

ATHLETIC PARTICIPATION AND SELF-ESTEEM IN EIGHTH GRADE

STUDENTS

by

Brooke Davis

A Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the  
Master of Science Degree  
in

Guidance and Counseling

Approved: 2 Semester Credits

  
Research Advisor

The Graduate School  
University of Wisconsin – Stout

December, 2004

The Graduate School  
University of Wisconsin Stout  
Menomonie, WI 54751

ABSTRACT

Davis	Brooke	E.
(Last Name)	(First Name)	(Middle)
Athletic Participation and Self-Esteem of Eighth Grade Students		
(Title)		
Master of Science in Guidance and Counseling		
(Graduate Degree Program)		
Barbara Flom, Ph.D.	December, 2004	34
(Research Advisor)	(Month/Year)	(No. of Pages)
American Psychological Association, 5 <sup>th</sup> edition		
(Name of Style of Manual Used in the Study)		

The purpose of this research was to examine the differences between the self-esteem of competitive student athletes in comparison to the self-esteem of students who do not participate in competitive athletics. The self-esteem of the students was measured using a self-esteem inventory. In addition to measuring self-esteem, the study also asked the students to provide demographics including sport(s) they participate in weekly, either through school, or within the community; the level of competition they feel they demonstrate when participating in their sport(s); and the degree of success they experience in their sport(s). The survey was administered during the fall semester of the 2004 – 2005 school year to eighth grade students. The school that participated in this study was a middle school located in the upper Midwest.

Previous research has shown that individuals who participate in sports also have higher levels of self-esteem than non-participants. This finding has been supported by the current study. The results of this study also indicated that students who consider themselves to be successful in the sport they participate in have significantly higher levels of self-esteem than those competitive athletes who consider themselves to be unsuccessful in their sport. In addition, the hours per week that a student spends participating in an athletic activity does not significantly change their level of self-esteem.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Barbara Flom, for her guidance, support and expertise from the start to finish of this research paper. This would not have been possible without her passion.

I would also like to thank Christine Ness for contributing her expertise in research and statistics. I am amazed by her gift in this area.

I would like to say “thank you” to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher who allowed me to administer my survey in her classrooms. I am also grateful to the school and the district that allowed me to administer my survey.

I also want to thank my parents for their continuing support and encouragement through many of the tough decisions I have made. You are both inspirations and role models to me.

Thank you, Andy, for your unbelievable patience, understanding, and support through this research paper and also throughout my graduate program. You have been there for me through it all.

Without each of these individuals, this research would not have been possible. Thank you.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT .....	ii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION .....	1
<i>Statement of the Problem</i> .....	3
<i>Purpose of the Study</i> .....	3
<i>Research Questions</i> .....	4
<i>Definition of Terms</i> .....	5
<i>Assumptions and Limitations</i> .....	6
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW	
<i>Benefits of Self-esteem</i> .....	7
<i>Benefits of Athletic Involvement of Adolescents</i> .....	8
<i>Athletic Involvement and Self-esteem</i> .....	9
<i>Self-esteem Levels in Various Sports</i> .....	13
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	
<i>Subject Selection and Description</i> .....	15
<i>Instrumentation</i> .....	16
<i>Data Collection</i> .....	17
<i>Data Analysis</i> .....	17
<i>Limitations</i> .....	18
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS	
<i>Participant Background</i> .....	19
<i>Item Analysis of Athletic Participation</i> .....	19

<i>Self-esteem Measure</i> .....	20
----------------------------------	----

<i>Research Questions</i> .....	21
---------------------------------	----

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

<i>Brief Review of Findings</i> .....	24
---------------------------------------	----

<i>Conclusions</i> .....	26
--------------------------	----

<i>Recommendations</i> .....	26
------------------------------	----

References.....	29
-----------------	----

Appendix A: Parent Permission Slip.....	32
---	----

Appendix B: Background Information.....	33
---	----

Appendix C: Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.....	34
--	----

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In many schools, students have the option to participate in a variety of competitive athletics. They also may chose to be a participant in an athletic activity considered to be more leisurely or noncompetitive. Students have learned from parents, teachers, mentors, and many other sources that exercise is healthy both physically and psychologically. Participation in various sports has been shown to be associated with higher levels of self-esteem (Bailey, Moulton, & Moulton, 1999; Kumar, Pathak, & Thakier, 1985). However, can it be possible that being involved in athletics can actually decrease an individual's self-esteem and lead to unhealthy psychological characteristics? Research examines this question as it relates to both positive and potentially negative aspects of an individual's involvement in various forms of adolescent athletic participation.

Studies have examined the relationship between self-esteem and life perceptions. Kerr and Goss (1997) found those who reported having a high self-esteem felt better about themselves and generally had a more positive outlook on life than individuals with a low self-esteem. Relationships between self-esteem and athletic participation have also been examined. For example, student athletes appear to have positive goals and ambitions throughout the time they are participating in athletics (Ryska, 2002). In class, those students who are involved in athletics appear to have a positive attitude and often serve as a role model to other students (Ryska, 2002).

A heightened level of self-esteem may also lead to a desire to continue sports activities (Fox, 1997). Fox has demonstrated that students who reported having a high self-esteem had the tendency to remain in athletics and, in turn, continued exemplifying

positive self-esteem. These findings are important to consider when examining self-esteem in athletes. Research such as this allows one to consider the impact that athletic involvement may have on a student's emotional well-being. According to these findings, it would be useful for parents, teachers, and school counselors to be advocates of athletic participation for students in hope that it will increase the self-esteem of students.

It has also been found that those who felt they were successful in the sport they participated in were more likely to demonstrate high levels of self-esteem (Grogan, 1999; Ebbeck & Weiss, 1998; Fox, 1997). Kerr and Goss (1997) also found that athletes who were motivated internally and thought of themselves as having high physical skills pertaining to that sport also scored high on measures of self-esteem. Kerr and Goss speculated that involvement in athletics increased self-esteem due to a firmer and stronger body, which may suggest that individuals should be encouraged to exercise if their goal is to improve self-esteem.

However, research has also shown that an increase of self-esteem has not been consistently demonstrated throughout athletic domains (Bailey, Moulton, & Moulton, 1999). When examining the relationship between self-esteem and athletic participation, other variables must also be considered. For instance, Kerr and Goss (1997) found that gymnasts rated themselves as having a lower self-esteem than norms for female athletes their age. This finding could have implications on the emotional and psychological development of many student athletes. Those individuals who are athletic participants and reported having low self-esteem may be doing more harm than good to their psychological well-being. It has also been found that low self-esteem has been associated with both physical and social difficulties (Voyle, 1989). Many female athletes at the elite



levels of competition are at risk for negative body image (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002), which may result in low levels of self-esteem. Elite levels of athletics are often extremely competitive and depend on perfection during competition. This perfectionism may be a variable affecting the self-esteem in student athletes. Level of athletic competition may also be a factor for those athletes who consider themselves to be a competitor or hold themselves to high performance standards.

If there is a link between participation in physical activity and the development of self-esteem, it would seem logical for teachers, parents, and other mentors to support athletic participation in students. The questions then arise, “What type of exercise should be recommended to increase an individual’s self-esteem?” and also “How do individuals who were alienated from competitive athletics feel about the results of this research?” Individuals choosing to participate in sports may also want to examine possible ramifications of competitive athletic involvement. When applying these research findings to student athletes, many implications need to be considered before coming to conclusions.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Research has demonstrated that self-esteem and athletics seem to have a relationship, but no specific studies have determined how they are related. This study will examine this issue in more detail in order to shed light on the way in which competitive and noncompetitive athletics and self-esteem may be related.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this research is to examine the differences between the self-esteem of competitive student athletes in comparison to the self-esteem of students who do not

participate in competitive athletics. The self-esteem of the students will be measured using a self-esteem inventory. In addition to measuring self-esteem, the study will also ask the students to provide demographics including sport(s) they participate in weekly, either through school, or within the community; the level of competition they feel they demonstrate when participating in their sport(s); and the degree of success they experience in their sport(s). The survey will be the same for all students, and will be administered during the fall semester of the 2004 – 2005 school year to eighth grade students. The school that will be participating in this study is a middle school located in the upper Midwest.

The results of this study are important because not only do they have implications on the development of students' self-esteem, but also the way in which self-esteem and athletics are related may have an influence on choices students make with their spare time. By having a better understanding of variables affecting self-esteem, counselors, teachers, parents, and students will have input as to why students' involvement in athletics may be important.

### *Research Questions*

There are four questions this research will try to answer. The questions are as follows:

1. Are those students who are involved in a competitive sport more likely to report having higher self-esteem than those students who are active but do not report to participate in a competitive sport or are not involved in athletics?
2. Is reported self-esteem higher in some competitive sports than others?

3. Is the number of hours in one week spent participating in a competitive sport related to the reported level of self-esteem in the students?

4. Are students who rate themselves as being successful in the competitive sport that they participate in more likely to also report having a higher self-esteem than those students who rate themselves as being unsuccessful in the competitive sport they participate in?

### *Definition of Terms*

In this study, four terms must be operationally defined in order to provide clarity for the research. The defined terms are:

*Self-esteem.* Self-esteem is the way in which a person evaluates him or herself and how satisfied or dissatisfied he or she is with this evaluation (King, 1997).

*Athletics.* Athletics pertains to exercises or sports engaged by an individual (Webster, 1993).

*Participation.* Participation involves taking part in an activity (Webster, 1993). In this study, if students are involved in a type of exercise at least 1-2 days a week, they are sports participants.

*Competitive.* Competitive pertains to an individual who is active in a rivalry with one or more other competitor(s) (Webster, 1993). In this study, a student is involved in a competitive sport if it is athletics organized by the school or athletics organized outside of the school. The student is not involved in a competitive sport if it is an activity that is not organized, but is participating only for leisure.

### *Assumptions and Limitations*

While examining this research, it is important to consider underlying assumptions. First, it has been assumed that those responding to the survey are answering honestly and to the best of their ability. Second, it is assumed that the students understand the characteristics that qualify an individual to be involved in competitive versus noncompetitive athletics.

There are also limitations that must be considered. First, some students may consider themselves to be in a competitive sport, or visa versa, when it does not meet the criteria for this research as being a competitive sport. Second, the data that are collected may not be representative of other students in eighth grade. Third, the data collected during the fall semester of 2004 are not a universally accurate representation of competitive and noncompetitive athletic participation and self-esteem for eighth grade students. Lastly, there may be variables that have not been considered that could alter the results and conclusions of the study.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will focus on four main concepts associated with self-esteem and athletic participation and their relation to the purpose of the study. First, studies that examine the benefits of high levels of self-esteem will be discussed as they relate to the developing adolescent. Second, findings related to the effects of adolescents' involvement in athletics will be examined. Third, the impact that general athletic involvement has on self-esteem is discussed. Lastly, studies that examine specific sports and their relation to levels of self-esteem will be examined and discussed.

### *Benefits of Self-esteem*

Research has shown that self-esteem plays an important role in the psychological development of individuals (Lane, Jones, & Stevens, 2002; Grogan, 1999; Hoyle & Leff, 1997; King, 1997). Also, it is commonly understood that self-esteem has positive effects on those who perceive themselves as having this variable. Kerr and Goss (1997) examined self-esteem and its relationship to motivation. In their research, they found that individuals who reported to have high levels of internal motivation also reported to have high levels of self-esteem. On the other hand, they also noted that a low level of self-esteem was associated with physical, psychological, and social difficulties.

This research was similar to that of King (1997), who found that adolescents who reported having high levels of self-esteem tended to engage in fewer negative health behaviors such as smoking and drug use. Adolescents with high self-esteem also expressed less intention to be involved in unhealthy behaviors in the future. However, youth with low self-esteem were more likely to become involved in premarital sexual

relationships and teen pregnancies. It is demonstrated that high levels of self-esteem have been associated with many individual benefits.

### *Benefits of Athletic Involvement of Adolescents*

It is well known that being involved in athletic activities has potential benefits to participants, both physically and psychologically. Galton (1980) reported that adolescents who participated in athletics learned about their personal capabilities, the value of teamwork, and also the lifelong importance of physical fitness. Also, female tennis players (14-18 years old) rated themselves high in self-esteem while they were participating in sports activities (Weiss & Smith, 2002). Raalte and Brewer (1996) felt that those who reported to have low levels of self-esteem benefited from various exercise programs.

Bean (1992) suggested other advantages to athletic involvement in adolescents. Bean felt that a variety of competitive sports have the advantage of providing individualized instruction to student athletes and promoting leadership skills for children in the school system and within the community. The positive values of sports should be emphasized because of their important effects on stamina, physiologic functioning, and promotion of lifelong advantages to participating in recreational activities. However, some sports were seen as being more appropriate for students than others, such as: archery, bowling, golf, skating, swimming, tennis, and track. Competitive sports were seen as being inappropriate at this level, and recreational activities were strongly encouraged. Smith and Storandt (1997) felt that young adulthood, rather than the teen years, was the critical life stage with regard to continued sports participation.

However, there has not been extensive research examining the specific benefits of competitive athletic involvement in adolescents. Pyle, McQuivey, Brassington, and Steiner (2003) examined a variety of students with various levels of athletic activity. They compared students who reported being involved in competitive sports with nonathletes. The research concluded that those involved in competitive sports had fewer mental health problems, fewer risk taking behaviors, and fewer eating problems for both males and females. They also found that by comparing athletes to nonathletes, both groups felt that they benefited from self-reported athletic activity. In other words, those who recorded their daily activity level were more likely to experience positive health benefits.

Similarly, Pyle, McQuivey, Brassington, and Steiner (2003) hypothesized that the positive relationship between athletic involvement and positive health benefits may change as the intensity of participation increases and pressures on the individual increase. (Competitive athletics and its implications will be examined later as it relates to specific sport participation.) They found in their study that competitive athletes reported better functioning across three areas. Competitive athletes differed from recreational athletes in that the former reported fewer mental health problems, eating disorders, and total risks. It was also suggested that sports participation should be encouraged in youth who express interest in such activities.

#### *Athletic Involvement and Self-esteem*

Experiences in athletics can have an important role in the development of the self-esteem of the adolescent participant (Hoyle & Leff, 1997; Raalte & Brewer, 1996).

Kavussunu and Harnisch (2000) and Raalte and Brewer (1996) found that young people

who reported being actively involved in sports also reported having high self-esteem and positive mental health. Similarly, Grogan (1999) noted a link between athletic activity and levels of self-esteem by stating that it was likely that exercise enhanced self-esteem by visual reinforcement. For example, when an individual noticed a firmer and stronger body their self-esteem increased. This also gives the individual a sense of confidence in himself/herself.

Establishing a link between participation in athletics and the development of self-esteem would reinforce the value of athletic involvement for adolescents. Kerr and Goss (1997) strengthened this link by reporting that people who perceived themselves as having superior athletic skills had higher levels of self-esteem. Also, those who felt poorly about their bodies and did not feel comfortable participating in athletics reported having lower levels of self-esteem, as measured by The Coppersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. This study also indicated that when students felt confident in their competence in a sport, self-esteem increased. This finding was supported by Hines (1989), who found self-esteem increased when their athletic competence was reinforced by parents, friends, and other variables such as awards and recognition.

Individual self-esteem is developed through increased confidence in their personal skill performance (Weiss & Smith, 2002). However, if the skills needed to participate in an activity are not obtained or reinforced, the self-esteem of the individual may decrease (Ewing, 1999). This seems to emphasize the importance of positive reinforcement from parents and those associated with the performance of the athlete.

As cited in Miracle and Rees (1994), longitudinal studies have indicated that participation in high school athletics was associated with increased self-esteem.



However, high school sports did little to benefit or harm the social development of high school student athletes. This demonstrates that, in this study at least, there was not a clear relationship between these two measures of adjustment and sport participation. In summary, then, self-esteem was found to increase with sport participation and also decrease with sport participation.

“Sport can be a vehicle for enhancing children’s self-esteem in as much as children have the opportunity to believe they are competent and experience positive emotions” (Ebbeck and Weiss, 1998, p. 296). This statement claimed that support by coaches, parents, and other influential individuals would have an effect on children’s self-esteem and their perceived athletic competence. This view was also stated by Gruber (1985), who found that participation in organized athletics contributed to the development of self-esteem in elementary age children. Those students who were involved in athletics reported having higher self-esteem than students who were not involved in organized athletics. Grogan (1999) also found that other variables may be affected by the involvement of moderate exercise in adolescents. Grogan stated that there was a growing body of evidence showing that moderate exercise improved perceptions of control, self-esteem, and decreased levels of dissatisfaction with the body.

However, the type of exercise may be an important variable when examining self-esteem of athletes. Lane, Jones, and Stevens (2002) investigated the relationship between self-esteem following a defeat in a tennis tie break competition. They found that after the defeat, those who scored low on self-esteem blamed themselves for the loss, where the others did not. Individuals scoring low in self-esteem also tended to respond to experiences in a balanced way. For example, these individuals experienced positive

events in a positive way and negative events in a negative way. It should be noted that, individuals scoring high on levels of self-esteem valued positive events, but put little value in the potentially threatening effects of negative events. This behavior was associated with maintaining positive emotional states in those with high levels of self-esteem. It was hypothesized by Miracle and Rees that both individuals with high self-esteem and individuals with low levels of self-esteem strove for success, but high self-esteem individuals were more likely to reject the negative implications of failure. Low self-esteem individuals tended to attribute negative events to internal factors, blaming themselves for the defeat. The final results of this study indicated that individuals reporting to have high levels of self-esteem tended to perceive situations as highly controllable and reacted to each event by changing strategies to solve a problem. On the other hand, individuals scoring low on the measure of self-esteem tended to perceive difficult tasks as beyond their control and tended to resort to using strategies that were emotionally focused, instead of focusing on productive strategies to solve a problem (Lane, Jones, & Stevens, 2002).

Fox (1997) also examined the relationship between sport involvement and levels of self-esteem. Various studies examined by Fox suggested that programs emphasizing student involvement in athletic activities were more likely to have an effect on variables pertaining to self-esteem. Fox hypothesized that learning sports skills and success in sports can lead to higher levels of self-esteem. This increased self-esteem can then lead to a desire to continue participating in athletic activities. However, being in sports is not necessarily a prerequisite for having high levels of self-esteem.

### *Self-esteem Levels in Various Sports*

It has been demonstrated that self-esteem is related to athletic involvement, but research has found that not every sport has participants with the same levels of reported self-esteem (Bailey, Moulton, & Moulton, 1999). Some sports may be more likely to demonstrate a negative relationship between an individual's involvement in that sport and the participants' levels of self-esteem. Kerr and Goss (1997) found that gymnasts reported having lower self-esteem levels than the published norms when comparing them to nonathletic females. Also, Amac, Anastasio, Morwick, and Yi (2003) found that girls from the ages of 10-13 who were in competitive gymnastics scored lower on levels of self-esteem than those gymnasts who were in gymnastics for recreational purposes. Lastly, former Olympic gymnast, Christy Henrich writes about her personal experiences in *Little Girls in Pretty Boxes*, by Joan Ryan (1995):

She [Christy] studies their faces. She wanted to see joy, satisfaction, any flicker of emotion that would tell her gymnastics had not stolen the souls of those girls too. She saw nothing. Gymnastics, she realized, perverted the lessons of sports. Sports should empower, yet she say it dismantle and strip. She saw it reduce a strong young woman's self-esteem to a thin soup in inadequacy, shame, and imperfection. She was afraid for the girls on her TV screen. (p 70)

Football players have also been examined in connection to levels of self-esteem. MacKinnon, Goldberg, Cheong, Elliot, Clarke, and Moe (2003) examined the relationships between athletic competence and self-esteem in high school football players. The participants consisted of a total of 2,844 male football players from 31 high schools in Oregon and Washington. Each participant completed a self-report

questionnaire consisting of demographics, perceived athletic competence, body image, and self-esteem measures. First, it was found that perceived physical competence was associated with global self-esteem. Also, as competence in their football capabilities increased, the levels of self-esteem also increased. Third, the results found a positive relationship between body image and levels of self-esteem. Ebbeck and Weiss (1998) also found that students who felt they were successful in football had higher levels of self-esteem. This finding may suggest that high levels of self-esteem may be more likely to be seen in some sports more than others.

According to Fox (1997), participation in activities such as running, swimming, bicycling, hiking, and walking has been associated with high self-esteem for a wide range of athletic abilities for those participating in these activities. Also, perceived physical appearance has been associated with increased levels of self-esteem across the lifespan (Cash & Prazinsky, 2002). From a general perspective, Bunker and Duncan (1997) as cited by March and Peart (1988) found that competitive athletic programs lowered variables related to the self-concepts of the athletes.

It has been demonstrated that many variables come into play when considering athletic participation and its relationship to the self-esteem of an individual. Although many agree those adolescents who participate in athletics demonstrate higher levels of self-esteem, there is a narrow, but emerging body of research suggesting that specific athletic activity may actually be related to lower levels of self-esteem in those who are participants. Due to this lack of solid research pertaining to athletic competitiveness in adolescents it is important to gain knowledge on a possible influence to the self-esteem of this group of individuals.

### CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter contains information pertaining to how the sample for the study was selected, the description of the sample, and a description of the instrument that was used. Data collection and data analysis procedures will also be discussed. Lastly, limitations to the methodology of the study will be examined.

#### *Subject Selection and Description*

The study took place at a Midwestern middle school with a total student population of 1,133 students. The school consisted of 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, with each grade divided into three teams of students and teachers. The student body consisted of the majority of the students being Caucasian (72%) with the minority of students considered to be Asian (26.1%) or from other ethnic backgrounds (American Indian, .5%; African American, .5%; Hispanic, .8%). Of this student population, 37.7% of the students were eligible for subsidized lunch during the 2003-2004 school year.

One hundred and thirty six students enrolled in one team of 8<sup>th</sup> grade classes during the 2004-2005 school year were asked to bring home a permission slip describing the purpose of the survey. The permission slip (Appendix A) stated that during one of their classes they would be asked to voluntarily complete a survey which asked demographic questions, questions related to the students' self-esteem, and questions related to athletic involvement. All students who brought back to school a signed permission slip were invited to participate in the survey. The majority of students were 13 years old (mean = 13.18); 45 were male and 53 were female. The total number of participants was 98 students.

The students who participated in the study had a wide range of both competitive and noncompetitive activities available to them. During the fall semester the two athletic activities that were available students were football and volleyball. The community also provided activities to this middle school population such as gymnastics, aerobics, weight lifting, karate, swimming and figure skating.

### *Instrumentation*

The survey that was given to the students contained two sections. The first section was made up of questions about the demographics and sports participation of the students. The sport(s) the students were currently involved in (both organized and unorganized) and the hours per week they participated in the sport(s), and whether or not they consider themselves to be competitive were asked. For this research, competitive was defined as a student who is involved in a competitive sport either organized by the school or athletics organized outside of the school. The student was not involved in a competitive sport if it is an activity that is not organized, but is participating only for leisure. In addition, the students' gender and age were included in this section of the survey. This document is shown in Appendix B.

The second part of the survey measured the self-esteem of the students by using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. This is a brief scale of ten questions that measures global self-esteem and has demonstrated good reliability and validity across a variety of sample groups (Rosenberg, 1965). The reported internal consistency estimates from a variety of samples range from  $\alpha = .89$  for a sample of 206 female undergraduate students to  $\alpha = .77$  for a sample of 1,332 men over 60 years of age. This scale has also demonstrated good test-retest reliability ranging from  $r = .82$  over a one-week period to

$r = .73$  over a three-month period. Rosenberg (1965) also measured a significant association ( $p < .05$ ) between the measure of self-esteem and other constructs related to individual self-esteem. Refer to Appendix C to reference the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

#### *Data Collection*

Before formal data collection began, the Wausau School District approved the use of the survey. This occurred in the spring of 2004, ensuring that the survey would be ready to administer in the fall of 2004. After the survey was approved, the University of Wisconsin – Stout Institutional Review Board committee reviewed and approved the study. Next, a teacher who instructs one third of the 8<sup>th</sup> graders at the school handed out the parent permission slip to the students. Those who were permitted to volunteer and wished to participate had one week to return the signed slips to their teacher. Students who did not have a signed slip were not eligible to participate in the study. The survey was then administered by the researcher to the voluntarily participating students in their class during the Thursday and Friday of that week. Lastly, the surveys were analyzed and interpreted.

#### *Data Analysis*

A variety of statistics were used to analyze the data in this study. The Statistical Program for Social Sciences was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics included frequency counts of demographic student data and athletic participation information. One-way analysis of variance, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and independent groups *t*-test analyses were conducted to determine whether groups of students (students in a school organized athletic activity and a leisure athletic activity, students in a school

organized athletic activity only, students in a leisure athletic activity only, and students not involved in any athletic activity) responded differently on the self-esteem instrument.

### *Limitations*

One limitation was that only a section of one school participated in this study. This means that the results of the study were based on a small non-random sample from only one area of the country. As a result, the sample may not be representative of the general population of students in eighth grade. Second, the results of the study relied on the accuracy of both the demographic and self-esteem sections of the survey being given. It was assumed that the test was both reliable and valid, as research on the test has indicated. Lastly, there were limitations to the testing procedure. It was assumed that the students understood how the test was to be completed and answered the questions honestly. These variables were methodological limitations that must be considered.



## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This chapter contains information pertaining to the background of the research participants. Next, an item analysis of both athletic participation and of the self-esteem measure will be described. Last, previous research questions are reexamined through current research findings.

### *Participant Background*

Of the 98 students who participated in the study, 45 students were male (45.9%) and 53 were female (54.1%). The ages of the students ranged from 13 to 14 years old, with 80 students (81.6%) 13 years old, and 18 students (18.4%) 14 years old.

### *Item Analysis of Athletic Participation*

From the total number of participants in the study, 31 students (31.6%) reported to be currently involved in a school organized sport, with 16 students in football and 15 students in volleyball. There were also students (46 students or 46.9%) who were involved in athletics, but the athletic activity was not organized by the school. Of these students, one was involved in badminton, six in basketball, one in bowling, one in breakdancing, seven in dance, one in figure skating, one in golf, two in gymnastics, three in hockey, one in horseback riding, one in motorcross racing, two in paintball, two in skateboarding, four in soccer, one in speed skating, six in swimming, two in tennis, one in wrestling, and two in cross-country.

Item number five asked the students if they considered themselves to be a competitive athlete. The results indicated that 73 students answered “yes” and 25 students answered “no.”

The sixth item asked participants if they considered themselves to be competitive athletes. Of those who responded, 76 answered “yes,” and 22 answered “no.”

The students were also asked if they regularly exercised, such as walking, weight lifting, or leisure activities in item number seven. Of the students who participated, 88 answered “yes” and 10 answered “no.” From the students who reported that they regularly exercise, 17 exercise 1-2 days a week, 25 exercise 3-4 days a week, 18 exercise 4-5 days a week, and 28 exercise 5-6 days a week.

### *Self-esteem Measure*

In order to measure the responses for the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, each response (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree) was assigned a number (1,2,3, or 4, with a score of 4 being associated with higher levels of self-esteem). Five of the ten questions were scored in reverse order (4,3,2,1) to account for the reverse wording of the item (see Appendix C). The mean for the self-esteem scale was then derived by averaging the total number of points each student obtained from the individual questions. The maximum possible score possible was 40. Of the students who participated the highest score was a 40 and the minimum score was 16. The mean total score of all the participants from the self-esteem scale was 31.10.

The results of the self-esteem measure are also compared to athletic involvement of the students. Students who reported to be involved in both a school organized sport and a sport organized outside of school had a mean self-esteem score of 34.55. Students who reported to only be involved in a school organized sport had a mean self-esteem of 32.70. Students who were only involved in an athletic activity that was organized outside

of the school setting had a mean self-esteem score of 32.59. Lastly, students who were not reportedly involved in any athletic activity had a mean self-esteem score of 27.34.

Self-esteem of students was also examined in relation to specific athletic participation. In the school organized sports of football and volleyball, the self-esteem mean scores were 33.44 (football) and 33.27 (volleyball). The standard deviation for football was 4.97 and for volleyball it was 3.79.

The relationship between self-esteem and the number of days the student participated in an athletic activity was also examined. Of the students who reported to participate in an athletic activity 1-2 days a week, their mean score on the self-esteem assessment was 31.35. Of the students who reported to participate in an athletic activity 3-4 days a week, the mean score on the self-esteem assessment was 30.21. The mean self-esteem score of students who reported to participate in athletics 4-5 days a week was 31.61 with a standard deviation of 5.35. Lastly, those who participated in an athletic activity 5-6 days a week had a mean self-esteem score of 32.39, with a standard deviation of 5.10.

### *Research Questions*

Four research questions were addressed and answered in this study. Research question number one was as follows: Are those students who are involved in a competitive sport more likely to report having higher self-esteem than those students who are active but do not report to participate in a competitive sport or those who are not involved in athletics? By using an analysis of variance (ANOVA), the data revealed that those students who were not involved in any type of competitive or noncompetitive athletics had statistically significantly lower levels of self-esteem than those students who

were involved in either competitive or noncompetitive athletics ( $F_{(3,93)} = 10.894; p < .01$ ). In other words, those students who were involved in any type of athletics, either competitive or noncompetitive, reported to have significantly higher levels of self-esteem than students who do not participate in any form of athletics. Also, there was no significant difference among the three groups of active students.

The second research question asked: Is reported self-esteem higher in some competitive sports than others? By using a *t*-test for equality of means, both football and volleyball were compared in terms of levels of self-esteem reported by both sports. Football and volleyball were the only two sports represented in this analysis because they were the sports that had measurable numbers of participants involved (football = 16 and volleyball = 15). The results of the two-tailed *t*-test when examining the sports and their levels of self-esteem were seen as not significant ( $t = .915$ ). Therefore, whether or not the student was involved in volleyball or football, their reported level of self-esteem was not significantly different.

The third research question was: Is the number of hours weekly spent participating in a competitive sport related to the reported level of self-esteem in the students? By examining the data provided by an analysis of variance ( $F_{(3,83)} = .722; p = .542$ ), it can be seen that there is no significant difference in level of self-esteem based on the hours a student participates in a competitive sport. This means that a student who is reportedly a competitive athlete and exercises 1-2 times a week has a level of self-esteem that is not significantly different from a competitive athlete who exercises 4-5 times in one week.

The fourth research question to be answered in this study was: Are students who rate themselves as being successful in a competitive sport more likely to also report having a higher self-esteem than those students who rate themselves as being unsuccessful in the competitive sport they participate in? The two-tailed  $t$ -test for equality of means shows that there is a significant difference ( $p < .001$ ) between students who consider themselves successful and those who do not consider themselves successful and are in athletics. In other words, those students who were currently involved in a competitive sport and were not successful had lower levels of self-esteem than those students who were involved in a competitive sport and were reported to be successful.

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that those students who are involved in some form of athletic activity report to have higher levels of self-esteem than students who are not involved in any form of athletic activity. Second, the current research has demonstrated that the levels of self-esteem of participants in the school organized sports of both volleyball and football are not significantly different. Third, this research has shown that there is no significant difference between the hours that a competitive athlete participates in an athletic and their level of self-esteem. Lastly, students who consider themselves to be successful in the sport they participate in have significantly higher levels of self-esteem than those competitive athletes who consider themselves to be unsuccessful in their sport.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the current study will be discussed in relation to similar research findings. First, a summary of the current study's findings will be provided. Second, conclusions that can be applied to a broader research based will be examined. Lastly, recommendations for further study and application of the research results will be discussed.

### *Brief Review of Findings*

First, the current study has shown that 8<sup>th</sup> grade students who were involved in either a competitive or noncompetitive athletic activity had statistically insignificant differences in their levels of self-esteem but, those students who did not participate in an athletic activity had significantly lower levels of self-esteem than those students involved in some form of either competitive or noncompetitive athletics. Second, the present research concluded that those students involved in either football or volleyball had self-esteem levels that were not significantly different from one another. However, due to the low number of participants in other forms of athletics, similar comparisons of sports organized outside of the school environment were not made. Third, the present research found that the number of hours that an 8<sup>th</sup> grade student spends participating in a competitive sport each week was not related to individual levels of self-esteem. Athletic participation at least one day a week was related to high levels of self-esteem. Last, students who reported being successful in the sport they participate in have significantly higher levels of self-esteem than those competitive athletes who consider themselves to be unsuccessful in their sport.

Certain aspects of the present research supported previously cited research findings. For example, the current study supported previous research pertaining to levels of self-esteem of individuals who participate in athletics and those who do not participate in an athletic activity (Weiss & Smith, 2002; Kavussunu & Harnisch, 2000; Grogan, 1999; Raalte & Brewer, 1996). The current research found that those who were involved in athletics, regardless if it was considered competitive or noncompetitive, had higher levels of self-esteem than those students who were not involve in an athletic activity. This was consistent with previous research.

The current study found the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students who were current participants in football and volleyball reported having high levels of self-esteem. This result is similar to the conclusions of Ebbeck and Weiss (1998) who found that students that felt they were successful in football had high levels of self-esteem.

Another link is seen when comparing current research findings with those of Kerr and Goss (1997), who reported that people who perceived themselves as having superior athletic skills had higher levels of self-esteem. They also found that self-esteem was higher for those who felt confident in their competence in a sport. This was also demonstrated in the current research. Here, 8<sup>th</sup> grade students who reported being successful in an athletic activity also had higher levels of self-esteem than 8<sup>th</sup> grade athletes who reported not being successful in athletics.

In addition, the current research suggested a new finding pertaining to the hours spent exercising each week. This study found that there is no significant difference in level of self-esteem of a student based on the hours they participate in a competitive sport. For example, if a student who reported to be a competitive athlete and exercises 1-

2 times a week had a level of self-esteem that is not significantly different from a competitive athlete who exercises 4-5 times in one week.

### *Conclusions*

The students who participated provided data that confirmed previous findings pertaining to the levels of self-esteem of individuals who participate in some form of athletics. Also, students who view themselves as being successful in a sport had self-esteem levels that were higher than those students who reported not participating in athletics. On the other hand, the current research found results that were not previously reported. According to the results of this study, the number of days a week that a competitive athlete participates in athletics does not play a role in their individual level of self-esteem. Overall, based on the results of this study, it appears that athletic participation is beneficial to those students who are active participants in a sport (either competitive or noncompetitive) and view themselves as being successful in their competitive athletic activity.

### *Recommendations*

Based on the current research findings, there are recommendations for specific areas that should be considered for further research. It would be helpful for both teachers and parents to have more knowledge pertaining to specific sports and corresponding levels of self-esteem in participants of the specific sports. To accomplish this, further research is needed that isolates various sports and the self-esteem of the participants. Although the current study was able to isolate both football and volleyball, other athletic activities (especially individual sports such as gymnastics and skating) should be examined to determine a possible relation of self-esteem and participation in these sports.



By examining athletics that are considered to be individual sports (as opposed to team sports), differences in individual pressures may become amplified in those sports where success and failure is more evident. For example, a mistake that is made in an individual sport may have more of an impact on the feeling of success than a mistake that is made in a team sport due to an increased focus on the individual and not a group of team members.

After completing the study, some changes could have been made to obtain different results. For example, the demographic portion of the survey could have included an operationalized definition of “organized sport” as a reference for the student taking the survey. It also may have been helpful to obtain data from different periods of the school year in order to obtain information regarding self-esteem of participants in a variety of organized sports.

Based on the current research findings, it is recommended that teachers, parents, and coaches take into consideration the level of success of each athletic participant. This study found that students who do not feel they are successful in the athletic activity have a lower level of self-esteem than their successful teammates. From this information, coaches and parents may consider making changes in athletic participants so that those involved in the sport are able to feel some form of success.

The results of this study provide useful information to a variety of groups. Parents can use this information when guiding their children into possible athletic activities. Students can also use this information to ponder possible alternate athletic activities if they do not feel successful. Lastly, coaches and teachers can encourage

students to participate in any form of competitive or noncompetitive athletic activity that they feel successful in, which will result in higher levels of self-esteem in their students.

## References

- Amac, Z., Anastasio, N., Morwick, A., & Yi, J. (2003). *Girls' self-esteem comparison in competitive and recreational gymnastics*. Unpublished master's thesis, Indiana University, Bloomington, CO.
- Bailey, K., Moulton, P., & Moulton, M. (1999). Athletics as a predictor of self-esteem and approval motivation. *The Sport Journal*, 2, 1-7.
- Bean, R. (1992). *The four conditions of self-esteem*. Santa Cruz, CA: ETR Associates.
- Bunker, L., & Duncan, M. (1997). *Physical activity and sport in the lives of girls: Physical and mental health dimensions from an interdisciplinary approach*. Washington, D.C.: President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sport.
- Cash, T., & Pruzinsky, T. (2002). *Body image: A handbook of theory, research, and clinical practice*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Ebbeck, V., & Weiss, M. (1998). Determinants of children's self-esteem: An examination of perceived competence and affect in sport. *Pediatric Exercise Science*, 10, 285-298.
- Ewing, M. (1999). *Sports and athletics*. SanDiego, CA: Greenhaven Press, Inc.
- Fox, K. (1997). *The physical self: From motivation to well-being*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Galton, L. (1980). *Your children in sports: A complete guide*. New York, NY: Franklin Watts.
- Grogan, S. (1999). *Body image*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Gruber, J. (1985). Physical activity and self-esteem development in children: A meta-analysis. *The Academy Papers*, 19, 330-348.

- Hines, S. (1989). Sports competition and its influence on self-esteem development. *Adolescence*, 24, 861-869.
- Hoyle, R., & Leff, L. (1997). The role of parental involvement in youth sport participation and performance. *Adolescence*, 32, 233-244.
- Kavussanu, M., & Harnisch, D.L. (2000). Self-esteem in children: Do goal orientations matter? *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 70, 229-242.
- Kerr, G., & Goss, J. (1997). Personal control in elite gymnasts: The relationships between locus of control, self-esteem, and trait anxiety. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 20, 69-83.
- King, K. (1997). Self-concept and self-esteem: A clarification of terms. *Journal of School Health*, 67, 68-71.
- Kumar, A., Pathak, N., & Thakur, G.P. (1985). Self-esteem in individual athletes, team members, and nonathletes. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 61, 178-184.
- Lane, A., Jones, L., & Stevens, M. (2002). Coping with failure: The effects of self-esteem and coping on changes in self-efficacy. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 25, 331-346.
- MacKinnon, D., Goldberg, L., Cheong, J., Elliot, D., Clarke, G., & Moe, E. (2003). Male body esteem and physical measurements: Do leaner, or stronger, high school football players have a more positive body image? *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 25, 307-322.
- Marsh, H. & Peart, J. (1988). Age and gender effects in physical self-concepts for adolescents elite athletics and nonathletics. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 20, 237-260.

- Miracle, A., & Rees, R. (1994). *Lessons of the locker room: The myth of school sports*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Pyle, R., McQuivey, R., Brassington, G., & Steiner, H. (2003). High school student athletes: Associations between intensity of participation and health factors. *Clinical Pediatrics*, 42, 697-701.
- Raalte, J., & Brewer, B. (1996). *Exploring sport and exercise psychology*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Ryan, J. (1995). *Little girls in pretty boxes*. New York, NY: Werner Books, Inc.
- Ryska, T. (2002). Perceived purposes of sport among recreational participants: The role of competitive dispositions. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 25, 91-113.
- Smith, C., & Storandt, M. (1997). Physical participation in older adults: A comparison of competitors, noncompetitors, and nonexercisers. *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity*, 5, 98-110.
- Voyle, J. (1989). Adolescent administration of a leisure center: Lessons for sport organization. *New Zealand Journal of Sport Psychology*, 7, 51-64.
- Webster, M. (1993). *Merriam Webster's collegiate dictionary: Tenth edition*. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc.
- Weiss, M., & Smith, A. (2002). Friendship quality in youth sport: Relationship to age, gender, and motivational variables. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 24, 420-438.

## Appendix A: Parent Letter and Permission Slip

### Parent Letter and Permission Slip

Dear Parents of a middle school student,

My name is Brooke Davis. I am a substitute teacher for the Wausau School District and I am also pursuing my graduate degree in Guidance and Counseling through UW-Stout. As a requirement for the program, I am writing a thesis on a topic of great interest to me, exercise and self-esteem. I feel self-esteem is essential for healthy development of each individual. The purpose of this study is to identify types of exercise that are more likely to increase the levels of self-esteem in students. With this knowledge, teachers and parents can encourage students to participate in athletic activities that will promote healthy levels of self-esteem in our students.

Students will be asked to voluntarily fill out a short survey that includes what kinds of sports they are involved in and questions related to how they feel about themselves. The study will be anonymous; in other words, students will not put their names on the survey. Risks in participating in the survey are minimal, and the student is free to withdraw from the survey at any time. I hope that you will allow your child to partake in this quick survey in order to help school staff understand how they can help to increase levels of self-esteem of the students.

If you have any questions, please contact Brooke Davis, the researcher, phone (715) 571-0077 or the research advisor Dr. Barbara Flom, phone (715) 232-1343. Questions about the rights of research subjects can be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 152 Voc Rehab, Menomonie, WI 54751, phone (715) 232-1126.

Thank you,

Brooke Davis

Please sign and return to your child's family and consumer education teacher by \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you!

\_\_\_\_\_ has my permission to fill out a survey on middle school students' involvement in athletic activities and levels of self-esteem. I understand that my child's participation will be kept confidential, that surveys will be filled out anonymously, and that the results from this study will be shared with administration to better help the school.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Guardian

## Appendix B: Background Information

### John Muir Middle School Self-Esteem Survey

This is a voluntary survey to help adults in this school find out how to increase students' levels of self-esteem through athletics. Because this survey is voluntary, you are free to stop participating at any time. Please do not put your name on the survey so it can be kept anonymous. We would appreciate it if you answer honestly. By returning this sheet, you are giving your consent to participate in this survey.

Thank you!

Brooke Davis

## Background Information

1. Gender (circle one):      male    female
2. Age (circle one):    11      12      13      14      15
3. Are you **currently** involved in a school organized sport? (circle one):    yes    no

If you answered yes, what sport are you **currently** involved in? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Do you **currently** participate in a sport or athletic activity that is **not** organized by the school? (circle one):    yes    no

If you answered yes, what sport are you **currently** involved in? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Would you consider yourself a competitive athlete? (circle one):    yes    no
6. Would you consider yourself successful in athletics? (circle one):    yes    no
7. Do you regularly exercise, such as walking, weight lifting, or leisure activities?  
(circle one):    yes    no

If you answered yes, how often do you **currently** exercise in one week? (circle one):

1-2 days a week    3-4 days a week    4-5 days a week    5-6 days a week

## Appendix C: Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

**Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)**

Instructions: Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. If you strongly agree, circle **SA**. If you agree with the statement, circle **A**. If you disagree, circle **D**. If you strongly disagree, circle **SD**.

- |     |  |                  |
|-----|--|------------------|
| 1.  | On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.                                      | <b>SA A D SD</b> |
| 2.  | At times, I think I am no good at all.   | <b>SA A D SD</b> |
| 3.  | I feel that I have a number of good qualities.                                 | <b>SA A D SD</b> |
| 4.  | I am able to do things as well as most other people.                           | <b>SA A D SD</b> |
| 5.  | I feel I do not have much to be proud of.                                      | <b>SA A D SD</b> |
| 6.  | I certainly feel useless at times.   | <b>SA A D SD</b> |
| 7.  | I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal<br>plane with others. | <b>SA A D SD</b> |
| 8.  | I wish I could have more respect for myself.                                   | <b>SA A D SD</b> |
| 9.  | All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.                         | <b>SA A D SD</b> |
| 10. | I take a positive attitude toward myself.                                      | <b>SA A D SD</b> |

The Morris Rosenberg Foundation