THE EFFECT OF ADULT SPORTSMANSHIP AND PRO-SOCIAL BEHAVIOR MODELING ON CHILD SELF-COMPETENCE IN YOUTH FOOTBALL PROGRAMS

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Abstract

Youth sports are viewed as a prime venue for teaching social values and life skills. By virtue of their organizing and leadership positions, adults play a critical role in communicating these lessons. Although there is little debate on the criticality of positive sportsmanship, there has been a serious trend in increasingly unsportsmanlike behaviors at youth events. In response, many organizations have implemented programs designed to increase positive adult sportsmanship communications and pro-social behaviors. While studies have shown that training does result in increased sportsmanship, less information is available on the impacts of such programs beyond increasing the “fun factor.” This study explores the connection between adult education programs and youth participant self-competence. A total of 160 children, ages 8 to 11, from two comparable youth football leagues completed a self-competence assessment following their 2010 season. The study’s primary dependent variable was the presence or lack of a league sponsored adult training program. The results indicate that the presence of adult education programs is likely to have a significant effect on the self-competence levels of participants, and highlight the value of continued implementation of such programs.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Importance of the Study

Youth sports programs are often viewed as a prime, safe venue for teaching important social values and life skills to children that will benefit them well into their adult lives. While there are many formal social settings in which childhood learning takes place, the youth sports environment is unique in that it generally offers a highly controlled environment where various elements of success and failure can be measured by a precisely defined set of rules. This controlled, defined environment affords young people the opportunity to test their decision making abilities and various other skills by taking risks in a setting where the ramifications of their actions has specific limits. The educational value of youth sports is well recognized throughout the United States, as evidenced by the near ubiquitous scholastic sponsorship of athletic programs around the country.

While youth are the intended recipients of the lessons available in youth sports, it is the adults who most often provide the subject matter. By virtue of their leadership positions as league organizers, coaches, officials, parents, and supporting spectators, adults are uniquely positioned to control the content of the lessons offered to the youth participants. These lessons are transmitted by adults through the purposeful communications contained in such areas as playing rules, practice plans, coaching techniques, speeches, and verbal interactions with players. Lessons are also communicated through indirect means, as youth players are constantly observing the adult leaders and their interactions with other adults (including other coaches, officials, parents, and spectators) and with other youth players.

Given the high value our society places upon education through youth sports, and the role that adults play in creating the lessons, it is important to understand how the leadership
characteristics and communication styles of adults impact the value and life skills development of the child participants. As today’s youth are the future caretakers of our society, it is imperative that we ensure that we, as today’s adults, are teaching lessons that have the collective best interests of society in mind.

Statement of the Problem

It is generally assumed that the adults we trust with teaching and coaching our children, and the adult spectators who come to watch our kids play, have the best interests of the children in mind. However, it is clear that the leadership and communication actions of a significant portion of the adult controllers of youth sports programs are not consistent with the best interests of the children and the greater society. Acts of physical violence, verbal abuse, poor sportsmanship, and win-at-all-costs attitudes perpetrated by adults appear to be increasingly pervasive in youth sports settings (Collins, 2010). Adult actions of this nature in youth sports, commonly referred to as “unsportsmanlike conduct,” generally do not communicate positive lessons to the children.

Realizing the potential impacts of the negative lessons often communicated by adults in youth sports, efforts have been undertaken on many fronts to improve sportsmanship levels in youth programs through sportsmanship and pro-social communication and behavioral training for adult participants. A significant number of studies undertaken to assess the success of such improvement programs have indicated that education programs do increase sportsmanship (e.g., Arthur-Banning, Paisley, & Wells, 2007; Weiss, 2008; Wells, Ellis, Paisley, & Arthur-Banning, 2005). However, there appears to be a dearth of studies directly addressed the impacts of such sportsmanship improvement upon the youth participants. This study seeks to address this relative
information gap through an investigation of the differences in developmental aspects of youth participants in leagues with and without adult communication and leadership training.

Definition of Terms

Adults – Persons who are both at least eighteen years of age, or older, and who have graduated from or are otherwise no longer attending high school.

League A – This term represents the division of the study population that administers communication training focused on sportsmanship and pro-social behavior modeling to adults involved with the youth football program. This league also maintains playing rules designed to minimize win-at-all-costs attitudes and promote a kid-centered focus for the program.

League B – This term represents the division of the study population that does not have specific programs designed to educate adults about sportsmanship communication, pro-social behavior modeling, or kid-centered youth sports philosophies.

Youth – Persons aged eighteen and younger who are not otherwise considered to be an adult as that term is defined above.

Youth Sports Programs – This term refers to scholastic and non-scholastic sponsored sports programs for youth participants at the high school level and below.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter One has briefly introduced the topic of adult sportsmanship and communication behaviors and their link to the emotional development of youth sports participants. Chapter Two provides a discussion of a communication theory and ethical issues surrounding sportsmanship in youth sports settings, and presents an in-depth examination of the literature that frames this thesis. Chapter Three delineates the scope and methodology of the research conducted for this study. Chapter Four outlines the data collected
during the study and provides an analysis with respect to the research questions. The thesis concludes in Chapter Five with a summary, implications for future research and current practice, and study conclusions.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Theoretical and Ethical Basis

There are a considerable number of theoretical perspectives that can be applied to the evaluations of interactions between people involved in youth sports activities. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effects of socialization messages delivered by adults on the life skills development of the child participants in youth sports programs. As such, this literature review will evaluate interactions between the adult and youth participants from a social cognitive theoretical perspective.

*Social Cognitive Theory*

Derived from his earlier work on social learning theory, Bandura’s social cognitive theory (1986) downplays, but does not eliminate, the importance that environmental factors have upon human development. Rather, social cognitive theory views people “as self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting and self-regulating rather than as reactive organisms shaped and shepherded by environmental forces” (Pajares, 2002, p.1). Bandura (1986) proposes that an individual’s regular interpretations of their own behaviors in specific situations provide input that can alter their environments and their personal characteristics. Subsequent behavior is then affected by the adjusted personal principles developed through this self-evaluative process. This self-reflection allows people to engage in a sagacious critique of their experiences and feelings in an effort to alter their thinking, personal beliefs, and consequent behavioral choices. Self-reflection, thus, is a central aspect of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986; Pajares, 2002). The personal feelings and principles developed through this self-reflection are termed self-efficacy. In short, self-efficacy is the confidence one has in their own abilities to succeed at a specific task in a specific context.
While Bandura’s (1977) self-efficacy is generally viewed as specific to a singular task, Harter’s (1982) self-competence is normally used in reference to personal confidence assessments on a broader scale. High self-efficacy in a specific task or environment can act as a springboard toward higher self-efficacy in tangentially related tasks. As the number of similar high self-efficacy situations increases for an individual, there is the likelihood of achieving an elevated level of self-competence for the broader cognitive area.

The Ethics of Sportsmanship

The literature review that follows will demonstrate that lessons learned through participation in youth sports provide for significant moral, physical, and social development. However, organized youth sports programs provide only an environment for development and learning and do not provide the actual lessons (Arthur-Banning, Wells, Baker, & Hegreness, 2009; Eitzen, 2003). It is the responsibility of the adults involved in the programs as coaches, parents, officials, and spectators, to ensure that a proper atmosphere is established and that proper messages are communicated in order to encourage strong positive development among the youth participants (Arthur-Banning et al., 2009; Smith & Smoll, 1997; Weiss & Petlichkoff, 1989). This necessary “proper atmosphere” for positive development is what is commonly referred to as sportsmanship (Kassing & Barber, 2007). Sportsmanship is clearly a concept that is important to society, as indicated by the copious amounts of recent literature devoted to study of various aspects of the subject. This interest is not a modern phenomenon. In a 1964 essay entitled *Sportsmanship as a moral category*, James Keating quotes former Rutgers University president Dr. Robert C. Clothier as having paraphrased Andrew Fletcher in this way: “I care not who makes the laws or even writes the songs if the code of sportsmanship is sound, for it is that which controls conduct and governs the relationships between men” (p. 25). Keating goes on to note the
high regard for sportsmanship of such historic figures as former president Herbert Hoover, Nobel
Prize winning author Albert Camus, former Columbia University President Lyman Bryson, and
professor Charles W. Kennedy of Princeton University. Though it is perhaps his quote of Pope
Pius XII that best emphasizes the place of sportsmanship in the moral and ethical patchwork of
society:

From the birthplace of sport came also the proverbial phrase ‘fair play’; that knightly and
courteous emulation which raises the spirit above meanness and deceit and dark
subterfuges of vanity and vindictiveness and preserves it from the excesses of a closed
and transient nationalism. Sport is the school of loyalty, of courage, of fortitude, of
resolution and universal brotherhood (p.25).

While the idea of sportsmanship is certainly not foreign to most, the literature generally
provides only anecdotal examples of good and bad sportsmanship rather than concrete
definitions of what sportsmanship is, or is not. Sportsmanship is more of an esoteric rather than a
discrete concept. Arnold (1983) postulates that sportsmanship is an ethical construct marked by
three synergistic perspectives: attention to social union, the promotion of pleasure, and altruism.

From a social union perspective, sportsmanship requires that participants go beyond simple
compliance with the rules of the game in the interest of what is fair for all participants. The
promotion of pleasure aspect is concerned not just with being fair, but with promoting acts that
allow all parties to enjoy their participation. The altruism facet implies that choosing behaviors
that promote social union and the pleasure of participation in sports is morally correct. Using
Arnold’s construct, specific behaviors can be classified as either sportsmanlike or
unsportsmanlike when evaluated for altruistic, social union, and promotion of pleasure
characteristics.
At their core, sportsmanlike behaviors are morally and ethically based actions that, with their focus on altruism, social union, and the promotion of pleasure, are consistent with conduct required to promote positive social development. This concept is of great significance to the discussion of social cognitive theory and adult communication influences on child self-efficacy in sport that fills the remainder of this chapter.

The Literature

Background

Each year between 30 and 40 million American youth participate in organized sports (Center for Kids First, n.d.). Considerable research has concluded that involvement in organized sports holds numerous potential benefits for children. The benefits suggested by the literature tend to be focused on positive physical and emotional development, and include opportunities for self-exploration, physical skill improvement, the development of social bonds and skills, peer group connections, teamwork skills, and positive relationships with adult role models (Hansen, Larson & Dworkin, 2003; Kremer-Sadlik & Kim, 2007). The personal development and life skills achieved through organized sports participation are vastly important to future success and will carry with a child well into their adult life.

While popular perception derived from mass media indicates that victory is of primary importance to satisfaction in sports participation, the literature indicates that winning is not a driving force in youths’ participation decisions, and is not directly correlated to enjoyment of the team sports experience. In fact, investigations have shown that youth coaches often rate the exaggerated importance adults place on winning as one of the elements most incongruent with the goals of the players (Cumming, Smoll, Smith, & Grossbard, 2007; Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes, & Pennisi, 2006; Meisterjahn & Dieffenbach, 2008). Although youth players do place
some emphasis on the outcome of contests, studies have shown that the primary goals for
participation are more likely to include: having fun, developing competence in sport skill sets,
affiliation and socialization with peer groups, and physical fitness. Continued participation is
more closely linked to achievement of these personal goals than any other aspect of team sports

It is expected that the longer children are exposed to a team sports environment, the more
likely they are to benefit from the potential for life skills development as identified by the
previous research. As continued participation is ultimately dependent on youth’s achievement of
their own personal participation goals, successful realization of the potential for life skills
enhancement requires the establishment of an environment conducive to fun, affirmative
socialization, and positive physical skills development.

With between two and four million coaches, tens of thousands of league managers and
game officials, and potentially tens of millions of parents and spectators involved each year,
adult participation in youth sports is significant. As the ultimate authorities and controllers of the
youth sports society, adults have the ability to utilize their communication techniques to exert
enormous influence over the development of youth players both in and outside of the youth
sports social setting. It is, therefore, the adults, who through the messages they communicate to
the children, dictate the environment of youth sports.

Self Efficacy

Self-efficacy can be defined as an individual’s personal beliefs concerning their
competence to develop and implement strategies to achieve their personal goals. Self-efficacy
beliefs are vitally important as those beliefs strongly influence personal choices and actions, and
form the foundations for emotional reactions. Humans generally gravitate toward situations
where they feel they have the best chance to succeed (i.e., have higher self-efficacy) and attempt to avoid circumstances where expectations for accomplishment are low (i.e., low self-efficacy). Self-efficacy levels not only act as a tipping point for determining when an individual will take part in an activity, but also affect the level of success a person is likely to obtain. Self-efficacy beliefs are a central yardstick of learning that occurs through communications within the social cognitive theory model. The development of high levels of self-efficacy in youth promotes sound decision making skills and work ethics and is an essential developmental factor that helps equip children to make strong, positive choices on such important adolescent topics as drug and alcohol use and sexual behavior, among others, in the face of often overwhelming societal pressures (Bandura, 1977).

In the social cognitive model, there are four central communication channels from which individuals glean information that directly influences the development of self-efficacy beliefs: a person’s own efforts toward mastering a task (“mastery experience”), observations of the messages communicated by the behaviors and actions of others (“vicarious experiences”), personal experiences with positive or negative reinforcement communicated by other members of groups to which an individual belongs (“social persuasions”), and an individual’s acute and chronic physiological states (“physiological states”) (Bandura, 1986). Of these four, vicarious experience and social persuasions are the elements most intertwined with communications exchanged between adults and children in youth sports environments.

*Vicarious experience*

Vicarious experience involves observing the actions, behaviors, successes, and failures of models as they participate in situations in which the observer plans to or is already participating. Information gained from repeated vicarious experience provides valuable input for developing
strategies for engagement in new or challenging tasks and facilitates the development of task specific goals and measures for determining when those goals have been successfully accomplished (Gould & Weiss, 1981; Lirgg & Feltz, 1991). Vicarious experience is particularly important for individuals with low confidence in their abilities, or little or no prior familiarity with a particular situation or undertaking, as it helps build a foundation for participation in unfamiliar or uncertain activities and provides assurances that it is possible to accomplish difficult tasks. Individuals with high self-efficacy and persons with extensive prior experience can also benefit from vicarious learning, as their observations of models they perceive to have a higher degree of success can lead to new or improved strategies for increasing their own levels of achievement (Bandura, 1986; Feltz, Short, & Sullivan, 2008; Pajares, 2002).

While behavioral modeling in general is important, vicarious experiences tend to be more influential the more closely an observer associates him or herself with the model being observed. Observing the successes or failures of a model that an individual closely identifies with is more likely to have an impact upon self-efficacy than observations of models with disparate attributes. While general similarities between the observer and model are important, similarities in performance, socially relevant experience, and context specific knowledge tend to be more influential than similarities based solely upon physical characteristics such as gender, age, or race (Feltz et al., 2008; George, Feltz, & Chase, 1992; Pajares, 2002; Weiss, McCullagh, Smith, & Berlant, 1998).

Although vicarious experiences gained from observing successful role models can have positive impacts upon self-efficacy, it is important to note that vicarious experiences can also have negative impacts. Observing repeated failures of a chosen model, and the model’s own reactions to those failures, can result in a lowering of the observer’s estimation of their own
ability or desire to achieve such goals. As such, an individual’s choice of role models can significantly influence the path his or her life may follow (Bandura, 1986; Pajares, 2002).

**Social persuasion**

Social persuasions generally take the form of ad-hoc verbal or non-verbal feedback, planned evaluative communications, and other reactions to performance by members of a common social setting. Social persuasion plays an important part in self-efficacy development in that it provides direct feedback to individuals on the socially held beliefs in their ability to achieve a given goal, and the perceived quality of their efforts toward that goal. In a youth sports setting, persuasions are commonly communicated by adult groups consisting of parents, spectators, coaches, and officials. To truly have positive effects, well thought out persuasions should nurture an individual’s belief in their skills and abilities, suggest that established goals are reasonable and attainable, and provide constructive direction for improvement. Even as such positive social persuasions can serve as compelling promoters of confidence and empowerment, facetious, flippant, or negative persuasions can have possibly even greater influence toward weakening self-efficacy beliefs (Feltz et al., 2008; Pajares, 2002). Concerning unrealistic expectations delivered through facetious persuasions, Bandura (1986) comments, “the raising of unrealistic beliefs of personal competence only invites failures that will discredit the persuaders and will further undermine the recipient's perceived self-efficacy” (p. 400).

While social persuasion is only one component of self-efficacy development, it may take on added significant in youth sports settings as many members of the adult persuasory groups function not only as social persuaders, but are role models for vicarious learning. By virtue of their position as central authority figures and primary sources of socially contextual knowledge, coaches in particular can have a significant impact on young athletes’ self-efficacy beliefs. The
methods coaches choose when delivering pre-game speeches, performance evaluations, team and individual expectations, and acknowledgments of players’ actions can have dramatic impacts on individual and team efficacy (Feltz et al., 2008; Vargas-Tonsing, 2009; Vargas-Tonsing & Bartholomew, 2006; Vargas-Tonsing, Myers, & Feltz, 2004). With their role as primary care givers and the central role models in the day to day lives of children, parents are also sources of significant social persuasion. The persuasions imparted by parents in a youth sports setting are not only in play during the event, but persist into non-sports contexts of the parent-child relationship. Parental persuasions that occurred in the sports setting are likely to be recounted away from the sports setting or adapted for use in other, not necessarily similar, situations.

*Adult influences on youth self-efficacy in sport*

Consistent with the postulations of Bandura’s social cognitive theory, a significant volume of literature indicates that a strong influential link exists between general messages communicated in behaviors modeled by adults and the actions of young people who see the adults as persons of significant importance, or role models, to their life (e.g., Arteaga, Chen, & Reynolds, 2010; Arthur-Banning et al., 2009; Dix, Phau, & Pougnet, 2010; Greenberg & And, 1995; Hurd, Zimmerman, & Xue, 2009; May, 2001). This is particularly true for parent-child relationships and behaviors in situations involving such social problems as drug and alcohol use, smoking, and general delinquency (Adams, 2006; Leadbeater, Foran, & Grove-White, 2008; Simons, Simons, & Conger, 2004; Yu & Perrine, 1997). Significant connections have also been made between the behavior of adults filling the specific roles of coach, referee, and/or parent/spectator and the experiences of youth sports participants during sporting events (Arthur-Banning et al., 2009; Arthur-Banning et al., 2007; Brustad, 1988; Feltz et al., 2008; Kassing & Infante, 1999; Shields, LaVoi, Bredemeier, & Power, 2007). Bakker (1992) takes the adult-youth
relationship in sports one step further and suggests that youth sports coaches may play a particularly important part in developing youth’s views concerning drug and alcohol use.

A considerable portion of the literature indicates that coaches can directly influence self-efficacy development through the vicarious learning experiences they present while communicating with players, parents, officials, and opposing teams (e.g., Feltz et al., 2008; Vargas-Tonsing, 2009; Vargas-Tonsing, & Bartholomew, 2006). Coaches are often viewed with great respect by youth players; often much more so than are coaches of older or adult sports participants. As such, the actions modeled by coaches are normally observed quite keenly by younger participants (e.g., Bakker, 1992; Ciairano, Gemelli, Molinengo, Musella, Rabaglietti, & Roggero, 2007). The social persuasions coaches offer can be particularly powerful in several respects. Of primary importance are the goals and expectations, and definitions of successful participant attainment, communicated by coaches during instruction periods, pre and post game speeches, and in-game situations. Feedback given to players on their efforts in practices and games also serves as valuable input for helping participants judge their progress toward task mastery. Coaches also have the ability to manage, to a degree, the physiological state of their players through careful choice and design of practice drills and techniques that may or may not impart undue physical or emotional stresses to the players (Bodey, Schaumleffel, Zakrajsek, & Joseph, 2009; Danish, 2002; Fraser-Thomas, & Côté, 2009; Miller, 2004; Oliver, Hardy, & Markland, 2010).

Parents and adult spectators play a slightly different role in youth sport self-efficacy development. Because the youth participants are not under their direct control while in the youth sports social environment (e.g., at practices, games, or team events), spectator parent and adult influences over self-efficacy is similar in nature to, but somewhat more limited than that of,
coaches. Adult youth sports spectators tend not to be casual sports fans and are more likely to be participant parents, grandparents, other relatives, neighbors, or other community members to whom the players ascribe specific significance. As such, the messages communicated by spectators are likely to be more closely monitored by youth participants than are spectator actions at events for older players. Spectator behaviors are the primary contributor to the background environment at youth sporting events (Arthur-Banning et al., 2009; Gould et al., 2006; Kanters, Bocarro, & Casper, 2008; Kassing, & Barber, 2007; Weiss, 2008). Additionally, by virtue of their primary caregiver role, parent influences can extend far beyond the youth sports environment. Parents have the ability to impart social persuasions outside the sports social setting that can either enhance or detract from the social learning taking place during game and practice sessions. Further, the actions and efforts of children in pursuit of goals in the youth sports social setting are often extrapolated by parents to situations far beyond the bounds of sport.

The established role of adults as sports officials is to manage contests in an effort to provide for player safety, ensure fair play, and promote sportsmanship in an altruistic manner. Ideally, sports officials will exhibit integrity, fairness, and professionalism and should be beyond moral reproach in the implementation of their game management duties. Officials can be viewed by youth players as role models in much the same way that police officers and firefighters are in the non-sports world. The examples sports officials provide and the messages they communicate in the administration of the game and dealings with coach, player, and spectator groups provide valuable feedback to youth participants on how integrity and fairness should be expressed.
Poor sportsmanship and self-efficacy

In a 2005 national survey of adults involved in community-based youth sports programs for children ages 6-14 conducted by the Citizenship Through Sports Alliance, youth athletic programs across the United States, as a whole, scored extremely poorly in areas of child-centered philosophy (Grade of D), health and safety (C+), and parental behavior/involvement (D) (Citizenship Through Sports Alliance, 2005). The survey specifically found that youth sports organizations in general have become significantly less focused on the experiences and goal achievement of child participants in favor of a more adult-centered focus on issues such as winning at all costs and striving for the largest possible margins of victory. The study also noted a considerable problem with unrealistic goal setting by parents for children and a significant level of adult unsportsmanlike activities that fail to promote the development of the child participants.

CTSA’s findings are supported by a significant volume of literature (e.g., Arthur-Banning et al., 2009; Collins, 2010; Kassing & Barber, 2007; Omli & LaVoi, 2009; Shields et al., 2007) that details how adult spectators, parents, and team personnel can frequently be observed shouting instructions to players and loudly disagreeing with officials’ or coaches’ decisions during youth sporting events. Often the adults’ messages are delivered with a communication style that appears to completely disregard the potential impacts upon the recipients. Other acts generally deemed unsportsmanlike, such as physical altercations, verbal threats of violence, projection of blame for failures, and obscene language and gestures are also routinely seen in youth sports social settings. Studies have shown that most adults generally view the messages communicated by their behaviors as positive and sportsmanlike encouragement for or in defense of their players and team. However, research also indicates that, on many occasions, the adults’
views of their own actions are incongruent with the interpretations of other adults or the youth players (Kassing & Barber, 2007; Meisterjahn & Dieffenbach, 2008). Often what is viewed by parent/spectators as encouraging to or protective of their team and players is received by others as quite unsportsmanlike or abusive. Omli and LaVoi (2009) have categorized unsportsmanlike behaviors from parent/spectators as background anger. Their study found that a significant proportion of youth sports players and coaches reported recognizing background anger during contests. Omli and LaVoi further note that “some parents may dismiss such behavior as a benign part of the game, failing to realize that, collectively, parents can create a perfect storm in youth sport – a storm that may adversely affect the experience, well-being, and performance of youth sport participants” (2009, p. 253).

An additional aspect of adult behavior that is often overlooked is the pressuring of young athletes to participate in a sport, perform better during a contest, or complete extra practice outside of organized play. The literature indicates that what many parents may interpret as encouragement may be perceived by youth players as overbearing pressure to perform that can significantly reduce the players ability and desire to reach their own participation goals (Gould et al., 2006; Hellstedt, 1990; Kanters et al., 2008; Weiss, 2008). Actions of this nature from parents are generally conveyed with negative social persuasions and can be detrimental to self-efficacy.

Unsportsmanlike and non-child centered behavior is certainly not limited to parents and spectators. The same 2005 CTSA study that exposed problems with parent groups also assigned a grade of C- to coaches. On his website Current Bad Acts, Donald Collins (2010) maintains a running list of noteworthy incidences of poor sportsmanship in youth athletics. A significant number of the entries on Collins’ site concern negative messages communicated by the actions of coaches. While coach behavior modeling does not typically extend beyond the youth sports
environment, as does parent modeling, the impacts of a coach’s behaviors upon child self-efficacy development can be profound. By virtue of their position as respected authority figures and the ultimate arbiters of on-field success or failure, as noted previously in this chapter, the actions of coaches is closely monitored by the child participants. Negative acts from such role models can often be more influential on self-efficacy development than positive acts (Bandura, 1986; Pajares, 2002). By focusing predominantly on win-at-all-costs messages in their practice methods and game communications with players and other adults, coaches can unwittingly contribute to increases in the factors that detract from player self-efficacy (Ciairano et al., 2007; Feltz, & Magyar, 2006).

As noted previously, self-efficacy development is sensitive to negative communication and social cues. General unsporting behavior; background anger; poor role model behavior; negative coach, parent and sports official persuasions; unrealistic physical practice designs; and win-at-all-costs philosophies provide copious fodder for degrading youth player self-efficacy.

*Good sportsmanship and self-efficacy*

While the literature lays clear the effects of unsportsmanlike activity upon child self-efficacy development, the positive impacts of good sportsmanship and the promotion of prosocial adult behavior messaging is also clear. As previously noted, sportsmanlike behaviors are focused on altruism, social union, and the promotion of pleasure among participants. These central tenets of sportsmanship are consistent with the elements described by Bandura (1986) as essential to the promotion of increased self-efficacy. In support of this position, a wealth of literature promoting specific coaching and parental involvement strategies and behaviors (e.g., Arthur-Banning et al., 2007; Arthur-Banning et al., 2009; Ciairano et al., 2007; Feltz et al., 2008; Feltz & Magyar, 2006; Smith & Smoll, 1997; Wells et al., 2005) clearly indicates that actions
and communications that meet the definition of sportsmanship, as outlined earlier in this chapter, are prerequisites for creating sports environments that positively impact child development.

In spite of the rather dire portrait of adult involvement in youth sports currently painted by the literature and the general media (e.g., Collins, 2010); there are a significant number of positive adult role models filling coach, parent, and referee positions in youth sports environments. In addition, considerable research has been conducted into developing strategies to improve the sportsmanship behaviors of adults involved in youth sports. In a 2005 paper entitled *Development and evaluation of a program to promote sportsmanship in youth sports*, Wells et al., outlined the potential benefits of educational programs designed to promote increased sportsmanship through pro-social behavioral modeling. The authors proposed that both adult and child participants would be more likely to act in a pro-social (i.e., sportsmanlike) manner toward individuals who have done so to them. This concept was further developed by suggesting that coaches, officials, and parents could be trained to exhibit pro-social behaviors during sporting events that would, in turn encourage other participants to respond in a similar fashion. Their proposals were supported by the works on general pro-social behavior by Bar-Tal (1976), Bierhoff (2002), Reykowski, (1982), and others. Works by Arthur-Banning et al. (2007), Weiss (2008), and Wells et al. (2005), which essentially followed up on the concept of sportsmanship education for adults, confirmed that such programs do in fact significantly increase the positive atmosphere of youth sporting environments. However, while more positive atmospheres have been shown to be conducive to increases in context sensitive self-efficacy, literature detailing the results of studies designed to assess the broader impacts of such programs on child development is somewhat thin.
Self-efficacy versus self-competence

Self-efficacy and self-competence are both related to an individual’s own perception of their abilities. Self-efficacy is generally viewed as one’s confidence in their abilities to be successful at a specific task in a specific social environment (Bandura, 1977). Harter’s (1982) idea of self-competence is a similar in concept to self-efficacy, but is normally used in reference to personal confidence assessments on a much broader scale. A review of a significant volume of literature indicates that the concept of self-efficacy is often used in research in a wider, less task-specific approach than perhaps advocated by Bandura (Gano-Overway, Newton, Magyar, Fry, Kim, & Guivernau, 2009; Henk & Melnick, 1995; Wilkinson, 2004). While even this more open interpretation of self-efficacy still stops short of the definition of self-competence, the expansion is nonetheless useful in relating social cognition and self-efficacy levels in youth sports participants to the attainment of physical and emotional developmental benefits available through sports, as suggested by the literature (Hansen et al., 2003; Kremer-Sadlik & Kim, 2007).

High self-efficacy in a specific task or environment can act as a springboard toward increased baseline self-efficacy in tangentially related tasks (Bandura, 1986; Bong, 1996). For example, an athlete that is proficient and confident in his ability to run fast in the sport of football may transfer some of that confidence to his initial feelings about similar skills required in a sport in which he has never competed, such as cross-country. Likewise, a player who receives repeated positive social persuasions from peers in the sporting environment will likely experience an increase in their self-efficacy for socialization in that setting, and a corresponding increase in baseline self-efficacy for making friends in unfamiliar settings. As the number of similar high self-efficacy situations increases for an individual, there is the likelihood of a corresponding elevated self-competence level for broader cognitive areas (Bong, 1996). A child
with multiple high self-efficacies in specific tasks in football may develop increased self-
competence for sport in general. A child with high self-efficacy for making friends in youth
sports may exhibit higher self-competence for making friends in general.

Summary and Hypothesis

Social cognitive theory provides a sound framework for elucidating the connections
between adult verbal and non-verbal communications in youth sports environments and the
subsequent impacts upon context specific youth player self-efficacy. The literature has indicated
that positive sportsmanship environments are highly conducive to increasing player self-efficacy
beliefs, while poor sportsmanship is normally detrimental. Additional studies have shown that
implementing adult sportsmanship education programs has a significant effect on improving the
atmosphere in youth leagues, which in turn can directly lead to increases in factors that
contribute to positive child self-efficacy development. The literature also indicates that positive
youth sports environments provide opportunities for general child life skills development more in
line with the broader concept of self-competence. (Hansen et al., 2003; Kremer-Sadlik & Kim,
2007). However, literature linking higher self-efficacy developed through youth sports to general
youth self-competence is relatively thin. As such, further investigation of potential links between
youth sport self-efficacy and general self-competence is warranted.

In an effort to contribute to the body of knowledge in this area, the following specific
hypothesis is proposed: Children that participate in youth sports programs that have established
adult education programs designed to increase sportsmanship and pro-social behavior modeling
will exhibit a higher degree of self-competence than participants in leagues with no such
emphasis on adult behaviors.
CHAPTER 3: SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

Scope of this Study

This study focuses on the potential effects of adult behaviors and communicated messages on the self-competence assessments of children. While adults can exert influence on the development of child self-competence in virtually every arena of life, this study specifically centers on those interactions in a youth football setting. The study compares the self-competence assessments of 8-10 year old youth football players in two different youth football leagues.

Methodology

The study began with the evaluation of multiple youth football leagues to identify two distinctly separate leagues from demographically similar general populations. The potential participant leagues were evaluated to determine the extent of any pro-social adult education programs within their organization. One football league with an established adult education program and one league without an adult education program were required for the study. Upon identification of leagues that fit the design parameters, participants in the 8-10 year old age groups were given a self-competence assessment.

Study population

Two independent youth football leagues from different suburban Columbus, Ohio, communities were chosen to participate in this study. The chosen football programs are located in communities that are in very close geographic proximity to each other, and are represented by the following demographic conditions: A resident population of approximately 30,000; a racial balance of 88% to 92% white, 2% to 3% black, 1% to 3% Asian, and 1.5% other; an average age of 35 to 37 years old; approximately 73% of residents living in family units (non-single residents); comparable crime rates; and a median annual household income between $65,000 and
$75,000 (United States Census Bureau, 2006). A pair of specific leagues was chosen for the similarities of the communities in which they are located, the lack of direct interaction between the leagues, and the divergence of their approaches toward adult behavior training.

Both leagues play by a nearly identical set of football rules, use referees from a common officiating pool, and have approximately the same number of total youth participants. The leagues do not play games against one another and, aside from the referees, there is generally no cross participation of adults in both leagues. Each league fields multiple teams in the 8-10 year old age range, with 15 to 20 players per team and a total participation of approximately 125 to 175 players per league. The actual number of participants in each league fluctuates slightly from year to year. However the difference in 8-10 year old participation figures between the leagues is normally small. All players participating on teams in the 8-10 year old age bracket in both leagues were targeted for inclusion in this study.

The leagues differ in their approach to adult pro-social training programs and participation goals designed to promote child development. League A has a long standing tradition of promoting the child developmental opportunities inherent in youth athletics, and routinely makes available pro-social education programs and materials to coach and parent groups. Annual certification through the National Youth Sports Coaches Association and participation in educational seminars focused on pro-social behaviors and child-centered coaching philosophies are required of all volunteers who will have direct contact with youth participants. In addition, League A enforces participation and sportsmanship rules that emphasize safe, fair, and fun play over win-at-all-costs attitudes. League A administrators report that, while unsporting attitudes do exist, relatively few noteworthy instances of poor adult sportsmanship are observed in any given season.
Conversely, with the exception of pre-season first-aid training, League B has no adult education programs for its volunteers. League B administrators have indicated that, while not universal, significant problems with poor adult sportsmanship and win-at-all-costs attitudes and coaching methods do exist within their organization. Further, although not by any means routine, there have been several instances in past years when it was necessary to summon law enforcement officials to League B’s youth athletic facility to deal with altercations between adults.

Data Collection

The research question posed at the outset of this thesis was operationalized for this study as an inter-league comparison of youth football players’ end-of-season assessments of self-competence in cognitive, social, physical, and general self worth areas. It was anticipated that a comparison of the results of the self-evaluation surveys could be used to help ascertain if a potential relationship exists between sportsmanship and pro-social training for adults and self-competence levels among youth participants.

Players within the target population from both leagues completed a confidential end-of-season written survey (see Appendix B) modeled on the Harter (1982) Perceived Competence Scale for Children. Data collection was performed in-person in a controlled setting, by team group, within one week of the end of the playing season. A total of fifteen separate survey sessions were conducted in the course of this study; nine for League A, and six for League B. Coaches, parents, and league personnel were asked to remain in an area separate from the space used to administer the survey in order to facilitate a sense of freedom among participants to answer survey questions without outside influence. At the beginning of each survey session, research staff explained to the participants the purpose of the survey and that their participation
was completely voluntary. Researchers also emphasized that the subjects’ answers would remain confidential, that there was no right or wrong answers, and that giving an honest opinion was what mattered most. To facilitate understanding of the survey questions, the survey administrator read each question to the group, offered an opportunity for respondents to ask clarifying questions, and then instructed participants to select their answer before moving on to the next question. Each survey session lasted between 15 and 20 minutes.

The survey instrument (see Appendix B) consisted of a total of 28 fill-in-the-dot style multiple-choice questions designed to evaluate the participants’ self assessment of their competence in cognitive, social, physical, and general self-worth domains. There were seven questions on the survey for each of the specific domains. Each question presented four possible answers, and all questions were presented in Harter’s “structure alternative format” (Figure 1.) designed to counter the tendency, found in Harter’s original 1978 scale, for respondents to give “socially appropriate” responses (Harter, 1982).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Really true for me</th>
<th>Sort of true for me</th>
<th>Some kids are usually chosen first for games</th>
<th>But</th>
<th>Other kids are chosen later for games</th>
<th>Sort of true for me</th>
<th>Really true for me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
<td>But</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>Some kids need lots of time to answer questions</td>
<td>But</td>
<td>Other kids can figure answers out quickly</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1.* Sample questions, presented in Harter’s “structure alternative format,” from survey instrument used in this study.

The questions were scored on a 4-point ordinal scale with a value of 1 indicating a low perceived competence level, and a value of 4 indicating a higher perceived competence. Respondents were not shown the point values of each potential answer. Consistent with Harter’s design, survey questions were arranged to ensure that no questions from the same domain
appeared consecutively and that no more than three consecutive items were keyed in the same direction. The survey was constructed in this manner to reduce the tendency for answers to one question to build a foundation for answering the questions that followed. Basic demographic information, such as player age and playing experience, was also collected as part of the survey.

Validity and Reliability

*Construct validity*

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 has established that youth self-efficacy beliefs derived from sports participation can be attributed in large part to the behaviors of the adults that create, organize, and administer the youth sports programs. Additionally, the literature review detailed how adult training programs designed to promote pro-social behaviors contribute to conditions conducive to increased youth self-efficacy. Further, it has been noted that it is possible that increases in specific self-efficacy beliefs can translate into increases in general self-competence. This study seeks to establish a link between programs designed to promote pro-social adult behaviors in youth football leagues and the self-competence levels of the youth participants.

This study employed pen and paper based multiple choice surveys to assess youth participants’ perception of their achievement of the participation goals outlined in Chapter 2. Multiple choice surveys have been utilized in numerous research projects and are commonly accepted methods for assessing research subjects’ personal evaluations. Among the strengths of multiple choice surveys is the ability for researchers to minimize instrument reliability concerns by establishing pre-defined response choices. The instrument used in this study was based on Harter’s Perceived Competence Scale for Children (1982) and was designed to assess the self-competence of study participants. Harter’s method for assessing self-competence has been
thoroughly tested and evaluated, and has been shown to exhibit a high degree of validity, reliability, and stability for use in assessing children’s self-perceptions in cognitive, social, physical, and general self-worth realms (e.g., Feltz & Brown, 1984; Lee, Super, & Harkness, 2003; Trew, Scully, Kremer, & Ogle, 1999; Vandenplas-Holper, Roskam, & Fontaine, 2010). Examples of survey questions can be found previously in this chapter in Figure 1. The environment in which the survey was administered was controlled, as noted in the data collection portion of this chapter, in an attempt to eliminate outside influences and further enhance the reliability of the results.

Given the conclusions of the studies cited in Chapter 2 concerning adult behaviors and factors related to self-efficacy/self-competence levels, as well as the extensive work completed by Harter and others on developing self-competence measuring instruments such as the one used here, the construct of this research is felt to be sound.

**Internal Validity**

While the data collection procedures employed in this research are sound, as supported by previously cited works, the construct of the study did not allow for complete control of all variables. Several youth football programs were evaluated for inclusion in this study. The programs ultimately selected for this research were chosen based on their demographic likeness, similarity of player eligibility rules (i.e., age restrictions, player groupings, etc.), close geographic proximity, and limited league interactions (i.e., little or no sports focused cross-contact between adult and youth participants). As noted previously, self-efficacy and self-competence can be influenced by a number of factors beyond the sports environment. While great care was taken to ensure the sampled communities were as homogenous as possible, there was simply no way to control every variable that might influence the self-competence
assessments of the child participants. To address this concern and blunt the potential impacts to
the validity and reliability of this study, the population samples from each league included as
many players as possible from several teams in the target leagues. This increased, diverse sample
should serve to enhance the validity and reliability of the study results. Repeating this study
multiple times using other youth football programs with similar demographic conditions can
further increase the reliability and validity of the results.

External validity

Considerable research, as outlined in Chapter 2, indicates that adult educational efforts
designed to improve the sportsmanship atmosphere of youth sporting events contribute
significantly to increased youth participant self-efficacy. The goal of this study is to determine if
such self-efficacy promoting conditions also contribute to increased self-competence. With the
exception of the 15 to 20 minute survey period following the football season, this research
resulted in no intrusion upon the real world setting of the study population. The self-efficacy
promoting adult education programs, playing rules, and general competitive environments, or
lack thereof, of the communities involved in the study were not modified in any way for this
study. In addition, neither community was contacted about participation in this study until their
respective playing seasons were already under way. The groups chosen for this project
represented a very common, suburban Midwest American demographic. As such, the results of
this study should carry significant validity for application in large portions of the United States.
To further increase the validity, this study should be repeated for demographic areas disparate to
those included here.
Data analysis

Responses for each league were compared by overall study population, respondent age, and by years of football playing experience. Independent subscale (also referred to as “domain”, see Appendix B) means and variances were calculated, by league, for each grouping. A one-way ANOVA was used to determine if significant differences (p < .05) existed between league subscale means for each respondent grouping. A one-way ANOVA was appropriate for this analysis as there were only two data sets to compare for each subscale and group.
CHAPTER 4: THE STUDY

Results of the Study

A total of 160 completed surveys were collected during the study’s fifteen individual survey sessions. There were 71 responses from nine different teams in League A, and 89 responses from six teams in League B. For the combined surveys, respondent ages ranged from eight to eleven years old, while football playing experience varied from one to seven years. A summary of the age and playing experience distribution of respondents by league is available in Tables 1 and 2. No additional participant demographic information was collected in the course of this study.

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years Old</th>
<th>League A Respondents</th>
<th>League B Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years Played</th>
<th>League A Respondents</th>
<th>League B Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data analysis

General study population

Survey responses for the general study population were scored, aggregated by subscale, and averaged to yield composite subscale means and variances for each league. Item means for all subscales in both leagues, as detailed in Table 3, generally fall away from the extreme scale endpoints and display a variance hovering around 1, indicating a lack of ceiling and/or floor effects and adequate survey item variability (Everitt & Skrondal, 2010; Vogt, 2005). Item means for both leagues were on par with what should be expected based on results obtained in Harter’s (1982) comprehensive work during the development of the competence scale for children.

Table 3.
Mean Subscale Scores and Variances by League for All Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub Scale</th>
<th>League A (N = 71)</th>
<th>League B (N = 89)</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>2.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>2.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * Significance at p < .05

When compared intra-league, composite means for the cognitive, physical, and social subscales for League A were significantly (p < .05) higher than were those for League B, indicating a higher reported level of cognitive, physical, and social self-competence for League A respondents. While not statistically significant (p = 0.15), League A’s mean score for the general subscale was also higher than the mean for League B and is noteworthy.

Intra-age comparisons

Survey responses were parsed and analyzed by participant age to produce intra-league comparisons of subscale means for each age group. Only the nine and ten-year-old age groups
were considered for this comparison as insufficient survey responses were received to allow for reliable analysis in the eight and eleven year old portions of the study population. For both the nine and ten-year-old populations, calculated means were again reliable for floor/ceiling effect and variability and, with the exception of the nine-year-old League A population, generally displayed consistency with the subscale mean predictions found in Harter’s (1982) previous work.

Consistent with the general study population, a comparison of intra-league subscale means for nine-year-olds revealed higher scores for the cognitive, physical, and social subscales among League A respondents than those for League B respondents (Table 4). While League A’s general subscale mean was not notably higher than League B’s among the overall study population, it is considerably higher when only nine-year-olds are considered. The differences among the means are much more significant for the nine-year-old group for all subscales than are those for the general study population, with all p values for the nine-year-old group calculating less than 0.00002.

In contrast to the outcomes for both the nine-year-old and general study populations, results for the ten-year-old group indicated no significant differences between subscale means for Leagues A and B (Table 4). While not found to be statistically significant, League A subscale means in all categories were, nonetheless, still higher than those for League B.
Table 4.

Mean Subscale Scores and Variances by League for 9 Year Old Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub Scale</th>
<th>Mean (League A N = 15)</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Mean (League B N = 29)</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>P-value*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 Year Olds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>&lt; 0.00001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>&lt; 0.00001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>&lt; 0.00001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>&lt; 0.00001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Year Olds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>0.188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>0.233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>0.283</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * Significance at p < .05

Years of experience comparison

Survey responses were also grouped and analyzed by reported years of football playing experience. As with the age grouped analyses, comparisons could not be made for all reported groupings due to insufficient responses at some grouping levels. Survey responses from both leagues fell predominantly within the two, three, and four years of experience levels, and were compared accordingly. Floor/ceiling effect and variability concerns again appeared not to be an issue with the data subsets.

League A means for the two years of experience group were significantly higher than League B means across all subscales (Table 5). This finding is consistent with the results for both the general study population and the nine-year-old grouping.

Similar to the results for the ten-year-old cluster, general, physical, and social subscale means for the three years of experience group showed remarkable intra-league similarity. However, in contrast to the ten-year-old group, means for the cognitive subscale players with
three years of experience showed a considerably significant difference in favor of League A \( (p = 0.002) \). Although the differences were only statistically significant for the cognitive subscale in this group, League A means for all subscales were still higher than those for League B.

The four years of experience comparison again showed, with the exception of the cognitive area, League A subscale means significantly higher than those for League B. Analysis for the cognitive subscale indicated a noteworthy, yet statistically insignificant \( (p = 0.13) \) difference in favor of League A (Table 5). While the results for this subset do appear consistent with other groupings within this study, League A means are significantly higher across the general, physical, and social subscales than are those for any other data grouping. This particular data subset may suffer from floor/ceiling and/or variability issues resulting from a relatively low number of survey responses \( (N = 8) \).
Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub Scale</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Years</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>0.0030*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.0005*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>0.0381*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.0003*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 Years</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>0.002*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>0.962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>0.325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>0.554</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>2.74</td>
<td>0.97</td>
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*Significance at p < .05

Discussion

In general, the results of the survey analysis indicate that a clear difference does exist between the self-competence ratings of players in League A and League B, with League A players exhibiting higher levels across all categories for the general study population. This is consistent with this study’s original prediction that youth players exposed to sports environments that exhibit a kid-centered focus established through pro-social behavioral training programs for adults, and the consequent higher levels of sportsmanship, would report increased levels of self-
competence in relation to players participating in leagues without such programs. While the general picture of a causal relationship between sportsmanship and youth football participant self-competence levels appears quite clear for the general study population, the relationship for individual age groupings is less so. The picture is also muddled with respect to the impact of exposure to divergent sportsmanship environments over time.

The effect of exposure on particular age groupings

Background anger was discussed at length in Chapter 2 as a central indicator of the prosocial behavior and sportsmanship environments in youth sports. De Arth-Pendley and Cummings (2002), and Omli and LaVoi (2009) indicated that coping mechanisms employed by children in response to background anger may vary between very young children and adolescents, but in any event result in consistent potential “long-term maladaptive reactions.” Nothing was noted in the literature that indicated self-competence level measurements arising from this study should vary based on age for children within a small age range. Considering this point, and the remainder of the literature, the results of the age group analysis were expected to show intra-league differences consistent with those for the general study population, with no appreciable age group differences within the same league. Respondents from both leagues ranged in age from eight to eleven years old. However, there were only sufficient numbers of respondents in each league to conduct an age based comparison for the nine and ten-year-old groups.

Consistent with the expectations for the age group analysis, subscale means for League B were stable across the nine and ten-year-old age groupings and were in line with League B means for the overall study population. However, the analysis revealed a significant difference in means for all subscales between the nine and ten-year-old age groups within League A. In fact,
League A means markedly decreased from the nine to the ten-year-old groups. The significant year to year decrease among League A respondents was unexpected and cannot be explained through the literature reviewed for this study. Among nine-year-old respondents, League A means were significantly higher across all subscales than were those for League B. This is in line with the original study predictions. Means comparisons for the ten-year-old group showed that, while League A means were still higher across all subscales, there were no statistically significant differences.

While there is a notable difference between the results for the nine and ten-year-old groups, the analytical data for this portion of the study are insufficient to unequivocally confirm or contradict the expected results. With data for only two age groups available, it cannot be determined if the decrease in means differences from the nine to ten-year-old groups is a true trend or an aberration in the data. In addition, the year to year decrease in means within League A is a peculiarity that was not expected and cannot be explained with the data available. As such, further research in this specific area, covering a greater range of ages, is warranted.

The effect of exposure over time

A review of previous studies lead to a further prediction that the gap between self-competence levels should increase the longer a particular group of players is exposed to the divergent pro-social conditions in each league. While this prediction appears to make sense based upon the literature, the results of the study are inconclusive as to the effect prolonged exposure to divergent pro-social environments has upon child self-competence.

Mean scores across all subscales for League B players in the experience groupings showed relatively little variation as exposure time increased. This indicates that continued exposure to low sportsmanship environments does not necessarily lead to decreases in youth
self-competence levels. In contrast, general, physical, and social subscale means for League A players showed a marked increase from the two to the four year experience levels, resulting in an increased self-competence gap between League A and B players when the two and four year groupings are compared. Accounting for only these two groupings it would appear that prolonged exposure to increased pro-social youth sports environments does indeed lead to greater self-competence levels among participants for the indicated subscales.

However, data from the three year experience grouping showed that, while still higher, League A means for the general, physical, and social subscales are not significantly different than those for League B. Only the League A cognitive mean remains significantly higher than the League B mean for this grouping. In addition, the data show a significant drop in self-competence levels among League A players from the two year to the three year experience groups. Further clouding the picture for experience based comparisons is the fact that the gap between cognitive subscale means for the leagues decreases each year from the two to the four year experience groups.

There are two primary factors that may account for the inconsistency of these results as compared with the projected outcome. First, the study collected only basic years of experience data from each respondent and did not gather information about the leagues in which that experience was gained. It is possible that a significant number of respondents did not gather their playing experience from only one league. If this is the case, respondent playing experiences gained from multiple leagues, operating with varying degrees of adult training programs and kid-focused environments, may have affected the respondents’ self-competence levels. Second, there were a higher total number of respondents in the three year experience grouping (57) than there were for the two (45) and four (21) year groups (Table 5). With only eight total respondents in
the League A four years of experience group and thirteen for League B, the results may suffer from floor/ceiling effects and variability problems.

The inconsistencies in the year to year results, and potential reliability issues due to small sample sizes and the inability to isolate playing experience to only one league, make drawing concrete self-competence trend conclusions from the experience based comparison inadvisable. However, the results of the overall experience based comparison are noteworthy and do show a significant increase in the self-competence gap over the entire playing experience range. Given this overall increase, the experience based aspect of this study warrants further research. The larger implications of the results of this study, with respect to social cognitive theory, are discussed below.
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Limitations of the Study

As with many applied research efforts, limitations existed within this study that may impact the extent to which the results can be extrapolated to more general populations. The primary limits of this study arise from a narrowly focused sample population. As detailed in Chapter 3, this study was conducted with a sample drawn from general populations that represent a very specific demographic segment of American society. As such, the applicability of the results may be limited with respect to disparate socioeconomic settings. In addition, while gender data was not specifically collected during the course of this study, the research staff noted that only one female participated in the survey. Given this lack of gender diversity, the applicability of the results found herein is limited with respect to female populations.

This research did not assess the quality or extent of adult sportsmanship and pro-social behavioral training programs for each league, but simply determined if a program did or did not exist as a criterion for inclusion in the study. In addition, it was not possible in this study to completely isolate training programs as the only element having an impact on player self-competence. The quality and content of the adult training programs, combined with variability in uncontrollable outside influences, may have impacted the results of this study.

Implications for Future Research

This study can be used as a springboard for additional research designed to further investigate the impacts of adult sportsmanship and pro-social communication training upon the self-competence of youth sports participants in many areas. Future researchers may wish to focus in one of three areas: diversifying this study to apply to more disparate populations and environments, identifying age and/or experience related trends, or investigating the impacts of
the quality of adult sportsmanship and pro-social behavioral training programs on youth participant self-competence.

With respect to diversity, this research was narrowly focused on youth football participants from a specific demographic segment. This very narrow focus leaves a significant information gap with respect to the applicability of the results found here to other conditions. Children from a wide range of socioeconomic and cultural environments participate in a myriad variety of sports well beyond football, and are subject to varying adult communication behaviors. In addition, football is traditionally an overwhelmingly male dominated sport, and so this study provides little insight into impacts upon females. Future researchers may seek to fill the information gap by repeating this research for the sport of football using different demographic criteria, or by conducting similar research within different sports environments and with differing mixes of male and female populations. This study, furthermore, had insufficient numbers of respondents in specific age and playing experience categories with which to draw concrete conclusions about age and experience related self-competence trends. Future researchers may wish to augment the results stated here with additional investigations focused on broadening the age and experience data available for drawing trending conclusions.

This study compared populations with and without adult sportsmanship communication and pro-social behavioral training programs, but did not address the quality or depth of such programs. The results of this study have shown that the simple presence of such training programs does appear to impact youth self-competence development. Future researchers may wish to investigate the effects of varying training programs quality and intensity upon youth self-competence development.
Implications for Current Practice

The results of this study indicate that adult training programs and a kid-centered program focus do have a positive effect of youth player self-competence levels. While the data was not conclusive for age and experience trends, there was nothing in the results to indicate any negative effects whatsoever related to the training programs. In addition, the literature review contained in Chapter Two indicates that adult education programs designed to improve sportsmanship do result in a more enjoyable, less violent atmosphere for all participants. Given the general benefits outlined in Chapter Two and the specific indicated by the results of this study, youth sports programs currently without adult training programs should endeavor to implement sportsmanship communication and pro-social behavior training. The results of this study were not comprehensive enough to indicate if changes should be made within organizations that have existing adult education programs.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed for this study demonstrated a significant link between lessons learned by children, and communication and behavior modeling by adults. With its focus on both direct (social persuasions) and indirect (vicarious learning) communications as a source for cognitive development, Bandura’s social cognitive theory provides a solid foundation for understanding this adult-child dynamic in the controlled youth sports context. Adults in youth sports programs generally fill all of the leadership and role model positions, and are responsible for delineating the boundaries of the sports social setting. Social cognitive theory would suggest that, by virtue of this all-controlling role, adults are the primary source for communicating the messages to child participants that drive the children’s context specific cognitive development.
The literature further indicates that the lessons taught by adults through the social cognitive model in youth sports can, and do, spill over into broader areas of the youth participant’s lives.

Understanding the critical role that adults in youth sports settings play in the cognitive development of youth players, the ethical construct of sportsmanship becomes vitally important. As detailed in Chapter Two, sportsmanship refers to morally and ethically based behaviors judged by the extent of their focus on altruism, social union, and the promotion of pleasure. Positive sportsmanship actions are generally more focused on altruism, social union, and the promotion of pleasure, and are consistent with conduct required to promote positive social development. Viewed in the context of the social cognitive model, positive sportsmanship actions and attitudes communicated and modeled by adults in youth sports settings should have a positive impact on youth participant cognitive development. Given this framework, youth sports environments that place an emphasis on positive sportsmanship communications from adults should be more conducive to constructive youth development than environments without such emphasis.

This research sought to test this theory through the comparison of self-competence levels in youth football players from leagues with and without an emphasis on adult sportsmanship communication and behavior modeling. The results of this study indicate that a significant positive correlation does exist between child participant self-competence levels and organizations that place an emphasis on adult sportsmanship communications and behaviors in youth football settings. This confirms the original hypothesis of this study.

In conclusion, the combination of social cognitive theory and the ethical construct of sportsmanship have potential application far beyond the rather limited world of youth sports. While the model identified here deals with children learning from adults in a specific context, it
would not be overreaching to infer that practicing good sportsmanship in other arenas or with other age groups (i.e., adult to adult) can yield similar results.
References


Appendix A

Gonzaga University Institutional Review Board
Letter of Project Approval
October 22, 2010

Nobuya Inagaki, Ph.D.
Department of Communication and Leadership
MSC 2616
Gonzaga University

Dear Nobuya,

I am writing on behalf of the Gonzaga Institutional Review Board, IRB, to notify you that the research proposal submitted by your graduate student, Bryan “Scott” Wilson, has been reviewed.

The research proposal, “The Effect of Adult Pro-Social Behavior Modeling on Child Self-Efficacy in Youth Football Programs” met the requirements for the Full Board Review status of the IRB. It was approved with the correction that the survey will be kept confidential, but is not anonymous. The IRB suggests that the researcher provide attention to potential self esteem loss for the students by offering an opportunity for further conversation and/or counseling.

We wish success as well as an optimal learning experience for Scott. We thank you for your support with his research.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
Deborah Booth, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

C: Scott Wilson
Appendix B

Survey Instrument
Sub-scale Assignment of Survey Questions

The survey instrument consists of a total of 28 fill-in-the-dot style multiple-choice questions designed to evaluate the participants’ self-assessment of their competence in cognitive, social, physical, and general self-worth domains (also referred to as “subscales”). Questions 1, 5, 9, 15, 18, 21, 25 were used to assess the cognitive; questions 4, 8, 12, 17, 20, 23, 28 for the general domain; questions 3, 7, 11, 13, 16, 22, 27 for the physical domain; and questions 2, 6, 10, 14, 19, 24, 26 for the social domain.
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<th>Age</th>
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<th>Sort of true for me</th>
<th>Sort of true for me</th>
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</table>

1. Some kids are good at school work but Other kids need more help with school work

2. Some kids have lots of friends but Some kids have fewer friends

3. Some kids struggle at sports but Other kids do very well in any sport

4. Some kids are not sure of themselves but Some kids are sure of themselves

5. Some kids do not like doing well in school but Other kids really like doing well in school

6. Some kids are really popular but Other kids are less popular

7. Some kids’ sports skills stay the same but Other kids get better at sports

8. Some kids want to change the way they are but Other kids are happy just as they are now

9. Some kids are just as smart as other kids but Other kids are not as smart as other kids

10. Some kids are very easy to like but Other kids take more time to like

11. Some kids do OK at new activities but Other kids do very well at new activities

12. Some kids feel good about the way they act but Other kids are not sure how they feel about how they act

13. Some kids are good enough at sports but Other kids need to get better at sports

14. Some kids like to do things alone but Other kids like to do things with other kids

15. Some kids can figure out answers quickly but Other kids need extra time to figure out answers

16. Some kids are always chosen first for games but Other kids are usually chosen later for games

17. Some kids wonder if they are doing the right things but Other kids are sure they do the right things

18. Some kids take lots of time to finish school work but Other kids finish school work quickly
| Really true for me | Sort of true for me | But | Other kids have an easy time making new friends | Really true for me | Sort of true for me | But | Other kids wonder if they are a good person | Really true for me | Sort of true for me | But | Other kids have to work hard to remember things | Really true for me | Sort of true for me | But | Other kids prefer to play | Really true for me | Sort of true for me | But | Other kids want to change | Really true for me | Sort of true for me | But | Other kids are not as important | Really true for me | Sort of true for me | But | Other kids understand what they read easily | Really true for me | Sort of true for me | But | Other kids are liked by most kids | Really true for me | Sort of true for me | But | Other kids have more trouble playing new games well | Really true for me | Sort of true for me | But | Other kids need to do things many times to get them right |