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# Parental Perceptions of Independence and Efficacy of their Children with Visual Impairments

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# Parental Perceptions of Independence and Efficacy of their Children with Visual Impairments

## **Cover Page Footnote**

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## Parental Perceptions of Independence and Efficacy of their Children with Visual Impairments

When it comes to raising children, there is a fine line between overprotection from hardship and healthy encouragement in activities that are difficult and challenging. Overprotection is defined as an excessive level of maternal or paternal protection taking into account the developmental and ability level of the child (Holmbeck, Johnson, Wills, McKernon, Rose, Erklin & Kemper, 2002). Overprotection may also include anxiety driven behaviors such as too much physical and social contact, coddling, and undo safety concerns (Holmbeck, et.al, 2002). Parents of students with visual impairments tend to overprotect their child due to safety concerns and the desire to compensate for their child's disability (Pinquart & Pfeiffer, 2011). These parents may face difficulty finding a balance between intense overprotection for reasons of safety versus the level of encouragement and attention to the participation in unique or challenging learning experiences their children may need. These parents of children with visual impairments may also may struggle to finding the fine line between viewing the child primarily through the lens of the impairment (*as other or less than*) versus treating the child in the same manner other children are treated in relation to expectations and independence. This is especially true when highly physical activities are involved. Perkins, Columna, Lieberman & Bailey (2013) posit that intentional planning, guidance and family involvement is crucial in engaging students with visual impairments in physical activity.

### Overprotection and the Impact on Skill Development and Independence

Parents of children with disabilities are generally knowledgeable about difficulties that their child may face and may have an intense desire to advocate for his or her individual needs. In some cases this attempt to meet various needs manifests itself in avoidance of engagement in

activities and experiences that have long-term benefit but may be perceived as difficult or a struggle in the short term. An overprotective parent is highly involved and concerned in all of their child's daily activities (Holmbeck et al., 2002). This level of involvement can often limit the learning and development of a variety of skills that are considered necessary for the life-long success of children with visual impairments. Overprotection is demonstrated by a parent (to the child and to society) as a manifestation of a low level of perceived efficacy and as evidence of lowered expectations of the child (Tuttle & Tuttle, 1996). Areas of development that may be impacted by parental overprotection include; the limiting of experiences in various environments, a lack of opportunity to acquire self-regulation and self-determination skills, interference in the practice of social skills, and avoidance of motor activities and mobility skills.

The framework for development of these skills begins in infancy and builds throughout childhood through experiences in and with the environment (Cho & Palmer, 2008). Parents of children with visual impairments may have a tendency to avoid involving their children in activities and may have difficulty allowing their children to participate in various experiences. Parents of children with visual impairments may tend to over protect and over assist to compensate for their child because they are concerned about their child's safety or in an attempt to compensate for their child's disability (Pinquart & Pfeiffer, 2011). As the physical nature of activities increases parents may show an increased tendency to over help because of a lack of trust in their child's abilities to participate and in the fear and anxiety related to a perceived increase in the possibility of injury (Stuart, Lieberman & Hand, 2006).

Parents may negatively impact the development of necessary skills by limiting opportunities of the child to self-direct. Self-determination; the ability to make decisions for oneself, and self-regulation; the ability to control one's behavior, fail to develop when restrictions

interfere with the environmental interactions of a child with visual impairment (Cho & Palmer, 2008). Students with visual impairments must first be made aware of available options and decisions to facilitate making age appropriate choices in their own life (Sapp & Hatlen, 2010). According to Cho and Palmer (2008), self-determination is a vital factor in decision making for any individual and that parental overprotection may significantly curtail the development of this skill. By being overprotective, parents may undermine skill development and limit the current and future level of independence that may be exhibited by their child (Holmbeck et.al, 2002). Overprotection can lead to a negative impact on the ability of their child to develop and practice social skills. Through this overprotection parents of children with blindness and visual impairments may inadvertently prevent their children from participating in important novel learning experiences (Cho & Palmer, 2008). Piquart and Pfeiffer (2011) suggest that overprotective behavior by parents may unknowingly produce a negative outcome when it comes to relationship building and social skill development. The authors state that, "Parental overprotection may inadvertently exacerbate avoidant tendencies and inhibit the establishment of peer relationships" (Piquart & Pfeiffer, 2011, p. 97).

Each of these skills seems to be intertwined. Overprotection may limit the ability to experience meaningful physical interactions with the environment for students with visual impairments. Environmental experiences through movement play a key role in developing self-regulation and self-determination. Instruction in orientation and mobility promotes purposeful movement through planned environmental exploration. Learning these skills teaches the student the skills necessary for independence (Sapp & Hatlen, 2010). Minimal motivation in the development of self-determination skills may occur if all experiences and interactions are mitigated by parent intervention. Unless a child with visual impairments explores and learns of

their own accord by reasons of all needs being met. Parental over protection may discourage purposeful movement by limiting self-determination because an infant may have no motivation to reach out and find their favorite toy as it is always placed in their hands (Cho & Palmer, 2008). Cho and Palmer (2008) conclude that self-regulation and self-determination are developed with interaction with people and with the environment. Families, in addition to school personnel, may not realize how overprotection affects self-determination's vital role in the creation of independence.

Overprotection can also result in lowered expectations and limited independence. There is a need for appropriate expectations placed on students in attempts to reach full potential. Lower expectations will yield lower results and students can become complacent; accustomed to doing less on their own which leads to less independence. Lieberman (2013) stated, "It is imperative to encourage individuals who are blind to participate in physical activity. The physical, social, and psychological benefits of physical activity increase the likelihood of independence and improve their quality of life". Some data suggests that due to lower levels of participation in lower levels in physical activity by persons with visual impairments has resulted there is a higher occurrence of obesity among this population (Holbrook, Caputo, Perry, Fuller, & Morgan, 2009). Other research implied similar findings, "Over protectiveness and lower expectations of parents and teachers contributed to the formation of sedentary tendencies among children with visual impairments" (Ward, Farnsworth, Babkes-Stellino & Perrett, 2011 p. 493). Students with visual impairments are inclined to be more dependent on family members for needs, therefore making this population less likely to be extroverted, limiting socialization (Pinquart & Pfeiffer, 2011). Students with visual impairments with parental overprotection tend

to have smaller social networks and less support from classmates when compared to their peers. (Pinquart & Pfeiffer, 2011).

### Interventions to Prepare Visually Impaired Children for Independence

One way to ensure that students with visual impairments become involved in social and physical activities is through parents and caregivers insurance of their direct exposure and participation. Participation in physical activities for this population is not automatic. To be consistently active, exposure to recreational experiences must be encouraged and carefully planned. "Recreation and leisure skills must be deliberately planned and taught to blind and visually impaired students and should focus on the development of life-long skills" (Hatlen, 1996, p. 29). According to Sapp & Hatlen (2010), the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) are the identified additional skills that children with visual impairments "need to be successful in school, the community, and the workplace" (p. 338). Skills that sighted children learn visually or through participation in activities, children with visual impairments may need individualized instruction at school and at home (Lieberman, 2013). Disability specific areas of deficiency that are impacted are addressed in addition to the academic core curriculum (Sapp & Hatlen, 2010). One of the nine areas of ECC is recreational and leisure skills including physical activities.

### Outcomes of Independence-building Activities

Physical activity is crucial to the development of physical and mental health and social interactions (Lieberman & Houston-Wilson, 1999). Children's self-esteem and body image can be positively correlated to physical activity, improved levels of depression and anxiety. Studies have shown that among children with visual impairments, only 27 percent are physically active on a regular basis (Boffoli, Gasperetti, Yang & Lieberman, 2011 p. 172). Becoming an active and social adult is dependent upon children with visual impairments learning recreation skills in

order to participate in normal activities alongside their peers (Lieberman, 2013). "Recreation is one place where our children should learn the skills necessary to be active and social adults. And so if they don't learn the basic recreation skills they're not going to be able to participate in normal activities when they grow older" (Lieberman, 2013).

### Purpose

The purpose of this research was to look at the variance of parental attitudes between student involvement in physical activity and parental overprotection for children with visual impairments. The focus of this study involved three areas of interest which included parents' perceptions of their child's safety, perceptions of the child's independence and advocacy skills, and the parents desire to protect or safeguard their child in relation to engagement in extracurricular and physical activities. During the research, several questions arose regarding physical activity of children with visual impairments and parental perceptions. Do parental beliefs in their child's ability, self advocacy, and self-directedness impact the provided encouragement and permissions the parents may provide for participation in such events? How does parents' perceived need to personally protect and safeguard their child align with the parents' belief in participation and experience building as essential in order for their child to develop?

### Unique Experiences of Students with Visual Impairments

Young students with visual impairments have fewer interactions socially with peers and generally spend more down time alone. Activities attended by children with visual impairments are more passive and less diverse. These students are less independent and are usually escorted by their parents (Jessup, Cornell & Bundy, 2010). As a means to building skills and a sense of



accomplishment, reduce social isolation and promote self-image, it is necessary for children with visual impairments to participate in leisure activities (Jessup, Cornell & Bundy, 2010)

Children with visual impairments need specially designed instruction in areas that are directly affected by their lack of vision in addition to the academic core curriculum. The Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) encompasses nine areas (Hatlen, 1996). These nine areas should be addressed by certified teachers of students with visual impairments and orientation and mobility specialists but may be taught in a collaborative manner with parents (Sapp & Hatlen, 2010). According to Sapp & Hatlen (2010) to ensure instruction in areas of need of the ECC.

Students with visual impairments must experience hands on activities due to limited visual abilities as compared to their sighted peers who can attend to tasks visually. Recreational and leisure activities are included in the ECC for students with visual impairments to meet their unique learning needs (Sapp & Hatlen, 2010). Overprotection can severely limit a student's growth due to parent's perception of fear of injury in the participation in recreation and leisure activities (Stuart, Lieberman & Hand, 2006). Sports and games must be purposefully taught to children with visual impairments in order to develop enjoyment and a drive to participate in recreation and leisure activities (Hatlen, 1996). Participation in recreational and leisure activities can have a positive effect in other areas of child's development. According to Jessup, Cornell and Bundy (2010), "Participation in recreation and leisure activities helps maintain physical, emotional, and mental health (p. 421). The authors go on to say "leisure activities can be a means to overcoming anxiety and adversity" (Jessup, Cornell & Bundy, 2010, p. 421). Participation in these activities may encourage building self-confidence necessary to try novel activities. Students with visual impairments are less likely to make judgment as to whether or not they will enjoy an activity unless provided direct experiences to participate. In addition, opportunities are

seldom provided since they are unaware or have little knowledge of activities available to them (Hatlen, 1996).

Opportunities in extracurricular activities must be provided to build necessary skills for independence. To overcome the challenges of parental overprotection as it pertains to physical and social activities, parents must be aware of available opportunities for their child to participate in extra-curricular activities. Parents also should encourage their child to take risks and engage in available opportunities. Overprotective parents of children with visual impairments who limit their child's participation in physical activities can cause a developmental delay in skills necessary for physical activities and social interactions (Lieberman & Houston-Wilson, 1999). Finding this balance is a challenge for parents, however lack of participation may limit social interactions and the development of independence.

According to Sapp & Hatlen (2010), students require specific instruction to acquire knowledge and experiences necessary to make informed choices. Direct instruction in problem solving skills allows students to take advantage of personal options by learning to adequately evaluate personal choices (Sapp & Hatlen, 2010). Cho and Palmer (2008) conclude that self-regulation and self-determination require collaborative efforts from early interventionists, vision professionals and parents. Collaborative endeavors limit over dependence on others by building effective choice making skills for a child with visual impairments. Self-determination skills that begin in the home should be reinforced in the school environment. "The desirability of avoiding overdependence of the child on parental direction and the child's expectation that all direction and initiation will come from external sources and the lack of social skills, problems with school adjustment and other difficulties that may result from a failure to acquire self-regulation" (Cho, & Palmer, 2008 p. 27). Despite its inclusion as part of the ECC, self-determination is

infrequently taught in school as a result of the lack of regard from government educational agencies (Levin & Rotheram-Fuller, 2011). The authors add that school administration should place more emphasis on self-determination because it is integral in promoting learning and independence and that largely, are not being taught skills to students with visual impairments (Levin & Rotheram-Fuller, 2011). Self-determination skills are a precursor to motivation that promotes participation in physical activities and movement (Cho & Palmer, 2008).

The most influential people in a child's life are their parents. In discussing physical activity, Stuart et al. (2006) state, "Adults expectations and the value placed on children's achievement choices influence the children's beliefs about the value of participating and the goals that children develop for these activities" (p.223). The advocacy site, Parent Connect, that is a joint venture of American Foundation for the Blind and the National Association of Parents of Children with Visual Impairments posits, "Setting lower expectations for a visually impaired child than for his sighted brothers or sisters or friends is telling him, in effect, that he isn't capable of doing what everyone else does" (Family Connect, 2015). A student with a visual impairment is most likely to take risks and participate in recreation and leisure activities with parental support and positive encouragement. Findings infer that attitudes regarding physical activities were influenced by values and support provided by parents of children with visual impairments (Stuart, Lieberman, & Hand, 2006). Pinqart and Pfeiffer (2011) add "Students who were blind were more likely to feel that they could not look after themselves unless their parents were around" (p. 104). These studies support the contention that self-determination, confidence and self-esteem may be impacted by dependence on parents hindering opportunities to experience recreation and leisure activities that encourage the growth and development of well-rounded individuals with positive self-esteem and self-confidence.

Parental support is crucial with involvement in physical activity (Perkins et.al. 2013). Recreation and leisure skills may assist a student with visual impairments demonstrate how well children with visual impairments perform independently and lessen the fears of their parents by demonstrating safe performance of activities. Participation in an activity may help the child feel a sense of accomplishment and pride. “Children who are physically active are more likely to become active adults who will benefit from exercise throughout their lives (Boffoli, Gasperetti, Yang & Lieberman, 2011 p. 172)”. Recreation and leisure activities allow opportunities for a person with a visual impairment to practice resilience against the hardships of life. “Resilience refers to the ability to thrive amid adversity. It’s two essential components are exposure to significant adversity (risk) and the judgment of competence in the achievement of positive adaptation” (Jessup, Cornell, & Bundy, 2010).

Participation in extra-curricular activities may support enhancement and maintenance of a healthy lifestyle, build social interaction, and develop resilience against the challenges faced by individuals with visual impairments. Working together, parents and professionals have ability to provide opportunities in cultivation of skills and concepts (Cho & Palmer, 2008). This partnership allows finding a level where overprotection may be less of an impeding factor for participation in extra-curricular activities by students with visual impairments.

### Method

Researchers sought to examine how the parents viewed their children in areas of independence, participation, and self advocacy in activities while exploring how the parents viewed their own role as protector. Deeper understanding of how the parental desire to safeguard their child may consciously or unconsciously impact the development of the skills that are necessary for children with visual impairments to be part of activities and to be independent. To

do this, a parent survey was created consisting of demographic information with inclusion of specific questions pertaining to their (family members) perceptions of their children's independence skills, self-determination skills, safety, and self-advocacy skills as it pertained to participation in physical and extracurricular activities. A survey was chosen to collect data to reach the largest number of respondents using what was perceived as an efficient means. The events chosen for the survey generally have large numbers of students and family members in attendance, therefore a larger number of surveys and information could be collected in a small amount of time. Advantage to using this method included anonymity. A Likert Scale Survey Model was chosen for data collection using a 5 point system. Answer choices provided to participants were "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "No Opinion", "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree". Demographic data consisting of nine questions collected on the families and students. A total of 11 questions were asked during the survey. Interview questions focused on the family's views on child safety, independence and self-determination. Questions focused on parent perception of their child's independence skills, self-determination and safety. Prior to beginning the study, the research plan and survey were approved by Institutional Review Board (IRB).

#### Data Collection Sites

Two distinct sporting activities that included extracurricular participation were chosen for the data collection. The two events were held in two distinct urban areas of a southern US gulf state. The first event is an annual sporting event co-sponsored by a regional educational center in the northern central part of the state and local chapters of a national non-profit, blindness advocacy organization. The event provides sports opportunities for students with visual impairments to compete in various track and field and/or blindness specific events such as Goal Ball. The event is open to students with visual impairments ages 0 – 22. The event includes

activities specially designed for individuals who are visually impaired and for those students with multiple impairments. This annual event takes place at a large high school.

The second event was a groups skills training activity held in January 2013. This annual event is sponsored by a state agency for children with visual impairments in collaboration with a regional educational entity in the southern part of the same state. The focus for this event is hands on vocational experience learning about vocational opportunities available for those interested in management, hospitality, and food service. The students with visual impairments along with family members participated in a behind the scenes tour of the inner workings of the conference center and vocational opportunities available in maintaining a sports team. At the culmination of the event, students with visual impairments and family members were encouraged to walk on the ice, skate and participate in sports events held on the ice alongside the professional hockey players. Participants were provided special seating to watch the game.

### Procedures

Events chosen were in two separate parts of the same southern state. Participating students/families were drawn from various regions across the state. The selection of the two events was made in attempt to provide more than a regional perspective to the topic being studied and allow for more diversity in the participants and gathered information. Additional surveys were emailed to 22 teachers and 10 members of the state visual impairment/blindness agency in an attempt to gain access to and collect survey data from parents unable to participate in either event. This opportunity allowed for parent participation in the survey, however, no responses were returned.

The researchers used two different strategies to recruit participants and collect completed surveys at the track and field sporting event. Some were collected at a table set up in the

registration area while other surveys were collected by soliciting parents at various locations during the event. In total, 30 surveys were collected. Parents were overall very receptive to research participation. Parents who completed the surveys consistently provided positive feedback about participating in the research.

The second event resulted in the collection of 17 more surveys from families. Families were approached as they entered the venue and asked to complete the survey. Again, participating parents provided encouraging feedback and interest related to the research topic and openly expressed their willingness to complete the survey. After completion of both events all of the surveys were collected. Responses for the questions were disaggregated and responses were totaled.

### Participants

The opening section of the survey was used to identify characteristics of the parent and their child. Of the forty-seven parents who responded, 72.3% (n=34) were female and 27.7% (n=13) were male. When provided the opportunity to self identify their ethnicity 12.8% (n=6) identified as black, 31.9% (n=15) as Hispanic, 2.1% (n=1) as Asian, and 53.2% (n=25) as Caucasian.

When asked to categorize the visual abilities of their child, 61.7% of the caregivers (n=29) identified their children as having a severe visual impairment, 27.4% (n=13) labeled the visual impairment of their child as moderate and 10.6% (n=5) indicated their child had a mild visual impairment. Of the survey respondents, 51% (n=24) indicated their children had additional disabilities and 53.2% (n=25) indicated their children did not have a disability in addition to the child's visual impairment.

Respondents were surveyed to determine the amount of support received from varied support systems. Results indicated that 93.6% (n=44) received a significant amount of support from the school system and 93.6% (n=44) of the respondents reported that other family members provided support. Only 61.7% (n=29) on the respondents reported that they received support from churches with 21.3% (n=10) indicated no support at all from these institutions.

Table 1.

Perceived Levels of Support from Various Sources

Report of the amount of perceived support. Values scaled 3-0

| (n=47)               | A lot of support<br>3 | Some support<br>2 | Very little support<br>1 | No support at all<br>0 | n/a          | Mean |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------|------|
| Other family members | 33<br>(70.2%)         | 11<br>(23.4%)     | 1<br>(2.1%)              | 1<br>(2.1%)            | 1<br>(2.1%)  | 2.60 |
| Church               | 15<br>(31.9%)         | 14<br>(29.8%)     | 6<br>(12.8%)             | 10<br>(21.3%)          | 2<br>(4.2%)  | 1.75 |
| School               | 35<br>(74.5%)         | 9<br>(19.1%)      | 3<br>(6.4%)              | 0 (0%)                 | 0 (0%)       | 2.68 |
| Other                | 19<br>(40.4%)         | 17<br>(36.2%)     | (0%)                     | 1<br>(2.1%)            | 9<br>(19.1%) | 2.45 |

The majority of the respondents (78.7%, n=37) indicated their families had more than one child. The number of additional children reported in the homes was between one and six with the mean being 1.88 siblings. All participants (100%) indicated that they were direct caregivers to children who have been diagnosed with a visual impairment including those with multiple disabilities. Of the respondents surveyed, 36.2% (n=17) reported being single parents.



## Results

### Independence and Self-Advocacy

Participating parents were asked to respond to statements pertaining to their personal perceptions on their children's level of independence and self-advocacy, the parents need to safeguard their child, and their awareness of availability of various activities in which their child may participate. The questions and responses are presented in below (see Table 2). Much of the data expressed in this section show responses across the range of available responses.

Table 2.

### Parent's Perceptions of Independence and Advocacy

*How the parents view their child's ability to be self-directed and how they support these behaviors*

| (n=47)   | Strongly Agree<br>5 | Agree<br>4    | No Opinion<br>3 | Disagree<br>2 | Strongly Disagree<br>1 | Mean |
|--|---------------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------------|------|
| I feel that my child functions with a high level of independence when separated from me. | 8<br>(17%)          | 27<br>(57.5%) | 3<br>(6.4%)     | 7<br>(14.9%)  | 2<br>(4.2%)            | 3.68 |
| I feel that my child will be able to advocate their needs if I am not around.            | 7<br>(14.9%)        | 22<br>(46.8%) | 6<br>(12.8%)    | 10<br>(21.3%) | 2<br>(4.2%)            | 3.47 |
| I encourage my child to participate in extra-curricular activities at school.            | 22<br>(46.8%)       | 21<br>(44.7%) | 2<br>(4.2%)     | 1<br>(2.1%)   | 1<br>(2.1%)            | 4.31 |
| I allow my child to play or go out with friends without me.                              | 10<br>(21.3%)       | 16<br>(34%)   | 3<br>(6.4%)     | 14<br>(39.8%) | 4<br>(8.5%)            | 3.30 |

On statements regarding independence, participants were asked to provide their personal perception about their children's' independent participation in physical activities. The first entry

asked the parents to respond to a statement that said, “*I feel that my child functions with a high level of independence when separated from me*”. Data showed that 74.5% (n=35) of the 47 respondents responded favorably to the comment. Only 19.1% (n=9) of the parents indicated that they did not agree with the statement. Three of the parents, 6.4% reported that they had no opinion on the statement.

The second entry in this category asked the parents to respond to the statement *I feel that my child will be able to advocate their needs if I am not around*. Data indicated that 61.7% (n=29) of the parents felt their child could advocate for his or her own needs even when they were away from parental supervision. Conversely, 25.5% (n=12) indicated that they did not feel that their child could advocate for their needs when a parent was not present. The remaining 12.8% of the parents (n=6) reported that they had no opinion on the statement.

The third statement is the only one in this category where parent presented highly unified responses. This entry asked the parents to respond to the statement *I encourage my child to participate in physical activities at school*. Responses to this statement were overwhelmingly positive with 91.5% (n=43) of the parents reporting that they encouraged their child to participate in physical activities. A low 4.2% (n=2) of the parents did not offer an opinion on the statement.

On the fourth statement regarding independence, participants were asked to respond to the statement that said “*I allow my child to play or go out without me*”. This question showed a significant trend toward disparity and bifurcation in responses. Data showed that 55.3% (n=26) responded favorably to the comment and 38.3% (n=18) of the parents indicated that they did not agree with the statement. Only 6.4% (n=3) reported that they had no opinion on the statement.

The final statement in this category asked participants to respond to the statement “*I feel that it is important for my child to participate in extra-curricular activities*.” This question was

only provided to participating parents at the second event studied. Data for this question showed that 100% (n=17) parents who responded felt that it was important for their child to participate in physical activities. Of the parents who responded, 88.2% (n=15) strongly agreed and 11.8% (n=2) agreed with the statement. All parents offered an opinion and none of the participating parents disagreed with the statement.

### Perceived Need to Protect and Safeguard

On statements regarding safety, participants were asked to provide their personal perception about their children's' safety while participating in physical activities. The breakdown of the responses is presented in Table 3. Data expressed in this section continued to show responses across the range of responses and showed increased tendency toward bifurcation of responses.

Table 3.

### Parental Desire to Safeguard

*How the parent's view their role as protectors and how that impacts consent.*

| (n=47)   | Strongly Agree<br>1 | Agree<br>2    | No Opinion<br>3 | Disagree<br>4 | Strongly Disagree<br>5 | Mean |
|--|---------------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------------|------|
| I feel the need to care for my child (children) with visual impairments differently than my child (children) with sight. | 13<br>(27.7%)       | 18<br>(38.3%) | 4<br>(8.5%)     | 9<br>(19.1%)  | 3<br>(6.4%)            | 2.38 |
| I must be present when my child participates in extra-curricular activities to ensure their safety.                      | 10<br>(21.3%)       | 9<br>(19.1%)  | 9<br>(19.1%)    | 18<br>(38.3%) | 1<br>(2.1%)            | 2.81 |

|  | Strongly<br>Agree<br>5 | Agree<br>4    | No<br>Opinion<br>3 | Disagree<br>2 | Strongly<br>Disagree<br>1 | Mean |
|--|------------------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------|---------------------------|------|
| I feel that my child should not depend on me for safety, security and support.                           | 5<br>(10.6%)           | 15<br>(31.9%) | 4<br>(8.5%)        | 18<br>(38.3%) | 5<br>(10.6%)              | 2.93 |
| I allow my child to experience anything they would like to do.   | 25<br>(53.2%)          | 18<br>(38.3%) | 1<br>(2.1%)        | 3<br>(6.4%)   | 0<br>(0%)                 | 4.38 |
| I feel that my child is able to participate in extra-curricular activities safely when I am not present. | 11<br>(23.4%)          | 25<br>(53.2%) | 5<br>(10.6%)       | 4<br>(8.5%)   | 2<br>(4.2%)               | 3.82 |

Note. The rating of the scores was scaled from 1-5 on the first two questions in this set to demonstrate the less desirable effect of agreeing with the statement. The rating of the scores on the last three questions was scaled in the opposite direction for the same purpose.

The first entry asked the parents to respond to a statement that said “*I feel the need to care for my child (children) with visual impairment differently than my child (children) with sight.*” Data showed that 66% (n=31) of the parents responded favorably and 25.5% (n=12) indicated that they did not agree with the statement. Only 6.4% (n=3) reported that they had no opinion on the statement.

The second entry in this category asked the parents to respond to the statement “*I must be present when my child participates in physical activities to ensure their safety.*” This result showed absolute bifurcation in favorable versus unfavorable responses. Data for this question showed that 40.4% (n=19) of the respondents felt that they must be present while their child participates in physical activities to ensure their safety while an equal number (40.4%, n=19)

indicated that they must not be present while their child participates in physical activities to ensure their safety. A sizeable 19.1% (n=7) reported that they had no opinion on the statement.

The third entry in the safety category asked the parents to respond to the statement *“I feel that my child should not depend on me for safety, security, and support.”* Data indicated that 42.6% (n=20) agreed that their child should not depend on them for security and support in participating in physical activities while 48% (n=23) disagreed, eighteen disagreed with an additional five strongly disagreeing. Only 8.5%, (n=4) did not offer an opinion on the statement.

The fourth entry regarding safety asked the parents to respond to a statement that said *“I allow my child to experience anything they would like to do.”* Responses to this statement were overwhelmingly positive. Data for this question showed that 91.5% (n=43) of the parents felt that they allow their child to experience anything that they wanted to try while only 6.4% (n=3) of the parents indicated that they did not agree with the statement. Only 3% (n=1) of the parents offered no opinion on the statement.

The final entry in this category asked the parents to respond to the statement *“I feel that my child is able to participate in physical activities safely when I am not present.”* Data showed that 76.6% (n=36) respondents responded favorably to the comment while only 12.8% (n=6) indicated that they did not feel that their child could participate safely in physical activities when a parent was not present. The remaining 10% (n=5) reported that they had no opinion on the statement.

### Awareness of Activities

One final entry asked parents about their personal perception on how well they perceive they are informed of physical activities in which their child with a visual impairment could participate.

Table 4.

Awareness

| (n=47)   | Strongly Agree | Agree        | No Opinion   | Disagree      | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------|
| I am not aware of extra-curricular activities that are available that my child can participate in. | 3<br>(6.4%)    | 9<br>(19.1%) | 6<br>(12.8%) | 22<br>(46.8%) | 7<br>(14.9%)      |

Though data was collected at an extracurricular event, findings showed that 25.5% (n=12) respondents felt that they were unaware of available opportunities for their child with visual impairments to participate in physical activities. The majority (61.7%, n=29) of the parents indicated that they were aware of such events. No opinion was offered by 12.8% (n=6) of the parents.

Discussion

The discussion section will explore how the data may provide insight into parental beliefs in their child’s ability, self-advocacy, and self-directedness. When the survey was developed, researchers hypothesized that this belief would have a direct impact on the encouragement and permissions the parents gave to their children. This was not clearly indicated by the data collected. Results from this study indicated that parents strongly believed that participation and experience building are essential for healthy development. Yet, the significant degree to which surveyed parents perceived the need to personally safeguard their child with visual impairments may indicate attitudes and roles that have the potential to actually limit the positive impact of participation in various physical activities and acts of independence.

The highest mean response recorded (4.38 out of 5) was in response to the statement that the parent would allow the child to experience anything they would like to do. This affirmation might be perceived as an alarming response to some parents and professionals as an indication of laissez-faire parenting. Laissez-faire, uninvolved, or permissive parenting, is defined by PsychologyDictionary.com as, “a style in which parents intervene as little as possible in their child’s development”. For a child with a visual impairment, planning, teaching and building learning experiences are necessary as a means to address learning that may typically be acquired visually (Hatlen, 1996; Lieberman, 2013; Sapp & Hatlen, 2010). For this population, and with this instructional background, researchers contend this finding indicates parents’ overwhelming belief in learning through experiences. In accordance with the belief in experiences, parents also indicated a very high level of reported encouragement provided to their child to participate in extra-curricular activities (4.31 out of 5). This response would again be a strong indication that parents view extracurricular activities as important experiences for their children. Professionals in the field of visual impairment have held that parental involvement must be cultivated in order for children with visual impairments to have the opportunity to participate in physical activities. Parents’ responses clearly indicated that learning by doing was important with 91.5% responding agree or strongly agree to both statements.

In spite of the belief in the importance of these opportunities 25.5% (n=12) of the parents surveyed indicated that they were unaware of activities available to them. While this data may seem surprising since the parents were surveyed while attending an extra-curricular/physical activity event with their child, literature has identified limited opportunity for active participation as an impediment for involvement of students in physical activities (Perkins, Columna, Lieberman, & Bailey, 2013). The community of professionals serving individuals with visual

impairments may either be ineffective in the development of an array of events desired by the parents or may be failing to adequately promote activities specifically designed to increase involvement of students in this population. Local school districts, parents, and community agencies are strongly encouraged to work in a collaborative manner to assess the degree to which opportunities are available to children with visual impairments, and develop and/or increase programming accordingly.

The third highest response, 3.82 out of 5, related to parents' perceived belief in their child's ability to participate independently in extra-curricular activities. In spite of the strong beliefs reported, parents indicated varying levels of need to protect, limit, or safeguard participation that may, in effect, seem to contradict their beliefs. Only 76.6% of parents (n=36) reported that their child would be able to safely participate in activities (mean 3.82) and only 61.7% (n=29) believed that their child could effectively advocate for his or her own needs (mean 3.47) without a parent being present. This need to be present increased when parents were asked if they would allow their child to play with friends. Only 55.3% (n=26) of the parents indicated that they allowed their child to independently play with friends (mean =3.30). Being allowed to play and interact with others creates valuable learning experiences. Parents, however, appear to hold back due to insecurities of the unknown in relationship to exposure to children, which interferes with participants allowing their child to experience social environments independently thus, inhibiting the child with visual impairments from trying new things (Cho & Palmer, 2008). New experiences allow children the opportunities to practice the use of prior knowledge and skills that require use of self-advocacy, self-determination and self-regulation skills (Cho & Palmer, 2008). The range and variety of responses in this research show that although parents may believe in their child's abilities, a level of anxiety about their child's well-being may persist.



Some of these differences may be attributed to the parents' perception of their child's ability to be independent in a controlled environment at school versus an uncontrolled environment facilitated by allowing their child to play with friends. Parents may still have reservations regarding the ability of their child to safely participate in activities independently. This uneasiness persists in spite of the already identified need for participation in activities to develop resilience (Jessup, Cornell, & Bundy, 2010), social skills (Lieberman & Houston-Wilson, 1999; Pinquart & Pfeffer, 2011), self-determination (Cho and Palmer, 2008; Sapp & Hatlen, 2010), and overall independence. In a school, supervision is an expectation, whereas socializing with peers in the community does not guarantee supervision. Though 93.6% (n=44) of the parents surveyed identified receiving support from the school, the parents' reported belief in their child's ability to participate without parental presence indicated varied responses associated with trust in systems to provide the necessary supervision to insure their child's safety and well-being.

The conflict between belief in the importance of independence and conscious or unconscious actions of parents of children with disabilities is detailed in literature. Peeters, Hilberink, and van Staa (2014) stated that, "Gaining independence requires a role change on the part of both parent and child" (p.33). The authors report that parent's need for control may limit their child's ability to develop social skills and independence. Findings indicated that parents were often less convinced than their child's ability to be independent than the child's self-perception of their independence (Peeters, Hilberink, & van Staa, 2014). This difference in perception can result in lowered expectations, associated changes in behavior by parents and resultant lowered self-concept of the in a child with a visual impairment (Tuttle & Tuttle, 1996).

Kloep and Hendry (2010), detailed the internal conflict of parents related to the child's developing autonomy. The authors described two of the parent's struggles as *letting go* and *holding on*. In their study, both letting go and holding on was related to reluctance to changing of roles. In both cases, the beliefs of the parents, inwardly or outwardly expressed, impacted both their willingness to let go and their need to hold on as their child transitions. Results from statement comparisons indicate that most parents do encourage independence in the development of their children with visual impairments, and understand the importance of engaging in planned physical activity as a means to develop very important life skills,.

In conclusion, the overall findings support research results from previous studies. Peeters, Hilberink & van Staa, (2014) call for the use of professional support for young individuals with disabilities to avoid negative outcomes and assist them in the changes in role and independence. This study indicates that parents may also benefit from assistance from professionals to help them understand the conscious or unconscious impact of their expectations and beliefs and to assist them in the process of better facilitating independence.

#### Limitations

All data was collected at two sporting events. Those that participated in the survey were those that had some sense of security for allowing their child to participate in activities and a higher belief in their child's ability to be independent. However, the strength of these findings is that even within this population, variance existed in terms of perceptions of their children's independence and in their perceptions of the parent's need to personally advocate on their children's behalf.

The statement *I feel that it is important for my child to participate in extra-curricular activities* was added to the survey distributed at the second event. Although the information

received from this statement was important, researchers were unable to fully include it with comparisons to other statements. It did not represent the entire population surveyed due to the anonymity of the survey and data was not separated by events, but collected as a whole.

Everyone's perception of security and independence varies on their level of comfort, therefore, these reported 'feelings' must be taken into account evaluating participants' expectations. The instrument included the option of "no opinion". In retrospect, providing only variations of "agree" and "disagree" would have required respondents to form either a positive or negative opinion.

Additional surveys were emailed to 22 teachers and 10 members of the state blindness agency in an attempt to gain access to and collect survey data from parents unable to participate in either event; however no responses were returned. Data was difficult to collect from non-participants due to problems with accessibility to our survey. It could have been as simple as these were the individuals who were less apt to encourage and/or support and/or insure their child's participation in such events. Although unable to collect data from families that did not participate in either activity, the researchers believe that their input would have proved critical information and might have increased the variance within the sample. Nevertheless, the researchers did conclude that the collection of data from those that attended these critical events did provide invaluable information on parental perceptions of safety and independence.

#### Directions for Future Research

Recommendations for future research include designs that compare the differences in parenting styles for children with a visual impairment and children with sight and the examination of the degree to which parenting and parental expectations may influence children's perception of his or her abilities. For example, the development of research designed to

specifically examine the degree to which the variance among children's engagement in acts of independence is associated with parents' engagement in aspects of each of the parenting styles noted in the literature is strongly recommended. Such studies would increase understanding of how parents might strategically facilitate the self-efficacy of their children and move them toward optimal levels of autonomy and independence. In addition, community programming and schools might engage in pre- and post-testing of children's self-efficacy and sense of independence after engagement in planned activities for the purpose of program evaluation and enhancement. The opportunities to enhance that which is already occurring are many, and findings in the literature (Perkins, Columna, Lieberman, & Bailey, 2013) and from this study verify once again that it is imperative that we as educators and practitioners work together with parents to increase awareness and strategically develop effective programming that facilitate the adaptation of physical activities that are available in which children with visual impairments might participate.

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