The Influence of a Sport-For-Development Event on Prejudice and Change Agent Efficacy

Jon Welty Peachey, University of Illinois
George B. Cunningham, Texas A&M University
Alexis Lyras, Georgetown University
Jennifer Bruening, University of Connecticut
Adam Cohen, Texas Tech University

Socio-cultural Saturday, May 31, 2014 20-minute oral presentation (including questions) (Frick)

Abstract 2014-263 10:50 AM

While prejudice and discrimination are present in many areas of sport (e.g., Sibson, 2010), there is also evidence that, under some circumstances, the opposite can occur; sport can be a place where boundaries and stereotypes are overcome (Sherry, 2010; Welty Peachey et al., 2013). Therein rests the promise of sport-for-development (SFD) activities. Collectively, this literature suggests SFD initiatives have the potential to combat many social injustices observed in other sport settings. However, sport interventions should be packaged within broader educational and cultural activities to have optimal effect (Coalter, 2010; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011). In this two-study project conducted at a global SFD event, we draw from the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998) and sport-for-development theory (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011) to examine how such activities might influence participants’ prejudice and willingness to serve as change agents. We also consider the influence of a moderator—social dominance orientation. The 2011 World Scholar-Athlete Games (WSAG) served as the data collection site. The event brings together young people (ages 15-19) from around the world to promote understanding, peace, development, and social change. At the event, the youth took part in a wide range of sports, fine arts, educational, cultural, and social activities.

Theoretical Framework

As Lyras and Welty Peachey (2011) noted, one outcome of SFD activities is improved intergroup relations. The contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998) is an effective method for reducing intergroup bias, as contact (a) allows for people to learn more about the out-group, (b) reduces their anxiety when around out-group members, and (c) serves to enhance their empathy and perspective taking toward the out-group. Sport is an arena that could be important in prejudice reduction, as the team aspect of sport may socialize individuals to see others as either teammates or opponents, rather than as people who may be different than themselves in terms of race, ethnicity, or culture (Brown et al., 2003; Carron, 1982). In line with this theory, we predicted that participants would express less prejudice after the event than they did beforehand (H1).

A second outcome of many SFD activities is to empower participants to take more active stances in creating social change (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011). From a social cognitive theory perspective, social persuasion represents one effective way of engendering greater self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). WSAG organizers sought to influence participants’ change agent efficacy by having them engage in a broad set of activities in addition to sport, consistent with sport-for-development theory. Therefore, we predicted that participants would express greater change agent self-efficacy after the event than they did beforehand (H2).

We also considered the role of a moderator: social dominance orientation. People with high social dominance orientation prefer to maintain current social structures and generally do not advocate for social change or justice (Federico & Sidanius, 2002). Thus, one’s social dominance orientation might influence the efficacy of initiatives aimed at improving intergroup relations. As a result, one might also be less receptive to interacting with dissimilar others, or the effects of those interactions might not result in the subsequent anxiety reduction seen among others. Thus, we predicted that social dominance would moderate the effects of event participation on changes in prejudice (H3) and change agent efficacy (H4).

Study 1

Participants included 136 youth who participated in the 2011 WSAG. All 525 WSAG participants were invited to take part in the study, with 136 participants voluntarily completing pre- and post-event questionnaires. We tested
predictions through a doubly multivariate repeated measures analysis of variance. Results indicate significant multivariate effects for Time, $F(2, 47) = 8.06, p = .001$. Examination of the univariate effects indicate significant changes in prejudice from before the event ($M = 2.08, SD = .87$) to after the event ($M = 1.83, SD = .98$), $F(1, 48) = 9.63, p = .003$. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported. Results also indicate an increase of change efficacy over time (before: $M = 5.73, SD = .96$; after: $M = 6.17, SD = .88$), $F(1, 48) = 13.52, p = .001$. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was also supported. The multivariate effects for the Time X Social Dominance Orientation interaction were not significant, $F(2, 47) = .95, p = .26$. As such, we did not observe support for Hypothesis 3 or Hypothesis 4.

Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 was to conduct a qualitative examination of how participation in a SFD event impacted participants’ prejudice and change agent efficacy. We conducted semi-structured focus groups on the last day of the WSAG with 27 participants (14 boys, 13 girls, from 14 countries). Purposive sampling was used to select participants from countries and activities that represented the diversity of the event. Two authors independently coded one transcript and then met to compare and cross-check codes, themes, and subthemes, and to agree on the coding scheme before proceeding with further coding and analysis (Creswell, 2012). The final step involved selective coding, where quotations were selected that represented the themes and sub-themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The findings support Study 1, in that participants spoke about how intergroup contact during the event helped to reduce prejudice and increase their change agent efficacy. The data also revealed that it was primarily the team sport environment and social opportunities that influenced prejudice reduction, as well as the educational platform that impacted participants’ change agent efficacy.

General Discussion

Results from Study 1 show that both outcomes significantly changed over the course of the event, consistent with the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998) and with the recommendations of sport-for-development theory (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011). Furthermore, the changes took place irrespective of the participants’ social dominance orientation. However, we were interested in further examining these effects, while also investigating the impetus for these changes. Study 2 achieved these goals, as participants indicated their prejudice and change agent efficacy were both affected by their participation. Moreover, in support of sport-for-development theory (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011), participants pointed to their participation on the sport teams and in the broader programming as factors facilitating these changes. SFD events should employ mixed activity groups to facilitate quantity and quality of intergroup contact for reducing prejudice. To facilitate change agent efficacy, organizers should include a vibrant educational platform. This research points to the efficacy of SFD events in facilitating prejudice reduction and change agent efficacy, provided the sport programming is packaged into a broader educational and cultural platform.