

# CAN SPORTSMANSHIP TRANSLATE INTO A PERSON'S EVERYDAY LIFE? A COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

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**Barney, D.** College students are taught a variety of courses including physical activity (PA) classes. One component students can learn and experience in their PA class is sportsmanship. Sportsmanship is associated with positive and negative behaviors that are exhibited during a competitive game. Alongside these behaviors, sportsmanship can be transferred into everyday life. Thus, when these behaviors are learned and exhibited in a person's everyday life, they benefit the individual and those that interact with the individual. The purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions and opinions of college-aged students in a competitive physical activity class regarding sportsmanship and its application in life. For this study, participants were surveyed and asked open-ended survey questions requiring them to write their responses. It was found that the participants for this study felt that sportsmanship does transfer into a person's everyday life. The results of this study reinforce the idea that PA can help positive behaviors and that college-aged student can benefit from participation in a PA class through sportsmanship.

**Key Words:** sportsmanship, physical activity, college students

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## INTRODUCTION

The goal of educating a college student is to prepare them to be contributing members of society in a given field. While college students learn knowledge from general education courses (i.e., mathematics, the sciences, the humanities), involvement in physical activity (PA) can also be beneficial. Unfortunately, this aspect of a college students' education is not given the appropriate attention it deserves (Cardinal, et. al., 2012). Thus, universities do not require PA classes as a requirement for graduation. Because of this, these classes are not in the forefront of the student's mind. What can be learned by taking and participating in PA classes? When a student participates in a PA class, they learn the importance of being physically active throughout their life, they will learn and improve skills for a given activity along with other physical activity related outcomes (Barney & McGaha, 2006). A lesser-known learning outcome from PA classes is understanding and applying the role of

sportsmanship. Vallerand et al. (1996) asked athletes from various sports to assess the extent to which sport situations and behaviors pertain to the realm of sportsmanship. The results came up with five dimensions of sportsmanship behaviors. First, athletes display a full commitment towards sport participation by showing up and working hard during all practices and games, and by acknowledging one's mistakes and trying to improve. The second dimension dealt with the respect for social conventions to be found in sports: shaking hands after the game, recognizing the good performance of the opponent and being a good loser. In the third dimension, the emphasis is on respect and concern for the rules and officials, even when the official appears incompetent. The fourth dimension, namely true respect and concern for the opponent, is evidenced through lending one's equipment to the opponent, agreeing to play even if the opponent is late, and refusing to take advantage of an injured opponent. Finally, in the fifth dimension, the approach toward sportsmanship is negative. Here

the athlete takes a win-at-all costs approach towards playing, shows a temper after having made a mistake, and competes for individual prizes and trophies (Vallerand, Deshaies, Cuerrier, Briere, and Pelletier, 1996 p. 198). These dimensions help assess qualities and characteristics of sportsmanship.

The PA classes can provide a vehicle for learning to cooperate with teammates, negotiate and reach solutions for moral conflicts, develop self-control, display courage, and learn virtues such as fairness, team loyalty, and persistence (Shields & Biedermeier, 1995; Stornes & Ommundsen, 2004; Koc & Tamer, 2016). Sportsmanship has been defined as a concern and respect for the rules and officials, social conventions, the opponent, as well as one's full commitment to one's sport and the relative absence of a negative approach towards sport participation (Bolter, Kipp & Johnson, 2018; Koc & Esenturk, 2018; Pennington, 2017; Vallerand et al., 1997).

Because of the nature and context of PA classes, students must closely interact with each other. With these interactions there is the possibility of either positively or negatively affecting student attitudes towards being physically active throughout their lives. Gutierrez and Ruiz (2009) investigated how students perceived the class climates effects on sportsmanship. For this study secondary students in PE class were surveyed, their study emphasized the importance of how a positive class environment can positively effect students' attitudes towards physical activity. Along this same line, Solmon (1996) studied the effects of a positive class environment can have on student's learning a new skill. Study findings indicated students in a positive class environment were more likely to stay on task and students in a negative class environment struggled with opportunities to learn. Interestingly, the researcher noted that when the class environment wasn't positive, students would argue regarding other students cheating during their attempts to execute the desired skill to be learned. Because of these arguments' students had hard feelings towards their classmates. The study did not mention 'sportsmanship', yet the behaviors exhibited by students were unsportsmanlike, creating a negative class environment.

With PA classes being an excellent place for students to be exposed to proper sportsmanship

behaviors, PA instructors can do their part in promoting these proper sportsmanship behaviors. A tool PA instructor have at their disposal in the National Association for Sport and Physical Education [NASPE] Appropriate Instructional Practices (AIP) documents. Documents have been prepared for elementary (NASPE, 2009a), middle school (NASPE, 2009b), high school (NASPE, 2009c) and higher education (NASPE, 2014). The intent of these AIP documents is to ensure that physical education instruction gives students "the best-known practices derived from both research and teaching experiences, into a pattern that maximizes opportunities for learning and success for all students" (NASPE, 2009c, p.3). The document for higher education has appropriate and inappropriate instructional practices in the following categories: a) administration/support, b) assessment, c) instruction, d) professionalism, e) learning environment, f) program staffing, and g) curriculum (NASPE, 2014). Another document created by NASPE is the National Standards and Grade-Level Outcomes for K-12 Physical Education (NASPE, 2014). Within this document there are five national standards for the purpose of assisting their students to become physically literate in a physical activity setting. One of the standards (Statement 4) states, "The physically literate individual exhibits responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others" (NASPE, 2014, p 12). This statement does not specifically mention the word 'sportsmanship', yet the tone of this statement strongly hints to the importance of sportsmanship (Bolter, et. al., 2018).

Within the AIP document for physical activity in higher education there are specific appropriate and inappropriate practices dealing with sportsmanship. An example of an appropriate practice is, "Unacceptable student remarks and behaviors are dealt with immediately and firmly." On the other hand, the inappropriate practice is, "Verbal or nonverbal behavior that is hurtful, intimidating or disrespectful to other students is overlooked and/or ignored" (NASPE, 2014, p.18). Another example of an appropriate instructional practice in the higher education AIP document is:

"Program offerings include content that allows students to develop social skills

(cooperation and communication) and responsible behavior that will lead them to become productive members of society. Curriculum is designed to ensure that these skills are taught intentionally and aren't left for "teachable moments" only (NASPE, 2014, p. 26).

For both instructional practices, there is no mention of sportsmanship, yet, both instructional practices strongly allude to the concepts of exhibiting good sportsmanship while participating in college PA class activities. Research regarding AIP in PE has ascertained the knowledge and opinions of parents (Barney & Pleban, 2010), school administrators (Barney & Prusak, 2016), Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) majors (Barney, Christenson, & Pleban, 2015; Barney & Christenson, 2013; Barney, Christenson, & Pleban, 2012), and K-12 students (Barney & Strand, 2008; Barney, Prusak, & Strand, 2013; Barney & Christenson, 2014). These research studies chiefly investigated general AIP practices, in K-12 PE context.

For this study the social learning theory was used as the basis for this study which Mears (2008) stated that the consequences of a behavior influences the likelihood of continued performance. For example, exposing students to certain concepts (sportsmanship in team sports) affects their interactions throughout their lives. Another element to social learning is that because humans learn by observing and participating in activities, they are likely to continue behaviors observed in others of similar age and ability. Thus, the more college-aged students are exposed to sportsmanship behaviors there is a greater likelihood they will continue them in competitive sports and in other aspects of their lives. It is implied in this study that college-aged students that exhibit proper sportsmanship behaviors will rely upon them throughout their lives. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions and opinions of college-aged students in a

competitive physical activity class regarding sportsmanship and its application in life.

## **METHODS**

### ***Participants***

Participants for this study included 206 college-aged students (123 males & 83 females) from a private university located in the western United States. Participants were comprised of both undergraduate students (44 freshmen, 43 sophomore, 52 juniors, and 54 seniors) and graduate students (13). The participants were enrolled in badminton and racquetball activity classes. These activities were chosen because of the competitive nature of the activity. Also, because of the COVID-19 pandemic these activities were available during this study. Classes met two days a week for one hour. The university Institutional Board (IRB) granted approval to conduct this study.

### ***Instrumentation***

For this study the researchers used portions of the Multidimensional Sportsmanship Orientation Scale (Vallerand, et. al., 1997). Originally, this instrument consisted of 25 items. Fourteen items were used which were applicable to this study. Additionally, from reading through the literature, six other statements were added to the survey<sup>1</sup> (see Table 1). The Multidimensional Sportsmanship Orientation Scale possesses adequate levels of reliability and validity (Gutierrez & Ruiz, 2009; Vallerand, et. al., 1997). The survey consisted of 14 Likert scale statements (Not Applied, Averagely Applied, Highly Applied, and Extremely). Other survey statements consisted of two Yes/No statements and four open-ended statements.

### ***Procedures***

Convenience sampling was employed to collect data for this study. The researcher contacted the instructors for each PA course explaining both the study and the survey. After obtaining the instructors agreement, the researchers attended each PA class,

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<sup>1</sup> Actual survey can be provided upon request.

explained the study, collected the informed consent forms, and administered the survey to the students. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete. The survey was administered at the beginning of class, upon the instructor's request. For this study 98% of the students agreed to participate by taking the survey. All students were assured that their voluntary decision to participate in the study would not affect their grade in the class or class standing.

### Data Analysis

For the quantitative data, descriptive statistics were derived from the survey. Qualitative data analysis consisting of thematic content analysis was conducted. To accomplish thematic content analysis of respondent's short answers, the researchers completed multiple readings of the data noting repeated and emerging themes that became evident for each survey question that the participants responded to (Mueller & Skamp, 2003). No auditor was used to eliminate any bias.

## RESULTS

The data was analyzed for both male and female participants responses to the sportsmanship survey (see Table 2). For statement one both male (50% Highly Applied) and females (42% Highly Applied) congratulated their opponent after a loss. Similarly, (statement 2), males (50% Highly Applied) and females (50% Extremely Applied) congratulates their opponent after defeating them. Another survey statement along the lines of congratulating and opponent, was statement seven. The survey statement dealt with congratulating an opponent after making a good play during competition. Male (50% Highly Applied) and females (53% Extremely Applied) has similar results as to the two previous survey statements. Finally, statement 15 asked the participants if they feel sportsmanship can translate into everyday aspects of life. The response options for this statement were yes/no. For this statement 98% of males and 99% of the females felt that 'yes' sportsmanship can translate into their everyday lives

**Table 1 – part 1**

*Results from the Sportsmanship Survey in Physical Activity Classes*

	Not Applied		Averagely Applies		Highly Applied		Extremely	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1. I congratulate my opponent after a loss.	6%	1%	9%	17%	50%	42%	35%	40%
2. I congratulate my opponent after a win.	2%	1%	7%	7%	50%	42%	41%	50%
3. I abide by the rules of the game.	1%	0%	1%	4%	30%	34%	68%	62%
4. I help an opponent up after a fall.	11%	7%	22%	23%	35%	36%	32%	34%
5. I make excuses for my poor play.	25%	22%	57%	60%	15%	14%	3%	4%
6. I get mad if I make a mistake during a game.	23%	30%	53%	45%	23%	18%	1%	7%
7. I congratulate my opponent after a good play they complete.	1%	1%	6%	4%	50%	42%	43%	53%

8. I blame teammates for a loss.	71%	80%	26%	19%	1%	1%	1%	0%
9. I accept defeat in good faith.	3%	2%	24%	20%	48%	45%	25%	33%
10. I draw attention of my teammates on poor play of an opponent.	60%	91%	26%	9%	10%	0%	4%	0%
11. I accept criticism and guidance from teammates.	1%	1%	24%	22%	58%	43%	17%	34%
12. I boast to the opponent when I win.	74%	84%	18%	12%	7%	3%	1%	1%
13. I am violent if my opponent plays better than me?	92%	98%	7%	2%	0%	0%	1%	0%
14. After I win, I taunt the opponent.	87%	94%	11%	5%	2%	1%	0%	0%

**Table 2 – part 2**

*Results from the Sportsmanship Survey in Physical Activity Class*

	YES		NO	
	M	F	M	F
15. Do you feel sportsmanship can translate into everyday life?	98%	99%	2%	1%
17. Do you feel it is important to practice good and proper sportsmanship while participating in your PA class?	99%	99%	1%	1%

The other data collected for this study were short answers from the survey. For this study participant statements to the survey serve to strengthen the data. Statement 16 asked the participants if

sportsmanship can translate into everyday life. It was generally felt from the participants that sportsmanship does translate into a person's everyday life. A male participant stated, "I feel like

especially in a work setting. This applies where I try to be patient and supportive of my co-workers.” Another male participant stated, “The court isn’t the only place that we compete or are competitive. Any interaction with co-workers is an opportunity to display sportsmanship.” A female participant stated, “I have noticed that people who use good sportsmanship tend to be more respectful of others in general. People who don’t use good sportsmanship tend to respect other people less.” And finally, one participant said, “Our life involves human interaction! Sportsmanship can apply to any social part of life (work, church, family, etc.)” Statement 18 asked the participants if they feel it is important to practice good sportsmanship while in their physical activity class. One participant stated, “This class is any easy place to practice sportsmanship for me.” Another participant said, “Practicing good sportsmanship in class will make it a habit, which we can apply in real games and in life.” A third participant stated, “Sportsmanship creates a positive environment which makes the game more fun.” A third statement (19) asked participants how sportsmanship can be applied in other aspects in life. One participant stated, “When things go wrong you can apply what you’ve learned with sportsmanship to work, school and hardships.” Another student said, “I apply it in my daily life when I congratulate other people on their talents and continue to develop my own.” And finally, a participant stated, “Those who know how to treat others kindly in various sport situations will know how to get along with co-workers, friends and family.”

## **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions and opinions of college-aged students in a competitive PA class regarding sportsmanship and its application to life. It was felt from the participants that sportsmanship can be applied throughout a person’s life. The results of this study showed that win or lose the participants would congratulate their opponent. These results are like what Clarke and Quill (2003) found in their research. The researchers studied physical education (PE) faculty training future PE teacher’s appropriate sportsmanship behaviors to be taught in PE classes. The findings from this study were that PE students appreciated rules and the acceptable codes of behavior for competition. The PE

majors learned how to acknowledge success of the student and how to accept defeat from an opponent. The participants from this study were extremely or highly willing to congratulate their opponent if they either defeated or lost to their opponent. One student stated, “Win or lose, being a decent human and control your emotions.” Another finding from this study dealt with aggressive behaviors during a competitive game, specifically taunting and boasting to an opponent. From the literature Koc (2018) examined the relationship between the PE course sportsmanship behaviors, tendency to violence and empathetic ability for elementary school 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. The results showed that females had higher sportsmanship, lesser violent tendencies, and higher levels of empathy. The results from this study revealed that a large majority of both male and female participants did not taunt or boast to their opponents. Regarding these findings participants comments were, “You don’t want to put down others for any reason”, “Got to be a good person”, and “Everyone deserves to be treated with respect. You don’t want to be the worst part of someone’s day.” Taunting and boasting to an opponent has become a common occurrence in a competitive sport setting. When watching a sport competition these behaviors can be very noticeable. The results imply otherwise different from what is seen in many sporting events at all levels. The results show that it is more important to be ‘a good person’ and being respectful with those a person will associate with. When this is done, better will be achieved.

One final point of discussion was if the participants felt sportsmanship can translate into everyday life. The results from this study showed that a majority of both the male and female participants felt that sportsmanship can translate into everyday life. Student comments regarding this survey statement were “Sportsmanship extends to everyday life. If you have sportsmanship in everyday life, you are just being a decent human being”, “Showing proper sportsmanship is something useful in all situations in life”, and “Sportsmanship is respect. Respect is used every day.” From the literature the social learning theory helps solidify the findings from this study (Mears, 2008). The theory states that the continuance of a behavior that is influenced will in likelihood be continued in a person’s life. Along these

lines, the practitioner literature has reinforced this line of thought that physical activity settings in schools' have a unique opportunity of learning and improving social behaviors (Pennington, 2017).

### **Implications of the Study**

The results from this study should reinforce the importance and value college PA classes can have on college students after they graduate and work in their professions and in their families and interpersonal relationships. This idea of sportsmanship being applied in many aspects of a person's life is very valuable. The nature of competitive activities and the results of a 'winner or loser' in a PA class can be beneficial for a person that has to work with others (Barney, Pleban, & Muday, 2019). Student experiences in their physical activity class can prepare them when not getting a job, or not receiving a promotion, being able to work together successfully in a group all can be gained for learning and exhibiting sportsmanship in college PA classes. The results from this study report the positive learning experiences that can be learned and used throughout a person's life. One student nicely summed up their experiences from their participation in their PA class by stating "Sportsmanship is important in competitive games. But I have come to realize that sportsmanship takes on many other forms in a person's life."

### **Study Limitations**

Study limitations were, First, the participants came from one university. Second, the research was conducted at a private university. These factors may not be a representative sampling of participants from other colleges or universities or geographic regions, which necessarily may limit and perhaps mostly applicable to those participants demographics. Further research with a broader demographic would provide a richer data set to ascertain the generalizability of the conclusions and implications found in this study.

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