Original Article

A comparison between boys and girls about the motives for the participation in school sport

JORGE SOARES^{1,2}, HELIO ANTUNNES¹, ROLAND VAN DEN TILLAAR^{2,3}

¹ Department of Physical Education and Sports, University of Madeira, Funchal, PORTUGAL

² Research Centre for Sport, Health and Human Development, Vila Real, PORTUGAL

³ Department of Teacher Education of Nord Trøndelag University College, Levanger, NORWAY

Published online: September 30, 2013

(Accepted for publication July 20, 2013)

DOI:10.7752/jpes.2013.03050;

Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to identify the effect of gender on the motivations for the practice of competition in school sports. A stratified random sample was obtained (team/group) with a total of 722 boys and 595 girls participating. The questionnaire included three categories of motives for sport participation: social motives, sport competition motives and healthy motives. The results showed very positive scores for both genders with regard to the motives: fun and enjoyment, “I want to be physically healthy”, “I want to be part of a team” and “To improve my skills”. On the other hand “to be a sport star or sport champion”, “to be popular” and “I like competition” were more important for boys than girls. Girls prefer friendship and fitness and sociability. It was concluded that fun, enjoy playing and making friends should be objective to focus in school sports if we want that girls are motivated for participation.

Key words: School sport competition; Gender effects; Motivation.

Introduction

Studies in the field of motivation and gender show that boys and girls have different motivations and needs for sports (Azzarito and Solmon, 2009; Crosnoe, 2001; Daley and O’Gara, 1998; Meece, Glienke and Burg, 2006). Researchers also have emphasized the important role that context plays in reinforcing, strengthening, or diminishing gender differences. Whereas early theories of motivation depicted women as underachievers, later studies indicated that gender differences in causal attributions as well as in competency, value, and self-efficacy beliefs are domain-specific (Kilpatrick, Hebert and Bartholomew, 2005; Papageorgiou, Hassandra, and Hatzigeorgiadis, 2008). In general it was found that boys tend to have positive achievement-related beliefs in the areas of mathematics, science, and sports, while girls show more favourable motivation patterns in language, social activities, arts and reading (see also Meece, Glienke & Burg, 2006; Sit & Lindner, 2007).

Smith, Thurston, Green and Lamb (1997) showed that the reported levels and forms of participation in different sports and physical activities in extracurricular Physical Education of young people (15 and 16-year-olds) varied significantly and differentially according to gender and, to some extent, social class. Moreover, the school and the type of activities it has to offer to its pupils is considered a determining factor in participation in sports of mainly 15 and 16-year-old girls. Scraton (1990) and Martin (1998) discussed the ways in which school sport and physical education reproduce gender stereotypes and traditional gender role socialisation. They found that boys tend to value competition and improvement performance in sport, while girls tend to prefer social interaction and friendship. The social role of sport seems to influence more the personality of young boys and behaviour concerning sports popularity than the role of girls, since the latter tend to give more praise to physical appearance rather than to familiarity. Azzarito and Solman (2009) also pointed out that girls are more pressured to participate in “appropriate, feminine physical activities, especially if the practices in the physical education classroom are constructed as “male terrain” (i.e., sports-based practices). Girls may position themselves at the margins of these practices; consequently, they considered physical education as lacking meaning. According to the choices and preferences of adolescent girls the school sport should improve social activity and game-like and/or competitive. The activities with a strong social component were the most appealing to adolescent girls. Azzarito and Solman (2009) also found that if the adolescent girls are given the choice to interact with their peers, they will gladly do so. Even if the sport and physical activities were combined with a social activity, the girls were significantly more likely to choose the game-like than the competitive activity (Chase & Dummer, 1992; Prusak & Darst, 2002). Women are more motivated to participate in sport by intrinsic motives rather than extrinsic motives, e.g., female children participate in sport more for fun and to be with friends (Chantel, Guay,

Deberah-Martinouwe & Weiss, 1996; Wang & Liu, 2007). Hellandsig (1998) and Lauriola, Zelli, Calcaterra, Cherubine, and Spinelli (2004) also found a gender effect on motivation of young athletes according the sport activity. His findings found evidence to support the fact that females participated more for friendship while males participated more for competition and the satisfaction of winning.

The effects of gender and sports modality (individual vs. collective sport) were studied by Gonçalves, Silva and Cruz (2007). They showed that boys give more importance to the "status", to "show that I am better than others," or "win or defeat the other." The girls had higher scores related to the competence, the fair play and sociability.

In several countries in Europe school sport is a part of the sport system in that country. It is referred to as it operates in Great Britain, Germany and other countries in Europe, namely competitive teams in various sports, that operate in schools, during pupils' free time, and involve many students in training sessions and interscholastic competition. The training sessions are organised by Physical Education teachers who are in charge of pedagogical responsibilities applied to athletes' guidance, either for training or competition. These activities are carried out according to a spirit of pupils' freedom to participate and their own choice of activities among the ones that are part of the school's activity plan, coordinated by the educational system. School sport activities have two basic features: regular training and competition between team schools (SSCO, 2006). Once the school sport is characterized by an organized and systematic activity, we want to know whether girls and boys have the same motivations for sports competition. The investigation in motivation for practice and sport competition could show us that boys tend to show more motivation for the competition and popularity while girls tend to value friendship over the aspects related to health and physical condition and enjoyment. So, what happens in the school sport competition?

Method

Participants

In the 2006/2007 school year there was a population of 5129 pupils from 32 schools studying at the 2nd and 3rd stages of elementary and secondary education (from 10 to 18 years old) who were engaged in school sport activities. The method of random and stratified sample (by group/team) was used to choose the target group, with a margin for error under 5%, having attained a representative sample of 1317 (722 boys and 595 girls) athletes from all schools and sports modalities involved in school sport. This corresponded to 25.7% of the population (table 1).

Table 1 – Age and gender of participants

Age	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	Total	%
Male	35	104	114	97	86	88	88	62	20	12	5	2	2	715	54,7
Female	38	60	99	94	77	67	69	61	20	4	1	1	0	591	45,3
Total	73	164	213	191	163	155	157	123	40	16	6	3	2	1306	100

The subjects were fully informed about the protocol before participating in this study. Informed consent was obtained prior to all testing from all subjects, parents, the regional Government for education and the board of schools, in accordance with the recommendations of local ethical committee and current ethical standards in sports and exercise research.

Questionnaire and Procedure

The questionnaire was designed using as a basis the school sport activities programme and its regulation, which was determined by SSCO (2006), as well as research work conducted by Correia & Rosado (2006). Three experienced teachers with specific knowledge about school sport contributed to its validation. Two of them were coordinator teachers who were familiar with the information and specific activities of the school sport programme, while the third one owned vast professional experience in the fields of sports coordination at school and research applied to sports. The questionnaire was also tested on a group of 30 athletes similar to the ones belonging to the sample, in order to ensure the clarity and objectivity of the questions.

Physical education teachers who coached the boys and girls at training, as well as the school sport coordinator from each school contributed to the questionnaire administration. A preparatory meeting was held between the research team and the teachers that were responsible for the participants, so that administration procedures and the answering of the questionnaire were made clear. The administration was processed as part of the school sport training schedule and the method of random stratification was used per training group.

The questionnaire included three categories of motives for sport participation. Firstly social motives, for example, be popular, be part of a team, to enjoy sport, my parents want me to practice sport. Secondly sport

competition motives, for example, improve skills, to compete and being a sports star or sports champion Thirdly healthy motives, for example: to be physically healthy.

Statistical analysis

Inferential analysis and data treatment was carried out using SPSS (version 14.0). In order to verify the significant influences between variables and groups a Chi-square test of independence (X^2) and the Mann-Whitney test were used with an error probability of 0.05. Cronbach's Alpha measure was used to test the reliability of the measuring instrument, which proved the existence of good internal consistency (0.86) for the set of variables to be analyzed.

Results

In general, if we look at the results we found that boys and girls show a very interesting level of satisfaction about school sports. As we can see in table 2, fun or enjoyment was the motive most noted for boys and girls to practice sport in schools, with very positive results (98,5% of boys and 96,6% of girls). "I want to be physically healthy", "I want to be part of a team" and "To improve my skills" there also are motives with high results.

In the other hand, the reasons given by boys and girls to practice sport in schools that received the worst scores were "I want to be popular", "Being a sport star or sports champion" and "My parents want me to practice sport". However, in what concerns the differences between boys and girls it was found that the motives to practice school sport like "to be a sport star or sport champion", "to be popular" and "I like competition" are more important for boys than girls (table 2). In these items, the statistical analysis of X^2 show very significant differences ($p < 0.001$, $df = 2$).

Table 2 - Comparison between girls and boys about the motives for the practice of school sport

Motives		Count	Disagree				Neither agree nor disagree				Agree				Pearson Chi-Square		
			Count	%	Std. Residual	Count	%	Std. Residual	Count	%	Std. Residual	Value	df	p.			
I want to be popular	Boys	314	384,5	44,1%	-3,6	209	183,2	29,4%	1,9	189	144,3	26,5%	3,7	67,417	2	<0,001	
	Girls	387	316,5	66,0%	4,0	125	150,8	21,3%	-2,1	74	118,7	12,6%	-4,1				
I want to be part of a team	Boys	8	9,3	1,1%	-,4	36	39,3	5,0%	-,5	669	664,4	93,8%	,2	1,089	2	,580	
	Girls	9	7,7	1,5%	,5	36	32,7	6,1%	,6	547	551,6	92,4%	-,2				
I want to be physically healthy	Boys	9	6,6	1,3%	,9	22	23,5	3,1%	-,3	685	685,9	95,7%	,0	2,213	2	,331	
	Girls	3	5,4	,5%	-1,0	21	19,5	3,5%	,3	568	567,1	95,9%	,0				
To improve my skills	Boys	5	6,6	,7%	-,6	16	21,3	2,2%	-1,2	696	689,1	97,1%	,3	3,938	2	,140	
	Girls	7	5,4	1,2%	,7	23	17,7	3,9%	1,3	563	569,9	94,9%	-,3				
Being a sports star or sports champion	Boys	97	121,0	13,7%	-2,2	207	242,5	29,2%	-2,3	406	346,5	57,2%	3,2	44,551	2	<0,001	
	Girls	124	100,0	21,1%	2,4	236	200,5	40,2%	2,5	227	286,5	38,7%	-3,5				
I want to make friends	Boys	12	13,7	1,7%	-,5	55	65,7	7,7%	-1,3	646	633,6	90,6%	,5	4,860	2	,088	
	Girls	13	11,3	2,2%	,5	65	54,3	11,0%	1,5	511	523,4	86,8%	-,5				
To enjoy sport	Boys	0	1,1	,0%	-1,0	11	15,9	1,5%	-1,2	707	701,0	98,5%	,2	5,853	2	,054	
	Girls	2	,9	,3%	1,2	18	13,1	3,0%	1,3	573	579,0	96,6%	-,2				
I like to compete	Boys	3	8,8	,4%	-1,9	36	59,1	5,0%	-3,0	674	645,1	94,5%	1,1	31,141	2	<0,001	
	Girls	13	7,2	2,2%	2,1	72	48,9	12,2%	3,3	505	533,9	85,6%	-1,2				
My parents want me to practice sport	Boys	123	143,4	17,4%	-1,7	177	192,2	25,0%	-1,1	408	372,4	57,6%	1,8	16,645	2	<0,001	
	Girls	138	117,6	23,8%	1,9	173	157,8	29,8%	1,2	270	305,6	46,5%	-2,0				

Another difference between boys and girls is the opinion of the parents about the practice of school sport. The results "My parents want me to practice sport" it is higher for boys (57.7%) than for girls (46.5). Therefore, the results show that boys tend to prefer the activities related to competition, wanting to win and be popular. For its part, the girls tend to prefer the variables related to health and fitness and want to make friends.

Discussion and conclusions

In this study, there is no doubt that the results show that girls and boys have a very positive opinion about school sport. In general, the reasons given by most boys and girls for school sports are associated with

intrinsic motivation and enjoyment of the game and competition (e.g. the enjoyment and improvement of the skills were the reasons cited as the most important for boys and girls to participate in school sport).

These results are consistent with other studies indicating that young people tend to value more the intrinsic reasons than the extrinsic (see Daley & O'Gara, 1998 and Kilpatric, Hebert & Bartholomew, 2005). Similarly, the findings are in line with studies with children and young people between 10 and 20 years of age (Cruz, 1996; Cid, 2002) revealing that the fitness, friendship and enjoying, were the most significant part of the reason for sports of young people. Conversely, the same studies revealed that the reasons: "to be important," "known" and "have an excuse to leave home," were less important.

However, gender differences were found for the motives of being popular or a becoming a sports champion with statistically significant results. Boys are more identified with the win the game, want to compete and want to be popular. The findings show us that boys tend to extrinsic motivation, including "I want to be popular" and "Being a sports star champion". Furthermore, the motivation to compete in sports is much more valued in boys than in girls. In the study conducted by Gomes (2008), that aimed to identify the motives of young people between 10 and 19 years, for the practice for school sports, revealed that they attributed more importance to the following reasons: "I want to improve my skills", "I want to be physically healthy" and "I like to enjoy myself." Our results are similar for the motivation of girls, particularly in what concerns to be physically healthy and enjoy sports. However, we expected better results in what concerns to the motivation of girls to "make friends", as the investigation indicates. Kilpatric, Hebert and Bartholomew (2005) indicated that the motive of enjoyment and physical activity and fitness was most important for women while boys tended to enjoy more sport participation and competition.

Other studies show us that boys tend to praise sports modalities that imply more physical confrontation and competition, such as football and rugby (Scruton, 1990; Martin; 1998; Smith, Thurston, Green & Lamb, 1997), while girls' tendency is to value sociability and commitment to game-like and sport activities (Hellandsig, 1998; Prusak & Darst, 2002); boys and girls also reported differing reasons for participation in extra-curricular physical activities (Daley & O'Gara, 1998); specific relationships between psychosocial and environmental attributes and their relative contributions to physical activity (Phongsavan, McLean and Bauman, 2007).

In our study we didn't find a significant difference between boys and girls in what concern "I want to be physically healthy", contrast to studies that indicate a greater motivation for girls to maintain health and fitness. It is possible that the results of the research could be explained by the fact that the great majority of athletes surveyed belong to a 12 to 14 years age group, that is, preceding adolescence and, therefore, differences at a psychosocial level are not evident. Still we expected to find differences in perceptions between the boys and the girls about the motives for competition and training. Hastie (1998) found that there were no differences between the perceptions of boys and girls regarding a curricular unit of sport education. However, in sport competition, while girls tended to emphasize more on aspects like responsibility and sociability, boys tended to show greater domain and power when performing referee and team leader functions. The education through extra physical education and sports generates changes in behaviour and acquisition of social skills between genders (Eldar, 2008).

The organization in charge of training and competition, as well as school sport teachers, should reconsider the different motives for sport participation of boys and girls. According to the recommendations of the sport education model by MacPhail, Kirk, and Kinchin (2004), Siedentop (2002), Wallhead and O'sullivan (2005), the integration and validation of young athletes can be attained if they perform the tasks of assistant to school sport training, on the condition that their teacher will supervise them. School sport participation provides a focus for social activity, an opportunity to make friends, a way to develop networks and social skills and develop team affiliation. Physical Education Teacher who are involved in school sport activities have to stimulate and improve quality in social behaviour during competition and encouraging older pupils to take responsibility for organizing and working with younger classes (Griggs & Wheeler, 2007). Another implication is that the activities of school sports for girls should be organized for the purpose of developing the fitness and sociability. The fun, enjoy playing and making friends should be objective to focus if we want girls motivated.

Conflicts of interest

This study was conducted without any funding from companies or manufacturers or outside organizations.

References

- Azzarito, L. & Solmon (2009). An Investigation of Students' Embodied Discourses in Physical Education: A Gender Project. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 28, 173-191.
- Cid, L. (2002). Alteração dos motivos para a prática desportiva das crianças e jovens. *Digital Review Buenos Aires* – year 8 – nº 55. Accessed in 10 of May 2010, in: <http://www.efdeportes.com/efd55/motiv.htm>
- Chantel, Y., Guay, F., Debrevia-Martinova, T., & Vallerand, R.J. (1996). Motivation and elite performance: an exploratory investigation with Bulgarian athletes. *International Journal of Sports Psychology*, 27, 173-182.

-
- Chase, M.A. & Dummer, G.M. (1992). The role of sports as a social status determinant for children. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 63: 4, 418-424.
- Correia, A. & Rosado, A. (2006). Satisfaction of school community and families towards school sport. Study supported by Ministry of Education, Portugal.
- Crosnoe, R. (2001). The social world of male and female athletes in high school. *Sociological Studies of Children and Youth*, 8, 89-110
- Cruz, J. (1996) Motivação para a prática e competição desportiva. In J.Cruz (Ed) *Manual de psicologia do desporto*, pp. 305-331.
- Daley, A. & O'Gara, A. (1998). Age, Gender and Motivation for Participation in Extra Curricular Physical Activities in Secondary School Adolescents. *European Physical Education Review*, 4, 1: 47-53 (1998).
- Eldar, E. (2008) Educating through the Physical—behavioral interpretation. *Physical Education & Sport Pedagogy*, 13:3, 215-229.
- Gomes, M. (2008). Satisfaction, Motivation and idealization of the Athletes of School Sport. Master Thesis, Technical University of Lisbon, Human Kinetics Faculty.
- Gonçalves, C., Silva, M. & Cruz., J. (2007). Efeito do género, contexto de prática e tipo de modalidade desportiva sobre os valores no desporto de jovens. *Boletim da Sociedade Portuguesa de Educação Física*, 21: 71-86.
- Griggs, G. & Wheeler, K.(2007). Play up, play up and play the game: the implications of Every Child Matters within physical education and school sport. *Education 3-13*, 35:3, 273 - 282.
- Hastie, P.A. (1998). The participation and perception of girls during a unit of sport education. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* 18: 157–71.
- Hellandsig, E. (1998). Motivation predictors of high performance and discontinuation in different types of sports among talented teenage athletes. *International Journal of Sports Psychology*, 29, 27-44.
- Kilpatrick, M.; Hebert, E. & Bartholomew, J. (2005). College students' motivation for physical activity: differentiating men's and women's motives for sport participation and exercise. *Journal of American College Health*, 54, 87-94.
- Lauriola, M., Zelli, A., Calcaterra, C., Cherubine, D. & Spinelli, D. (2004) Sport gender Stereotypes in Italy, *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 35 (3), 189-206.
- Meece, J., Glienke, B. & Burg, S. (2006). Gender and motivation. *Journal of School Psychology*, 44: 351–373.
- O'Neill, M. & Palmer, A. (2003). An exploratory study of the effects of experience on consumer perceptions of the service quality construct. *Managing Service Quality*, 13:3, 187-196.
- Papageorgiou, M., Hassandra, M. & Hatzigeorgiadis, A. (2008). Fair Play in Physical Education: Effects of Sex, Age and Intrinsic Motivation. *Inquiries in Sport & Physical Education*, 6, 3, p.162.
- Phongsavan, P., McLean, G. & Adrian Bauman, A. (2007). Gender differences in influences of perceived environmental and psychosocial correlates on recommended level of physical activity among New Zealanders. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*. 8, 939–950.
- Prusak, K. & Darst, P. (2002). Effects of Types of Walking Activities on Actual Choices by Adolescent Female Physical Education Students. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 21, 230-241.
- Ryan, R.M., Frederick, C.M., Lepes, D., Rubio, D., & Sheldon, K.S. (1997). Intrinsic motivation and exercise adherence. *International Journal of Sports Psychology*, 28, 355-354.
- School Sports Coordinating Office (2006). School Sport Programme 2006/2007. Available: [www.madeira-edu.pt/dre/School Sports Coordinating Office](http://www.madeira-edu.pt/dre/School%20Sports%20Coordinating%20Office) , December 2006.
- Scruton, S. (1990). Gender and Physical Education. Geelong, Deakin University Press.
- Siedentop, D. (2002) Sport Education: A retrospective. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 21, 409-418.
- Sit, C. & Lindner, K. (2007). Achievement goal profiles, perceived ability and participation motivation for sport and physical activity. *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 3, July-September.
- Smith, A., Thurston, M., Green, K. & Lamb, K. (1997). Young people's participation in extracurricular physical education: A study of 15–16 year olds in North-West England and North-East Wales. *European Physical Education Review*, 13: 3, 339-368.
- Paridolf (Ed.). *Exercise and Sport Sciences* (Vol. 15. pp. 389-425). New York: Macniillan.
- Wallhead, T., & O'sullivan. M. (2005). Sport education: Physical education for the new millennium? *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* 10, 2: 181–210.
- Wang, C. K. J. & Liu, W. C. (2007). Promoting enjoyment in girls' physical education: The impact of goals, beliefs, and self-determination. *European Physical Education Review*, 13, 145-164.