The Relationship between Sports and Self Image

The aim of this research was to investigate the relationship between sports and self image. Do individuals who participate in sports have the inclination to participate because they want to expand their self image, or do they have a stronger self-image than the average individual and this propels them to do more and more?

Self image can be defined as 'one's evaluative judgment of the self' (Rosenburg 1979) and sport as 'structured or unstructured physical activity, such as running, walking, sports, garden or yard work, and heavy housecleaning' (Patterson, 2000)

This investigation stemmed from research by Kirkcald, Shephard & Siefen (2002) who gathered information from German adolescents. They found that those who practiced regular exercise had a more positive self image, particularly body image and self esteem. Further research was performed by Rickman and Shaffer (2000), who concluded that participating in sports promotes females' self-worth by fostering physical competencies, favourable body images, and gender flexibility.

We investigated this by conducting semi-structured interviews or 'guided conversations' (Rubin and Rubin, 95). Each of us interviewed 1 participant whilst another observed. Participants were informed about the nature of the interview and signed a consent form. We tried to make each interviewee feel as comfortable as possible by interviewing them in their own home. Prior to conducting the interviews we created a set of 10 questions to be asked to roughly shape the data, which would be easier to analyze as the data is comparable across participants.
What sport do you practice?
How often do you play sport?
Why did you start playing sport?
How do you feel when you play sport?
How would you feel if you couldn't play sports?
How do you feel if you miss a session?
How would you describe yourself?
How close are you to your teammates?
How do you feel about other sports players?
Would you encourage others to play sport?

For each standard question we asked approximately three probe questions to try and get our participant to expand on their answer and to obtain as

much information as possible. As these were unstructured questions in allowed a natural flow of conversation and offered the participants a chance to expand on their answers. It also allowed us to clarify anything that was contradictory to previous answers or unclear.

We were attentive and responded to the participants answers by nodding etc. The interviews lasted approximately an hour. We then transcribed the conversation from the detailed notes taken by both the interviewer and observer. The Qualitative portions involved describing a bit about each of our interviews, for example:

I felt my interview went well. I interviewed her at her own environment, and the conversation flowed easily. However, to begin with she seemed a bit self conscious so I did my best to reassure her. Some of the answers weren't as long as I hoped for, so quite a lot of probe questions were needed. But she seemed to answer very honestly and when asked, went into a lot of detail.

Once we had transcribed our data we set about conducting our analysis. Our aim was to create an initial framework of categories which we could use to try to answer the research question.

We each went through our individual interviews coding phrases into different categories. Some phrases could be grouped together under the same categories whereas sometimes a new category was required for a single phrase. After looking at our own interviews we swapped papers within in the group to check that nothing had been missed out. It is easy to habituate your own participant as each interview was around an hour long.

A fresh pair of eyes can often pick up on something you missed previously. Put in quotes and show what categories they'd go to...

Once each phrase had been successfully assigned to a category we merged the three interviews together to see if there were any common themes or categories. We also counted how often each category had been mentioned in the interview as the frequency to which each category appeared would tell us something about how significant it is to that person. Working from the bottom up we created a structural map of the data. The aim was to try and get a better understanding of how the data was linked by visualizing it. In this way we could see how seemingly small individual events contribute to the big picture.