

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-LA CROSSE

Graduate Studies

SOCIAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: THE IMPACT OF SPORTS PARTICIPATION

A Chapter Style Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Education Specialist

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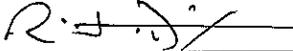
May, 2011

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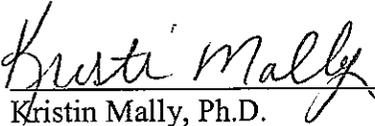
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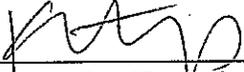
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## ABSTRACT

Stoner, J. A. Social Skills Development: The Impact of Sports Participation. Ed.S. in School Psychology, May 2011, 66pp. (R. Dixon)

Past research examining the benefits of sports participation has largely focused on middle school, high school, and college age students. The current study expanded the age range by looking at upper elementary school students. Cowart et al. (2004) examined the relationship between social skills and recreational activity preferences using parent report for K to 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. The aim of this study is to obtain information from the children's perspective regarding differences in social skills behaviors between gender and types of sport participation. Although there was no difference in type of sport participation, results demonstrate that there was a difference between gender and social skills behaviors. When asked to identify one activity that helped them do better in school, participants perceived that a passive recreational activity involving technology helped them achieve in the classroom. It may be important for educators to integrate technological methods into their classroom instruction in order to promote positive benefits to learning. In addition, student perception of the benefits of technology on their academic achievement can be generalized to social skills development. As School Psychologists, we can use this information to be creative in teaching and practicing social skills with the students through use of technology.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank several people who contributed to the completion of this thesis project. First, I would like to thank my thesis committee chairperson, Dr. Robert Dixon, for all of the time and assistance that he provided to me throughout the duration of this research study. I would also like to thank Dr. Katherine Kortenkamp and Dr. Kristin Mally for agreeing to be a part of my committee and also contributing to the finished product. I would like to thank Dr. Foerstch and six of the Archdiocese of Chicago Catholic Schools for their participation in my thesis study. I would like to thank the teachers and students for their participation in the study and allowing me to gain insight on students' social skills development and sports participation. I would like to acknowledge funding from the Graduate Student Research, Service and Education Leadership Grant Program at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

Lastly, I must recognize the support I have received from my family, especially my parents, Jim and Jan Stoner, not only through this process, but my entire educational career. Your support, encouragement, and involvement have given me the confidence I need to complete this project.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

Merrell (2008) described social competence – consisting of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional characteristics – as an important skill in forming quality social relations, engaging in appropriate social interactions, and performing adequately on social tasks. Social competence is a “multidimensional” construct that is explained by more specific constructs such as social skills (i.e., specific social behaviors), adaptive behavior, and prosocial peer relationships (Merrell, 2008). Gresham and Elliott (1993) define social skills as “socially acceptable learned behaviors that enable a person to interact with others in ways that elicit positive responses and assist in avoiding negative responses” (p. 287). Social skills include a range of behaviors, such as waiting your turn, asking to do something, asking for help, accepting consequences, and not interrupting. Social skills are essential to successful social interactions and the optimal educational achievement of all students (Elliott, Malecki, & Demaray, 2001). Well-developed social skills can contribute to academic success, positive self feelings, healthy peer relationships, and positive adjustment to school, home, and community surroundings (Gresham & Elliott, 1993). Thus, opportunities for our youth to develop social skills behaviors are essential to successful educational, social, emotional, and home functioning.

It is important to identify the existing programs and environments that promote children's social skill development. In particular, as schools face times of tight educational budgets. The sports domain, with an increasing rate of youth participation, is of particular interest due to the potential for positive outcomes in social skill development. According to the National Council of Youth Sports (NCYS), in 2008, the total number of boys and girls involved in organized sports programs has increased over the past 10 years. In comparison to the NCYS 1997 study, girls are beginning participation in organized youth sports earlier and earlier (National Council of Youth Sports, 2008). All children, but especially girls, are enrolling in community sport programs and participating in school-based sport activities at younger ages than before. Thus, it is important to look at gender in current sport research due to increased participation, in particular, in the female population in sporting activities.

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) regularly offers swim lessons to children at the age of two, and some as early as six months old. In the fall 2005 season, American Youth Soccer Association (AYSO) implemented a new Under 5 (U5) program that allows children to start playing "jamboree style" as early as four years old (American Youth Soccer Association, 2005). According to the AYSO, since the creation of the program, involvement at this young age is one of the fastest growing levels in the United States. These findings suggest that youth are participating in organized sport activities earlier in life and at greater numbers (Ewing & Seefeldt, 2002). As the above information demonstrates, athletic participation is common among children in today's society. However, the personal perception of the impact of participating as younger athletes has not received the same level of attention (Slutzky & Simpkins, 2009). Thus,

the child's perception of their involvement in activities should be obtained. The current study aims to examine the impact of participation in existing sport programs on social skills behaviors from the perception of the child.

Due to the opportunities, as mentioned above, parents can potentially start their children in sports programs, both team- and individual-oriented, at very early ages. These children may grow to enjoy sports participation as a team player, some may prefer to perform as an individual, and others will excel at both types of sports. As a result of earlier sports participation, it is important to identify the impact that sports participation has on the child's social skills behaviors at younger ages. In the present study, the impact of sports participation on social skills behaviors was investigated among upper elementary school children.

## **Social Skills**

### **Social Skills and Educational Achievement**

Prosocial behaviors in the classroom can have value beyond facilitating social relationships with other people as they can also impact a student's current academic achievement, serving as an academic enabler (Elliott, Malecki, & DeMaray, 2001; Wentzel, 1993), as well as later academic achievement (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Concetta, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000). Caprara et al., found that early prosocial behavior positively impacted children's developmental paths within social and academic areas. Participants included 294 third grade children (166 boys and 128 girls). Prosocial behavior was defined to encompass three types of assessments on the degree of helpfulness, sharing, kindness, and cooperativeness: self-ratings, sociometric ratings, and teacher ratings. These findings demonstrate that early prosocial behavior paves the way

to later success in academic and social domains. Thus, these findings have implications for the development of programs that promote social and educational skills, such as sports activities, which can be influential for young athletes in later years. Youth involved in team sports activities may be at an advantage to learning from their prosocial teammates or knowledgeable adult coaches, and thus have the opportunity to practice social skills behaviors.

### **Learning Social Skills**

According to Albert Bandura (1977) there are four component processes that explain observational learning: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. First, the learner attends to the model long enough to benefit from the performance. Attention to models is channeled by interpersonal attraction and associational patterns (e.g., the people one regularly associates with). Second, the learner remembers the behavior when the model is no longer present. Third, the learner takes the symbolic representations from memory and overtly performs the appropriate behavior after practicing and obtaining informative feedback about its accuracy. Lastly, social learning theory differentiates between learning a behavior and performing the learned behavior because people do not act out all behaviors they have observed (Bandura, 1977). Sports activities provide the participant with opportunities to acquire and practice many new skills, such as social skills. Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1969) placed importance on humans acquiring new behaviors through observation of others, known as modeling. In addition, since much of social learning occurs outside the influence of parents and teachers, individuals may be more motivated to adopt prosocial behaviors when in contact with peers, siblings, co-workers (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2003), and possibly even teammates. Bandura also

emphasized the key role of big events and activities in the course of one's life (e.g., marriage, education, and unemployment) (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2003). Thus, participation in sports or if the opportunity is earned – championships, team trips, etc may be significant enough experiences to shape the life and social functioning of individuals.

### **Types of Social Skills**

Gresham and Elliott (2008) have identified seven essential social skills behaviors that lead to positive interactions and incorporated them in the social skills domain on the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS). The seven core social skills include: assertion, communication, cooperation, empathy, engagement, responsibility, and self-control.

Although Gresham and Elliott (2008) rate seven social skills behaviors on the SSIS, Elliott, Barnard, and Gresham (1989) examined which social skills are most valued in the school and home setting. They concluded that the social skills highly valued in children by educators and parents include assertion, communication, cooperation, and self-control. A few examples of these behaviors include communicating problems, appropriately asking questions when unsure of what to do in school work, paying attention to verbal instructions, complying with directions, cooperating with peers, and showing concern for friends and siblings (Elliott, Barnard, & Gresham, 1989). Due to the importance of these specific social skills behaviors in the home and school environment, the current study focuses on three of these prosocial behaviors: cooperation, self-control, and assertion, and in addition, responsibility.

More recent researchers have also focused on a specific subset of social skills (i.e., assertion, cooperation, self-control) over and over and examined teachers'

perceptions of the importance of social skills for success in the classroom (Lane, Pierson, & Givner, 2003; Meier, DiPerna, & Oster, 2006). These researchers, like others (Lane, Givner, & Pierson, 2004; Lane, Pierson, & Givner, 2004), have mainly focused on the same three social skills (i.e., assertion, cooperation, self-control). Results indicated that competence in cooperation and self-control have equal importance for students' success in school, and are more important than assertion skills (Meier et al., 2006). Lane et al. (2003) examined these social skills according to grade level (elementary, middle, and high school) and program type (general and special education), finding that overall teachers rated cooperation and self-control skills the most important. It is important to understand the social skills that teachers expect of their students. This study will assess whether sports participation impacts social skills behaviors by focusing on an identified subset of social skills behaviors – assertion, cooperation, self-control, and responsibility

### **Sports Participation**

Researchers suggest that future research on sports should be “unpacked” as an attempt to identify potential benefits of participating in specific sports activities (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005). They recommended that sports should be examined in more detail, such as differences in participation levels because findings may show that the effects of such activities vary according to the type of sport involvement (i.e., team or individual sports).

The current study explores the effect of sports participation and gender on social skills. The study will build on previous research findings on the benefits of sports participation by analyzing sports participation by team sport, individual sport, team / individual sport, and no sport. The following terms will be defined using the *Dictionary*

*of Sports* (Cummings, 1949). *Team sport* participation will be defined as preference for a sport in which teamwork is an essential component and where players occupy particular positions, for example, competition between teams of players (e.g., basketball, soccer). *Individual sport* will be defined as preference for a sport generally involving competition between individuals, for example, two opposing individuals (e.g., tennis) or one individual (e.g., golf). *Team / Individual sport* participation will be defined as preference for both team and individual sport activities. *No participation* will be defined as a preference for a non-sport activity. The types of participation will be further defined within the population examined according to their interest levels.

Slutzky and Simpkins (2009) examined the relationships between elementary school-aged children's sport participation and self-esteem. They explained that sports participation has been shown to be positively associated with self-esteem among adolescents and that the research overall lacks information on the benefits of sport participation among younger children. In addition, sports participation was defined as team- and individual-oriented organized sports. A list of 40 organized sport was divided into one of two types: team (16 activities; e.g., soccer, basketball, football) or individual (24 activities; e.g., swimming, gymnastics). Slutzky and Simpkins found that children who spent more time in team sports, not individual sports, reported higher self-concept, which was then associated with higher self-esteem. Thus, their findings demonstrate that differences do exist between types of sports participation, such that team sports provide opportunities that may lead to positive outcomes that are not available in individual sports, and should be further examined.

In addition, previous research examining the impact of sports participation has largely focused on middle school (e.g., Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2007), high school (e.g., Broh, 2002; Fredericks & Eccles, 2006; Marsh & Kleitman, 2003), and college age students (e.g., Curry, Rehm, & Bernuth, 1997; Melendez, 2006). Therefore, this study will expand the age range by looking at upper elementary school students because they are understudied in the field of sports participation. Current researchers are incorporating findings from past studies to demonstrate the present status of sport participation (Danish, Forneris, & Wallace, 2005; Fraser-Thomas & Cote, 2006). For example, Seefeldt and Ewing (1996) found that children were participating in sports at earlier ages. Thus, it is important to determine the impact of sports participation with this population because younger students have become more involved in the last decade. Examining potential benefits of sports participation in younger samples may shed light on the beginning stages of sports involvement and its potential impact on youth development and prosocial behaviors.

Sports are seen as important and result in high-rate of participation for many students (Ingels & Dalton, 2008) and should be examined at younger ages when students are just starting their participation. Prior investigations of sport involvement, the majority of which have studied high school and college age populations and even down to middle school age students, rather than elementary school age children, have found that students benefit from participating in sports activities in multiple ways (Curry, Rehm, & Bernuth, 1997; Marsh & Kleitman, 2003; Slutzky & Simpkins, 2009). The current study sought to identify if participating in sports is associated with positive outcomes, specifically social skills behaviors, for younger athletes. The following

research will seek to find consistent findings of sport involvement as compared with young adult and adolescent athletes.

Many studies examined the impact of sports participation in late adolescence. Marsh and Kleitman (2003) used the National Educational Longitudinal Study: 1988 (NELS: 88) national data set to examine the impact of high school sports participation on college attendance. They found that participation in team sports (e.g., baseball, softball, basketball, football, soccer) was more advantageous than involvement in individual sports (e.g., gymnastics, golf, tennis, track) regarding educational attitudes and values (e.g., internal locus of control, self-esteem, intensity and duration of university enrollment, higher grades, more time spent on homework, and highest level of postsecondary education attained). Team sports provided non-academic opportunities for students for enhancing identification with school and commitment to school-related values (e.g., academic achievement). Also, found among the college age population, sports involvement resulted in higher self-perceived social acceptance in university athletes when compared to non-athletes (Curry, Rehm, & Bernuth, 1997). Among the college athletes, sports participation was associated with higher social acceptance and involvement in team sports pointed to higher educational beliefs.

Sports participation for middle school and high school students has also resulted in positive outcomes. Sports activities are one of the many activities offered through extracurricular programs. Brown and Evans (2005) defined extracurricular activity participation (EAP) as a structured opportunity for children to experience prosocial programs within in- and out-of-school settings. Brown and Evans surveyed 1,739 secondary students (grades 7 through 12) to measure EAP, school connectedness,

demographics, and substance use. Sports, compared to out-of-school activities, in-school activities, and fine arts, showed the highest participation rates across the different ethnic groups. Findings from the study demonstrated that total number of hours engaged in EAP activities and participation in sports and out-of-school activities were positively correlated with higher levels of school connectedness (Brown & Evans, 2005). The purpose of the current study is to determine whether sports participation leads to the same positive educational outcomes in our younger children who participate in sports.

Past research studies have not examined the benefits of sports participation on social skills behaviors in as much focus as other positive outcomes. However, studies that have investigated the topic of social skills behavior have primarily focused on adolescents. McHale, Vinden, Bush, Richer, Shaw, and Smith (2005) examined patterns of personal and social adjustment among urban middle-school children involved in organized team sports (i.e., baseball, football, softball, basketball, soccer, other). An organized team sport was defined as a sport involving coaches, practices, and a season schedule. One of the many factors examined in the study measured by teacher ratings included social competence. Compared with non-involved children, sport-involved youth were rated as more socially competent. Thus, involvement in organized team sports was associated with a higher level of social competence when compared to non-involved peers even in middle school. It is important to determine if these benefits, specifically in social skills behaviors, are evident in upper elementary school age students as well. McHale et al. examined social competence between non-involved adolescents and adolescents involved in organized team sports but did not make a comparison between

different types of sports (e.g., type of participation) to determine if there are differences that may lead to a high degree of social competence.

In another study using an adolescent population (aged 12 to 19 years old), Browne and Francis (1993) studied social competence of participants in a school-sponsored sport (baseball) compared to those adolescents in an independent sports activity (skateboarding). Participants self-rated their feelings of social competence based on attractiveness, popularity, and ability to make others like them. In a predominantly male (97%) sample, the skateboarders reported high self-esteem and positive feelings about their social abilities, although slightly lower when compared to the baseball players (Browne & Francis, 1993). Thus, involvement of nontraditional individual sports, such as skateboarding, may lead to positive outcomes by providing participants with peer support and sense of belonging that may not be available in traditional community- and school-based sports activities. Findings from Browne and Francis' study may imply that overall participation in sports activities may result in positive outcomes in relation to social skills development, but when broken down into types of sports participation, such as in the current study, team and individual sports, it may be that team sports participation leads to a greater degree of positive association because of the influence of peers when acquiring and practicing social skills behaviors. The emergence of social skill behaviors examined in the above studies should be extended to the upper elementary school age child as well.

The discussed findings from past research have demonstrated many positive findings as a result of sports participation in athletes. For example, increased educational achievement, social skills behaviors, and school connectedness were found (Marsh &

Kleitman, 2003; McHale et al., 2005; Brown & Evans, 2005). However, the participants of these prior studies show positive outcomes for individuals from adolescence up to adulthood. The current study will examine whether athletes in their middle childhood years experience such positive outcomes, specifically social skills behavior.

Cowart, Saylor, Dingle, and Mainor (2004) examined the relationship between social skills and recreational activity preferences using kindergarten to eighth grade students with disabilities (42%) and without disabilities (58%). Data were collected via a parent-report *Recreational Preferences* questionnaire (Cowart et al., 2004) and *Social Skills Rating System* (SSRS; Gresham & Elliott, 1990). Thus, parental perspective was provided for their elementary and middle school children regarding their social skills behaviors (i.e., Cooperation, Self-Control, Assertiveness, Responsibility, Social Skills Standard Score) as related to their recreational participation and experiences (i.e., Sports, Active Recreation, Passive Recreation, Arts, Camps/Clubs, and Volunteer/Work). As perceived by parents, children without a diagnosis of a disability were found to have higher overall social skills scores than the youth with diagnoses of ADHD or diagnosis of disability other than ADHD (e.g., Hearing Impairment, Anxiety Disorder, Depression, Cerebral Palsy) on the SSRS. Using the full sample, a positive relationship was found between overall higher social skills and active recreation (e.g., swimming, riding a bike), arts, volunteer work, and camps/clubs. Volunteer work was found to be the activity that most strongly related to social skills behaviors perhaps due to necessary cooperation and communication skills. Also important, results revealed that passive recreation (e.g., watching TV, playing computer or video games) had a negative relationship with social skills. Thus, the results suggest that sports participation, defined as playing baseball,

basketball, soccer, and football, as perceived by the parents of elementary and middle school children, was the one activity having no correlation with social skills development.

The research completed by Cowart et al. reveals important information from a parents' perspective regarding the activities that their children are engaged in and the relationship that those activities may have on social skills. However, children may respond differently. Thus, the aim of this study is to obtain information from the children's perspective regarding their sports participation and social skills behavior. In addition, the present study focused on the same four social skills behaviors (i.e., cooperation, self-control, assertion, and responsibility) examined by Cowart et al. (2004) as influenced by one's involvement in types of sports activities. Thus, the present study, as an extension of Cowart et al.'s study, will extend the research to examine the impact the type of sports participation has on upper elementary age students, as well as focus on the social skills behaviors as a result of sports participation. The research question for this study is to determine if a significant difference exists between gender and type of sports participation (team, individual, team / individual, or no participation) on social skills behaviors (cooperation, self-control, assertion, and responsibility).

## **CHAPTER II**

### **METHOD**

The purpose of this study is to identify the differences in social skills behaviors between gender and types of sport participation among upper elementary school students. Data were collected via surveys administered directly to upper elementary school age children.

#### **Participants**

The study focused on students who were both participants of school- and community-based sports programs and students who were not. Participants were 294 students from grades 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> enrolled in six elementary Catholic schools in an Archdiocese of a large urban city. The study focused on students who were participants in team and individual sports and students who were not. Parents of participants were asked to provide consent for their child's participation in the study (Appendix A). Students with obtained parent consent had the opportunity to choose to participate or not participate by checking a Yes or No box for assent at the beginning of the survey (Appendix C).

#### **Measures**

Several instruments were used in this study. This included a student demographic sheet, which helped describe the sample and the *All About Me* survey, which assessed

sports participation (see Appendix D). The Social Skills Improvement System (Gresham & Elliott, 2008; SSIS) was designed to measure students' perceptions of their social skills behaviors (see Appendix E).

### **Sports Survey**

Participants were provided with a set of questions adapted from Cowart et al. (2004) parent-report *Recreational Preferences* survey. The survey maintained the same content as the parent-report, but was modified to be more developmentally appropriate for children to respond to. Additional items were included to obtain demographic data and contextual information. Children were asked to rate 20 activities using a four-point scale (☹ = an activity in which the children never participates to ☺ = a favorite activity) that best describe his/her recreational participation and experiences. Items were categorized into: a) Team Sports (6 activities; e.g., playing basketball, playing soccer, playing baseball / softball), b) Individual Sports (7 activities; e.g., swimming, gymnastics, Karate / Martial Arts), and c) Passive Recreation (7 activities; e.g., playing with toys, watching TV or movies, listening to music).

Reliability for the parent-report Recreational Preferences questionnaire used in Cowart et al. (2004) was examined using an internal consistency model. The Alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was found to be .77. The reliability of each factor (i.e., volunteer/work, camps/clubs, passive recreational, arts, active recreational, and sports) was also examined. Alpha coefficients for these factors ranged from .34 and .66.

### **Social Skills Survey**

Social skills behavior was assessed using the items from the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS; Gresham & Elliott, 2008). The SSIS assesses individual's

social skills, behavior problems, and academic competence. The SSIS Rating Scale consists of three versions, a Parent Form, which is completed by parent(s); a Teacher Form, which is completed by the teacher(s), and a Student Form, which is completed by the student. For the purpose of this study, only social skills domain scores from the Student (Ages 8-12) Form were used. The normative scores for the Student Form (Ages 8-12) were developed from a nationwide sample of 500 children aged 8 through 12 years, mirroring the U.S. population according to sex, race, socioeconomic status, and geographic region for that particular year.

The SSIS–Student Form can be administered in large group format and takes about 15-20 minutes to complete. Students rated how true each Social Skills item is for them using a 4-point frequency scale (i.e., *Not True*, *A Little True*, *A Lot True*, *Very True*). Students were explained the distinction that *A Lot True* can mean *often true*, and *Very True* can mean *almost always true*. The students completed a portion of the Social Skills domain on the SSIS–Student Form. Example items in the Social Skills domain include, “I ask for information when I need it”, “I work well with my classmates”, and “I pay attention when the teacher talks to the class.” The *Social Skills Scale* measures: Communication, Cooperation, Assertion, Responsibility, Empathy, Engagement, and Self-Control. Similar to Cowart et al. (2008), of the six subscales, four were used in this study: Cooperation (7 items; “I follow school rules”, “I work well with my classmates”), Self-Control (6 items; “I stay calm when dealing with problems”, “I try to find a good way to end a disagreement”), Assertion (5 items; “I ask for information when I need it”, “I show others how I feel”), and Responsibility (7 items; “I do my part in a group”, “I do

the right thing without being told”). Of the 46 items that represent the Social Skills subscale on the SSIS (Gresham & Elliott, 2008), 25 were used in the current study.

The authors determined the readability of the Student Form using the Flesch Grade Level Index. This index measures readability in terms of sentence length and number of syllables per word and expresses readability in grade levels. The reading grade level of the Student Forms is lower than Grade 2.

The authors have examined the psychometric properties of the SSIS. The test score reliability of the SSIS–Student Form was evaluated using test-retest ( $N=127$ ; with a mean interval of 66 days) and internal consistency. Test-retest reliability coefficients for Social Skills subscales for the Student Form ranged from .59 to .81. The authors concluded the relatively low coefficients suggest that students interpret the items somewhat less consistently across time. Test-retest reliability coefficient for Social Skills scale is .81. Internal consistency reliability coefficients for the Student Form (Ages 8-12) ranged from .72 to .94, demonstrating that the behavior items making up each subscale generally reflect the intended Social Skill subscale. Internal consistency reliability coefficient for Social Skills Scale is .94 (Gresham & Elliott, 2008).

The validity results demonstrated that the SSIS Rating Scales measured what it is supposed to measure and that the results can be interpreted with confidence. The validity of the SSIS – Student Form was established by comparing the SSIS to the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS; Gresham & Elliott, 1990) and the Behavior Assessment System for Children, Second Edition, Self-Report of Personality (BASC-2 (SRP-C)). The adjusted Social Skills scale correlations coefficients between SSIS Rating Scales and SSRS Student Forms were .64 for students ages 8 to 12. Although the BASC-2 student

forms (SRP-C; SRP-A) include four scales of prosocial behaviors (i.e., Personal Adjustment ( $r = .35$ ), Relations with Parents ( $r = .32$ ), Interpersonal Relations ( $r = .10$ ), Self-Esteem ( $r = .14$ ), and Self-Reliance ( $r = .41$ )), none of the scales of prosocial behaviors in the BASC-2 (SRP) correspond closely to any of the SSIS Rating Scales subscales. The prosocial behaviors measured on both instruments for ages 8 to 12 are generally low. Thus, these numbers demonstrate that the SSIS was not directly measuring the same constructs comprised on the BASC-2 (SRP) (Gresham & Elliott, 2008)

### **Data Collection and Procedures**

Approval was received from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Next, permission was received from the Director of Data and Research in the Archdiocese of Chicago Catholic Schools Office. Descriptions of the study were mailed to the principals of 30 Chicago Catholic Schools on the north side of Chicago. Follow up phone calls and emails were conducted to obtain interest for the school's participation. Consent letters for student participation were sent to parents to return if they wished their child to participate in the study (Appendix A). Parents were informed that their child would complete questionnaire items related to sports participation and social skills behaviors. During data collection, the classroom teachers read a script explaining the procedures and directions to the participants (Appendix B). Students were also provided with an opportunity to choose not to participate through the child assent check box (Appendix C). Participants then completed the questionnaires. The data collection process was estimated to take approximately 20 minutes to complete. After data was collected and analyzed, the schools received a brief summary of the results for their use.

## **Hypotheses and Data Analysis**

H<sub>01</sub>: Students will not differ in their development of social skills behaviors based on gender and/or types of sports participation (team, individual, team / individual, and no sport participation).

### **Statistical Method**

Sport participation (i.e., Team, Individual, Team / Individual, and None) and gender are the independent variables and social skills behaviors (i.e., cooperation, self-control, assertion, and responsibility) are the dependent variables. The data was combined into four levels: high team participants, high individual participants, high team & individual participants, and low sport participants (i.e., low on team and individual sports). Sport participation levels were determined by doing a tertile split on the team and individual participation and recreational/passive scales. The dependant variables were social skills behaviors (i.e., cooperation, self-control, assertion, and responsibility). A 4 x 2 MANOVA was utilized to determine if students' type of sports participation and/or gender impacted their social skills behavior. A  $p < .05$  statistical level was used to determine statistical analysis using post hoc comparisons.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESULTS**

The purpose of this study is to identify the differences in social skills behaviors between gender and types of sport participation among upper elementary school students. Sport participation and gender are the independent variables and social skills behaviors are the dependent variables.

#### **Demographics**

There were 294 students in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade who participated in this study from six elementary schools in a private school district in the Midwest. Fifty-seven percent ( $n = 166$ ) of the sample was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and forty-three percent ( $n = 127$ ) of the sample was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Ages of the students ranged from 9 to 11 years old ( $M = 10.15$ ,  $SD = .65$ ). Of the sampled students, fifty-five percent ( $n = 162$ ) of the sample was female and forty-four percent ( $n = 129$ ) of the sample was male. Participants were asked to identify their race/ethnicity. A majority of the population identified themselves as Caucasian. Table 1 illustrates the specifics of the sample's race/ethnicity.

Table 1. Race/Ethnicity of Student Participants

Ethnicity	<i>n</i>	%
Caucasian	243	83
Hispanic	11	4
I Don't Know	8	3
Asian American	7	2
African American	5	2
Native American	4	1
Multi-Racial	2	1
Missing / Other	14	5
Total	294	100

### Contextual Information

Participants were also asked to identify the location in which they play sports. A majority of the students reported playing for their school team and/or in the community (e.g., YMCA, park district, community center). The survey item allowed students to respond to more than one option as it best described him/her. Table 2 illustrates the specifics of the sample's sport participation.

Table 2. Sports Locations Played by Participants

Sport Locations	<i>n</i>	%
In the Community	208	41
After School	164	32
Private Lessons	61	12
Other	57	11
Do Not Play Sports	14	3
Missing	2	<1
Total	506	

*Note:* Participants could select more than one option if appropriate.

### **Sports Information**

Students were asked what recreational activities they participated in (i.e., team sports, individual sports, and passive recreational activities). Participation in the specific activity was determined by “Do it” and “Do not do it” responses independent of whether the student enjoyed the activity. These are arranged as items appear on the questionnaire by category in Table 3.

Table 3. Participation in Recreational Activity

Recreational Activities	Do not do it	Do it
<b>Team Sport</b>		
Basketball Team	64	230
Baseball / Softball Team	103	191
Soccer Team	172	122
Football Team	197	97
Volleyball Team	174	120
Hockey Team	250	44
<b>Individual Sport</b>		
Swim Team	208	85
Figure Skating	259	35
Gymnastics Team	244	50
Golf Lessons	193	101
Karate / Martial Arts	242	51
Tennis Lessons	207	87
Dance Lessons	220	74
<b>Passive Recreational</b>		
Watching TV or Movies	5	288
Listening to Music	13	278
Playing with Toys	57	234
Playing Video Games	19	274
Going on the Internet	13	280
Talking with friends, in person or by phone	7	287
Playing Board Games	12	281

### Survey Results

An internal consistency reliability analysis of the *All About Me* Survey: team sport, individual sports, and passive recreational activity scales were conducted to confirm the scales reliability was adequate. The Cronbach alpha of the team sports scale was .40, individual sports scale was .61, and recreational/passive was .56. Reliability was consistent with the parent-report Recreational Preferences questionnaire used in Cowart et al. (2004).

An internal consistency reliability analysis of the *Social Skills* Survey: cooperation, self-control, assertion, and responsibility scales were conducted to confirm

the scales reliability was adequate. The Cronbach alpha of the cooperation scale was .75, self-control was .80, assertion was .63, and responsibility was .71, thus the Alpha coefficients were slightly lower than past research which ranged from .72 and .94 (Gresham & Elliot, 2008).

A 4 x 2 MANOVA was conducted using the independent variables of sport participation (i.e., team, individual, team/individual and none) and gender on the dependent variables of social skills (i.e., Cooperation, Assertion, Self Control and Responsibility). The overall model was not significant for a main effect of sport participation,  $F(12, 561) = 1.52, p = .11, \eta^2 = .03$ . It was significant for gender,  $F(4, 185) = 4.48, p = .002, \eta^2 = .09$ . There were no interaction effects,  $F(12, 561) = .80, p = .66, \eta^2 = .02$ .

Although significant findings were found for gender, due to lack of significant findings using the originally stated sports participation variables, additional exploratory analysis was computed. Prior to creating new independent variables, correlations among the variables were computed. See Appendix E for Table 4.

A tertile split was completed on the recreational activity scales (i.e., team, individual, and passive) to create new independent variables of active, passive, active/passive, and none (see Table 5). Frequency data was used to determine the top and bottom third for the tertile split. A tertile split was completed in order to make distinctions between types of activities in the extreme direction. Participants responded to questionnaire items that resulted in high engagement across the three original variables. The tertile split created equivalent groups. Active participation was determined as high team and individual activities, passive participation was determined

by passive/recreational activities, active/passive was determined by high rates of participation across all three activities, and none was determined by low rates of participation across all three activities.

Table 5. New Independent Variables: Participation

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Active/Passive	56	22
Passive	61	25
Active	61	25
None	69	28

A 4 x 2 MANOVA was utilized to test for any potential significant differences between students' type of sports participation and/or gender in their self-reported social skills behavior. There was no significant main effect for type of sports participation,  $F(12, 714) = 1.46, p = .13, \eta^2 = .02$ . There was a significant main effect for gender,  $F(4, 236) = 5.70, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$ . There was no significant effect for an interaction between students' type of sports participation and gender,  $F(12, 714) = 1.15, p = .31, \eta^2 = .02$ . This means that there was a difference between boys and girls in their perception of social skills behaviors and these will be discussed in detail next.

Based on the significant main effect between student's gender and social skills behaviors, the impact on the specific social skills behaviors was more closely examined. A significant effect was found for Cooperation,  $F(1, 239) = 13.64, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05$  and Responsibility,  $F(1, 239) = 22.59, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$ . Effect sizes were small. No significant effect was found for Assertion,  $F(1, 239) = 9.62, p = .002, \eta^2 = .04$  and Self Control  $F(1, 239) = 5.58, p = .02, \eta^2 = .02$ . Therefore, females were more likely to self

report higher Cooperation and Responsibility skills than males; whereas no difference was found between males and females in their self reported Assertion and Self Control skills (see Table 6).

Table 6. Mean and Standard Deviations for Students' Self Report of Social Skills Behaviors by Gender

Social Skills Behavior	Female			Male		
	N	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	N	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Cooperation *	141	23.9	3.0	113	22.3	3.8
Assertion	141	15.1	2.9	113	14.0	3.9
Self-Control	141	17.2	3.8	131	16.0	4.0
Responsibility *	141	24.4	2.7	131	22.5	3.6

Note: \* Denotes a significant difference between the two groups.

### Qualitative Questions

Participants were asked to identify one activity from the survey that helped them do better in school. A majority of the sample selected a recreational activity categorized as passive recreational (e.g., listening to music, watching TV or movies, going on the internet, playing video games, talking with friends). Specifically, a majority of the students selected talking with friends or going on the Internet as an activity that helps them do better in school. Figure 1 illustrates the specifics of the sample's reporting on activities that help them do better in school displayed according to four main category types.

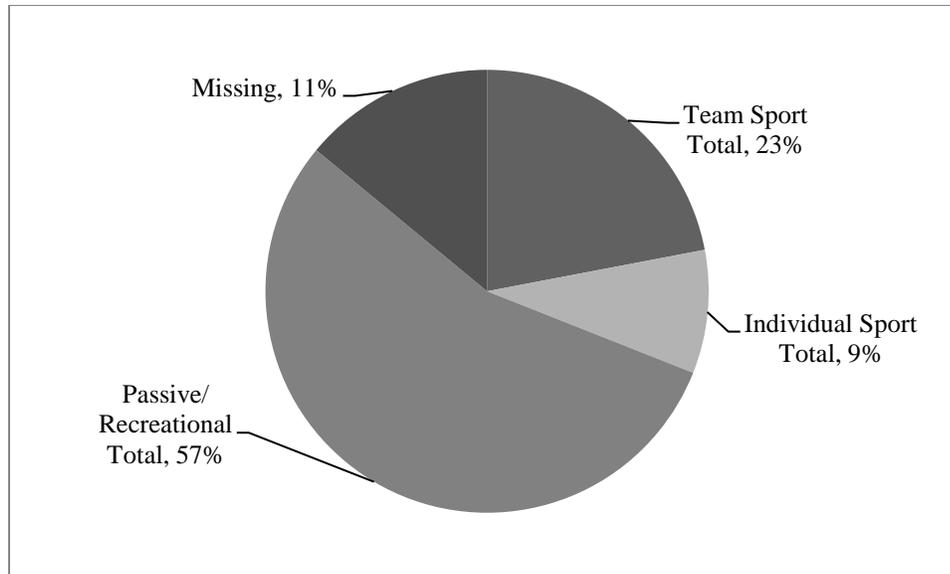


Figure 1. Percents of Activities that Help Students do Better in School

Table 7 illustrates the specific passive/recreational activity that students identified to help them do better in school. Of the total participants, 32 participants (11% of the sample) did not respond to the question.

Table 7. Passive/Recreational Activities that Help Students do Better in School

Activity	<i>n</i>	%
Watching TV or Movies	16	5.5
Listening to Music	22	7.6
Playing with toys	0	0
Video games (e.g., Wii, Xbox)	9	3.1
Going on the Internet	58	19.9
Talking with friends, in person or by phone	36	12.3
Playing board games (e.g., Monopoly, Clue, Sorry)	25	8.6
Total	166	57

*Note:* Percentage is taken from total responses to the survey item.

To follow-up the question, “What activity helps you do better in school?” students were asked one open-ended qualitative question to determine how participation in that activity helps them do better in school. Out of the 294 students who completed the survey, 40 students (14% of the sample) did not answer this second part of the qualitative question. A frequency count was performed on students’ responses for the qualitative question (See Table 6). “I can learn new things / look up information” and “It helps me focus / concentrate” were the two most frequently reported answers by students in response to this question. A complete list of students’ responses to the qualitative question can be found in Appendix G.

Table 8. How Does the Activity Help You do Better in School

Reasons	Frequency	Percent
I can learn new things or look up information	62	21
It helps me focus or concentrate	25	9
I can ask for help from my friends	18	6
It helps me think, solve difficult things, use strategies	17	6
It can be educational or school-related	16	6
It helps me relax	14	5
It helps me make friends, get along with others	14	5
I can practice counting and using math	12	4

*Note.* Responses are listed in descending order starting with the most frequent response.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **DISCUSSION**

The present study sought to expand upon the sports participation research by investigating possible differences between upper elementary school students' self-report on the impact their involvement in sports activities has on their social skills behaviors. First, a comparison of the survey reliabilities will be discussed in regards to the reliabilities that were obtained for the present study and those that were reported by Cowart et al. (2004). Next, a discussion of the obtained study results in regards to the proposed hypotheses will take place, along with an analysis of student's responses to involvement in passive activities and the qualitative questions. Following, the study's limitations and future directions will be highlighted and discussed. Finally, a discussion of the implications for the schools and field of school psychology will be provided.

An important outcome that needs to be taken into consideration when analyzing the results of the current study is the low reliability of the questionnaire used to assess types of sports participation, *All About Me Survey*. Thus, results may not be a valid depiction of the impact sports participation has on social skills development. Student raters did not respond in a consistent manner to the items on the questionnaire. Several thoughts are considered to explain this limitation. First, the questions asked were not developed in a logical manner that would result in accurate and consistent findings for the

factors examined, especially across variables. Types of activities that upper elementary aged students participate in may not be variables that can be realistically examined. For example, children at this age may be exploring the activities that they want to participate in and thus may not have favorite sports (i.e., individual, team) or activities that they consistently participate in due to varying interests and dependence on parents. In addition, participants may be exploring the team aspect, such as playing various sports categorized as team or playing sports that are categorized in both team and individual. Even though the intention of this study was to examine team/individual sports participation and benefits, at this age, it may be unrealistic to assume that if a student participates in one team sport, that he/she participates in all and only team sports. Thus, the lack of finding a team and/or individual sport orientation may have impacted the reliability of the measure.

Second, perhaps completing the items to assess this topic area may be too much to ask of this age group. Upper elementary age students may be developmentally immature to complete the survey as it was written. Prior research that utilizes self-reported data involve older populations (e.g., middle school, high school, college) (Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2007; Broh, 2002; Fredericks & Eccles, 2006; Marsh & Kleitman, 2003; Curry, Rehm, & Bernuth, 1997; Melendez, 2006).

The primary goal of this study was to examine the differences in social skills behaviors between gender and types of sport participation among upper elementary school students. Past research on sports participation has mainly examined self-reported data from middle school, high school, and college age students. Findings indicated that sports participation results in benefits for the adolescent participants in these populations,

such as increased school connectedness (Brown & Evans, 2005), social competence (McHale et al., 2005) and acceptance (Curry, Rehm, & Bernuth, 1997), self-esteem (Slutzky & Simpkins, 2009), and school-related values (Marsh & Kleitman, 2003). The current study sought to extend the method of self-reported data to the upper elementary age students to examine if the same positive impacts of sports participation exist. The current research does not reject the null hypothesis that types of sports participation will not impact social skills behaviors, meaning the study did not find that there was a significant impact of different types of sports participation on social skills behavior. These findings support past research by Cowart et al. (2004) that sports participation did not impact social skills behaviors in a positive or negative way. Thus, parent reports for the neutral impact of sports participation as found in Cowart et al. are similar to students' self-reported perceptions found in the current study. Findings demonstrate that the current study does not support past research that examined types of sport participation and overall sport participation, as suggested in McHale et al. (2005) and Browne and Francis (1993).

The difference in results may be attributed to the differences in the methods used in the current study and the targeted younger population (i.e., self-report, upper elementary students). The results may suggest that students in upper elementary school are provided various opportunities in their school environment to develop and practice social skills behaviors compared to the middle school and older students that participated in the prior studies. Thus, all students are receiving social skills instruction on a daily basis as built into their school schedule. An alternative explanation, results may suggest that sports at the elementary level are designed to allow everyone to play despite athletic

skills. Thus, sports are not a unique experience for children to learn and practice their social skills. In addition, past research by Marsh and Kleitman (2003) revealed differences in educational attitudes and values dependent upon high school sports participation in team and individual sports. Differences in types of sports participation were not confirmed in the current study perhaps due to the age of the participants. Students in middle and high school may begin to specialize in a sport of interest, whereas in elementary school, students may participate in multiple team/individual sports at one time and still have time to engage in passive recreational activities, making the distinctions difficult to identify. Furthermore, students have a breadth of participation that makes it difficult to make clear distinctions between passive and active activities, especially due to the high rate of participation in passive recreational activities.

Lastly, as the current study aimed to extend the sports participation research downward to upper elementary school students, it may be that the results are an accurate depiction as there may not be any academic and social-behavioral benefits by being involved in sport activities. Results may suggest that sports participation research cannot be extended downward to a younger population as illustrated in earlier points as well as another factor, using self-reported measurement tools. However, it is important to remember that the data collection tools used had low reliability. Although it is difficult to pinpoint the reasoning for the differences in results between the current study and prior research, results do suggest that differences are present in the elementary school level compared to older students (i.e., middle school, high school, college).

A second hypothesis that was examined during this study was to determine if a significant difference existed between gender and sport and gender and social skills. This

study found a main effect between genders and social skills behaviors, in particular cooperation and responsibilities. Perhaps findings suggest that girls may be socialized to be more cooperative and responsible compared to their male peers. Gender differences are a topic of interest in the sports realm and social skills behavior research. For example, in a research study on social skills and behavior problems of Iranian preschoolers, Abdi (2008) found that parents and teachers rated girls to have higher social skills compared to boys, specifically cooperation, responsibility, and self-control.

### **Passive Engagement**

An interesting finding from the current research is the high rate of engagement in passive recreational activities (e.g., listening to music, watching movies or TV, searching the Internet). Each of the activities categorized as passive recreational have a higher rate of participation than any of the sport activities, both team and individual. Students reported these activities, in comparison to team and individual sports, to have helped them do better in school. These results suggest that students find technological tools to help them advance in their learning. Educators should look for ways to continue to incorporate technology into the classroom and academic instruction. Future research needs to be conducted in the area of passive recreational activities/technology as it leads to academic achievement and the development of social skills behaviors.

Cowart et al. (2004) collected data through parent ratings and found that passive recreational activities had a negative relationship with social skills. In this study, the focus was shifted to a self-report from upper elementary school students because these factors had not been assessed in the field of sports participation. The current research findings suggest there was no impact of sports participation on social skills behaviors.

This suggests that there may be a difference in parent versus self-reported ratings. Many parents may report passive recreational activities to be detrimental to students' social skills and academic achievement. However, students may enjoy passive recreation and thus report these activities help them in school but report no relationship on their social skills. Parent and student perceptions of passive recreational activities (e.g., technology) may not be the same. It may be that students are more aware of how passive recreational activities are used in teacher instruction to achieve academic success within the school environment, whereas parent's perception of passive recreational activities may be limited to those in the home environment (e.g., playing video games, watching TV, listening to music).

In addition, six years ago technology, such as the Internet, was limited in what it could do and who could use it. Times have changed and many schools are integrating technology into their classroom (e.g., Moodle, Promethean boards, DyKnow, educational websites). As the participants reported, technology can be educational and it provides an opportunity to have a wealth of information available to them to learn new things and look up information. The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), specifically e-status, demonstrated an increase in students' learning as measured by their class grades (Gonzalez, Jover, Cobo, & Munoz, 2010). This web-based tool gave the students immediate feedback on their responses to statistical exercises. Although the current study aimed to evaluate the impact sports participation has on academic performance, the self-reported data indicate that students perceive passive activities to help them do better in school. Considering the results of the current study, there is a need for further research in this area.

With an increase in technologies available to the schools and educators, it is important to examine the new creative possibilities for social skills interventions. Recent research in the area of technology has been conducted to describe outcomes for its usage as technology has become such an important aspect in everyday life and interpersonal interactions (i.e., communication) (Baker, Parks-Savage, & Rehfuss, 2009). Barker et al. (2009) examined the impact of a small group social skills intervention using a virtual environment (three-dimensional) has on social skill development (i.e., problem behaviors, academic competence, cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, self-control). Results suggest that a newer technology medium tool – virtual world – lead to positive changes in student behavior in four of the seven dependent variables (i.e., problem behaviors, cooperation, responsibility, self-control) (Baker et al., 2009). Social skills were taught using the traditional techniques of a combination of modeling, role playing, psychoeducational teaching, and practicing of specific skills (Lane, Menzies, & Barton-Arwood, 2005), but in a virtual environment. Thus, recent research demonstrates that social skills instruction can be provided to students using technological tools within the elementary school environment.

Recent research also examines the impact that technology can have on academic achievement (Clements, 1999; Clements & Sarama, 2003). The results from Espinosa, Laffey, Whittaker, and Sheng (2006) show that access and use of technology influence children's academic achievement. However, the results reveal that merely having access to technology is unlikely to be sufficient for all children to benefit in their learning. It is important for adults to supervise computer use and types of programs (i.e., educational software) being used. Similarly, in some reports educational television watching among

preschoolers demonstrated to have higher grades and read more books in high school (Anderson, Huston, Schmitt, Lineberger, & Wright, 2001). Other reports show negative impacts of regular television watching (Christakis, Limmerman, DiGiuseppe, & McCarty, 2004). Thus, technology use won't lead to positive results in academics or social skills by mere access to it. It is important for adult supervision and a basis in educational purpose and instruction. The way technology is incorporated into the classroom curriculum and integrated with the lesson goal is important.

### **Study Limitations and Future Directions**

This study did have some limitations that must be discussed. As stated earlier, an important limitation to the current study that impedes the validity of results is the low reliability of the questionnaire that assessed types of sports participation. A second limitation from the current study may be the possibility of low receptive language skills or low reading skills exhibited by the participants. It was noted in the Teacher Administration Guidelines that teachers may read items aloud to the student if the student exhibits low reading or receptive language skills. Although the readability of the Social Skills Survey was reported by Gresham and Elliott (2008) to be in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, a readability level was not identified for the *All About Me* Survey. Thus, students may have misinterpreted items which may have resulted in a low reliability. A third limitation may be how students completed the surveys, an approach of "in the moment". Perhaps it is a challenge to ask students to self-report their participation in activities over the course of a calendar year. Or perhaps experiences that involved the social skills of the participants that were more recent stand out in completing the Social Skills Survey, rather than their patterns or tendencies that best describe who they are.

More information should be collected with different questions. For example, questionnaire items should consider addressing hours/week and years of participation, success/failure of “game” outcomes, parental support versus pressure, or perception of teammates / coach. Although the current study did not succeed in determining a positive impact of sports participation on social skills among upper elementary school students using the *All About Me Survey*, this topic with this age group is still important to research due to high rates of participation as reported by Ingels and Dalton (2008). A questionnaire needs to be developed that can better “unpack” sports participation. If team and individual sports were targeted variables in the future, items should be developed to better assess the team concept. For example, several questions that relate to team sports may be asked, such as assessing the following topics – travelling with teammates, working together to score points, etc. This variable may be difficult to “unpack” at this age level because coaches may create a “team” environment even within typical individual sports or students may not have a well-developed knowledge for team sports. Perhaps an adequate reliability should not be expected in the sports survey, specifically in regards to team sports, because students may actually specialize in a team sport early on. This means that if a student plays basketball he may not play any other team sport because he plays it year round for his school team, AAU (Amateur Athletic Union) team, and various summer camps. Therefore, future research should lead pilot testing of questionnaires to be used to ensure comprehension of items by participants as well as to ensure that the items are measuring involvement in activities and social skills as intended.

In addition, students reported the highest rates of sport participation in the community compared to after school, private lesson, and other. In attempt to “unpack”

sports participation, future research should examine the impact that sports based on various locations may have on the positive outcomes for student participation. For example, YMCA programs have a strong emphasis on the four core values – caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility (Youth Men’s Christian Association). These core values are expected to be incorporated in all children’s activities sponsored by the YMCA. If so, social skills behaviors, such as responsibility, should be developed and opportunities for practice should be provided to all participants.

Future research should examine the effect of types of sports participation and gender on social skills behaviors longitudinally. It may be that the impact that sports participation has on social skills behaviors changes as students get older. The elementary school experience may embed social skills instructions in the academic day (e.g., cooperative learning) and therefore, students have opportunities to develop and practice social skills behaviors within the school setting. Whereas, when students enter middle and high school, learning is more individualized and they are required to engage in alternative activities, such as sports, to develop and practice social skills behaviors. Students may better recognize the impact that extracurricular activities can have on their social skills in their adolescent years and older. Thus, it would be appealing to know if self-reported data changes as students get older and their participation levels in various activities changes. For example, when children are 10 years old, video games may be a social activity with peers. However, when students are in high school, video games may be played in an isolated setting or through indirect social interaction via online gaming network. Therefore, true practice of social skills may not occur.

The current study aimed to assess sports participation as it may impact social skills behaviors for upper elementary school students, as well as perceived academic performance through qualitative questions. One area that was addressed within the independent variable of sports participation was passive engagement in recreational activities that involved the use of technological tools (e.g., playing video games, watch movies or TV, playing board games). Student self-reported data suggest that passive recreational activities help them do better in school. These findings indicate a need for further research in this area. In addition, future research may want to collect data on actual student performance in addition to student perceived academic performance. Data may assist in making conclusions for implications for the classroom.

### **Implications for Education and School Psychology**

Although the present research study did not lead to significant results for types of sports participation, it is important for school psychologists and educators to recognize the prevalence of activities students are participating in and which of these activities students perceive are helping them do better in school. Information about the profile of students we work with helps us to better understand what motivates and interests them.

In addition, results from the current study demonstrate that students perceive technology to positively impact their education. It may be important for educators to integrate technological methods into their classroom instruction in order to promote positive benefits to learning. Educational computer games, variety of media tools, computer software programs, research-based websites, etc are various methods for incorporating technology into an academic lesson. In addition, student report of the benefits of technology on their academic achievement can be generalized to social skills

development. Participants reported “listening to music” as an activity that helps them relax and focus/concentrate on the task at hand. Thus, students should be taught activities such as this that may help them in their studies and getting along with others. Educators should be creative in ways of teaching and practicing social skills with their students through use of technology. For example, students can be matched with students from anywhere in the world through Skype to practice interpersonal communication skills, such as introducing oneself, initiating and maintaining conversations, identifying interests, labeling feelings. As past research suggests, merely having access to technology will not lead to positive outcomes in academics (Espinosa et al., 2006). Many technological tools, such as video games, TV viewing, Internet searching, and listening to music can be isolated activities and enjoyed while alone if students are not instructed to share the experience with others. Thus, school administrators should encourage teachers to use technology in their classroom, but to be creative by integrating it in a way that emphasizes social skills development and cooperative learning or team-based learning.

### **Conclusion**

The present study sought to expand upon the research on the benefits of sports participation by examining the impact of types of sports participation (i.e., team, individual) and gender on social skills. Although the current study found that sports participation did not affect social skills, gender differences resulted in differences in cooperation and responsibility. An important finding from the study was that students reported high rates of participation in passive recreational activities as well as they report these activities help them do better in school. As school psychologists, we should be advocating for students to make it easier for them to choose from multiple options for

extracurricular involvement. In addition, we should encourage teachers to integrate technology into their classroom and assignments/projects as students report technological modality as positively impacting their academic achievement. Future research should continue to explore the impact different types of sport participation and gender have on social skills behaviors in elementary school students, including examining the effect longitudinally.

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APPENDIX A  
PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

Dear Parents of Fourth and Fifth Grade Students,

My name is Jenny Stoner and I graduated from St. Margaret Mary School in 2000 and Regina Dominican High School in 2004. I am currently a graduate student in the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse School Psychology Program. As part of my graduate program, I am doing a research study to learn more about the lives of upper elementary students. I am contacting you to ask you to allow your child to participate in my study by answering two questionnaires related to their participation and interest in active and passive recreation activities. The results may lead to emphasis on developing and maintaining programs that will help your child have a more positive school experience. The results reflecting groups of students may be submitted for presentation or publication. Please read the following information and **sign and return the bottom** if you **DO** give your child permission to participate in the research.

- I have been informed that this questionnaire is ANONYMOUS and will not include any identifying information. The questionnaire will not ask for the name of my child, nor will it ask for any other information that could be used to identify my child.
- I have been informed that there are no rewards for participation and no negative consequences associated with nonparticipation.
- I have been informed that my child can withdraw from the study at any time for any reason without penalty. School personnel will be available to talk to any students who would like to discuss the survey or their reaction to it.
- I have been informed that this study may benefit students and school professionals by supporting and developing programs that help to develop social skills behaviors.

The Director of Research and Data from the Office of Catholic Schools approved the study in January 2010. Questions regarding study procedures may be directed to the principal researcher, Ms. Jennifer Stoner (773) 576-0089. Questions may also be directed to the study advisor, Dr. Rob Dixon, Department of School Psychology, University of Wisconsin – La Crosse (608) 785-6893. Questions regarding the protection of human subjects may be addressed to the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (608) 785-8124.

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Please fill out this form and **return it to the school** front office before \_\_\_\_\_ if you **DO WANT** your child to participate.

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Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

I have read the above, have been informed of the nature of this study, and DO want my child to participate.

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Parent / Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX B  
TEACHER ADMINISTRATION GUIDELINES

**1. Read this section to the class (before you pass out the surveys).**

Today I am going to ask you to help out with a research study being completed by Ms. Jenny Stoner, who is a graduate from St. Margaret Mary and a graduate student from the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse. She is doing a research study to learn more about students your age. A letter was sent home to your parents / guardians and they have given their consent for your participation.

As part of this study, you will be given a number of questions to complete. The questions will be about your social behaviors and interest in sport activities. In addition, the questions are about the things students your age think about and things they do. Jenny is inviting you to be in this study because your thoughts are important. Answering these questions is different from taking a test because there are no right or wrong answers. She just wants you to be honest about what you really think and do.

When Jenny is finished with this study, she will write a report about what was learned. Her report will be included in a thesis paper as part of a requirement for her graduate school program. This report will not include your name or any information that you were in this study.

This study is ANONYMOUS, which means that you do not put your name on it and no one will know your answers. You can ask questions about this study at any time. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. If you decide to stop after you begin, that's okay.

**2. Pass out Student Assent Forms (to students with obtained parent consent for participation).**

Please read with me the lines on the half sheet of paper [read student permission aloud]. Remember, being in this study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you decide not to participate or if you decide to stop before you have answered all of the questions.

If you decide not to participate in this study, check the *No* box and sign your name. Please wait quietly while your classmates are completing the questionnaires.

If you decide to participate in this study, check the *Yes* box and sign your name. I will come by to collect all the permission forms.

**3. Pass out stapled surveys to students who agree to participate in the study.**

Those that checked the *Yes* box you may begin answering the questions.

Remember to read the questions carefully and answer them as truthfully as you can.

There are four options to answer the items. Directions are on the top of each survey. The recreation items are answered with facial expression symbols and the social skills items are answered as N = Not true, L = Little true, A = A lot true, and V = Very true. A lot true can mean often true and Very true can also mean almost always true.

Are there any questions before we begin? When you complete the survey, you can turn them over. All surveys will be collected together when the last person has finished. Note: If a student needs items to be read aloud to him/her due to low reading skills or receptive language skills, please provide that accommodation to the student.

**4. Collect completed surveys.**

**5. Put completed surveys, student assent forms, and returned parent consent forms in the provided envelope and bring down to the office. The packet will be picked up.**

APPENDIX C  
STUDENT ASSENT FORM

**STUDENT PERMISSION FORM**

I have been told about the study and I know why it is being done. I have been told that this survey will not have my name on it. I know that I do not have to fill out the questions if I do not want to. I know that I can stop at any time.

I agree to participate in this study: [circle your response]      Yes      No

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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**STUDENT PERMISSION FORM**

I have been told about the study and I know why it is being done. I have been told that this survey will not have my name on it. I know that I do not have to fill out the questions if I do not want to. I know that I can stop at any time.

I agree to participate in this study: [circle your response]      Yes      No

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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**STUDENT PERMISSION FORM**

I have been told about the study and I know why it is being done. I have been told that this survey will not have my name on it. I know that I do not have to fill out the questions if I do not want to. I know that I can stop at any time.

I agree to participate in this study: [circle your response]      Yes      No

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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**STUDENT PERMISSION FORM**

I have been told about the study and I know why it is being done. I have been told that this survey will not have my name on it. I know that I do not have to fill out the questions if I do not want to. I know that I can stop at any time.

I agree to participate in this study: [circle your response]      Yes      No

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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APPENDIX D  
ABOUT ME SURVEY

### ABOUT ME SURVEY

If you circled **YES** please answer the following questions about yourself, how you get along with others, and participation in activities. Answer each question honestly and to the best of your ability. If you have any questions about any items, please raise your hand and ask for more information. Thank you for your cooperation!

Using the scale, circle the shape that shows your participation in the following activities within the last year.

Do not do it = ☹

Do it, but do not like it = 😞

Do it = 😊

Do it and like it = 😄

- |                                   |   |   |   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Playing on a basketball team   | ☹ | 😞 | 😊 | 😄 |
| 2. Swim team                      | ☹ | 😞 | 😊 | 😄 |
| 3. Watching TV or movies          | ☹ | 😞 | 😊 | 😄 |
| 4. Baseball / softball team       | ☹ | 😞 | 😊 | 😄 |
| 5. Figure skating lessons         | ☹ | 😞 | 😊 | 😄 |
| 6. Soccer team                    | ☹ | 😞 | 😊 | 😄 |
| 7. Gymnastics team                | ☹ | 😞 | 😊 | 😄 |
| 8. Listening to music             | ☹ | 😞 | 😊 | 😄 |
| 9. Football team                  | ☹ | 😞 | 😊 | 😄 |
| 10. Golf lessons                  | ☹ | 😞 | 😊 | 😄 |
| 11. Playing with toys             | ☹ | 😞 | 😊 | 😄 |
| 12. Volleyball team               | ☹ | 😞 | 😊 | 😄 |
| 13. Karate / Martial Arts lessons | ☹ | 😞 | 😊 | 😄 |
| 14. Hockey team                   | ☹ | 😞 | 😊 | 😄 |
| 15. Tennis lessons                | ☹ | 😞 | 😊 | 😄 |
| 16. Video games (e.g., Wii, Xbox) | ☹ | 😞 | 😊 | 😄 |
| 17. Dance lessons                 | ☹ | 😞 | 😊 | 😄 |

18. Going on the internet (e.g., Webkinz, YouTube)      ☹      😞      😐      😊
19. Talking with friends, in person or by phone      ☹      😞      😐      😊
20. Playing board games (e.g., Monopoly, Clue, Sorry)      ☹      😞      😐      😊

☆ **Circle the number of ONE activity from the list (#1-20) that helps you do better in school.**

**Tell me how the circled activity helps you do better in school.**

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*Directions: Fill in the blanks.*

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender (*check one*): Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

*Ethnicity (Check the best one that describes you):*

\_\_\_\_\_ White                      \_\_\_\_\_ Asian-American                      \_\_\_\_\_ Native  
 American  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Spanish                      \_\_\_\_\_ African-American                      \_\_\_\_\_ Hmong  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Other                      \_\_\_\_\_ I do not know

*Directions: Circle the box(es) that best describes you.*

I play sports (you can circle more than one box):

After school for my school team	In the community (YMCA, park district, park and recreation, community center)	In private lessons	I do not play sports	Other: _____
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APPENDIX E

CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS BETWEEN SPORT PARTICIPATION AND  
SOCIAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Table 4. Correlation Coefficients between Sports Participation and Social Skills

Development

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Team	--	.250*	-.017	.050	.054	.037	.055
2.Individual	--	--	.034	.215*	.214*	.172*	.166*
3.Recreation/Passive	--	--	--	.249*	.240*	.164*	.272*
4.Cooperation	--	--	--	--	.570*	.575*	.744*
5.Assertion	--	--	--	--	--	.427*	.597*
6.Self-Control	--	--	--	--	--	--	.551*
7.Responsibility	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

*Note:* \*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

APPENDIX F

HOW ACTIVITIES HELP STUDENTS DO BETTER IN SCHOOL

Table 9. How the Specified Activity Helps Students do Better in School

Reasons	Frequency	Percent
I can learn new things or look up information	62	21
It helps me focus or concentrate	25	9
I can ask for help from my friends	18	6
It helps me think, solve difficult things, use strategies	17	6
It can be educational or school-related	16	6
It helps me relax	14	5
It helps me make friends, get along with others	14	5
I can practice counting and using math	12	4
It helps me in gym class	8	3
I have to get good grades to play (i.e., eligibility rule)	5	2
It helps me stay active	5	2
I can get out my energy	5	2
It is fun	5	2
I can study with my friends	4	1
I keeps me motivated	4	1
It gives me confidence	3	1
I learn how to work in group activities	3	1
It helps me better my communication with others	2	1
It helps me do my homework	2	1
It helps me have hand-eye coordination	2	1
Because it helps	2	1
It helps me listen to others	2	1
It helps me study	1	0
I learn self-respect	1	0
It helps me relieve stress	1	0
It gives me an opportunity to get away from my schoolwork so when I come back to it I am more refreshed and ready to try	1	0
It makes me responsible	1	0
I can get more street smart	1	0
It helps me learn faster	1	0
It helps me learn to never give up and to always try again	1	0
It wakes me up	1	0
It gives me discipline and sportsmanship	1	0
It makes me more athletic for school	1	0
It helps me be proud of my school work	1	0
I am good at it and it means a lot to me at school	1	0
It will give me a good college degree	1	0
It helps me write better	1	0
It helps me understand conflicts in real life and school	1	0
It helps me plan to do a dance for the talent show	1	0
I feel happy that my friends are always there	1	0
YouTube helps me if I had a bad day at school. I can laugh and forget the bad day and do better the next day	1	0
I am well-rested for the next school day	1	0
It helps me with my Spanish vocabulary	1	0

*Note.* Responses are listed in descending order starting with the most frequent response.