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Title: Athletics and Identity

About the Author:

Keywords: Intramurals, Identity, Athletics, High School, Recreation, Competition, Sports

Abstract: My research questions were:

- How do sports influence a person's identity?
- Are high school athletes more likely to do intramural sports if they're not on the varsity team in college?
- Do boys and girls have different intensity levels while playing?
- Why do people choose to be in sports in the first place?

To answer these questions I conducted interviews with fellow freshman, analyzed the intramural web page, looked at case studies done through journal articles, and observed intramural games being played to observe the level of play. My findings were much like I suspected, with some surprises such as what people considered to be athletic, expectations for different levels of competition, and reasons for participating in different levels of competition- what they wanted to get out of it. I found that the boys and girls intramural leagues are played at different levels of competition, even though they are both recreational. The boys play more intensely and competitively than the girls, the girls just seem to want to have fun with it.

Initial Exercises:

Question: My primary question was how do sports affect a person's personal identity?

Plan: It was originally going to be many artifact analyses, but eventually I realized that interviews and observations were the best way to gain insight on people's motives behind athletic participation.

Data: see interview attachments at the bottom

Discuss: Coming into this paper, I knew that sports had a large impact on a person's life and personal identity. I wanted to research more about this and find the meaning behind it. Sports are one of the best ways for a student to get involved with their classmates, especially in high school where it is the most vital to have a close group of friends. Sport participation can provide one with a better sense of security and belonging. I know that many people play sports in high school, but do not make the varsity team in college or choose not to play. In this case, I chose to research whether or not these students chose to carry on playing sports in college through intramurals or club teams, since sports have a large part of their identity. I think it is interesting to see whether or not they keep their identity from high school intact or if they choose to create a new one.

Through my research, I found that people play different levels of competitive sport for different reasons- for friends, fitness, enjoyment or image. I also found that people who played sports in high school considered themselves an athlete then but not now, even if they still play intramurals at college. This led me to believe that this is because people associate athletes with a certain level of competition and ability. For instance, if you sit on the bench some may say you are not considered an athlete, which is difficult because they put the same effort into it as everyone else. Also, if you play at higher levels of competition you are considered an athlete, but lower levels not so much. I found all of this very interesting to analyze.

EUI Links: <http://www.ideals.uiuc.edu/handle/2142/1868>

Reflect: Throughout writing this paper, I kept coming up on more studies done and interviews. These, along with my observations, were what really helped me understand more the minds of other people and how sports have an impact on them. It was stressful at times when studies and such would show up that was no help at all, but besides this not too bad. Working online made it much easier though to find information and send it to the

necessary people. Complying with an IRB was really no trouble at all, the people I interviewed had no trouble signing the consent form. As for archiving, I haven't made up my mind yet.

Final Reflections

Coming into Rhetoric 105 I had a few goals in mind. One of them was, obviously, to improve my writing in general. But there were more specific goals that I thought would help me to achieve this. One in particular is that I wanted to learn how to write in a more formal way, because many of my papers I usually write informally. During high school it did not seem to be as big of a deal if the paper was slightly more informal, but here in college it matters much more. One key example was the research paper. I knew that it had to be written more formally than I was used to, and it was a bit of a challenge for me. Overall though I think that I did a good job and did what I could with it. My topic was intramural sports, which are usually very relaxed. I tend to write how I feel at the time, and when I was observing and interviewing people for this paper I was more relaxed than I might have been in other circumstances or if I was researching other topics. Since this paper was supposed to be more formal I had to work harder to make this casual and relatively laid-back scene seem more formal. For some it may not be difficult for I had a harder time. I think that another

reason that I have a more difficult time writing formally sometimes is because I like to joke around and have fun, while writing formally tends to be more serious. It is a little outside of the box for me, I guess you could say, and that is why I have been trying to improve upon it.

Another goal of mine was to figure out an easier, more successful method of writing and wanted to have a system to do so. I think that this can go along with the term “writing as a process.” Coming into the class I did not know what this meant, but now I look at it as writing a paper piece by piece and tying it all together. I think that it is important to be able to tie everything you write together, not have it be all over the place in a paper. I learned from this class that the final composition takes a lot of work, more than it seemed to in high school. I found that by using writing as a process, by writing it all in order to tie together in the end, a writer is able to put together a satisfactory final piece, and this is one of the most important lessons that I learned this semester.

By helping me realize this, I think that this class helped me a lot. We had the chance to work with different styles of writing and that made it easier to see what each style is like and what they each require. In the Course Pack and various handouts there were many different types of writing. We saw

interviews, observations, investigative research, visual images, etc. There were pieces about many different topics such as racism, strict rules in certain schools, an undercover teacher acting as a freshman, etc. Each of these taught us something different in writing like giving good visual descriptions, expanding on ideas, and incorporating your surroundings into the paper. Before this class I knew that these factors were important but did not realize just how much. They really help to tie a paper together and make it more interesting for the reader to read. The student who came in and discussed interviews during class was also extremely helpful. He helped us to learn how to properly document an interview and showed us how to properly conduct an interview and what is required when doing ethnographic research. While writing my research paper, his advice really helped me because much of my paper was based off of interviews I conducted. Before this, I had never heard of ethnographic research and did not know what to make of it. After taking the class I think I have a better idea of it. If I had to define it I would say that it is doing extensive research on a specific topic through interviews, observations and analyses and putting these together to form an educated argument. I'm not sure what the exact definition is, but that's the best one that I can come up with, and I tried to write it as formally as possible!

Even though this research paper had to be written more formally, there were other pieces of work during the semester that were not as strict upon this guideline. The pieces that I am referring to are the reading responses, in particular the third one. I felt that this one was much more informal. It dealt with racism and prejudice and our own personal opinions on how they still affect the world today. Since this piece required more opinions than anything else, it seemed to me to be much more formal than other papers. I feel that these kinds of assignments, ones where you are to talk about personal opinions and beliefs, tend to be more informal than formal. When you are writing down your beliefs, often times you will “ramble on” without stopping. It takes much more editing to make it formal, but these reading responses were more casual than other assignments in the class. In addition to these, the inquiries were also formal at times and informal at others. One in particular that stands out to me is the third inquiry. Compared to the other two, which had been focused on analyses and personal relations to the university, this one was much more informal. It was to help prepare us for writing our research paper and was an annotated bibliography. The reason that this one was so informal is because we simply had to describe the site and how it would help us when writing our paper. I think that this was

one of the easiest ones to write because of it being informal and because it was so straightforward.

Because we wrote different kinds of pieces this semester, I think that we had a well rounded experience of working with different types of writing, whether it was simply reading them or reading them and writing our own as well. As helpful as these were, I think that the most helpful days were when we had our conferences. Both the individual conference and the group conference gave me the best sense of where I was in my writing and what I had to do to improve. One reason for this is that I believe it is easier to learn in a smaller environment where the teacher can really focus on the individual and give them more personal and focused advice. Of these two conferences I think that the group conference was the most helpful because we were able to receive advice from both the teacher and our peers, who are in the same position as us.

All in all, I think that this class helped me a lot in improving my writing. I knew coming in that I had a lot of work ahead and that I was going to put a lot of effort into writing at the college level. In high school the teachers seemed to let more slide than here, and I think that taking this class helped bring me closer to writing at the college level like I should be. It wasn't

always a smooth ride, though. I struggled in parts of the class, particularly the beginning and on the more formal pieces, but I feel that I am much farther ahead than I was five months ago.

Recommendations: If you want to use this go for it I don't care either way really. I would say use it if you need it!