The Impact of Physical Activity and Sports on Self-Esteem in Adolescent Girls

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in the Graduate School of Marietta College

By

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Abstract

Females have historically been discouraged from participating in physical activity and sports. Research however has found that females, especially young adolescents, benefit greatly from physical activity and sports. Physical activity not only promotes a higher sense of self esteem in women but also provides a greater sense of body image and overall well being throughout life. It has been shown that women that engage in physical activity as young adults tend to continue to stay active later in life, leading to a greater sense of self esteem. With the evidence that has been shown in past research and the research that was administered, the researcher attempted to encourage the inclusion of regular physical activity and sports participation in the daily lives of adolescent girls. The purpose of this study was to determine whether regular physical activity and sports participation had an impact on the self-esteem of adolescent girls. A quantitative experimental design was used, utilizing stratified sampling. The researcher used a nominal scale survey to gather data from girls between the ages of 14 to 18. It was hypothesized that girls would show that regular physical activity and sports participation affected their self-esteem in a positive way.
DEDICATION

To all that believe in me and continue to push me further
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am thankful to those close to me for their support and excitement about the completion of this paper and my degree. You all kept me going when I was tired of typing and reviewing literature.

I would like to thank Derek Stanley for letting me work on a lot of this project while I was “on the job.” I know you probably were tired of hearing me tell you that, yes, I was still working on my thesis.

I am grateful to Dr. William Bauer for helping me through all of my life decisions and guiding me in the right directions. Thank you for showing me how research can be fun if you apply yourself.

Thanks also to Cathy Mowrer for taking me through the homestretch of my thesis. I know it is a long paper to read!

Thank you to the Mike Elliott at Marietta High School for letting me distribute my surveys so that I could collect my data. I know things like these can be a nuisance.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally women have been discouraged and excluded from physical activity and sports based on a number of inconspicuous philosophies. Originally it was presumed that women’s bodies were unable to handle the stresses of physical sports and exercise. (Gilbert, 2001) Present day research clearly argues the fallacy of these claims. Several research studies show however that participation in physical activity and sports can increase a woman’s self esteem and overall well-being (Feltes, 1998).

The purpose of this research was to show the correlation between sports and physical activity and the self-esteem of girls. Self-esteem encompasses many factors including aspects such as body image, feelings of competency and self-satisfaction (Jafee, LynnWu & Peggy 1996).

Females between the ages of 11-15 experience a severe decrease in self esteem usually related to body image. Consequently, around this time, girls’ participation in sports decreases greatly (Feltes, 1998). The female body goes through many changes during this time, from the growth of breasts, changes in height and weight and also the addition of menarche.

Body image has been speculated as one of the most problematic areas for girls this age. In a study done by the American Association of University Women in 1992, the researchers concluded that girls have the highest self esteem at the approximate age of 11 to 12 with a critical hit in self esteem coming between the ages of 14 to 15. The researchers also made mention that the transition from elementary school to the middle
school can be a dramatic blow to the self esteem of young girls. Girls in this study were asked to answer yes or no to the statement, “I feel good about myself.” It was found that 60% of those girls in the 5th grade answered yes while only 37% of those in 6th grade answered yes respectively.

Body image does not necessarily have to do with body weight and size but can better be described as feelings about one’s appearance. Body image plays a large role in one’s self esteem and overall well-being. Girls especially have been shown to be overly concerned with body image with pressure coming not only from the media but also from other peers (Mendelson, 1996).

It has been shown that overweight individuals, especially girls, have lower self-esteem and body image. Girls in our society however are judged by peers, comparing them to unrealistic notions of body size and weight, which are in turn reinforced by the media. Noting this, it is imperative that females remain active in sports participation which has been shown to improve not only their self-esteem but also their overall self image and physical well being. It is important that females get the opportunity to participate in physical activity which can start at an early age.

Due to this disparity between the benefits of sport and exercise and the increased number of adolescent girls quitting sports, the researcher felt that a study of this trend needed to be reinforced. The study was administered to examine if exercise and sports do affect the self-esteem of adolescent girls.
Statement of the Problem

Many young girls have been positively impacted by physical activity and sports, which directly relates to their overall self-esteem levels (Jafee, 1996). Unfortunately, many adolescent girls are not involving themselves in physical activity. With the increased funding of girls sports from Title IX, more girls should be involving themselves in physical activity and sports. Previous research has shown that physical activity and sports build self-esteem (Feltes, 1998). In order to build self-esteem, more girls should be participating in physical activity.

Purpose and Research Questions

Many researchers believe that physical activity and sports does help adolescent girls improve and maintain their self-esteem (Gilbert, 2001). This study attempted to show how physical activity in girls leads to increased levels of self-esteem. This study aimed to assess the effect that physical activity has on girls in relation to such factors as: body image, overall self worth and peer acceptance, which encompass the concept of self-esteem. The study will ask: “Do adolescent girls really benefit from physical activity and sports participation?”

Research Hypothesis

It was anticipated from the results of the survey answers that girls participating in physical activity and sports on a regular basis will have higher scores on the administered self-esteem survey than those who do not participate in physical activity and sports.
Null Hypothesis

Female students participating in physical activity and sports on a regular basis do not have higher self-esteem than those female students not participating in physical activity and sports.

Alternative Hypotheses

Female students participating in physical activity and sports on a regular basis have higher self-esteem than those female students not participating in physical activity and sports.
Limitations of the Study

There may be several factors leading to girls decreased participation in sports, which in turn, can lead to lower self-esteem levels. Some researchers have studied both the positive and negative benefits from sport and found that there are several confounding factors keeping girls from participating in physical activity (McEwin, 1981; Feltes, 1998). Results from these studies have shown several factors that lead to decreased participation in physical activity.

Physical Education classes provide girls with the opportunity to become involved in physical activity. These classes are usually co-ed, which can lead to girls feeling intimidated by boys in their classes. Boys tend to place increased emphasis on winning for both its intrinsic and personal value (Jonas, 2002). It has been shown that young girls are more interested in building relationships at the expense of developing athletic skills (Feltes, 1998). To continue, another area of alarm for girls in physical education classes is the tendency for boys to control the environment, which in turn can lead to a decrease in the girls’ level of participation.

Participating in sports is the primary way for girls to exercise, however, many girls can be regularly active on their own by utilizing a wide variety of physical activities. Many girls believe that they need to be involved in sport to exercise. Studies have shown that the healthful effects of physical activity can be achieved with regular amounts of exercise that are not sport related such as running or biking (Feltes, 1998).

Additionally, both parents and coaches can provide un-needed pressure on the student, focusing on winning as the primary determining factor for achievement. Some coaches and parents can treat their daughters as “little pros”, which can invoke feelings of
anxiety and apprehension in their child (McEwin, 1981). Girls have been shown to be less concerned with winning and more concerned with the relationships they make while participating in physical activity and sports. Additionally, it has been shown that the primary reason girls play sports is fun (Derry, 2002). While much research has shown the positive effects of coaches and parents in relation to self-esteem, un-needed pressure can provide students with an overwhelming amount of stress and anxiety that can lead to decreased participation in sports (Hoyle & Leff, 1997).

Another possible limitation of this study could have been the sample size and diversity of that sample size. 682 students from a rural high school were sampled. The data from a more diverse sample would be much more applicable as a sample population. Additionally, middle school aged students could also have added to the age diversity amongst the sample population.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There is an existing body of research related to the impact of exercise and sports on self esteem in adolescent girls. Many articles have shown a positive correlation between these two factors. This review of literature will present the relevant research that is available in order to provide background to the research problem.

Women in history have been previously described as being inferior to men, devoid of serious thought while being highly skilled in areas such as cooking and cleaning. Many women were prohibited from exercising and playing sports for fear of medical malady. As time passed, women were allowed to participate in female traditional activities such as tennis, bowling and even swimming. Any form of exercise beyond this was felt to ultimately lead to a more masculine and unattractive woman that would be unsuitable for true womanhood. Fortunately, those days are becoming extinct, as a new generation of women are being empowered to break the standards previously set by society. These standards set by society are starting to crumble as more women are becoming involved with exercise and sport activity (Gilbert, 2001).

Girls become involved in exercise and sports not only because they are good for them, but also because they are extremely enjoyable. Historically, men have competed longer in sport than women. In fact women could not run the Marathon as an Olympic event until 1984. There were no races longer than 1500 meters contested for women until the 1980’s. Some women in the 1970’s trying to enter into the coveted Boston Marathon
were handed back entry forms with notes saying, “women are not physically capable of running a marathon” (Lovett, 1997).

Over time women have increased participation in sports based solely on the number of female sports contested. Title IX has helped to increase the participation in women’s sports at the high school level by over 800% and has increased participation in college sports by 400% respectively (Women’s Sports Foundation, 2001).

Both girls and boys in the past have listed fun as the number one reason to play sports. Boys have listed the number two and three reasons to play sports as “skill improvement” and “for the excitement of competition.” Girls have listed the number two and three reasons to play sport as “to stay in shape” and “to get exercise.” Looking at the statistical upswing in female sports and the importance placed on these sports, one may assume that females may be beginning to focus more on skill development and competition more than merely staying in shape. It is assumed that females in sports are aiming to be the best possible athletes, which may lead to more emphasis on winning.

Girls play sports for many reasons: fun, staying in shape, to get exercise, to improve skills and to be a part of a team, just to name a few, ironically though, many girls in grades 7-12 are not participating in sports or are quitting playing altogether.

Research done in Colorado Springs, Colorado focused on the reasons boys and girls play and quit sports (Lanelines, 1992). The researchers in this study sampled 2,700 boys and 3,100 girls in grades 7-12. The girls and boys sampled had reported on an initial questionnaire that they had recently stopped playing a non-school or school sport. The girls in the study listed these statements as needed qualifiers to play sports again: “Practices were more fun, there was no conflict with studies, coaches understood players
better, there was no conflict with social life, I could play more and coaches were better teachers.” Boy’s results were similar, though the emphasis on “conflict with social life” was not ranked towards the top.

In research done by Jaffee in 1992 it was shown that “girls aged nine to twelve build self-esteem through challenge, achievement in sports, risk taking experiences and skill development. Older girls derived positive self esteem through the approval of others and a belief that girls in general are capable and able to play sports well” (Jaffee, 1992). However, research done by the U.S. Dept. of Health, 1992; Wilson Report, 1987, shows that during the adolescent years, females’ participation in sports and physical activity drops dramatically. Girls’ motivation at this time however has traditionally been more directed towards the idea of “fitting in.” With this said, it is a negative that all girls are not involved in sports and physical exercise.

Girls benefit from sports participation on many levels. Some of these benefits are highlighted by a study conducted by McEwin (1981). The journal stated eleven positives of participation in sports for adolescents. The following are a few highlighted selections from this list. Some girls enjoy the exercise, while others enjoy the bonds made from interaction with peers and with the respective coaches. Competing in sports may lead to an awarding of a college scholarship or the ability to play sports in college. Sports allow leaders to emerge and utilized talents to be discovered. Finally, competitive sports show adolescents a better understanding of competition and how it is related to everyday life (McEwin, 1981).
Other potential benefits may include peers and coaches acting as a support system during a time of low self-esteem. Sports and physical activity also serve as a break from schoolwork and a stress reliever for girls.

Lindgren et al (2000) studied the impact of sports upon later physical activity in adult life. The research concluded that most women felt that they would continue to be physically active later in life after being physically active as younger girls. One woman was quoted as saying, “I really enjoy taking part in sport and feel better for it. I can’t imagine life without sport.”

In a similar study, Attitudes towards competition: do differences exist between boys and girls, Mary Healy Jonas (2002) showed through the research that both boys and girls number one reason to play sports is fun. The focus of this research however, was to show the differences between boys and girls in relation to their views on sports.

The researchers’ review of the literature states that women are less competitive than men and also are less interested in “dominance striving.” In order to gather data a questionnaire was administered to a sample population of 879 youth members. 29% of the sample fell between the ages of 16-18, 31% of the sample was between the ages of 14-15 and lastly, 37% of the sample fell between the ages of 12-13. Boys represented 36% of the sample (336) while girls represented 64% of the sample (557). Interestingly, the researchers hypothesis was correct, both boys and girls listed fun as the first reason to play sports. One aspect of this study worth noting is the questions on the questionnaire about fair play and its importance in the overall sport experience. When girls were asked how important fair play was to them, 72% listed fair play as important or very important, while only 48% of the boys listed fair play as important. Also worth noting was when
asked if the concept of “everyone gets a chance to play” was important, 53% of girls said yes, while only 34% of the boys answered yes respectively. Looking at the data it is shown that boys weigh more importance on winning than on the overall fairness of the game itself.

Females in the United States are bombarded with images of waif thin models, which paint an unrealistic portrait of the ideal female body. Girls see these images every day through various forms of media such as television, magazines and even at school during the Channel One news program, a news program made for adolescents, which is often mandatory for students to watch. Most of these women are naturally thin and diet excessively to maintain the mentioned body shape. The women on the cover of magazines such as Cosmopolitan are then airbrushed to make the appearance of a thinner and more “beautiful” model. Girls in our society in turn strive to appear identical to these models, which often push girls to develop poor eating habits or worse yet, eating disorders.

In some studies girls as young as six years old have expressed the need to start a regimented diet in order to look thinner like the models on the television. A study done by Bowker et. al, (2003) reported that, “body image is paramount in adolescence as young individuals deal with both the bodily changes initiated by puberty and increased interest from and toward the other sex.”

(Bowker et. al, 2003) Lieberman, Gauvin, Bukowski & White (2003) showed that peer pressure was shown to be a defining predictor of body esteem and eating behavior. Girls defined as “popular” in this study were more likely to have lower body esteem and engage in eating that would be considered “disordered.” Many girls at this
age begin to talk about how fat they are and in turn watch what they eat, or don’t eat, very carefully. A vicious cycle takes over for these young girls plagued by a misrepresentation of women in the media. This cycle can be broken if girls are exposed to physical activity and sports at an early age. The goal is to educate girls that the female body is not just for looks but for physical action and activity.

Research done by the Melpomene Institute provides the evidence that. “Among older teens, those who engage in sports and other physical activities are least likely to drop out of school, get pregnant, develop eating disorders, put up with abusive relationships, smoke, drink, do drugs or develop breast cancer as adults.” (Daughters, 2004)

In a study done by Ferron, Narring, Cauderay &Michaud (1999) show that sport and exercise can become preventative medicine against such ailments as stress, depression and negative experimental behavior. “The perception of the involvement in physical activity and sports as a protective factor against stress and depression or unsettling behaviors (notably risk taking, experimental behaviour and drug use) is currently spreading among health professionals and policy makers (Ferron et. al, 1999).

These researchers in this study have also commented that low levels of sports participation have been tied to the tendency to adopt experimental behavior in many areas. For example, there has been shown to be an inverse correlation between cigarette smoking and the frequency of sport activity. Marijuana use is also included in this statistic. It has been concluded that females participating in sports are at a greater advantage than those that are not based on these factors alone (Ferron et. al, 1999). Females now have the opportunities to be physically active and most that play sports
agree that it is fun. It is shown that the most important aspect of sports and physical activity for females is fun, with “staying in shape” being numbered as the second most important.

In a related study, Strelan, Mehaffey & Tiggeman (2003) explained that women are more likely than men to exercise for reasons such as: body tone, weight control and attractiveness. It is concluded that women exercise in this fashion because of the societal expectations that pressure women into looking attractive and thin. These researchers also state that, “It is argued that constant evaluation (e.g. by male gaze) and objectification (e.g. media presentation of bodies and body parts) leads women, and perhaps girls and young women in particular, to internalize this external view of themselves, a process referred to as “self objectification.” The article also explains that young women, above all others, have been shown to score the highest on the measures of self objectification (Strelan et. al, 2003). Adolescent aged women are more impressionable and more likely to be judged on their attractiveness than any other age of women.

Eva-Carin Tebeius, Ulla Fridlund and Bengt (2000), supported the idea that parental support was required for any child to be involved in physical activity or sports. The research also shows that fathers more than mothers are a key motivator towards the involvement of girls in sports. The question has been asked before as to what motivates girls to start to become physically active and involved in sports.

An article appearing July 2004 in Daughters magazine which highlighted previous research done by the Melpomene Institute, an organization that studies the connections between physical activity and the self esteem of women, points the finger once again at the father. The research in this article states that, “the most influential factor is a father
who plays with his daughter when she is young.” The article then suggests that fathers who start at an early age to crawl, run and build things together with girls will be acclimating the girls to skills that will be needed later on to be physically active. Too many parents raise children in a tunnel pointed straight at masculinity or femininity and fail to realize that androgynous teaching leads to a much healthier and well-rounded child.

Also worth noting is that parental pressure is associated with decreased levels of sport participation, while parental support has been linked to greater enjoyment of the athletes respective sport (Hoyle & Leff, 1997).

Interest in girls’ participation in sports has grown considerably in the last 25 years (Gilbert, 2001). The addition of appropriate facilities, female only sports teams and the overall exposure of women’s sport in the media has made much of the difference. Many professionals have built prevention programs bases solely on the promotion of female sports and exercise activities. Some still argue the relevance of women’s sports in the present day, however none will disagree that women’s sports participation is on the rise. Women previously chastised by the media and by their peers are now leading an all out charge, breaking into the ranks of the male dominated arenas. More women are becoming exposed to the benefits of sports and exercise from not only a physical stand point, but also a psychological stand point. Women are experiencing benefits such as, “improved physical health, reduced depression and increased self confidence” (Gilbert, 2001).

Several studies have shown the positive correlation between sports and self esteem in girls (Jonas, 2002). Some studies show that girls self esteem drops at three
times the rate of boys their age. Decreases in self esteem in girls can lead to drug use, unwanted pregnancy and depression. Some other problems that can be caused by low levels of self esteem in girls are suicide, eating disorders and social withdraw. Girls that participate in sports have a greater feeling of psychological well being and are often times shown to have a better sense of body image. Girls that play sports also have been shown to experience less depression throughout their lives.

One study found that only 29% of high school girls listed that they were “happy the way I am.” Self esteem in girls is linked to many factors, some of them being: personal appearance, acceptance of peers and even physical competence. However, the most influential factor in determining girl’s self-esteem is perceived physical attractiveness (Jaffee, LynnWu and Peggy, 1996). High self esteem has been linked to many positive qualities such as: active engagement in daily activities, better psychological health and even a more optimistic attitude (Bowker, Gadbois & Cornock, 2003).

Conversely, low self esteem has been shown to cause feelings of inadequacy, incompetence and an overall expectation of failing. Most girls have an unrealistically high expectation of their appearance which leads to feelings of inadequacy. Most girls compare themselves at some point to models on television and even others at school. Boys during this time do not facilitate the girls positively, for they tend too hold girls to unrealistic standards of beauty.

Girls have been found to be discouraged from exercise and sports. It has been shown in research done by Feltes (1998) that girls face a variety of obstacles in relation to exercise and sports such as: “parents who perpetuate the stereotype of femininity by
associating sports with masculinity to the lack of encouragement for girls to participate in sports in the school system” (Feltes, 1998).

Some other examples of unfair treatment were highlighted in a study done by Jafee (1992). “Obstacles such as unfair treatment by boys, assumptions that girls were not good players, inappropriate level of challenge, lack of opportunity and time conflicts with other activities were all shown to have a negative impact on girls’ participation in sports and exercise” (Jafee, 1992). The researchers in this study developed a number of recommendations from the themes developed from the study. Some of the responses included “Involve girls in the development of programming physical activities for girls. Get girls together, some who use the site and some who don’t, and ask them what they want. Give them realistic choices. They will feel ownership of the programs that develop” (Feltes, 1998).

In response to these findings, many researchers have attempted to assess the effectiveness of co-educational physical education classes. Some researchers have shown that more equitable treatment occurs in a single-sex physical education environment (Derry, 2002).

Girls in this study described single-sex physical education classes as offering, “more comfort and support from female peers, less fear of failure and embarrassment, more opportunity for self-growth, athletic ability and to form bonds within their female peer group. Furthermore, single-sex classes seemed to provide girls with a relaxed and fun environment where they did not feel pressure or the need to impress boys, and were able to challenge themselves athletically due to their increased opportunities to participate” (Derry, 2002).
It is important that females get the opportunity to participate in physical activity which can start at an early age. The Melpomene Institute researches correlations between physical activity and self esteem and they have come up with research that states that the most important and influential factor for females is a father that plays with his daughter when she is young. Too many fathers play only with their boys, feeling that the girls will not like the rough and tumble play. By doing this the father decreases the chance that his girl will be physically active when older. Traditionally, fathers are more liberal with their children and allow them to take more physical risks. Showing girls that this is appropriate play for a girl is a positive step forward towards better physical and emotional health as an adult (Daughters, 2004).

Girls that play sports are less likely to get pregnant, smoke, drink, do drugs, drop out of school, develop an eating disorder or even put up with an abusive partner or relationship (Ferron, 1999). Physical activity lowers the chances of all of these problems and also lowers the amount of trouble a girl faces in adolescence. Noting this, it is imperative that females remain active in sports participation, which has been shown to improve not only their self-esteem but also their overall self-image and physical well being.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Study Design

Evaluation of the impact of physical activity and sports on the self esteem in adolescent girls was done using a quantitative research approach. A one-shot case study format was used to measure the participant’s self-esteem levels. A survey utilizing a five point Likert scale assessed the subjects involved in the study. The survey was then distributed to a local high school and passed out to all students in grades 9-12. A quantitative analysis was then administered using the data collected from the survey. The advantage of using a quantitative survey was the ease of collecting the data. Conversely, feelings and themes could not be evaluated using this approach and would be better suited for a qualitative research design.

The target population for this study was female students ages 14-18; however, males were also surveyed to ensure that there was no threat to internal validity on the basis of selection. After using stratified sampling to target the sample population, the researcher then extrapolated the results to a larger population.

Participants

The researcher used 682 rural students aged 14-18 to examine the impact of physical activity and sports on self esteem in adolescent girls. Both male and female students were surveyed using a five-point Likert scale. Although the completed male surveys were unused towards data collection, the researcher aimed to ensure there was no threat to internal validity on the basis of selection by assessing both males and females.
The subjects in the study were not compensated in any way and were not required to complete the survey.

Procedures

The principal from Marietta High School was contacted in person by the researcher in order to gain access to the students which made up the sample population for the study. The schools were delivered the surveys to pass out to all teachers who eventually directed and guided students in the classroom to complete the survey. The students were then read brief directions describing the format of the survey, the general purpose of the study, and finally the choice in whether to participate in the research study. Students were then asked to complete a 12 question survey assessing the impact of physical exercise and sports on self-esteem.

Upon completion of the surveys, the teachers at the schools collected the assessment, placed them in confidential folders, and had them prepared to be picked up by the researcher. The researcher then entered the data using the SPSS statistical software program. A thank you letter was hand delivered to the principal of Marietta High School following the research study to express gratitude for the ability to use the students for research purposes.

Instruments

The study was conducted using a five-point Likert scale survey composed of 12 questions. The data collected from the survey was conducted using the SPSS Statistical software program.
Timeline

- January 2006 – The principal of the local high school was contacted to gain access to the desired sample population.
- February 2006 – Surveys were distributed and completed by the sample population
- March 2006 – Data was collected and analyzed by the researchers to determine the impact of physical activity and sports on self esteem.
- April 2006 – Research was completed.

Reliability

The reliability of the research completed was ensured by many factors. The survey questions were clear and unequivocal to all subjects ensuring an accurate assessment while providing for internal consistency. Additionally, the survey was administered in a manner that was consistent to all students. Classroom teachers were also provided with explicit directions as to the conduction of the survey, collection of materials, and packaging of completed surveys. The researcher felt that these steps ensured the reliability of the study and the data collected during the study.

Validity

The validity of the research was supported by three factors. Content validity was supported by making sure the survey questions asked represented the specific area of interest. This was accomplished by asking experts in the appropriate field to ensure the validity of survey questions. Criterion-related validity was supported by establishing a quality instrument in which to assess the students’ answers. Construct validity was reinforced by testing an acceptable theory against the gathered scores collected from the survey. These precautions verified the validity of the data collected during the study.
CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS

Interpretation of Findings

A 12 question survey was used to assess the difference in self-esteem between those students that were physically active and those that were not physically active. The surveys were collected in person from Marietta High School from the principal of the building. The results of the findings were then tabulated using the SPSS statistical software program. 682 surveys were collected from the students at Marietta High School.

The survey used was a 12 question, five point Likert scale survey. The first two questions on the survey were answered either yes or no and were nominal questions. The remaining 10 questions on the survey were in five point Likert format, which is based on an ordinal scale. A quantitative research design was used to determine the outcome of the data collected.

Of the 682 surveys collected by the researcher, 351 (51%) were male and 331 (49%) were female. Although the researcher was only interpreting data for the female population, male data was also collected and was compared in this study. Physically active males made up 41.5% of the total data while 9.3% of the total population was comprised of non active males. Physically active females made up 33.3% of the total population while 14.3% of the total population was comprised of non active females. The data purports that 74.8% of those surveys were physically active most days of the week or participated in sports and 25.2% were not.
Ten variables were assessed on a five point Likert Scale in relation to participation in sports and gender. The variables were:

- I fear failure in life.
- When talking with others I have trouble making good eye contact.
- I get sick often.
- When someone makes me angry I keep my feelings to myself.
- I blame others for my problems and mistakes.
- I see myself as a victim of other people’s actions.
- I often lie or tell only part of the truth.
- I tend to be quiet even when I feel strongly about something.
- When I look in the mirror I am usually unhappy with how I look.
- I get angry easily and take it out on other people.
Figure 1

_Females Mean Scores on Survey_

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Figure 1. shows the mean scores of those females participating in physical activity and sports and those not participating in physical activity and sports. In relation to the means the differences between those participating and those not is shown to be significant.

Based on the mean scores, nine out of ten of the variables have a lower mean score indicating that those that participate in sports and are physically active have higher levels of self-esteem than those that do not.
Interestingly, looking at the mean scores of the male data in Figure 2, it is shown that males that participate in sports and are physically active have even higher levels of self-esteem than the males that do not. There is a much greater disparity between the mean scores of the male data and the mean scores of the female data in relation to those either participating in sports and being physically and active and those that are not.

Figure 2

*Males Mean Scores on Survey*

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Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine whether physical activity and sports participation have an impact on the self-esteem of adolescent girls.

A five-point Likert Scale survey was used to assess the self-esteem of 682 high school student’s grade 9-12. The first question on the survey asked if the participant was physically active on a regular basis or was involved in a sport. The second question on the survey was to classify them as being either male or female. Following these two questions were 10 phrases in which the participants had to select their response based on a five point scale.

The researcher was granted access to 682 students, grade 9-12 at Marietta High School. This data was then entered into the SPSS statistical software program. After completing the data analysis from all of the valid surveys the researcher believes that regular physical activity and sports participation do have a positive impact on the self-esteem of adolescent girls.

The mean scores of the female students’ data showed that those that participated in sports and regular physical activity were much more likely to exhibit signs of positive self-esteem. The females in the survey showed significance on nine out of the ten survey questions. Those that responded that they were not physically active or involved in sports showed considerably lower levels of self-esteem. Interestingly, male data also
showed the same trend, as those involved in regular physical activity and sports participation scored higher on the self-esteem survey.

Discussion

Central to the present study was the critical debate related to regular physical activity and sports participation in relation adolescent females’ self-esteem levels. This area of research is reinforced by several key findings advocating regular physical activity and sports participation for adolescent females. The researcher felt it was particularly important to assess the self-esteem levels in these girls given that overall health and well-being had been linked to physical activity and sports participation. (Jonas, 2002) It has also been shown that girls that show high levels of physical activity are more likely to participate in these activities later in life, which has been shown to increase the overall quality of there lives. (Jonas, 2002) This being said, the researcher felt it necessary to support and add to the body of past research and perhaps incite others to continue with further research in this area of interest.

The theme of self-esteem is a concept that all human beings encounter every day. Teachers, coaches, and parents are constantly striving to improve the self-esteem of their students, which has been shown to increase performance on all levels, including grades, athletic performance and overall behavior (Ferron, 1999). There is a growing body of evidence that those participating in physical activity and sports on a regular basis are actually less likely to experience depression, high stress levels and even negative behavioral problems (Ferron, 1999). It is also shown that nonphysical activities do not
offer females the same benefits that physical activities or a combination of the two can offer.

The data collected was consistent with the researcher’s hypothesis for the study. Self-Esteem was higher for both males and females that were physically active on a regular basis or participated in sports. The research data is limited to the population that was sampled, however the researcher feels that the data collected can be accurately extrapolated to a much larger population.

Previously, several limitations were discussed that could have affected the outcome of the research. Those limitations and other will be discussed to raise possible avenues for future research.

A 12 item survey was distributed to 682 males and females in a rural school district setting. The survey was created using many well-known self-esteem questions aimed at gauged the overall self-esteem of the participant. Several limitations may be applicable to this research study.

The survey method is an efficient way to gather data, however there are many variables that must be considered when using it as the main source of data. The survey is limited to the questions that the researcher feels are good predictors of either low or high self esteem. The survey method does not enable the student to explain their answers, which would ultimately lead to a much more accurate description of their overall self esteem level. An interview method may have been a more accurate assessment as to the perceived level of self esteem in the sample population as it would allow the researcher to establish rapport with the student.
Regular physical activity and sports participation are not the only factors that effect self-esteem levels. The participants that were surveyed may have many external factors that affect their overall self-esteem levels. Other factors influencing self-esteem could possibly be the participant’s family life, overall body image, and even the onset of puberty. Students with insufficient funding or parental involvement may also be discouraged from participation in sports or physical activity (McEwin, 1981).

Jonas, 2002 studied the effect that boys’ have on the girls in a physical education setting. It has been shown that boys place much more emphasis on winning, while girls will often focus much more on friendship and fair play. This disparity can often lead to girls being discouraged from participating fully in physical education classes. (Jonas, 2002) Several of the girls that reported that they weren’t physically active may have had bad experiences with physical education classes in the past, discouraging them from overall sports participation.

The total sample size may have been one area of concern, as more responses would have increased the integrity of the research that was conducted. Several middle and high schools could have been used to gather a larger amount of data, showing a much larger sample population. Also, the sample population that was used was composed of 682 rural high school students. A more diverse sample population could have also increased the strength of the sample population.

Future Research

To this day researchers continue to study the impact that regular physical activity and sports participation has on girls. Many girls have shown significant improvements in their overall well-being with the addition of physical activity. As a society it is important
that parents, teachers, and coaches realize the impact that these activities have on their children. In a world where the obesity epidemic is in full swing, it is important to stress regular physical activity to children. Children are dependent on their elders to make good choices regarding health, exercise and personal well being. Future research should strive to continue to encourage children to be physically active, as it has been shown to increase overall life satisfaction. In the future it would be interesting to study not only the self-esteem levels of adolescent girls, but also study what variables tend to affect the self-esteem in these girls. More research needs to be conducted showing the importance physical activity in adolescent girls. Below is a summary of topics that may add the growing body of research in the area of physical activity in relation to self-esteem.

- Future research needs to look at the reasons why girls’ self-esteem has continued to diminish over the past fifty years.
- Future research can guide educators to make better decisions as far as curriculum, including regular physical activity in schools.
- Future research needs to look at alternative forms of funding to continue to help women’s sports thrive in a world of oppression.
- Future research can help parents understand their children better and show them how to support their child from multiple perspectives.
- Future research needs to assess the role that socio-economic status has in relation to sports participation and overall well-being.
REFERENCE PAGE


Women’s Rights Groups Win Title IX Victory. (2001) *Women’s Sports Foundation*
APPENDIX I

Marietta College
Human Subjects Review

General Information

- All research (including surveys) involving human subjects should be received by the Human Subjects Committee at least two weeks prior to initiation of the experiments. It is the investigators' responsibility to have submitted the appropriate review form with enough lead time to allow for the review process.

- If questions are not answered or answered insufficiently to the satisfaction of the reviewers, then approval of the project may be delayed. The review committee reserves the right to request other information not explicitly requested on the review form that it regards as necessary to judge the safety of the proposed research.

- The Human Subjects Review Committee's duty is to protect the welfare of subjects participating in projects and to ensure research is conducted in an ethical and responsible manner. The purpose of this review process is not to judge the scientific legitimacy of the project design, however, the scholarly and educational outcomes of the research must be considered in balance with the risks to participants.

- Investigators must obtain 'Informed Consent' for all subjects involved in the research project or justify why this is not appropriate, feasible, or practical.

- The completed, typed proposal must be sent to the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee.

This reviewed application has been: [ ] Approved [ ] Denied Date ____________

HSR member name ______________________ Signature _______________________

Reason(s) for denial:
Marietta College
Human Subjects Review

Long Review Form

1. Name of researcher(s): Chris Basich

2. Principle investigator’s phone number: 740-376-4345 Email: cwb001@marietta.edu

3. Course name and number (if applicable): EDUC 690

4. Instructor’s name (if applicable): Dr. Bill Bauer

5. Title of Project: The Impact of Sport and Physical Activity on Self Esteem in Adolescent Girls.


7. Type of research?
   _____ Faculty
   _____ Student honor’s project
   _____ Graduate student project
   _____ Undergraduate student project
   _____ Class project
   _____ Other

8. Have previous research or pilot studies indicated any significant dangers or risks in the procedure being used?
   _____ Yes
   _______ No

9. Does this research involve active deception (i.e. misleading or false information) of subjects?
   _____ Yes
   _______ No

If you answered 'YES' to the above question, answer the (3) statements below.

9A - Explain the rationale for the deception. – The subjects may answer according to the answer they “think” is socially acceptable to give.

9B - Explain how and when the subjects will be informed of the deception. The subjects will be read a debriefing statement at the end of the survey.

9C - Describe the expected reaction or consequences (immediate or long-term) that the deception may have on subjects. Include potential
negative reactions. *None known*

10. Will any data from this investigation be confidential?

  - _x_ Yes
  - _____No

  If you answered ‘YES’ to the above question, answer the (3) questions below.

  10A - Who will have access to confidential information?
  *Only the researcher and his advisor.*

  10B - How will confidential information be stored and protected?
  *The data will be stored at the researcher’s house under lock and key until all data is entered. Then it will be destroyed.*

  10C - What will happen to confidential information after the study?
  *The surveys will be shredded upon completion of the data entry.*

11. Briefly describe the general purpose of the research.

   To determine whether sports and physical activity make a difference in adolescent girls’ self esteem.

12. Describe the types of procedures and tests to be used in the investigation.

   *The subjects will be read brief directions before the survey. The subjects will then be given the survey and asked to fill it out to the best of their ability. No student will be required to fill out the survey. Participation is entirely optional. Upon completion of the survey, the subjects will be read a debriefing form describing the intent of the study.*

13. Describe the method of data collection.

   *Each survey question will be scaled using a five point Lickert Scale. The subjects will circle the answer that best describes them. This data will then be entered into the SPSS statistical software program.*

14. Explain the time frame of the study.

   *The principals of the schools will first be contacted. Then the researcher will hand deliver the surveys to the schools complete with directions. The surveys will be administered to the students on a given school day and then picked up the following completion of the surveys. Then the researcher will tabulate the data and determine the results of the study. This process will take approximately 3 months.*

15. Describe how informed consent will be obtained or justify why it will not be.

   *The principals of the schools will be questioned as to whether the study will be obtrusive to the student body. The survey is not intended to be negative or inappropriate in nature. I have personally spoke to the principal of Marietta High School and he assured me that this survey will not be problematic for his students. He has received copies of all forms, directions and surveys.*
16. Describe how subjects will be recruited, any special requirements of the subjects, and criteria used for inclusion or exclusion of subjects.

All students within the high school will be surveyed. The survey will consist of 10 brief questions with answers selected on a five-point Lickert Scale.

17. Identify and describe the potential hazards (physical, psychological, ethical, social, economic, legal, etc.) of this type of study you have found in previous research.

Site sources in APA style.

N/A

18. Assess and describe the potential hazards (physical, psychological, ethical, social, economic, legal, etc.) involved with your study and estimate their likelihood and seriousness.

N/A

19. Describe any procedures that will be employed to minimize potential hazards and give an assessment of their potential effectiveness.

The debriefing form will cover all the information about the study and its intent. Also the students will be informed in the directions that if at any time during the survey they feel uncomfortable, they may be excused from taking the assessment.

20. Identify the audience(s) to be reached in the report of the study.

Girls grades 9-12

21. Identify the presentation method(s) to be used.

Directions will be read to the students. Then the survey will be taken. Then the students will be read a debriefing form. These will all be administered by the teacher in the classroom. The researcher will have no control over the data collection.

22. Indicate how and when subjects will be informed of the purpose of the research and how feedback will be provided.

Subjects will be informed directly following completion of the survey. They will be read a debriefing form.

23. Describe what you know about the ethical guidelines for treating human subjects within this field or discipline.

Site sources in APA style.

Appendix C has all of the Ethical Standards for reporting and publishing scientific information. This section is comprised of guidelines for researchers and act as a “code of conduct.” First, the data collected needs to be kept confidential (names etc.). An informed consent form must be used to gain access to your sample population. Upon completion of the study the subjects need to be debriefed by the administrator of the survey. Finally, the research study needs to be as unobtrusive as possible while maintaining credibility.

_I am extremely excited to see what results I will find from this study. I also feel excited because Mr. Elliott (Marietta High School Principal) has given me full backing to complete my research._

25. Attach the following: (if applicable)
   A. Informed consent form (in duplicate).
   B. Letters of permissions.
   C. Tests/surveys/questionnaires.
   D. Additional items relevant to the study.
February 8, 2006

Dear Mr. Elliott,

My name is Chris Basich and I am a graduate student at Marietta College. This semester I will be completing my Masters Thesis. My topic is *The Impact of Sport and Physical Exercise on Self Esteem in Adolescent Girls*. The sample population of my research will be girls in grades 9-12. I will also assess the boys in these grade levels, however their data will not be used in the final research process. I am writing to gain permission to survey the students in your school in grades 9-12. Copies of the attached survey, directions, and debriefing form will be delivered to the school by me and will be distributed to each classroom within this grade range. As you can see, the survey is short, unobtrusive and valuable to my research interests. It should take no longer than five minutes to administer to the class. Upon completion of the survey, students will be debriefed as to the goals of my research study. If you would please sign the attached form signifying that you give permission for me to survey your students that would be much appreciated. I am aiming to have all surveys completed by the end of February. Thank you for you time and I will be talking with you soon. If you have any additional questions about my research study please feel free to call or email.

Chris Basich
Marietta College
740-376-4345
cwb001@marietta.edu
I ____________________________ hereby give permission to Chris Basich at Marietta College to survey the students in my school. I know in confidence that this research will not harm or injure the students in my school. I trust that the researcher will perform the research in an orderly fashion that will be as unobtrusive to students as possible.

________________________________________
Building Principal

________________________________________
Date
APPENDIX IV

Debriefing Form

Please do not read until all surveys are completed and collected.
Please read to the entire class.

Dear Students,

Thank you for participating in my study. The title of my research project is *The Impact of Physical Exercise and Sport on Adolescent Girls*. Although both boys and girls were surveyed, only the girls’ data will be used for final research (sorry guys!). I feel in confidence that the survey you have taken is an appropriate measure of self esteem in relation to sport and physical exercise. Past research has shown that girls that participate in sports and physical exercise have higher levels of self esteem. Please note that you may still have high levels of self esteem even though you may not be physically active or involved in a sport. Once again thank you for your time and good luck with the rest of the school year.

Chris Basich
Teacher Directions:

Please Read this to ALL students before handing out the survey.

My name is Chris Basich and I am completing a research study for Marietta College. You will be handed a survey that has ten questions. Please circle the response that best describes you for each question. Upon completion of the survey, please turn your paper over and wait until others are finished. **Do not place your name on this survey.** If you do not feel comfortable at any time during the survey you do not need to take the survey. If you **DO** decide to complete the survey, **ALL questions must be answered.** Thank you for your time.

Chris Basich
Marietta College
Dear Classroom Teacher,

Thank you for taking the time to have your class complete this survey for me. Please read the Teacher Directions to ALL students before passing out the survey. After ALL surveys have been collected please read the Debriefing Form to ALL students. It should take you no longer than about 5 minutes. This data will be used to complete my thesis. When the surveys are completed, please place them back in the folder and turn them in to Mr. Elliott. Thanks again and have a great day!

Chris Basich
Marietta College
APPENDIX VII

Please circle the appropriate response for each question.

I participate in sports and/or are physically active most days of the week.
Yes       No

Please circle your appropriate gender.
Male       Female

________________________________________________________________________

1. I fear failure in life.
   1 2 3 4 5
   Completely Disagree Disagree Not Applicable Agree Completely Agree

2. When talking with others I have trouble making good eye contact.
   1 2 3 4 5
   Completely Disagree Disagree Not Applicable Agree Completely Agree

3. I get sick often.
   1 2 3 4 5
   Completely Disagree Disagree Not Applicable Agree Completely Agree

4. When someone makes me angry I keep my feelings to myself.
   1 2 3 4 5
   Completely Disagree Disagree Not Applicable Agree Completely Agree

5. I blame others for my problems and mistakes.
   1 2 3 4 5
   Completely Disagree Disagree Not Applicable Agree Completely Agree

6. I see myself as a victim of other people’s actions.
   1 2 3 4 5
   Completely Disagree Disagree Not Applicable Agree Completely Agree

7. I often lie or tell only part of the truth.
   1 2 3 4 5
   Completely Disagree Disagree Not Applicable Agree Completely Agree

8. I tend to be quiet even when I feel strongly about something.
   1 2 3 4 5
   Completely Disagree Disagree Not Applicable Agree Completely Agree

9. When I look in the mirror I am usually unhappy with how I look.
   1 2 3 4 5
   Completely Disagree Disagree Not Applicable Agree Completely Agree

10. I get angry easily and take it out on other people.
    1 2 3 4 5
    Completely Disagree Disagree Not Applicable Agree Completely Agree