perception or their self-esteem. This shows that sports have a significant effect on a child's self-perception, which is associated with his or her self-esteem.

One could argue that having a high level self-perception and self-esteem might have the effect on children to assume an athletic identity. This is because people generally assume identities that coincide with their successes. A study conducted by Anderson, Mâsse, Zhang, Coleman, and Chang (2009) suggested that self-concepts determine the activities in which people spend time. They studied a total of 1503 children by asking them to complete questionnaires, participating in physical activity and measuring their weight.

Anderson et al. (2009) also found that athletic identity was stronger in children who were involved in team sports. This study proposes that a stronger sense of athletic identity will increase sport participation. They found that athletic identity is based on people's physical activity because it becomes part of their life and what defines them. So, if a person has a positive self-concept, it will positively affect their level of athletic identity. Similar to loneliness, the relationships between physical participation and athletic identity form a never-ending circle. The more self-esteem a person has in regards to sports, the more they will participate in the activity and thus begin to take on an athletic identity.

A study conducted by Eriksson, Nordqvist, and Rasmussen (2008) suggests the same idea as the previous study, that it is important to increase a child's athletic competence so that they will be more physically active. They also observed the effects of weight on a child's physical activity, by looking at 1124 Swedish children (571 girls and 553 boys) and related it to his or her parents. However, this study did not find a relationship between self-concept and self-esteem.

Childhood development is important because it paves the path for a person's future. Through all the changes a child must undergo, it is important that they have self-

esteem to know their self-worth and feel that they are valuable to society. In order to feel this, the child needs a positive self-perception to believe that he or she is capable of certain tasks. With this, the child will be more likely to participate not only in sports, but in life, and feel confident about his or her contribution. Furthermore, athletics is connected with academic performance in a positive way in that athletics teach children skills that they can apply to their schoolwork (Buchanan et al., 1976).

Chapter 3: Family

In the United States, sports participation is highly encouraged for children. However, the initial desire for participation usually stems from the parents because they want their children to be active humans. It is wonderful that so many children are becoming active, but they are learning more than just sports. The article *Youth Sports Benefits* claimed that being involved in athletics at a young age helps children to stay healthy, but more importantly, it helps children to stay out of trouble and provides quality time for families (LIVESTRONG.com). Sports can teach children valuable skills and impact their relationship with their family in a positive way.

Kremer-Sadlik and Kim (2007) expressed that parents have reported that sport activities are valuable in more ways than physicality. Through research, they found that parents are highly involved in a child's initial social development and highlight the value that sports has in a family setting. It is important to parents and to children (though they will not realize it until later), that sports include life lessons that help children become

invested members of society. The reason that parents enroll their children in athletics is to socialize them to important ideals (Kremer-Sadlik & Kim, 2007). The goal of this study was to understand how the definition of sports and its meaning to families affects their daily lives.

In their study, Kremer-Sadlik and Kim (2007) documented the lives of 32 middle-class families in Los Angeles. These families consisted of about two to three children, one of whom was between 8 and 10 years of age. The UCLA Sloan Center on Everyday Lives of Families (CLEF) collected data on the families, recording the daily activities that occurred in the household by interviewing or recording them. Each family was examined for at least 50 hours. It was found that sports activities were the most prevalent in these families, with at least one child involved in athletics and more commonly, it was determined that most families had more than one child participating in sports. Parents spend significant time driving their children to these activities, coaching, and refereeing, which often forces them to make sacrifices in their work or personal schedules. However, it is important to note that a child's participation in sports requires the entirety of the family to achieve success.

Interestingly, children experience and master skills expected in society through their sports (Kremer-Sadlik & Kim, 2007). There are many ways that children can participate in athletic activities; however, Kremer-Sadlik and Kim (2007) noted that most researchers (as well as parents in their study) focus on what is known as formal activities. These activities are usually organized leagues or clubs, and as their children are involved in these sports, parents have noticed characteristics that their children are learning which are deemed important. One mother said that because of her child's participation in karate, her child has learned self-confidence, the importance of setting and achieving goals,

leadership and respecting those in charge. Obviously the mother is pleased with the results of her child's learning and views the activity as important to the development of these traits.

Children learn such life lessons from their direct contact with their coaches, but also from their parents' comments about their performance. Kremer-Sadlik (2007) noted that parental support of the lessons sports teach during their child's activity and assessment afterwards, could also impact a child. For example, sports teach children that it is important to be tough and fight through pain. When a child experiences pain during an event, it is important for the parents (especially mothers) to allow the child to recover on their own, without babying them. In this way parents can reinforce the importance of physical and emotional toughness (Kremer-Sadlik & Kim, 2007). Parent-child interactions after competitions are also very important because parents express the importance of topics such as winning and losing and teamwork. From these comments children also learn what is morally acceptable and valuable.

Kremer-Sadlik and Kim (2007) also highlight the impact of informal sports on family relationships because there is more interaction among family members. In these sorts of activities, family members make rules and decisions and thus offer an opportunity for discussion and active learning of what is right versus what is wrong. For example, one father from the study took an opportunity to teach his sons about whining and playing fair. He teaches the boys that whining will not result in getting what you want and that rules are in place to keep the game fair. These lessons show that children must learn problem solving and equality. Another family focused on the importance of sportsmanship after a girl versus boy game of basketball. At the end of the game, the girls began a chant that put the other team down and the father commented that it was

inappropriate. He told the girls that at the end of a game, the winning team should acknowledge the effort of the other team and maintain respect for them. The children learned that sports are not only about winning but also about doing what is right (being a good sport by behaving appropriately).

Families also communicate important values during passive sporting events. Kremer-Sadlik and Kim (2007) noted that many families watch sports on TV and discuss rules, morals and appropriate communication regarding sports during these times. Although children are not physically active during this time, they are still engaged in life lessons. For example, children learn appropriate language for cheering while a game is on the TV and the importance of loyalty by cheering for a team regardless of their performance. The study of passive sporting events and its effect on children shows that it is not only active participation in sports that teach children how to be decent members of society; they can also learn as non-athletes by watching sports and interacting with others in this way.

Kremer-Sadlik and Kim's (2007) study showed how family involvement in sports teaches children important life lessons during development. Parents play an active role in socializing their children to important characteristics valued in society that can be obtained through participation in athletics. Because a majority of time spent as a family is centered on athletics, Kremer-Sadlik and Kim's (2007) research supports the idea that sports have a positive effect on familial interaction since children learn valuable lessons. Children learn about appropriate behavior and morals through these interactions with their families on a daily basis.

A study conducted by Eriksson, Nordqvist, and Rasmussen (2008) examined the association between parent-child physical activities and a child's self-esteem and athletic

competence. As most people know, physical activity is important to live a healthy life, but not everyone is physically active. Typically, children look up to their parents in order to understand what is right and what should be done. Parents are examples to their children for many aspects of life, including physical activity. Although there is not extensive research covering this topic, one goal of this study was to investigate the association between parent and child physical activity.

The Parental Influences on Their Children's Health (PITCH) is a collection of data that were used to select the parent participants for the study, which was conducted in Sweden. Parents who are normal weight and overweight were selected. The Body Mass Index (BMI) baseline data was collected from the Military Service Conscription Register (MSCR) for the fathers when they were 18 and from the Medical Birth Register (MBR) for mothers prior to their pregnancies. A total of 1931 families completed one of three questionnaires and 1124 children (571 female and 553 male) along with their parents made up the sample of the study.

In order to assess the physical activity of the parents, the researchers used the Baecke questionnaire which assessed physical activity using three levels: 1) occupational, 2) leisure, excluding sports, and 3) sport during leisure time. A fourth level was added to assess total physical activity. However, Eriksson et al. (2008) only used the third level for assessment during the study. Finally, the parents were asked if they usually participate in sports or exercise during times of leisure. Children's physical activity was assessed with the same question as well as a question asking how many days a week they participate in vigorous activity for longer than 20 minutes resulting in sweating and loss of breath. Self-esteem and obesity were also assessed.

The study found that parental physical activity was strongly associated with child physical activity. Additionally, maternal physical activity had a stronger effect on her daughter's physical activity than her sons'. The same type of gender pattern was found in the paternal physical activity, fathers had a stronger effect on their sons as opposed to their daughters. Also, there was no difference in relationships between parental and child physical activity when comparing obese children to families whose children were not obese. Thus, the results of the study support the idea that child and parental physical activity are related. Children are positively affected by their parents' choices to be active and this could have an effect on other aspects of their life. It is important that children are active and they will learn this through their parents' example.

Cassidy and Conroy (2006) aimed to discover the effect of parental involvement and autonomy support on children's perceived competence and self-esteem in academics and athletics. However, the focus on this study was on the effect of the child by studying the maternal involvement and autonomy support. Parents are expected to have an influence on their child's development because they are a large part of that child's world and thus their involvement and support of a child's activities will have a great effect on them. Cassidy and Conroy (2006) noted that a child's perception of how his or her parent acts would be associated with his or her self-esteem. The parental approval of a child's abilities could increase that child's competence in his or her sport activities.

Cassidy and Conroy (2006) investigated 57 middle school-aged children (19 female and 38 male) and their parents to determine the effect of parents being interested, knowledgeable, and active in the child's athletics as well as allowing the child to make decisions independently. The more interest and time a parent invests in a child's

athletics, the more he or she will feel supported by that parent. This could give the child a greater sense of approval and thus greater self-perception and self-esteem.

The results of the study showed that children's self-esteem in the athletic domain was not affected by maternal involvement. Although the results do not support these ideas, it is important to note that sports still have some effect on family. It was mentioned in the study that maybe this is because children look to their fathers for this approval. In terms of autonomy, results showed that a child's self-perception of competence and self-esteem were not affected. The researchers noted that some of their assessments might not have had a broad enough spectrum to obtain the differences they anticipated. However, these results do not reflect total parental influence on a child's perception and self-esteem or the idea that young children gain their self-esteem and base their perceptions on the love and support they receive from those who they desire affection. Children might look to please friends, coaches or others because they already know that their mothers love and support them. Overall, sports offer an opportunity for families to share a passion together.

In the article *The Benefits of Youth Sports for Children* on the LIVESTRONG website stated that youth sports are beneficial to families because they help build trust and communication among family members. They also provide a chance for parents to encourage their children. In this situation, children feel loved and feel accomplished. They feel that their parents approve of their abilities on the field.

Physical activity is a great activity for children and families to do together. In the About.com article *The Bonding Benefits of Family Fitness*, Catherine Holecko claimed that when children are active with their families, they are not only practicing healthy exercise, but also building memories of fun family experiences. She also said touched on

how playing with parents is fun for children because they get to see a silly side of their parents. It is important for families to let loose sometimes and just forget about things that need to be done; just relax and spend some fun time as a family. Active games are a spontaneous way for families to bond. These times provide an opportunity for children to learn leadership as well. Holecko stated that children love to take the lead and be in control during playtime. Leadership is an important skill for growing children because it teaches them independence and decision-making skills. These play times do not necessarily come from organized sports, but clearly athletic activity is still important for families.

Familial involvement relates to youth sports most simply because if parents did not take their children to practice and such, the child would likely not be able to participate. If a child comes home from sports and the parents are hardly interested, the child would likely feel that their athletics are not valued in the family dynamic. A child's interest and participation is very much associated with the family and vice versa. Sporting events not only offer time for the family to spend together and support each other, but they also teach life lessons for the child as well as for the family as a whole.

Chapter 4: Academics

Youth sports are an easy avenue for children to get the physical activity they need. Organized sports provide a more consistent and intense physical program from children. However, simple physical activity is really all they need. Many schools have physical education requirements to keep kids moving. However, their efforts may have a deeper goal; physical activity can increase academic performance.

Castelli, Hillman, Buck, and Erwin (2007) conducted a study to determine the relationship between physical activity and academic performance. They stated that teachers and health professionals support the theory that children who are physically active will do better in school. Interestingly, it was found that spending more time on physical activity and a little less on academic classes did not negatively affect academic success. This is because physical activity can help with cognition; being active helps children with mental processes.

Two hundred fifty-nine children participated in this study. The children were sampled from four different schools in Illinois, from third to fifth grades. Each child completed five parts of the Fitnessgram physical fitness test, which is supported by the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM). In conducting the physical portion of the study, researchers first demonstrated the exercises for the children and helped them practice testing standards. Next, aerobic capacity was tested with 20-meter shuttle runs. During the third session, the children performed push-ups, curl-ups, and hip and leg exercises in order to assess muscular strength. The height and weight of each child was

measured to gather data on body composition using Body Mass Index standards. In order to assess academic achievement, children were asked to take parts of the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT). They took many parts of the test; each one had a 40-minute time interval. The test was composed of multiple choice questions as well as free response questions regarding math and reading.

The study found that physical fitness of third to fifth-graders is related to academic performance (Castelli et al., 2007). This was supported by the data that showed that math and reading are both associated with body composition and aerobic capacity. This means that children who are physically active will typically have better performance at school.

An early study conducted by Villimez, Eisenberg, and Carroll (1986) looked at the sex differences regarding child height and weight and its relationship with academic performance and competence. The children's height and weight were analyzed to determine associations with how other people viewed their accomplishments. Though this article discusses a child's appearance in relation to his or her weight, the research is still valid since children who are overweight are not physically active and their lack of activity can affect their academics.

Villimez et al. (1986) noted that physical appearance of children affected not only how other people perceived the child's accomplishments but also how the children viewed themselves. The purpose of this study was to investigate the association of a child's height and weight to others' perceptions and their self-perceptions of their academic achievement. Eighteen teachers rated 388 students in the first and third grades, and the children also rated each other on competence, both social and academic. The teacher ratings consisted of four competence ratings that were 7-point scales: 1) academic

aptitude, 2) athletic ability, 3) social competence, and 4) independence. In order to rate their peers, children were asked to put pictures of their friends into four piles: 1) “very good” at schoolwork, 2) “very good” in physical education, 3) who “everyone liked a lot”, and 4) who did things well on their own. After this, the children were asked to narrow down their choices and rank the top three in each category. The school nurse measured height and weight while academic competence was gathered using the California Achievement Test (CAT) as well as grades from report cards. The teachers assessed the children in September and January, peers assessed each other in January, and the competence scores were collected in May.

The study found that in general, teachers’ attributions of their students’ competencies are related to the child’s physical appearance. Their study also suggests that teacher and student perceptions of children’s competence are affected by height and weight. Also, tallness for males is related with positive perceptions of academic success and females who are heavy are negatively associated with academic success. So, for girls, the more “in shape” they are, the more likely they will perform well in school and boys will most likely perform better if they are “bulkier.” From Castelli et al. (2007), it is apparent that physicality does affect academics—the more physical a child is the better they will do in school.

In a more recent study, Papaioannou, Ampatzoglou, Kalogiannis, and Sagovits (2008) attempted to discover the effect of motivation on an athlete’s achievement goals, sport satisfaction, and academic performance. The researchers believed that academics are important to athletes since many young athletes will not become professionals and will need to rely on their academic success for their futures. This study expands the research on sports and academics by looking at how achievement goals are affected by

people whom the athlete holds dear. Coaches and parents generally do all they can to help athletes succeed and meet their goals physically, but they are also academically invested. There were two parts to this study. The first consists of the effects of achievement goals in athletics: mastery, performance approach, performance avoidance and social approval. The second part of the study consisted of the athlete's achievement goals regarding sports and academic performance. It was hypothesized that goals in sports would relate positively to academics because goal setting applies to many domains.

In the study, Papaioannou et al. (2008) observed 863 Greek athletes from 28 varying sports. There were two age groups, a high school aged-group and a middle school-age group. Once the athletes had been in school for four months, they completed three questionnaires. One questionnaire assessed goal orientations in their sports, which used 5-point Likert scales to assess the four achievement goals mentioned above. The second questionnaire assessed the perception of the goal orientations in relation to the athletes' loved ones with a 5-point Likert scale. The final questionnaire also used a 5-point Likert scale to assess the satisfaction athletes had with sport. Finally, an average of the athletes' grades was provided at the end of the school year.

From this study, it can be said that coaches, mothers, and best friends shape goal orientations and that each person helps in a different way. Coaches and mothers, as opposed to best friends, had a greater influence on athletes' adaptive goals (mastery and social approval). Additionally, a group that overemphasizes performance approach goals in sports negatively affects an athlete's academic performance because they do not stress academic goal-setting. Parents and coaches have a stronger influence on the behaviors in children than do their peers. Papaioannou et al. (2008) claimed that coaches who

emphasize mastery goals in sports have a positive relationship to the athletes' academic achievement, though their emphasis on social approval had a negative effect. The researchers noted that the positive effects of mastery goals and perceptions are outweighed by coaches' stress of social approval. However, coaches are dedicated to their athletes' success in areas other than sports. They may also believe that success in school will relate to success in athletics.

In Buchanan et al.'s (1976) study on popularity, children reported that they would rather be good at their schoolwork than athletics. This shows that regardless of their athletic ability, children value their academic performance. However, Buchanan et al. (1976) noted that this could be due to parent influence since most parents have the expectation that their children focus and perform academically. It was found that boys value athletics in others but for girls, it is important that athletic success is coupled with academic success. This study suggests that children have different expectations for themselves than they do for others. However, overall, it is important to note that children want to succeed academically regardless of the fact that the people they find popular are also athletically gifted (or, for boys, only athletically gifted).

In a study conducted by Cassidy and Conroy (2006), the researchers argued that comparing social traits in children such as athletics and academics can aid in the understanding of how these domains influence child development. This is especially true since children spend a majority of their time at school or playing sports, so these two domains are the most influential in their development. The reason that researchers use these two domains to study children is that children are learning similar lessons in both of these domains. They are challenged in both areas to learn skills and overcome obstacles.

Since athletics and academics are both essential to a child's development, it is important to understand that they are related.

Research has generally shown that athletic involvement in children relates to positive academic achievement. Thus, it is important that children are physically active because it will translate to success in the classroom. Papaioannou et al. (2008) even suggest that coaches are more than athletic teachers, they also deeply care and are committed to academic performance for the children they coach. This commitment is very important because many children want to succeed more athletically than academically. Because most children will not enjoy a career in athletics, their academics are what will determine their success in the future. However, children should maintain their involvement in sports since it improves their academic performance through commitment to hard work and perseverance.

Conclusion

Previous research and the current literature review support that athletics has a positive effect on child development. This occurs in many areas, but a positive relationship was most obvious in friendships, self-esteem and identity, family interactions, and academic performance. Researchers have been hypothesizing about

such issues for some time. As more information is found and research methods improve, there will be more complete support of these hypotheses. For now, it is generally accepted that when a child participates in sports, he or she will see positive occurrences in other aspects of their lives.

The research conducted by Dunn et al. (2007), Cassidy and Conroy (2006), Smith (2003), and Weiss and Smith (1999) found that child participation in sports positively affected their social development. Athletic events are an automatic way for children to make friends and develop social relationships. Children must learn how to act appropriately around peers and figures of authority, which they can acquire from sports activities. Social development at this age is mechanized through peer acceptance. At young ages, children expect their friends to be athletic and the group does not accept those who are not athletic. However, when peer acceptance occurs through sports, the children find a sense of value through a common experience. Sports encourage cooperation, conflict resolution and communication in young children—all vital skills for development.

In terms of self-esteem and identity, athletic participation is a catalyst for these concepts. Children immediately see and feel a sense of accomplishment through their role in sports; their self-esteem increases and they will feel self-worth and begin to develop an athletic identity (Anderson et al., 2009). When teammates, coaches and parents approve of a child's ability, the child will experience pride in himself and it can transfer to other domains. It is also possible that the children will develop their own style of leadership from their sports activities, but one can only be a confident leader with high self-esteem.

Usually parents enroll their children in sports, which initiates their interest in an active lifestyle. However, most children continue to participate in sports because they

begin to like it and it is fun. Families are highly affected by a child's involvement in sports because in the United States, most family time is spent around sporting events (Kremer-Sadlik and Kim, 2007). Thus, parents spend a lot of personal time driving their children to practice or coaching. Competitions are usually a family event, and research has found that competition sparks parent-child conversations regarding life lessons. Parents can use athletic themes to teach their children proper behavior and morals, for example. They can impress upon their children the importance of sportsmanship, teamwork and the effects of winning and losing. Families can become closer because of the values that sports impact in their daily lives.

Academic performance is possibly one of the most important results of physical activity for young children. Research conducted by Pappaionnou et al. (2008), Castelli et al. (2007), and Villimez et al. (1986) suggests that the more active children are, the better they perform in school. This is because physical activity increases cognition and helps children to do better on tests. The types of goal-setting lessons that children learn from sports can be applied to schoolwork. Athletic participation helps children to understand that quitting is not a good option when they are faced with difficult tasks. When children are involved in healthy extra-curricular activities like sports, they will be better students and have a much higher probability of success in their future.

Overall, sports are very influential in the lives of children and have profound effects on their development. The lessons children learn from their athletic participation will stay with them throughout their lives. Additionally, it can be argued that small aspects developed and conquered in competition will definitely help a child in his or her future in domains that has nothing to do with athletics. For example, competitions force children to overcome an obstacle such as defeating a strong team. In the academic arena,

it is helpful to have this skill when completing difficult homework assignments.

Learning one's role on a team can help children later in their lives especially at work so they understand their duties and role as a member of a group. Sports are not just fun activities; they are an avenue for child development that children may not even notice until they have left athletics. Athletics last only for a short time, but impact children for a lifetime.

References

- Anderson, C., Mâsse, L., Zhang, H., Coleman, K., & Chang, S. (2009). Contribution of athletic identity to child and adolescent physical activity. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 37*(3), 220-226. doi: 10.1016/j.amepre.2009.05.017
- Buchanan, H., Blankenbaker, J., & Cotten, D. (1976). Academic and athletic ability as popularity factors in elementary school children. *Research Quarterly, 47*(3), 320-325.
- Cassidy, C., & Conroy, D. (2006). Children's self-esteem related to school- and sport-specific perceptions of self and others. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 29*(1), 3-26.

- Castelli, D., Hillman, C., Buck, S., & Erwin, H. (2007). Physical fitness and academic achievement in third- and fifth-grade students. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology, 29*(2), 239-252.
- Chambers, S. (1991). Factors affecting elementary school students' participation in sports. *The Elementary School Journal, 91*(5), 413-419.
- Cluff, D. No Date. Emotional development and the self esteem in children. *Homeschool Curriculum and Child Learning*. Retrieved November 22, 2010, from <http://www.child-central.com/Emotional-Development-and-Self-Esteem-in-Children.html>.
- Dunn, J., Dunn, J., & Bayduza, A. (2007). Perceived athletic competence, sociometric status, and loneliness in elementary school children. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 30*(3), 249-269.
- Eriksson, M., Nordqvist, T., & Rasmussen, F. (2008). Associations between parents' and 12-year-old children's sport and vigorous activity: The role of self-esteem and athletic competence. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health, 5*(3), 359-373.
- Holecko, C. No Date. The bonding benefits of family fitness. *Family Fitness*. Retrieved November 22, 2010, from <http://familyfitness.about.com/od/motivation/a/bonding.htm>.
- Kremer-Sadlik, T., & Kim, J. (2007). Lessons from sports: Children's socialization to values through family interaction during sports activities. *Discourse & Society, 18*(1), 35-52. doi: 10.1177/0957926507069456
- Papaioannou, A., Ampatzoglou, G., Kalogiannis, P., & Sagovits, A. (2008). Social Agents, achievement goals, satisfaction and academic achievement in youth sport.

Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 9(2), 122-141.

doi:10.1016/j.psychsport.2007.02.003

- Slutzky, C., & Simpkins, S. (2009). The link between children's sport participation and self-esteem: Exploring the mediating role of sport self-concept. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 10(3), 381-389.
- Smith, A. (2003). Peer relationships in physical activity contexts: A road less traveled in youth sport and exercise psychology research. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 4(1), 25-39. doi: 10.1016/S1469-0292(02)00015-8
- Theokas, C. (2009). Youth sport participation—a view of the issues: Introduction to the special section. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(2), 303-306. doi: 10.1037/a0015042
- Villimez, C., Eisenberg, N., & Carroll, J. (1986). Sex differences in the relation of children's height and weight to academic performance and others' attributions of competence. *Sex Roles*, 15(11-12), 667-681.
- Weiss, M., & Smith, A. (1999). Quality of youth sport friendships: Measurement development and validation. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 21(2), 145-166.
- Weiss, M., Smith, A., & Theeboom, M. (1996). "That's what friends are for": Children's and teenagers' perceptions of peer relationships in the sport domain. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Science*, 18, 347-349.