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PERCEIVED SCHOLASTIC COMPETENCE, SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE, AND CLOSE FRIENDSHIPS AMONG FEMALE ATHLETES AND NONATHLETES

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Michelle L. Richter

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PERCEIVED SCHOLASTIC COMPETENCE, SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE, AND CLOSE FRIENDSHIPS AMONG FEMALE ATHLETES AND NONATHLETES

By

Michelle L. Richter

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ABSTRACT

PERCEIVED SCHOLASTIC COMPETENCE, SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE, AND CLOSE FRIENDSHIPS AMONG FEMALE ATHLETES AND NONATHLETES

By

Michelle L. Richter

This study examined the perception of scholastic competence, social acceptance, and close friendships among athletes and nonathletes.

The study population consisted of 65 females from a rural midwestern middle school. Analysis was done to compare perceived scholastic competence (PSC), perceived social acceptance (PSA), and perceived close friendships (PCF) between athletes and nonathletes.

The results of this study revealed positive correlations among PSA, PSC, and PCF. No significant difference was found between athletes and nonathletes in relation to PCF, PSA, and PCF.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS (cont.)

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

Although the number of females involved in organized sports has increased in recent years, the actual number of male athletes clearly exceeds that of females (Corbin, 1984). In general, physical activity attracts the participation of males in greater numbers than females (Paxton, Wertheim, Gibbons, Szmukler, Hillier, & Petrovich, 1991). The smaller percentage of female sport participants provides some explanation for the lack of research that exists today involving young, female athletes. With the many psychological and physiological benefits gained from physical activity, it is important to understand how such activity impacts individuals of different gender and age. Health care providers, including physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, psychologists, physical therapists and social scientists are interested in the psychological and physiological benefits correlated with participation in sports and physical activity (Biddle & Armstrong, 1992; Heaps, 1978; Koniak-Griffin, 1994).

Peer acceptance and relationships are important to the child making the transition to adolescence. At this age, individuals are seeking to develop an identity separate from that of their family (Turner & Helms, 1995). As children

become adolescents, they seek out peers and activities that help them identify who and what they are. Often, these young teenagers find fun, friendship, challenge, and social acceptance by joining clubs, groups, and teams. Young males frequently claim that being an athlete impacts their peer relationships and makes them more socially acceptable (Chase & Dummer, 1992; Williams & White, 1983). More opportunities exist today for young females to become involved in organized sports. As a member of an athletic team, young girls interact with peers who share a common interest. Further, research suggests that children believe that participation on an athletic team provides an opportunity to make new friends (Weiss & Duncan, 1996; Weiss, Smith, & Theeboom, 1992).

As children and teenagers become more active in organized sports, researchers have acknowledged a general concern that the commitment to a sport may negatively impact the future academic commitment of the participants (Goldberg & Chandler, 1989; Kleiber & Malik, 1989; Snyder, 1985). Although this concern is a logical one, research involving athletes and their academic success demonstrates that participation in school sports can positively influence the academic success of the athlete (Snyder, 1985).

Of importance however, is understanding the motivation behind an adolescent's decision to attempt to master a particular skill. Harter's (1978) theory of competence motivation provides a thorough explanation of the success

and failure associated with mastery attempts. An individual's perception of competence in a given skill domain affects their mastery attempts in achievement domains such as academics, sports, and social interactions (Harter, 1978). To examine adolescents' perceived competence in these various domains, Harter (1986) developed the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA). Understanding the perceived competence of an adolescent in these domains will provide teachers, coaches, health care providers, and others with an awareness of particular areas of an adolescent's life that may need special attention and support.

Regular physical activity provides individuals with the opportunity for better health, such as lower levels of stress and a decline in the risk for cardiovascular disease (Koniak-Griffin, 1994). In addition, physical activity can lower depression, improve mood and emotional well-being, strengthen friendships, improve body image, and promote better self-expression (Heaps, 1978; Kavussanu & McAuley, 1995; Koniak-Griffin, 1994; Volden, Langemo, Adamson, & Oechsle, 1990). Friendships, body image and self-expression are all important factors that influence the overall self-esteem of young, adolescent girls (Damon, 1983; Harter & Jackson, 1993). At this very volatile age, health care providers continually seek ways to help these young clients feel good about themselves during this time of role confusion. More research is needed to help understand the

role of physical activity in the development of physical, social, psychological, and academic well-being of young female athletes.

Problem Statement

Unfortunately, only minimal research exists involving participation in athletics and the junior high school population. Even less has been done in regards to females. Adolescence is a critical time as these young individuals are seeking to define their own, unique identity and nestle themselves into a comfortable, accepting peer group (Rice, 1995). Of interest among this age group is the role that athletics play and how participation in organized sports may influence the lives of young individuals as they search for their own identity within society. Because young females in particular are more likely than males to experience emotional disturbances, and are less likely to be physically active, it would be interesting to examine how participation in organized sports affects this particular population. The purpose of this study is to determine if a significant difference exists between athletic and nonathletic girls in regards to their perceived scholastic competence, social acceptance, and close friendships.

Conceptual Definitions of the Variables

Scholastic competence. The level of academic performance as perceived by an individual. May involve performance on assignments, tests, and report cards (Harter & Jackson, 1993).

Social acceptance. Acceptance by peers as perceived by an individual (Vernberg, 1989). Peer approval can be based on different types of behavior including social skills, personality, style of dress, or membership in a popular group (Rice, 1995; Turner & Helms, 1995).

Close friendship. A relationship, as perceived by the individual, made up of the smallest peer group whose members share similar personalities, values, interests, and activities (Dacey & Travers, 1996; Turner & Helms, 1995).

Middle school students. Those students currently enrolled in sixth, seventh, or eighth grade (Harter, Marold, Whitesell & Cobbs, 1996).

Athletes. Individuals who are members of at least one organized sports team where scheduled practices and competition are important features (Duda & Nicholls, 1989).

Nonathletes. Those individuals who do not participate in organized sports (Andre & Holland, 1995).

Theoretical Framework

Individuals are unique beings whose actions are influenced by many different factors (Dacey & Travers, 1996). Competence motivation is a concept that provides an explanation for the motivation behind an individual's decision to act in a particular way (Harter, 1978). Harter's (1978) model of competence motivation provides an appropriate framework for the variables in this study.

The general framework for competence motivation begins with an individual's attempt to master a skill in one of

three domains: cognitive, social, and/or physical (Harter, 1978). In applying the variables of the present study to the competence motivation framework then, the young female subjects are seeking to achieve scholastic success, social acceptance, and close friendships.

Harter's (1978) model of competence motivation, as depicted in Figure 1, addresses both the success and failure outcomes of mastery attempts. The outer loops of the diagram identify with more external influences, such as the individual's socialization history, reward incentives, and cultural/environmental reinforcement. Consequently then, the inner loops illustrate the impact of internal factors, such as the perceived challenge of the task and the pleasure or anxiety that the task produces.

Although the diagram in Figure 1 depicts a rather simple path to either success or failure, undoubtedly the actual process is somewhat more complex (Harter, 1978). Further, it is unlikely that an individual's mastery attempts will follow one path (success) or the other (negative). Harter (1978) suggests in other words, that although an individual may perceive him/herself as successful at a particular skill, it is probable that this individual experienced some degree of failure during his/her attempts to succeed. The present study's population for example, may perceive themselves as scholastically competent, but have received a less than satisfactory grade at some time in the past. Similarly, the middle school

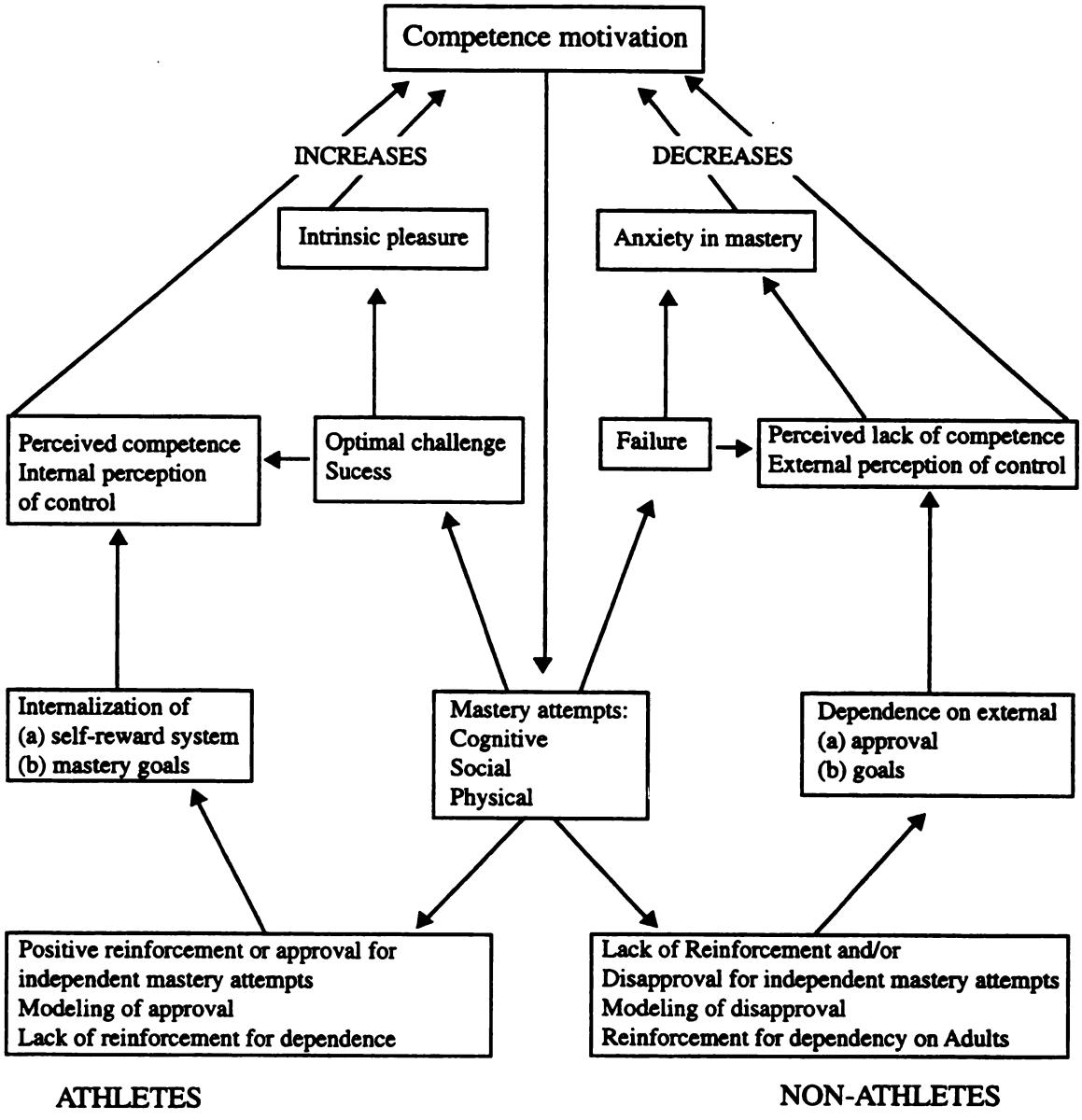

Figure 1. Competence Motivation Model (Harter, 1978, p.38)

student who sees herself as socially accepted has probably faced more than one insult from a peer during her childhood.

As illustrated in Figure 1, Harter's (1978) competence motivation framework suggests that several factors impact the motivation behind an individual's mastery attempts. Factors that reinforce one's mastery attempts include verbal approval, cultural acceptance of the skill being attempted, and support for independent actions and actual attempts. On the contrary, social disapproval for one's actions or mastery attempts, along with the reinforcement for dependency on adults, leads youth more towards failure and inhibits motivation. In terms of the population in the present study, positive reinforcement for close friendship might be an invitation to a friend's house. Verbal support from a teammate for a young girl's effort in a basketball game, despite having not scored a single point, provides positive reinforcement for the individual's actual attempt. Support for actual mastery attempts enhance an individual's ability to internalize goals and develop self-reward systems (Harter, 1978).

Social reinforcement and approval encourages individuals to develop their own goals and self-rewards (Harter, 1978). Harter (1978) describes this process as internalization and suggests that as individuals become more internally focused, their need for external approval diminishes. Further, these individuals then, are likely to feel a greater sense of control which enhances their

perception of competence in a given area (Harter, 1978). Negative reinforcement and frequent disapproval of one's mastery attempts however, promote a dependency on external approval and rewards (Harter, 1978).

As illustrated in Figure 1, the actual degree of challenge that exists in relation to a mastery attempt must be considered before assuming that an individual will experience a pleasurable or successful outcome (Harter, 1978). Boredom, in other words, negatively impacts the motivation behind mastery attempts (Duda & Nicholls, 1992). Within the present study, the motivation a young girl has towards her academic career may decline should she find her school assignments too easy and unchallenging.

The variables of this study are easily applied to Harter's (1978) theory of competence motivation. The diagram in Figure 2 provides a thorough illustration of this study's variables within the competence motivation framework.

In examining the mastery attempts for the present study, social acceptance and close friendships in particular, require some degree of social interaction. Organized sports is one activity, often available to adolescents, that provides a social environment where friendships are formed and strengthened (Weiss et al., 1996). Young females who participate in organized sports, such as the population in the present study, may experience a greater degree of success and pleasure from their mastery

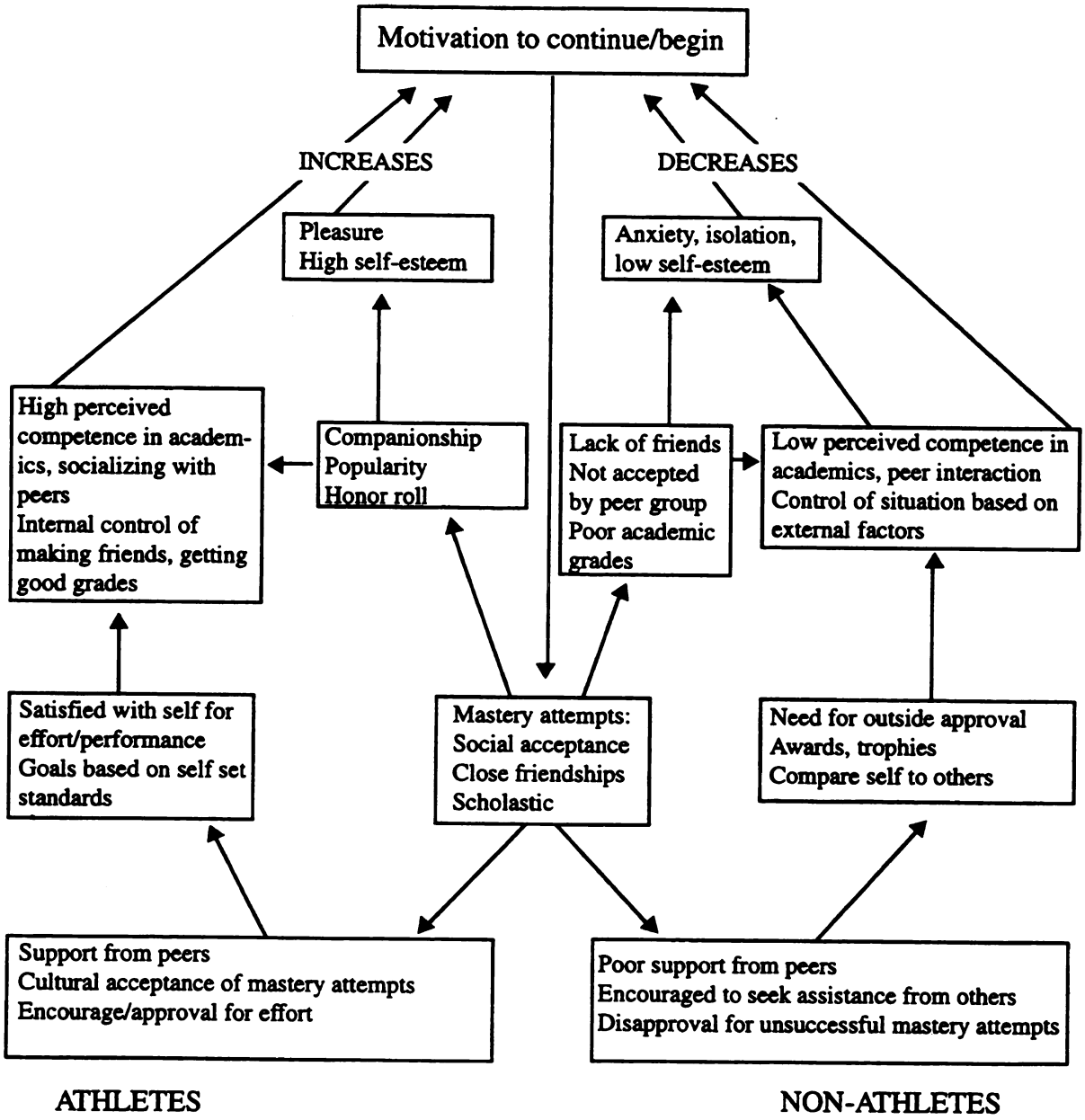

Figure 2. Competence Motivation Model with Study Variables.

attempts, as opposed to their peers who do not experience the social interaction that comes with athletic participation.

Further, a fair amount of literature identifies one's peer group as being highly influential during the adolescent years (Damon, 1983; Erikson, 1982; Rice, 1995). Harter (1978) also points out the importance of peers during adolescence and describes the peer group as "...a dispenser of reinforcements, a determiner of mastery goals, and an influence on one's self-esteem (p. 54)."

Lastly, it is important to keep in mind that mastery attempts are likely to be more successful when they are accepted by society. Competence, in domains valued by peers of similar age, is believed to improve peer acceptance (Weiss & Duncan, 1992). Female participation in organized sports has increased over the past several years and research indicates that such participation is gaining acceptance throughout society (Corbin, 1984; Greendorfer, 1992). Female athletes like those in the present study therefore, are not only participating in an activity that has gained cultural approval, but one that offers a challenging environment with opportunities to socially interact with peers, set and achieve goals, improve athletic skills, and most importantly to experience pleasure and enjoyment.

Review of Literature

Scholastic Competence

As a participant in organized sports, one must find time and energy to put towards developing and maintaining athletic skill in both practice and game situations. Specifically, when the individual participating in a particular sport is also a student, the individual is faced with a dual role, where both roles require some degree of commitment in order to be successful (Goldberg & Chandler, 1989). Research findings that describe the relationship between athletic and academic performance remain inconsistent.

As a student involved in organized sports, one is forced to take on the dual roles of student and athlete (Goldberg & Chandler, 1989). A general concern is the potential decline in the commitment to school work and studying from the student athlete (Kleiber & Malik, 1989; Snyder, 1985). As more students begin to participate in school sports, it is important to look closely at how their time, energy, and role loyalty are divided.

To validate the concern that the academic career of the student athlete suffers, Snyder (1985) offers several explanations. These explanations include: the moderate amount of time and energy required to develop athletic skill leaves less time to commit to school work; the idea that academic eligibility requirements may lead to preferential treatment of the athlete with falsely earned grades; and a

lack of enrollment in more difficult courses, such as college prep classes. Lastly, Snyder (1985) contends that athletes may have unrealistic views of their athletic skill and have an unrealistic belief of a professional athletic career. Although careers as professional athletes have mainly been limited to males, the development of professional women's teams, such as the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA), the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), the American Basketball League (ABL), and the debut of a women's professional softball league, and the Women's Elite Soccer League have given females a reason to strive for careers as professional athletes (Green, 1997).

In his analysis of academic and athletic roles, Snyder (1985) points out that the majority of studies involving high school students reveal that athletes, when compared to nonathletes, perform at the same or higher level in the academic arena. Arguments supporting the academic performance of student athletes include: an increased interest in school spirit from their participation in a school sport increases the spirit on the academic side as well; successful athletic experiences increase self worth which spreads to academic success; participation on a sports team means hard work, commitment, and success, which can be carried over into the academic arena (Snyder, 1985). Further, there may be an eligibility requirement to be met in order to continue sport participation which can be a

motivational factor in itself, as well as, the personal interest and support from teachers, parents, coaches, and teammates (Snyder, 1985).

Culture, gender, age and the socialization background of an individual all influence how he/she perceives his/her role as student and athlete (Chase & Dummer, 1992; Corbin, 1984; Dacey & Travers, 1996; Kane, 1988; Randall, 1990; Volden et al., 1990; Williams & White, 1983). As a child grows and develops, he/she is socialized into his/her role from the influence of parents, teachers, and other adults, as well as peers.

Behaviorist theories suggest that the process of learning occurs from conditioning (Rice, 1995). Skinner and his study of behavior illustrates that one's behavior is based on the previously experienced rewards or punishments for such actions (Turner & Helms, 1995). This may explain then, the impact that both, verbal and nonverbal feedback from parents, teachers, and peers have on an individual's behavior (Rice, 1995). In other words, the perceived reaction from others can influence a child's motivation and interest in sports.

A fair amount of literature exists, that documents the differences between males and females in the area of athletics (Andre & Holland, 1995; Chase & Dummer, 1992; Williams & White, 1983). Males are socialized differently than females as illustrated by studies which report that boys express a greater desire to be remembered as a super

athlete in high school, than do girls (Chase & Dummer, 1992; Goldberg & Chandler, 1989; Kane, 1988; Williams & White, 1983).

Even at birth, males and females are often socialized differently. As described by behaviorist theories, the consequences of a child's actions, such as rewards or punishments, influence the future behavior of the child (Rice, 1995). Humanist, Carl Rogers, offers further insight on development and socialization. Rogers suggests that individuals are "victims of a conditional positive regard" (Rice, 1995, p. 42), where one receives praise and approval only when he/she has conformed to the parental and social standards that surround them. Such developmental theories help to explain how and why children develop different views and perspectives, in terms of what their role is, and what is considered masculine and feminine. In the academic arena, for example, it has been suggested that mathematics is a subject more masculine in nature (Randall, 1990). This belief again brings up the issue of socialization, in that it is often assumed by parents, teachers, and students themselves, that boys will perform well in mathematics (Randall, 1990).

In the past, and probably even still today, the world of sports emphasizes a masculine as opposed to feminine interest (Randall, 1990). With this in mind, Randall (1990) proposed a relationship between the desire of young girls to participate in sports, demonstrating "masculine interest",

and their mathematics ability (a suggested subject of masculine nature). Final results involving girls in fourth, fifth, and sixth grades supported the hypothesis that self-perception of athletic ability was correlated with mathematics achievement (Randall, 1990).

In support of individuals involved in both student and athlete roles, the energy expansion theory, proposes that more energy is produced when individuals commit themselves to numerous physical and social activities (Snyder, 1985). Physical fitness experts defend such a theory in reports that state exercise is energizing (Fromm & Trustem, 1989) and may improve the quality of life (Volden et al., 1990). Physical activity is also hailed to be a way of improving self-esteem among children and adolescents (Vealey, 1992). This is important since high levels of self-esteem are associated with hard work towards achieving goals (Burton, 1992). Goals in this respect, therefore, may include those involving educational success.

In understanding commitment to sports and/or education, it is essential to consider both the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that are involved. The motivation to participate in organized sports may be purely intrinsic and done simply for the enjoyment and challenge of the sport (Biddle & Armstrong, 1992). Intrinsic factors may also play a role in the decision to commit oneself to both school and athletics. In other words, the commitment to both school and sports may produce a greater sense of accomplishment and personal well-

being versus focusing on only one role or the other (Snyder, 1985).

Extrinsic factors may also influence one's desire to take on both the role of student and athlete. That is, the rewards reaped from success in this dual role may further the motivation behind its success (Snyder, 1985). Rewards from success in both academics and athletics, such as trophies, companionship, enhanced self-esteem, and social acceptance all represent some type of achievement.

Lastly, perhaps no longer do individuals desire to be only an athletic success, the "jock", or an academic success, the "brain", but instead, as illustrated by Goldberg and Chandler (1989), today, adolescents want to be seen as the "all-American athlete", with both academic and athletic achievement in hand.

Although a fair amount of literature exists in support of adolescents who take on the dual roles of athlete and student, the majority of this literature involves males as opposed to females. In recent years however, interest in organized sports has increased among the female population (Corbin, 1984; Goldberg & Chandler, 1989). In examining the impact of athletics on one's academic career, it is important not only to focus on male athletes, but to investigate this impact on the growing number of female athletes as well. This study will examine how young female athletes and nonathletes perceive their scholastic competence.

Social Acceptance

As children make the transition to adolescence, they begin to see themselves as part of a broader social context (Lidz, 1976). Seeking to distinguish their own identity, where they are comfortable within society, adolescent behavior and actions stem from attempts at finding social acceptance (Erikson, 1982). Acceptance from peers is very important to the emotional state of the adolescent (Chase & Dummer, 1992).

Young teenagers have reported that being rejected by peers makes them feel depressed and diminishes their sense of self-worth (Harter & Jackson, 1993; McCoy, 1994). Further, young females in particular, tend to have a higher risk of developing emotional disturbances related to self-esteem, such as depression, than their male counterparts (McCoy, 1994; Pine, Cohen & Brook, 1996, Steptoe & Butler, 1996). Vernberg (1990) examined the perception of acceptance among adolescents based on their past and present experience with peers, and found that a decline in this perception corresponds with rejection by peers. Further, the junior high years present changes associated with puberty and school transitions, resulting in physical, emotional and social changes (Butcher, 1986). Positive impact on social adjustment has been associated with physical fitness (Heaps, 1978).

Social acceptance is important at all ages, but specifically at the volatile age of adolescence (Turner &

Helms, 1995). Research by Williams and White (1983), illustrated that junior high school girls cited that being most popular was the way they would want to be remembered. Further, Eccles, Flanagan, Miller, Reuman, and Yee (1989) found that junior high school students rated the importance of social activities the highest in grade six with a slow decline toward grade eight. Social skills, however, still ranked most important at all ages when compared to math, English, and sports (Eccles et al., 1989). This supports the notion that social comparison and evaluation play a significant part in the life of the adolescent.

During adolescence, the shift from childhood to adulthood is influenced by the individual's cultural experiences, social roles, and interactions with peers (Block & Robins, 1993). In particular, when looking at female involvement in sports one must examine how the athletic system is perceived within the status system of the school and/or how popular it is among peers (Butcher, 1986).

According to Goldberg and Chandler (1989), however, the role of athletics is becoming more important to females than has been previously shown. In assessing criteria for adolescent acceptance and popularity, the results of the study by Goldberg and Chandler (1989) were inconsistent with those previously done by Williams and White (1983), Butcher (1986), and Kane (1988). In comparing how females and males would like to be remembered in high school, both female and males cited being outstanding students as most important

(versus leader in activities, most popular, and outstanding athlete), followed immediately by outstanding athlete for males, while the second choice for females, though to a lesser extent, was outstanding athlete as well (Goldberg & Chandler, 1989). The results of Goldberg and Chandler's (1989) study lends support to the idea that more females are interested in athletics today, than in the past.

To gain a further understanding of the relationship between social status and sports, it is important to consider differences that may exist between athletes and nonathletes. According to a 1986 study (Butcher), perceptions of sports as socially acceptable and popular among peers differs between athletes and nonathletes. Butcher (1986) reported that female participants in interschool sports rated being good at sports and getting good grades as more important than good looks, in terms of popularity among peers. As frequently pointed out in the literature, athletic team membership and being a student requires much time, energy, and organization (Butcher, 1986; Snyder, 1985). Butcher (1986) suggests that the extra effort and participation put forth by athletes contributes to their popularity, instead of such external factors as good looks.

On the other hand, the literature expressing the lack of popularity ratings associated with females and sports offers some possible explanations. These explanations suggest that the history of females and sports in general,

and the overall socialization of young females may have the greatest impact on their infrequent choice of sports as a social status determinant (Kane, 1988; Williams & White, 1983).

At the conclusion of her study of appropriate versus inappropriate sports for females, Kane (1988) implies that strong, traditional perceptions of "appropriate feminine behavior" surround the social acceptability of female athletes. Further, Kane (1988) identifies that certain sports, considered sex appropriate, are viewed as more feminine or "lady like", and participation in such sports results in higher status rankings from both male and female peers. These results add to the debate surrounding the social acceptability of sports for females (Kane, 1988).

Evidence from other sources indicates that conditions today are promising for women in sports, and that attitudes toward female athletes will continue to see positive changes (Green, 1997). Further, Chase and Dummer (1992) suggest that female involvement in sports will be more socially accepted as more females, affected by Title IX, become parents. The traditional views that females do not belong in sports may fade and more socially acceptable views of female athletes will be embraced as more girls are encouraged to participate in sports (Chase & Dummer, 1992).

Previous research suggests that negative associations between females and sports often lie within their upbringing (Corbin, 1984; Kane, 1988; Randall, 1990), geographic

location, and socioeconomic background (Goldberg & Chandler, 1989; Williams & White, 1983). As more females participate in sports, and the attitude towards females in sports becomes less negative, the social acceptability of female athletes broadens, and girls are given the opportunity to experience the benefits from participation in organized sports. The desire here, is not to have social acceptability measured only by actual participation in athletics, but instead, to make female athletes socially accepted. Everyone, therefore, regardless of gender, should be provided with equal opportunities to comfortably participate in sports, if they so desire.

The benefits of sports participation can be seen in both the physical and psychological well-being of the individual (Heaps, 1978; Kavussanu & McAuley, 1995; Koniak-Griffin, 1994). As research indicates, more young girls are showing a greater interest in sports today, than in the past (Corbin, 1984; Goldberg & Chandler, 1989). Adolescence, often considered to be an unsettled age, is a period when individuals are most likely to be influenced by their social surroundings (Rice, 1995). It is helpful therefore, to teachers, counselors, healthcare providers and social scientists alike, to better understand what types of social activities, such as organized sports, influence a student's perception of their acceptance among peers. This study will examine how female athletes and nonathletes differ in terms of their perceived social acceptance.

Close Friendships

The value of friendship and the role of peers gain importance as individuals make the transition from childhood to adolescence (Damon, 1983; Lidz, 1976; Rice, 1995). As Erikson (1982) pointed out, it is during this transition when young people look to peers, not only for companionship, but to help them define and develop their own identity. With peers, individuals engage in companionships that offer common interests, recognition, and acceptance (Turner & Helms, 1995).

As children move towards adolescence, interest in their surrounding social environment expands (Erikson, 1982; Turner & Helms, 1995). Peers are no longer just school time buddies or playmates, but instead, participate in more elaborate aspects of friendship, where roles are now based on trust, loyalty, and intimacy (Damon, 1983). The overall value of friendship increases as children approach adolescence (Rice, 1995). Friendship is an important piece in the ever-changing life span, particularly during the early adolescent years. Researchers examining the relationships that exist during adolescence have reported several, common and reciprocal notions among friends. These include loyalty, intimacy, support, trust, and commitment (Dacy & Travers, 1996; Damon, 1983; Lidz, 1976; Turner & Helms, 1995).

Friendships provide social support and companionship. Strong social support has been linked to a decreased

mortality level and overall improved health (Muhlenkamp & Sayles, 1986). Further suggestions are made relating social relationships with the ability to change the body's chemistry, resulting in better protection from illness and disease (Foley & Nechas, 1993). Muhlenkamp and Sayles, (1986) demonstrated that a positive correlation exists between social support and self-care practices in their study examining the relationship between self-esteem, social support, and positive health practices.

Friendship is a unique bond between individuals and it is experienced by both males and females, from different racial groups, ages, and religions. Each experience is different from another and varies on the degree of closeness. Females in particular, are more often involved in close relationships and seek out social support more frequently than males (Biddle & Armstrong, 1992; Foley & Nechas, 1993). Expanding their social relations, then, is something to be considered when looking at females and their participation in group activities, such as sports (Biddle & Armstrong, 1992).

As a member of an athletic team, young girls encounter peers with similar interests. Time spent together as teammates at practice, during games, and traveling sets the stage for friendship. As members of the same team, individuals share a common goal of success for the team. This interactive team environment has the potential to promote the giving and receiving of mental, emotional and

physical support, as well as the experience of camaraderie and sharing.

Much research exists describing the positive impact of close friendships among adolescent females (Foley & Nechas, 1993; Muhlenkamp & Sayles, 1986). Seldom however, does this research describe activities, such as athletics, that may influence the development of such relationships. The need for close friendships increases among the adolescent years (Rice, 1995), and more females than males seek out social support (Biddle & Armstrong, 1992; Foley & Nechas, 1993). A better understanding therefore, of how and where such relationships are formed, will be helpful to young individuals seeking friendship. This study will examine how participation in organized sports impacts the perception of close friendships among adolescent girls.

Hypotheses

The investigator proposes the following hypotheses in regards to the data obtained from a population of young females residing in a rural midwestern setting.

1. Middle school female athletes will score significantly higher on perceived scholastic competence, perceived social acceptance, and perceived close friendships than nonathletes.
2. Perceived scholastic competence and perceived close friendships are positively correlated with perceived social acceptance.

Methods

A nonexperimental, descriptive approach was utilized to examine perceived scholastic competence, perceived social acceptance, and perceived close friendships among female athletes and nonathletes from a population of junior high school students. This study used secondary analysis from data previously collected for use in a similar, nonexperimental study. The primary study examined the relationship of global self-worth, perceived physical competence, and perceived physical appearance among athletic and nonathletic girls (Hayes, 1995). The present study then, involves secondary analysis of the data collected from a rural midwestern setting (Hayes, 1995).

Sample

The physical education class within a rural midwestern middle school was the setting in which potential female subjects were asked to participate in the study after being given a thorough explanation of how and why the research was being conducted. Data collection took place during the 1994 fall semester. The sample consisted of sixty-five Caucasian females from several different socioeconomic groups. Subjects were asked to identify themselves as either athletic or nonathletic ((non)participation in at least one organized sport). The sixty-five participants in the study were then separated into one of two groups based on this identifying factor.

Field Procedures

The investigator of the original study met with the physical education classes to introduce the study, which consisted of a one time only questionnaire process, and to review the consent forms with potential subjects. A short period of time was allowed to obtain parental consent for those students agreeing to participate in the study. On the day the actual questionnaire was administered, those students who agreed to participate in the study and had obtained the proper consent forms remained in class. Those students not desiring to be included in the study then left the classroom until after the questionnaire was completed. Following the introduction of the investigator, an identical monologue was read by the investigator to each physical education class (Hayes, 1995).

Data Collection Procedures and Recording

Individuals who agreed to participate in the study and returned the appropriate consent forms made up the actual sample. It was again stated that participants could drop out of the study at any time. The one time questionnaire presented to subjects consisted of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents entitled "What I Am Like" (Harter, 1986), as well as a short demographic section (Appendix A).

All participants were asked to complete the demographic section before beginning the questionnaire. The four demographic questions asked the participants to identify their date of birth, circle their current grade level,

circle those sports previously and/or currently participating in during junior high, and circle "yes" or "no" in terms of whether or not they intended to continue involvement in competitive sports.

To ensure that the participants had a clear understanding of how to respond to the questionnaire, an example was provided. The example question was similar to those found on the actual questionnaire and was reviewed by the investigator using both verbal instruction and a visual aid.

Protection of Human Subjects

After a thorough explanation of the study was provided, potential subjects were required to provide the investigator with their own written consent, as well as a written consent from their parent or guardian. Names and personal characteristics of the actual subjects in the study remained confidential and anonymous. Again, subjects were reminded that they could withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty.

All necessary consents to carry out the primary study were obtained by the study's original investigator (Hayes, 1995). Approval was received from Michigan State University's Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the school district, the middle school principal, as well as the written consents from the subjects and their parents or guardians.

For the purpose of the present study, a computer disk containing data collected during the original study with no identifying information was received. All participants remained anonymous and were identified only by the prerecorded number on their questionnaire (Hayes, 1995).

Approval was also obtained by the investigator of the present study from the Michigan State University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (Appendix B).

Instrumentation

Data collected for use in the original study was obtained using the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA), developed by Harter (1986). Originally designed for children, the SPPA is widely used to assess self-worth and perceived competence in various areas. To facilitate the use of the original children's scale among the adolescent population, some of the language of the instrument was modified and additional items were included (Harter, 1986). The SPPA is comprised of the following nine subscales:

1. Scholastic Competence
2. Social Acceptance
3. Athletic Competence
4. Physical Appearance
5. Job Competence
6. Romantic Appeal
7. Conduct/Morality
8. Close Friendship
9. Global Self-Worth (Harter, 1986, p.1).

Individual perception of competence based on specific skill domains can be examined using one or more of the subscales from Harter's (1986) SPPA. Each subscale is comprised of approximately five items with possible

responses to each item ranging from one to four. Scholastic Competence, Social Acceptance, and Close Friendships are the three subscales to be used in this study.

Although several studies have been done to evaluate the reliability of the SPPA, a 1986 (Harter) study examining boys and girls in grades five through twelve, was used to provide the means and reliabilities for the three selected subscales in this study. Using Cronbach's alpha, Harter (1986) calculated reliabilities for each subscale on the SPPA. The reliabilities for the subscales involved in this study are as follows (Harter, 1986):

	Scholastic Competence	Social Acceptance	Close Friendship
Grade			
Seven	.91	.86	.79
Eight	.93	.94	.80
Females	.90	.89	.82
Males	.92	.88	.73

Operational Definitions of the Variables

Perceived Scholastic Competence. The subscale PSC is based on items 1, 10, 19, 28, and 37 of Harter's (1986) Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA). PSC examines an individual's perception of their academic abilities. The means developed for this particular subscale come from a previous study by Harter (1986) involving individuals in grades five through twelve. Specifically looking at females, the PSC means are as follows; grade six:

3.17, grade seven: 2.86, grade eight: 3.01. As an average of these scores, a mean of 3.01 will serve as the mean for the purpose of the present study. A score > 3.01, therefore, identifies that the subject perceives herself as academically competent.

Perceived Social Acceptance. The subscale PSA is based on items 2, 11, 20, 29, and 38 of Harter's (1986) SPPA. Items that comprise the social acceptance subscale reflect the individual's perception of their popularity among peers. Based on a previous study involving female middle school students, Harter identified the means for this subscale as 3.05 for grade six, 2.90 for grade seven, and 2.85 for grade eight. The average of these three means, 2.93, will be the subscale mean used to analyze the data in this study. A score > 2.93, then, indicates that the subject feels socially accepted by her peers.

Perceived Close Friendship. The subscale PCF is based on items 8, 17, 26, 35, and 44 of Harter's (1986) SPPA. The items that comprise the subscale PCF reflect the individual's perception of their ability to engage in close relationships. Means for this subscale were derived from a 1986 (Harter) study of adolescents. The mean scores for seventh and eighth grade females were 3.51 and 3.22 respectively. Although a mean score for sixth grade females was not included, the average of the means for grades seven and eight will be used as the subscale mean for the purpose of the present study. Thus, a score > 3.37 suggests that

the young female perceives herself as being involved in at least one close friendship.

Athletes. Based on responses to the original survey, those students who claim to be a member of at least one competitive sports team (i.e. basketball, gymnastics, competitive skiing, soccer, track) are considered to be an athlete for the purpose of this study.

Nonathletes. Based on responses to the original survey, those students who indicate that they are not a member of a competitive sports team are considered to be a nonathlete for the purpose of this study.

Middle School Students. For the purpose of this study, middle school students will refer to those individuals who are enrolled in grade six, seven or eight.

Procedures for Scoring and Data Summarization

Again, there are four possible responses to all of the questions that comprise the SPPA. Using Harter's (1986) instructions for administering and scoring the instrument, all responses are given a score of one, two, three, or four. A score of four on an item indicates that the individual perceives herself as competent in that particular domain. On the other hand, a score of one on an item implies that the individual does not perceive herself as competent in that specific area.

Data Analysis and Statistical Procedures

To investigate and analyze the data obtained from the female subjects of this study, several statistical tests

were conducted. Responses to the SPPA were examined using frequency and descriptive statistics to develop means and standard deviations. The *t*-test procedure was then utilized to compare the scores of the athletes to those of the nonathletes on each of the three subscales. To examine correlations between PSA, PSC, and PCF, Pearson's r Correlation Coefficient was applied.

Results

The results of this study begin by providing a descriptive look at the study's population. Explanation is then provided for the statistical procedures used in analyzing the hypotheses. Although not the original intent of the study, the large discrepancy between the number of athletes versus nonathletes led the investigator to further analysis in regards to grade level. Thus, the results include a look at the significance of grade level and PSA, PSC, and PCF. Lastly, the significance of the relationship between PSA, PSC, and PCF is discussed.

Demographics

The population for this study was comprised of 65 females from a rural, midwestern middle school. From this sample, 53 (81.5%) participated in competitive sports as opposed to 12 (18.5%) who did not. The distribution of sport participation and grade level among subjects is described in Table 1.

Table 2 illustrates the age range and frequency of the sample. Ages of the subjects ranged from 11 to 14 years,

Table 1.

Frequency and Percentage of Grade Level and Sport Participation Among Subjects (N=65)

Variable	# of Subjects	Percentage
Grade 6		
Athletes	14	10.8
Nonathletes	7	21.5
Total	21	32.3
Grade 7		
Athletes	16	24.6
Nonathletes	3	4.6
Total	19	29.2
Grade 8		
Athletes	23	35.4
Nonathletes	2	3.1
Total	25	38.5
Total		
Athletes	53	81.5
Nonathletes	12	18.5
Total	65	100

Table 2.

Frequency and Percentage of Age Distribution Among Subjects (N=65)

Age	# of Subjects	Percentage
11 years	10	15.4
12 years	26	40
13 years	22	33.8
14 years	7	10.8
Total	65	100

with a mean age for all subjects of 12.4 years. Study participants were included from the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade levels with a mean grade of 7.06 for all subjects. In looking specifically at the group labeled athletes, the mean grade was 7.17, with a mean age of 12.5 years. Among the 12 nonathletes, the mean grade was 6.6 and the mean age was 12.0 years. Table 3 displays the mean age and grade of all subjects.

Reliabilities

Reliabilities based on the data under investigation in this study were obtained using Cronbach's alpha. The reliabilities for the subscale used for this study are illustrated in Table 4.

PSA, PSC, and PCF

The means and standard deviations for the variables of this study are displayed in Table 5. Responses to items comprising the PSA category were obtained from 63 subjects. The sample mean for PSA was 2.91, with the mean for athletes only slightly higher at 2.98, and the mean for nonathletes lower at 2.62. A previous study by Harter (1986), established a PSA mean of 2.93, which is surpassed only by the athletic subjects.

The PSC variable for this study consisted of responses from 63 subjects with a mean score of 2.95 for total sample. This mean score of 2.95 is slightly lower than the mean developed by Harter (1986) of 3.01. The PSC means for both

Table 3.

Mean Grade and Age of Subjects (N=65)

Variable	# of Subjects	Mean Grade	SD	Mean Age	SD
Athletes	53	7.17	.68	12.5	.85
Non-athletes	12	6.6	.79	12.0	.95
Total	65	7.06	.85	12.4	.88

Table 4.

Reliabilities for PSA, PSC, and PCF

PSA	PSC	PCF
.63	.77	.76

Table 5.

Frequency, Mean and Standard Deviation of PSA, PSC, and PCF in Relation to Sport Participation

Variable	# of Subjects	Mean	SD
PSA			
Athletes	51	2.98	.60
Nonathletes	12	2.62	.40
Total	63	2.91	.76
PSC			
Athletes	51	3.0	.74
Nonathletes	12	2.73	.81
Total	63	2.95	.76
PCF			
Athletes	53	3.34	.70
Nonathletes	12	3.23	.50
Total	65	3.32	.67

athletes at 3.0, and nonathletes at 2.73, fail to exceed Harter's (1986) established mean.

All 65 subjects responded to questions about PCF. The mean PCF score for the 53 athletes was 3.34, followed by a mean score of 3.23 for the 12 nonathletes. The derived PCF mean from a previous study by Harter (1986) for this age group is 3.37. Thus, all PCF means for this population, including the total sample mean of 3.32, are lower than that developed by Harter (1986).

Means scores for PSA, PSC, and PCF were also established in regards to grade level and are illustrated in Table 6. Once again, using the means developed by Harter (1986), only the subjects in grade seven, with a mean PSA score of 3.02, scored higher than the established PSA mean of 2.93. PSA means for the sixth and eighth grade subjects were 2.89 and 2.84 respectively, while the PSA mean for the total sample was 2.91.

In looking at the responses to PSC, a mean score of 3.03 from subjects in grade eight was slightly higher than the established PSC mean of 3.01 (Harter, 1986). The mean score for subjects in grade six was equal to the established mean, while the seventh grade population showed a lower mean PSC score of 2.80.

Harter's (1986) established mean score for PCF at 3.37 is surpassed again, only by those subjects in grade seven, whose mean PCF score was 3.46. Both the sixth grade mean of 3.17, and the eighth grade mean of 3.34 are lower than the

Table 6.

Frequency, Mean, and Standard Deviation of PSA, PSC, and PCF in Relation to Grade Level

Variable	# of Subjects	Mean	SD
PSA			
Grade 6	21	2.89	.58
Grade 7	18	3.02	.54
Grade 8	24	2.84	.64
Total	63	2.91	.76
PSC			
Grade 6	20	3.01	.70
Grade 7	19	2.80	.87
Grade 8	24	3.03	.72
Total	63	2.95	.76
PCF			
Grade 6	21	3.17	.60
Grade 7	19	3.46	.72
Grade 8	25	3.34	.67
Total	65	3.32	.67

established mean of 3.37 (Harter, 1986), as is the PCF mean for the total sample at 3.32.

T-test for equal groups was utilized to examine the significance of mean differences between the sample population and PSA, PSC, and PCF. The results of the *t*-test, as seen in Table 7, identified no significant differences in PSA, PSC, and PCF among those subjects involved in competitive sports. Although the hypothesis is thus rejected, it is interesting to note that PSA is near significance at .055.

Table 7.

Summary of T-test for Sport Participation and PSA, PSC, and PCF

Variable	t value	DF	2-tail sig
PSA	1.95	61	.055
PSC	1.12	61	.269
PCF	.50	63	.622

$p \leq .05$

The Simple Factorial Analysis of Variance procedure was used to examine the means of sport participation and grade level in relation to PSA, PSC, and PCF. This test examined the impact of sport participation and grade level, both together and as separate variables. As presented in Table 8, the results indicate that grade level and sport participation do not significantly impact PSA, PSC, or PCF.

Lastly, to examine the relationship between PSA, PSC, and PCF, Pearson's r correlation coefficient was implemented. The results of this computation, as illustrated in Table 9, identify PSA as having a significant positive correlation to PCF ($r=.39$, $p \leq .05$). Further, a smaller but significant positive relationship was also found between PSC and PCF ($r=.23$, $p \leq .05$). These results, therefore, support the hypothesis that PSA is positively correlated with PSC and PCF.

Table 8.

Summary of Analysis of Variance Significance of Sport Participation and Grade Level on PSA, PSC, and PCF

Variable	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Sig of F
PSA	Main Effects	1.75	3	.163
	Sport Partic.	1.26	1	.056
	Grade	.49	2	.478
	2Way Interact	.79	2	.309
PSC	Main Effects	1.47	3	.450
	Sport Partic.	.71	1	.259
	Grade	.75	2	.506
	2Way Interact	2.97	2	.075
PCF	Main effects	.88	3	.588
	Sport Partic.	.11	1	.624
	Grade	.77	2	.433
	2Way Interact	.72	2	.460

Table 9.

Pearson's r Correlation Coefficient of PSA, PSC, and PCF

Correlations:	PSA	PSC	PCF
PSA	1.00	.64	.39
	(63)	(61)	(63)
PSC	.64**	1.00	.23
	(61)	(62)	(63)
PCF	.39**	.23*	1.00
	(63)	(63)	(65)

p≤ * .01 ** .001 (Cases)

Interpretation of Findings

Although only one of the hypotheses under investigation was supported, the results of this study do provide findings that are of interest for this particular age group. The supported hypothesis that PSA relates positively with PSC and PCF is consistent with other literature identifying perceived peer approval as important to the emotional well-being of the female adolescent population (Chase & Dummer, 1992; Erikson, 1982). Further, previous claims that academic success is hindered by athletic participation (Kleiber & Malik, 1989; Snyder, 1985) is challenged by the results of this study, which found that athletes consistently score higher than nonathletes in all three subscales, including PSC. In other words, athletes have a higher perception of themselves in terms of social acceptance, scholastic competence, and close friendships versus nonathletes.

Although the findings of the *t*-tests suggested no significant differences in PSC and PCF in relation to participation in competitive sports, PSA does approach significance much more closely than do PSC and PCF.

Tests to examine the relationship of grade level on PSA, PSC, and PCF revealed no significant correlations nor differences among the three grades. Mean scores for subjects in grade seven surpassed Harter's (1986) established means in both the PSA and PCF subscales, however, suggesting that among middle school students, those

in grade seven are more socially confident. Lastly, the findings of the ANOVA procedure indicated no significant impact on PSA, PSC, or PCF when grade level and sport participation were looked at, both independently and collectively.

The positive relationship with participation in competitive sports and PSA supports previous views that the role of athletics is becoming more important to females and their perception of peer acceptance (Butcher, 1986; Goldberg & Chandler, 1989). Although there is a considerable difference between the number of athlete subjects versus the nonathlete subjects, it is of interest to note that the majority of the sample were involved in some type of competitive sport.

Discussion

Limitations

As is common to most research, some limitations did unfold as the study was being carried out. First, it is important to remember that a convenience sample was used, and therefore the extent to which these findings can be generalized remains very limited. The overall sample size is small and it is likely that the results are further biased by the unequal representation of athletes versus nonathletes (53 athlete participants versus 12 nonathlete participants). The strictly rural setting suggests that the findings are applicable only to similar settings while the sample population, consisting exclusively of females,

eliminates the ability to apply this study to middle school students in general. Although demographic factors such as race, economic status, location, and family make-up were not examined for this study, the probability that such factors could influence the results must be considered.

Further, a participant was considered an athlete only on the basis of her participation in at least one competitive team sport. Unfortunately, activities that a nonathlete might engage in on her own were not considered in this study. Activities such as aerobics, jogging, or weight lifting may not involve being a member of a competitive team, however all require some athletic ability. Therefore an "athlete" may have been labeled a "nonathlete" in this study, since activities other than competitive sports were not considered. Furthermore, only twelve subjects were considered nonathletes as opposed to the fifty-three subjects labeled athletes. Although the focus of this study was to examine the effect of sport participation on a young girl's PSC, PSA, and PCF, it is important to note that nine of the twelve nonathletes regularly engaged in other activities. Lastly, since all qualified subjects did not participate in the study, the responses of the willing subjects must be considered as possibly biased.

Reliabilities for this study were obtained using Cronbach's alpha. Although the reliabilities of both PSC and PCF were within an acceptable range, the PSA result of 0.63 does present some concern. Harter's (1986) use of an

urban setting to establish reliabilities for the SPPA may account for the discrepancy in the PSA values, as this study was based on a rural population.

Other limitations of the study were found among the sixth grade participants. At the time of the original questionnaire, participants in grade six had been exposed to only a small number of competitive sports, and therefore had a limited opportunity to participate in athletics. Further, it was noted by the original investigator (Hayes, 1995) that the seventh and eighth grade subjects were able to complete the questionnaire in under twenty minutes, while the sixth grade subjects required more time. Lastly, two of the sixth grade participants gave more than one response to each question which made their results ineligible for the study.

Implications for Advanced Practice Nurses

Although the study's findings cannot be generalized to the entire population of female middle school students, the results do provide insight for advanced practice nurses (APNs) in rural, ambulatory settings. APNs in primary care whose clients include adolescent females can use the findings of this study to enhance the ongoing relationship between these clients and themselves. Research suggesting that a regular source of primary care is often inaccessible to rural residents further demonstrates the importance of the APN's role in such settings (Hayward, Bernard, Freeman, & Corey, 1991). The APN fills a position in primary care that encompasses several distinct roles, all of which impact

health promotion, maintenance, and disease prevention of adolescent females.

The various roles of the APN encompass a broad domain. As an assessor, the APN continually gathers both subjective and objective information pertaining to the client to help identify patient, family, and community needs. Assessment not only involves physical evaluation, but encompasses emotional, spiritual, and psychological aspects as well. A great deal of literature suggests friendships and social acceptance are important to adolescent females and perceived failure in these areas increases the potential for low self-esteem and depression (Pipher, 1996). As this study suggests, participation in competitive sports provides an opportunity for young girls to interact with peers and develop friendships. Should the APN encounter a young female in practice who lacks peer relationships, the APN can then encourage athletic participation where there is ample opportunity for social interaction.

A thorough assessment of the middle school student's coping skills, motivation to achieve goals, social network, and support group is essential in determining the needs of the young client within her rural environment. Further, the APN must also assess how the school and community provide opportunities for females to strengthen their social support and peer relationships. Because community resources are often limited in rural settings, it is important for the APN

to be aware of what extracurricular activities, such as organized sports, are available to a particular population.

Thorough assessment also involves evaluating the knowledge of the client, family, school educators, and community in terms of understanding what factors influence the success or failure of an individual's mastery attempts. The APN can be a key figure in determining where knowledge deficits exist in a rural community, and how they can be corrected and refined to better serve a specific population.

The role of educator is another important piece to the APN's practice in primary care. It is essential for the APN to educate clients, families, communities, and other health care professionals about promoting healthy lifestyles. Because exercise has been shown to lower stress levels and decrease the risk for cardiovascular disease (Koniak-Griffin, 1994), and the results of this study indicate that athletic participants perceived themselves as being more socially accepted than nonathletes, the APN can confidently promote involvement in physical activity for adolescent girls. Educating these young girls, their families, peers, and communities about the benefits of physical activity is crucial to health prevention, promotion and maintenance. APNs play an important role in helping their community understand the importance of providing young girls with the opportunity to participate in organized activities that promote peer interaction and physical well-being, such as competitive sports. School systems faced with limited

funding often look to eliminate nonacademic classes and activities in an effort to save money. The role of the APN in such situations is again that of educator. The APN must educate the community on the importance of extracurricular activities such as competitive sports, as this study suggests that athletes perceive themselves more socially accepted, more scholastically competent and involved in more close friendships than nonathletes. Further, the APN may be the key figure in assisting rural communities on how to fund, organize, and implement such healthy activities.

Athletic participation, however, does not come without risks. The goal, then, is to minimize these risks, and the APN does this by educating the participants, coaches, and parents about appropriate physical exams, injury prevention, safety equipment, and healthy attitudes toward competition.

Furthermore, the APN must educate other health care providers, teachers, families, and students how to communicate approval for an individual's mastery attempts. As indicated by Harter's (1978) competence motivation model, such positive feedback is a significant factor for the motivation behind an individual's mastery attempts, perception of competence, successful outcomes, and genuine self-satisfaction. Given the population of middle school females, the APN must educate the public about the importance of peers, social acceptance, and the need for self-confidence among this age group. It is essential therefore, that the APN not only instruct the community on

how to be positive role models, but also on appropriate ways to demonstrate approval for the mastery attempts of a given population.

Middle school females are often overwhelmed with changes in their bodies, schools, friends, and environment (Pipher, 1996). By developing a trusting relationship with the young female client, the APN can counsel her about setting personal goals, developing self-confidence, and achieving success. Once trusting relationships are established between the APN and the adolescent female client, the APN fills the role of planner and assists the client in devising strategies to achieve self-set goals that promote intrinsic pleasure and well-being. As this study describes, APNs may encounter females with low self-esteem who are eager to be socially accepted or part of a close friendship. The APN can suggest sport involvement as part of a client's plan to be successful and maintain the motivation to achieve self determined goals, such as social acceptance and academic success.

The APN then evaluates the outcomes based on the client's care plan. For example, does the client display self-confidence, does she experience intrinsic pleasure from her mastery attempts, and are her actions and behaviors health promoting? On the other hand does the client correlate success with extrinsic rewards, feel that the outcomes of her mastery attempts are essentially out of her control, and has she been unsuccessful in meeting her goals?

As evaluator, the APN encourages the adolescent female to assess her motivation behind specific mastery attempts, examine the outcomes of her actions, reevaluate her goals, and make further adjustments in her behavior and environment where appropriate.

Involving other health care disciplines is often necessary to maintain both physical and emotional well-being. The APN, then, is considered a collaborator, as she works with other disciplines to bring about the best outcomes for the client. When the APN collaborates with other disciplines, she provides her community with access to comprehensive, quality care that is often lacking in rural settings (McEwen, 1994). As expressed by the literature, populations similar to the one in this study demonstrate a strong desire to be socially accepted (Williams & White, 1983). During the volatile junior high years depression and eating disorders are not uncommon among female adolescents (Pipher, 1996). The APN must keep this in mind as he/she assesses young female clients. Should signs or symptoms of such illnesses arise, the APN might consider collaborating with other disciplines such as psychologists, psychiatrists, and nutritionists to better direct the troubled teenager toward a healthy lifestyle. Collaboration by the APN, however, is not limited to other health care providers. In other words, the APN should also collaborate with a client's teachers and family to evaluate her particular needs and to ensure that the client's environment is providing her with

the best opportunity for success. For example, since involvement in regular physical activity has been shown to decrease depression and anxiety, and increase perceived well-being and social adjustment (Heaps, 1978; Koniak-Griffin, 1994), the APN can suggest to teachers and parents that participation in competitive sports may be helpful in maintaining a well-adjusted emotional state.

APNs in primary care therefore, play a critical role in health maintenance, promotion, and prevention. Their actions involving assessment, education, and counseling incorporate all aspects of a client's environment and enhance overall competence motivation.

Implications for Nursing Education

To better serve the adolescent female population, it is critical to understand the physical and emotional needs of these young girls. This study provides some insight in terms of how such individuals perceive themselves.

As documented in previous literature, children who are making the transition to adolescence typically experience changes in their physical and emotional states, as well as changes amid relationships with parents and friends (Chase & Dummer, 1992). Further research indicates that during this volatile age, females, in particular, are at risk for developing emotional problems related to self-esteem, such as depression (McCoy, 1994; Pine, Cohen & Brook, 1996; Steptoe & Butler, 1996). It is important therefore, to

educate nurses who encounter the adolescent population about the emotional and physical needs of such individuals.

Residents of rural communities are frequently found to have limited access to primary care centers (Hayward et al., 1991). It is likely then, that young females from rural communities, like those in this study, may lack the appropriate knowledge for maintaining their health and well-being. Educating nurses about the barriers to ambulatory care faced by rural residents provides them, as health care providers, with a better understanding of where their services will be welcomed, appreciated and most importantly invaluable.

Implications for Future Research

To establish greater generalizability, it is essential that future research focus on larger sample sizes from a broad range of settings and backgrounds. As this study was limited to a small rural midwestern area, it would be interesting to compare results of similar studies conducted in different settings. Further, although the intent of this study was to focus specifically on young females, it would be helpful to health care providers, educators, and physical education teachers to gain a further understanding of how athletics may/may not impact the lives of junior high school males as well.

Demographic factors such as race, religion, age, sex, community setting, and family make-up are likely to have some degree of impact on the relationships of PSC, PSA, and

PCF among athletes and nonathletes. A closer examination into how demographic factors affect an individual's decision to participate in sports may help provide a better understanding of why some individuals are athletes while others are not.

Furthermore, long term or longitudinal research is appropriate to examine the impact of sports on individuals over time. Lastly, although the focus of this study was to examine the impact of athletics on PSC, PSA, and PCF, it is necessary that future research consider the effects of other extracurricular activities that students participate in on a regular basis. For example, there exists several competitive team activities that are not considered athletic, such as debate team, quiz bowl, and Odyssey of the mind. Although the focus of such teams is not athletic skill, the group still provides a team atmosphere and competitive camaraderie.

Conclusion

The findings of this study support participation in athletics by young females for the social, scholastic and physical benefits. Opportunities for sport participation should be made available to all females with approval for mastery attempts clearly communicated.

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APPENDIX A

Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents, (Harter, 1986)

WHAT I AM LIKE

Birthdate_____
Month Day Year

Circle the grade you are now in 6 7 8

CIRCLE the activities that you participate in now or have participated in while in middle school:

art
band
basketball
bowling
cheerleading
cross country
choir
dance
figure skating competition
gymnastics competition
skating (racing team)
skiing (racing team)
soccer
swimming (racing team)
track
volleyball
clubs:_____

If you did participate in any of these activities, do you plan to continue? circle: yes no

What I Am Like

Name_____ Age_____ Birthday_____ Group_____
Month Day

SAMPLE SENTENCE

	Really True for Me	Sort of True for Me				Sort of True for Me	Really True for Me
a)	☐	☐	Some teenagers like to go to movies in their spare time	**BUT**	Other teenagers would rather go to sports events.	☐	☐
1.	☐	☐	Some teenagers feel that they are just as smart as others their age	**BUT**	Other teenagers aren't so sure and wonder if they are as smart.	☐	☐
2.	☐	☐	Some teenagers find it hard to make friends	**BUT**	For other teenagers it's pretty easy.	☐	☐
3.	☐	☐	Some teenagers do very well at all kinds of sports	**BUT**	Other teenagers don't feel that they are very good when it comes to sports.	☐	☐
4.	☐	☐	Some teenagers are *not* happy with the way they look	**BUT**	Other teenagers *are* happy with the way they look.	☐	☐
5.	☐	☐	Some teenagers feel that they are ready to do well at a part-time job	**BUT**	Other teenagers feel that they are not quite ready to handle a part-time job.	☐	☐
6.	☐	☐	Some teenagers feel that if they are romantically interested in someone, that person will like them back	**BUT**	Other teenagers worry that when they like someone romantically, that person *won't* like them back.	☐	☐
7.	☐	☐	Some teenagers usually do the right thing	**BUT**	Other teenagers often don't do what they know is right.	☐	☐
8.	☐	☐	Some teenagers are able to make really close friends	**BUT**	Other teenagers find it hard to make really close friends.	☐	☐
9.	☐	☐	Some teenagers are often disappointed with themselves	**BUT**	Other teenagers are pretty pleased with themselves.	☐	☐
10.	☐	☐	Some teenagers are pretty slow in finishing their school work	**BUT**	Other teenagers can do their school work more quickly.	☐	☐
11.	☐	☐	Some teenagers have a lot of friends	**BUT**	Other teenagers don't have very many friends.	☐	☐
12.	☐	☐	Some teenagers think they could do well at just about any new athletic activity	**BUT**	Other teenagers are afraid they might not do well at a new athletic activity.	☐	☐

	Really True for Me	Sort of True for Me				Sort of True for Me	Really True for Me
13.	☐	☐	Some teenagers wish their body was different	BUT	Other teenagers like their body the way it is.	☐	☐
14.	☐	☐	Some teenagers feel that they *don't* have enough skills to do well at a job	BUT	Other teenagers feel that they *do* have enough skills to do a job well.	☐	☐
15.	☐	☐	Some teenagers are *not* dating the people they are really attracted to	BUT	Other teenagers are dating those people they are attracted to.	☐	☐
16.	☐	☐	Some teenagers often feel guilty about certain things they do	BUT	Other teenagers hardly ever feel guilty about what they do.	☐	☐
17.	☐	☐	Some teenagers can be trusted to keep secrets that their friends tell them	BUT	Other teenagers have a hard time keeping secrets that their friends tell them.	☐	☐
18.	☐	☐	Some teenagers don't like the way they are leading their life	BUT	Other teenagers do like the way they are leading their life.	☐	☐
19.	☐	☐	Some teenagers do very well at their classwork	BUT	Other teenagers don't do very well at their classwork.	☐	☐
20.	☐	☐	Some teenagers are very hard to like	BUT	Other teenagers are really easy to like.	☐	☐
21.	☐	☐	Some teenagers feel that they are better than others their age at sports	BUT	Other teenagers don't feel they can play as well.	☐	☐
22.	☐	☐	Some teenagers wish their physical appearance was different	BUT	Other teenagers like their physical appearance the way it is.	☐	☐
23.	☐	☐	Some teenagers are proud of the work they do on jobs they get paid for	BUT	For other teenagers, getting paid is more important than feeling proud of what they do.	☐	☐
24.	☐	☐	Some teenagers feel that people their age will be romantically attracted to them	BUT	Other teenagers worry about whether people their age will be attracted to them.	☐	☐
25.	☐	☐	Some teenagers are usually pleased with the way they act	BUT	Other teenagers are often ashamed of the way they act.	☐	☐
26.	☐	☐	Some teenagers don't really have a close friend to share things with	BUT	Other teenagers *do* have a close friend to share things with.	☐	☐
27.	☐	☐	Some teenagers are happy with themselves most of the time	BUT	Other teenagers are often not happy with themselves.	☐	☐
28.	☐	☐	Some teenagers have trouble figuring out the answers in school	BUT	Other teenagers almost always can figure out the answers.	☐	☐

	True for Me	True for Me				Sort of True for Me	Really True for Me
29.	☐	☐	Some teenagers are popular with others their age	BUT	Other teenagers are not very popular.	☐	☐
30.	☐	☐	Some teenagers don't do well at new outdoor games	BUT	Other teenagers are good at new games right away.	☐	☐
31.	☐	☐	Some teenagers think that they are good looking	BUT	Other teenagers think that they are not very good looking.	☐	☐
32.	☐	☐	Some teenagers feel like they could do better at work they do for pay	BUT	Other teenagers feel that they are doing really well at work they do for pay.	☐	☐
33.	☐	☐	Some teenagers feel that they are fun and interesting on a date	BUT	Other teenagers wonder about how fun and interesting they are on a date.	☐	☐
34.	☐	☐	Some teenagers do things they know they shouldn't do	BUT	Other teenagers hardly ever do things they know they shouldn't do.	☐	☐
35.	☐	☐	Some teenagers find it hard to make friends they can really trust	BUT	Other teenagers *are* able to make close friends they can really trust.	☐	☐
36.	☐	☐	Some teenagers like the kind of person they are	BUT	Other teenagers often wish they were someone else.	☐	☐
37.	☐	☐	Some teenagers feel that they are pretty intelligent	BUT	Other teenagers question whether they are intelligent.	☐	☐
38.	☐	☐	Some teenagers feel that they are socially accepted	BUT	Other teenagers wished that more people their age accepted them.	☐	☐
39.	☐	☐	Some teenagers do not feel that they are very athletic	BUT	Other teenagers feel that they *are* very athletic.	☐	☐
40.	☐	☐	Some teenagers really like their looks	BUT	Other teenagers wish they looked different.	☐	☐
41.	☐	☐	Some teenagers feel that it's really important to do the best you can on paying jobs	BUT	Other teenagers feel that getting the job done is what really counts.	☐	☐
42.	☐	☐	Some teenagers usually *don't* get asked out by people they would like to date	BUT	Other teenagers *do* get asked out by people they really want to date.	☐	☐
43.	☐	☐	Some teenagers usually act the way they know they are supposed to	BUT	Other teenagers often don't act the way they are supposed to.	☐	☐
44.	☐	☐	Some teenagers *don't* have a friend that is close enough to share really personal thoughts with	BUT	Other teenagers do have a close friend that they can share personal thoughts and feelings with.	☐	☐

APPENDIX B

UCRIHS Approval Letter

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

February 12, 1998

TO: Linda Spence
A230 Life Sciences

RE: IRB#: 98-079
TITLE: A LOOK AT SCHOLASTIC COMPETENCE, SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE AND CLOSE FRIENDSHIPS AMONG FEMAL ATHLETES AND NON-ATHLETES
REVISION REQUESTED: N/A
CATEGORY: 1-A,C,E
APPROVAL DATE: 02/12/98

The University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects' (UCRIHS) review of this project is complete. I am pleased to advise that the rights and welfare of the human subjects appear to be adequately protected and methods to obtain informed consent are appropriate. Therefore, the UCRIHS approved this project and any revisions listed above.

RENEWAL: UCRIHS approval is valid for one calendar year, beginning with the approval date shown above. Investigators planning to continue a project beyond one year must use the green renewal form (enclosed with the original approval letter or when a project is renewed) to seek updated certification. There is a maximum of four such expedited renewals possible. Investigators wishing to continue a project beyond that time need to submit it again for complete review.

REVISIONS: UCRIHS must review any changes in procedures involving human subjects, prior to initiation of the change. If this is done at the time of renewal, please use the green renewal form. To revise an approved protocol at any other time during the year, send your written request to the UCRIHS Chair, requesting revised approval and referencing the project's IRB # and title. Include in your request a description of the change and any revised instruments, consent forms or advertisements that are applicable.

PROBLEMS/ CHANGES: Should either of the following arise during the course of the work, investigators must notify UCRIHS promptly: (1) problems (unexpected side effects, complaints, etc.) involving human subjects or (2) changes in the research environment or new information indicating greater risk to the human subjects than existed when the protocol was previously reviewed and approved.

If we can be of any future help, please do not hesitate to contact us at (517)355-2180 or FAX (517)432-1171.

Sincerely,

David E. Wright, Ph.D.
UCRIHS Chair

DEW:bed

cc: Michelle Brewer-Richter

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AND
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