Toward More Nuanced Understandings of Demonstration Effects: Insights from the 2019 Netball World Cup

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Method - Design (Elite Sport)
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)
Session: Live Q&A for Method (Asynchronous)

Demonstration effects (DE) refer the “process by which people are inspired by elite sport, sports people, or sports events to participate themselves.” (Weed, 2009, p. 4). Empirical evidence of demonstration effects is mixed, with some studies reporting minimal or no changes in post-event participation (Weed et al., 2015). Recently, extant research in this area has been critiqued for masking the full reach and scope of the phenomena (Potwarka, 2020). When examining evidence of DE, previous research has tended to rely on analysis of population-level secondary participation data (Kokolakakis et al., 2018). Often, these data fail to engage in primary research efforts with event “consumers”, and are rarely delineated by sub-populations and demographic characteristics. DE research also lacks nuanced understandings of inspirational outcomes that can result from watching sport events. There is no consensus that elite sport events influence participation in the sport on display or sport/physical activity (PA) more broadly (Potwarka & McCarville, 2010). Moreover, previous investigations of DE are often limited to global measures of post-event “intentions” to participate (Brown et al., 2017), assessments of sport club registrations (e.g., Wicker & Frick, 2016), and binary measures of participation in a new sport opportunity. Therefore, the purpose of the present investigation was to examine three distinct inspirational outcomes associated with attending the 2019 Netball World Cup held in the UK.

Data were collected from spectators (n = 3,904) through face-to-face and online surveys conducted during and immediately following the event. A five-point Likert scale was used to record respondents’ level of agreement with statements about feeling inspired by their event attendance to increase the "frequency", "intensity" (effort) and "duration" of engagement in sport and PA. Those who responded positively to any these statements (i.e. "strongly agree" or "agree" responses) were then asked to indicate whether their sense of inspiration was related to the sport featured (i.e. netball in this case) or to sport/PA generally. The survey also incorporated questions relating to respondents’ demographic profile (age, gender, ethnicity and disability) as well as their existing participation in sport/PA and netball.

We conducted a preliminary cluster analysis on the data, which revealed the following inspirational cohorts for netball and/or sport/PA generally: (a) 32.5% of the sample was inspired across all three participation dimensions (frequency, intensity and duration); (b) 12.8% was inspired in any two ways (e.g. frequency and duration but not intensity); (c) 14.5% was inspired in only one of these ways (e.g. frequency only); and, (d) 40.2% was not inspired in any way.

Our findings highlight the importance of capturing inspirational outcomes using multiple dimensions of participation behaviour in order to provide a more holistic approach to the assessment of DE. The next stage of this research involves examining the influence of spectator demographic and behavioural characteristics on the different inspirational cohorts identified from the preliminary cluster analysis and testing (and delineating them by both netball and sport/PA more generally). We will share these findings in our presentation.