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# Sport, Popularity, and Academic Achievement in Relation to Student Preference, Peer Acceptance, and Perception to Parental Preference of Elementary School Children

Hugh Troy Buchanan Jr.

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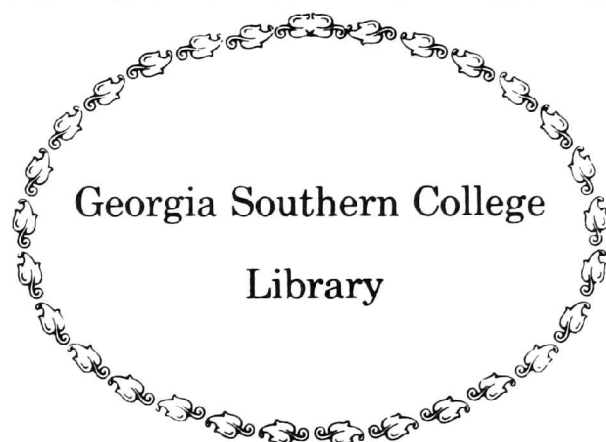
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SPORT, POPULARITY, AND  
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN  
RELATION TO STUDENT PREFERENCE,  
PEER ACCEPTANCE, AND  
PERCEPTION OF PARENTAL  
PREFERENCE OF ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOL CHILDREN

Hugh Troy Buchanan, Jr.



Sport, Popularity, and Academic Achievement in Relation to  
Student Preference, Peer Acceptance, and Perception of  
Parental Preference of Elementary School Children

by

Hugh Troy Buchanan, Jr.

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Georgia  
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the requirements for the Degree of Master  
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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

It is probable that never before in the history of the United States have sports enjoyed its present popularity over such a wide range in ages. This is shown in three different ways: by attendance at athletic events, by the coverage of sports by the mass media, and by the actual participation of Americans in sports.

Even though individual franchises have yearly fluctuations in attendance, it is almost a yearly occurrence that overall attendance increases in the professional sports leagues. It was reported by The U.S. News and World Report (1971) that from 1965 to 1970 there was a gain in overall attendance in the National Football League, the National Basketball Association and the National Hockey League. Many colleges and high schools also experience these same effects. In many cases, the only contact that supporters of high schools and colleges have with the schools is through the athletic program.

The second way that popularity of sports is shown is by the coverage afforded it by the mass media. Beisser (1967) states that there is no lack of evidence of the overwhelming importance of sports in American life. In many of the American newspapers the sports pages constitute the largest specialized daily section. One tenth of the World Almanac is devoted to sports. According to Beisser (1967), in both newspapers and the almanac the sports sections are greater in volume than the sections devoted to politics, business, entertainment, or

science. Most major periodicals also have major sections devoted to sports and employ staff members to cover sports.

This coverage by the mass media also includes radio and television. Rare is the weekend television prime time that does not have one of the major television networks telecasting a sports related event. Many times all the networks telecast sports events simultaneously. As many as 60 million people have been reported to have watched some athletic events on television with countless millions listening on radio. Most radio and television stations have a significant portion of their news devoted to sports.

This popularity of sport is also reflected by the number of actual participants. This participation in sports annually numbers in the millions. The New York Times (1972) reported that Americans, with increasing amounts of leisure time, sought pleasure in jogging, boating, tennis, skiing, golf, cycling, snorkeling, snowmobiling, riding, bowling, camping and just plain relaxing in record numbers in 1972. The number of tennis players was up 20 percent, bicyclists 15 percent, skiers 10 percent and golfers 5 percent. It was stated also that 1973 promised to be another record year.

This interest in athletics is also very evident in our colleges and high schools. A thorough study was completed recently by Coleman (1961) in which he found that a high percentage of high school students felt that athletics were more important than academic achievement. He says that the amount of time and attention given to sports is out of proportion to the amount of time given to academics. Coleman also offered data indicating that athletes are the leaders of the school and the most



popular students. According to Coleman, athletics were more central to the attention of adolescents, far more so than academics, and the thing that is really disturbing to him is the fact that the schools seem to encourage rather than discourage this practice.

From the above study it is inferred that the primary blame for this situation lies with the educational system in which athletics are supported by some administrators as good for the students as well as good for the school. However, Coleman's results and conclusions are based entirely on high school samples. There remains a need for research concerning the significance of athletic participation in relation to academic performance at the elementary level. Such an investigation would indicate whether the over emphasis on sports is a product of the secondary school environment or a reflection of the general population's feelings. This study attempted to determine if elementary pupils consider athletics to be more important than academic achievement, while controlling for school emphasis on athletics by testing in schools that have no organized athletic program.

#### Statement of Problem

It was the purpose of this study to examine fourth, fifth and sixth grade students to determine whether they consider athletics to be more important to them at school than success in school work. More specifically, this study was concerned with the subjects' views on four points: (1) what the subjects felt was necessary to be popular at school; (2) whether the subjects saw good students or good athletes as most popular students; (3) what role the subject would like to see himself in at

school; and (4) what role the subjects felt their parents would like to see them in at school.

### Definition of Terms

Student. Any subject that was listed on 30 percent of the questionnaires issued to subjects as one of the three individuals making the best grades in that class and not being chosen as an athlete.

Athlete. Any subject that was listed on 30 percent of the questionnaires issued to subjects as one of three individuals best at sports in that class and not being chosen as a student.

Student-athlete. Any subject that was listed on 30 percent of the questionnaires issued to subjects as one of the three individuals making the best grades in that class and 30 percent of the questionnaires issued to subjects as one of three individuals best at sports in that class.

Other. Any subject that did not receive enough support to be listed as a student, an athlete or a student-athlete.

Popular-student. Any subject that was listed on 30 percent of the questionnaires issued to subjects as one of three most popular boys or girls in that class.

### Assumptions

The following assumptions have been made in relation to this study: (1) all subjects completed the questionnaires in an honest manner; (2) the opinions given are the opinions of the subject; and (3) the categories as listed in definitions were valid discriminators.

### Delimitations

This study was delimited to 803 fourth, fifth, and sixth grade pupils selected from a total 1717 in the school system of Bulloch County, Georgia, and one private school in the county. Students in grades one through three were not included in the investigation, because it was felt they would have trouble understanding the questionnaire. The results of this study for both boys and girls are based on data collected from both sexes. Therefore, the results do not necessarily reflect how boys feel about other boys and girls feel about girls, but reflect how all classmates feel about their peers.

### Limitations

There are basically two limitations to the study. The first was that it was not possible to control for the amount of participation in athletics outside of the school environment, i.e. recreation department activities.

The second limitation was that subjects used in the study all attended schools in Bulloch County, Georgia, a rural area of Southeast Georgia. Thus, the results of this study might not be consistent with similar research in a metropolitan area.

## Chapter II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter consists of a review of literature that has a bearing upon this investigation. The following review consists of three sections: (1) the relationship of physical performance to the popularity of youth; (2) the public school promotion of athletics; and (3) the societal promotion of athletics.

#### The Relationship of Physical Performance to Popularity of Youth

Much has been written about the importance of physical ability and performance in relationship to popularity of youth. Layman (1970) stated that the importance of acceptance by social groups as a condition necessary for emotional health and stability has been stressed many times. Results of studies on boys from kindergarten to college age have indicated that athletic skill is related to social status and prestige in peer groups.

Hendrey (1970) wrote that those who are physically active and have an attractive physique usually find that they are more readily accepted in social groups than those who are not active and have less attractive physiques. Therefore, he concluded that social relationships were partly dependent upon the physical make up of individuals and others' reactions to them.

It was suggested by Frost (1971) that athletic ability was an important means of attaining prestige among peers. He further stated that physically related social incentives had a large influence on an



individual's behavior. Among these incentives are: (1) to be liked and respected by one's peers; (2) to be an accepted member of a team or group; (3) to know that one looks well in the eyes of playmates and associates; (4) to be a captain of a squad or team; and (5) to be admitted to the inner circle of a group.

Studies were conducted by Cowell (1970), Walters (1955) and Marks (1954) on the relationship of physical activity to the social development of adolescents. It was indicated that much social interaction centers around physical skill. In analyzing peer status within social groups, it was found that the better performers of a group are the better accepted members of the group than are the poor performers. The child that is lacking in motor skills and has a low level of athletic ability is often barred or not accepted in social participation.

In a similar study conducted by McGraw and Talbert (1953) the sociometric status of junior high school boys in relation to athletic ability was investigated. A moderately high relationship was reported between the choices of best liked students and participation in interscholastic and intramural athletics. It was found that approximately 50 percent of the subjects listed as most popular and well liked were also outstanding athletes in the opinions of their fellow students. Conversely, over 75 percent of the subjects not listed as most popular or well liked were not athletes.

An investigation was conducted by Hagberg (1963) to analyze and compare the social standing of children, by using a sociometric test, with fitness status as measured by selected fitness tests. Third, fourth and fifth grade students were used as subjects. She found that there was a

positive relationship between fitness and popularity in all three grades, with the relationship being highest in the third grade. This would indicate that physical fitness and athletic ability are factors in the make-up of social popularity.

Spreitzer and Pugh (1973) studied perceived peer status in relationship to athletic participation on the secondary school level. A gamma of .53 was reported, thus indicating a moderate association. Results also indicated that 34 percent of the athletes tested defined themselves as "one of the most popular" or as "very popular" compared with 14 percent of the non-athletes.

Sports skills are a social media for youth according to Lawther (1972). Athletic success plus subsequent approval and admiration bring greater group acceptance. Lawther contended that from this the individual gains a feeling of security within his social group, a need very common in adolescents. These athletic successes are employed in an attempt to gain popularity and prestige by children, adolescents and even adults.

Lawther further stated that public images of the athlete tell much of the place of sports in modern culture. Some academicians tend to look down on the athlete insofar as high academic achievement is concerned. The general student body, however, tends to hold the prowess and achievements of the athlete in high esteem and to grant him high social status and prestige.

Jones (1949) and Kane (1964) also investigated the relationship of physical ability to sociometric status among adolescents. In general, they reported that boys who were athletically inclined and

possessed a high level of strength tend to have good physiques, to be physically fit and to enjoy favorable social status among peers. On the other hand, it was indicated that boys who lacked athletic ability and were physically weak showed tendencies toward asthenic physiques, social difficulties, lack of status among peers, and feelings of inferiority.

McIntosh (1963) reviewed a study conducted in California that was designed to find out what qualities were most admired in boys and girls. The results indicated a sexually divergent pattern of interest. The most admired qualities among boys 11 to 13 years of age were skill in organized games, aggressiveness, and boisterousness. The admiration for physical skills, strength, and aggressiveness were retained at age 16 and even later at the age of 19 skill in competitive sports still held prestige value. Among girls, success in games was recognized, but not to the extent as with boys. At the age of 16, active participation and good sportsmanship were admired. The results indicated that by the age of 19, athletic prowess carried little prestige value by itself among girls, with the exceptions of dancing, swimming and tennis.

Cratty (1967) also remarked of the pattern of sexual divergence in relation to athletic ability and popularity. He stated that in childhood and adolescence, particularly among males, social success and prestige may be largely based upon proficiency in physical skills. As the children reach five and six years of age, they and their companions tend to group into larger and larger units. Since many of the available tasks permitted them are movement tasks, leadership and social recognition are often gained through effective physical performance.

The group leaders among five and six year olds, those who are identified by teachers and peers as "best liked" and "popular", are children whose physical achievements are superior in such activities as running, throwing and balancing.

Cratty constructed a graph to indicate the importance of physical prowess to status as a function of age and sex. According to Cratty, girls view physical prowess and athletic skill as an important asset by children beginning at age five. This importance peaks at age 12 and starts a downward path to age 15 where it begins to level off. Cratty indicates that boys view this prowess as increasing in importance until age 18, where it begins a decline that levels off around age 40.

Coleman (1970) found that among the freshmen he studied in high school, the one attribute shared by every boy in every leading clique was being out for football or basketball. Most were out for both. There was no other attribute that so sharply distinguished the leading clique.

A number of other studies investigated physical ability in relation to personality factors. Among these studies was that of Cowell and Ismail (1962). They investigated boys ranging in age from 10 to 14 and found that those boys who scored high on measures of physical ability were likely to have leadership potentialities, to be accepted at close personal distance by their peers and to be socially well adjusted.

Anderson (1965) and Brace (1954) conducted investigations of elementary and junior high school boys comparing athletes and non-athletes on measures of personal adjustment and social status. The results



indicated that the athletes enjoyed a higher level of peer status and social adjustment and were more interested in their peers than were the non-participants.

In a study of athletic achievement and the personal and social adjustment of high school boys, it was reported by Biddulph (1954) that a superior athletic achievement group showed a significantly higher mean on two social adjustment indices, that of teachers ratings of popularity, and sociograms. These results indicated that the group ranking high in athletic achievement demonstrated a significantly higher degree of personal and social adjustment than did the group ranking low in athletic achievement. It was also reported that members of the superior athletic achievement group listed more personal friends and were chosen more frequently by peers in work, play and social situations.

Cooper (1969) wrote that a relatively large number of studies have been executed using group personality tests with both high school and college samples of males. The picture painted of athletes usually describes them as follows: (1) more outgoing and socially confident; (2) socially aggressive, dominant and leading; (3) more emotionally stable; (4) higher social adjustment as rated by both teachers and peers; and (5) lower feminine interest and higher masculine ones.

Each of the above investigations reported results of a positive relationship between physical performance and peer status. However, a few studies were found that indicated a negative relationship or no relationship.

In a study of the relationship of motor ability to athletic participation and certain personality measures, Keogh (1959) reported

that no significant relationship was found between either motor ability or athletic participation and the 18 separate scales of the California Psychological Inventory. This lack of relationship is contradictory to the findings of other studies in this section in which varsity athletes and high motor ability groups were more positively related to personality measures.

A study of the basis on which elementary age children select and reject friends was conducted by Austin and Thompson (1948). In this study they found that being skillful in games was rated sixteenth on the list of reasons for choosing someone as a playmate or a friend.

An investigation was conducted by Schendel (1970) in which he studied the psychological characteristics of high school athletes and non-participants in athletics. He wrote that it appeared that achievement status is important to the social-psychological development of young men, but the nature of that achievement is non-specific; i.e., achievement through athletics may not be any more meaningful in terms of the qualities measured by the California Psychological Inventory than achievement through other kinds of student activity.

#### School Promotion of Athletics

The school promotion of athletics is a topic that has enjoyed much popularity in the modern day American society. Research tends to indicate that athletics are promoted by the schools, possibly to the extent of over emphasis. This section will be limited to those studies that relate to this factor.

According to Lawther (1972), the argument of sports as an instrument of education has been one of the most common reasons proposed in the

attempt to justify sports. This proposal for justification is not unique to the schools and colleges of the United States. It was also present during the ancient Greek civilizations, in the Great Public Schools of England, and in the existing primitive societies.

Support for the above argument was given by Dimnet (1966) when he stated that it is an accepted fact that sport is a part of the mosaic of the school system. This is obvious to anyone who is involved with the school and sport. Many individuals, from school administrators through the students, view sport as the essential part of the school life of a child.

Waller (1965) conducted much research on the sociology of teaching and found that athletics occupy a central role among the youth of the school. Of all the activities that are supported by the school, athletics appears to be the most popular among students and community. Because of this support, it is the most flourishing and most revered of the cultural patterns among youth.

Possibly the most scathing attack ever on interscholastic sport was delivered by Coleman (1970). According to Coleman, American school sports have been praised as the most important factor in the evolution of national character by some and assailed as the poison ivy of the schools by others. He wrote that the elaborate organization of interscholastic sport is a uniquely American phenomenon. In most countries of the world there is very little sport in the school systems. Interscholastic sport provides countless Americans with excitement and entertainment, and any serious attempt to curtail them is immediately met with a barrage of rebuttals. School teams serve as a mobilizing force of

morale and esprit de corps for the school and community. As a result of this the athletes are the folk heroes of the educational system.

As an example of the situation as described by Coleman, Miller (1971) reports of a case involving the Cincinnati Board of Education ordering elimination of interschool sports, among other programs, in an attempt to curtail spiraling budgets. As a result many public officials, among them a chief of police and various school officials, expressed great concern as to the possible results of such elimination. Among the concerns was the fear of a possible rise in juvenile delinquency because of a lack of sport to provide an outlet and keep school morale high.

Schafer and Armer (1968) and Schafer (1969) wrote of the various reasons given for interscholastic sport. Various claims have been made by school administrators, coaches, playground directors and little league promoters as to the reasons for their existence. These individuals usually spoke in terms of the values of sport to the school in general and to youth in particular. Among the values given were: (1) a healthy and well supported program for educational ends; (2) student and community involvement in school affairs; and (3) social control by deterring students from deviance within the school and delinquency in the community. As a consequence of this promotion of athletic participation, Schafer stated that the flow of energy moves away from the academic and towards support of school activities.

Solberg (1970) referred to interscholastic athletics as the tail that wags the dog. He stated that it has reached the point that in many schools that the hiring of classroom instructors is predicated upon the coaching competencies of the teacher. Some moderately sized high schools

have been known to expend as much as \$20,000 annually on salaries for coaches. Why do schools support athletics in this manner? He gave four traditional reasons: (1) self-realization and development of the individual through participation or observation; learning skills, techniques and information necessary to enjoy sports; (2) involvement of the athlete with others in real life experiences; attainment of positive attitudes regarding group efforts; (3) exposure to vocational possibilities; and (4) the cultivation of respect for and need for regulations; an encouragement of a sense of civic responsibility.

#### Societal Promotion of Athletics

The societal promotion of athletics is a much discussed topic. It is present in many forms and the effects are wide spread. This section will include those studies that relate to the promotion of sports and athletic activities by various factors (excluding schools) in American society.

A major example of promotion of sports to youth is pressure to participate. These pressures may come from various sources. Cratty (1967) referred to the problem of parental pressure to participate when he stated that parents with a high need for achievement usually produce children with the same characteristics. Thus, achievement training on the part of the parents positively effects the children, whether it be in athletic participation or academic pursuit.

Ogilvie and Tutko (1970) gave support to the achievement factor in stating that many times it is not even considered whether or not the child wants to participate or compete. Too often the child becomes the

means through which the achievement needs of the parents are met. As a result of this the child learns that to be loved, he must compete.

Scott (1953) conducted an investigation of attitudes of parents, teachers and school administrators toward elementary school athletic competition. She found that 78 percent of the parents interviewed favored elementary school athletic competition. This compared with 68 percent of the teachers and 55 percent of the administrators interviewed. This would indicate that parents are among the chief supporters of athletic programs. Solberg (1970) supported this by theorizing that perhaps schools were in the sports business because parents need the vicarious satisfaction they obtain from their child's participation.

With sport occupying its place of importance in the culture of America, there are definite ways in which it affects individuals. This is true to the extent that the image of the athlete has become stereotyped. Patience (1971) referred to a perception of what an athlete or sports figure embodies. He stated that the athlete has become one of the stereotypes of our culture. No matter on what level an individual participates, the image of the athlete in the minds of society is that of a clean-cut, morally upright youngster who embodies all of the values for which sport supposedly stands.

Sport is cast in the image of a mirror of American life by Robert Boyle (1963). Sport has many influences on all levels of society. According to Boyle, sport influences among other things: (1) status; (2) clothing styles; (3) ethical values; (4) race relations; (5) life styles; and (6) the concept of the hero. Each of these have an effect on youth in some manner.

Support for the general idea of hero worship was given by Davitz (1955). On the basis of his research on self-perception and perceived similarity, he inferred that there is an underlying need to be similar to valued persons. He further stated that one way to satisfy this need is to try to make oneself like others. Thus, the child tries to become like his mother, his father or some hero figure. With the emphasis that our society places on sport and with the availability of contact that a child has with sport through actual participation or by media contact, it is easy to see how some come to value athletics so highly.

Another factor in the societal promotion of athletics is the age at which youth begin athletic participation. Beisser (1967) referred to the early age at which children are prepared for sports participation. He says that parents and adults not only look with favor on the role of the athlete, but deliberately foster it. They are provided with all types of youth organizations in which to participate in every sport. Of particular concern to Beisser is the fact that this role is thrust upon youth at ever increasing younger ages. Children are outfitted in replicas of sports uniforms before they can walk. Then, once they can walk, training begins in earnest.

Schwertley (1970) also wrote of the young age at which children are exposed to sports and said there are detrimental aspects. He stated that when a boy reaches the tender age of seven he is eligible to try out for a little league farm team. After several years of seasoning he is eligible for the big time. Thus, by the time a boy reaches junior high

school, he has come up through the bush leagues; held a baseball contract; possibly been a member of a traveling all-star team; and if he can withstand the pressure, faced a little league world series.

The early start on athletic participation obviously has an effect on the child in relation to peer status. Cratty (1967) suggested that at preschool age peers begin to exert an important influence over an individual as he engages in various play activities. This opportunity is afforded by many of the movement activities promoted by the school as well as other socializing forces such as the mass media of radio, television, books and movies. Many of the television features, movies and books suggest to the child that it is desirable to be a dynamic man of action. As the child, especially the male, becomes older, the physical activities in which he participates become more organized and greater peer and community emphasis is placed on this participation.

Some individuals have expressed the proposition that sport is simply a mirror of the society in which it exists. Miller (1971) states that sport not only represents microcosms of society--codes of ethics, ideologies, religions, myths and so forth--but also, helps determine the structure of society. She contended that within the "social matrix", sport may be recognized as a locus for man's group feelings, identity, mobility, integration, assimilation and diffusion. This could serve as a possible explanation as to the rabid support given by some communities to its sports teams and sports figures.

Reger (1967) and Sutton-Smith (1963) referred to the effects that an achievement oriented society can have on children. It was



theorized that when children are raised in an environment that emphasizes achievement, participation is encouraged in physical activities that involve skill and power. Because of this need for achievement, we live in a society that promotes competition as a means of gaining social prestige, social mobility, and monetary gains, as well as simple competition for the sake of competition.

Luchen (1967) also wrote of the achievement factor and the effect it can have on society. In most societies, achievement has such a high rank in the hierarchy of values of sport that the actual performance of an individual will determine the status he gets within the system. This fact is present at all levels of the American society. From small communities to the largest cities, sports figures take their place among the most popular and admired individuals of the locale.

The importance of sport in a democratic and industrialized society has been expounded on various times. Frost (1971) indicated that sport is an important ingredient in a democratic society, because it serves as a focal point for common loyalties and enthusiasms, as well as fostering better understanding between both individuals and groups. When sport is viewed as a necessity for a democratic society, then it is no wonder that participation in athletics is encouraged to a large degree.

Baitsch and others (1972) offered a similar proposal in referring to industrialized societies. They wrote that though sport may not be the leisure activity that receives the largest amount of time, it is the leisure activity that receives the highest attention in industrialized societies. It is claimed that this is due mainly to the fact of

participation and spectatorship by means of the mass media. With the wide range and various means of the mass media, millions of individuals come into contact with sports every day. In this manner sport takes a very influential place in the American cultural pattern.

Referring to sport and American society, Ulrich (1971) raised some excellent points. She said that status in America is usually measured by wealth, power, residence and education. Status usually establishes opportunity and chances in life are strongly influenced by status pattern. According to Ulrich, status mobility has been provided by sports. Because the athlete represents the perfected man, American society has awarded him with a certain high status. This high status is an act of encouragement for some individuals to ally themselves with sport.

From the investigations reviewed in this particular section, it is obvious that there are various factors that indicate a societal promotion of sport. Lawther (1972) gave what could be considered a summary of these factors in relating aspects that affect sports performance by an individual. Among these aspects are: (1) the age at which the child is encouraged to begin participation; (2) the social environment in which he is raised; (3) the attitudes of his parents toward sports participation; and (4) the attitudes of his peers toward sports participation.

A statement by Craig Fisher (1971) serves as a good summary of this section. He stated that since sports, with all its pomp and ceremony, is definitely one of the most esteemed elements of the American

culture, there is a great desire for individuals to ally themselves with sport.

### Summary

Much has been written about the importance of physical ability and athletic performance in relation to popularity of youth. Most investigations reported that there was a positive relationship between physical ability and peer status. This was especially true for males. Investigations have also been conducted comparing athletes and non-athletes on various personality traits. The athlete is usually pictured as: (1) possessing leadership potential; (2) socially well adjusted; (3) highly regarded by peers; (4) more outgoing; and (5) emotionally stable.

Research on interscholastic sport indicated that athletics are being promoted by the school. This is indicated by the popularity of sports with students and community. Among the reasons given for school support of athletics were: (1) school administrators see educational values in athletics; (2) sports provide a common affair for school and community involvement; (3) serves as a deterrent to deviant student behavior; (4) provides an outlet for student energy; and (5) serves as a democratizing force for youth.

Numerous research has been conducted on the place of sport in American society. It was found that sport is promoted by society in various ways. Among these were: (1) parental pressure to participate; (2) the image afforded the athlete; (3) the age at which youth are encouraged to begin competitive participation; (4) the achievement

needs of individuals within the society; (5) attitudes that sport is a necessity in a democratic society; and (6) the affording of status by participation in sport.

From the above investigations three things are inferred: (1) physical performance is important to youth; (2) some schools do promote athletics; and (3) society promotes sports in various ways. These are three very positive statements that affect the total youth culture. Yet, a majority of the research was conducted on samples of junior high, high school and college males that attend institutions that support athletic teams. There remains a need for additional research concerning these same factors in relation to elementary age youth. Such a study should yield a more valid indication of whether the promotion of sports is more a product of the school environment or truly a reflection of the general population's feelings toward athletics.

## Chapter III

### PROCEDURES

This chapter is devoted to the procedures utilized in this study to determine if elementary age children consider success in school work or success in athletics to be most important to them at school. These procedures were used to answer four questions specifically. These questions were: (1) what the subject felt was necessary to be popular at school; (2) whether the subjects saw good students or good athletes as the most popular individuals; (3) what role the subject would most like to see himself in at school; and (4) what role the subjects felt their parents would like to see them in at school.

#### Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted prior to the present study to determine if the procedures and instruments to be used in the later study were satisfactory. One school in Statesboro, Georgia, was used in the pilot study. From this school, one fourth grade and one fifth grade class were chosen to participate. In each class, the investigator distributed the questionnaire (see Appendix) to the subjects and read the questions to the class, giving instructions in the process.

Results of the pilot study indicated that the questionnaire used did yield data appropriate for the statistical analysis to be used. The pilot study was also used to evaluate the use of a percentage index in placing subjects into the various categories used in

the investigation. Results indicated that this index was appropriate to use and would facilitate the division of subjects into the various categories.

There were some weaknesses indicated by the pilot study that needed to be corrected in the later study. The primary weakness was that when testing the age children involved in this study, more explicit directions were needed. The initial testing procedure revealed that there were some flaws in the directions. Not all of the subjects knew the meaning of all the words used in the questions, thus the investigator had to prepare a list of appropriate synonyms to be used in these situations.

A second weakness revealed in the pilot study was the fact that the subjects had to be reminded of certain instructions at various times throughout the testing. Their attention span was short, thus, the subjects had to be constantly reminded that first and last names had to be given on each question, not to get ahead of the class, and to raise hands if they had any questions.

Additionally, it was indicated that talking had to be kept at a minimum during the testing. From the results of the pilot study, it was suspected that any talking at all could be influential to the selections made by some subjects. Thus, it was decided that no talking would be allowed in the later study.

#### Selection of Schools and Subjects

Six elementary schools and one junior high school located in Bulloch County, Georgia, were used for the main study. Two of the

schools were within the city limits of Statesboro, Georgia. The remaining schools were in the outlying county. These schools were selected because they contained the grade levels to be used in this investigation. It was felt that by testing in all of the available areas of the county the sample would be diverse enough to include various social elements. The schools were also chosen because they did not financially support, nor were in anyway represented by an organized athletic program.

The subjects used in this study were taken from intact classes. Whole classes were used, because it was felt that this would be a more efficient method of testing timewise and would be more acceptable to the school administrators and teachers involved. A stratified random sample was used in the selection procedure to insure a representative sample. Sixty percent of the fourth, fifth and sixth grade students attending the Bulloch County schools attend the two schools within the city of Statesboro. Thus, sixty percent of the sample was randomly selected from these two schools. The remaining 40 percent was randomly selected from the remaining five schools in the county. It had been predetermined that the sample would include ten classes from each grade level. Thus, the classes were listed in each category (city and county) by teachers' names. The names were placed in alphabetical order. A list of random numbers was then used to select the sample. On each grade level six classes were selected from the city schools, four classes from the county schools. There were 802 subjects selected from a possible 1717 pupils. The breakdown according to grade was 259 fourth graders,

273 fifth graders and 270 sixth graders. The sample included 422 boys and 380 girls. Class sizes ranged from 18 to 33 pupils with a mean of 27 pupils. The subjects were classified by use of the questionnaire into four categories: (1) students; (2) athletes; (3) student-athletes; and (4) other. A subject could only be classified into one category. Each subject answered every question, thus boys answered questions about girls and vice versa.

### Questionnaire

The questionnaire (see Appendix) used in this investigation was partially patterned after one used by Coleman (1961) in his study of athletics in high school. The remainder of the questionnaire was constructed by the investigator. All data collected were obtained by use of the questionnaire. The following data were made available by use of the testing instrument: (1) which males and females were considered by their classmates to make the best grades; (2) which males and females were considered to be the best athletes in each class; (3) whether each subject would prefer to be popular, to make good grades, or be good at sports; (4) which males and females were the most popular in each class; (5) what subjects felt would make them popular among classmates; and (6) what subjects felt their parents wanted them to do while at school. Because the questionnaire used for each grade level was identical and because of the differences in reading ability within each level, the questions on the instrument were made very simple and explicit.



### Collection of Data

Before visiting each of the schools used for the investigation, permission was requested of the county school superintendent to collect data in the schools involved. After permission was received, a visit was made to each school and a personal conference was held with the principal of that school at which time a detailed explanation was given as to the scope and purpose of the investigation. Permission was granted by each principal to enter the schools. During the conference with the principals, data necessary for the random selection of subjects were obtained. The data included the number of classes on each grade level in that school, the number of students in each class, and the name of the teacher of each class.

After the sample was selected, each principal was contacted via telephone and meetings were arranged with the teachers of the classes selected. During these conferences the investigation was explained to the teachers, as well as complete coverage of the questionnaire that would be administered to the subjects. A date and time was then arranged for the testing of each class.

The testing sessions were conducted in the following manner. The investigator explained in very simple terms the purpose of the session and enlisted the help of each subject in collecting the data. Before the questionnaires were given to the subjects, a detailed list of instructions was given. These instructions were:

1. Do not put your name on the questionnaire.
2. If you are a boy, place an x at the top of the page.
3. If you are a girl, leave the top of the page blank.

4. This is not a test, thus, there are no right or wrong answers.
5. This is to get your opinion only so do not talk to anyone during the session.
6. Answer only one question at a time and do not get ahead of the class.
7. Answer each question only when instructed to do so.
8. When answering questions, use first and last names.
9. If you do not know someone's last name, raise your hand and your teacher will come and help you.
10. If there are any other questions, raise your hand.

After giving the instructions, the importance of giving sincere and honest responses was emphasized to the subjects. The questionnaires were then passed out, and they began to answer the questions. Each question was read to the subjects twice in succession, then after a pause of approximately one minute, the question was repeated. Approximately three minutes were allowed for the completion of each question. Occasionally synonyms were used to explain to a subject the meaning of a word. For example, many did not know what the word popular meant, thus, they were told that it referred to well-liked pupils. At the completion of the session the subjects were instructed to turn over the questionnaire and the investigator collected them.

#### Formation and Testing of Research Hypotheses

This section contains the relationships formulated as general hypotheses for the study. The discussion preceding and following each

hypothesis includes: (1) a brief review of literature used to formulate the statements, and (2) a method of testing the hypothesis.

Preference of children in relation to academic achievement and athletic performance. Several studies indicated that in general, children (especially males) value being good at sports more than they do making good grades at school. Both McIntosh (1963) and Cratty (1967) referred to the fact that physical skills were among the most admired qualities in boys and girls up to the age of 18. A study by Waller (1965) reported similar findings. He found that athletics occupy a central role among the youth of the school and is the most revered of the youth cultural patterns.

Coleman (1961) found in his investigations that a high percentage of high school students felt that athletics were more important than academic achievement. He claims that athletics are more central to the attention of adolescents than are academics. Based on this evidence, the hypotheses are: when asked to make a choice between making good grades, being good at sports, or being popular:

1. Elementary age boys prefer to be good at sports rather than make good grades or be popular.
2. Elementary age girls prefer to make good grades rather than being good at sports or being popular.

Each subject was asked what would you most like to do at school? There were three answers available: (1) make good grades; (2) be good at sports; and (3) be popular. The results of the total sample were arranged into a three by three table. The independent variables were the three grade levels and the dependent variables were

the choices of grades, sports or popularity. Gamma (Mueller, Schuessler and Costner, 1970) was then applied to determine if there was a significant difference between grade levels.

A second comparison was made within grade levels. This comparison was between boys and girls within each grade level. The data were arranged in a three by two table. The independent variables were the sexes while the choices of grades, sports or popularity remained as dependent variables. Chi square (Bruning and Kintz, 1968) was applied to determine if there was a significant relationship.

The comparison of outstanding students to athletes in relation to popularity. Hendry (1970), Frost (1971) and Cowell (1970) found that individuals who are physically active attain higher prestige among peers. Since much social interaction centers around physical skill, the better performers of a group are usually better accepted within the group. Positive relationships between athletic participation and popularity among peers were also reported by Hagberg (1963), and McGraw and Talbert (1953).

Spreitzer and Pugh (1973) conducted a study on perceived peer status in relation to athletics. The results indicated that more athletes see themselves as popular and well liked among peers than non-athletes. Based on this evidence, the hypotheses are:

3. Among elementary children, the most popular individuals are those categorized as athletes.
4. Elementary age girls believe that making good grades is more important for being popular than being good at sports.
5. Elementary age boys believe that being good at sports is more important for being popular than making good grades.

There are three questions involved in the testing of the first hypothesis. The first question determined who the boys and girls are in each class that make the best grades and are the best at sports. From this, the subjects are classified as a student, student-athlete, or athlete by use of a percentage index. A comparison was then made of the results of this question and the results of questions three and four on the questionnaire. Questions three and four determined who the most popular boys and girls were in each class. From this comparison an indication was given as to which categories contained the most popular children.

The data collected were classified as to sex. Thus, the results of boys and girls were analyzed separately. In each case the data were arranged into three by three tables. The independent variable was the grade level and the dependent variables were the categories of students, student-athletes and athletes. Gamma (See description, p. 33.) was then applied to determine if there was a significant difference between grade levels.

To further test the relationship between subject classification and popularity, chi square analysis was used. The data were arranged in a two by four table for each sex. The independent variable was popular and non-popular subjects and the dependent variable was subject classification. From this a comparison was made between classification of subjects and popularity.

The second and third hypotheses were tested by asking each subject what they felt would make them popular among their friends.

There were four choices available and the subject ranked them in order of importance. The choices were: (1) make good grades; (2) having lots of money; (3) being good at sports; and (4) being handsome or pretty. The results were tallied by averaging the rank of each choice. The resulting averages were then placed in a table for each grade level for use as a descriptive statistic.

Children's perception of parental values in relation to academic achievement and athletic performance. Several investigators indicated that parental pressure is an influence in determining whether or not a child participates in sports. Cratty (1967) referred to this by stating that the achievement needs of parents carry over to their children. Ogilvie and Tutko (1970) lend support to this by stating that often times the child becomes the means through which the achievement needs of the parents are met.

In a study by Scott (1953), it was found that 78 percent of the parents questioned favored athletic competition and athletic programs for the elementary schools. This indicated that parents are among the chief supporters of athletic programs. Thus, the hypothesis is:

6. Elementary age children believe their parents would rather they be good at sports than make good grades in school or be popular.

This hypothesis was tested in the same manner as the first hypothesis with one exception. The exception was the questioning procedure. To test this hypothesis the subjects were asked what do your parents want you to do at school? The choice of answers available were: (1) be good at sports; (2) make good grades; and (3) be popular.

### Statistical Procedures

Two statistical measures were enlisted for this investigation. For all comparisons among boys and girls the complex chi square was used. This particular statistic was used because frequency data were involved and there were two or more groups on either of the variables. By use of the chi square it may be determined if the frequencies obtained in this study are different from the frequencies that might be expected due to chance variation.

The second statistical measure used was gamma. In this investigation gamma was used to measure the degree of association between the student's choice of what he prefers to do at school, student's perception of what his parents want him to do at school, the classification of most popular subjects, and grade level. Mueller, Schuessler and Costner (1970) offer an excellent explanation of gamma. They state that the numerical value of gamma gives the percentage of guessing errors eliminated by using knowledge of a second variable to predict order in the first. There are two possible predictions of order and the sign of gamma indicates which of the two is more accurate. It is stated that a positive sign indicates that a prediction of the same order on the predicted variable is more accurate, while a negative sign indicates that a prediction of the reverse order is more accurate. Values of gamma range from -1.0 to +1.0, thus a gamma of +1.0 indicates perfect same order prediction while a gamma of -1.0 indicates perfect reverse order predictability.

On those measures in which the chi square statistic was used, significance was reported at various levels. This manner was chosen

because this study was concerned at least in part with trends. By reporting the levels at which values were significant a truer indication was given of the actual significance of the value involved, thus allowing a more valid study of any possible trends that might be present.



## Chapter IV

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine if fourth, fifth and sixth grade students consider athletics to be more important to them at school than popularity or academic success. Specifically, this study was concerned with four points: (1) what the subjects felt was necessary to be popular at school; (2) whether the subjects chose good students or good athletes as the more popular individuals; (3) what role the subject wanted to see himself in at school; and (4) what role the subjects believed their parents wanted to see them in at school.

Data obtained from a questionnaire administered to subjects in seven elementary schools were presented in tables of both raw data and percentages. The degree of relationship between the dependent and independent variables was measured by appropriate statistical procedures.

The results were organized into three sections: (1) preference of children in relation to academic achievement, athletic performance, and popularity; (2) a comparison of outstanding students with athletes in relation to popularity; and (3) children's perception of parents' values in relation to academic achievement, athletic performance, and popularity.

#### Preference of Children in Relation to Academic Achievement and Athletic Performance

The subjects were requested to answer a question asking what they prefer to do at school. The subjects were given the choices of: (1) making

good grades; (2) being good at sports; or (3) being popular. This section contains the results and discussion of that question.

The predicted hypotheses of the subjects choice of what they preferred to do at school was based on research which indicated that children in general, and boys in particular, value being good at sports more than they value making good grades at school. Based on the experimental and non-experimental observations reviewed, the hypotheses were: when asked to make a choice between making good grades, being good at sports, or being popular:

1. Elementary age boys prefer to be good at sports rather than make good grades or be popular.
2. Elementary age girls prefer to make good grades rather than being good at sports or being popular.

The choices of what elementary school children prefer to do at school are presented in Table 1. The data are presented by raw score and percentages. The comparison made in Table 1 is by grade level.

Table 1  
Comparison by Grade Level of What Elementary School  
Children Prefer to do While at School

Level	<u>Good Grades</u>		<u>Be Popular</u>		<u>Good at Sports</u>		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Grade 4	204	79	15	6	40	15	259
Grade 5	203	74	25	9	45	17	273
Grade 6	184	68	39	14	47	18	270

Gamma = +.1478

Research indicated that the possibility exists that boys and girls differ in the amount of value placed on physical and athletic performance. Therefore, the data were compiled in such manner as to allow for the comparison of boys and girls by grade levels on the question of what they preferred to do at school. To determine if a relationship exists between sexes and choices made, the complex chi square procedure was used. This data are presented in Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Table 2  
Comparison by Sex of What Fourth Grade Children  
Prefer to do While at School

Sex	Good Grades	Be Popular	Good at Sports
Boys	102	7	28
Girls	102	8	12

$$\chi^2 = 5.609$$

$$\chi^2_{.10; 1,2} = 4.605$$

Table 3  
Comparison by Sex of What Fifth Grade Children  
Prefer to do While at School

Sex	Good Grades	Be Popular	Good at Sports
Boys	109	8	36
Girls	94	15	11

$$\chi^2 = 12.73$$

$$\chi^2_{.01; 1,2} = 9.210$$

Table 4

Comparison by Sex of What Sixth Grade Children  
Prefer to do While at School

Sex	Good Grades	Be Popular	Good at Sports
Boys	85	17	30
Girls	99	22	17

$$\chi^2 = 5.16$$

$$\chi^2_{.10; 1,2} = 4.605$$

Table 5

Comparison by Sex of What Total Sample  
Prefers to do While at School

Sex	Good Grades	Be Popular	Good at Sports
Boys	296	32	94
Girls	295	45	40

$$\chi^2 = 21.81$$

$$\chi^2_{.001; 1,2} = 13.815$$

Findings. A majority of subjects at each grade level (see Table 1) indicated that they preferred to make good grades over being good at sports or being popular. A comparison by grade levels of what elementary school children preferred to do revealed a gamma of  $+0.1478$ , indicating a relatively weak positive relationship between grade level and choices made. The chi square analyses (see Tables 2, 3, and 4) comparing sex at each grade level indicated that there was a relationship between sex and choices made at each grade level. The chi square analyses applied to the total sample (see Table 5) yielded a relationship that was significant beyond the .001 level. Data presented in each table indicated that at all three grade levels, success in sports was more attractive to the boys than to the girls.

Discussion. The data presented in Table 1 indicated that most subjects wanted to make good grades in school rather than be good at sports or be popular. There were, however, a few variations between grade levels. The weak positive gamma yielded by the data in Table 1 indicated that there is a slight tendency for children to consider popularity and sport participation to be more attractive as they increase in age. Though the trend is slight, it does give some support to the findings of Coleman (1961), that as the child increases in age academics begin to decrease in importance. Unlike Coleman, however, the trend in this particular study can be attributed to a shift toward an increased attractiveness of popularity rather than athletics.

The data in Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5 failed to support the first hypothesis that boys prefer to be good at sports rather than to make good grades or be popular. These findings also failed to support those

previously cited studies that indicated that boys in particular viewed physical activities and sports as more important to them than making good grades. The data did support the second hypothesis that girls prefer to make good grades rather than being good at sports or being popular. The chi square values indicated that there was a relationship between sex and choices made at each grade level. In each case, after looking at the figures, it was apparent that the relationship indicated that boys' preferences tended toward success in sports more often than did those of the girls. The relationship between sex and choice made was strengthened when the total sample was compared (see Table 5). Even though this relationship exists, data presented in Table 5 give additional evidence that the vast majority of both boys and girls prefer to make good grades rather than to be good at sports or be popular.

#### A Comparison of Outstanding Students to Athletes in Relation to Popularity

The subjects were tested on which classmates they felt were the most popular individuals. From this an indication was given as to which category the most popular subjects were members of. An indication of what the subjects believed was necessary for popularity was also gained by having the subjects rank in order of importance to them a list of four factors that could lead to peer popularity.

The hypothesis for the popularity of elementary school children was based on the review of various investigations which indicated that children who are physically active and participate in sports attain higher prestige among peers. Again, this was particularly true of boys.

Based on this evidence, the hypotheses were:

3. Among elementary children, the most popular individuals are those categorized as athletes.
4. Elementary age girls believe that making good grades is more important for being popular than being good at sports.
5. Elementary age boys believe that being good at sports is more important for being popular than making good grades.

Tables 6, 7, 8, and 9 compare popular children with non-popular children in each classification. Data are presented in Tables 6 and 7 that compares the subjects that are students, student-athletes, and athletes with those classified as other in relation to popularity. Tables 8 and 9 contain data that compare only students, student-athletes, and athletes in relation to popularity and non-popularity. Table 10 contains data that compare popular and non-popular boys in relation to the category in which they are classified, while Table 11 compares popular and non-popular girls in these categories.

Table 6

The Comparison of Popular and Non-Popular Boys  
in Relation to Classification

	Students	Student-Athletes	Athletes	Other
Popular	42	55	61	37
Not Popular	30	32	25	140

$$\chi^2 = 81.10$$

$$\chi^2_{.001; 1,2} = 13.815$$

Table 7

The Comparison of Popular and Non-Popular Girls  
in Relation to Classification

	Students	Student-Athletes	Athletes	Other
Popular	47	53	56	28
Not Popular	35	26	38	97

$$\chi^2 = 52.15$$

$$\chi^2_{.001; 1,2} = 13.815$$

Table 8

The Comparison of Boy Students, Student-Athletes and  
Athletes in Relation to Popularity

	Students	Student-Athletes	Athletes
Popular	42	55	61
Not Popular	30	32	25

$$\chi^2 = 35.51$$

$$\chi^2_{.001; 1,2} = 13.815$$



Table 9

The Comparison of Girl Students, Student-Athletes and  
Athletes in Relation to Popularity

	Students	Student-Athletes	Athletes
Popular	47	53	56
Not Popular	35	26	38

$$\chi^2 = 18.27$$

$$\chi^2_{.001; 1,2} = 13.815$$

Table 10

The Classification of Popular Boys  
As Related to Grade Level

Level	<u>Students</u>		<u>Student-Athletes</u>		<u>Athletes</u>		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Grade 4	11	22	22	44	17	34	50
Grade 5	14	27	15	29	23	44	52
Grade 6	17	30	18	32	21	38	56

$$\text{Gamma} = -.0279$$

Table 11  
The Classification of Popular Girls  
As Related to Grade Level

Level	<u>Students</u>		<u>Student-Athletes</u>		<u>Athletes</u>		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Grade 4	12	23	22	42	18	35	52
Grade 5	19	41	13	28	14	31	46
Grade 6	16	28	18	31	24	41	58

Gamma = +.0243

Findings. Comparison of the incidence of popularity among the four categories revealed a significant relationship between popularity and category for both boys and girls. The chi square analyses applied to each sex yielded relationships that were significant beyond the .001 level (see Tables 6 and 7). This significant chi square indicated that students, student-athletes, and athletes are more likely to be popular than others. The chi square analyses applied to data presented in Tables 8 and 9 also yielded highly significant relationships. These relationships indicated that with boys, athletes were the most popular individuals, while among the girls, student-athletes were the most popular.

Percentages given in Tables 10 and 11 lend additional evidence to the fact that those subjects chosen as popular by peers were more often athletes and student-athletes than students. This was true at all three grade levels for boys (see Table 10) and two of the three grade

levels for girls (see Table 11). By combining the percentage totals for athletes and student-athletes, a very high percentage score is obtained, thus indicating that a large majority of those subjects chosen as popular were perceived by peers as being good athletes. A gamma of near zero was obtained when testing for a relationship between the classification of popular children and grade level.

The subjects were also requested to examine a list of four factors contributing to popularity. They were asked to rank the factors in the order in which they believed the factors would enhance their popularity in their peer group. The values listed in Tables 12, 13, 14, and 15 represent the average rank of that particular factor for each grade level and for the total group. A rank of 1.0 indicated most important and 4.0 least important, thus, the lower the average rank, the more important the factor toward popularity.

Table 12  
Comparison of What Fourth Grade Children  
Believe Will Make Them Popular

Factor	<u>Average Rank For</u>	
	Boys	Girls
Grades	2.16	1.96
Sports	2.14	2.46
Looks	2.82	2.58
Money	2.85	2.91

Table 13

Comparison of What Fifth Grade Children  
Believe Will Make Them Popular

Factor	<u>Average Rank For</u>	
	Boys	Girls
Grades	2.01	1.87
Sports	1.90	2.06
Looks	2.74	2.78
Money	3.20	3.52

Table 14

Comparison of What Sixth Grade Children  
Believe Will Make Them Popular

Factor	<u>Average Rank For</u>	
	Boys	Girls
Grades	2.11	1.99
Sports	1.87	2.33
Looks	2.47	2.37
Money	3.19	3.57

Table 15  
Composite Ranking of What Elementary Age Children  
Believe Will Make Them Popular

Factor	<u>Average Rank For</u>	
	Boys	Girls
Grades	2.09	1.94
Sports	1.97	2.28
Looks	2.68	2.57
Money	3.08	3.33

Comparisons between sexes at each grade level (see Tables 12, 13, 14, and 15) of what factors were believed to be important for popularity indicated a slight difference between choices made by boys and those made by girls when viewed in relation to average rank. At each grade level boys indicated that being good at sports was more important for popularity among peers than were the other choices. In comparison, girls at each grade level indicated that making good grades was most important for popularity. The data also indicated that among boys, as the grade level increased, the importance placed on being good at sports to attain popularity increased slightly.

Discussion. Data collected gave support to the third hypothesis that elementary children view athletes as the most popular individuals. The significant relationships reported in Tables 6 and 7 indicated that those children classified as students, student-athletes, and athletes were chosen by peers as most popular more often than those children

classified as others. From this it could be inferred that by being a good student or good at sports a child enhances his chances of popularity among peers. Significant results reported in Tables 8 and 9 indicated that there is a relationship between the incidence of popularity and the categories of students, student-athletes, and athletes. With boys, it would appear that the relationship could be attributed to the low incidence of non-popularity as compared to popularity among those categorized as athletes. In this particular case, the ratio was over two-to-one in favor of popularity. With girls, the relationship is probably a result of the large number of student-athletes who were popular as compared with the non-popular student-athletes. In this instance, the ratio is slightly over two-to-one. The low gammas yielded in Tables 10 and 11 indicated that there was practically no variation in the classification of popular individuals as grade level increased.

Data presented thus far (see Tables 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11) present a contrast to the results presented in Table 1. In response to the question--What would you most like to do at school?--a majority of the subjects answered "make good grades". However, Tables 6 through 11 indicated that popularity accompanies those subjects who were athletes or student-athletes. This situation could have resulted because in answering what they preferred to do at school, the subjects actually were reflecting outside pressures from parents and teachers to make good grades in school. However, when choosing the most popular individuals in their class, the subjects based their choices on actual experiences and their own feelings.

The data collected supported the fourth and fifth hypotheses relating to what elementary school children believed was important to attain popularity among peers. The data in Table 15 indicated a moderate, but consistent, difference between the sexes, with the girls placing the greatest value on good grades, and boys valuing being good at sports the most. This was true at each grade level. With boys, it was also observed that as the grade level increased, the average rank was higher, thus indicating that the importance of being good at sports increased somewhat as the grade level increased. This lends additional support to the contentions of Coleman (1961) that children learn to overemphasize sports while in school. No such trend existed among the girls, thus indicating that girls viewed the importance of being good at sports in a different perspective than did the boys.

#### Children's Perception of Parental Values in Relation to Academic Achievement and Athletic Performance

The subjects were tested to determine how they perceived the values of their parents in relation to academic achievement and athletic performance. This section contains the results of how elementary school children perceive these values.

The hypothesis was based on research which indicated that parents place considerable importance on athletics. Ogilvie and Tutko (1970) indicated that many times the achievement needs of the parents are met through the performance of the child. Scott (1953) reported that many parents favored athletic competition for elementary school children.

Based on these investigations, the hypothesis was:

6. Elementary age children believe their parents would rather they be good at sports than make good grades in school or be popular.

The choices of what elementary school children feel their parents prefer they do at school are presented in Table 16. The comparison made in Table 16 is by grade level.

Table 16

Comparison by Grade Level of What Elementary  
School Subjects Believe Their Parents  
Prefer They Do At School

Level	<u>Good Grades</u>		<u>Be Popular</u>		<u>Good At Sports</u>		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Grade 4	236	91	7	3	16	6	259
Grade 5	241	88	11	4	21	8	273
Grade 6	245	91	11	4	14	5	270

Gamma = +.0069

A comparison between sexes was also made on this question. The data for this comparison are presented for each grade level in Tables 17, 18, and 19 and for the entire group in Table 20.



Table 17

Comparison by Sex of What Fourth Grade Children  
Believe Their Parents Prefer  
Them to Do at School

Sex	Good Grades	Be Popular	Good At Sports
Boys	120	2	15
Girls	116	5	1

$$\chi^2 = 12.77$$

$$\chi^2_{.01; 1,2} = 9.210$$

Table 18

Comparison by Sex of What Fifth Grade Children  
Believe Their Parents Prefer  
Them to Do at School

Sex	Good Grades	Be Popular	Good At Sports
Boys	132	4	17
Girls	109	7	4

$$\chi^2 = 7.17$$

$$\chi^2_{.05; 1,2} = 5.991$$

Table 19

Comparison by Sex of What Sixth Grade Children  
Believe Their Parents Prefer  
Them to Do at School

Sex	Good Grades	Be Popular	Good At Sports
Boys	115	5	12
Girls	130	6	2

$$\chi^2 = 8.01$$

$$\chi^2_{.02; 1,2} = 7.824$$

Table 20

Comparison by Sex of What the Total Sample  
Believe Their Parents Prefer  
Them to Do at School

Sex	Good Grades	Be Popular	Good At Sports
Boys	367	11	44
Girls	355	18	7

$$\chi^2 = 26.58$$

$$\chi^2_{.001; 1,2} = 13.815$$

Findings. The gamma value of  $+0.0069$  yielded in the comparison by grade levels indicated that there was no difference at the three grade levels as to what the subjects thought their parents expected of them. Based on percentages (see Table 16), it was indicated that at each grade level many more subjects believed their parents preferred that they make good grades rather than be good at sports or be popular. Comparisons by sex indicated that there was a relationship between sex and choice of parental preference at each grade level. A highly significant chi square value of 26.58 was yielded by the total data in Table 20. Data presented in Tables 17, 18, and 19 indicated that at all grade levels tested, more boys than girls felt their parents wanted them to be good at sports. However, at all three grade levels the majority of boys and girls believed their parents wanted them to make good grades.

Discussion. The data failed to support the sixth hypothesis that elementary age children believe their parents would prefer they be good at sports than make good grades or be popular. The choice of good grades was made by approximately equal proportions of subjects at each grade level, therefore accounting for the near zero relationship (gamma:  $+0.0069$ ). This may be compared to the subjects' choices presented in Table 1 where there was a slight tendency for the subjects to gravitate toward the choice of sports and popularity as the grade level increased. The data clearly showed a large percentage of the subjects felt their parents preferred them to be good students. The results indicated here are similar to those derived from the subjects' preferences listed in Tables 2, 3, and 4. Thus, this would lend support to the statement made

previously that the possibility exists that the data presented in Tables 2, 3, and 4 were basically a reflection of what the subjects believed their parents would choose for them to do.

#### Summary of Results

The data indicated that in general, boys and girls prefer to make good grades in school rather than be good at sports. This was particularly true of girls. It was found, however, that as grade level increased, the number of subjects wanting to be popular and to be good at sports increased slightly. In comparing the sexes it was found that there was a relationship between sex and choice made. At each grade level more boys than girls preferred to be good at sports.

Three comparisons in this study indicated the importance of sports in relation to popularity. It was found that those individuals chosen as popular were more often athletes and student-athletes than students. Additionally, it was indicated that the greatest difference between popular and non-popular pupils occurred within the athlete and student-athlete categories for each sex. When asked to rank in order, four factors that would make an individual popular among peers, boys at each grade level ranked being good at sport first. At each grade level, girls ranked making good grades first.

In testing the child's perception of what they felt their parents preferred him to do at school, it was found that a higher percentage of boys and girls felt their parents preferred they make good grades at every level. There was a virtual zero relationship between

choices made and grade level, indicating that grade level did not effect the choice. In the comparison of sexes as to parental preference, it was indicated that boys were more likely to choose the "be good at sports" category than were the girls.

## Chapter V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Problem. The purpose of this study was to determine whether fourth, fifth, and sixth grade children consider athletics to be more important to them at school than academic success. Specifically, this study was concerned with the children's views on four points: (1) what the subjects felt was necessary to be popular at school; (2) whether the subjects chose good students or good athletes as the most popular individuals; (3) what role the subject wanted to see himself in at school; and (4) what role the subjects believed their parents wanted to see them in at school.

Related literature. Much research has been conducted investigating the importance of physical ability and athletic performance to popularity among youth. In most investigations there was a positive relationship reported between physical ability and peer status, especially among males. However, a majority of the research found dealt with high school subjects. Additional studies indicated that athletes and non-athletes differed on various personality traits, among them being social adjustment. Various sources indicated that athletics are in their judgement excessively promoted by schools. A general indication of this is the popularity of sports with the students and within the community. Several studies pointed out that the primary focus of attention afforded many schools by students, community and various media forms is through interscholastic sports.

Other investigations reviewed also indicated that sport is promoted by society. This promotion was present in various forms. Among the most prevalent were: (1) parental pressure to participate; (2) the image afforded the athlete; (3) the meeting of achievement needs; and (4) the status that often accompanies participation.

Selection of subjects. The subjects used in this investigation were selected from schools in Bulloch County, Georgia. Both male and female subjects were included in the selection. To insure a group representative of all the pupils within the county, a stratified random sample was used. The sample consisted of 422 boys and 380 girls (N=802). The subjects selected represented both city and county schools as well as the local private school.

Procedure. A pilot study was conducted to determine if the procedures to be used in the investigation were satisfactory. After several weaknesses were rectified, the formal investigation was started. Once the subjects were identified, a questionnaire was administered to them soliciting information about themselves and their peers. This investigation was conducted with an emphasis placed on three specific areas: (1) the preference of children in relation to academic achievement, athletic performance, and popularity; (2) a comparison of students to athletes in relation to popularity; and (3) the subjects' perception of parental values in relation to academic achievement, athletic performance, and popularity.

The preference of children in relation to academic achievement, athletic performance, and popularity was determined by asking the subjects-

what would you most like to do at school? Two comparisons were made from the data collected. The first comparison was of choices made by grade level. Gamma was used to determine the existence of any difference between grade levels. The second comparison was between choices made and sex at each grade level. The complex chi square was used to determine any significant relationship in this instance.

A second emphasis of this study was the comparison of the categories in relation to popularity. Basically, there were three questions involved with this factor. The first was who were the most popular subjects, good students, good athletes, or student-athletes? Boys and girls were analyzed separately. Gamma was used to determine if there were differences between classification of those chosen as popular and grade level. The second question involved the incidence of popularity among the four categories. The complex chi square was used to determine if there was a significant relationship between student classification and popularity. The third question involved what the subject felt was necessary to be popular among peers. This was determined by having the subjects rank in order of importance a list of four factors given to them by the investigator, that they felt contributed to peer popularity. The average rank of each factor was computed and comparisons were made by sex at each grade level.

The subjects' perception of parental values in relation to academic achievement, athletic performance, and popularity was the third area of emphasis of this investigation. This perception was determined by asking the subjects what they believed their parents



preferred them to do at school. A comparison of choices made by grade level was accomplished by use of gamma. A second comparison was made between choices made and sex of subjects at each grade level. This comparison was made by use of the complex chi square.

### Summary of Findings

The hypotheses proposed were based on the findings of previous investigations in related areas. The following findings resulted from the testing of these hypotheses.

Preference of children in relation to academic achievement and athletic performance. At each grade level, the large majority of subjects preferred to make good grades than preferred to be good at sports or be popular. However, there was a slight tendency for more subjects to choose to be popular and to be good at sports as grade level increased. There was a relationship between sex and choice made at each grade level. At each grade level, more boys wanted to be good at sports than did girls.

Comparison of outstanding students to athletes in relation to popularity. It was found that those subjects chosen as popular by peers were more often athletes than students. The importance of athletic ability to popularity is magnified by the fact that a large majority of those subjects chosen as popular were either athletes or student-athletes. When all categories were compared in relation to popularity, it was found that those listed as students, student-athletes, and athletes were chosen as popular more than those in the others category. Additionally, with

students, student-athletes, and athletes, it was indicated that among boys, athletes were most often chosen as popular, while among the girls, student-athletes were chosen as most popular. The importance of being good at sports varied between sexes. At each grade level boys chose to be good at sports as the most important factor for peer popularity, while girls chose to make good grades. With boys, as the grade level increased, the importance placed on sports to attain popularity increased.

Children's perception of parental values in relation to academic achievement and athletic performance. At each grade level a large majority of subjects believed their parents preferred they make good grades rather than be good at sports or be popular. There was a relationship between sex and choice made at each grade level. In each instance more boys felt their parents wanted them to be good at sports than did girls.

### Conclusions

1. Elementary school children, when given a choice, indicate a preference for making good grades over being good at sports or being popular.
2. The strength of the choice for making good grades may decline as the children advance in age.
3. Elementary school children who are popular among peers are more often athletes than good students.
4. By being a good student or good at sports, a child enhances his chances of popularity among peers.

5. The most popular boys are those considered to be good at sports by peers. The most popular girls are those considered to be student-athletes by peers.

6. Boys consider sports to be the most important factor in attaining peer popularity. However, girls consider grades to be the most important factor for the attainment of popularity.

7. Elementary school children believe that their parents prefer they make good grades rather than be good at sports or be popular.

8. Generally, more boys believe their parents prefer they be good at sports than do girls.

9. Athletic prowess is more important to boys than to girls at every grade level.

#### Observations

It has been observed that the strength of choice for making good grades may decline as children advance in age. There are two factors that may possibly contribute to this trend. The primary factor is that this decline may be a result of peer popularity increasing in importance as the child grows older or progresses in school. The second factor is the slight increase in the number of children choosing to be good at sports as they progress in school. This could be attributed to the fact that as children get older they begin to come into contact more with sports through means such as the recreation department.

The results of this investigation are similar in nature to what Coleman (1961) found in his study of high school subjects in relation to peer popularity. Thus, it is apparent that the situation whereby athletes are more popular among peers than good students is

present before the child gets to high school. From these findings it can be assumed that elementary children desire acceptance and popularity with their peers. Athletic prowess appears to be an excellent avenue toward such acceptance. However, when the subjects were given a choice of being a good student, good at sports, or being popular, a higher percentage of children chose to be good students. Apparently, elementary school children feel obligated to choose to make good grades, while in actual practice they afford the greatest acclaim to those individuals who excel in sports.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

There are three recommendations to be made that would benefit further investigations in this general area. One is that the age subjects used for this investigation have characteristics that differ from those children of younger and slightly older ages. Therefore, it is recommended that future investigations of this nature be completed over the entire range of elementary grades. This would clarify the attitudes of youth toward sports participation on a broader scope.

The subjects in this study could differ characteristically from those children living in a larger metropolitan area. Therefore, it is recommended that future investigations involve additional children from a more urban area. This would allow for a better cross section of youth and thus, give a truer indication of how important sport participation is to children.

A third recommendation is that a study of this nature be conducted in an elementary school that sponsors athletic teams. It would be interesting to note any differences in attitudes that would be recorded in such a situation.

## APPENDIX

## SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. A. Name the three boys in your class who make the best grades.  
1)  
2)  
3)
  - B. Name the three boys in your class who are the best at sports.  
1)  
2)  
3)
  - C. Name the three girls in your class who make the best grades.  
1)  
2)  
3)
  - D. Name the three girls in your class who are the best at sports.  
1)  
2)  
3)
2. What would you most like to do at school?  
A. Make good grades.  
B. Be good at sports.  
C. Be popular.
3. Name the three most popular boys in your class.  
1)  
2)  
3)
4. Name the three most popular girls in your class.  
1)  
2)  
3)
5. Which of the following would make you popular among your friends?  
Rank in order.  
\_\_\_\_\_ Make good grades.  
\_\_\_\_\_ Having lots of money.  
\_\_\_\_\_ Being good at sports.  
\_\_\_\_\_ Being handsome or pretty.
6. Which of the following had your parents rather you do?  
A. Be good at sports.  
B. Make good grades.  
C. Be popular.

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