A Literature Review of Self-Esteem and Physical Self-Efficacy with Female Adolescents

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Abstract: Positive self-esteem and physical self-efficacy have been found to be contributing factors in the well-being of female adolescence. Research has supported that sports participation has resulted in many positive factors toward healthy development in female adolescents. The purpose of the paper is to examine self-esteem and physical self-efficacy of adolescent girls’ involvement in sports. Previous research will attempt to reveal correlations between participation in adolescent female sports and a statistically significant relationship between self-esteem and physical self-efficacy.

In formulating a theoretical perspective for the proposed study of the relationship between adolescent involvement in sports and self-esteem and physical self-efficacy, the social cognitive theory provides a solid prototype. Albert Bandura is known for his research and work on social cognitive theory. The main question for psychologists is why do individuals act the way they do? Bandura believes the answer to this question is a combination of individual's cognitions and their environment. An individual's cognitions and environment will work together to form certain behaviors.

Keywords: Self-Esteem, Self-Efficacy, Adolescence, Sports

1. Introduction

Female adolescence can be seen as a time of growth and development with self-esteem and physical self-efficacy being two major variables in understanding the psychological well-being of this age group. Adolescence can be broken down into physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral changes. In understanding the growth of adolescence, family, school, community, workplace, gender, race, sexual orientation, disabilities, and religious beliefs [1] are all factors in the outcome of human development.

2. Theoretical Framework

With any parent, educator, medical professional, or individual in charge of children, decision-making is inevitable. A sound childhood development theory can provide a solid basis for guidance in deciding what is best for a child. Childhood development theories provide a supportive background for the importance of healthy development in young people. Some of the theories of childhood development consist of the psychodynamic, learning, cognitive, ethological, and contextual. Childhood development theories provide a solid theoretical framework for how children develop and the particular needs associated with this age group.

Alfred Adler’s work can be seen within the historical context of self-esteem. Adler saw self-esteem as developed through a child’s strive for self-acceptance, mastery, and survival [13]. Positive self-esteem is developed through favorable experiences with primary caregivers. Adler theorized that self-esteem and social interests are developed through “cooperation and mutuality with significant others in the family or neighborhood” [13].

Self-esteem is often measured in the social sciences through a variety of tools. Sociologist Morris Rosenberg developed one of the most used self-esteem scales. Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) was originally developed in 1965 as a one-dimensional scale to determine self-esteem and self-concept [14]. In addition to the RSES, the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI) tests for self-concept in children can be adapted for adults. The Self-Perception Profile (SPP) was originally developed for children, but has been adapted for adolescents, college students, and adults [21].

Early historical theories of self-efficacy can be seen in the work of Albert Bandura. Bandura first developed his theory in 1977 as part of his theoretical framework of social cognitive theory [25]. Self-efficacy is an individual’s judgment of their ability to perform a behavior. An adolescent who believes they are good at writing may take more writing classes [25]. In comparison, an adolescent who judges their skills at sports as competent may continue to engage in extracurricular sports. During the stages of adolescence, new skills are mastered as they learn to navigate the demands of adulthood. Adolescents who do not have a sense of inefficacy will carry these feelings over to the new demands they are faced with in adulthood.

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3. Sports History

One area that self-esteem and self-efficacy can
be a factor in for adolescent females is sports participation. This is a relatively new field of study
since, prior to 1870, sports existed for women in
recreational form only. Some of the contemporary
beliefs of the time were that each individual had a set
amount of energy and exhausting both physical and
intellectual components of energy could be
hazardous to one’s health. As noted in Dr. Edward
Clarke’s Sex in Education (1874), a contemporary
belief of the time was that women’s menstrual cycle
combined with physical activity could be an
additional hazard to women [4]. The past 130 years
has brought about tremendous change to women in
sports. One of the major contributions was the
change in ideology of women in sports with the
legislative act of Title IX in 1972.

No modern day discussion of women and sports
can take place without a look into the legislative act
of Title IX. Title IX prohibits the discrimination of
gender in ten areas of federally funded education
programs, one of which is in sports. Title IX has
been a main contribut or to the changes seen in
modern day society. The change in figures of female
participants in the last 45 years is staggering. In
1971, 294,015 girls participated in high school
athletics; by 2010 the numbers had risen to 3,173,549
girls in high school athletics [18].

One of the main benefits of women participating
in sports is the health factor. Women who participate
in sports are less likely to drink, use drugs, smoke,
and have unwanted pregnancies [23]. In addition,
levels of self-efficacy and self-esteem have been
associated with sports participation.

Parent care-giving behaviors are also an
important influence in children’s development [7].
The period of development during adolescence is
marked by physical, cognitive, and social changes
[5]. Adolescent and sports research has shown that
participation in sporting activities generates higher
boys and girls.

Research has shown that there is an increase in
organized sports among children, and particularly
girls’ sports. According to the National Federation of
State High School Association [17], girls’
participation has been on the rise for the past 25
years with a record of 3,267,664 participants in the
year 2012-213. Life skills that could be developed
through sports programs are persistence, team work,
leadership and character development [24]. In
addition, research has shown that sports participation
is a factor in positive and negative self-esteem and
physical self-efficacy.

According to Daniels & Leaper [8] boys are
typically shown to be associated with sports in U.S.
society. Daniels & Leaper [8] found that, “boys’
participation in sports remains an important avenue
to peer acceptance and later positive feelings of self-
worth.” [8] However, historically, sports has not
been socially accepted for girls in the U.S., but the
legislative act of Title IX has changed that by
making sports more acceptable to girls. The
continued increased acceptance of girls’ participation
in sports will most likely make the socioemotional
benefits more available to athletic girls.

4. Self-Esteem

This section of the literature review will present
four studies on self-esteem and sports. Richman,
Brown, & Clark [19] present findings on the
relationship between self-esteem and specific
maladaptive behavioral patterns. The study by
Richman & Schafer [20] will present findings on
show the relationship between cognitive variables
will present findings on global self-esteem related to
participation in sports competition.

Self-esteem and Specific Maladaptive
Behavioral Patterns

Richman, Brown, & Clark [19] used a sample
population of 195 11th and 12th graders with the mean
age of 16.2. The data collection site was at a High
School. The dependent variable was self-esteem.
Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale and Piers-Harris
Children’s Self-Concept Scale were used in this
study. Low social class level subjects were
significantly different than middle and high self-
estee (SES) subjects (p < .05). Male subject scores
were significantly greater than female subject scores
(p < .05). Richman et al. [19] study revealed that
lower general self-esteem is found in females
compared to males, and that lower social class levels
had considerably lower self-esteem than middle and high Social Class (SES) subject.

Female Self Esteem and Sports

Richman & Schaffer [20] used a sample population of 220 college females with the mean age of 19 years. The data collection site was a college setting. Self-Esteem was studied using the Children’s Physical-Self Description Questionnaire (PSDQ), Body Esteem Scale, Personal Attribute Questionnaire, and Self-Esteem subscale of the PSDQ. The results from Richman & Schaffer [20] show that “participating in sports promotes females’ self-worth by fostering physical competencies, favorable body images, and gender flexibility, and in the absence of any such psychosocial benefits, participation in sports has little salutary effect on and can even undermine self-esteem” [20].

Relationship between Cognitive Variables and Self-Esteem

Misra & Aguillon [15] used a sample population of 158 adolescents from 9th-12th grade. The collection site was at a high school. Self-esteem was measured using Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale, Ransoms Modeled Behavior Questionnaire, Kaplan’s Exercise Scale, and the Center for Science in Public Interest (CSPI) quiz. “Scientific evidence strongly demonstrates that significant health gains can be realized through regular participation in physical activity and good nutrition” [15].

Global Self-Esteem Related to Participation in Sports Competition

Bowker, Gadbois, & Cornock [6] used a sample population of 100 11th graders. The collection site was at a local high school. Self-esteem was measured using a Self-Perception Profile and the Body Esteem Scale. Bowker, Gadbois, & Cornock found that:

Although boys reported greater satisfaction with weight and appearance, there were no gender differences in self-worth. In addition, more feminine individuals who participated in competitive sports reported lower levels of perceived athletic competence and global self-worth, but higher self-esteem when they participated in more noncompetitive sports. [6]

In summary, the studies from Richman et al. [19] Richmond & Schafer [20] and Misra & Aguillon [15] and Bowker et al. [6] all use adolescent high school students as their subject. Although Richman & Schafer [20] have subjects of college age, the study focuses on their precollege participation in sports. Subjects range from 13-19 years of age, which is within the standard of adolescent years of human development. All four studies have the dependent variable of self-esteem.

5. Physical Self-Efficacy

Adolescents who participated in sports were found to have less behavioral problems and higher emotional well-being. Adolescents who were found to be involved in sports participation were perceived to have significant higher levels of athletic and social competence and global self-worth [9].

Self-efficacy can also be found in the domain of academic functioning and connected to persistence. Students who are faced with difficult academic tasks and have higher levels of self-efficacy have been found to be more persistent in their efforts than students with lower self-efficacy [27].

According to Gano-Overway, et. al [11], positive youth development (PYD) programs provide venues for youth to develop assets that allow them to make positive contributions to society. Sports have been found to foster this type of development as well. Gano-Overway, et al. examined the National Youth Sports Program (NYSP) to determine social benefits. The NYSP mission is to “provide children with the right start” [11]. Overall, children of the program found the environment to be caring and had a positive influence on ones self-efficacy and willingness to help others.

The literature findings will discuss three studies based on physical self-efficacy. The first study by Moritz, Feltz, Fahrbach & Mack [16] will provide a meta-analysis on athlete’s self-efficacy and performance. The second study presented in the literature review by Gernigon & Delloye [12] will discuss the relationship between self-efficacy, performance, and affect before competition. The third study by Valois, Umstattd, Zullig, & Paxton [26] presented findings on the relationship between adolescence and physical activity behaviors and emotional self-efficacy.

Self-Efficacy and Sports Performance

Moritz, Feltz, Fahrbach & Mack [16] conducted a meta-analysis of various studies regarding self-efficacy and performance in sports with the mean age being 15 years. Each of the studies had to, “(a) provide a measure of self-efficacy; (b) provide a measure of performance; (c) provide a correlation between self-efficacy and performance; and (d) be related to sport rather than exercise or physical activity” [16]. The findings of this meta-analysis suggest that, “self-efficacy beliefs have a positive and moderate relationship with performance in sport” [16].
Performance and Self-Efficacy

Gernigon & Delloye [12] used a sample population of 42 males, 20 females. The mean age was 19.9. The site of data collection was at an indoor track and field federation national championship. Self-efficacy was measured using Bandura’s Self-Efficacy Scale and the Revised Casual Dimensions Scale. First, the subjects self-efficacy was assessed, after which they completed a 60 meter run with manipulated timing to determine success versus failure. Their self-efficacy was assessed a second time and the subjects ran a second 60 meter trial. Gernigon & Delloye found, “Success and failure, respectively, increased and decreased self-efficacy,” and that “Performance was not influenced by feedback but was weakly predicted by self-efficacy” [12].

Physical Activity and Reduced Emotional Self-Efficacy

Valois, Umstattd, Zullig, & Paxton [26] used a sample population 3,836 high school students. Ages of participants ranged from 12-18 years. The site of data collection was at a high school. Self-efficacy was measured using the Center for Disease Control Youth Risk Behavior Survey (physical activity and emotional self-efficacy items). According to Valois et al. [26] results of the study suggest that reduced vigorous physical activity, strengthening and toning exercises, and playing on sports teams were associated with reduced emotional self-efficacy for specific race and gender.

In summary, the studies from Moritz, et al. [16], Gernigon & Delloye [12] and Valois et al. [26] all use adolescent high school students as their subject. Subjects range from 12-18 years of age, which is within the standard of adolescent years of human development. All three studies have the dependent variable of self-efficacy.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion of the literature review, themes have developed that self-esteem and physical self-efficacy is multifaceted. These can include family, school, friends, body image, sports and athletics. Research has shown that girls’ and boys’ self-esteem have varying differences. It is also worth noting that Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy and self-esteem can provide a reasonable background to cognitive development and the impact that sports participation can have on helping children grown both cognitively and socially.

7. Recommendations

The problem is that there is limited research on self-esteem and physical self-efficacy of adolescent girls’ participation in sports. Most of the research has concentrated on self-esteem and physical self-efficacy as separate factors in adolescent development. Future research should bridge this gap to show a connection between the two and whether sports participation is a factor in positive self-esteem and physical self-efficacy.

With an understanding of sports participation and the impact on physical self-efficacy and self-esteem in adolescent women, future research can focus on how sports participation contributes to healthy behaviors of adolescent girls.

Future proposed research should also focus on the distinction of self-esteem and physical self-efficacy as a combination of factors that can be affected by female sports participation. This future research may help professionals working with the female adolescent population gain a greater understanding on how sports can impact self-esteem and physical self-efficacy. Possible future research for investigation may include:

1. Do female adolescents who participate in sports have a statistically significant higher level of reported self-esteem when compared to those who do not participate in sports?

2. Do female adolescents who participate in sports have a statistically significant higher level of reported physical self-efficacy when compared to those who do not participate in sports?

3. Is there a significant relationship between self-esteem and physical self-efficacy?

Previous studies have focused on adolescent self-esteem and adolescent physical self-efficacy in relation to specific factors, but have not focused on the combination of self-esteem and physical self-efficacy in relationship to adolescent participation in sports.

8. References


