Orientations Toward Sport of Male and Female Intercollegiate Athletes

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The social outcomes of sport experiences have been of particular interest to a number of investigators in recent years (e.g., Staniford, 1979). Because it is often contended that one of the most salient outcomes of sport participation is the attitude that participants develop toward competitive sports, over the past decade a great deal of research has been focused on orientations toward competitive games and sports (see Snyder & Spreitzer, 1979a, for a review).

The most frequently used instrument for assessing orientation towards sport has been the Webb (1969) Attitude Toward Play Inventory. With this instrument, respondents are asked: “What do you think is most important in playing a game?” They are then asked to rank three responses: (a) to play it fairly (play fair orientation), (b) to play as well as you are able (skill orientation), and (c) to beat your opponent (win or victory orientation). Webb (1969) found that as boys and girls advanced in age, their fundamental attitudes toward play changed. Webb reported that this change is represented by the “substitution of ‘skill’ for ‘fairness’ as the paramount factor in play activity, and the increasing importance of victory” (p. 164). He considered this attitudinal trend as a professionalization of play.

Webb’s scale has been employed by several investigators. Mantel and Vander Velden (1974) assessed the orientation of preadolescent boys and found that those who had played on organized sports teams placed greater emphasis on playing well and beating opponents than did those who had not participated in youth sports programs; the latter valued playing fairly more highly. Maloney and Petrie (1972) administered the Webb scale to 567 Canadian students in grades 8, 9, 10 and 12. Their findings were similar to Webb’s in that older students expressed a stronger professional orientation toward play than did younger students; moreover, males expressed higher professionalization scores than females at all grade levels. They also found that students “involved in a combination of casual, interscholastic, and community sporting activities were

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more professionalized in their attitudes toward play” (p. 191) than students not involved in organized sports programs.

Several investigators have studied college students' orientations toward sport (Loy, Birrell, & Rose, 1976; Petrie, 1971a, 1971b; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1979a), but intercollegiate athletes have not been the major focus in any of the previous studies. Because collegiate athletes have typically been involved in organized competitive athletics throughout their youth and have therefore been extensively exposed to the agents and agencies directing sports programs, they have presumably undergone the intense socialization accompanying such experiences; one means of assessing the social outcomes of sports programs is to study the persons who have been the most involved in them. Therefore, the first purpose of this study was to supplement and extend the limited research on orientations toward sport among college students, with the unique focus being on intercollegiate athletes.

Based on the predictions of models for explaining variations in orientations toward sport formulated by Kidd and Woodman (1975) and Snyder and Spreitzer (1979b), and on previous research with the Webb scale (Petrie, 1971a, 1971b; Loy et al., 1976; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1979a), it was expected that intercollegiate athletes would endorse a strong orientation toward playing as well as possible (skill orientation) and playing to win (professional orientation) while showing a weak orientation toward playing fairly. Moreover, it is often contended that females are socialized into being less competitive, less motivated to win in sports, and more means and/or self-expressive oriented than males (e.g., Nicholson, 1979). Because previous research has found that females do have a stronger orientation toward playing for fun and playing fairly and a weaker orientation toward striving for victory (Kidd & Woodman, 1975; Loy et al., 1976; Petrie, 1971a, 1971b; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1979a), it was expected that male athletes would express a stronger orientation towards skill and the quest for victory than female athletes.

The Webb scale has been the most commonly used instrument for assessing orientation toward sport. Kidd and Woodman (1975) developed a modification of the Webb scale by substituting the item “To have fun” for “To play fairly.” Other than these two scales, few alternative instruments exist for assessing orientation toward sport. With few exceptions (Loy et al., 1976; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1979a), Webb and others employing his scale have failed to provide any reliability or validity information. Loy et al. (1976) provided some indication of construct validity by reporting only moderate relationships between the Webb scale and Rosenberg's (1955) “Faith in People” and “Success Orientation” scales. In examining the interrelationships of item responses on the Webb scale and Kidd/Woodman scale, Snyder and Spreitzer (1979a) noted:

The two items of winning and playing as well as you can are not cognitively identical in the two scale formats. In the Webb version of the scale, winning and playing as well as you can are rank ordered vis a vis playing fairly; in the Kidd and Woodman scale, these two items are rank ordered vis a vis having