

**Boys in the Background: The Impact of Sports on Males
Growing Up in a Small Town**

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Abstract

In a small town in a Canadian prairie province where sports, particularly football and basketball, are the chief activities, many young men in school define their self-worth based on their athletic ability. To determine the impact that sports had on the young men in this particular town, 20 boys between the ages of 15 and 19 were selected for interviews. Due to the importance placed upon sports in the school and the small size of the school, all 20 of the boys had some association with football and basketball. They either played on one of the sports teams but spent much of the time sitting on the bench, or they desired to play but failed to qualify for team play. Only one of the boys had never tried to play on one of the teams. The boys were interviewed about how they fit into the circle of sports and how their participation or non-participation has influenced them. It was determined that sports did influence their self-esteem. Many of the boys, both those who were part of the team and those who had been cut from the team, felt left out and began to doubt their abilities and their worth. The study confirms much of the current literature. Recommendations include making coaches and administration aware that boys were being negatively influenced by a successful sports program, as well as calling for further research to determine the extent and depth of the negative influence of sports on boys who are not the stars of the team.

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Autobiographical Preamble

I grew up in a small town. In fact, it was a very small town. We only had one school, which housed 300 students from grades seven to twelve, two small grocery stores, and a handful of churches. There was just one small swimming pool that was only open for a few months in the summer, a very small, very old public library, and a curling rink which was only used by a very few people. Needless to say, it seemed to me as a teenager that there was an awful lot of time with very few desirable activities to occupy it.

However, we did have one big excitement. We had a high school basketball team. The entire town adored that team and attending games was a definite highlight of life for many. Children would play in the bleachers while the game was in progress and then run out onto the gym floor during half time to try to shoot basketballs as high in the air as their little arms could throw, hoping that one time they would put the ball through the hoop. White-haired men and women whose children had long graduated and left the town continued to be at every single game, cheering their team on to victory.

And the team was victorious. Year after year, our little team would be sent off to the provincial championships competing against schools triple and even quadruple our size. Yet, despite our size, the tournaments would often prove to be a David versus Goliath experience and our team would arrive home with the winning banner to a veritable parade of congratulation and celebration.

Those athletes who played on the team were, not surprisingly, heroes in our town. They

were loved and admired by everyone, from the mayor and other distinguished pillars of their community, to the adoring four- and five-year-olds who wanted to grow up and be just like them.

It all sounds very thrilling and more of a novel than reality. But it wasn't. The problem was that there were so many who wanted to play basketball, or at least be involved in some aspect of the game that would allow them to experience the excitement and glory that was reserved for members of the team. The basketball team, however, was very small. Five players were all that could play at once and then there were usually only five or six more who rounded out the team. What happened to the students who made the team but didn't see much court time? How did those who desperately wanted to play but were cut from the team feel? What about the young people who had no interest in basketball at all, but because their skills were not on the court, were largely ignored by the other students and even the community?

I grew up in the town but I didn't play basketball and, as a result, I know something of the difficulties that are faced by young men who are not a part of the team. Actually, I quite enjoyed basketball. I remember as a twelve-year-old playing on a team in a tournament. I realized very quickly, as did all of my teammates, that I wasn't particularly talented when it came to handling a basketball and, rather than face the humiliation of being laughed at or belittled, I withdrew from the sport and watched from the bleachers.

Unfortunately, I learned rather quickly that because I lacked what it took to be a proficient basketball player, I not only was left off of the team but I also was left out of many circles that were reserved for those students who were elevated to popularity because of their athletic skill. The athletic giants were always nice, but also very distant from the circles of which I was a part.

Years later, I was helping to coach a baseball team that my son plays on and I realized how much I loved baseball and I regretted that I did not play as a youth. More than regret though, I felt anger. I knew why I had not played. Because I had not been very good at basketball, I had assumed, as had many of those who were considered the elite of the athletic world, that I was also not much of a baseball player. I had been cheated out of an experience that I would have enjoyed simply because I had been led to believe, by my own lack of confidence and by a few discouraging remarks from my peers, that I was not good enough to play on a competitive team.

I am pleased to acknowledge that I did have some skills and have moved on to be successful and extremely content with my life choices. However, there are many times when feelings of inadequacy due to lack of athletic abilities creep back to haunt me and, in fact, hinder my progression. I believe that many of those feelings were first developed when I was told by peers, and realized myself, that I wasn't good enough to participate in many of the sports that were considered "cool."

Were the above autobiography the end of my experience with sports in small towns, I would have put the past behind and moved on. However, I have discovered that my story is not unique and so I have decided to pursue a thesis grounded in my own distressing experiences.

Chapter One

Background to the Study

As an educator, I have become aware over the past several years of many young people (boys in particular) who have struggled with feelings of low self-esteem. In many of these cases the fact that these young men were not considered one of the athletically elite in school seemed to intensify the struggle. Stories of being left out, of being made fun of, and of feeling very alone have been the focus of many of our conversations. Most of these young men have longed to be part of a team and might have benefitted greatly from such participation. As Kleiber and Kirshnit (1991) suggest, if sports is a large part of the leisure time of young people, then the development of competence and identification with a social group will result. In addition, males who participate in sports may have the traditional aspects of masculinity reinforced for them (Messner & Sabo, 1990). Wearing (1994) further states that athletic involvement forms boundaries for young men that allow their masculinity to develop and at the same time allows young males the ability to break from mother and femininity. Additionally, sports allows males to participate in task orientation and achievement, as well as male-governed behaviour, furthering essential male identity development. It would appear then, that for young men especially, participating in sports is certainly important—maybe even crucial for them to develop a sense of identity.

There are other developmental benefits that have been shown to arise from participation in sports. One of these benefits stems from the fact that youth have some autonomy in choosing the sport they will participate in, as well as the competitive structure and the social support that comes from being a part of a team. This combination provides an excellent environment in

which a young person can develop and mature (Eppright, Sanfacon, & Beck, 1997). Another beneficial effect of sports is shown by Seidel and Reppucci (1993) who, after extensive evaluation of the literature, concluded that individuals who are beginning to move away from the family as their sole source of support are able to acquire physical skills and competencies through sports. By the acquisition of these skills and associations, such individuals tend to develop healthy psychosocial behaviours which help to counteract emotional disturbances which sometimes characterize these difficult transition years.

The studies mentioned above show the benefits of all sports and do not specifically refer to organized school sports. It is clear that involvement in any kind of sport can yield many benefits. However, I have observed that in some smaller communities the school often becomes the sole source of opportunities to be a participant in sports. It seems that with increasing hectic pace of life in these communities, fewer children and adolescents are involved in informal neighborhood sports, but rather look to more formal, organized sports for their recreation (Coakley, 1998; Griffen, 1998; Vaughan, 1984). The advantage of this movement toward involvement in organized sports has many advantages, including qualified coaches, regular and set practices and games, as well as more opportunities for a wide variety of competition.

However, the disadvantages are also abundant. Perhaps the biggest disadvantage is the fact that school teams have a limited number of players, thus the number of participants that are allowed on the team is greatly reduced. One text reported that the percentage of participants in school-sponsored sports is reduced to approximately one-half of those who play in non-school sports (Smoll & Smith, 1996). I have observed personally young people who desired to be on an organized team in school but, due to lack of skill, were cut from the team. These people were

labeled as “losers” and were then shunned by the popular groups, which included many athletes. I have observed that some of these young people have then turned to drugs, alcohol and other deviant behaviours, all in an effort to find friends and feel acceptance.

Recently, I conducted an independent study with teachers asking them to report their observations of how highly visible sports programs in a particular small school influenced their students (Pilling, 2000). The conversations that took place between these seasoned teachers and myself only cemented in my mind the great need to continue with this study.

To my amazement, much of the dialogue that occurred during the interviews was not about the observations of the teachers at all, but instead about their own personal experiences being a part of, or being left out of, sports when they attended high school. Even after so many years and so many successes, several of these teachers turned back to the painful experiences of their youth. One teacher spoke of living in the shadow of an older sibling who excelled at sports and was the hero of many different teams in high school. This teacher turned to other interests that were outside the world of athletics and became quite successful at such endeavors. However, the teacher spoke of parents who would not support or even acknowledge such accomplishments, but instead focused only on the older sibling, never missing a game or event of his.

Other respondents, who did not have negative experiences of their own, spoke of the pains their own children had endured. One teacher addressed how she felt watching her children suffer after being cut from teams and losing friends. She concluded her thoughts by stating that she absolutely knew that “there would be no sports in heaven.”

Perhaps Bob Greene (1991), a popular journalist, would agree. He published his story, as

well as the stories of five other professional men, regarding the effects that being cut from a team had upon them. He recalls:

I remember vividly the last time I cried. I was twelve years old, in the seventh grade, and I had tried out for the junior high school basketball team. I walked into the gymnasium; there was a piece of paper tacked to the bulletin board. It was a team list. . . . My name was not on the list. . . . I held myself together as I walked out of the gym and out of the school, but when I got home I began to sob. I couldn't stop. For the first time in my life, I had been told officially that I wasn't good enough. (p. 492)

Greene continued by stating that, to boys his age, athletics was the most important thing there was in school. In fact, he felt that if you were on the team, then you were part of the "desirable" group, but if you were not, your status in school was very poor. Greene concluded his thoughts by saying that his situation was not unique. He wrote, "a curious thing has happened: in traveling around the country, I have found that an inordinately large proportion of successful men share that same memory--the memory of being cut from a sports team as a boy." (p. 492). The article continues with the other men stating similar experiences and recalling equally painful emotions. All of the men are now very successful in their own fields, yet they cannot forget the scars that have now become a part of who they are.

I have become aware of the sad stories of young men from two distinct groups. Some have given every effort to make the team and continued to work with all their might during practices, but then ended up sitting on the bench game after game wondering if they are any good at anything. Others have desired to be on the team but have been eliminated during the try out process and have been labeled as "unathletic." These young men have been left out of many social circles and even ridiculed and mocked. A common occurrence with both of these groups young men is their reluctance to share their experiences. Their silence, and even refusal to

discuss their situation, may be because it is often so painful for them to admit that they lack the athletic talent they so desperately want, or to acknowledge that they are lonely because they are ignored by many who think that popularity is determined by how well you play a game. .

As a result of this silence, many teachers and even parents may be unaware of the negative effects that the sports teams have had on these young men. For example, I asked one teacher, who was very involved in many different coaching positions what his observations were concerning those who try out for the team and then are cut. He sincerely and very apologetically admitted that because his time is so focused on the athletes themselves, he really did not know how those particular students were affected.

Focus of the Study

The rationale for this study is rooted in the fact that there are many young men in my circle of associations who are being excluded from sports participation in school. Most of these young men would like to be able to play the sports and experience the enjoyment that comes with being a part of a team. These young men need the benefits that have been shown to flow from such participation. Yet, because of the way many school sports programs are being operated, particularly in smaller schools, most of these young men are either left off the team or else are finding that being a part of the team means that they do not play much—having to yield to superior players. Sadly, administrators and coaches may be largely oblivious to the fact that so many young men might be negatively influenced as a result of the sports programs that are being offered to help build young men. Their ignorance is surely the result of the fact that most of these young men have been unwilling to reveal their negative experiences but have, as is perhaps typical with many young men, remained silent regarding their situations. As a result,

there is little done by educators to address the needs and wants of such students by developing additional programs that would satisfy the social and physical requirements of the entire student body.

Further, if there are many in my limited circle of acquaintances and colleagues who have been negatively influenced by the present structure of sports in schools, it is logical to assume that there are other schools and other boys who are encountering similarly difficult and potentially harmful situations. This study provides an opportunity for the silent voices of 20 students, who have suffered some degree of anguish to be heard.

Approach

The method employed to study the experiences of these young men is qualitative in nature. Lengthy interviews with the subjects in this study were conducted. Questions asked during the interviews were open ended and general enough to allow the participants to openly and freely discuss their insights and perceptions regarding their associations with sports.

Twenty young men, all students at one particular school, participated in this study. It must be acknowledged that while 20 individuals constitute a relatively small sample, the point of the study is not to establish that there are a large number of young men who are having difficult experiences as a result of school sports, nor is it to show that the difficulties experienced by those in the study are universal. Rather, this study attempts to show that problems do exist and that there are young men who are being adversely affected by a the over emphasis on sports. At the same time, this study seeks to identify common trends within the sample population.

In the case of the young men in my study, there is a need to understand what exactly they were dealing with as they faced the pressures of attending a school where sports is supreme.

Their perceptions must be heard. Their needs must be addressed. As educators we must do everything we can to aid in the development of all young people, making special effort in behalf of those whose needs may not be well recognized.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Recently, newspapers have been noting the mounting pressures on children and adolescents who participate in organized sports. It is acknowledged that much of that pressure can be attributed to parents and community members. Carol Thibert of Lethbridge Community Development Support Services reported in the Lethbridge Herald (Allison, 2000) that there had been some “disturbing incidents” in the 31st Annual Southern Alberta Summer Games in Medicine Hat. “There have been some real embarrassing situations with parents at some of the sports,” she said. Most incidents at the games involved parents yelling and screaming. However, the intensity of similar outbursts in other situations has become so great that many different amateur sports organizations have developed contracts for parents to sign that are aimed at curbing their aggressive behaviour (“Parent contract to curb behaviour”, 2000). In the U.S. there was one incident recently where a father was killed at his son’s hockey game after an argument between hockey parents turned violent (“Brawl at hockey game leaves one father dead”, 2000).

Such media reports bring home the reality that, while sports in general may offer a wide range of benefits and enjoyments, there are also problems associated with sports programs. These benefits, as well as the problems, have been widely studied and reported in the literature for many years. This chapter will review the benefits and the problems as reported in the academic literature.

Potential Benefits of Participation in Sports

One need only turn on the television or pick up a newspaper or magazine to appreciate that sport has become a huge part of society. Advertisers can pay millions of dollars to obtain just a few minutes of air time during prime sporting events on television to reach the millions of people watching these events.

Not only is the viewing of sports popular, but participating in sports is equally attractive. Given the potential benefits of sports involvement-- such as physical, mental, and emotional development-- it is no wonder that high schools have spent so much money and place such a high emphasis on sports participation. There is significant research that has concluded that the benefits of participation in sports are tremendous. For example, in a document citing the national standards for physical education, Seefeldt and Vogel (1986) suggest that physical activity in all levels of schooling not only serves as an avenue for children to gain self-esteem, but also allows students to gain valuable experience in setting and achieving personal goals. At the same time, students who participate in sports are, as Judith Young (1997) states, able to cultivate social and cooperative skills.

Besides the physical education classes that are part of school curriculum, most schools offer extra-curricular involvement in sports. Extra-curricular competitive sports certainly do much to provide fun, improve school spirit, and give a sense of belonging to those who participate as members of a team. Of such participation in extra-curricular sports, Maureen Weiss and her team at the University of Oregon state that a survey of educators, social workers, and police officials in the U.S. has shown that participants in sports had better grades in school and had fewer behavioural problems both in the classroom as well as out of school (cited by the

American Psychological Association, 1996). These same researchers also discovered that those who do not participate in extra-curricular sports are more likely to be involved in many types of negative behaviour. Weiss and colleagues provide the following statistics: compared with those who participate in organized sports, non-participants in sports are 57 percent more likely to drop out of school, 49 percent more likely to use drugs, 37 percent more likely to be teen parents, 35 percent more likely to smoke cigarettes, and 27 percent more likely to have been arrested. Such data is indeed impressive and justifies schools going to great lengths to make sports a large part of their program. Further research only solidifies the position that a sports program is an essential part of school. Estrada, Gelfand, and Hartmann (1988) write that besides the clear motoric benefits that resulted from adolescents learning to use their bodies in skillful ways, there were also opportunities in sports for young people to learn lessons about competition, values, and social skills.

Another benefit of participation in sports appears to be the improvement of self-esteem, which is essential to the normal development of adolescents. It appears that athletes tend to have a higher level of self-esteem than non-athletes. Whitehead and Corbin (1997) evaluated the work of many different researchers and concluded that there is a wealth of research supporting the idea that sports programs aid significantly in the development of self-esteem. Three other studies all came to the same conclusion: athletes rate themselves significantly higher as to their overall self-esteem than do non-athletes (Holland & Andre, 1994; Kamal, Blais, Kelly & Ekstrand, 1995; Welk, Corbin & Lewis, 1995).

The interesting aspect of sports involvement is that athletes appear to develop self-esteem in many areas, not just physical self-esteem. After measuring the self-esteem of 126

children ages 8 to 13 at a seven week summer sports program, Weiss and Duncan (1992) concluded that boys and girls who believe they are good in sports have superior peer relationships . Two German authors, Brettschneider and Heim (1997) evaluated an earlier German study (Brettschneider & Brautigam, 1990) in which 4000 young people were interviewed. This preliminary evaluation concluded that it was immediately clear that athletes had a more positive self-concept not only in physical areas, but also in social relationships and school abilities than those who were not participants in sporting programs. A study by Eppright, Sanfacon, Beck, and Bradley (1997) determined that those who were successful at sports received significant recognition from not only their peers and coaches, but also from adults in the community. Eppright and colleagues concluded that achieving such a favourable social status greatly improved the development of self-confidence and social skills in children and adolescents. Further evidence that sports-oriented youth are more socially adjusted was given by Melnick, Sabo, and Vanfossen (1992) who discovered that African-American and Hispanic youth who were involved in sports tended to also be more involved in community service than those who were not.

Besides aiding in the social adjustment of individuals, it appears that participation in sports also contributes to the elevation of an individual's social status. Suitor and Carter (1999) interviewed 1,755 college students from all over the United States. They asked the participants to name the factors that gave prestige to young men in college. Success at sports was the most common response.

Gaining prestige and confidence in self is extremely important during childhood and adolescence. It was Erik Erikson, and later James Marcia, who observed that during the

adolescent years a central focus to an individual's life is a search for identity (Winzer, 1995).

As well, Maslow (1970) determined that during the adolescent years it is essential that individuals receive love, affection, and acceptance. In fact, Maslow stated that if these needs are not met, it places in jeopardy an individual's concept of self-worth. It is very possible then, perhaps even probable, that young men who find that they are not accepted into the popular circles of high school because of their lack of athletic skill may have more difficulty in clearly establishing their identity than their peers who possess athletic skills.

One of the difficulties in achieving sufficient status in sports so that the self-esteem of an individual is improved is that often the goals of those who run the sports programs and those who play in the sports programs are very different. Robert Griffen (1998), a professor of education at University of Vermont, conducted a study on the impact of sports on children. He found that the only things children really want out of their participation in sports is to be included and to feel competent at the sport. Two other researchers (Chambers, 1991; Stratton, 1998) reported that children list fun, learning skills, developing fitness, and enjoying competition as the top reasons that they wish to play sports.

It seems that coaches and parents and communities focus more on competition and winning than they do on the reasons why children desire to play sports. A class of undergraduate psychology students was asked to identify the top problems in youth sports and, after extensive interviews, they confirmed that the overemphasis on winning, and the resulting sacrifice of fun, was the number one problem (Stratton, 1998). Weinberg (1981) wrote that in a study of 60 individuals who participated in a variety of different athletic teams, 67 percent of athletes left their teams due to an overemphasis on competition. LeUnes and Nation (1989) note

that many youth have left sports participation citing the following reasons: not getting enough playing time, not having enough fun, too much emphasis on winning, and too much stress from parents and peers. Mike Pfahl, the vice president of education at the National Alliance for Youth Sports is quoted by Bob Katz (2000) as saying that parents put great pressures on youth to perform at top levels because “they worry that if their child doesn’t win on the field, it’s a sign that he may not be accepted by his peers, perform well in public situations, or have a strong sense of self-worth.” (p. 190). The worry seems to be unfounded, given the research regarding what is important to the athletes themselves (Chambers, 1991; Griffen 1998; Stratton, 1998).

Too much pressure from families on athletes to win every competition was a common theme emerging in several different studies. Coakley (1996) found that while few sociologists have studied the impact of sports on family relationships, the work that has been done has indicated that, because parents often become so emotionally involved in sports, what they think is encouragement is often perceived by their children as pressure. Thus, relationships suffer. Wearing (1994) added that competition and the emphasis that winning is everything which arose from either parents, peers, or community or school members was the cause for most athletes leaving sports. So, with a continued emphasis on flawless performance and a narrow focus on winning, many who would like to participate are being left out of sports. In fact, research suggests that some children and adolescents are driven away from sports because of pressures to compete and win (Chambers, 1991; Griffen, 1998; Stratton, 1998).

While the literature shows that competition is driving some children away from participation in sports, and that those who are not involved in sports have lower levels of self-esteem, current research continues to ignore the emotional plight of these students. Very little

scholarly work focuses on the specific perceptions and experiences of the individuals themselves who are behind the statistics. Only a handful of studies focus at all on those who must struggle through adolescence as non-athletes or those who are labeled as non-athletes. Clearly, there is a large gap in the literature that must be addressed.

More research is needed to determine what is happening in specific lives as individuals are having negative experiences with sports. Searches of many different sources in the literature, both in sports journals as well as psychology and sociology journals, revealed that the voice of the child is not being focused upon. There was one particular early study by Dubois (1978) that looked at whether athletic involvement was a source of prestige in the workplace; however, this was a study of how adults were affected by sports. Again, the voice of the child was overlooked.

One of the rare studies that did focus on the children themselves was written by Orlick and Botterill in 1978, more than 22 years ago. They cited an earlier study by Orlick (1974) where extensive interviews were conducted with eight- and nine-year old organized sports participants, nonparticipants, and drop-outs. Orlick stated that

75 percent of the nonparticipant children, all of whom thought they were not good enough to make the team, indicated that they would go out for a team if they thought they would surely make it. Fear of failure, or the psychological stress of disapproval, appeared to influence certain children to the extent that they were afraid to participate. (p. 148).

One of the many conclusions made by Orlick was that, rather than cutting boys from the basketball team, there must be a conscious effort to ensure that all students are encouraged to “come out for a sport and [make] it a meaningful place for them.” (p. 146).

In summary, it is apparent that there are great benefits for children and adolescents from

being involved in sports. It is also clear that there are too many young people not realizing those benefits for a variety of reasons, including pressures from parents, pressure from peers, and an overemphasis on competition which leads to a decrease in player satisfaction.

Male Development Needs and Sports Participation

During the adolescent years there are many developmental needs that must be met. If these milestones are not reached, there are often resulting consequences that may adversely influence a person's life for many years into the future (Maslow, 1970). Erikson (1968) suggested over 30 years ago that one of the crucial steps at this stage of development is the formation of a strong and coherent sense of identity.

Since leisure time makes up much of the adolescent lifestyle, it has been suggested that what individuals do during that leisure time may have a significant effect on the development of identity (Csikszentmihayli & Larson, 1984). Kleiber and Kirshnit (1991) suggest that if sports is a large part of that leisure time, then the development of competence and identification with a social group will result. In addition, males who participate in sports may more readily develop some traditional aspects of masculinity, such as toughness, aggressiveness, achievement orientation, and competitiveness, over those who do not participate in sports (Messner & Sabo, 1990; Shaw, Kleiber & Caldwell, 1995). Wearing (1994) further stated that athletic involvement forms boundaries for young men that allow their masculinity to develop, while at the same time allowing young males the ability to break from mother and femininity. In addition, sports allow males to participate in task orientation and achievement, as well as male-governed behaviour, furthering essential male identity development. It would appear then, that for young men, participating in sports is certainly important, perhaps even crucial.

There are other developmental benefits that have been shown to arise from participation in sports. Some of these benefits stem from the fact that youth have some autonomy in choosing the sport they will participate in, as well as the competitive structure and the social support that comes from being a part of a team. This combination provides an excellent environment in which a young person can develop and mature (Eppright, Sanfacon, Beck & Bradley, 1997). Another beneficial effect of sports was identified by Seidel and Reppucci (1993) who, after extensive evaluation of the literature, concluded that individuals who are beginning to move away from the family as their sole source of support have been able to acquire physical skills and competencies through sports. By the acquisition of these skills and associations, young men have developed healthy psychosocial behaviours which helped to prevent emotional disturbances during these difficult transition years. Seidel and Reppucci (1993) called for further research to verify the possible moral, social, physical, and psychological development that may result from being a part of organized sports. Brettschneider and Heim (1997) suggested that there is abundant evidence that sports involvement has considerable potential to aid in the establishment of social networks and the formation of such developmental tasks as the acceptance of physical appearance.

In contrast to the positive benefits for those who actively participate in sports, Rotella and Newburg (1989) studied those who make the team but become nothing more than benchwarmers. These researchers found, after extensive interviewing, that those who sit on the bench have a loss of identity that is often severe and even dangerous, since despair is often the outcome. Snyder and Spreitzer (1992) concluded, after studying the effects of academic scholarship and athletic success on the development of young people, that schools who

discipline their students by denying them a place in varsity athletics may be causing many more problems than they are solving. Such ineligibility to participate in organized team sports tends to separate young people from conventional society. It is, therefore, often counterproductive.

From the above studies, I conclude that participation in organized sports has value that goes beyond what many administrators, coaches, parents, and students may have imagined. I am even tempted to conclude that participation in conventional team sports should be mandatory. However, I realize that in reality the opposite often occurs; many young people are left out of sports participation.

Why Do They Not All Play?

With the evidence accumulating on the benefits of participation in any kind of athletics, but especially organized team athletics, it is difficult to believe that Canadian research indicates that 60 percent of children in Canada do not meet even the minimum standards of fitness (“Pressure can turn kids off sports”, 2000). While it may be true that some children simply have no desire to be a part of sports, I believe that those who fall into this category are very few. In fact, many children begin to be involved in sports, but then drop out. In the United States, Gould (1987) suggested that on average 35 percent of children and adolescents, both male and female, who are involved in youth sports withdraw from participation every single year. Another study showed that participation in sports dramatically decreases between the ages of 11 and 13 years of age (Athletic Footwear Association, 1990).

Petlichkoff (1996) argued that most studies infer that the drop-out rate is always the choice of the child when, in fact, there are many factors which cause a person to not participate in sports. The following research shows that some of the reasons given for giving up

involvement in sports are much more complicated than simply attributing the attrition to the conscious choice of the child.

There have been many efforts on the part of researchers to determine the reasons that youth terminate their involvement in sports and thus separate themselves from an experience that is so beneficial. Weinberg (1981) wrote that in a study of 60 individuals who participated in a variety of different athletic teams, 67 percent of athletes left their teams due to an overemphasis on competition. Wearing (1994) confirmed that competition and the emphasis that 'winning is everything' was the cause for most athletes leaving sports, either for reasons of being cut from the team or their own dissatisfaction with the game.

The element of fierce competition showing its face in sports is interesting since the literature shows that initially children do not put a priority on winning. In fact, winning and receiving individual awards do not even appear among the top reasons that children in elementary school give for wanting to participate in sports. Rather, children list fun, learning skills, developing fitness, and enjoying competition as the top reasons that they wish to play sports (Chambers, 1991; LeUnes & Nations, 1989; Stratton, 1998; Weinberg, 1981).

Unfortunately, it appears that parents, communities, and coaches have introduced into sports the idea of winning and losing, and using extrinsic rewards as a major motivating factor. In fact, Minuchin (1977) noted that the real harm in competition is that it is always connected to external awards and approval. This type of reward system can result, and often does, in children learning to define themselves extrinsically rather than discovering the motivation that lies within themselves. He believes that using external rewards to motivate can never be the basis of building a strong foundation of self-concept. Hellstedt (1988) states emphatically that

competition and the idea that winning is what is important must not be a part of a child's sports experience until at least the age of fourteen years. By introducing competition at too young an age, Hellstedt (1988) argues that children can have too many negative outcomes which can result in low self-esteem and even aggression and anxiety.

Sitz (1997) adds that young children have a difficult time understanding the concepts of winning and losing. He also notes that all of the attention of teachers and parents, and even society at large, is focused on the winners, while the losers are usually ignored. The only message that children gain from such a notion is that people are only of value if they win at a sport.

Further documentation of the destructive aspects of competition is provided by Stratton (1998). In this study, a class of undergraduate psychology students was asked to identify the top problems in youth sports. They chose the overemphasis on winning and the resulting sacrifice of fun to be number one.

Yet, schools are continuing to encourage competitive programs where winning is the primary goal. With such a focus, team numbers are often small and only the best athletes are allowed to participate on the team. In fact, Chambers (1991) reviewed a study by Orlick (1974) who interviewed children who had never participated in organized sports and found that 75 percent of those interviewed claimed that they wanted to play sports but never even tried out for a team because they assumed they were not good enough to play.

One study showed that participation by any individual who wants to be involved on a team is truly possible. This evidence came from Cal Riemcke (1988) in his evaluation of the Yakima Washington School District. The school district's philosophy was that, given the

evidence that poor athletic programs can cause youngsters psychological setbacks, a program must be developed so that “all must play.” The school district developed a mission statement which set out a much needed philosophy which states,

Participation, performance, and competition in the athletic program will focus on the opportunity for students to develop and exhibit skills to the best of their abilities without pressures to determine individual or group superiority and with equal value placed on each activity. (p. 82)

The Yakima Washington District school authorities did not keep any league standings or award any trophies. Nor did they publish any game results. The teams were distinguished by colour rather than the “A” team or the “B” team. If teams lost, they were to lose graciously. But, as reported by Riemcke, winning or losing “is not a big deal in our league—to have all the kids play is!” (p. 83). Very few high schools, however, have adopted such a model. Schools continue to have limited teams and a competitive orientation. Therefore, many young people who would like to be involved in team sports are left out.

Closely associated with competition, and equally responsible for the lack of participation in sports, is the idea that young children should become specialists in a specific sport. The American Academy of Pediatrics stated in a recent policy that encouraging children to limit themselves to the specialization of one sport prior to adolescence has actually lead to individuals who tend to withdraw from sports participation altogether. (“Preteens too young to specialize in specific sport, says doctors”, 2000).

Another reason that many young men do not participate in sports is because society has stereotypes of which sports are acceptable for boys, and which are not. Two different studies indicated that because of the “narrowness” of male sports-- that is the traditional and, therefore,

expected sports that boys should be involved in-- there tended to be a decrease in the possibility for exploration for young male athletes. By implication, there is an increase in the possibility of frustration and withdrawal from participation by many males (Kleiber & Kirschnit, 1991; Shaw, Kleiber & Caldwell, 1995). In fact, Shaw, Kleiber and Caldwell (1991) suggested that males who participated in non-traditional male activities still could benefit from the sport if they can resist the sanctions against their participation in such sports. Traditional sports for boys in the 1991 study included hockey, basketball, biking, soccer, and weightlifting. The non-traditional sports included gymnastics and aerobics.

Another interesting idea that arose from a study by Holland and Andre (1994) was that males who participated in sex-appropriate sports were preferred for a date over those not involved in traditionally male sports by 85 percent of females and preferred as a friend by 82 percent of the males. This fact increases the impact that participation or non-participation in the "right" sport has on the development of self-esteem in young men.

The Role of the Coach

It is the voice of the coach that has the biggest impact on the self-esteem of those who play and those who do not play. Hines and Groves (1989) sampled 201 young men and women who were participants in a recreational basketball league. After thorough analysis incorporating three different self-esteem scales, the researchers concluded that it was the coach's assessment of the ability and motivation of the participant that most greatly influenced the self-esteem of the individual. In fact, Hines and Groves determined that parental influence and reactions from team mates were minor elements in impacting self-esteem, when compared to the influence of

the coach. A University of Washington study (Smith & Smoll, 1982) further revealed that while the research could not establish a clear relationship between players with low self-esteem and negative comments from the coach, it was evident that there was a higher level of self-esteem amongst players who had encouraging and supportive coaches, and lower levels of self-esteem among players who had coaches that were more negative.

In an article addressed to coaches, Rubin and Smith (1994) reminded them that many students who drop out of sports cite several reasons for leaving sports, but all seem to focus on the coach. “The coach hates me” or “ No one helps me get better” or “ Only the best get picked” and even “If you’re not the best, the coach doesn’t care” have all been stated by those who chose to no longer play (p. 18). Further supporting the argument that coaches can keep young people from participating in sports, Weinberg (1981) concluded that poor coaching was a key reason for discontinuation of sports involvement. (see also Chambers, 1991).

Too many coaches are totally enthralled with the attitude that the only acceptable outcome of a game is to win; therefore, they ensure that they have a winning team at all costs (Eppright, Sanfacon, Beck & Bradley, 1997; Davis, 1999; Messner, 1990). Consequently, many young people who are willing to put forth the effort and make the sacrifices necessary to be a member of the team are kept on the bench or some will find that they do not earn a position on the team at all. The need to win is not always shared by the athletes themselves, but rather is mainly the vision of the coach. A study of young male athletes showed that 90 percent said they would rather be part of a losing team and get to play the game, than be part of the winning team but have to sit on the bench (Hellstedt, 1988).

When coaches understand the power that they can have in the development of confident,

well-rounded individuals, better outcomes can result. Since many coaches are volunteers, they may not have the necessary training to allow them to understand the life-long impact they are having. Vaughan (1984) reviewed several studies which concluded that children who were coached by individuals who had been part of a preseason training program showed significantly higher levels of self-esteem than children guided by non-trained coaches.

Positive effects have been shown to result from trained coaches who have some creativity in their approaches. Armstrong and Drabman (1994) wrote about a situation where high school and college students were involved in one-on-one sports tutoring of unpopular elementary school boys. The children were tutored until their athletic skills reached a certain level; they were then placed on a team and put in a position of relative importance. In most cases, the once unpopular boys were described as being more self-confident and happier. Teachers, in turn, reported that as these students became more accepted on the team, they became less disruptive in the classroom.

Sister Marion Irvine (1990), the principal of a high school in Napa, California claims that being an athlete herself has allowed her to understand what is needed in a coach. She said,

I want a gentlemen coach--one who is dedicated to truth, who gives respect to his athletes and inspires its return to him, who is compassionate and encouraging, who builds self-esteem, who models concern and caring, who works untiringly to teach the life-long benefits of participation in team sports. I want a hero, that special someone in a young athlete's life that he aspires to emulate, someone whose inspiration and goodness he'll remember as he matures into adulthood and beyond. (p.40)

It is interesting that Irvine never mentions a coach who will produce a winning team.

Imagine what could happen in the lives of young people if they all had such a person for a coach.

Teams would be huge and maybe not very good, but life skills could be fostered and encouraged.

In reality, however, winning has become so ingrained into society that the potential destruction that it causes in the lives of young people is hardly recognized. It is apparent that with greater understanding, coaches could do much more to use sports to build students rather than diminish them.

The Effects of Sports in Small Schools

In the literature reviewed, only a few papers acknowledged the need to look at the effect of socialization through sports in schools with a small number of students. In a school where the student population is small, the factors influencing popularity and even acceptance are possibly, even probably, much greater an issue than in large schools. One study by Williams and White (1983) acknowledged the fact that smaller schools deal with different issues than larger schools. The authors concluded that because all of their research was conducted in large urban high schools, future research needed to be carried out to compare the results with athletes in small rural schools. Holland and Andre (1994) took that step by studying sports in small schools. Their study included 171 male and 251 female high school students, as well as some college students, who were interviewed. Eighty four of these students attended high schools that had an enrollment of less than 150 students in grades 9 through 12. An additional 77 of the students were from high schools where the population was between 300 and 400 students, and 169 of those interviewed attended a high school with over 1000 students enrolled. The results were telling. Not only did males in small schools have a greater desire to be remembered as athletic stars than those in large schools, but there was a much greater enthusiasm for athletics among males in small schools. In interviewing 30 former athletes, Messner (1990) stated that the reason many of the men played sports was because it was expected that the boys would be a part

of sports. It would seem appropriate to conclude that in small settings this is even more true.

Coakley (1996) looked at the impact of sports in smaller schools and concluded that it was the high visibility of athletes that made sports not only a big part of the school but of the entire community. With sports playing such a large role in the everyday culture of a community, an individual's socialization, Coakley said, can be extremely dependant on that individual's involvement in sport.

Although the research into the pressures to participate in small schools is limited, the small body of literature does seem to indicate that participation in sports in small settings has a greater impact on socialization, popularity and, by implication, self-esteem development than in other situations.

A Call for Research

While there has been some research into the effects of sports on child and adolescent development, there is not nearly enough. Obviously, the available literature has only scratched the surface regarding the influence of sports in communities and schools. Many researchers have concluded their papers by calling for further research. Rotella and Newburg (1989) concluded their study of those who end up as "benchwarmers" by stating that there may be a hidden side of sports-- a side which negatively influences the athletes by teaching them that they are not good enough to play. They suggested that these difficulties in sports have been largely ignored. Other experts have asked for future research to be done specifically looking into the thoughts and feelings that children have about themselves as a result of involvement in sports (Seidel & Reppucci, 1993).

Most experts are encouraging other investigators to employ qualitative methodologies

when conducting original research. Petlichkoff (1996) suggested that survey research has been so heavily relied upon that there are many issues regarding the effects of sports on children that have been missed. She asked that interviews be conducted with those involved with sports so that more variables regarding participation in sports could be brought to the surface. Gould and Eklund (1996) and Weiss and Ebbeck (1996) agreed that most of the research to date has studied the quantitative effects of sports and, therefore, too many variables have been unexplored.

Such research is difficult. Studies involving intimate life experiences of individuals are complex and often requires long-term access to individuals. However, these complications do not negate the need to determine the social and developmental impact of sports on children and adolescents (Coakley, 1996). Vaughan (1984) observed that it is the child who is the consumer with regards to sport, yet little attention is paid to the actual voices of children and adolescents. She further states that more focus must be paid to the effect sports programs have upon those children who either drop out of sports, or are pushed out by coaches and then labeled as unathletic. In support of Vaughan's views, I found that few of the current researchers paid any attention at all to the voice of those athletes and non-athletes who are the very people so effected by sports in the schools. Eppright, Sanfacon, Beck and Bradley (1997) also acknowledge that there is a lack of literature concerning the effects of athletics on all individuals, specifically stating that there is an important need for further research to address the issue of the physical and psychological effects of sports on those who do not participate in them. It is clear that there is a great need for more information to be gathered that would allow the voice of the individual to be heard when it comes to how sports can impact lives.

Conclusion

The literature concludes clearly that sports benefits the development of young people, specifically in regards to self-esteem and socialization. There is also some evidence that many young men actually need to be involved in some kind of organized sport in order for them to more easily develop the important psychosocial skills, as well as a sense of masculinity. However, there are so many who are not a part of sports. For many of these individuals, the desire to participate does not seem to be the issue. Rather, non-participation is a result of coaches and systems that demand winning teams and, therefore, establish the necessity for the elite athlete.

Although there is little research into the effects of sports on the social dynamics in small schools, the studies that have been done indicate that popularity and self-esteem in smaller schools hinge, to a large degree, on one's involvement with organized sports. In these schools it even matters what sport the boys participate in. Therefore, the impact of sports programs in these schools may even more dramatically influence the development of both participants and non-participants.

With so much at stake, it is strange that so little attention has been paid to the place that sports has in the lives of adolescents. The literature stresses the need for further research.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Much of the research that has been conducted on the impact of organized sports on adolescent males has employed quantitative methods. Quantitative methods provide much data but, as Petlichkoff (1996) suggests, survey research has been so heavily relied upon that there are many issues regarding the effects of sports on children that have not been reported. Gould and Ekland (1996) concluded that quantitative research into the stress and anxiety associated with sports has failed to explore the issues from the athletes' perspective. Similarly, Weiss and Ebbeck (1996) stated that research designs that rely solely on quantitative methods can only take averages and fail to reveal individual findings. A qualitative approach may be advantageous in studying the effects of sports on young men since such research would allow for individual experiences to be discovered and then analyzed and discussed, thus revealing new information. Vaughan (1984) believes that due to the complexity of issues regarding the effects of sports on individuals, research must be moved from the laboratory setting to the playing fields so that deeper communication can occur between the researcher and the child, who is the real consumer.

There are several approaches that could be employed. For example, Noddings and Witherell (1991) suggest that the telling of individual, specific stories is one effective strategy that serves many purposes. Stories, they observe, explain and help us to really understand situations since they take the abstract and make it concrete and accessible. The authors continue by saying that specific perceptions of individuals have the power to motivate us to action since they "provide us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems"

(p.280). Narrative researchers are able to discover the thoughts and feelings of individuals that have been missed by researchers relying solely on surveys and questionnaires. By revealing these perceptions and describing the experiences of individuals, research can become something that is tangible (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). For all these reasons, stories can be powerful research tools.

This particular study incorporates some aspects of the research tradition of narrative inquiry. This is a method which will allow the young men in the study to voice their concerns regarding their personal experiences associated with organized sports. There must also be some quantitative control so that the results offer a degree of validity to the study rather than yielding simply a collection of stories. That is, the sample must be small enough and the interviews unstructured enough so that individual experiences and perceptions can be focused upon. At the same time, the sample must be large enough and the questions specific enough for trends to be determined. Expanding the sample to include a larger number of individuals and then asking the same set of questions to those individuals will help to add some objectivity which is beneficial to qualitative researchers. Employing aspects of each research methodology is consistent with the thinking of Addis (1987) who calls for the use of both qualitative and quantitative devices in order to develop an optimal design for the problem being addressed

The strategy I have used employs some aspects of quantitative research to form a number base that can be built upon. I interviewed 20 young men and asked each a set of standard questions. With 20 boys all answering the same questions, similarities and comparisons can be found and, therefore, some conclusions can be drawn, thus yielding a valid, albeit small, quantitative component to the study. In order for the research to fulfill a qualitative role, I have

allowed the interviews to wander according to the thoughts of the subjects. This has allowed individual voices to be heard, thus revealing variables that may not have been noted previously.

Sample

It is essential that individual experiences are explored and analyzed so that the qualitative view is respected. Quantitative measures must also be taken so that a foundation can be formed upon which individual experiences may be built. Therefore, the sample size was carefully planned. A large sample would make it impractical to spend the time necessary to explore the experiences of individuals. Too small of a sample would eliminate the ability to draw any real conclusions. The high school that I studied has a student body of approximately 280. The community in which this research was done is unique due to the homogeneous nature of the population. With few exceptions the members of this town have lived in the community for decades and belong to very traditional families. The cultural, socioeconomic, educational and religious backgrounds are so similar that even a relatively small sample would represent a typical cross section of the entire population. Therefore, I selected 20 young men to participate in this study.

I wanted to ensure that all of the 20 boys in the sample lived in the community and attended the school. I also thought it was important that I recruited young men who had expressed frustration due to the sports program. I wanted to talk to boys that I had observed sitting on the bench instead of playing during games or those who had been cut from the team. However, due to time constraints, I found it necessary to rely heavily on a convenience sample. I am a teacher of religion and my office is adjacent to the school so that students are constantly walking back and forth in front of my office as well as in and out of our building. Often I would

walk out of my office into the hallway and find a group of students and ask one of the boys to participate in the study. Another time I was walking down the street and saw several boys coming toward me and invited a member of the group to become part of my research. In some of the cases, I knew that a particular boy in the group had been cut from the team or had spent much of the basketball game sitting on the bench and this became the determining factor for which boy I selected. However, in many cases I was unaware of the sports background of the boys and, therefore, my selection was a random one. In one case I was driving down the street and saw a young man working in a field. I did not know what his involvement in sports was and I had observed that he was quite popular amongst his peers, still I stopped the car and asked him to participate.

Without exception, each boy accepted my invitation to participate in the study and took a letter of consent home to their parents. Each of the boys returned the signed letter at the time of the interview. This truly became a convenience sample, a common phenomenon in scientific research.

The 20 young men that were selected were between the ages of 15 and 18. The specific breakdown was: 2 boys who were 15 years of age, 3 were 16 years old, 10 were 17 years and the final 5 were 18 years. Only one young man moved to the community in the year before the study, the rest had been attending the schools in this small town since their early elementary years. The school is located in a southern Canadian prairie province town and is recognized for its excellence in athletic pursuits. The town consists of approximately 3000 people.

While the sample cannot be considered a random sample, considering the homogeneous population of the school, the sample is certainly typical of the students at the school. It was

interesting and unexpected to discover how diverse the participants experience with sports was. Some of the young men in this study had been heavily involved in sports while others had never played on a team of any kind. Some had great desires to be a part of a team even though they had never had that experience and others were content to sit on the sidelines and watch. One young man had no interest in sports at all.

Data Collection

Once the participants were selected and approval for this study was given by the Human Subjects Committee at the University of Lethbridge, consent forms were signed by parents. The subjects were then interviewed. Jansen (1992) explains that it is important that these interviews take on a conversational tone. Then students may bring to light issues that may have been thought to be unimportant but may actually be more connected to the topic than initially realized. Hence, the settings for the interviews varied since my intent was to make the interview as casual as possible. The setting for some of the interviews was my office, a familiar place for some of the subjects. Other interviews were conducted from my home. One took place out in a field, at the place of employment of the young man. The attempt was to make the interviews more like conversations rather than formal interviews. In removing the formality of the interview, it was my hope that the experiences and struggles of these young men as they relate to sports would be more readily revealed.

While the interviews did lack aspects of the traditional structured interview, they could not be considered unstructured since 15 specific, focused questions were asked to each participant. The questions that were used as a blueprint are listed in the appendix. These

questions acted as a guide for the interview; however, they did not become the focus. In fact, many times the interviews would take an unexpected route and lead to discussions that I had not previously considered. After these side journeys seemed to be exhausted, I would return to the list of questions so that each candidate was asked all of the questions.

While these interviews were being conducted an audio tape was used to record our conversations. Initially, the tape recorder was a distraction for many of the young men; however, after a few minutes I noticed that they paid little attention to it and carried on openly and freely. Later, each of the tapes were listened to and I noted on paper the similarities and differences that existed between the participants. I then listened to each tape again, using the notes I had made previously as a blueprint to determine what parts of the tape I would transcribe. Only a partial transcription was made for each tape since there was some information that was not pertinent to this study. For instance, one boy, who had withdrawn from school after having a difficult time as a member of the team, began talking about the steps he had taken to enroll in home school and discussing his experiences and feelings regarding home school. I felt this information was outside of the parameters of this study and so this information was not transcribed.

I realize that in addition to the presence of a recording device, my presence as the researcher impacted on the research context. However, I have taught most of these boys and have come to know many very well as a result of that daily association in the classroom. As well, it must be noted that the community that we lived in was very small. Therefore, I saw these young men on the streets and at the stores and at community functions. Given the unique nature of the community, it was not unusual for us to be somewhat of a large, extended family.

Therefore, I came to know all of these boys very well, even those who I did not teach in any of my classes. Through the many encounters I had with each of the participants over the years, I have developed relationships of trust and respect. The interviews were comfortable and relaxed, and I felt that the subjects all were uninhibited with their stories and comments.

As pointed out by Clandinin and Connelly (1990) it is impossible to listen to experiences of individuals without the researcher becoming a part of the experience. Instead, researchers need to include their experiences in connection with the process of discovering the experiences of the subjects. "Scribes we were not; story tellers and story lovers we were." (p. 12). After each interview, I recorded some of my own observations about the young man's behaviour during the interview. These observations included such things as which questions seemed to be the hardest to answer for the individual, and other revealing body language that indicated whether the student was giving the whole story or holding back some information. The result of this process of interviews and my own observations and impressions is the union of the participant's perceptions and the researcher's own perceptions. These can then be considered as collaborative stories.

Data Analysis and Coding

The information gathered from interviews, conversations, and observations was analyzed to find comparisons and contrasts that exist amongst the 20 respondents. I used a cross case/content analysis (Patton, 1990) approach. The answers and comments of each participant in the study were recorded and then the information from each interview was compared and contrasted with the other interviews so that the commonalities as well as the differences between the subjects could be noted. This comparison allowed for common themes to be extracted and

reported on while the contrasts revealed the individuality of the subjects. .

Keeping in mind the intent of the entire study, the most important aspect of the analysis was to allow the individual voice of each student to be heard. Therefore, specific quotations and stories were pulled from the interviews to illustrate the responses rather than simply reporting the numbers of individuals who answered in certain ways.

Limitations

The greatest limitation of the study may be the fact that my sample was not random. Rather, all participants were selected from a small town where the population of the high school is approximately 280 students. The psychology of the town is unique in that it has a high population of members of a particular denomination of Christianity that greatly encourages its members to be goal oriented and highly successful at everything they embark upon. While most of the participants in this study were members of that Church, not all were, and several members were not active participants in the Church.

Also similar in the background of each of the participants is the fact that each of the boys had two parents living in their homes. In many cases, their mothers did not work or only worked part time and so spent much of their time as full-time nurturers. These similar family dynamics certainly influenced the perceptions of the young men and must be noted as a limitation of the study.

As well, the town has a history of excellence in sports; the school has brought home literally scores of provincial championships in basketball and football. Such a record creates a unique environment where young children grow up with an overwhelming desire to be part of a winning team. Therefore, other communities that lack these characteristics may not find the same results the study yielded.

Chapter Four

Results

Each of the subjects in the study was asked 15 standard questions. Questions were not always presented in the same order nor were they asked using the exact same wording since my intent was to make the interviews informal and more conversational. Depending on the response to the question, additional questions were asked and, as a result, additional information was gained. In order for the results to be clearly shown, the 15 questions will form the sub-headings for this chapter. In the cases where individuals gave extra insight as a result of the general question and the added impromptu questions, the information gathered will be recorded under the general heading. While little commentary will be reported in this chapter, my observations as the researcher will be recorded since these observations are an essential part of the results.

1. *What determines the popularity of students in your school?*

Without any delay, 18 of the 20 respondents said that the main determinant for popularity was whether or not an individual excelled at sports. For each of these students I asked the question again, stating that they should not be influenced by the fact that the study was about sports. Each of the 18 maintained that the sports involvement was definitely a key factor in determining the popularity of individuals. Three other responses were given when I asked if there were any other factors that influenced popularity: 3 said that a person's last name made a big difference regarding how you fit into the social structure of the school, 5 of the young men said that how you treated others was a reason, and 4 of the 20 young men said that if you had lots of money then you were often popular.

2. *Are you popular?*

This was a difficult question for most of the respondents and all tried to soften their answers. There was one young man who was humble but quick to admit that he was one of the popular ones in the school. Three of the young men looked down and admitted that they were not popular at all. The most common response, from 80 percent of the boys, was a yes and no answer. They said that it depended on which group was being asked because they were popular in their own circles but not really in the school as a whole.

3. *Many times you are given labels in school. Do you have a label that others have given you?*

This was, perhaps, the most difficult question that was asked and the most uncomfortable to answer for each of the boys. After much thought, 6 of the subjects said that they just didn't know. I reworded the question and tried to give a few examples of what others in the school might say such as "jock" or "brain", but still the question was unanswered. The other 14 did give answers, though few of them were totally secure with their responses. In fact, only the 4 boys who put themselves in the loser group and the 5 who claimed they were in the brain group did so with any kind of clarity. One young man said he was a "musician;" another said that he was a "new kid." Some seemed so uncomfortable with their status in school that they seemed to be softening the truth. One young man said he was an "outsider" while 2 came up with the label of "floater." When I asked them what that word actually meant they said that they just go from group to group.

After the initial discussion about labels that the young men wear, I asked 8 of the boys when those titles were first given. Two reported that those labels actually began in the early elementary years and, the 4 who said they were losers, said it was determined solely by sports. One boy reported that it was the jocks who gave him his title of loser and he was picked on every

day because of it. Another young man said that he had been picked on “forever.” Still another, who classified himself as a loser, said that the jocks have always looked down on him and that he felt “out of it” and felt that so many people were better than he was.

4. *What do you think of when you hear “school sports?”*

One hundred percent of the respondents said that they thought of football and 95 percent said that they also thought of basketball. I then asked them if they ever thought of any of the other sports in the school and in every case the boys said that these were the only “real” school sports.

5. *Do you play on a team other than the Basketball or Football team and if so are you recognized by the school for your achievement?*

Sixty-five percent of the subjects said that they did play on other sports teams but all of the 13 boys said that they were not recognized by the school administrators, the teachers, or their peers for their accomplishments on those teams. Ten of the 13 also played on the basketball or football team and all 13 boys said that only the basketball and football teams were given recognition.

6. *Do you like sports?*

There was only one boy who said that he doesn’t like playing sports or watching them. He had no contempt towards them, they just weren’t for him, he concluded. The other 19 boys (95 percent), said that they enjoyed watching sports and they also liked to play them.

7. *Have you ever felt pressure from the community to be on “the team?”*

Fourteen young men reported that they felt pressures from members in the town to be part of the basketball or football program. When I asked those 14 boys to further comment on their responses there was a collective agreement that at very early ages they had felt that they needed

to be a part of the sporting programs in the school simply because that was an understood expectation.

Another issue that arose from this question was that 100 percent of the respondents felt that there was too much pressure from coaches and schools and communities to be a winning team. They felt that this was the underlying reason why so few boys were given an opportunity to play. Five of the 20, all of whom at one point in their lives had participated as members of either the basketball or football team, volunteered that they were so afraid that they would make a mistake and that they would be mocked by teammates and punished by coaches, that they held back when given playing time, not really giving their all. They all wanted to play so badly, yet, when they were given a chance, their nervousness, which resulted from the pressure placed upon them, prevented them from really playing. They felt that they played at a level much lower than they were capable of because of this nervousness and, as a result, the coach gave them less and less playing time. As one of the young men in this group put it, "I messed up more when they gave me a hard time for messing up."

8. *Have you ever felt that the boys who did play on the basketball or football team received special privileges?*

Nine of the respondents said that the members of the sports teams were "teacher's pets" and were given easier assignments or more flexible deadlines. Six of the 9 said that this was especially apparent during tournament and playoff times when the athletes would not have any homework at all and did not have to make up time lost. One of the boys felt that these same privileges were not extended to members of the school choir when they went on trips or were putting on shows.

There was a feeling from 7 of the 9 respondents that this special treatment was

especially evident with the teachers who were also coaches; however, 2 believed that even the teachers who were not directly involved with the sports programs often favoured those on the teams.

One young man complained that there were certain facilities in the school that could only be used if you were a part of the basketball or football team. The example he gave was a weightlifting class which was only available to members of the football and basketball team. He said that when the teacher told him he could not participate in the class that he went to the principal asking to use the weight room during the time, but his request was denied.

9. *Have you ever played on the basketball or football team?*

Of the 16 young men who played on sporting teams, 10 of them have actually played on the school basketball or football team and 6 of those 10 players were a part of the team for 3 or more years throughout junior and/or senior high school.

10. *Were you happy on the team?*

None of the 10 who played on the basketball or football team said that it was a positive experience. One young man stated that it wasn't fun at all for the entire 3 years that he was on the basketball team. He sat on the bench for the majority of the games and it only made him feel bad about his athletic abilities and, in fact, about himself. Another boy was on the team in grade 7 and felt that it was a lot of fun even though he didn't get very much playing time. However, in subsequent years the pressure became much greater to be a contributing part of the team and he began to realize that he simply did not possess the skill that his fellow players had and so finally quit. He said that by the time he quit the team, he was too scared to even try because he was sure he would "mess up" and that would only bring upon himself more ridicule from the coach as well as his fellow teammates.

One of the young men who had been on both the basketball and football teams related that the first year he played he hated both teams because he “didn’t get to play at all.” The next year, in basketball, he played quite a bit and so really enjoyed the coach and the whole experience. The next year he felt that he was simply “a practice dummy” and so endured through the year but vowed he would never play on the team again in spite of the fact that most of his friends were a part of the team. He wanted to be on the team and to play the game. When that didn’t happen, he felt frustration and resentment.

Only one of the 10 young men who played on either the basketball or football teams remained on the team for his entire junior and senior high school experience. He loved the game of basketball so much that he kept hoping the next year the coach would allow him more playing time. In his senior year of high school, however, he spent many games sitting on the bench for the entire duration of the game—not playing for even one second. In other games, he played for a only a few minutes. Many of his comments were laced with feelings of bitterness towards the coach and the entire system. He had worked as hard as he felt was possible so that he could be a part of the team, yet, in spite of the fact that he was on the team, his dream of playing was never realized.

11. *Why did you quit the basketball or football team?*

Nine of the 10 players decided that they did not want to continue their association with the team. There were 6 who did not even complete the season, but ended up quitting in the middle of the year. Those who quit the team gave multiple reasons for quitting. Four boys said they quit because they spent very little time actually playing the game. All mentioned that they had attended every practice and worked hard at those sessions, yet, when it came time for the games they spent almost the entire game sitting on the bench.

Three boys said there was too much emphasis on competition and not enough opportunity for fun. While all of the young men who played on the team said that they liked winning, they all admitted that playing for fun was their number one motivation. They felt this desire was not shared by coaches, teammates, and even the community itself. Three boys felt there was too much pressure placed upon them from their teammates.

Two of the young men said they also quit because the coaches were too demanding. One young man said his favourite year playing on the basketball team was because the coach was more concerned with having fun and acquiring skills than he was with winning any medals. Another young man who quit the basketball team in the middle of his grade 10 year blamed the coach as being the primary reason for quitting since he used fear as a motivator to do better in the games. He reported that if the team lost a game then they knew that the next practice would consist entirely of running exercises which continued until all the members of the team were physically exhausted. There was an incident reported by another of the subjects where he said that a teammate fainted from the exhaustion that resulted from endless running. He said that the running was not an attempt to produce better fitness, but simply a punishment.

12. *Were you ever cut from the team after trying out?*

There were 11 boys who tried to make the team roster but at one point in their sports experience were eliminated from the team. Three of those 11 tried again the next year to be a part of either the basketball or the football team even though they had been unsuccessful the previous year. One young man said of his attempt to play on the team, "I went in knowing I wouldn't make it, but I hoped I would."

One 18 year old said he remembered well the tryouts for the football team in grade 10. He felt that he had done quite well and was shocked when he was told he didn't make the cut.

He reported that the really hurtful part was that he knew those who did make it looked at him and thought “oh, he wasn’t good enough.” He said he never did try out for the basketball team because even though he loved the game, he knew he wasn’t good enough to play.

Still another of the boys reported that he always wanted to play basketball and so tried out for the team. When I asked him how he felt about being cut he replied, “I knew I wouldn’t make it.” I tried to further explore his comment but he simply repeated that he just knew that he wasn’t the caliber of athlete that the coach was looking for. In spite of his initial failure to make the team, he tried again the following year to once again be a part of the basketball team. When questioned why, he replied that he still had hope that he could make it and so endured the grueling try-out procedures; however, once again he was cut from the team. He was successful in his attempt to become a part of the football team but he was given little playing time which didn’t surprise him at first since he was a rookie, but by the third year on the team he hated it because he still stood on the side lines. He said that he was mocked by his fellow players and, of course, it made him not want to be around them because he felt so bad about himself.

There were 4 of this particular group of 11 who were cut from the teams whose responses were noteworthy. Actually, it wasn’t what they said but how they said it that revealed the effect that not being on school sports teams has had upon their feelings of self-worth. In fact, 2 of these young men claimed that they had not really been affected by being cut from the team, however, as they spoke about their experiences they did so with a great deal of bitterness. One on them claimed “I don’t care about them,” when referring to members of the school teams, however, this was said with a tone of obvious contempt. Another said that “Getting cut wasn’t a big deal,” but his tone and manner revealed that he was not convinced that his comment was

actually true. There were 2 in this group who maintained that they couldn't remember how they felt when they were cut from the team. Since these experiences had occurred within that last 3 or 4 years, and since others have remembered so vividly the moment they were cut from the team, coupled with their seeming discomfort from the particular conversation, I question whether these boys really had forgotten such an experience. Instead, it seemed as if they didn't want to remember. My perception was that these experiences still evoked a certain degree of painful memories and, therefore, these young men chose not to think about them.

13. *What was the impact of being cut from or quitting the team?*

All of the 11 boys who were cut from the basketball or football team felt that they were eliminated because they simply were not good enough to play at the level that was expected. In many cases, I felt that they were not just saying they weren't good enough to play ball, but that they weren't good enough in a general sense. All 11 young men admitted that they struggled to find their place in the school since they weren't one of the recognized athletes. One boy stated, "I wanted to play because I like it, but it would also make me have more status." Another observed that, "It's not important to be in sports, but it makes me feel good when I am."

Another result from being cut from or quitting the team was the change that occurred in the circle of friends of these boys. Fifty percent of the 20 boys volunteered that their friends changed when sports became involved. For some, this change in friendships occurred when their friends became part of the team, for others who had been on the team, it was when they quit the team. They all agreed that this was partly the result of not being able to spend as much time together since team practices took so much time.

However, there were also many comments that indicated there were other reasons for the

split in friendships. One young man who had participated as a team member said he was mocked by his fellow teammates, some who had been real friends, when he made mistakes and he even faked an injury so that he wouldn't have to attend practices. Another who quit the team said that once he was off the team he was mostly ignored by those who had been his friends when he was on the team. In addition to being ignored, there were instances when "mean things were said as I walked down the halls at school." One other subject in the study said he became a part of the team just so he could be with his friends. In fact, he only tried out at their encouragement. However, when he ended up quitting because of intense pressures to win, he reported that many of his fellow players who had been his friends either were unkind to him or ignored him altogether.

An additional insight arose from a discussion with one of the young men who had not grown up in the community. He said that he found it was very hard to find friends since he was not on one of the teams. He had observed others who moved into the area who had secured a place on the basketball or football team and they seemed to have instant friends whereas he, because he participated in a non-recognized school sport, felt that it was much harder to find friends.

14. *If you were the principal, what would you change about the school?*

This question generated a great deal of excitement amongst the boys since it seemed to give them a moment of power where they could actually envision things changing. Only 4 types of responses were given.

The response requesting that all sports—not just basketball and football— be given equal emphasis was mentioned by 13 of the boys, yet there were mixed feelings regarding the benefits

of such a move. Four of the young men felt that the fact that they were ignored on the soccer team or on the baseball team was good since there was less pressure to win and more of an emphasis on just having fun. One young man said that while on the volleyball team they rarely won a game, however, he felt this was a good thing because they were playing to have fun and not to win. Consequently, the members of the team never really felt badly about the results. Another young man stated that on his soccer team they actually did really well, even though they only played to have fun. He felt that because there was less pressure to win, as there were no fans watching and hoping and cheering, the players actually did better and they ended up being much more successful than anyone thought they could be.

However, along with the relief that these non-recognized teams were left alone to just have fun, there was a feeling of resentment resulting from the fact that the successes of these teams and individuals, and even their attempts at success, were overlooked by administrators, teachers, peers, and the community itself. One young man expressed anger when he looked at the yearbook and saw that there were several pages that were devoted to the basketball team and to the football team, with huge photos of the teams and many action shots. He then discovered that the baseball team, which was school sponsored as well, did not have one picture in the yearbook and, in fact, wasn't even mentioned. He said that at basketball and football games the stands are full but there were very few who ever came to watch the baseball games. This was surprising, he said, since the baseball team consists of many individuals who are also valuable players on the football and basketball teams.

Another, who was on the track team, said not only were they not recognized for their sacrifices and efforts, but few even knew that the school had a track team. All 13 who mentioned

that the school needed to recognize the efforts of all athletes felt that this one change would do much to improve the atmosphere at the school. One young man felt that recognition would not only encourage more people to participate in sports, but it would also do much to boost the self-confidence of the players.

It seemed that this was a very emotional topic for most of the young men. One of them even mentioned, with a great deal of contempt, that another of his peers had won a provincial title in boxing but no one seemed to know or care that it had happened. This same young man cited the high school rodeo team which never generated too much excitement with the officials or students at the school.

Another response from 11 of the subjects focused on encouraging more students to participate in sports. They felt there was a need to set up a program where anyone who wished to could play on a recreational sports league. Seven of the boys mentioned that this had been done during their elementary years and it was very enjoyable since the focus was not on competition but instead on playing and having fun. The 11 young men who mentioned this as a solution to improve the school atmosphere saw no reason why such a league could not be a part of the high school experience. They all felt that such a program would provide a much needed avenue to be physically active and provide an opportunity for all who wanted to play basketball and football to do so. However, 2 of the respondents felt that if there was an intramural sports program, members of the basketball team would be angry. They both felt that those who played on the basketball team believed that they really owned the gym and that the rest of the school had no right to use the facilities.

The third most popular response, given by 8 of the young men in the study, expressed the

feeling that if the school would emphasize non-sport activities much would be accomplished to improve the school environment. When I asked them to be specific as to what activities they were referring to, all 8 praised the formation of the high school choir as a wonderful alternative to sports. Not surprisingly, all 8 of those who suggested this solution were members of the school choir. They felt that the choir provided them the chance not only to work with their peers, but also to perform for the community, thus being recognized for their talents and efforts.

Another specific activity that was mentioned by 5 of these 8 individuals was art. I learned from the boys that there was an art class at the school and the projects of the students were displayed, yet they felt there needed to be even more emphasis placed on the accomplishments of the students in this class.

Academics was mentioned by 4 of these 8 students. One of the boys said that even though the point of school was to learn math and science and reading and writing, academics had, in fact, taken a back seat to athletics in this particular school. All 8 admitted that there was recognition for those who achieved academically. However, they all agreed that the status that was afforded the athletes exceeded that which was given those who excelled at school work itself.

The fourth response was given by 3 of the 20 boys who stated that the school would be better if there was a decrease in the competitive aspect of school sports.

15. *Is the way the sports program is being operated in the school a good thing or a bad thing?*

This question did not generate a great deal of discussion which could be the result of the question itself or the fact that it came at the end of a long and intense interview. However, it did

much to summarize the overall feelings of those involved in the study. Of the 20 who were asked this question, 6 of them said that sports was a good thing, and another 6 said they were both good and bad. The remaining 8 felt that the way the sports programs were in the school was bad.

The 6 respondents who reported that sports was a good thing in the school all cited very similar reasons. All of the 6 said it was because it generated a lot of school spirit and that was good. Other comments were that sports brought the school a lot of recognition which was good for everyone in the school. The most common response was that sports was good for those who played because it gave them something to do and kept them busy.

The 6 young men who said that sports was good and bad used a very similar line of reasoning as those who said it was good. They felt that sports provided many good things for the school and was good for those who played. However, they also said that there were some negative aspects of school sports since too many people didn't have a chance to participate in the programs. One within this group reiterated that there was too much competition and desire to win and that yielded negative results. Two other young men said that the problem with school sports was that the members of the teams had such an elevated status in the school that their egos became huge. As a result, they became people that you didn't want to hang around with.

The 8 young men who said that sports were bad gave a variety of responses, yet most echoed the themes that had emerged during the interview. Statements such as "Sports is recognized even more than academics" and "School is only about sports" and "There are too many politics and it's too competitive" were made. Again, the response that not enough people are given an opportunity to play and have fun was an answer to this final question. One of the

young men who said that sports was bad said that he has seen “a lot of resentment and bitter feelings from many, many individuals” which has resulted because “our town has put such an emphasis and need to be on ‘the team’.”

Even those who had never played on a team sport felt that the fun of the sport had been removed because all that seemed important was being the best in the league. They all admitted that winning the games was exciting, however, the sentiment expressed was that when winning was the only focus, there were too many negative factors that resulted.

Chapter Five

Discussion

The questions that were asked generated a great deal of discussion and emotion. In the results chapter, simple responses were recorded to allow for common trends to be noted and percentages to be reported. However, there were many stories and insights that surfaced that do much to answer the question regarding the impact of a successful sports program on the boys who feel that they are on the sidelines. In this chapter, I will discuss some of the implications that arise from the information that came from each of the questions. Where appropriate, I will also draw parallels between the results of this study and the discussions presented in the literature.

1. *What determines the popularity of students in your school?*

The intent of this question was to establish whether sports influenced a young man's standing in the school. If participation in sports is a determinant in popularity, then it is possible that sports will influence the self-esteem levels of those who participate in them and, more especially, those who do not participate or who are known as the second string: those who are part of the team but not a valuable part and only are allowed to play in a game when there is no danger of losing. A study (Eppright, Sanfacon, Beck, & Bradley, 1997) confirmed this thought when the researchers concluded that achieving status in school is an essential key to the development of self-confidence.

It was the opinion of every one of the 20 young men in this study that status in their school resulted almost entirely from sports participation. Those who were not on the school sports teams felt that they were not recognized for their abilities nor were they a part of the

popular group. Perhaps this explains why an administrator of one of the schools in the community observed that he had never seen in any other community such a deep desire amongst the young men to be a member of the sports team (Pilling, 2000). As one student summed up, "In this school sports is 90 percent and art is 10 percent. Only 20 percent of the students are athletes so that leaves nothing for the other 80 percent."

2. Are you popular?

My observation was that this was one of the most difficult questions for the students to answer. It required them to admit things that made them uncomfortable. It has been confirmed that adolescents regard for themselves depends heavily on how others view them (Eppright, Sanfacon, Beck, & Bradley, 1997; Maslow, 1970; Orlick, 1974; Winzer, 1995). Such was the case for these 20 young men. This question not only revealed how the boys felt that they were perceived by others, but how they felt about themselves.

Evidence of this came from the experience related by one young man who had come to the community with the principal purpose of playing on the basketball team. He loved the game and wanted to improve his skills. His dream was that by improving he could one day go on to play college basketball. Initially, he loved the competitive nature of the team since he felt it would help him to improve and it offered a great deal of excitement. However, after only a few weeks of being on the team he experienced ridicule from his teammates and belittlement from his coach when he made mistakes. He became scared to play at all because every mistake he made seemed to be a source of mockery. He became self-conscious not only on the basketball court but also in the halls and classrooms of the school. Although it had been a great sacrifice on his part and the part of his family for him to attend the school, he withdrew after several weeks.

The devastation that he felt as a result of this experience effected every aspect of his life. He did not go back to any school and, in fact, withdrew from society as a whole. During his interview, he blamed the intense competitive nature of the program for his treatment.

It seemed that his self-esteem was so closely connected to his popularity as an important member of the team that when his place as a player was in jeopardy, so was the way he felt about himself as a human being. Yet, the research shows that a major benefit of participation in sports is the presence of higher levels of self-esteem when compared to those who do not participate (e.g., Holland & Andre, 1994; Kamal, Blais, Kelly & Ekstrand, 1995; Weiss & Duncan, 1992; Welk, Corbin & Lewis, 1995; Whitehead & Corbin, 1997). The experience of this young man confirmed the conclusions of the researchers cited above. The truth seems to be that participation in sports alone is not enough. Instead, it appears that in order for sports to have a positive impact on self-esteem, the member of the team must be one of the very successful, and thus popular, members of the team.

The intense desire to be popular and the recognition that sports was an avenue to that popularity was demonstrated by the fact that 18 of the 20 boys in this present study attempted to become a member of the football or the basketball team. Even a young man who claimed that he really did not like sports was among those who tried out for team membership. I asked him why he even wanted to be on one of the sports teams if he cared so little for sports. His explanation was, "I thought I might as well try out."

Holland and Andre (1994) noted in high schools with small populations, self-confidence and esteem was built not just by being in sports; rather it was vitally important to participate in the "right" sports. This certainly was the belief of many of the young men in my study. One of

the boys excelled in martial arts, yet did not consider himself an athlete because he was not a basketball or football player. Still another in the study tried out two years in a row for the basketball team even though he described the first time he was cut from the team as being a very difficult experience. This young man is very serious about academics and claimed to really not care whether he was a part of the team. Yet, he continued to pursue membership on the team despite a disappointing initial try. When asked why, he couldn't explain. However, I have watched him struggle to find friends and to find himself. It is possible that his desire to be a part of the team was an attempt to elevate his perception of his own self-worth. One of the boys who played on both the football and basketball teams from grade 7 all the way to grade 11 summed it all up by admitting that even though he hated that fact that he didn't ever get to play, he was willing to put up with that because being on the team gave him a desired status in the school.

3. *Many times you are given labels in school. Do you have a label that others have given you?*

This question drew responses similar to those in question 2. For many of the respondents, this question was difficult since it also forced them to recall painful memories. Many of the young men, in discussing the labels that they had worn throughout their experiences in school, revealed that these labels had been given in their early elementary years. The comments of an elementary school teacher in a study that I conducted (Pilling, 2000) confirmed what the young men reported. The teacher stated that it was evident to see the groups that form on the playground and that they are largely determined by athletic ability. The teacher went on to say that during class activities the children are constantly mixed up so that they have opportunities to play on teams with everyone in the class. However, once they are back on the

playground at recess, the same divisions occur because those who are “good” at sports don’t want to be on the same team with the ones who “aren’t good.”

It may well be that these experiences on the playground did much to shape how these young men felt about themselves and their talents in their teenage years. One young man said of his later attempt to be on the basketball team, “I tried out but didn’t make it, of course. I knew I would get cut so it wasn’t a surprise to me when it happened.” The telling phrase in that sentence is “of course.” He knew that he didn’t have the ability to make the team because that had been taught to him by peers on the elementary playground. He had made the attempt to escape the label that had been attached to him, yet he was convinced that such a jump in status really wasn’t possible. He didn’t make the team, of course, and continued to wear the label of “non-athlete,” which was synonymous, in the minds of many, with the label of “loser.”

It appears that the labels these boys have worn have greatly determined how they feel about themselves. Sports has been, in the opinion of those I interviewed, the chief factor influencing who wears what label.

4. *What do you think of when you hear “school sports?”*

This question did much to reveal the culture of the community in which the boys in this study were living. There are many different sports found in the community such as hockey, baseball, rodeo, soccer, figure skating, track, weightlifting, boxing and judo. Yet, the boys felt that only basketball and football were recognized as “real” school sports. While this may not appear significant, I feel that this simple fact of what is perceived as a “real” sport has caused a great deal of damage over the years to many who had great athletic talent.

One of the young men who was a part of this study blamed this community perception of

sports for the mocking that he received. He said that besides the taunts he actually had to fight so that people would leave him alone. I felt that there were many other issues that resulted in such behaviour. However, the fact that he was not recognized as an athlete embittered him toward those who were hailed as heroes. He said that he was looked down on by members of the school teams even though he worked extremely hard at the non-school sport that he was in. He even traveled internationally to compete in the sport. However, he reported that his successes were not recognized by the school or his peers and he felt discouraged by his accomplishments and discouraged about himself. This particular young man moved from the community after his grade 11 year and attended a larger school in a larger centre. He seemed a different boy after this move and was much more content with who he was. When I asked him about this, he claimed that in his new school and community he was as important to his peers as were the basketball and football players.

5. Do you play on a team other than the basketball or football team and if so are you recognized by the school for your achievement?

There were 13 boys who played on other sport teams and they all admitted there was little recognition given them. Some of those boys thought that was a good thing and responded that since they were largely ignored as members of the soccer team or the baseball team, there was less pressure to win and more of an emphasis on just having fun. As a result, they felt that they actually did better and certainly had a lot more fun.

For example, one of the boys reported that his soccer team was very successful even though they only played to have fun. He felt that because there was less pressure to win as there were no fans watching and hoping and cheering, the players actually did better and they ended up winning more games than any of them thought was possible. Another young man said that

while on the volleyball team they rarely won a game. He felt this was a good thing because they were playing to have fun and not to win. Consequently, the members of the team never really felt bad about the results. All of these responses are consistent with the literature which concludes that young people play sports wanting to have fun and learn skills rather than win games (e.g., Chambers, 1991; Griffen, 1998; Stratton, 1998).

However, along with the relief that these non-recognized teams were left alone to just have fun, there was a feeling of resentment resulting from the fact that the successes of these teams and individuals, and even their attempts at success, were overlooked by administrators, teachers, peers, and the community itself. One young man expressed anger when he looked at the yearbook and saw that there were several pages that were devoted to the basketball team and to the football team with huge photos of the teams and many action shots. He then discovered that the baseball team, which was school sponsored as well, did not have one picture in the yearbook and, in fact, wasn't even mentioned. He said that at basketball and football games the stands are full but there were very few who ever came to watch the baseball games.

Another respondent who was on the track team said not only were they not recognized for their sacrifices and efforts, but few even knew that the school had a track team. Another insightful young man felt that recognition would not only encourage more people to participate in sports, but it would also do much to boost the self-confidence of the players. Indeed, he was insightful since what he said could have been taken from a page of the research literature published by Eppright, Sanfacon, Beck, and Bradley (1997). They found that recognition was the key to success at sports and the necessary ingredient for the development of confidence and self-esteem.

It seemed that this was a very emotional topic for most of the young men. One of them even mentioned, with a great deal of contempt, that another of his peers had won a provincial title in boxing but no one seemed to know or care that it had happened. This same young man also referred to the high school rodeo team which never generated too much excitement with the officials or students at the school.

Another response that focused on encouraging more to participate in sports was the need to set up a program where any who wished could play in a recreational sports league. Many of the boys mentioned that this had been done during their elementary years and it was great fun since the focus was not on competition but instead on playing and having fun. The 11 young men who mentioned this as a solution to improve the school atmosphere saw no reason why such a league could not be a part of the high school experience. They all felt that such a program would provide a much needed avenue to be physically active and provide an opportunity for all who wanted to play basketball and football to do so. Their responses confirmed the conclusions in the research of Reimcke (1988) who demanded that all must play.

However, two of the respondents felt that if there was an intramural sports program, members of the basketball team would be angry. They both felt that those who played on the basketball team believed that they really owned the gym and that the rest of the school had no right to use the facilities. These statements reveal an interesting attitude that may exist amongst the elite athletes towards others.

6. *Do you like sports?*

Many researchers such as Gould (1987), Petlichkoff (1996), Wearing (1994), and Weinberg (1981) wonder why there is such a significant drop-out rate from sports participation

during the adolescent years. The studies reported by these researchers suggest that many young people enjoy sports and are anxious to participate in them. However, contrary to their initial desires, many terminate their involvement with sports because of pressures from many different sources. Therefore, the literature has suggested that the reason why so many adolescents are not continuing to play on sports teams has nothing to do with whether they like sports. Such a finding is confirmed by my study since 95 percent of the participants responded that they enjoyed participating in sports. Further, many of the boys in this study used phrases such as “of course” and “absolutely” when answering this question. In fact, all affirmative answers were accompanied by enough enthusiasm that I was convinced that they really did like sports.

The significance of this question becomes obvious when it is noted that in spite of the enthusiasm of the boys towards the playing of sports, only one of the 20 boys actually played on a high school sports team throughout his entire junior and high school experience. The fact that many of the boys did not play sports or quit playing sports had nothing to do with how they felt about sports.

7. Have you ever felt pressure from the community to be on “the team?”

There are many pressures that boys are faced with as they travel the rocky and stormy path of adolescence. Many of those pressures are placed upon them by the expectations of the community in which they grow up. This seems to be magnified when the community is a small one, since privacy has its own unique definition in such settings.

The unique characteristics of small communities were recognized by the literature when Holland and Andre (1994) suggested that males in small schools have a greater desire to be remembered as athletic stars than those in large schools, and that there was an unusually large

amount of enthusiasm for athletics among males in small rural schools. Coakley (1996) agreed that much of this desire and excitement was due to the high visibility of athletes amongst the members of sparsely populated communities. The responses from the young men in this study regarding the pressures they have felt from the community were consistent with such thinking. Not surprisingly, 100 percent of the boys in this study felt that there was great pressure, in fact, too great pressure, not only to play sports but to win at sports.

It can be argued that such a tradition of excellence can only be positive since it does much to motivate and encourage individuals to reach their full potential. Unfortunately, with such enthusiasm from an entire population towards being the victorious team, little flexibility may be extended to those whose athletic talents are still being developed or may be lacking altogether.

8. *Have you ever felt that the boys who did play on the basketball or football team received special privileges?*

Given the previous answers regarding labels and popularity and the determining factors for status, I expected that many of the boys would feel that those who played on the sports teams would receive special considerations from teachers and administrations, even though the literature did not address this issue. However, only 45 percent of the young men noted that such treatment was extended solely to the players on the team. Those who cited instances of special privileges to team members did so with a degree of bitterness and some jealousy. Still, most of the young men felt that they were offered the same considerations by the teachers as were those who were considered athletes. I feel the results of this question speak to not only the quality of teaching, but also to the fact that the answers from the boys were truthful. That is, while with many of the questions the boys displayed a great deal of emotion, their answers did not appear to

be clouded by resentment since, when they didn't really see a problem, they admitted it.

9. *Have you ever played on the basketball or football team?*

The reason for asking this question was to establish the background of these boys. The fact that 16 of the 20 have played on some kind of sports teams, and that 50 percent of the 20 boys have played on the school basketball or football teams, show that the young men in this study were certainly not unathletic. The fact that so many played on the teams at school also reveals that these young men have experience from the outside as well as the inside. Such knowledge adds a great amount of credibility to their comments.

10. *Were you happy on the team?*

The young men who participated as members of the school teams wanted to play because they loved the sport and they wanted the confidence and friends that often accompany an "athlete" status. Unfortunately, the comments from each one of the young men who had participated on the team showed that their self-esteem actually took a beating from being a part of the team. All but one of the young men ended up quitting and the one who carried on did so only because he held on to the hope that one day he would really get to have fun and actually play in a real game. His hopes were never realized. Others continued to play for more than one year, again hoping that the next year would be better. Finally, they gave up and tried to find their niche in other corners of the school structure. Rotella and Newburg (1989) attempted to show that those who make the team but then do little more than attend practices and warm the bench can experience harmful effects. The fact that these young men wanted to be a part of the team, but then quit, taking with them many bitter feelings, is evidence that harmful effects are indeed a result.

While it has been suggested by the literature that participation in sports yields very positive results as far as increased levels of self-esteem (Brettschneider & Heim, 1997; Holland & Andre, 1994; Melnick, Sabo & Vanfossen, 1992; Weiss & Duncan, 1992), there were many young men in this study who failed to experience such beneficial results. Instead, there were several who devoted countless hours of dedicated work to make the team. These players sacrificed other activities so they could attend practices and games, giving their all to be a valued part of the team. However, rather than finding the success they sought, they were mocked by teammates and ignored by coaches. As Hellstedt (1988) states, young men would rather play and lose than be on the team where they are not be allowed to play. Such inconsistencies in what the boys want and need and what they are actually given warrants attention and demands further study.

11. *Why did you quit the basketball or football team?*

This question was only directed to the 10 students who had played on the basketball or football team, therefore, the sample size was cut in half compared to the other questions in the study. However, in spite of the very small sample for this question, the answers given corresponded exactly with what has been shown in the literature. In fact, many researchers have been asking this same question (Coakley, 1998; Gould, 1987; Katz, 2000; LeUnes & Nation, 1989; Stratton, 1998; Weinberg, 1981) and the answers they discovered match the responses from the boys in this study. Consistent with the literature, the subjects of this study listed not having enough time to actually play during games, or coaches putting too much pressure on them, or too much emphasis on winning as the reasons for quitting the team.

It is essential to note, therefore, that each one of the boys who quit playing on the team

agonized over the decision and then lived with the consequences of that decision. It was only total frustration and, in many cases, humiliation, that led them to the decision that they simply could no longer be a participant on the team.

12. *Were you ever cut from the team after trying out?*

There was not one single boy among the 11 who were cut who was not impacted by the experience. A point of interest that arose from this question was from the two young men who each stated that they knew they would not make the team, yet tried anyway. Those comments shed much light on the desire of these young men to be on the team as well as the expectation for them to play for the school teams. It appears that each of these boys knew they did not possess the talent that it took for them to be a member of the team, yet they were willing to submit themselves to the anguish that accompanies being cut from the team just because in this community, everyone tried out for the teams. A principal in the community remarked that he had never been to any other community where he had seen such an intense desire from such an early age to be part of the sports teams in junior and senior high school (Pilling, 2000). Obviously, such a tradition has its drawbacks since it sets some up for failure by pushing them towards an activity that lies beyond their natural ability rather than encouraging the development of talents that may lie outside of the scope of basketball or football.

13. *What was the impact of being cut from or quitting the team?*

The responses to this question may have shown more clearly the impact of sports on the boys in this small town than any other question. Realizing that Messner (1990) found that for boys and men everywhere being a part of sports is an expectation, and considering that Coakley (1996) concluded that the high visibility of athletes in small schools results in huge pressures

from schools and entire communities for all to participate in athletics, it is not difficult to imagine the precarious position a young man would be placed in if he was cut from the team or even if he voluntarily quit the team. It has been clearly established that sports involvement in this school determines so much of one's status, popularity, and even friends. Coakley (1996) determined that an individual's socialization can be extremely dependant on his involvement in sport. It seems that for those boys who tried and then failed to be a valuable member of the team, all aspects of their lives were impacted.

One such young man had grown up in the community and, like most of the other boys, wanted to end up a member of the football team. He played during the elementary years and loved the association with other players as well as the thrill of the sport itself. He attempted to secure a position on the team once in junior high school and was very pleased with his performance after the week of tryouts. He reported absolute shock when he found his name amongst those who had been cut from the team. The really detrimental part of this experience may have been that he had thought he was fairly good at sports. Now he was being told that was not so. He said that the worst part of this experience was that he knew the players who were successful in their attempts to be on the team were now looking at him and thinking that he wasn't good enough.

While this may or may not have been true, the important thing is he believed that it was true. It seems that besides doubting his athletic talent, he began to question his other abilities. He felt that since he was wrong about his football talent then he may have also been wrong about other perceived talents. He said he didn't even try to make the basketball team because he knew he lacked the talent.

Although there were certainly other difficulties in this respondent's life, he said it was this great shock that changed many things about his life. He said that he disliked going to school more than ever because he felt that he had few friends and now he felt there was no hope of finding others. He attempted withdraw from the social aspect of school and attempted a year of home school. That presented other challenges that he failed at and so he returned the following year to the public school. Upon his return to school, he spent more and more time with the students who were not involved athletically or academically with the school, most of whom were involved in alcohol and drugs. It was not long before he too became involved. As he sat in the interview, I felt that he was a very lonely, very sad young man who felt he was trapped. He did not blame his situation entirely on his experience with being cut from the team, but he did feel that it played a part.

Perhaps one of the problems of having such a successful sports program in a small community is that there is little else to go to if you are not a part of the program. Many of the boys acknowledged that it was impossible for the teams to accept an unlimited number of players. The problem, they felt, was that there is no alternative for those who were not elite athletes. Therefore, even though they questioned whether they had what it took to be a member of the team, they still attempted to try out--then when they were cut they felt discouraged and even devastated. Of course these young men had many talents and abilities. However, it seemed that with such a visible focus pointing to athletics, these other talents were ignored by others and, consequently, not even recognized by the individuals themselves.

Besides the underdevelopment of many non-athletic talents, those boys who had wanted to be members of the teams and then were cut or quit also suffered socially. Weiss and Duncan

(1992) concluded that boys who believe they are good in sports have superior peer relationships. I found that many of the young men who tried but did not end up playing on sports teams not only lost some of their friends but became almost outcasts. I have noticed that several of these young men, though they did not openly discuss it, have been victims of cruelty by those who were part of the sports teams. One of the young men confirmed my observations when he spoke about getting pushed around in the halls by the “jocks.” A few others who had been on the team, did state that they felt ignored and shunned by their peers once their participation on the team ended.

14. *If you were the principal, what would you change about the school?*

There were two ideas that emerged from this question. One theme that came from their answers was that these young men wanted to be involved in athletics. They did not recognize the physical, mental, and social benefits of participation in sports, nor did they understand the psychological set backs that are sometimes associated with athletic programs where so few can participate (Riemcke, 1988). They did recognize, however, that the sports program in the school had become so focused on producing a winning team that it had become a club for the elite athletes and the marginal athletes were excluded from play. They simply enjoyed sports and enjoyed friendly competition and wanted to have the opportunity to play. Their recommendations as would-be principals made it clear that there is a need for the incorporation of an in-school sports program where anyone who has the desire can participate. Interestingly, such a program does not need to be extensive, it simply needs to be available.

The second theme, and this was expressed in many different ways, was that the young men wanted recognition for their athleticism that was expressed outside of football and

basketball. Among the 20 boys in this study, there were hockey players, soccer players, baseball players, weight lifters, martial arts enthusiasts, and participants in track, and they all wanted to be recognized for their efforts and achievements. Of course, the students wanted this recognition from the teachers and administrators at the school as well as parents and community members. But even more so, they seek the approval of their peers. Researchers have stressed that such recognition from peers is readily achieved when individuals are involved in sports (Eppright, Sanfacon, Beck, & Bradley, 1997). Yet, the focus of the school, which is so influenced by the administration and staff, has largely ignored the accomplishments of the non-basketball and non-football athletes.

The danger in failing to recognize the talents of these young men is obvious. Many researchers have concluded that athletes rate themselves as having higher levels of self-esteem than non-athletes (Holland & Andre, 1994; Kamal, Blais, Kelly & Ekstrand, 1995; Welk, Corbin & Lewis, 1995). Although the participants in this study cannot be accurately called non-athletic, that is exactly what they have been labeled and, as such, they all fail to recognize the true worth that each possesses. I did not ask them specifically to talk about how they felt about their self-worth, however, as they spoke of labels and popularity and being cut from the team and losing friends, it was obvious that they have all struggled with low levels of self-esteem. It was evident that some of the more mature young men have worked through these struggles and have come to recognize their own worth, yet too many spoke with bitterness and even contempt.

Besides being recognized for their involvement with athletics, the boys wanted to elevate the prestige attached to academics, art, music and drama. It was interesting that none of these boys wanted to eliminate the competitive school sports teams, they just wanted to have non-sport

activities be given equal value.

It was the American Academy of Pediatrics which issued the statement that it was unwise to encourage children to specialize in one sport to the exclusion of others (“Preteens too young to specialize in specific sport, says doctors”, 2000). I would argue that it may be unwise for adolescents to become specialists in one aspect of their lives if it means eliminating others. The young men in this study had many different talents, but there was little opportunity for the development of those talents. The school and even the community had become so specialized and successful in running effective basketball and football programs that too many of the young men in this study were denied access to other programs. As a teacher at the school lamented, there really isn’t any kind of program for those who don’t fit into an exact type of mold (Pilling, 2000).

One young man spoke of his feelings of entrapment by these limitations. He had been quite successful in a non-school sport and had even traveled internationally to represent his club. However, as expressed so many times by others, his accomplishments were ignored. He said that he felt very low and useless. That ended, however, when in grade 11 he moved to a larger centre and became involved in non-athletic extra-curricular activities. He claimed that this one move did so much to influence not only how he felt about his talents, but ultimately what he thought about himself.

15. *Is the way the sports program is being operated in the school a good thing or a bad thing?*

In spite of all the negative discussion regarding sports that preceded this question, there were still 12 of the 20 boys who saw the good that came from sports. They liked that their town was recognized because of superior athleticism. They liked the excitement of the games and

cheering their team on to victory. They even saw that sports had been a good thing for those who were on the team since it gave them something to do and developed the skills they possessed. However, they kept returning to the idea that activities outside of the school gymnasium, or off the football field should be given equal time and equal energy. They definitely experienced the “narrowness” spoken of by those researchers who said that because of the rigidity of traditional male sports there is not enough opportunity to explore the options and, therefore, many young males become frustrated (Kleiber & Kirschnit, 1991; Shaw, Kleiber & Caldwell, 1995). Such narrowness of opportunity has created a stifling environment where many potentials are diminished rather than expanded.

Another thought arising from this final question was directed towards coaches in particular. It appeared that the subjects in this study agreed with Hines and Groves (1989) who concluded that it was coaches who had more of an influence upon the self-esteem of the players than any other group. Further, Smith & Smoll (1982) associated low self-esteem with negative comments coming from the coach.

It seemed that the influence of the coach not only effected the players who worked on his team but extended outwards to impact the attitude of many in regards to sports. The boys directed several comments toward the coaches, the main message being that sports needed to be more fun and that the idea of winning needed to become a secondary objective. Many of the young men recognized that unreasonable demands which were placed upon players by the coaches created a tense atmosphere so that a sporting event became a battlefield experience rather than a friendly game. An illustration of these demands was given by one of the young men who revealed that if the team lost a game they had to run and they kept running until the players

could go no more. He said that the running was a punishment to scold rather than an exercise to build. He remembered one incident where one of the players actually fainted because of sheer exhaustion resulting from one of these chastising episodes.

When a coach wants primarily to win, it must be realized that the costs may be higher than bargained for. Rotella and Newburg (1989) concluded that those who become nothing more than benchwarmers have a loss of identity and the result is often a feeling of despair. The experience of a particular young man in my study would confirm this conclusion. This young man grew up wanting nothing more than to be a basketball star. He loved the game and spent many hours with friends and on his own with a basketball in his hands shooting basket after basket. He had a farming background, as many in this community did, and knew how to work hard. He used those skills of determination and hard work and became a member of the team. He admitted to me that he was one of the most un-skilled players on the team, yet, he claimed that none of his teammates worked quite as hard as he did. Because of this hard work, he maintained a position on the team throughout his entire experience in high school. He never missed a practice and gave each session his all, yet, his efforts were not rewarded by the coach and he found that game after game he sat on the bench. He felt that if he just worked harder that finally his chance would come to have some significant playing time during games. Year after year he waited for his chance, hoping that eventually he would become valuable enough to the team that the coach would let him play. However, his opportunity never did come, and he admitted that the few times he did get to play in a real game he often made mistakes because of the excitement and nervousness of finally being in a game.

Time went by and he entered his senior year of high school—the final season of his high

school basketball career and he was positive that this would be the year that he would finally be recognized for his years of work and effort. He was confident that the opportunity to be a full participant on the team had finally arrived. Although he was given a minute here and a minute there to play, 95 percent of game time he was simply sitting and watching his teammates play. As the season drew to a close, the now too familiar pattern continued and he never was given more than a few minutes a game to play the sport that he loved so much. His team was successful that season, becoming one of the winning teams in the league and so, at the end of the term, he received a team medal, as he had in previous years. However, this time he sensed the hypocrisy of that medal. He knew that he had done nothing to earn such a reward. With tears in his eyes he described to me the day after the medal ceremonies, driving out to a lake and throwing that award as hard as he could into the middle of it. He said he was angry at the years he felt he had wasted and he questioned what value they had been to him. More than that he questioned what value he had been to the team or to anyone for that matter. He also doubted his own self-worth and, as Rotella and Newburg (1989) speculated, his own identity was in question. One can only wonder what kind of scar this experience has left on this young man. It remains to be seen whether there will be far reaching consequences for him as he now tries to apply the lessons learned sitting on the bench to a world outside of high school.

The ordeals of this young man are quite dramatic. However, many of those in my study experienced negative feelings as a result of their associations with the sporting programs of the school. Those who didn't get a chance to play on the team wanted to. Those who tried and were cut seemed to struggle with feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. Those who did get a chance to play on the team never did find the status they were searching for because of pressure from

coaches and peers to be the best.

Unanswered Questions

One question that could not be answered by this study and was never addressed in any of the literature searched is what kind of long-term impact these experiences will have on these young men. It was Maslow (1970) who said that if the basic needs of self-esteem are not satisfied in the earlier stages of life, then a person's self-concept may be placed in jeopardy and this can carry on into later life. In the community where these young men have grown up, this appears to be the case in many instances.

As I interviewed teachers at the schools (Pilling, 2000), an interesting phenomena occurred. Those teachers who had grown up in the community kept referring back to their own experiences with sports rather than answering the questions that I asked about the effects of sports on the students today. One teacher spoke of his resentment towards a brother who was one of the sports stars of the school and related how he, a non-athlete, had tried many things in order to gain the recognition and attention of parents, peers, and members of the community. This teacher had been away from high school sports for many years yet, as he spoke, the painful emotions of being left out in high school had returned. Another teacher revealed her own bitterness toward sports when she summed up her feelings by saying "all I know is that there will be no sports in heaven." There certainly is a possibility that there are long-term effects upon those who have been negatively effected in high school by sports and I call on other researchers to follow up and search out these effects.

Chapter Six

Recommendations

There are many conclusions and recommendations that could be drawn from this particular study. One thing of particular significance that arose from this study is that, along with the answers, the feelings of the participants were able to be conveyed. For example, simply reporting that 40 percent of the boys in this study quit the team because they spent too much time on the bench does little to describe the personal angst felt by each one of these young men. The boys who worked so hard to be a valuable part of the team were devastated to have to sit on the bench game after game. Similarly, those 6 young men who quit in the middle of the season did not do so because they were quitters, nor did they decide overnight to end their association with the team. In fact, all their lives they had wanted to be a member of the team. It was only after weeks of inner turmoil that they turned their back on their dream to be on “the team.”

It also became apparent from the responses given that for the students in this study popularity and recognition, so important for a typical adolescent, were intricately linked to participation and success in athletics. Therefore, those who found themselves outside of the game suffered isolation and distress.

I believe that as a result of this study something can be done for future generations of boys who find that they do not possess the skills necessary to be successful athletes and so are not given an opportunity to really be a part of the school sports teams. Because of insights that were revealed from the responses of the boys in this study, much has been added to the current literature. The most important addition, I believe is that the real-life feelings of the participants

were able to be heard and can now be examined. It is in light of those findings that I make the following recommendations:

1. There are many benefits to participation in sports and there are many who wish to participate. Therefore, every effort should be made in schools, especially smaller schools where there is a limited number of programs, to establish a sports program where anyone who wishes could participate. It has been shown that it is possible to ensure that “all must play” (Reimcke, 1988) and if such an attitude were to prevail among coaches and administrators much could be done to help many young boys.

2. Teachers, administrators and coaches need to be aware that those who are labeled as non-athletes as well as those who spend a great deal of time sitting on the bench rather than playing the sport may require special attention. If educators were to recognize the struggles of the young men who wish to participate in sports but for whatever reason are not allowed to, then more could be done to compensate for the potential problems that may result. Such recognition alone could do much to aid in the development of talents that lie outside of the court or field.

3. The call for further study, with an emphasis on qualitative research, has been a plea in much of the literature. Indeed, too much of the literature has focused on gathering empirical data only. This study substantiated the fact that little is known regarding the pressures that successful sports programs have upon the so-called “non-athletes” and those who are members of the team but spend much of their time sitting on the bench. The comments of the 20 young men in my study verified the conclusions of a study by Rotella and Newburg (1989), who wondered if there was a negative side of sports which was hidden from view. The suffering of many of the boys in this study was certainly silent, since few had voiced the distress that they felt

as a result of the sports programs. As Vaughn (1984) expressed, the voice of the child has not been heard. The interviews that I conducted accomplished what I had hoped since they gave the boys an opportunity to voice feelings regarding their experiences of attending a school where sports plays such a major role. This study also allowed me, as the researcher, the opportunity and challenge of interpreting the feelings behind the comments, and this is an important element in such research.

Since this study was conducted on a small group of boys living in a very small community, it is important that further research be conducted to determine the universality of such problems. It is also important to discover the long-term effects that may be found in young men who have had such negative experiences with sports participation. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that more research be undertaken.

Conclusion

This study has established that there are many young men who desire to be an important part of a sports team but are not given that opportunity. My conclusion is that the self-esteem of these young men has suffered as a result of being left out of the inner sports circles. It is hoped that by implementing these recommendations more can be discovered and steps can be taken to ensure that all students are given equal opportunities in schools to develop self-confidence and become the best they can be upon whatever path they choose to embark.

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Appendix A

Questions for Interview

1. *What determines the popularity of students in your school?*
2. *Are you Popular?*
3. *Many times you are given labels in school. Do you have a label that others have given you?*
4. *What do you think when you hear "school sports?"*
5. *Do you play on a team other than the Basketball or Football team and if so are you recognized by the school for your achievement?*
6. *Do you like sports?*
7. *Have you ever felt pressure from the community to be on "the team?"*
8. *Have you ever felt that the boys who did play on the basketball or football team received special privileges?*
9. *Have you ever played on the basketball or football team?*
10. *Were you happy on the team?*
11. *Why did you quit the basketball or football team?*
12. *Were you ever cut from the team after trying out?*
13. *What was the impact of being cut from or quitting the team?*
14. *If you were the Principal, what would you change about the school?*
15. *Is the way the sports program is being operated in the school a good thing or a bad thing?*

Appendix C

Consent Form

Name of Research Project: Boys in the Background: The Impact of Sports on Males Growing Up in a Small Town

Description of Project: The effect of sports programs in small rural schools upon the development of self-esteem in the students.

I allow my child, _____, to participate in this study.

(Signature)

(Date)