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Economists Link Athletics to Success in School, Job Markets

For years, researchers have known that there's a link between children's participation in high school sports and success later in life. Problem is, they haven't understood exactly what that link is.

That's because children who participate in athletics may have other things going for them before they lace up their cleats. If they're already aggressive, goal-oriented extroverts with physical attributes, such as height, that improve their chances of doing well later, the effect of sports may be negligible.

But **Wharton** economist **Betsey Stevenson** [may have found a way](#) to untangle the lines of cause and effect. She examined what happened after Title IX — the 1972 law that banned gender discrimination at federally-funded schools.

Title IX's most pronounced effect was on athletics. Girls' participation in high school sports went from 1 in 27 in 1972 to 1 in 4 in 1978. But its effect wasn't uniform because states where boys' participation in athletics was high were forced to increase girls' participation the most. Ms. Stevenson was able to use the variation between states to tease out the effect of girls participation in sports from other factors. That allowed her to see how playing sports affected girls' success later in life.

Her conclusion: A 10 percentage-point rise in girls' participation in high school sports leads to a 1 percentage point increase in female college attendance and a 1 to 2 percentage point increase in female labor-force participation.

Maybe athletics should be added to reading, writing and arithmetic.



Sports participation is linked to economic success. (Getty Images)

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