



Multilateral teaching in physical education improves resilience and self-efficacy in adolescents and could help reduce bullying behaviors

Authors' contribution:

- A) conception and design of the study
- B) acquisition of data
- C) analysis and interpretation of data
- D) manuscript preparation
- E) obtaining funding

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Abstract

Youth with higher levels of resilience and self-efficacy are less likely to engage in aggressive behaviors or be victims of bullying. Previous anti-bullying approaches have often achieved no reduction in bullying behavior. Thus, the aim of this study was to examine the effect of 12 weeks of extracurricular multilateral teaching on the risk for students (aged 14–16 years) to be involved in bullying. Sixty male students were allocated to an experimental group (n = 30) that performed psychoeducational activities combined with physical exercise training and team games (90 min, 2d · week⁻¹) or a control group (n = 30). Before and after the intervention, we used the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-28) to assess individual capacities and resources, relationship with primary caregiver, contextual factors, and total resilience; and the Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for Children (SEQ-C) to measure academic, social, emotional, and total self-efficacy. Four participants from the experimental group withdrew. Significant improvements of crucial relevance were found for the resilience and self-efficacy scales ($p < 0.05$) in the experimental group. We found that multilateral teaching may improve resilience and self-efficacy in adolescents and make them less likely to engage in aggressive behavior or be bullied. Multilateral teaching should be considered an effective alternative to the anti-bullying approach, highlighting the crucial role of physical education teachers in the promotion of proactive educational strategies to reduce bullying behaviors.

Key words: Special education, resilience, self-efficacy, physical exercise, victimization

Introduction

Bullying is a controversial issue. However, there is no standard definition of bullying (Rigby, 2008), and it is difficult to establish a definition inclusive of all bullying behaviors (Lines, 2008). Research suggests bullying can be characterized as (1) a type of aggression (Pellegrini, 2004), (2) systematic and repeated (Olweus, 1993), and (3) based upon an imbalance of power (Bouman et al., 2012). These behaviors occur both directly and indirectly and can have negative social consequences. Examples of commonplace power differences in school include being able to physically hurt others, numerical (group) superiority, being more confident or assertive than others, having greater verbal dexterity, having superior social or manipulative skills, and having greater status and corresponding capacity to impose one's will on others (Rigby, 2008). Anti-bullying strategies are the main approach for addressing bullying

in schools (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009) and claim substantial support to address bullying. However, anti-bullying approaches are often found to achieve no reduction of bullying behavior or actually lead to increases in this type of behavior (Moore & Woodcock, 2017a; Rigby, 2002, 2008).

Resilience is a complex construct (Kaplan, 2006) that is defined as the attainment of positive outcomes, adaptation, or developmental milestones in the face of significant adversity, risk, or stress (Goldstein & Brooks, 2006). Different conceptualizations describe resilience as (a) a protective process, (b) the interaction of protection and risks, and (c) a conceptual tool within predictive models (Elias, Parker, & Rosenblatt, 2006). The operational definition of resilience varies and has included hardiness, optimism, competence, self-esteem, social-skills, achievement, and the absence of pathology in the face of adversity (Prince-Embury, 2007). The research examining the relationship between bullying and resilience is not extensive (Sapouna & Wolke, 2013), and findings include: (a) students with a strong resilience profile were less likely to engage in aggressive behaviors or be bullied than those who reported fewer developmental strengths (Donnon, 2010); (b) bullying appeared to decrease if social skills were improved in victims, and strategies of nonchalance and emotional regulation were useful (Lisboa & Killer, 2008); and (c) resilience to bullying was improved if the student had a peer or family member with whom to disclose their feelings (Bowes, Maughan, Caspi, Moffitt, & Arseneault, 2010; Rivers & Cowie, 2006).

Some authors have shown that the practice of physical activity is an excellent means for the transmission of values (Portolés & González, 2015) and helps to promote prosocial attitudes (González et al., 2016), so it can be useful in the prevention and treatment of bullying. Young people are allowed to develop resilience and self-efficacy through participation in physical activity and sport (Bandura, 2012; Schiraldi, 2011). Furthermore, the youth – particularly males – with higher social self-efficacy are somewhat more likely to resist pressure to engage in risky behaviors such as delinquent behavior and being victimized (Ludwig & Pittman, 1999). However, it seems that the amount of physical activity carried out and the type of sport practiced can act as regulators in the victimization caused by bullying (Cascales & Prieto, 2019). For example, moderate physical activity that is geared towards disciplines such as football or athletics implies greater victimization in all dimensions, while activity oriented towards traditional martial arts or popular games involves lower victimization rates (Macarie & Roberts, 2010). Also, in a recent systematic review, it was mentioned that few studies relate bullying to physical activity and sport (Baena & Bosca, 2018; Holt, 2016).

Accordingly, we may speculate that multilateral teaching in physical education, a method including psychoeducational activities combining physical exercise training and team games, may be an effective alternative approach to anti-bullying (Hartmann, 2003). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the effects of 12 weeks of an extracurricular multilateral teaching program on students' risk of being involved with bullying (bully and victim) through the analysis of the resilience and self-efficacy variables. It was hypothesized that multilateral teaching would improve the resilience processes and perceived self-efficacy.

Methods

Study design

The study was a 12-week high-school-based intervention that was evaluated using a randomized controlled study. Data were collected and recorded at baseline (pre-test) and after 12 weeks (post-test). After pre-test and randomization, the experimental group participated in a multilateral teaching program. The control group participated in the same program after the post-intervention assessment. The design was facilitated through the use of standardized tests, which increase the validity and reliability of data as such instruments have been developed and normalized using larger samples and have been piloted to ensure test items measure the intended data (Cohen & Swerdlik, 2005).

Participants

Sixty male adolescents (mean age, 14.59 ± 0.71 ; range 14–16 years) from two local high schools were recruited to participate in the study. The socioeconomic status of all participants was reported as middle class. Power calculations were conducted to determine the sample size required to detect changes in the dependent measures resulting from multilateral teaching. An a priori power analysis (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) with an assumed type I error of 0.05 and a type II error rate of 0.10 (90% statistical power) was calculated and revealed that 46 participants in total would be sufficient to observe medium “Time x Group” interaction effects. The following inclusion criteria were applied: a) male gender, b) aged 14 to 16 years old, and c) not involved in regular exercise during the

last two years. Participants were excluded if they had a chronic pediatric disease or an orthopedic condition that would limit their ability to perform the exercise. All participants and their parents received a complete explanation in advance about the purpose of the experiment, and the parents provided written consent to the study. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and the protocol was approved by the local Ethics Committee. The study was conducted from April to June 2019.

Procedures

The recruitment occurred from schools in close proximity to the workplace of one of the researchers. The school staff distributed information and consent forms to all students to be recruited and their parents. Participants were verbally reminded that participation was voluntary, that they could discontinue the survey at any point, and that their responses were confidential and anonymous. Participants were instructed regarding (a) not writing their names on the survey, (b) how to respond to rating scales, and (c) how to correct responses. Participants were not given the definitions of bullying, resilience, or self-efficacy in order to avoid bias in their responses. Surveys were then provided to the participants.

Randomization into experimental ($n = 30$; age 14.54 ± 0.71 years) and wait-list control groups ($n = 30$; age 14.63 ± 0.72 years) occurred after pre-intervention assessments. Participants were pair-matched based on age, and the randomization was carried out by Research Randomizer, a program published on a publicly accessible official website (www.randomizer.org). The researchers were blinded to this randomization of experimental and control group allocations. Fifty-six participants completed the post-intervention assessment, and four participants from the experimental group did not complete the study for unknown reasons.

Measures

To evaluate the effects of the multilateral teaching program, two standardized psychometric instruments were used: the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-28) (Liebenberg, Ungar, & Van de Vijver, 2012; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011) and the Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for Children (SEQ-C) (Muris, 2001; Suldo & Shaffer, 2007).

The CYRM-28 is a 28-item instrument that measures various aspects of the resilience of children and adolescents. The scale provides a total resilience scale ($\alpha = 0.86$) and three subscales including an individual capacities and resources scale ($\alpha = 0.84$), relationship with primary caregiver scale ($\alpha = 0.84$), and contextual factors scale ($\alpha = 0.83$). Items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale with 0 = not at all, 1 = a little, 2 = somewhat, 3 = quite a bit, and 4 = a lot. The CYRM-28 is designed as a screening tool to explore the resources (individual, relational, and contextual) available to bolster resilience competence in the face of adversity. Individual resources are individual personal skills (e.g., “I am aware of my own strengths.”), individual peer support (e.g., “I feel supported by my friends.”), and individual social skills (e.g., “I know where to go in my community to get help.”). Relational resources are physical caregiving (e.g., “My caregiver[s] watch me closely.”) and psychological caregiving (e.g., “I talk to my caregiver[s] about how I feel.”). Contextual resources are spiritual (e.g., “Spiritual beliefs are a source of strength for me.”), educational (e.g., “Getting an education is important to me.”), and cultural (e.g., “I am proud of my ethnic background.”). Higher scores indicate a greater presence of resilience processes.

The SEQ-C is a 24-item instrument that measures various aspects of the self-efficacy of children and adolescents. The scale provides a total self-efficacy scale and three subscales: (1) academic self-efficacy (eight items), which is concerned with the perceived capability to manage one’s academic affairs (e.g., “How well can you study when there are other interesting things to do?”); (2) social self-efficacy (eight items), which has to do with the perceived capability to deal with other people in an effective way (e.g., “How well can you become friends with other children?”); and (3) emotional self-efficacy (eight items), which pertains to the perceived capability of coping with negative emotions (e.g., “How well can you control your feelings?”). The SEQ-C scales have good cross-cultural validity (Minter & Pritzker, 2017) and show a reliable to highly reliable internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.78\text{--}0.85$). Items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale with 0 = not at all, 1 = a little, 2 = somewhat, 3 = quite a bit, and 4 = very well. A total self-efficacy score can be computed by summing all items. A high score in this questionnaire shows high self-efficacy in the specific function in question.

Multilateral teaching program

The program was performed on-site at participating schools. Participants participated in a multilateral teaching program for about 90 minutes, two extracurricular sessions per week, for a total of 24 training sessions. Each session was supervised by the primary investigator and conducted by two graduates in sport sciences and sports

coaching specialists. Also, the mode, frequency, intensity, duration, and progression were recorded in an individual exercise log to ensure adequate training. Each training session started with a few minutes of psychoeducational activities that were also covered during the session; subsequently, a brief dynamic warm-up program, mainly consisting of calisthenics-type exercises, was performed; finally, a cool-down program, consisting of static stretching exercises, completed the session. The conditioning phase of the multilateral teaching program included cardiovascular endurance, resistance training, flexibility, and team-building activities. Flexibility was trained using both dynamic and static stretches during the warm-up or cool-down phase of each training session. During the first four weeks, the training primarily consisted of preconditioning. From the fifth week onwards, we gradually increased the intensity and volume of the training. For effective training, the principles of overload and specificity were addressed (Haff & Triplett, 2016). The contents of the multilateral teaching program are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample multilateral teaching extracurricular session by the experimental group

Psychoeducational activities	Warm-up	Cardiovascular endurance	Resistance training	Team building	Cool-down
Topics included: Respect, goal-setting, self-concept and self-esteem, courage, resilience, bullying and peer pressure, self-care and caring for others, values, and optimism and hope.	Arm swings Trunk twisting High marching Stride jumping High knees Side bending Side stretching Skipping leg swings Backwards sprinting Lateral shuffles	Running Walking Circuits Sprint intervals Agility (i.e., the ladder exercise)	Jump squats Lunges Push-ups Pull-ups Curl-ups Half squats Long jumps Planks Medicine ball tosses	Volleyball Basketball Handball Soccer Modified forms of the previous team games	Static stretching: Achilles tendon/calf stretches Skier's stretches Quadriceps stretches Hurdler's stretches Straddle stretches Groin stretches Back stretches Archers
<i>Guidelines</i> Duration: 5 minutes. Topics specifically covered during team-building activities	<i>Guidelines</i> Duration: 10 minutes. Perform each exercise for 60 sec, 1 set	<i>Guidelines</i> Duration: gradually from 20 to 30 minutes. Intensity: 60 to 90% HRmax (220-age). Used HR rate monitor (Polar®) to ensure proper, effective, and safe training. Progression: increase duration before intensity	<i>Guidelines</i> Duration: 10–20 minutes. 1–2 sets of 8–15 repetitions with 45 sec of slow walking between each exercise	<i>Guidelines</i> Duration: about 20 minutes. Performed at the end of the conditioning, before the cool-down. Characterized by a predominantly playful approach to encourage enthusiasm, socialization, and participation	<i>Guidelines</i> Total duration: 10 minutes. Overload: stretch beyond resting length but not beyond pain-free ROM. Duration: 10-30 sec/stretch. Repetitions: 2-4, accumulate 60 sec per exercise. Progression: gradual increase in stretch duration or repetitions

Statistical analyses

Statistical analyses were carried out using SAS JMP® Statistics (Version <14.3>, SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC, USA, 2018). Data were presented as group mean values and standard deviations and checked for assumptions of normality that were confirmed with visual observation of univariate histograms, Q-Q plots, and skewness and kurtosis values. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to detect group differences at baseline. A two-way ANOVA (group [experimental/control] × time [pre/post-intervention]) with repeated measures on the time dimension was conducted to examine the effect of multilateral teaching on all examined variables. When “Group x Time” interactions reached the level of significance, group-specific post hoc tests (i.e., paired t-tests) were conducted to identify the significant comparisons.

Partial eta squared (η_p^2) was used to estimate the magnitude of the difference within each group and was interpreted using the following criteria: small ($\eta_p^2 < 0.06$), medium ($0.06 \leq \eta_p^2 < 0.14$), large ($\eta_p^2 \geq 0.14$). Effect sizes for the pairwise comparisons were determined by Cohen's d and interpreted as small ($0.20 \leq d < 0.50$), moderate ($0.50 \leq d < 0.79$), and large ($d \geq 0.80$) (Cohen, 1992). The standardized Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011) was used as a measure of the reliability of the psychological tests (reliable: $0.70 \leq \alpha < 0.80$; highly reliable: $0.80 \leq \alpha \leq 0.90$). Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results

Four participants from the experimental group withdrew, and thus fifty-six students completed the study. No injuries or other health problems were noted in the participants over the 12 weeks. All the participants of the experimental group showed satisfaction and reported a desire to continue practicing physical activity afterwards. The groups did not differ significantly at baseline in all the dependent variables ($p = 0.926$). Table 2 shows the group changes in total resilience and self-efficacy and related subscales after 12 weeks.

Table 2. Changes in resilience and self-efficacy scales after 12-week multilateral teaching

	Experimental group (n = 26)			Control group (n = 30)		
	Baseline	Post-test	Δ	Baseline	Post-test	Δ
CYRM-28 Resilience scales						
Individual capacities and resources	2.92 (0.52)	3.07 (0.52)†*	0.14 (0.15)	3.11 (0.70)	3.12 (0.65)	0.01 (0.24)
Relationship with primary caregiver	3.06 (0.65)	3.18 (0.59)†*	0.13 (0.20)	3.01 (0.66)	2.95 (0.63)	-0.06 (0.18)
Contextual factors	2.55 (0.67)	2.72 (0.64)†*	0.17 (0.23)	2.53 (0.84)	2.42 (0.66)	-0.10 (0.38)
Total resilience	2.84 (0.39)	2.99 (0.37)†*	0.15 (0.12)	2.88 (0.48)	2.83 (0.40)	-0.05 (0.16)
SEQ-C Self-efficacy scales						
Academic self-efficacy	2.58 (0.70)	2.88 (0.59)†*	0.31 (0.74)	2.70 (0.65)	2.67 (0.61)	-0.03 (0.18)
Social self-efficacy	2.58 (0.64)	2.69 (0.55)†*	0.12 (0.33)	2.63 (0.61)	2.60 (0.62)	-0.03 (0.18)
Emotional self-efficacy	2.46 (0.51)	2.73 (0.45)†*	0.27 (0.45)	2.53 (0.57)	2.47 (0.57)	-0.07 (0.25)
Total self-efficacy	2.54 (0.33)	2.77 (0.26)†*	0.23 (0.28)	2.62 (0.27)	2.58 (0.29)*	-0.04 (0.12)

Note: values are presented as mean (\pm SD); Δ : pre – to post-training changes; †Significant “Group x Time” interaction: significant effect of the intervention ($p < 0.05$). *Significantly different from pre-test ($p < 0.05$).

Resilience

Individual capacities and resources: A significant “Time x Group” interaction ($F_{1,54} = 6.09, p = 0.017, \eta_p^2 = 0.10$) and main effect of “Time” ($F_{1,54} = 7.21, p = 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.12$) were found, but no significant main effects of “Group” were detected.

Relationship with primary caregiver: Statistical analysis revealed only a significant “Time x Group” interaction ($F_{1,54} = 14.15, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.21$), whereas no significant main effects of “Time” or “Group” were detected.

Contextual factors: A significant “Time x Group” interaction ($F_{1,54} = 10.25, p = 0.002, \eta_p^2 = 0.16$) was found, but significant main effects of “Time” or “Group” were not.

Total resilience: A significant “Time x Group” interaction ($F_{1,54} = 27.36, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.34$) and main effect of “Time” ($F_{1,54} = 5.97, p = 0.018, \eta_p^2 = 0.10$) were found, but no significant main effects of “Group” were detected.

The post hoc analyses revealed a significant increase in scores from pre – to post-test for the experimental group in individual capacities and resources ($p < 0.001, d = 0.99$), relationship with primary caregiver ($p = 0.002, d = 0.61$), contextual factors ($p = 0.001, d = 0.73$), and total resilience ($p < 0.001, d = 1.27$).

Self-efficacy

Academic self-efficacy: A significant “Time x Group” interaction ($F_{1,54} = 6.03, p = 0.017, \eta_p^2 = 0.10$) was found, but no significant main effects of “Time” or “Group” were detected.

Social self-efficacy: A significant “Time x Group” interaction ($F_{1,54} = 4.59, p = 0.037, \eta_p^2 = 0.08$) was found, but significant main effects of “Time” or “Group” were not.

Emotional self-efficacy: Statistical analysis revealed a significant “Time x Group” interaction ($F_{1,54} = 12.15, p = 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.18$) and significant main effect of “Time” ($F_{1,54} = 4.42, p = 0.040, \eta_p^2 = 0.08$), whereas no significant main effect of “Group” was detected.

Total self-efficacy: A significant “Time x Group” interaction ($F_{1,54} = 24.41, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.31$) and significant main effect of “Time” ($F_{1,54} = 11.19, p = 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.17$) were found. No significant main effect of “Group” was detected.

The post hoc analyses revealed significant improvements from pre – to post-test for the experimental group in academic self-efficacy ($p = 0.043, d = 0.41$), social self-efficacy ($p = 0.041, d = 0.34$), emotional self-efficacy ($p = 0.006, d = 0.60$), and total self-efficacy ($p < 0.001, d = 0.82$). Also, the control group showed worsening in total self-efficacy ($p = 0.043, d = 0.35$) after 12 weeks.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a 12-week extracurricular multilateral physical education program on male students’ risk of being involved in bullying (bully and victim) through analysis of the variables of resilience and self-efficacy. The results provided valid and reliable evidence that psychoeducational activities combined with physical exercise training and team games could be an effective alternative method for improving well-being, including resilience and self-efficacy (Hartmann, 2003). In addition, interventions using this approach should promote an individual’s ability to cope with the effects of bullying. Significant improvements were found in the experimental group for levels of overall resilience and resilience sub-factors, as well as for total self-efficacy and self-efficacy subscales. Therefore, our hypothesis has been confirmed and the results agree with previous studies showing the effectiveness of a multilateral teaching program in promoting prosocial attitudes (González et al., 2016) and the transmission of values (Portolés & González, 2015), as well as the development of resilience and self-efficacy (Bandura, 2012; Schiraldi, 2011) in young people. Furthermore, the non-competitive nature of multilateral teaching could involve lower victimization rates caused by bullying (Cascales & Prieto, 2019; Macarie & Roberts, 2010), and higher social self-efficacy could allow resistance to pressure to engage in risky behaviors (Ludwig & Pittman, 1999).

For the experimental group, positive changes in resilience showed a moderate to large effect size for all subscales and total resilience. This is an important achievement because students who report higher levels of resilience may be less likely to engage in aggressive behavior or be bullied (Donnon, 2010; Lisboa & Killer, 2008; Rigby, 2008). Significantly improved relationships with primary caregivers have been particularly important as family factors, including warm relationships and positive home environments, are associated with increased resilience to bullying (Bowes et al., 2010). It has been shown that resilience to bullying behaviors is improved when people can reveal their experiences to a family member (Rivers & Cowie, 2006). Furthermore, significant improvements in available individual, relational, and contextual resources support resilience competence in the face of adversity (Fischetti, Cataldi, Di Terlizzi, & Greco, 2019; Goldstein & Brooks, 2006; Kaplan, 2006; Naglieri & LeBuffe, 2006; Prince-Embury, 2007) and, thus, bullying (Bowes et al., 2010; Donnon, 2010; Greco, Cataldi, & Fischetti, 2019b; Lisboa & Killer, 2008; Rivers & Cowie, 2006; Sapouna & Wolke, 2013).

Our study showed increases with a large effect size for total self-efficacy and with a small to moderate effect for the subscales. However, the control group exhibited decreases for total self-efficacy with a small effect size, and this suggests that intervention had a greater effect on self-efficacy outcomes (Bandura, 2012). Since the victims of bullying report lower self-efficacy than non-victims (Moore & Woodcock, 2017b), the result that total self-efficacy improved for the experimental group and decreased for the control group suggests that the intervention could improve participants’ abilities to cope with bullying (Ludwig & Pittman, 1999). Also, externalizing and antisocial behaviors among youth are of pressing concern and are considered a major public health problem (Krug, Mercy, Dahlberg, & Zwi, 2002). Multilateral teaching could be an effective alternative intervention for the treatment of externalizing behaviors. Our results agree with studies that have suggested motor and sport activities reduce externalizing behaviors (Zhou et al., 2007) and improve psychological (Fischetti, Latino, Cataldi, & Greco, 2019) and physical fitness (Fischetti & Greco, 2017; Greco, Cataldi, & Fischetti, 2019a), cognitive functions, and, specifically, executive functions in youth (Diamond & Lee, 2011).

Some limitations may limit the results of the current study. Given that the study only examined male participants from two high schools, the findings should be interpreted cautiously, as they may be the result of a localized effect. Also, as noted in the literature review, both bullying and resilience are complex constructs and lack an agreed academic definition. This presents questions in terms of whether the definitions used in the current study adequately operationalize the constructs. Future research should expand the definition of resilience and bullying. Finally, psychoeducational activities may have had a confounding effect on combined physical exercise training. However, psychoeducational activity is naturally carried out by an experienced coach during physical and sports education sessions, so we can consider this limit irrelevant.

This study has some important strengths, i.e., it proposes an alternative approach to educational policy and suggests that instead of focusing resources towards eliminating bullying behaviors, the policy should focus on promoting mental health through the development of well-being. Furthermore, the results obtained are of crucial relevance (i.e., moderate to large effect size) and reinforce those previously found in a few studies that relate bullying to physical activity and sport (Baena & Bosca, 2018; Holt, 2016). Future research should examine the multilateral teaching program's effects on different population samples and consider students with certain vulnerabilities (e.g., deficient gross motor skills), as doing so could help diminish bullying (Bejerot, Plenty, Humble, & Humble, 2013; Healy, 2014).

In conclusion, the findings suggest that a multilateral teaching program based on psychoeducational activities combined with physical exercise training and team games may improve resilience and self-efficacy in male adolescents and make them less likely to engage in aggressive behavior or be bullied. Evidence supports the assertion that anti-bullying policies are inconsistent; therefore, multilateral teaching in physical education should be considered an alternative practice for improving individuals' ability to cope with the effects of bullying and an effective alternative to the failing anti-bullying approach used by institutions. Consequently, we must highlight the fact that the role of physical education teachers is noteworthy in the promotion of proactive educational strategies to reduce bullying behaviors. During training sessions and competitions, they can introduce conflict resolution and reduce the focus on competitiveness (Hand, 2016; López-Castedo, Álvarez, Domínguez, & Álvarez, 2018).

Ethics approval and informed consent

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the University Institutional Review Board and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Competing interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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How football fans perceive sports heroes – The case of Israel

Authors' contribution:

- A) conception and design of the study
- B) acquisition of data
- C) analysis and interpretation of data
- D) manuscript preparation
- E) obtaining funding

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Abstract

Background: Hero-making and hero-worship are common in human society. Yet despite the universal appeal of heroes, the features attributed to these figures and the attitudes toward them change depending upon the circumstances. Heroes have been the topic of extensive discussion in the academic literature. Nevertheless, little research attention has been directed at sports heroes. Examining soccer heroes is of special importance, particularly in view of soccer's popularity across the globe and the celebrity status of top soccer stars.

Purpose: The objective of this paper is to examine and map the defining features of soccer heroes as subjectively perceived by their fans.

Methods: We conducted a qualitative study that entailed semi-structured interviews with 18 young Israeli soccer fans as well as content analysis of fan chants.

Results: The research findings indicate that fans attribute special importance to three main characteristics that are not perceived as dominant among heroes in other contexts: loyalty to team and family, modesty and morality, and the ability to influence their surroundings. Based on the findings, the paper discusses the unique nature of soccer heroes in contrast to other elite players and the role played by these heroes for their fans.

Key words: Heroes, Role Model, Soccer, Football

Introduction

Research literature has discussed and extensively examined the significance of larger-than-life figures in society, their influence on individuals and groups, and the psychological needs they satisfy. Known as “heroes” or “role models,” these figures have appeared throughout human history, from Oedipus in Greek mythology to popular athletes in the modern age, such as German racing driver Michael Schumacher (Biskup & Pfister, 1999). While the image of the hero has taken many forms, for the most part it is marked by a limited number of characteristics that exert a similar impact on human beings (Allison & Goethals, 2016). The hero figure answers an individual and social need and can therefore find expression in various fields. This study examines the widespread admiration afforded to sports heroes who serve as role models for sports fans (Shuart, 2007). In view of soccer's popularity across the globe and the disproportionate lack of research attention given to this specific branch of sport, the study focuses on

soccer heroes. The research objective is to examine and map the characteristics of soccer heroes as perceived by fans. To this end, the research adopts a qualitative approach that uses two research tools: in-depth interviews and content analysis.

Literature review

There are many terms for sports heroes in the theoretical literature, including celebrated athletes, celebrities, stars, icons, and role models. Their commonality is that they are all athletes who enjoy a special status among the public and the media due to their success in sports. The existence of such a variety of definitions is mainly due to contradictions between those figures' values and appeal inside and outside the sports context. For example, Reid (2017) points out that contrary to the heroic perception of sports heroes as soldiers or Good Samaritans, sports heroes do not protect the innocent or save lives and, in any case, do not endanger their lives in order to achieve their goals. That is, they do not exhibit self-sacrifice or make any form of contribution to society and its weakest members. Moreover, their role as role models may also be perceived as problematic. For even if they are setting an example of sporting excellence, it is only relevant to other athletes at their level who can make effective use of this example (*ibid.*). Therefore, their status as role models should be based on their ability to display excellence in other sports or other fields. Freezell (2005) notes that celebrated athletes may influence others' behavior, especially young fans, but do not set a moral example or even represent normative behavior, meaning they cannot be role models outside the context of sports. In comparison, Dixon and Flynn (2008) argue that the public also sees universal values such as integrity, expertise, reliability, and durability in sports celebrities. The conceptual distance between athletes and the traditional model of heroes is also found in Tännsjö's (1998) claims that when it comes to sports, common spectators have contempt for personal weaknesses and evaluate athletes primarily on talents and success above hard work. In the present article, we do not seek to define the sports hero's contribution or values but rather focus on how fans perceive this term

The dictionary defines the word "hero" as "a person admired for achievements and noble qualities" (Merriam-Webster.com, 2020). This definition refers to two distinctive traits of the hero: personal characteristics and actions. Hence, being a hero does not depend solely upon physical strength or inborn talent. Rather, a woman fighting breast cancer can also be defined as a hero (Burrows, 2010). Indeed, someone who has no remarkable personal achievements but has demonstrated bravery, endurance and sometimes even self-sacrifice in coping with a particular difficulty can be considered a hero (Keczer et al., 2016). In their paper on the prototype of the hero, (Kinsella et al., 2015) identified thirteen central features alongside thirteen peripheral features. Among the central features were moral integrity, bravery, self-sacrifice, selflessness and altruism, while the peripheral features included leadership, strength, humility and risk-taking. Being deemed a hero is not necessarily dependent upon superiority over others, but rather on reciprocal relations with others. Accordingly, another definition of "hero" focuses on serving as a role model (Parry, 2009), defined as an influential individual who is "geographically, generationally and experientially close" to the lives of those being influenced (Walker, 2007). According to Zimbardo (2011), the modern hero is not exalted over others or endowed with special inherent abilities. Rather, a hero is an ordinary person who understands the risks they are taking, is willing to pay a personal price, and whose actions are perceived as heroic in that they are intended to serve a moral cause. From here emerges society's need for heroes who on the one hand represent the potential for greatness among ordinary people and on the other hand symbolize taking a stand against something perceived as negative, such as injustice, evil, or corruption.

Both celebrities and heroes arouse admiration among fans and are perceived as role models based on the values they represent or based on their behavior. Both, in the modern world, are images represented by the media (Dumitriu, 2018). Moreover, the recent expansion of the hero concept includes aspects of everyday activities, blurring the line between heroes and celebrities (Frisk, 2018). Similarly, Reid (2017) argues that a reduction in sports heroes' status as such is due to the alleged exploitation of their status as celebrities. Reid notes that the connection between athletes and heroes stems from their relationship to heroism or its values. This aspect is crucial for differentiating between the two terms as it emphasizes the message or values that athletes represent. Celebrities represent sporting success expressed in terms of status and money, while sports heroes represent behaviors described in connection with heroism and its values.

Among other things, fans' identification with sports heroes stems from a desire for a connection to success, thus leading to a sense of emotional and social well-being (Teitelbaum, 2008). This identification also contributes to fans' sense of self-efficacy and motivation to succeed (Jun et al., 2016). Hero worship also serves the social need to preserve the ideal perception that individuals can succeed in realizing their dreams despite outside

limitations (Rader, 1983). Thus, because heroic leadership is of value to society, people act to ensure that heroes will remain part of the collective conscience and memory (Allison & Goethals, 2016). The special status afforded to sports celebrities in modern society reinforces the desire to model oneself on them and attracts others to this field (Shuart, 2007). According to Gammon (2014), perceptions of sports heroes and their qualities are also dependent upon the local cultural context. For example, in North America the emphasis is primarily on winning, while the British concept also relies upon the aesthetics of sports. Despite this, specific common characteristics can still be attributed to sports heroes. More than three decades ago, Barney (1985) described a number of such qualities, among them athletic excellence, moral excellence, altruism, and an ethical lifestyle appropriate for the times. These qualities must be placed in historical context, and the way the sports hero arrived at these personal and athletic achievements should also be considered (Hughson, 2009). The importance of context is tied to society's need for heroes and to the way in which heroism is expressed (Gammon, 2014). While heroes are measured by their achievements, an achievement can find expression in major victories as well as in steadfast resistance to defeats (Rauch, 1996), as can be seen in the cinematic portrayals of sports heroes and the widespread interest in athletes who are underdogs and therefore not among those favored to win. At the end of such movies, success in sports is measured by impressive victories or by losses after brave confrontations on equal ground against favored athletes endowed with greater talents, as in movies such as *Cool Runnings* (1993), *Million Dollar Baby* (2004), and *Rocky* (1976; Vandello et al., 2016).

The literature provides much evidence for the extent to which heroes influence individuals (Keczer et al., 2016) and the importance of sports heroes to their fans' lives (Shuart, 2007). The sports hero phenomenon encompasses various components that touch upon the notion of hero-making and sports in general. A sports hero is defined by heroic qualities shared by heroes in other fields of human endeavors as well as by outstanding and exceptional athletic abilities (Lines, 2001). Sports fans expect their heroes to embody characteristics valued by society, such as leadership and determination, and at the same time exhibit proficiency and expertise in their sport (Parry, 2009). Bobby Charlton, a soccer player who survived the Munich air disaster and had a long career with Manchester United, is very popular with fans but is not considered a hero. One attribute that fans consider to have been a barrier to his becoming a hero was his distance from the fans and his preference for socializing with the club managers rather than the other players on his team (Taylor, 2000). Heroes are outstanding due to their talents, but at the same time they are ordinary people, just like their fans (Woolridge, 2002). Fans also look for universal cultural values in their heroes that find expression outside the arena of competitive sports. Among these values are loyalty to the family and involvement in charitable work (Parry, 2009), alongside tolerance, excellence, and compassion (Berg, 2002). Note also that heroic activities often entail other personal attributes seen as positive, such as special talents and an aesthetically pleasing external appearance. Hence, many modern cultural heroes represent a combination of good looks and good works, particularly in fields demanding skills, such as acting, politics, and sports (Allison & Goethals, 2011). With respect to the outward appearance of athletes, Nevill et al. (2009) found that the top ten soccer players of 2000 were taller (by 1.2 centimeters) and heavier (by 1.29 kilograms) than their successful counterparts in the previous decade.

In the 21st century, the popularity of sports in modern society is rising. Among other reasons, this is due to the increased dominance of new media (Boyle, 2009). Furthermore, sports heroes appear more frequently in the media (Whannel, 2005). As a result of this increase in the popularity of sports in modern society and the expansion of media coverage, high-level athletes have gained worldwide recognition among both men and women, and even among those who are not interested in sports (Lines, 2001). This rise in the number of familiar sports figures is accompanied by a growing number of people seeking role models and heroes in the world of sports (Parry, 2009). In addition, the world of sports is replete with linguistic expressions related to these heroes and the myths surrounding them (Levental & Galily, 2018). In a study conducted in England among students studying various sports disciplines, more than 75% indicated that they admired at least one sports hero who often served as a role model for their behavior (Shuart, 2007). The popularity of sports heroes also finds expression in the establishment of sports halls of fame and museums (Snyder, 1991). Today, the mass media is the main source of information about current events, while at the same time sports have claimed a larger volume of the various media in terms of content and channels (Vogan, 2015). Hence, more than any other area, the field of sports serves as fertile ground for hero-making (Lucifora & Simmons, 2003). Note that the period of a sports hero's professional and competitive activity is limited, usually up to two decades. Nevertheless, the games in which a hero takes part are documented and discussed by fans, in the press, on television shows, and in films, such that the hero remains in the public consciousness for much longer periods of time (Woolridge, 2002).

Methods

This study focuses on soccer heroes as their fans perceive them. It should be emphasized that this study dealt with Israeli fans' perceptions of athletes from Israel and other European countries. While cultural importance cannot be ignored, sports fandom's visual expressions and motivations in modern times are mostly similar across the globe (Johnson et al., 2021). Therefore, while this study is particularly relevant to the Israeli case, it can serve as a basis for the analysis of fan perceptions worldwide.

The research objective is to examine the defining characteristics of soccer heroes as subjectively perceived by soccer fans from different groups. The goal is to find points of similarity in how these heroes are defined that are not dependent on the personal context of these idolized athletes. To this end, we adopted a qualitative phenomenological approach that entailed conducting semi-structured interviews with 18 sports fans. All the interviewees were men between the ages of 19 and 27, Israeli residents, Hebrew speakers, and fans of various soccer clubs in Israel and in Europe: Liverpool and Arsenal (UK); Barcelona and Real Madrid (Spain); Beitar Jerusalem, Maccabi Haifa, Maccabi Tel-Aviv, and Hapoel Haifa (Israel); and Inter Milan and Roma (Italy). The study included soccer clubs from four different countries to elicit characterizations of soccer heroes that were not dependent on the heroes' local circumstances but rather on the Israeli cultural and social context. The participants were chosen in two ways. First, we contacted official fan organizations through Facebook pages and WhatsApp groups and asked them to participate in the study. Second, due to the closed nature of these fan groups, we also used the snowball method to locate additional interviewees (Haridakis, 2010).

The researchers built the semi-structured interviews used in this study. The use of this research tool facilitated delving into the interviewees' subjective interpretations while maintaining flexibility, which is essential in qualitative research that seeks subjectivity (Shkedi, 2011). All the interviews took place face to face in the first months of 2020. In some cases, complementary interviews took place by phone. The questions focused on characterizing the image of the sports hero and the hero's perceived importance in soccer fans' lives. To this end, some questions touched upon the soccer heroes themselves, while others focused on the fans and their support. Sample questions include "What characterizes you as a soccer fan, and how does your support find expression in your everyday life?" and "What are the outstanding features or characteristics of your soccer hero?" In addition, the questionnaire included a question focusing on a negative incident related to the hero, in accordance with the identity of the specific hero. The following question, for example, was asked about soccer hero Steven Gerrard: "How did you feel when Gerrard made his famous dive, which cost Liverpool the game and, according to some, the championship for that season?" About Thierry Henry, the questionnaire asked, "How did you feel when Henry left to join Barcelona after eight years with Arsenal?" The purpose of these questions was to examine the interviewees' attitudes toward incidents that seemingly contradicted the hero image and related characteristics, such as athletic success and loyalty, that emerged from the literature review. In analyzing the interviews, we placed emphasis on the interviewees' various interpretations of the image of a soccer hero as well as each interviewee's subjective views. First, we analyzed the interviews separately to determine central and outstanding categories. Then, we mapped the interviews to formulate thematic categories.

To complete the individual perspective, we used another research tool: content analysis of fan chants. These songs served as an additional platform that facilitated collective observation from the point of view of soccer fans and their attitude toward their favorite players. Popular fan chants are important as they point to two critical aspects in the present study. One is that their popularity expresses the fans' connection as a community to the symbolic content that appears in the lyrics. That is, they feature images of heroes as perceived by sports fans. The second is that they contribute to forming a collective identity among the fan community by representing its common symbols. We chose five songs in English from the internet site *Fanchants.com* that referred to fan favorites for a particular club. The objective of analyzing these chants was to provide a comparative perspective to the fans' individual interviews. The chants selected were "Duncan Is Our Hero" (Everton), "Big Paddy Bonner" (Celtic), "Forever and Ever" (Manchester United), "When You're Smiling" (Leicester City), and "Stevie Gerrard Is Our Captain" (Liverpool). Due to the small sample, relative uniformity of the songs was needed. Therefore, all songs chosen were in the English language, from a similar fan culture, and perceived as particularly popular. That is, the songs were in congruence and offered a reliable representation of the fans.

Results

Analysis of the interviews yielded a broad range of personal attributes and behavioral characteristics of soccer heroes. Among others, these touched upon their personal conduct outside the world of soccer, their perceived

emotional ties, their professional choices, their behavior on the field, their place in the minds of fans, and their personal stories. While all these were noted frequently and in the context of specific players, three central and significant themes emerged among all the interviewees. These themes reflect how the research participants perceived their soccer heroes and yielded an image focused on their behavioral and symbolic traits. The names of the themes were taken from soccer fan chants and express the main ideas emerging from these themes: loyalty, being a role model, and having emotional influence. The first theme discusses the importance of loyalty in defining a soccer player as a hero, mainly in the context of fan loyalty to the hero and the team being reciprocated through the hero's loyalty to the fans and the team. The second theme deals with the soccer hero's status as a role model through athletic behavior on the field and positive ethical conduct off the field. The third theme describes the emotional impact of the soccer hero on a fan as deriving both from the hero's status as a revered figure and from the fan's profound emotional investment in the hero and the team. This impact is in essence the perceived result of the first two themes.

Loyalty: “He wears his shirt with pride, he wears it all the time”

The name of this theme is taken from the Everton fans' chant about their hero Duncan Ferguson. The chant underscores the soccer player's loyalty to the club:

*Duncan is our hero, he wears the Number 9,
He wears his shirt with pride,
He wears it all the time.
He wears it in the shower...*

This loyalty to the club and its symbols is the most prominent characteristic through which the interviewees identified their heroes. The research participants attributed particular importance to the issue of loyalty for two reasons. The first is the moral significance attributed to loyalty in all areas of society, making it valuable in the context of sports as well. The second is that the commercialization and globalization of modern soccer has weakened the ties between players and clubs so that today loyalty is even more valued because it is rare. This factor is of interest because the research literature on heroes in general and sports heroes in particular does not refer to loyalty as a positive characteristic. For example, loyalty and devotion were not among the 26 central or peripheral features defined by Kinsella et al. (2015). An example of the major importance of loyalty in defining a hero can be seen in these remarks by one of the interviewees: “True sports heroes are those who are the most devoted to the club, have the strongest ties to the fans and spend most of their career with one club.” This loyalty to one club often is at the cost of the player's personal success, for by moving from one club to another, a player can improve the financial terms of their contract and enhance their overall recognition and prestige. Another Arsenal fan referred to this when describing his soccer hero, Thierry Henry, as being both “a star and loyal and [thus] not only in pursuit of money or success.” This preference for loyalty over the pursuit of fame or success is popular in modern society in general and therefore also applies to the world of sports heroes (Lines, 2001).

The interviewees pointed to three areas in which loyalty finds expression in a sports hero: loyalty to family, to fans, and to the team. The first refers to the hero's loyalty to family, and in particular to a spouse. For example, one of the fans noted the following about his hero Lionel Messi: “He's loyal to his wife as well. They've been together since age 13. He's a family man. He's loyal to the club and to his wife, the same wife since he was young. Especially today, when so many celebrities don't stay with their wives or cheat on them...” These remarks express the fan's admiration and respect for this quality. This component of the importance of family has also emerged in previous studies that pointed to the special significance of a hero's loyalty to the family (see Brownhill, 2010; Parry, 2009).

The second aspect of loyalty extends from the family to the fan community. When asked about the most prominent features of his hero Eli Ohana, one interviewee responded that he admired “his genuine loyalty to the spectators.” Another interviewee added, “He plays only for one group of spectators.” Yet another interviewee compared his hero Yaniv Katan to another player, distinguishing between the two based on their connection to spectators and commitment to the club: “A soccer hero is not the best player. Take, for example, Eran Zahavi. He's an excellent player but he has no ties to any club, he doesn't represent any group of fans and for that reason he is not a soccer hero... he is merely a good player who makes goals and moves from one club to another.” The literature does indicate that sports can influence a community of fans by providing them with a loyal figure (Rubio-Hernández, 2011). Nevertheless, the importance of a hero's loyalty to fans is not discussed on its own but rather is inherent in the notion of loyalty to the club, the third aspect of loyalty. In this context, the interviewees described the commercialization of sports, which has resulted in a player's personal success becoming more important to them than their loyalty to their club and their fans. Indeed, one of the interviewees made the following comment about Francesco Totti: “He received offers from lots of better teams in Europe, like Real Madrid, yet he chose to stay with Roma.”

This participant even quoted a remark made by Totti in the past on this matter: “They taught us at school that family is the most important. Roma is my family. Have you ever heard of someone who left his poor parents to live with rich strangers?” Other interviewees expressed similar sentiments:

[Yaniv Katan] played for Maccabi Haifa during the time when big money started coming to Israeli soccer and players moved to different clubs every year to improve their salaries. It was a period in which the value of a home team player and his loyalty to the team dwindled. And contrary to this prevailing atmosphere in soccer, he remained loyal to Maccabi Haifa... despite recurring offers with large salaries.

Another interviewee commented on Mauro Icardi: “He got lots of offers from clubs much larger than Inter, but despite these tempting offers he decided to remain with the club where he made his breakthrough and where the fans are so connected to him.” These sentiments also emerge in the fan chants, for example in the Celtic club’s song about its hero, Patrick Bonner: “All tried to sign him but they have no chance.” This admiration for team loyalty derives in part from perceptions of the importance of loyalty in the fan’s self-definition, where an important component of the fan’s identity is declaration of loyalty over time (Millward, 2011). Hence, fans look for these same defining qualities in their sports heroes (Teitelbaum, 2008; Parry, 2009). These three characteristics refer to the sports hero’s enduring loyalty to family, the community of fans, and the team, which in the world of sports also constitutes a type of extended family. The importance of loyalty is to a large extent a response to the commercialization of modern soccer and the frequent movement of players from one club to another. This situation has created a discrepancy between the fan’s self-definition that is based upon loyalty and the professionalism of sports today. Indeed, loyalty is a highly esteemed quality in society as a whole; it is also characteristic of fans and what they view as the exemplary values that guide them; and finally, it symbolizes the unique nature of soccer heroes compared to other athletes.

Admired qualities and being a role model: “Forever and ever, we’ll follow the boys”

The first theme focused on the importance of loyalty, a quality that is essential to a fan’s self-identity. The second theme emerging from the interviews referred to the unique qualities that turn a player into a hero and that represent values to strive for. The heading we gave to this section on the second theme underscores the duality in the meaning of the word “follow” in that it describes fans’ enthusiastic support for sports and at the same time their tendency to imitate the behavior of soccer players. According to one interviewee, “professional ability is not the only thing needed to be a hero. A hero is something beyond this. A hero is a role model . . . someone you want to be like.” The implication is that these admired characteristics are not within the realm of professional ability but rather are related to other personal attributes. Another interviewee made a similar comment about Steven Gerrard: “He also had moral and unique values. He would not feign a move simply to obtain a foul, would not resort to inappropriate means to win. In my opinion many ‘heroes’ conduct themselves in a way that is unfair and not suitable to a game like this and to players on this level, who are admired and imitated by kids all over the world.” Yet another interviewee also referred to the issue of ethical conduct: “A sports hero must demonstrate social values, for ultimately he serves as a role model for lots of youngsters who admire him and do exactly what he does.” The interviewees’ remarks indicate that an athlete must behave in a way that reflects social ideals and not in response to the needs of the sport. This contention is in line with the definition of a sports hero as someone who succeeds in sports while at the same time upholds revered social values and thus is deemed worthy of having their noble conduct imitated by fans (Shuart, 2007). Moreover, even when a sports hero deviates from this moral ideal, fans come to their defense, explaining their actions so as to make their worldview accommodate them. One interviewee referred to the immoral behavior of his hero, who was subject to public criticism. He explained in detail why the hero was misunderstood, asserting that the hero’s actions were within the required moral standards:

Everyone was interested in Icardi’s affair with his wife, including me, so I decided to examine the matter in more depth. Icardi was cast as an immoral person due to all the media coverage. But his side should also have been heard. Icardi did fall in love with his wife while she was married to someone else, but he did not hide this and immediately confessed this to his friend Maxi Lopez, who was married to her at the time. When she and Icardi got married and moved in together, Icardi began taking care of her children, which is quite common today, and they all got along excellently. There was never any provocative behavior. For that reason I think that Icardi is a very moral and sociable man, even off the field, as you can see on the social networks.

In addition to unique attributes and moral standards, the fans also noted that heroes are normal people who are not exalted above others. For example, one interviewee stated the following:

When I was 10 I went to a game between Maccabi Haifa and Beitar Jerusalem at Teddy Stadium. Maccabi Haifa's performance was lousy and the crowd booed them throughout the game and in the end when we lost. At the final whistle, all the players went to the locker room. Yaniv Katan was the only one who faced the crowd, clapped and thanked them for their support. For ten minutes he talked to the crowd about what's happening in the club, tried to explain and mainly listened. It's hard to explain how unusual this was in soccer, and certainly in Israeli soccer. I felt he was a role model.

According to Taylor (2000), by distancing themselves from the spectators, athletes generate alienation. Hence, fans attribute special importance to this type of direct contact and to a player's willingness to devote time to this connection, which they see as reflective of mutual interests.

The research participants noted two additional features that are essential for a sports hero to be a role model: leadership, as noted in the first theme, and modesty. Kinsella et al. (2015) identified these features as peripheral features of heroes, without any connection to sports. In this study, the main emphasis was on the connection between these two features, a connection that the interviewees repeated in the context of different players. The interviews indicated that it is precisely the athletic abilities emerging in leaders that underscore the heroes' modesty and their ability to share credit with their teammates. That is, because the heroes have superior athletic abilities and therefore are the leaders of their teams, their modesty is not necessarily to be expected. For this reason, the interviewees called special attention to the quality of modesty in the context of athletic ability. One interviewee made the following comment about Raúl: "Modesty is the quality that differentiates him from all the other stars." Another noted about Messi, "As great as he is, he is still modest and team oriented, sharing credit with his fellow players." These qualities were also attributed to Toti, Icardi, Ohana, Katan, and others. As in the case of the aforementioned features, it is not a player's built-in advantage that sets them apart as a hero but rather their normative or even ideal behavior in the context of this advantage.

The ability to influence: "When you're smiling, the whole world smiles with you"

The heading of this section is taken from the anthem of Leicester City fans and expresses the fans' deeply felt love for their team. According to the words of the song, happiness, sadness, sunshine, and rain are all dependent upon the success of the team and its players. Likewise, this theme also deals with the ability of a sports hero to exert an indirect influence on the everyday lives of fans. According to the interviewees, this influence emerges mainly in the realm of associated emotions and the love of the game.

In talking about their heroes, the interviewees repeatedly expressed their sense of excitement, as can be seen, for example, in one interviewee's comments about Eli Ohana: "It was Beitar's 96-97 championship season, and Ohana had a major role. Excitement, falling in love with soccer, and for the first time in my life, admiration for a soccer star." Another interviewee talked about Raúl González in similar terms: "The player's overall spirit and his performance excited me anew each time." While these feelings are associated with particular moments, they continue beyond a particular point in time. As Shuart (2007) claimed, nostalgic reflection on heroes after they have died or retired enhances the emotional element derived from admiration, generating significant and emotional memories among fans. The tendency to commemorate great moments in sports emerges in the interviewees' detailed and emotional descriptions, as in the following example about Steven Gerrard:

I don't remember that moment or even if I watched it live. It was in the Champions League Final in 2005 and every time I see a recap of the game I am filled with motivation and overcome with emotion. The team was losing to Milan 3-0 at the end of the first half. Around the 60th minute Gerrard made an amazing goal, signaling to the crowd to get things moving. Every move of his showed that he had no intention of losing and would give it everything he had. I think that if I had been playing with him then, I would have been caught up in his enthusiasm. After bringing the score to 3-3 within six minutes, Liverpool won the game with a penalty shoot-out during extra time.

Another interviewee made similar comments about Thierry Henry:

As I recall, Henry returned to Arsenal a few years after leaving Barcelona. He was no longer at the height of his abilities... far from that... and it was clear he hadn't come to Arsenal to be a star, but in the first game after his return that season he went in as a substitute for one of the players when the game was tied, and he made the winning goal. I remember how happy I felt... I remember his run and the crazy celebration, it was a home game or at least the stands were full of team supporters, and at that moment I was so thrilled. What a great player. What a personality. What a thrill, what a pleasure. All in all a glorious moment.

These memories are clearly accompanied by strong feelings. Yet these feelings are not necessarily always positive and are also likely to be negative, as in this description of athletic failure on the part of the interviewee's hero: "It did not change my perspective on him. I simply felt sorry for him at that moment. Even remembering it now fills me with sadness and compassion. He showed me that even a hero like him can fail. That did not scare me. Rather, I was encouraged to see him continue playing and fighting in a manner that befitted him." Even when a hero behaved in a manner seemingly contradictory to their admired qualities unrelated to their athletic achievements, the interviewees tended to examine the situation in a positive light. The following statement is an example:

It made absolutely no difference to my perception of him as a hero. As I said, over the years Katan received countless offers from other teams but chose to remain with Maccabi Haifa. West Ham United competes in the Premier League in England, and when Katan received an offer from them, all the fans were happy for him and gave him the credit he was due and felt he was representing us in the best league in the world. It was clear to him and to everyone that in Israel he has only one team.

This attitude points to the fans' desire to form an emotional connection with their hero, such that they are attracted to the hero's qualities and identify with them (Parry, 2009). This attraction to athletes derives from a sense of the special qualities needed to cause fans to feel special themselves (Teitelbaum, 2008). Moreover, these feelings described by the interviewees are not only momentary expressions of emotion. Rather, to a certain extent they point to their perspective on other events. That is, these memories serve as motivational factors or stimulate feelings of optimism among the fans, leading to a sense of self-efficacy, a positive perspective, and satisfaction (Jun et al., 2016). The comments of one of the interviewees about Francesco Totti support this claim:

In the summer of 2006 I was in the eighth grade, impatiently waiting for the start of soccer practices for the coming season. But then the Second Lebanon War broke out and practices were cancelled. Totti was playing for the Italian team that won the World Cup in Germany that summer. I remember him very well from that World Cup. He was one of the team's outstanding players and was a bright spot for me during and after the war.

Another point that emerged from the interviews was the association the fans made between admiration for their hero and love for the game. Their attachment to their hero naturally emerged from their love for soccer and from watching the games. Nonetheless, most of the interviewees made the surprising claim that it was their attachment to the hero that reinforced their love for soccer and for the team and in some cases even generated it in the first place. One interviewee stated, "I have been a fan of this team for 15 years. Why? Because I fell in love with a particular player that played for Arsenal and was even considered one of the greatest players of all time. For me, he [Henry] is the reason for watching soccer." Another interviewee added, "I've been a fan of Inter Milan since I was a kid because Adriano played for them then and since then I've been an Inter fan." This subjective observation described by the interviewees effectively blurs the boundaries between love for sports, love for the team, and love for a particular player. Indeed, for the fan, the hero often symbolizes the entire team (Teitelbaum, 2008).

Conclusion

This paper sought to examine sports heroes as characterized by soccer fans. Among the many qualities attributed to these heroes in the context of soccer, fans attribute special importance to three main characteristics of heroes. The first is loyalty, defined as an absolute value and not necessarily in terms of belonging to a particular group. Loyalty is a significant factor as it is an essential component in the self-definition of fans, who define themselves in terms of their time investment and devotion, especially in the face of failure (Tachis & Tzetzis, 2015). Thus, they perceive loyalty as part of the world of sports and sports fandom in particular. Therefore, the hero's loyalty is an ideal to strive for and a way to relate to the hero. The second characteristic is the ability of these heroes to serve as role models based upon their morality, leadership, and modesty, as well as how they reflect these positive traits in their overall behavior. This is especially evident in view of the nature of professional sports these days, which often showcases negative characteristics running counter to societal ideals. The third characteristic is the long-term influence of these heroes on groups and individuals in society. While this third characteristic is related to the emotional ties between fans and their hero, the first two are not necessarily related to sports. Indeed, these heroes are often noted for how they differ from the image of a sports superhero in the modern era. A soccer hero is not defined as such simply based on their talents and performance, even though these are usually the factors that make them exceptional and cause

them to be perceived as such. The perceived distance between the hero and other players does not refer to the hero's relationship to their teammates. By contrast, in most cases the soccer hero is compared to other superior players. Hence, the picture of the sports hero emerging from this study is an expression of the branch of sports in which the hero plays and of the normative culture in this branch. This paper strives to present an initial perspective on the unique features of the soccer hero vis-à-vis the image of the hero in society as a whole. The findings point to the relationship between sports and sports heroes, indicating that modern soccer and its values, at least in the context of sports heroes, are cross-cultural rather than local.

In conclusion, soccer heroes emerge here as superior athletes who have other defining qualities, in particular loyalty, morality, and modesty—qualities that are not so prevalent among athletes at this level. Note that the research underlying this paper focused on soccer heroes who are still active or who retired during the last ten years. Moreover, the research participants were Israeli soccer fans. Hence, the research corpus should be extended to examine soccer heroes in other cultures and at other times in order to reveal similarities and differences to the examined case.

Competing interests

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A case study: the AFL as a positive institution

Authors' contribution:

- A) conception and design of the study
- B) acquisition of data
- C) analysis and interpretation of data
- D) manuscript preparation
- E) obtaining funding

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Abstract

The Australian Football League (AFL) is a leading professional sports organization within the multi-billion-dollar entertainment industry. This case study uses publicly available information to investigate the AFL in terms of its credentials as a positive institution using the good work model developed by Stansbury and Sonenshein (2012). The AFL has taken advantage of the economic rationalism and developed a corporate structure able to deliver a range of good work activities. For example, developmental programs that help players exceeding high community expectations. This study suggests that the good work model is beneficial for cognitive resources, normal functioning, regulatory focus, and impression formation. The AFL appears to answer Cameron et al. (2004) call to identify and enable flourishing and life-giving aspects of their organisation and, thus, represents a kind of positive institution. Finally, the study recognizes positive institutions as worthwhile but raises concerns about the uniqueness and lack of cultural research.

Key words: Australian Football League, positive institution, good work model, flourishing

Introduction

This case study investigates a professional sports organization as a positive institution. Positive Institutions represent organizational and structural practices that outwardly elevate, magnify, and refract to the world our highest human strengths (Cooperrider, 2012). Recognition of this institution type has evolved from the positive psychology movement (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and represents one of its three pillars. The other pillars being positive subjective feelings and individual traits. Peterson (2006) suggests that such positive institutions exist among families, schools, businesses, communities, and societies that promote human flourishing. Positive institutions emphasize responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethics. The organizational and social benefits of positive institutions are gaining support and recognition from the business world (Laszlo, Cooperrider, & Fry, 2020). However, this third pillar of positive psychology remains under-researched (Budzińska, 2018), rarely, if at all, examined within the professional sports industry. We aim to overcome this deficit by examining the Australian Football League (AFL) using the good work model developed by Stansbury and Sonenshein (2012) and augments our understanding of ethics.

The good work model theorizes specific positive counterparts to unethical behavior and introduces concepts such as discretionary, praiseworthy, and positively deviant aspects to the ethical debate (Stansbury & Sonenshein, 2012). As

a result, this model (a) expands the decision criteria and process, and draws on additional cognitive resources (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001), (b) enables normal functioning to move from problematic (i.e., deficit gap) to virtuous (i.e., abundance gap) issues (Cameron, 2003), (c) encourages a regulatory focus that moves from prevention (i.e., safety and danger) to promotion (i.e., achievement and accomplishment) concerns (Higgins, 1998), and finally (d) facilitate cognitive categories and heuristic from system one to system two impression formation processes (Brewer, 1988). Previously normative behavioral ethic literature primarily focuses on the processes that either lead or prevent unethical behaviors or decisions (Stansbury & Sonenshein, 2012). For example, the moral philosophy of utilitarianism/consequentialism investigates ethical decisions from the best overall outcome perspective (Scheffler, 1988). Unfortunately, such philosophies tend to disproportionately concentrate on the adverse human behavior and morality aspects (Spreitzer, Cameron, Stansbury, & Sonenshein, 2012). This focus encourages a fight or flight (flee) mentality (Wright & Cropanzano, 2004). Such a negative bias limits thinking and ignoring positive aspects of ethics, such as moral efficacy, moral meaningfulness, and moral courage (May, Luth, & Schwoerer, 2014). We argue that the good work model overcomes this limitation by expands our understanding of cognitive resources, normal functioning, regulatory focus, and impression formation. Such expansion can empower leaders to increase their behavioral repertoire.

Professional sports industry and the AFL?

Over the last four decades, the professional sports industry has emerged from suburban grassroots clubs into a multi-billion-dollar entertainment business. It enables talented players to earn millions of dollars for their skills in ensuring on-field success that translates into off-field financial prosperity (Duncan, 2018b). The Australian Football League is one of the most successful organizations within the professional sports industry. In 2019, this league accumulated a gross national audience during the ‘home and away’ season exceeded 91 million (Auld, 2019). The AFL employs 700 people, has nearly seven million attendees every season, 1055 elite athletes, 18 clubs, 1.4 million participants, 2755 community clubs, and reach 122 million people through our television viewership (The AFL, 2019). The Australian Football League (AFL) is headed by ten commissioners, who appoint the senior leader (i.e., the chief executive). The AFL appoints a general manager to their ten departments, who directly reports to the chief executive and are members of the AFL executive committee (The Australian Football League, n.d.). The AFL Chairman highlights their significant commitment to ensuring women and men have equal opportunity to advance and participate in the AFL fully as players, employees, volunteers, and supporters. They expect all who engage with our code to observe the terms of this Respect and Responsibility policy (The AFL, 2005). The AFL negotiates the overall pay and conditions for players (Niall, 2020).

Macro-system

Ethical pressure on the AFL can be understood from the macro-system (i.e., society and sectorial context) perspective. We argue elements within this system enables or inhibits an organization from being a “positive” institution. This ecological perspective allows the individual and contextual systems to be considered and interrelated simultaneously (Stokols, 1996). It improves our understanding of how the degree of globalization, urbanization, and environmental trends influence individuals’ attributes and behaviors (McLaren & Hawe, 2005). Other influences are apparent in chronosystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, and microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), but beyond this case study’s scope. ‘Economic rationalism’ is a crucial influence within the AFL’s political and economic setting, which positions market principles and imperatives as driving forces that underpin operations (Pusey, 1991). These macro forces place the accumulation of money (i.e., economic capital) as a primary objective for the league, clubs, sponsors, players, coaches, and support staff, enabling participation beyond the sporting field (Duncan, 2018a). Income generated enables positive operations, such as empowering diversity programs but inhibits size and duration. A range of macro-system elements influences decisions throughout the organization, such as the economy and competition with other football codes (e.g., rugby, soccer, & basketball).

Unfortunately, the recent pandemic and community health issues are becoming regular on-going influences and not just one-off events. The CEO Gillian McLachlan of the AFL described the pandemic or virus as their greatest threat ever (Walsh & Read, 2020). They are arguably the most apparent and high impact macro-system that has inhibited the AFL from being a positive institution. After all, community health concerns have shut down the AFL and cause a massive cash crisis that will last for years (Ralph, 2020). Also, the need to reduce concussion risks among AFL players who do not wear helmets threatens the game’s very nature (Ractilffe, 2021). However, typically, the community health trends, such as the need to exercise, encourage fans to improve physical and mental health, which are enablers for the AFL within the macrosystem. Such trends provide opportunities for the AFL to promote its credential as a positive organization in the media and community. While arguably, elite or spectator sports are no

guarantee for improving health in the community, the AFL's full spectrum of children to elite games has an extensive health footprint in the community. Finally, the extensive AFL promotional and advertising activities emphasize positive subjective feelings and traits. For example, a spectacular slow-motion vision of players leaping and kicking to the cheers of loving fans are effective positive role models in the community. Such images promote subjective feelings and desirable traits for players and spectators, which are positive psychology pillars. However, the AFL's reach relies on the interest their communities show in on and off-field activities.

Over the last 150 years, dramatic changes to the AFL have occurred. A once local, community-held, grassroots endeavor evolved into a multi-billion national dollar entertainment industry (Duncan, 2017). Such a trend has seen the disappearance of teams consisting of merely a coach and group of players and enabled the emergence of assistant coaches, line-coaches, managers, sports scientists, nutritionists, and fitness advisors (Duncan, 2016). These professions enable evidence-based knowledge communication to the greater community, which has significant benefits for the community served. As a significant part of the entertainment sector, the AFL transformation is influenced by the Media more than any other industry (Duncan, 2018b). This trend is unlikely to abate. The Media's influence on all of the AFL's corporate structure encourages them to play a leading role in issues that impact the broader community, such as equality and racism (see The AFL, 2005). This therefore capitalizes on Australian rules football's inherent position in the fabric of Australian society (Nauright, 2020) and reflects democratic principles (Warren, 2003). Such ideas represent what is good, right, and worthy of cultivation (McCullough & Snyder, 2000; Peterson, 2003) and are associated with moral goodness or virtuousness (Cameron, 2003). The AFL's equality and racism promotions and policies exist for their own sake and have inherent value (see Cameron, 2011). Thus, they are more compatible with Aristotle's (1999, as cited in Cameron, 2003) label of good. This label emphasizes such things as externally necessary and brings meaning to life (i.e., first intent); rather than moving things towards what is essential (i.e., second intent).

The AFL within the good work model

Traditionally, behavioral business ethics seize readers' attention by referring to scandals and suggesting how to prevent them (Spreitzer et al., 2012). Such an agenda reinforces the negative tendency or lens when examining behaviors (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and assumes that organizations will be more ethical by reducing or eliminating these aspects. In contrast, positive organizational scholarship addresses this innate virtuousness within organizations (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003) and uses a positive lens to understand better and promote ethical behaviors (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). Such a positive lens draws our attention to how organizations and their people engage in positive behaviors (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This case study examines the AFL's reaction to 'drink driving' player scandals by providing developmental programs in terms of the good work model lens.

This lens helps conceptually distinguish good works from other constructs (e.g., Corporate Social Responsibility) that emphasize positive behaviors descriptively (Stansbury & Sonenshein, 2012). Positively deviant represents intentional behaviors that positively deviate from norms (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004) and recognizes what 'ought or ought not to occur' (Clinard & Meier, 2001). The normative approach of positive deviance views such behavior as a departure from a referent group's norm in honorable ways (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003). A reference group can exist in general principles of business norms (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004). In terms of the AFL, economic rationalism is a dominant influence in their political and economic operating setting (Pusey, 1991). The AFL brand is a significant revenue-generating entity. Thus, the norm is for most organizations to avoid damaging the brand at all costs. The drink driving scandal (see Tiernan, 2020) directly damages the marketability of the AFL brand. Sacking the players would be an appropriate decision, from a rational economic perspective; after all, the world is not short of people wanting to be a professional and well-paid AFL player. People resigning for damaging their employers' brand is quite common or the norm in various industries. Banking scandals are a widely published example where CEOs resign for their poor behaviors (Butler, 2019). Sacking players could reduce revenue. However, spending money on these players via drink driving and personal development courses and paying players while suspended, on balance, represents positive deviant behaviors.

Morally praiseworthy is the second lens of Stansbury and Sonenshein's (2012) good work model. Such behaviors are above and beyond a moral duty or obligation that attaches no blame if not provided (Mellema, 1991) and recognizes a vision of a good life (Stansbury & Sonenshein, 2012). Duncan (2017) suggests the AFL promotes the vision of active participation, reaching one's full potential, and working towards shared and common goals. These positive images are inherent to Australian Rules Football and project visions of a good life. The AFL voluntary drink driving, managing finance, and diversity courses not only promotes this good life vision but provide players with the means to achieve them. Such programs demonstrate a degree of being morally praiseworthy, as they promote the individual

and collective well-being of players (Stansbury & Sonenshein, 2012) and take on the extraordinary responsibility for developing players that goes above and beyond what is required, that is supererogatory (see Heyd, 1982).

The third lens of Stansbury and Sonenshein's (2012) good work model is discretionary instead of obligatory behavior. AFL not only meet their obligations to reward their players adequately (i.e., obligatory behavior) but pays well compared to the average worker in terms of risk to their physical health (Morris, 2020). While market forces influence the amounts paid to players and their conditions, the provision of additional development programs is ultimately discretionary. Barnett (2007) could characterize it as improving the social welfare of players and enhancing stakeholder relationships. In summary, the AFL's bad behavior reduction programs represent good work. Their activities are (a) positively deviant, in terms of not sacking the player, and instead investing in them, (b) morally praiseworthy, in terms of helping players achieve a good life through improving their well-being, and (c) discretionary, in terms of going beyond payment for services (i.e., playing, and training) to one that encourages commitment, professionalism, and responsibility.

How worthwhile are positive institutions?

The current case study demonstrates how discussions, debates, and arguments about a positive institution's pros and cons are worthwhile and expand understanding of ethical issues beyond the negative. Simply avoiding negative and challenging interactions can ultimately be detrimental to a good life in organizations. Put simply, ignorance and silence about values such as virtue promote the negative bias that inhibits ethical behaviors. Researchers and policymakers gain from evidence-based and scientifically informed results (Duan, Chen, & Ho, 2020). The positive psychology movement is rapidly building this capacity. Further, Donaldson and Ko (2010) suggest that an essential benefit of the positive psychology field is the stimulus of new research and application. However, the critical question is, does the theory genuinely enable the leaders to enable their organizations to flourish. A systematic review and meta-analysis by Donaldson and colleagues (2019) support the conclusion that positive psychology interventions improved well-being and engagement but not overall performance indicators. Unfortunately, disconnects between organization and policy level reforms exist and challenge positive institutions' applicability (Rusk & Waters, 2013; White, 2016). Also, the unique and somewhat clumsy terminology is a significant inhibitor for implementation. More recent terminology, such as moral efficacy, moral meaningfulness, and moral courage (May et al., 2014), appears more popular within the positive organization ethics field. A systematic review and critique of healthy leadership research identified many similar issues (Cort, Murphy, & Zacher, 2020). Also, the impact assessment of cultural values and beliefs appears limited, despite positive psychology issues being more cultural-bound than other psychology sub-disciplines (Wong, 2013) and focusing on the self rather than the collective. Seligman (2019) sees that the range of positive topics (e.g., positive education) continues to expand and gather steam. However, the positive institution's critical challenge is to establish unique ideas beyond established research streams, such as organizational development. Finally, the idea that good work produced in positive institutions helps communities flourish remains an attractive vehicle for professional sports and business organizations. Moreover, it is compatible with the positive psychology objective "to improve quality of life and prevent the pathologies that arise when life is barren and meaningless" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5).

Ethics approval and informed consent

This manuscript adheres to the university's ethical requirements. It uses only published secondary sources, which do not require formal approval from the established ethics committees.

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Individual knowledge of, perceptions about, and barriers to physical literacy (PL) in Malaysia

Authors' contribution:

- A) conception and design of the study
- B) acquisition of data
- C) analysis and interpretation of data
- D) manuscript preparation
- E) obtaining funding

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to evaluate individuals' knowledge of, perceptions about, and barriers to promoting physical literacy (PL) in Malaysia. Random samples of 360 participants of different genders, ages, races, and education levels (aged 15–60 years) residing in Malaysia participated in this study, which was conducted on online platforms between the months of February and May, 2019. The participants' knowledge was assessed using a modified Physical Literacy Knowledge questionnaire (PLKQ). Open-ended questions were also conducted to assess perceived perceptions and barriers to improving participants' PL, thus strengthening the validity and reliability of data collection. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (e.g., means, SD) and the Pearson correlation coefficient, while the analysis of qualitative data involved the usage of the Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (IPA). The participants showed greater efficacy about standards in physical education and believed that PL is developed throughout one's lifetime, with (M = 3.2, SD = 1.02) and (M = 3.78, SD = 1.02), respectively. Additionally, most participants pointed to the necessity of having specific skills and experience to develop PL among young people as the main barrier to improving PL in Malaysia, with (M = 3.25, SD = 1.02). This initial study will provide better direction for future researchers and educators to plan an intervention to increase PL among Malaysians and advocate for physical activity in individuals' daily lives. Additionally, this study will be useful to inform future educators' teaching practices, particularly in Malaysian schools.

Key words: physical literacy, physical education, physical activity, teaching, learning

Introduction

The rationale for this study came from the author's observations and communication with undergraduate students from the Faculty of Education at the local university of Central Malaysia. Most of the students (aged 19–30 years old) appeared to be unsure and confused about the concept of physical literacy (PL). They associated PL with adolescents learning sports skills and eventually becoming skillful in their particular sport. Additionally, the students viewed PL as essential only for those involved in sports and physical education (PE). Unfortunately, some of the students also regarded PL as less important than writing, reading, and numerical literacy. The national health survey reported that as many as 25.1% of Malaysians are physically inactive (Institute for Public Health, 2019), and

this inactivity has contributed to as much as 16.4% of deaths related to sedentariness (Lee et al., 2012; Khoo et al., 2020). Thus, this initial project was designed to seek evidence concerning the understanding and importance of PL and determine starting points for planned interventions to increase PL among Malaysians.

Many studies on PL found some Malaysian local schools' policies were inconsistent with national standards and preferred to reduce PE time from the recommended 32 hours/year (primary) and 48 hours/year (secondary), contributing to lower skill competencies (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2019). Apart from time, the number of students in primary and high school continued to rise from 0.7% to 3.1% in 2018 compared to the previous year, while the number of teachers in both levels declined from 0.5% to 2.2% (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019). Apart from the short period of time spent in PE and the imbalanced ratios between teachers and students, insufficient equipment and teachers' insufficient content knowledge and pedagogical and technological skills were all blamed for students' lower skill levels (Castilli & Valley, 2007; Graham, 2015). Choi et al. (2018) further explained that PL is essential in developing basic skills, enabling individuals to master many complex skills such as the cartwheel, basketball jump-shot, and knotting. Despite its importance, Malaysians were still unaware of, unconcerned about, hesitant about, and resistant to the concept of PL and its potential for many aspects of life (e.g., health, social, economic; Lopes et al., 2017).

The newer generation is more technologically savvy; for instance, 97% of Malaysians aged 16–64 years old possess a minimum of one smartphone and spend on average eight hours per day with media (e.g., social media, watching TV, streaming services, gaming; Kemp, 2020). Both social networking and chat applications are most preferred, with a preference of 98% and 97%, respectively, while health and fitness applications are only downloaded by a mere 27% of Malaysian Internet users (Kemp, 2020). In addition to uncontrolled Internet usage, the current COVID-19 pandemic also increases the likelihood of individuals becoming sedentary and reducing their physical activity (PA) levels. The current situation also contributes to individuals' lack of skills, musculoskeletal and cognitive decline, low self-esteem, low motivation levels, and feelings of alienation from their peers (Bowden Davies et al., 2019; Woods et al., 2020). Due to the insecurity among students, they tend to produce excuses such as a lack of time, fatigue, and laziness to avoid PA (Choi, Sum, Leung, & Ng, 2018). All these factors in some ways have contributed to the fact that Malaysia currently has the highest rate of obesity in Asia (World Health Organization, 2019).

Physical literacy (PL)

Physical literacy (PL) is defined as the “motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding to value and take responsibility for engaging in PA for life” (Whitehead, 2016). In other words, a physically literate individual would enjoy learning the skills, background, and values around sports and appreciate the benefits of engaging in PA. Additionally, PL is considered to be the essence of meaningful PE, which helps students gain confidence in developing mastery in sports skills (Choi et al., 2018).

The positive relationship between PL and PE is beneficial to the individual in many ways. Dudley, Okley, Pearson, and Cotton (2011) found that higher PL would provide an advantage to individuals learning and developing skill proficiencies. PL provides better hand-eye coordination and skill-related fitness (e.g., reaction time, balance, agility), thus helping individuals develop more complex skills such as golf putting, skiing, and cartwheels in gymnastics. An individual's mastery of sports skills is believed to be a crucial factor in lifetime involvement in PA (Logan, Webster, Gretchell, Pfeiffer, & Robinson, 2015).

Furthermore, several studies have also found that a physically literate individual is versatile, an initiator, and more willing to be involved in a variety of sports in comparison to others with lower levels of PL. Their skill mastery contributes to a higher level of motivation, persistence, and a spirit of adventure, which provides them with higher chances of success when learning new sports skills (Choi et al., 2018). Perhaps the most important benefits of developing PL is the ability to develop a sense of control both internally and externally, which is associated with a feeling of optimism in the individual's life (Seligman, 2002).

Fundamental movement skills (FMS) and PL

Fundamental movement skills (FMS) are closely associated with an individual's PL. FMS are the basic behaviors and movement patterns developed throughout childhood to adulthood (e.g., running, hopping, dodging, catching). FMS are developed through previously learned movements from reflexive and rudimentary movement phases to advanced skills (O'Brian, Belton, & Issartel, 2016). Although many individuals originally perceived the development of FMS as part of the process of growing up, several studies have argued that FMS need to be developed through developmentally appropriate activities, personalized teaching and learning strategies, meaningful feedback, and sufficient practice time (Cools et al., 2009; Hardy et al., 2010a; Logan et al., 2015). Several studies

have also associated a dose-response relationship between these terms; the higher the FMS, the greater the individual's development of PL throughout their lifetime (O'Brian, Belton, & Issartel, 2016). Studies by both Ennis (2010) and Harten, Olds, and Dollman (2008) have suggested that higher levels of motor skills can be associated with greater play activity and participation in diverse activities throughout an individual's lifetime. Studies dating from the twentieth century have found individuals with FMS deficiencies were more likely to develop lifelong problems with movement skills (Ulrich, 2000). For instance, Mitchell et al. (2013) worked with children and early adolescents (5–13 years old) and found less than half of the participants were proficient in basic FMS such as kicking (21%), throwing (31%), and striking (40%). Although the scores vary from country to country, the majority of studies related to FMS have demonstrated most children and adolescents fail to surpass 50% mastery in most skills (Hardy et al., 2010b; O'Brian et al., 2016). Therefore, FMS are the foundation for developing a physically literate individual capable of performing many tasks and successfully navigating through physical, mental, and emotional challenges.

The teacher's role in developing PL

In Malaysia and most other countries around the world, the majority of young people spend much of their time attending school (van Sluijs, McMinn, & Griffin, 2007; Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019). Previous studies have also shown the need for young people attending schools to engage in more organized and structured motor skill programs rather than simple play or games (Choi et al., 2018). Therefore, the teacher's role in planning and implement content, managing students and the classroom, and assessing student learning has profound effects on the academic development of students, as well as the development of the individual as a whole (Lopes, Stodden, & Rodrigues, 2017).

Prioritizing the implementation of strategies for teaching and learning would increase learning ownership among students. In return, students would be more likely to get involved, engage with content, get motivated, and find meaning in their learning (Martinek, 2017; Martinek, Holland, & Seo, 2019). Additionally, a student-centered approach in the classroom also provides students with more choices and promotes cooperative learning, which helps reduce the fear of failure and increases opportunities for success. Most importantly, teachers should strive to promote PL through contemporary teaching methods (i.e., peer-teaching, videos, role-play, fantasy cards) and increase PA via age-appropriate practices (Choi et al., 2018).

In contrast, the traditional teaching style's emphasis on direct instructions typically results in students disengaging from the content and becoming frustrated (Barnett, Dawes, Morgan, & Wilmot, 2012). Disregarding individuals' strengths, weaknesses, interests, and backgrounds during the process of teaching also reduces the effectiveness of the content while increasing the chance of off-task behaviors. Similarly, neglecting factors such gender, PA intensity, and type of motor skills also reduces motor skill competencies and the likelihood of lifetime fitness (Feguera & An, 2017). Unfortunately, weak motor skills affect individuals' self-esteem and motivation to engage in PA, especially in competitive settings (Choi et al., 2018). Additionally, using traditional teaching styles would cause more difficulty for teachers in determining whether students are able to perform skills correctly due to the short period of time for assessment and students' tendency to shy away from trying their best (Marton, 2015).

Purpose

The current study builds on these previous studies to determine participants' current knowledge of and perceptions towards PL and barriers to PL being equally recognized along with others forms of literacy (e.g., numerical or reading). This study utilizes several methods designed to influence learning domains, including a questionnaire (cognitive) and use of open-ended questions (affective) to increase the validity and reliability of the data. Therefore, the following questions were addressed in this study: (1) Are participants able to introduce and explain the concept of PL? (2) Are participants' perceptions biased toward agreement or disagreement with the concept of PL? (3) What are the main barriers in developing and promoting the concept of PL in schools and the community?

Materials and methods

Participants

The participants of this study were random samples of 360 individuals (180 male and 180 female) with an age range of 15–60 years old. Although the sample group included different genders, ages, races, and education levels, the majority of the participants reported having a Malay ethnic background. A total of 26 participants reported

having other ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Sabahan, Sarawakians), and five reported Chinese ethnicity. The participants were invited to participate in this study via email. Their email addresses were obtained from various local universities in Peninsular Malaysia. Most of the participants initially reported limited knowledge of and experience with the concept of PL. The random sampling was chosen as it provided an equal chance for the public to participate in this study. Apart from ease of use, the sampling technique offered a better representation of the population. Therefore, the researcher was able to make more accurate generalizations from the results to the population (Sharma, 2017).

Setting

The Progressive University (pseudonym), located in a large suburban area in central Malaysia, was chosen to be the main location for the implementation of the study via online platforms (e.g., email, WhatsApp [Facebook Inc.], Google Form [Google Inc.]). Additionally, the researcher also utilized the non-teaching time to observe PE classes among physical and health education (PHE) undergraduate students to improve observational data on participants' PL. Additionally, the time was also used to conduct literature reviews and plan for using appropriate instruments to achieve the study's objectives. The data collection was conducted between the months of February and May, 2019.

Study design and procedures

This study adopted the cross-sectional study design due to its capability to estimate the current population's interest in PL. Additionally, this study design was also chosen as it allowed the researcher to obtain the needed information at one time point and in a short period of time (Levin, 2006). Apart from being quick to implement, this design was also inexpensive to conduct and provided meaningful information for future planning and modification of PE. Nonetheless, the design was not able to infer causality as the study was carried out for a short period of time with one time point and provided no prior or post-study information (Levin, 2006).

The researcher utilized the Physical Literacy Knowledge Questionnaire (PLKQ) and open-ended questions to explore and determine participants' current knowledge of, perceptions about, and barriers to PL. The duration of the study was from February to May, 2019. The study primarily focused on gathering initial data concerning individuals' knowledge and perceptions of PL. The participants were given the opportunity to share their thoughts on PL and previous experience related to learning PA without any interference from the author. Nonetheless, the author also took the opportunity to accentuate the importance of PL concepts in skill development and independent learning in the introduction of the questionnaire and open-ended questions. Additionally, the author prompted the participants by initiating situational-related discussions to help them recall their experience with PL and improve connections between understanding and actions.

This study involved several phases: (1) preparation, (2) implementation, and (3) data processing. Prior to the study, the researcher conducted an extensive literature review to gain insights about the issues and plan for implementing the appropriate instruments to achieve the study's objectives. Additionally, instruments were developed and sent for peer review to increase both the validity and fidelity of the study. Next, random samples were invited to participate in the study via the Internet. Their willingness to fill in the questionnaire and answer the open-ended questions indicates their consent to participate in the study. The researcher ensured all information (i.e., aims, objectives, benefits) were included in the instruments and email sent to potential participants. The last phase involved

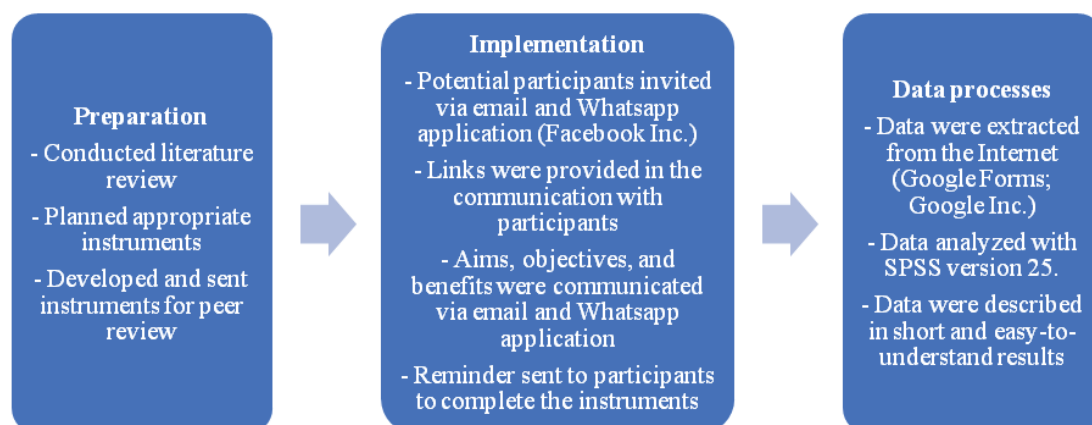


Figure 1. The different phases of the study

the researcher analyzing the data and producing meaningful information with regards to the study's objectives. The researcher used the results to attempt to formulate a generalization of the knowledge and perceptions of PL among the general population in Peninsular Malaysia. In addition, the researcher proposed several ideas to move forward from this current study. All the participants' details were kept confidential throughout the study, and participants were made fully aware of the purpose and objectives of the study before their consent was obtained.

Instruments

Modified Physical Literacy Knowledge Questionnaire (PLKQ): This instrument was based on the Physical Literacy Knowledge Questionnaire (PLKQ) as a standard for measuring PL knowledge (Longmuir, Woodruff, Boyer, Lloyd, & Tremblay, 2018). The modified PLKQ contains 21 questions with knowledge, perception, and barriers components and utilizes a five-point Likert-like scale ranging from low to high (1 = very low, 5 = very high). Specifically, it was used to explore participants' knowledge, feelings, and degree of certainty towards various aspects related to PL. They were asked to self-assess their understanding of various aspects of PL (i.e., skill movement, skill development, standards, policies, educators' roles, facilities). Participants spent approximately 3–5 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The researcher provided a short explanation of the aims, objectives, and benefits of completing the questionnaire to help participants understand and complete the questionnaire in the best manner.

Open-ended questions

The Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach was used for the open-ended questions to assess participants' current knowledge and perceptions of the concept of PL (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). They were given the freedom to express their thoughts and demonstrate their understanding of the influence of PL on their daily activity. There were a total of four questions related to PL. The author asked the participants: (1) What do you understand about PL? (2) Do you consider PL as important as reading and numerical literacy? (3) Would you advocate for PL? (4) What are the barriers for promoting PL among Malaysians? Moreover, the author stressed both in the email and at the beginning of the questions the importance of participants expressing their own thoughts in answering each of the questions. The questions' content, structure, and word selection were sent for peer-review before being administered to the participants.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics – that is, mean (M), standard deviation (SD), and percentages – were calculated for variables assessed in the study (knowledge, perceptions, barriers) using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 25.0; Mills, 2014). Additionally, a test of association between knowledge and perception of PL using the Pearson correlation coefficient was also conducted to gain better insights about PL in Peninsular Malaysia. In short, correlation is described as occurring between the range of -1.00 to $+1.00$. A score of -1.00 indicates a negative relationship between the variables, whereas $+1.00$ indicates a positive relationship between the variables. A score of 0.00 suggests no relationship between the variables (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Furthermore, data from the open-ended questions were transcribed, extracted, and categorized into four themes: (1) knowledge, (2) perceptions, (3) facilities, and (4) technology. Both quantitative and qualitative data were useful in increasing the validity and reliability of this study. In addition, bar graphs/charts were used to visually demonstrate significant findings qualitatively. Apart from showing the findings, graphs were also beneficial in displaying behavioral changes among participants and interpretations of behaviors, offering meaningful visual feedback for readers (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007).

Results

Following the exclusion of 5 participants (i.e., incomplete questionnaire, did not attend meetings), participants consisted of 360 participants from various backgrounds who enrolled in the study during the four-month time frame.

Modified PLKQ

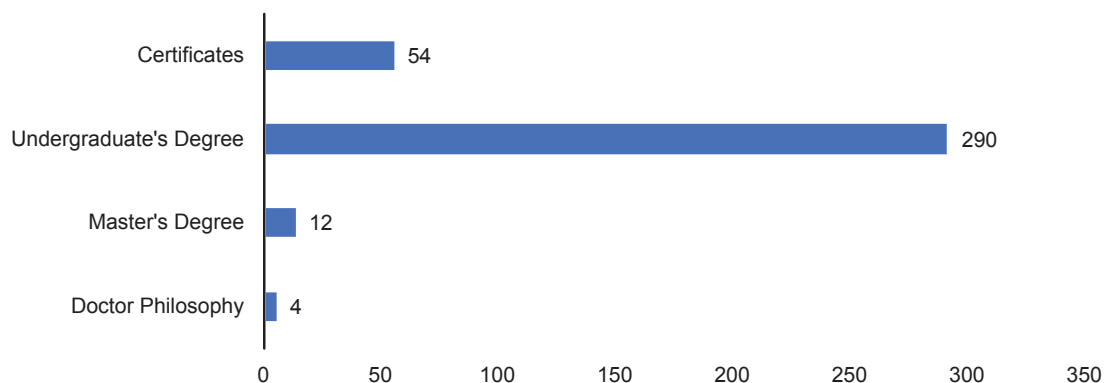
There were a total of 360 participants, with an equal number of males and females participating in the study. Based on Table 1, the majority of the participants were between the ages of 22 and 30 years old, with 259 (72%)

Table 1. Age of respondents

Age category	Percent	n
15–21	22.5	81
22–30	71.9	259
31–59	4.7	17
60+	0.8	3

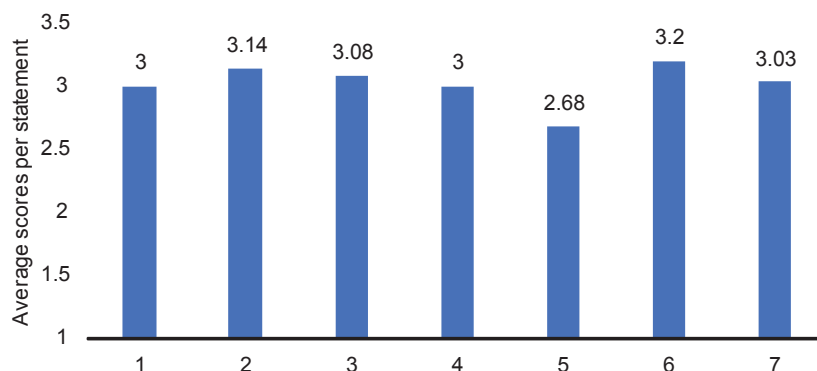
in this age group. A total of 81 (22.5%) participants were in the 15–21 age group. The age groups of 31–59 and 60+ recorded the least number of participants, with 17 (4.7%) and 3 (0.8%), respectively.

The majority of the participants, 290 (80%), were currently enrolled in an undergraduate program or possessed an undergraduate degree. A total of 54 (15%) possessed various certificates (i.e., high school diplomas, technical or skill certificates), and a minority of participants possessed a doctorate (n = 4, 1%).

**Figure 2.** The chart above shows the education levels among the participants

Participants' level of knowledge of the concept of PL

The participants' level of knowledge of the concept of PL as shown in Figure 3 shows consistency among all questions with the highest scores (M = 3.2, SD = 1.02) found in the descriptor "I know the standards on physical and health education lessons." This was followed by the descriptor "I know the basic of locomotor movements" (M = 3.14, SD = 1.12). Meanwhile, both the descriptors of "I know about the concept of PL" and "I have taught others about PL" recorded the lowest scores among participants with (M = 3, SD = 1.03) and (M = 2.68, SD = 1.14), respectively.

**Figure 3.** Mean scores of participants' level of knowledge of the concept of PL across the study

Participants' perceptions of the concept of PL

The participants had lowest confidence in the descriptor "I consider myself as an advocator for PL" (M = 2.97, SD = 1.04), while descriptors 10 and 12, "I think PL should only be emphasized at schools" and "I think PL can be developed by itself without specific and structured learning" had similar scores with (M = 2.98, SD = 1.29) and (M = 2.98, SD = 1.14), respectively. Nonetheless, most of the participants agreed with the descriptor "PL is developed throughout one's lifetime" (M = 3.78, SD = 1.02).

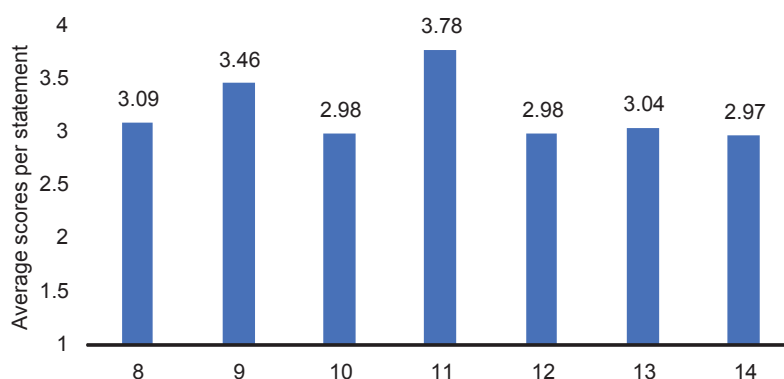


Figure 4. Mean scores of participants' perceptions of the concept of PL across the study

Barriers to promoting PL

Descriptive statistics results for barriers to promoting PL are presented in Figure 5. Most of the participants pointed to the descriptor “developing PL requires a highly skilled educator” as the main obstacle in promoting the concept of PL in Malaysia ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.02$). Besides this, many also agreed that the descriptors “developing PL requires complex/specific facilities” and “developing PL requires specific equipment” were crucial for developing and advocating for PL among Malaysians, with ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.03$) and ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 1.07$), respectively. Additionally, the majority of participants rejected the descriptor “I dislike the concept of PL” as a barrier to promoting PL ($M = 1.93$, $SD = 0.91$).

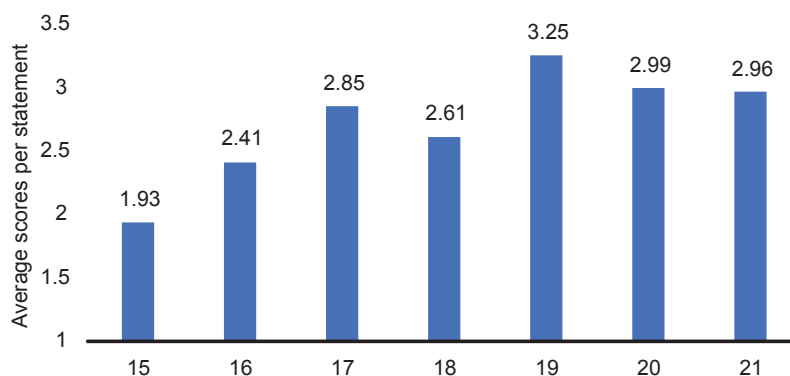


Figure 5. Mean scores of barriers to developing and promoting the concept of PL in Malaysia

The association between knowledge and perceptions of PL

The correlation coefficient results between the highest and lowest descriptor scores for knowledge and perceptions are presented in Table 2 and 3. The Pearson's r in Table 2 demonstrates a moderate positive relationship between the K6 and P11 descriptors ($r = .406$, $p = < 0.05$, $n = 360$). The lowest descriptor scores in Table 3 also suggest a moderate positive relationship between the K5 and P14 descriptors ($r = .628$, $p = < 0.05$, $n = 360$). As the 2-tailed significance value is $< .000$, this study will assume the correlation to be significant and not due to sampling error. Therefore, having knowledge may develop participants' perceptions of PL, whereas an individual's perception will either motivate or demotivate their effort to obtain knowledge related to PL.

Discussion

Knowledge of the concept of PL

The majority of the participants reported average to poor knowledge and understanding of the concept of PL and its functions and benefits to the development of individuals. The respondents from non-sports backgrounds

Table 2. The correlation between the highest descriptor scores

		K6	P11
I know the standard of PHE lessons (K6)	Pearson correlation	1	.406**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	360	360
PL is developed throughout one's lifetime (P11)	Pearson correlation	.406**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	360	360

** – Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3. The correlation between the lowest descriptor scores

		K5	P14
I have taught others about PL (K5)	Pearson correlation	1	.628**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	360	360
I consider myself as an advocator for PL (P14)	Pearson correlation	.628**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	360	360

** – Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

especially reported lower familiarity or lack of familiarity with the concept of PL. One of the respondents suggested “I never heard about PL, probably due to my sedentary lifestyle,” while another respondent explained “I do not have a clear idea about what PL is as it was not taught during school time.” Most of them blamed their lack of knowledge and experience related to PL with the lack of exposure in schools. This issue is in line with the suggestion of Feguera and An (2017) that the traditional teacher-centered learning process causes more students to disengage from the educator and learning content, leads to a higher fear of failure due to lower self-esteem, and results in individuals developing fewer skills throughout their lifetimes. Fortunately, most of the respondents also showed a high interest in getting to know more about PL and learning what they can do to advocate for PL in their community.

Nonetheless, some respondents agreed that PL “helped to develop basic movement skills such as walking, running, skipping, and jumping,” “helped to maintain my overall health,” “helped me to perform a variety of movements fundamental to confidence and without pain or fear or failure,” and “helped individuals achieve optimum physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and social states.” As the majority of young people in Malaysia attend school, the educator should invest more time in teaching FMS, including primary and complex skills, during high school. This will help develop PL among newer generations. Most of the time, young people develop skills more easily when compared to adults due to their current involvement in PE, access to many technologies (e.g., Internet, smart devices), and fewer commitments (Lopes, Stodden, & Rodrigues, 2017).

Perceptions of PL

Although most of the respondents were not familiar with the concept of PL, most of them believed PL could help increase PA and prevent non-communicable diseases (NCDs; e.g., obesity, diabetes, cardiac diseases). One of the respondents suggested “PL must be taught to give young people confidence in doing PA,” while the older participants mostly agreed that “PL development should begin at home.” Studies by Logan et al. (2015) and Whitehead, Durden-Myers, and Pot (2018) also reiterate the importance of developing skills in the early years of life as individuals' competencies in sports skills would increase the likelihood of the individual being active throughout their lifetime. Additionally, some of the respondents pointed out that PL could be taught and developed anywhere, even in a field, school compound, yard, gymnasium, or classroom. A systematic review by van Sluijs et al. (2007) also found many FMS and even complex skills can be developed inside the classroom. Apart from developing PL, many students experience higher academic achievement and on-task behavior due to the integration of PA into classroom learning.

Nonetheless, respondents voiced their concerns on matters related to knowledge, skills, and qualifications. A few of the respondents suggested that it is “impossible to teach PL due to the lack of knowledge,” “teaching PL will be much easier if they have the knowledge,” “only qualified educators should teach children about PL,” and “teachers are not doing enough at school to achieve PE standards, therefore it will be difficult to improve PL.” In addition, some of the respondents also associated PL with high-intensity exercise performed to the point of fatigue. The lack of knowledge and exposure may have led to fear and uncertainty among the participants with regard to PL. The International Physical Literacy Association (2017) also suggested a combination of physical competence, motivation,

and confidence as being crucial to encouraging lifelong participation in PA. Therefore, based on the results, it is important not only for educators but for all individuals to seek knowledge related to PL, as individuals' perceptions are shaped by the knowledge they possess. It is only through knowledge that individuals can truly appreciate and consistently engage in appropriate and safe PA.

Barriers to advocating for PL

Family values and practices were considered the main determinant of lifetime PA. Most of the participants assumed the importance of PL and PA were majorly influenced by their family upbringing. For example, one of the respondents explained "I did not want my son to be involved in PA as I am afraid he will get hurt when playing," while another respondent pointed to time constraints as barriers to developing PL, "as both of us are working and come back home mostly in the late evening, we rarely have time to spend with our children doing PA." This was supported by previous authors suggesting individuals, especially women, highly value support from friends and family as a factor for them to participate in PA (Hanlon, Khoo, Morris, & Eime, 2017). Additionally, many young parents also blamed limited playing space and difficulties with committing to and being consistent with engaging in PA with their children. They also tended to place the responsibilities of developing PL solely on educators as they considered themselves less knowledgeable and too inexperienced to teach their own children or the people around them. This was in line with Hanlon et al. (2014), who suggested that perceived community and cultural expectations and backgrounds were determinants for consistent participation in PA. Individuals raised in physically active families would be more likely to become active throughout their lifetimes compared to individuals raised in families with a more sedentary lifestyle.

Some of the participants also suggested a lack of physical energy and social support as barriers in developing PL. Apart from family values, technology (e.g., mobile games, social media) was considered the main barrier to developing PL and a healthy lifestyle among Malaysians. Many participants agreed that the prolonged usage of smart devices has led young people to become lethargic and experience a lack of motivation and physical energy. One of the respondents explained "My son tends to spend most of the evening after school in front of the television or playing online games rather than going outside playing." She also added "I am really concerned about him playing online shooting games and not doing any PA while he is at home." Previous studies on digital data also suggested similar situations in which most Malaysians preferred social networking and chat applications while a minority of individuals, from adolescents to older adults, use technology as a tool to promote PA and improve their PL (Kemp, 2020).

Findings from this study further underscore the findings of Logan et al. (2015), whose study suggested individuals with knowledge of PL tend to have positive perceptions of PL and are more active throughout the day. These individuals are also more likely to be successful in learning motor skills compared to sedentary individuals. The respondent who reported never having heard of PL due to their sedentary lifestyle also underscores the findings of Dudley et al. (2011) on the interrelationship between PL and PA. In other words, lower PL would lead to lower PA. Lower PL would hinder the development of an individual's body coordination, lowering their skill-related fitness (e.g., reaction time, balance, twisting ability) and therefore exposing the individual to higher risks of injury and disease (Logan et al., 2015). Nonetheless, previous studies have shown that sport-based PA specifically would not be sufficient for developing PL as changing the behavior of an individual involves many dynamic factors (Nahas, Goldfine, & Collins, 2003). This study also found that most of the participants agreed that they can develop PL throughout their lifetime via PA (e.g., gardening, cooking, exercising) rather than just through sports.

Many of the participants seemed to agree that teachers are fully responsible for students' learning, including introducing, explaining, and demonstrating new concepts. As young people in Malaysia spend most of their days at school, teachers have the best opportunity to educate students about PL and encourage PL development (McKenzie, Marshall, Sallis, & Conway, 2000; Donnelly & Lambourne, 2011). The content used by teachers, as well as their pedagogy knowledge, could play a valuable role in helping them personalize their teaching methods to address different strengths, weaknesses, and interests among students. This study fully supports the use of a variety of teaching methods and learning aids to attract the interest of students and engage them in learning about and developing PL (Choi et al., 2018). Additionally, appropriate planning, content usage, classroom management, and learning assessments are equally crucial in the development of PL (Lopes et al., 2017).

Nonetheless, this study intends to express the role of social support in the development of PL in young people. Although many of the participants perceived teachers as being mostly responsible for developing PL, many previous studies have suggested that both teachers and parents are important for the development of PL and

interest in lifetime PA. For instance, a previous study found social support to be an important determinant in PA and lifetime fitness (Beets, Pitetti, & Forlaw, 2007; Gao, 2012). Hoefler, McKenzie, Sallis, Marshall, and Conway (2001) also looked at parents or other individuals offering social support (e.g., siblings, friends) who accompanied children in PA. They found that children are more likely to be active and feel a greater sense of achievement when these individuals are involved. An initiative led by parents or other individuals offering social support to plan a variety of after-school PA programs would be helpful in giving children the chance to develop PL in a fun and engaging environment (Huang, Gao, Hannon, Schultz, Newton, & Jenson, 2012). A previous study found that students who participated in an organized PA after-school program recorded more active time and metabolic equivalents compared to students who did not participate in any after-school session of PA (Liu & Chepyator-Thomson, 2004).

Implications for practice

The results from this study are valuable for teachers, parents, administrators, and policymakers in planning and developing PL among Malaysians. Individuals with high PL tend to be more skillful and have higher self-esteem and motivation to complete daily tasks. Indirectly, this results in higher health quality and could thus reduce the nation's NCD statistics. Emphasizing the fulfillment of survival needs (i.e., fun, movement, freedom), teachers should modify aspects such as playing areas, equipment, and instructions to enhance their teaching methods and tailor them to accommodate students' needs, strengths, and weaknesses (Lengel & Kuczala, 2018). Parents should also strive to invest more time doing PA with their children. They should spend this time engaging with them and creating games which integrate the elements of fun, activity, problem solving, and communication. In addition, parents should provide equipment that helps children be active and stimulates their interest in engaging in PA. Several authors have also stressed the importance of having sufficient and suitable equipment to stimulate young people to engage in PA and develop lifetime PL (Verstraete, Cardon, De Clercq, & De Bourdeaudhuij, 2006).

Additionally, administrators and policymakers in Malaysia should also place greater importance on promoting lifetime fitness among Malaysians and emphasize that "prevention is better than medicine" through investment in providing the facilities, amenities, and professional development workshops for teachers and parents to better educate them about the potential of PL. The maintenance of these facilities and enforcement of current policies on PA are equally important as behavior change is a long and dynamic process (Nahas et al., 2003). Policymakers should also consider having a topic on integrating technology into PE in the current national school textbook to accentuate the utilization of technology in the classroom as well as in PE.

The results of this study stress that more studies need to be done in the future, particularly on the development of inclusive and age-appropriate learning structures as well as the development of assessment tools to assess PL levels among Malaysians. The author assumes the criteria and measurement methods used in the West (e.g., McCarron Assessment of Neuromuscular Development [MAND] in Northern Ireland, School Sport Survey in Wales [Spengler, 2015]) would yield different results among Malaysians due to differences in geography, demographics, skill levels, and initial knowledge factors. A couple of limitations to the study include its small sample size, absence of skill tests, and lack of participation from other ethnicities in Malaysia.

Conclusion

This study provides teachers with insight about PL awareness in Malaysia and can inform their future practice to focus more on using innovative strategies (student-centered learning, practice structures, reciprocal teaching). Personalized learning experiences can help students gain confidence, reduce their fear of failure, and gain interest in engaging in PA. These efforts would then help improve students' learning engagement and strengthen the connection between the concept and actual situations. This study demonstrated that the current knowledge of PL in Malaysia is average, which influences Malaysians' perception of the importance of PL in overall development. Additionally, the majority of the participants agreed that family upbringing and excessive use of technology are the main challenges to overcome when improving PL and wellness across levels of society in Malaysia.

Ethics approval and informed consent

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM).

Competing interests

There is no conflict of interest in this study.

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Sport as a tool for public diplomacy in Hungary

Authors' contribution:

- A) conception and design of the study
- B) acquisition of data
- C) analysis and interpretation of data
- D) manuscript preparation
- E) obtaining funding

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Abstract

Sport is often utilized as a tool by governments and nation-states in building a favorable international image, seeking external political legitimacy, and strengthening nation-building endeavors across borders. Given its universal appeal, sport is often perceived as a valuable soft power asset for conveying positive messages to foreign publics. Against this backdrop, the present study aims to introduce the sports diplomacy approach of Hungary, specifically focusing on the state-led utilization of sport in public diplomacy under the recent government of Viktor Orbán (2010–2020). With the institutionalization of sport in public diplomacy, Hungary has become a pioneering country in Central and Eastern Europe that can provide an example for other nation-states in the region. The Hungarian government's sports diplomacy ambitions have not been curbed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the country continues to invest large amounts of public funding in attracting and organizing international sporting competitions. Hosting the Summer Olympic Games in Budapest remains the ultimate goal of the current government's sports diplomacy strategy, which focuses on elite sport.

Key words: Hungary, sports diplomacy, public diplomacy, Viktor Orbán, COVID-19

Introduction

Public diplomacy can be defined as an “instrument used by states, associations of states, and some sub-state and non-state actors to understand cultures, attitudes and behaviors; to build and manage relationships; and to influence thoughts and mobilize actions to advance their interests and values” (Gregory, 2011, p. 343). According to Gilboa (2008), public diplomacy is used by policymakers to communicate with and influence foreign populations and their governments. In the academic literature, sports diplomacy is generally identified as part of the wide umbrella of state-led public diplomacy. Sports diplomacy is often described as the governmental utilization of “sportspeople and sporting events to engage, inform, and create a favorable image amongst foreign publics” (Murray, 2012, p. 581). Given its universal appeal, sport is often perceived as a valuable soft power asset and a cost-effective tool for conveying positive messages to foreign citizens (Garamvölgyi et al., 2020). This self-serving and instrumentalist utilization of sport by governments and their Ministries of Foreign Affairs has earned considerable academic attention over the past few decades. Various studies have focused on the application of mega-sport events for reaching foreign policy goals (Cornelissen, 2010; Nauright, 2013; Grix & Lee, 2013; Esherick et al., 2017; Knott, Fyall, &

Jones, 2017; Min & Choi, 2019), while international sporting successes are often considered as significant soft power opportunities through which states can project favorable external images (Grix & Brannagan, 2016). Emerging states and authoritarian regimes in particular reveal great interest in the organization of mega-sport events in order to showcase their identity to the global audience and to “cement the loyalty of their citizens to the system” (Horák, 2016, p. 50).

Despite the wealth of literature focusing on the application of elite sport in state-led diplomacies, the sports diplomacy approaches of small nation-states have often been neglected by academia. Sport’s role in post-socialist states’ foreign policy is a topic that has been given less attention within the academic field of sports and international relations. Central and Eastern European countries have especially been overlooked by researchers. Therefore, investigating the case of Hungary could foster an understanding of how relatively small, post-socialist states strive to take advantage of sport as a political tool for raising their international profile and strengthening their external image and foreign relations. By introducing the case of Hungary, the present paper aims to fill a gap in the rapidly expanding academic literature of sports diplomacy. To bring in new research perspectives, the paper also reflects on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Hungarian government’s plans for hosting more large-scale international sporting competitions.

Methods

The methodology of the present study was based on policy and document analysis. In the first step, academic publications concerning the utilization of sport in foreign affairs in Hungary were screened. Second, publicly available governmental policy documents and communications on endeavors related to sports diplomacy were collected and evaluated. Third, relevant domestic and international online media archives from between 2010 and 2020 were gathered and analyzed. The limitations of the present study partly derived from the scarce amount of relevant academic literature and the limited availability of governmental policy documents. Therefore, the paper represents an attempt to understand the Hungarian practice of sports diplomacy from an international perspective and also highlights the government’s recent approach to tackling the challenges posed by the COVID-19 global pandemic.

The Orbán government’s sports policy: a brief overview (2010–2020)

Since 2010, sport has played a “national strategic role” in Hungary (Sárközy, 2013). The Orbán-led government has devoted considerable political and financial support to the sports sector, which, according to many, can be attributed to the prime minister’s love for sports, especially football. As a consequence, the sports sector received major funding from the state, and companies sponsoring “spectator sports” began to take advantage of tax credits (Bozóki, 2016). The overarching sports policy goal is to make Hungary a sporting nation while maintaining its sports nation status. The Fidesz¹-KDNP (Christian Democratic People’s Party) government of the period between 2010 and 2020 took several measures to this end, especially with regards to elite sport development. Key sports policy actions include the gradual introduction of daily physical education in public education, a major stadium and sports facility construction program, and the corporate income tax relief system (TAO) to support grassroots sports infrastructure development and youth sport. The emphasis on sport as a sector of national priority also has an impact on the government’s foreign relations strategy and diplomatic relations. Sport as a means of gaining international prestige and reputation is encompassed by the foreign policy of the Hungarian government reflecting the concept of “traditional sports diplomacy” (Murray, 2018).

Orbán’s sports-oriented governance comes at a substantial price for the Hungarian economy. By 2020, the Fidesz-KDNP government built or renovated at least 32 football stadiums at a cost of approximately 215 billion Hungarian forints (601 million euro) from public funds, as estimated by the Hungarian investigative news portal *Átlátszó* (Csepregi, 2016). At the same time, the government has made donations to sports clubs tax deductible, and money is pouring into government officials’ favorite football clubs and academies (Bayer, 2017). The TAO system was approved by the European Commission in 2011 and extended in 2017, allowing all corporations subject to corporate income tax in Hungary to donate up to 70% of their corporate tax to six “spectator sports” (football, handball, basketball, water polo, ice hockey, and volleyball, which was added in 2017) to gain two types of tax benefits. Between 2011 and 2020, sports federations and associations raised 790 billion forints (2.209 billion euro), about 40% of which went to football (Bita & Pető, 2020). In addition to several civil society organizations voicing

¹ Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Alliance, the political party led by Viktor Orbán.

their disquiet at the high risk of corruption and lack of transparency surrounding the TAO system, there are many other concerns (European Parliament, 2017). Puskás Academy, a football club that was funded by Viktor Orbán, has largely benefited from the TAO system. It is estimated that the club has raised over 32 billion forints (89.5 million euro) in TAO support (Bita & Pető, 2020).

Sport in Hungary's public diplomacy (2010–2020)

Hungarian non-governmental sports diplomacy reflects centuries-old traditions. Hungarian sports diplomats² have long played key roles in developing the international sports movement: they contributed to the establishment of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the first European university sports association. Concerning government-led sports diplomacy, the 20th century provided various examples in terms of the interactions between sport and politics, foreign policy, and diplomacy. These cases include the relocation of the 1920 Olympic Games from Budapest to Antwerp, the Rákosi era's communist sports policy in the early 1950s, and the Olympic boycott of 1984. Nonetheless, the development of the modern version of governmental sports diplomacy has gained momentum since 2010, with an emphasis on sport as a sector of national strategy. Based on the analysis of sports policy documents and the publicly available communications of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Ministry of Human Capacities (hosting the State Secretariat for Sports), the Hungarian government's sports diplomacy strategy is organized along five major pillars.

1. Improving the image of Hungary through the organization of international sports events and conferences

In the international context, the cornerstone of Orbán's sports policy is to host as many sporting competitions as possible. Between 2010 and 2020, several large-scale international sports events were organized in the country, not least due to the government's financial guarantees. According to Máté and András (2016), Hungary hosted 109 international sports events between the 2012 London Olympic Games and the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. Based on the statistics of the State Secretariat for Sports, the Hungarian government co-financed the organization of 34 international sports events in 2010 compared to 113 in 2017 (Stocker, 2018). According to the government's communications, it is believed that the organization of large-scale international sporting events can help promote Hungary's brand and positively influence the image of the country. As a matter of fact, the president of the International Swimming Federation (FINA) called the 2017 World Aquatics Championships hosted by Budapest and Balatonfüred in 2017 the best championships in the history of the event (Abouthungary.hu, 2017). During the competition, Viktor Orbán stated that "apart from the FIFA World Cup, which is another matter, there's no major world event that is beyond Budapest's capabilities" (Bayer, 2017). The prime minister's proclamation aimed to provide high-level political support for Budapest's bid to host the 2024 Summer Olympic Games. Arguably, the organization of the Summer Olympics in Hungary represents the ultimate sports diplomacy goal of Viktor Orbán.

Capitalizing on the government's support and financial guarantees, the Hungarian sports federations started to invest considerable efforts in bidding for major European and international sports competitions. In 2017, besides the FINA World Aquatics Championships (Budapest), the European Youth Olympic Festival (Győr), and the Judo World Championships (Budapest), several other competitions were hosted in Hungary. In 2018, Budapest organized the World Wrestling Championships. Then, in 2019, the city hosted the World Table Tennis, Pentathlon, and Fencing Championships, as well as the European Maccabi Games, the World Urban Games, and the UEFA Women's Champions League Final. In the same year, Budapest held the title of the European Capital of Sport, awarded by the European Capitals and Cities of Sport Federation (ACES Europe). Although the 2020 Swimming European Championships and the games of the 2020 UEFA Football Championship were postponed, the UEFA Super Cup was organized in September 2020 in the new Puskás Aréna, which was inaugurated a year earlier. In 2023, the Hungarian capital will host the IAAF World Athletics Championships, one of the most well-known global sports events. According to Tamás Menczer, the state secretary for communication and the international representation of Hungary, "these world competitions have one by one improved Hungary's international image and sports diplomacy aspirations" (Kormany.hu, 2019).

Besides sporting competitions, the Fidesz-KDNP government has been backing the organization of sport-themed international conferences. One prominent example is the reception of the 62nd FIFA Congress in 2012. The last time Budapest hosted the event was in 1930, when the world governing body of football only had 27 member organizations (Diplomacy & Trade, 2012). In November 2016, the Council of Europe's 14th Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport took place in the Hungarian capital. The event was attended by the ministers or representatives

² E.g., Ferenc Kemény, Ferenc Mező, Árpád Csanády, and István Gyulai.

of 42 European countries, 5 observer states, and more than 25 sports organizations. The main focus points of the agenda involved the fight against doping, match-fixing, and good governance. More recently, the International Sports Press Association's (AIPS) 83rd Congress was hosted in the Hungarian capital in February 2020, as was the International University Sports Federation (FISU) World Forum's latest edition in August 2020. Although the COVID-19 global pandemic pushed the FISU forum online, it was still attended by 1,500 participants, including 600 university students from 105 countries (Kooos, 2020).

2. Sport as a tool for strengthening international relations

Sport is often described as a popular and accessible platform of communication that easily overcomes cultural barriers and ethnic-national divides. Viktor Orbán considers sport, in particular football, as an impactful tool for establishing and building diplomatic relations, as well as strengthening the Hungarian national identity in the Carpathian Basin. International sporting competitions and sport-based investments create opportunities to strengthen inter-state relations and, in the case of neighboring countries, relations among ethnic Hungarians as well. Over the past decade, several state leaders and politicians have taken advantage of sporting competitions to conduct high-level political meetings in Budapest. Russian President Vladimir Putin is a regular guest in the Hungarian capital. On the occasion of the 2017 World Judo Championships, Putin visited Orbán for the second time to conduct strategic negotiations while observing the performance of Russian judokas. Ahead of the FIFA World Cup Final in Moscow in 2018, Orbán made an official visit to the Kremlin and praised the Russian organization of the largest football event. Aside from governmental negotiations dressed up as sports diplomacy, the Hungarian prime minister often welcomes international sports leaders, from Thomas Bach (IOC) to Aleksander Čeferin (UEFA), in his office.

Over the last decade, the Fidesz-led government has made considerable efforts to boost the development of sports infrastructure not only in Hungary, but also in neighboring countries. Between 2013 and 2018, the Hungarian state invested approximately 16 billion forints (45 million euro) in football academies located in Romania, Slovakia, and Serbia (Oroszi & Sipos, 2018). At the inauguration event of the TSC Football Academy in Topola (Topolya), Serbia, the prime minister stated that sport is “Central Europe’s common language” that brings together Serbs and Hungarians (Halász-Szabó, 2018). At the inauguration of the MOL Football Academy in Dunajská Streda (Dunaszerdahely), Slovakia, Orbán echoed that “sport is an excellent link between the people and countries of the Carpathian Basin” (Kormany.hu, 2018a). Despite these statements stressing the role of sport in regional diplomacy, Molnar and Whigham (2021) argue that the Orbán government’s extra-territorial sporting investments are mere attempts to reconstruct the Hungarian nation, which “invokes ethnically rooted nationalism” (p. 144). The authors contend that Orbán envisions the Hungarian nation in its pre-Trianon form, adopting an irredentist stance to “reconnect Magyars inside and outside of Hungary” (Molnar & Whigham, 2021, p. 143).

3. Representation of Hungarian sports interests in international sports federations

Ensuring adequate national representation in international sports federations is understood as a basic condition for attracting international sports competitions to Hungary. Although it is not specifically the competence of the state-led sports administration, the Hungarian government has actively supported the nomination and election of sports leaders into the executive committees and decision-making bodies of European and international sports federations. One recent example is the election of Dr. Tünde Szabó, the secretary of state responsible for sports, as the vice president of the European Swimming League (LEN) in November 2020. Szabó, an Olympic, World, and European Championship silver medalist backstroker, is also a member of the governing Fidesz party. Another prominent example is Hungary’s richest businessman, Sándor Csányi, chairman-CEO of OTP Bank, who was elected deputy chair of FIFA in 2018. Mr. Csányi, who has headed the Hungarian Football Federation since 2010, is an important ally of Viktor Orbán (Vass, 2018).

Aján and Némethné Móra (2006) estimated that 74 Hungarians held 106 different positions in international sports federations in 2006. The authors claimed that this number was relatively high in comparison to Hungary’s population, but could be justified by the sports diplomacy traditions of the country. Despite the traditionally high representation of Hungarian sports leaders in international sports federations, recent data have shown a decreasing trend. According to the Sports Political Power Index,³ Hungary’s position has weakened by 3 points between 2013 and 2019, meaning that fewer Hungarians were elected to executive boards of international sports federations. Following the resignation of Dr. Tamás Aján as the president of the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF), the number of elected Hungarian sports leaders further decreased in 2020. Nevertheless, some developments occurred over the same period in terms

³ <https://www.dif.dk/en/politik/nyheder/powerindex>

of the representation of Hungary in the executive bodies of continental sports federations, which reflects the general trends of shifting sports-related political power from Western to Eastern European countries.

Besides backing the nomination of Hungarian sports diplomats, the government aims to attract international sports organizations to relocate their headquarters to Hungary. On April 2, 2019, the National Assembly adopted the amendment of the 2004 Act on Sport, thus creating the legal possibility for international sports federations to settle in Hungary. Compared to other non-governmental organizations, the law gives the international sports federation a great deal of freedom to determine the content of its founding document and the internal rules of its operation. In addition to modifying the Act on Sport, a tax-benefit scheme was introduced to provide a favorable operational environment. The introduction of such legal and fiscal benefits opened the doors to the International Judo Federation (IJF), which relocated its headquarters to the Hungarian capital in 2019 (Vass, 2019). More recently, the General Assembly of the International Federation of Teqball (FITEQ) decided to transfer its official seat from Lausanne to Budapest (Fiteq.org, 2020c).

4. Representing the interests of Hungarian sports companies and inventions abroad

According to Marton et al. (2015), economic interests have considerable influence on sports policy development and sports diplomacy in the 21st century. Given the sports sector's national strategic role in Hungary, its economic and innovative aspects have also come to the fore since 2010. Supporting the foreign acquisitions of Hungarian sports companies and promoting Hungarian sports products and innovations abroad are also endeavors of the Hungarian government's sports diplomacy. In the views of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the international acquisitions of sports companies can indirectly contribute to strengthening Hungary's international reputation and image. One of the prominent Hungarian sports inventions is teqball, a new football-based sport played on a specially curved table. On the occasion of the Teqball World Championships of 2019, which took place in Budapest, the International Teqball Federation signed an agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Based on the deal, 200 teqball tables were donated to "philanthropic projects and organizations" around the world, popularizing the sport of teqball and strengthening the image of Hungary (Fiteq.org, 2020a). Hungarian embassies took an active role in the promotion of the new sport and supported the organization of bilateral sports meetings where the invention was introduced. In November 2020, FITEQ was granted full membership of the Global Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF), which marked a significant milestone for the governing body of teqball and para-teqball (Fiteq.org, 2020b).

Between 2015 and 2018, the Sports Diplomacy Division of the Hungarian National Chamber of Commerce supported the foreign acquisitions of Hungarian sports enterprises. In 2018, the role of the Hungarian National Chamber of Commerce was taken over by the Hungarian Export Development Agency Nonprofit Ltd. Sport is perceived as a tool to reach the goals of the "Eastern and Southern opening" foreign policy strategies initiated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade to develop and strengthen investment ties with emerging countries in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Between 2010 and 2020, a number of such bilateral agreements were established in the field of sport. The secretary of state for sport is in charge of developing inter-ministerial cooperation agreements such as the Hungarian-Cuban (Kormany.hu, 2017a), Hungarian-Iranian (Kormany.hu, 2017b), and Hungarian-Vietnamese (hanoi.mfa.gov.hu, 2020) bilateral sports and youth declarations of intent.

5. Ex-athletes and sports journalists in diplomatic positions

The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade is increasingly taking advantage of successful athletes' popularity. Since 2010, several sportsmen have been appointed to influential roles in the state's administration and diplomacy. Shortly after the landslide election success of Fidesz-KDNP in 2010, Pál Schmitt, an internationally well-known former Olympic champion fencer, ex-ambassador to Switzerland and Spain, and member of the International Olympic Committee, was nominated as Hungary's president. In 2012, Schmitt resigned following an academic misconduct controversy concerning his doctoral thesis, submitted in 1992 (Sullivan, 2015). Despite his failure, Schmitt did not fully withdraw from public commitments; in 2015, he was appointed by Commissioner Tibor Navracsics (a member of the Fidesz party) to lead a high-level group of experts in evaluating the role of sport in the European Union's foreign affairs and provide advice on how sport could contribute to reaching the EU's foreign policy goals (Sullivan, 2015).

Péter Szijjártó, ex-futsal player and minister of foreign affairs and trade since 2014, pays much attention to Hungarian sporting achievements as a means to conduct public diplomacy. While he likes to be portrayed with Hungarian sports celebrities, Szijjártó often highlights the growing stature of Hungary in the sporting world. He has appointed a number of ex-athletes to diplomatic roles, such as Miklós Górnagy, the world champion water

polo player who embarked on a diplomatic mission to New York in 2020. Ottó Vincze, an ex-football player, was commissioned by Szijjártó to “process the Hungarian heritage in Barcelona” as a sports diplomacy consultant. The minister justified his choice by saying that Vincze was the last Hungarian player to compete in FC Barcelona’s adult team (Fekő, 2020). In 2019, Hungary’s former Olympic champion swimmer and IOC member Dániel Gyurta was named as a senior advisor of sports diplomacy to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Morgan, 2019). Moreover, the former captain of the Hungarian national football team, Balázs Dzsudzsák, received a diplomatic passport that he kept even after continuing his football career in the Hungarian second division (Fekő, 2020).

Besides well-known athletes, Szijjártó appointed György Szöllősi, editor-in-chief of the Hungarian sports daily *Nemzeti Sport* and president of the Hungarian Sports Journalists’ Association, as a diplomat representing the legacy of the country’s most revered football player, Ferenc Puskás. Szöllősi is officially named as the “ambassador of Hungarian football tradition and affairs concerning the heritage of Ferenc Puskás,” which has no parallel with any conventional diplomatic roles. In 2019, Szöllősi was elected as the vice president of AIPS Europe, the European branch of the International Sports Press Association. Besides Szöllősi, former Olympic gymnast and vice president of the Hungarian Sports Journalists’ Association, Zsuzsa Csisztu, was elected as a member of the Executive Committee of AIPS.

Making Hungary great again? the olympic dreams of Viktor Orbán

For a long time, Orbán’s ultimate sports policy and nation-building goal has been the organization of the Olympic Games in Hungary. The prime minister looks at Hungarian Olympic sporting achievements as the expression of the quest for national identity and determination. At the Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games in 2016, he declared that during the 20th century Hungarians found their sole source of joy in Olympic medals, and “sporting success was the only way they could show their determination to see the nation’s flag flying high and proud above the field of play” (Kormany.hu, 2016). In 2016, one of the pro-government online news portals paralleled Orbán’s Olympic ambition to Donald Trump’s “Make America Great Again” presidential campaign and called for action with the slogan “Dare to dream big!” (Topolansky, 2016). The government’s communication channels depicted the Olympic plans as “the passion of Hungarian people,” a “desire by the nation to revive itself,” and “a long-coveted boost to the nation’s psyche.” Moreover, it was argued that Hungary was the only country among the 10 most successful countries in the Summer Olympics yet to host the event (Topolansky, 2016).

The idea of organizing the Summer Olympic Games in Budapest was not first conceived by the current political and sports leadership; bids were introduced for the 1916, 1920, 1936, 1944, and 1960 games. The Hungarian capital would have hosted the global sport event in 1920, the year of the Trianon Treaty following World War I. However, the defeated country was not even invited, and the event was relocated to Antwerp. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, Olympic aspirations were resurrected through the establishment of the Budapest Olympic Movement in 2005. Initially, the 2020 Olympics were targeted; however, the bid was only entered into the competition for the 2024 games. The idea was fully backed by the government, and Orbán argued the time had arrived for Hungary to host the event. The prime minister emphasized that the “organization of the Budapest games would also help lay new foundations for the Olympic movement, as if a medium-sized city were given the opportunity to host the games with a medium-sized budget, other medium-sized cities could also dream of hosting future Olympics” (Kormany.hu, 2016). In the views of Orbán, the IOC’s Agenda 2020 represented the ultimate opportunity for smaller countries like Hungary to act as an example for organizing a global event on a small budget.

The Hungarian prime minister’s Olympic dreams were shattered by an emerging political movement called Momentum, which collected 266,151 signatures to hold a local referendum among the citizens of Budapest regarding the bid. Momentum argued the collection of signatures was also motivated by the goal that no decision should be made on a gigantic investment without the public being asked in advance (Székely, 2017). The success of the “Nolimpia” campaign forced the Hungarian government to pass a resolution proposing the City of Budapest and the Hungarian Olympic Committee to withdraw the bid. In fact, the outcome of the referendum was not predictable. Despite the gradual decrease in the ratio of those supporting the bid, with political preferences being the main background factor (Dóczi, 2015), it still appeared to be a close race. According to a representative survey conducted during the Rio Olympics, 45% of the Hungarian population would have supported the organization of the games in Hungary, while 50% were against it (Publicus.hu, 2016). Nevertheless, in a radio interview, Orbán went on to contend that the bid had to be withdrawn in order to avoid humiliating the country and argued that the Momentum Movement’s political ambitions had resulted in the “murdering of dreams” (Novak, 2017).

Despite the withdrawal of the Olympic bid, the prime minister did not give up on his dreams. The Puskás Aréna, the new national football stadium with a capacity of close to 68,000 seats, was officially inaugurated in November

2019, costing the Hungarian taxpayers a total of 190 billion forints (531 million euro; Hvg.hu, 2020). The day before the inauguration, the prime minister published a short video on his Facebook page revealing the football skills of top Hungarian politicians such as Secretary of State Balázs Fűrjes (responsible for the construction of the stadium), Minister of Justice Judit Varga (a former football player), and finally himself, kicking a ball on the balcony of his office at the Carmelite Monastery while reading *Nemzeti Sport*, his favorite sports daily (Kaszás, 2019). Although the new leadership of Budapest campaigned with the enforcement of a “stadium stop” in the city, in 2019 the government made a deal for the construction of a new athletics stadium hosting the 2023 IAAF World Athletics Championships. According to the existing plans, by 2024 most of the future Olympic facilities will have been inaugurated, and Budapest will be ready to be considered for a new Olympic bid.

The institutionalization of the government-led sports diplomacy

Prior to the April 2018 parliamentary elections, the External Relations Coordination Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade was responsible for carrying out the ministry’s sports diplomacy tasks and providing the Hungarian embassies with up-to-date information on sports-related matters. During the bidding process of the 2024 Olympic Games, the department facilitated the communication between Budapest 2024 Nonprofit Ltd., the Hungarian Olympic Committee, and the Hungarian embassies. The primary task of the department was to satisfy the information needs of the foreign missions and grant timely communication and background materials related to Budapest’s Olympic bid. The department also contributed to the organization of the 150th anniversary of Hungarian-Japanese bilateral relations, which featured friendly sports games between the two nations and presented Japanese martial arts, such as karate and kendo (Buzna, 2018).

Following the 2018 parliamentary elections, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade underwent an organizational transformation, resulting in the establishment of the State Secretariat for Communication and Hungary’s International Image and the appointment of former sports reporter Tamás Menczer as the secretary of state (Kormany.hu, 2018b). With the formation of a new Sports Diplomacy Department, sport was given an even more prominent role in public diplomacy. The tasks of the Department of Sports Diplomacy were defined by the 17/2018 decree on the Organizational and Operational Regulations of the Ministry. Menczer, who supervises the field, stated that sport can open doors to places in the world where Hungary has not yet established a major presence. He expressed that sport as a tool for diplomacy can help overcome political debates and controversies, as it is “easier to resolve disputes based on trust built through sport” (Sinkovics, 2018). In October 2019, one year after the establishment of the department, the secretary of state announced that 200 sports diplomacy projects had already been delivered by the division (Kormany.hu, 2019). Although there is no publicly available database of these projects, according to the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, sports diplomacy programs have been implemented in China (Hangzhou), Kazakhstan (Nur-Sultan), Pakistan (Islamabad), and Italy (Rome and Vercelli), among others. Many of these initiatives featured teqball as a means of establishing and strengthening international relations.

Hungarian sports diplomacy during the times of COVID-19

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the sports sector in Europe and worldwide. Hungary was one of the first European countries to impose a full border closure in March 2020 to curb the spread of the virus. The first wave of the pandemic thwarted the organization of international sports events hosted by Hungary, such as the 2020 UEFA Football Championships (Budapest is still one of the host cities and is prepared to host the games in 2021), the 2020 Swimming European Championships, and the Giro D’Italia cycling competition that was supposed to be launched from Budapest. Compared to other European countries, Hungary got through the first wave with relatively few casualties. With the early relaunch of sports leagues, the country was among the first to re-open the doors of stadiums for fans. While spectators were not allowed to return to football grounds in most of Europe, there were no restrictions on attending sporting events in Hungary between August and October 2020. Although travel restrictions were re-imposed in September, athletes or managers accredited to international sporting competitions hosted by Hungary were treated equally as Hungarian citizens and were exempted from strict regulations. Organized on September 24, 2020, the UEFA Super Cup was a major “pilot test” to bring football fans back into the stadiums. The governing body of European football “has ruled that up to 30 percent of the 67,215-seat Puskás Aréna can be taken by fans, with 3,000 tickets available for the supporters coming from abroad” (Kató, 2020). The organization of the game was opposed by political and civil groups, but the government persisted. Another example of Hungary’s “pandemic sports diplomacy” concerns the organization of the International Swimming League (ISL). Over 300 world-class swimmers traveled to the Hungarian capital to compete in the second season of ISL, which took place between October 16 and November 22, 2020. The event was held behind closed doors while athletes

spent six weeks in the Budapest bubble with strict regulations concerning health and safety standards. Although the Hungarian government introduced strict measures on November 9, 2020, the ISL competitions went on and were concluded with success. After the second wave of the virus hit the country heavily, the government kept pouring public funds into international sports competitions taking place behind closed doors, such as the group games of the European professional water polo club competition, the LEN Champions League. Benefiting from an additional 1 billion forints in state aid, the Hungarian Water Polo Federation claimed that it was in the “outstanding sports diplomacy interest of Hungary” to host the first significant international water polo event after the shutdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Pető, 2020).

Discussion and conclusion

Since 2010, sport has played a national strategic role in Hungary. The Fidesz-KDNP government has invested considerable financial assets in elite sport and sporting infrastructure. The relevance of sport in the domain of foreign policy and international relations has rapidly increased. Large-scale international sporting competitions became an integral part of the state-led public diplomacy endeavors. Arguably, elite sport events and international sporting success are seen as soft power assets to raise international visibility and create a more favorable external image of the country. With the recent establishment of the Sports Diplomacy Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Hungary has become a pioneer in the Central and Eastern European region for institutionalizing sports diplomacy in the administration of its foreign affairs. Despite the absence of a publicly available sports diplomacy strategy, the government has taken an active role in utilizing sports, sporting competitions, and athletes to reach foreign policy goals. International sporting competitions are the backbone of Viktor Orbán’s sports diplomacy, which ultimately aims to pave the way for hosting the Olympic Games in Budapest. In spite of the failure of the 2024 Olympic bid, public investment in the country’s sports infrastructure has continued to thrive in recent years, and not even the COVID-19 pandemic has been able to halt the organization of international sporting competitions. If the 2023 IAAF World Athletics Championships are successfully organized in Budapest, the future political leadership can easily claim that the country is ready to host the largest summer multisport event in the world.

Concerning the wider international framework, a growing number of governments aim to innovate the toolkits of their foreign policy and diplomacy. Due to its universal nature and global popularity, sport can be an appealing soft power asset to governments and their Ministries of Foreign Affairs. As introduced above, the approach of Hungary can be considered as one of the leading examples in the Central and Eastern European region. However, the utilization of sport in public diplomacies is driven by more powerful and wealthier states, such as the United States (SportsUnited program), Australia (the first country to publicly introduce its sports diplomacy strategy), France (host of the 2024 Summer Olympics), Japan (host of the 2020/21 Summer Olympics), or Qatar (host of the 2022 FIFA World Cup). As a small post-socialist country, Hungary can mainly rely on its rich sporting heritage, sports-based innovations, and the high-level education of the new generation of sports leaders. Regarding the latter, some Hungarian institutions of higher education have already made important progress in developing their curricula in the field of sports diplomacy. Despite these efforts, the number of elected Hungarian sports leaders in the main decision-making bodies of international sports federations seems to have decreased in the last decade, which could impact the country’s global sports power aspirations and bidding capacities for future competitions. It remains a question as to what extent future sports diplomats will be recruited from these graduate programs, as opposed to the current practice of appointing former elite athletes to leadership positions. Additionally, and perhaps as a result of this, the Hungarian approach remains focused on elite sport, whereas grassroots sport and sport-based development have not yet been discovered as possible elements of the Hungarian sports diplomacy strategy. We believe these issues are worth exploring to further strengthen the relevance and utilization of sport as a tool in state-led public diplomacy.

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How sport and its values are perceived by adults in the USA and Ukraine: a cross-cultural comparison

Authors' contribution:

- A) conception and design of the study
- B) acquisition of data
- C) analysis and interpretation of data
- D) manuscript preparation
- E) obtaining funding

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Abstract

There are practically no cross-cultural studies in the field of physical education and sport with Ukrainian society as the object of research. However, there is a particular and obvious interest to research not only young people as a major strategic resource for any state, but also adults, including parents. The main purpose of the study is to identify common and different features of the attitude toward sport and its axiological component in the Ukrainian and American societies. A total of 500 adults aged 18-64 (196 men and 304 women) participated in the national survey, with the majority being Ukrainian school teachers. The results obtained from the study were compared with the results of a study conducted in the United States. It should be noted that in our study, we only selected questions from the American questionnaire that solely addressed adults' perceptions of sport and its values. We did not choose other questions. Mathematical processing of the survey indicators was carried out using the computer program SPSS. The result of the research is a comparison of statements from adults of both countries regarding the actual and potential impact of social institutions on the youth; their statements about sport; values or principles that may or may not be important in sport; the extent of sport's actual influence on the formation of values; the values adults hope their children will learn from participating in sport; and statements about the importance of values from adults who are actively involved in sport. The results of the cross-cultural study among adults in the USA and Ukraine indicate that there is both an identical idea of certain values in sport and a different vision due to, in our opinion, the divergence of cultural traditions and the status of sport in the countries.

Key words: physical education, axiological component, culture, parents, public opinion

Introduction

The processes of globalization that transform the human community into a “global village” actualize cross-cultural studies, which are becoming one of the most important areas of scientific research in the humanities. The analysis of publications in recent decades in the humanities proves that today it is one of the most influential empirical and scientific directions, which considerably expands the possibilities for comparative research.

It should be noted that the current socio-economic situation in the world is characterized by the formation of a multicultural environment caused by migration and the intensification of interethnic contacts leading to the

transformation of the value-normative system of the socio-cultural environment and influencing the development of value orientations of the individual, including physical education and sports (Turchyk, Sorokolyt, & Chopyk, 2019, p. 82).

At the same time, as our analysis of literary sources shows, there have been practically no cross-cultural studies in the field of physical education and sports with Ukrainian society as the object of research.

The only research dealing with the level and forms of motor activity was carried out by M.V. Dutchak (2009), who also analyzed reasons for the positive and passive attitude of the population toward sports for all.

Comparative studies with a focus on young people have also been used in scientific publications by such Ukrainian specialists as M.M. Bulatova (2011), E.S. Vilchkovsky, V.R. Pasichnyk (2007), T.Y. Krutsevich (2007), and N.V. Moskalenko et al. (2014).

However, there is a particular and obvious interest to research not only young people as a major strategic resource of any state but also adults, including parents. After all, many scholars define the family as the dominant factor influencing the youth throughout the process of socialization (Dorsch, Smith, McDonough, 2009, p. 444; Kay, 2000, p. 151; Knight, Rouquette, & Furusa, 2020, p. 303), with parental commitment being a key factor leading to young people's engagement in sports activities (Harwood, Knight, Thrower, & Berrow, 2019, p. 66; Mazer, 2012, p. 9; Stefansen, Smette, & Strandbu, 2018, p. 162).

In addition, the systematic study of values, attitudes, self-esteem, needs and interests of people, and analysis of public opinion on the state of sports development is a promising mechanism for managing sports activities/movement in any country (Dutchak, 2008, p. 15; Dutchak, 2009, p. 10; Gonçalves, Rocha, do Nascimento, de Oliveira, & Guerra, 2017, p. 274).

The country where sport has become the "second religion" that most citizens believe in is the United States. The population takes good care of their health, understanding that it is personal capital on the quality of which much depends in life: career, personal happiness, a bright future. Back in the 1960s, after the release of Robert H. Boyle's book *Sports is the Mirror of American Life*, sport became a national hobby and a model of American society itself (Boyle, 1963). The American philosopher M. Novak even warned that neglecting sports would mean losing one of the important national assets (Novak, 1994, p. 12).

According to American scientists, "sports can best build character and contribute to the formation of dignity, honesty, respect, dedicated teamwork, dedication to achieving a great goal. The sports activities/lessons (good or bad), especially the field games are transformed into relationships in the classroom, and subsequently into the business world and the surrounding society, making a huge contribution to shaping the character and culture of American citizens" (U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, 2010). Recognizing sports as a valuable national asset, American experts see some of the existing problems.

Therefore, in order to better understand the role and importance of sports in U.S. society, as well as to identify the public's attitude toward sports ethics and values that are generated through sports, a large-scale study called "What Sport Means in America: A Study of Sport's Role in Society" was held under the auspices of the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, 2010). Carrying out a similar survey in Ukraine and comparing it with the results of American researchers allowed us to make a cross-cultural analysis of adults' attitudes toward sport and its implied values in both countries, which became the purpose of this study.

Material and methods

A total of 8,934 surveys were completed in the United States, representing five different audience segments:

- General population adults aged 18-64 (n = 4,443)
- NGB Adults (n = 370): Members of national governing body (NGB) sport organizations who are 18 years or older and who participate in sport, are parents of children who participate, or are officials or volunteers
- NGB Coaches (n = 193)
- Teachers (n = 201) who were selected through the Discovery Education program by telephone survey
- Children aged 8–17 (n = 3590)

Only the first group of representatives and the parents of children who participate in sports from the second group were the objects of comparison in our study. We did not use any other categories as this was not the task of our study.

A total of 500 adults aged 18–64 (196 men and 304 women) participated in the national survey with the majority being Ukrainian school teachers.

It should be noted that in our study, we only selected questions from the American questionnaire that addressed the adults' perceptions of sport and its values. We did not choose other questions.

Our domestic questionnaire was tested during a pilot study with further amendments. According to the conclusions of the Department of Sociology at Drohobych Ivan Franko State Pedagogical University, the questionnaire "meets the standards of sociological tools and is designed for interviews with obligatory participation of the interviewer."

The mathematical processing of the survey indicators was carried out using the computer program SPSS.

Results

The first questions for adults in the survey questionnaire were to identify their perceptions of the potential and actual impact of social institutions, including sports, on youth. Respondents from both countries were asked to rank eight institutions that could potentially and actually impact youth. As can be seen from Figure 1, the U.S. citizens believe that, in fact, most of the institutions listed above influence their children at this stage (average place 3.1), as do family (average 3.3), school (average 4.2), television (average place 4.4), social networks (average place 5), and music (average place 5.1), while sports and church/religion occupy the very last places (average of 5.4).

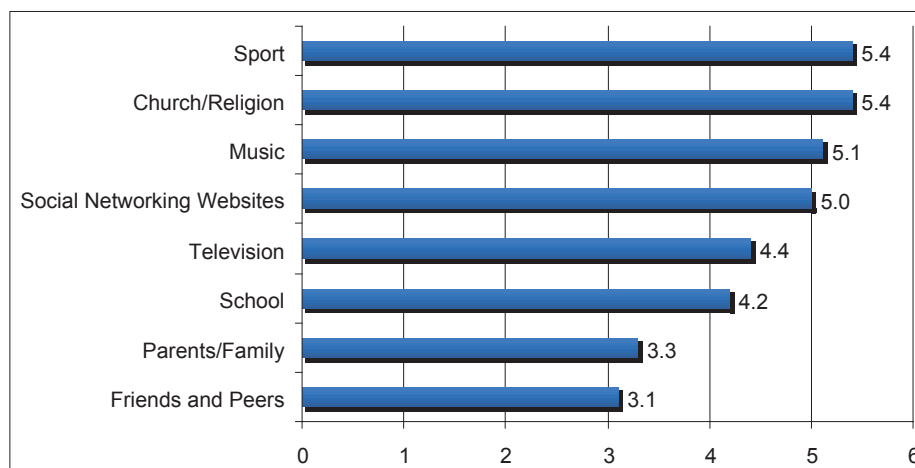


Figure 1. The actual impact of social institutions on youth in the United States

Source: U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, "What Sport Means in America: A Survey of Sport's Role in Society," 2010, p. 12, f. 4

The opinions of Ukrainian citizens on the actual impact of institutions on children somewhat differed (Fig. 2). The adults believe that the biggest influence on children is exercised by social networks (average place 2.9), friends (average place 3.1), and parents (average place 3.4). Other major influences include school (average place 4.5), television (average place 5.1), and sports (average place 5.2), while music and church took last place (average place 5.9).

Thus, according to the analysis of the respondents' answers, the adults of both countries believe that sport has a somewhat limited actual positive impact on the youth, having taken last place in the U.S. study and the penultimate place in the Ukrainian study. The next question was to identify the potential impact of the same institutions on the youth. It was found that the answers in both countries were slightly different from the previous questions.

We found that U.S. adults believe that the following social institutions can and do have the greatest potential for influence: family (average 2.4), school (average 3.5), friends (average 3.9), church (average 4.3), television (average 5.1), sports (average 5.3), music (average 5.7), and social networks (average 5.8) (Fig. 3).

Thus, as we can see, the U.S. adults believe the potential influence of sports activities on the youth is somewhat higher. Among the same institutions, U.S. adults ranked it in sixth place (with an average of 5.3), behind music and social networks.

It is interesting to note that the Ukrainians chose the same first three institutions as the U.S. citizens. Namely, the first place for potential influence is occupied by parents (average place 2.5), school takes second (average

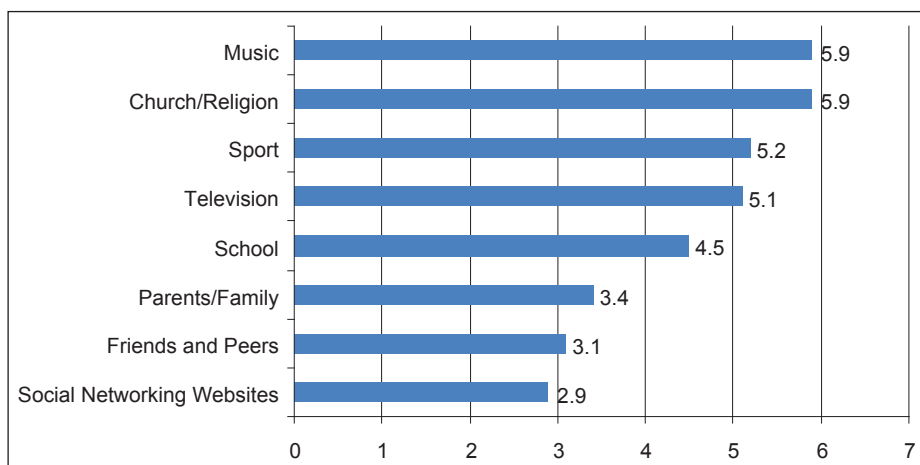


Figure 2. The actual impact of social institutions on youth in Ukraine

Source: own study

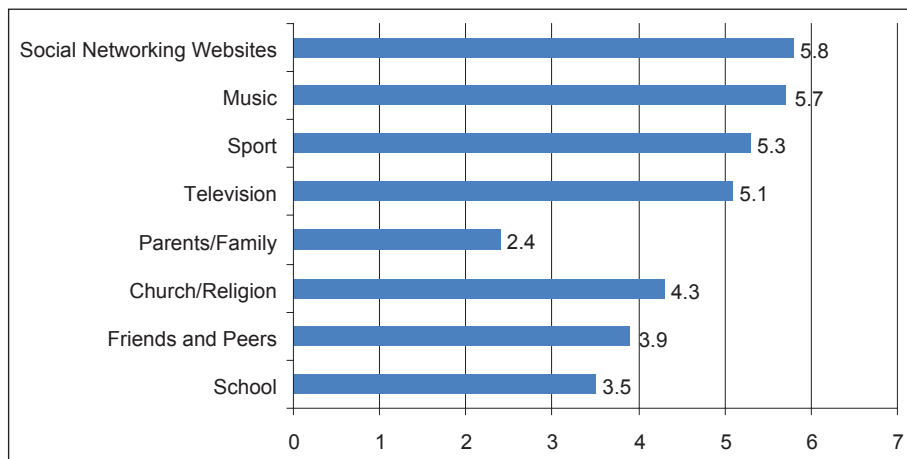


Figure 3. Potential impact of social institutions on youth in the United States

Source: U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, “What Sport Means in America: A Survey of Sport’s Role in Society,” p.12, f. 4

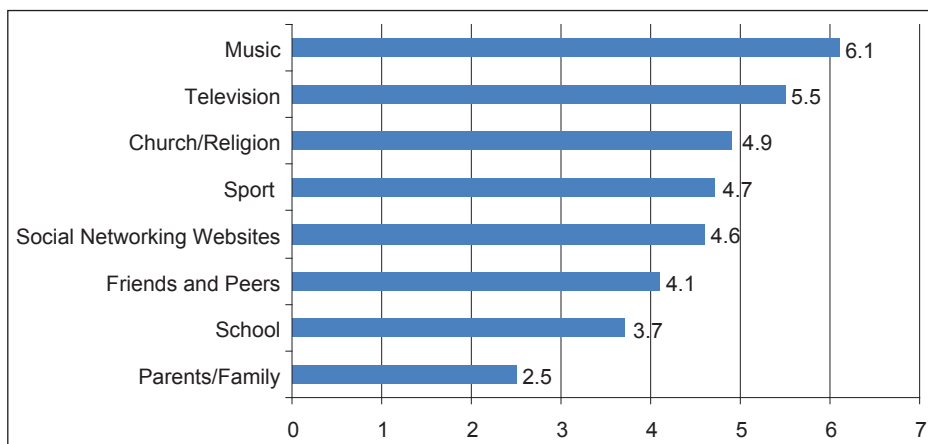


Figure 4. Potential impact of social institutions on youth in Ukraine

Source: own study

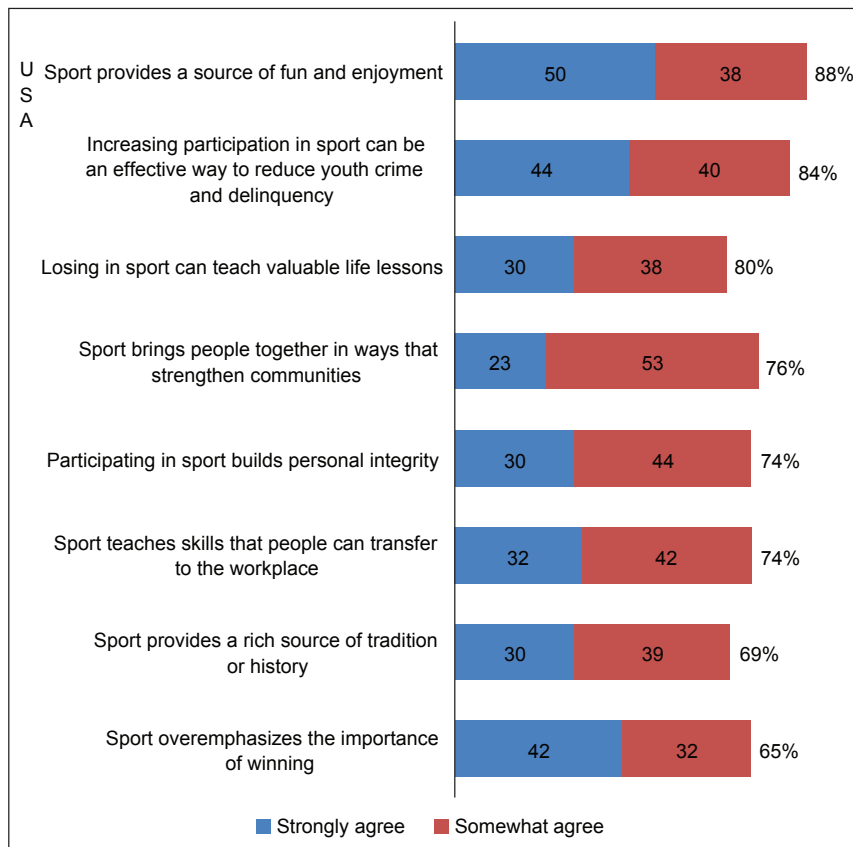


Figure 5. Statements of adults about sports in the USA

Source: U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, “What Sport Means in America: A Survey of Sport’s Role in Society,” 2010, p.13, f. 5

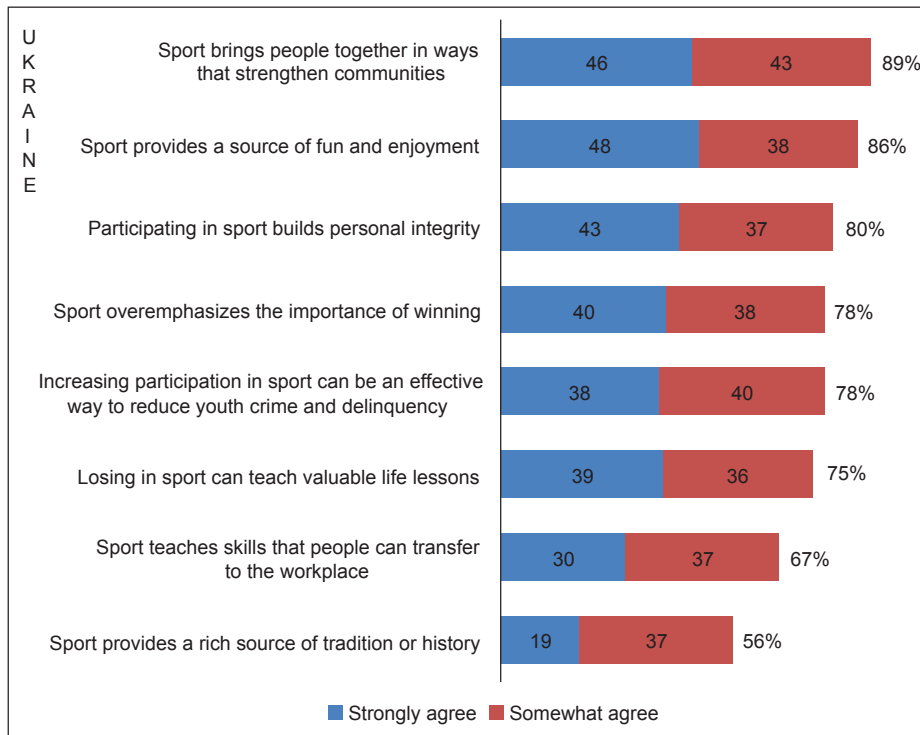


Figure 6. Statements of adults about sports in Ukraine

Source: own study

place 3.7), and friends take third (average place 4.1). Unfortunately, social networks (average place 4.6) occupy fourth place among Ukrainians, but it is nice to note that sport occupies fifth place (average place 4.7), followed by church (average place 4.9) and television (average place 5.5), with music in last place (mean 6.1) (Fig. 4).

Thus, it has been established that the citizens of both countries believe sports have a higher potential for impact on the youth than they do in actuality. Among the U.S. adults, sport was up by two places compared to its actual influence; the result was the same among the Ukrainians. This gives grounds to argue that the two populations hold a similar attitude regarding the impact of sport on youth.

Therefore, while understanding that sport has a relatively mild (minor) impact on the youth, U.S. adults recognize the many positive benefits of playing sports. The results of the following question revealed that 88% of adults agree that sport is a source of pleasure and can prevent and reduce crime (84%), and that defeats in sport provide valuable life lessons (80%) (Fig. 5). However, nearly 55% of the U.S. adult population agree that the importance of winning in sports is over-emphasized.

The adult population in Ukraine was asked the same question. Quite unexpectedly, our compatriots see sport as a phenomenon that first of all aims to consolidate people and form a community (89%). A total of 86% said that sport is a source of joy and pleasure, while 80% agree that participation in sport forms a personality with positive moral qualities. The lowest ranking statement was that sports are a source of history and traditions (56%) (Fig. 6).

Therefore, we can see that adults in both countries find sports to be a source of pleasure and joy and an institution that can unite the community. At the same time, unlike Ukrainians, Americans believe sports have the potential for preventing crime and offenses by the youth and offer a source of history and tradition.

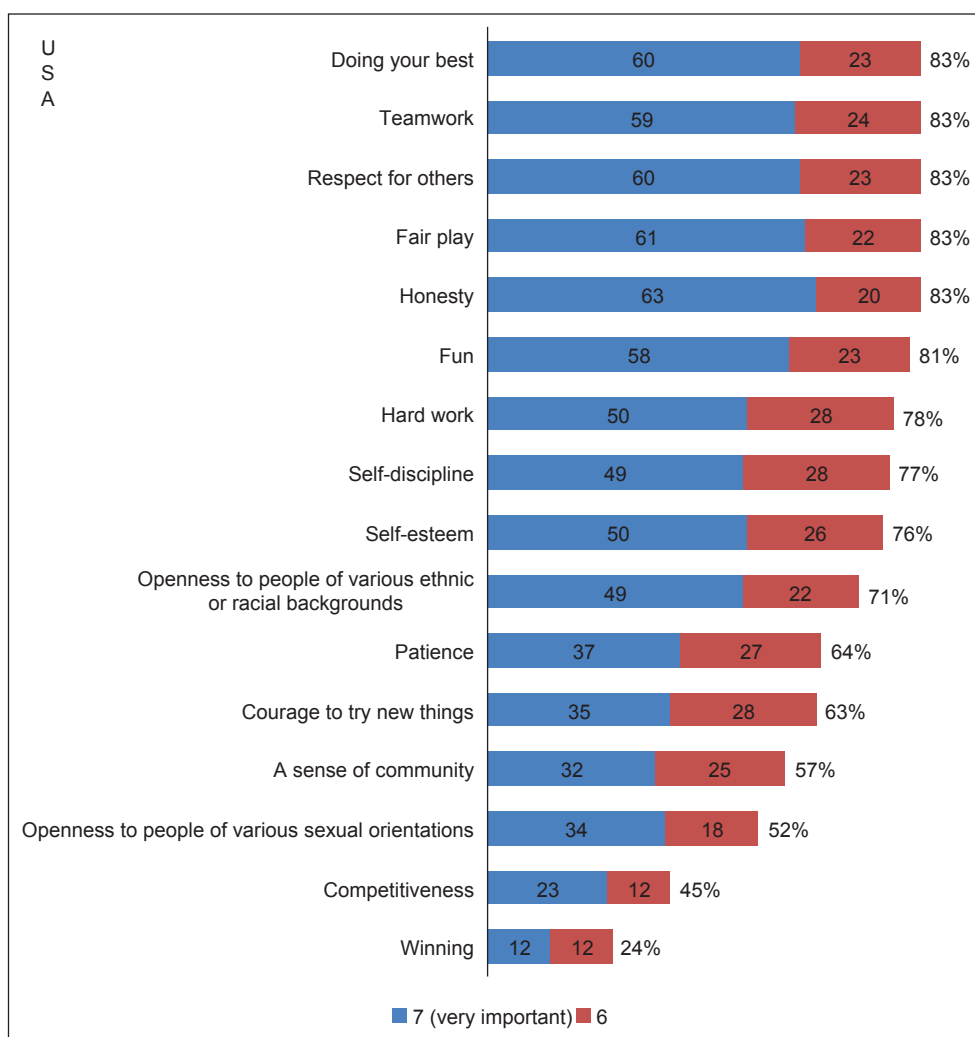


Figure 7. Importance of values in sports (U.S. adult opinion)

Source: U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, "What Sport Means in America: A Survey of Sport's Role in Society," 2010, p.16, f. 8

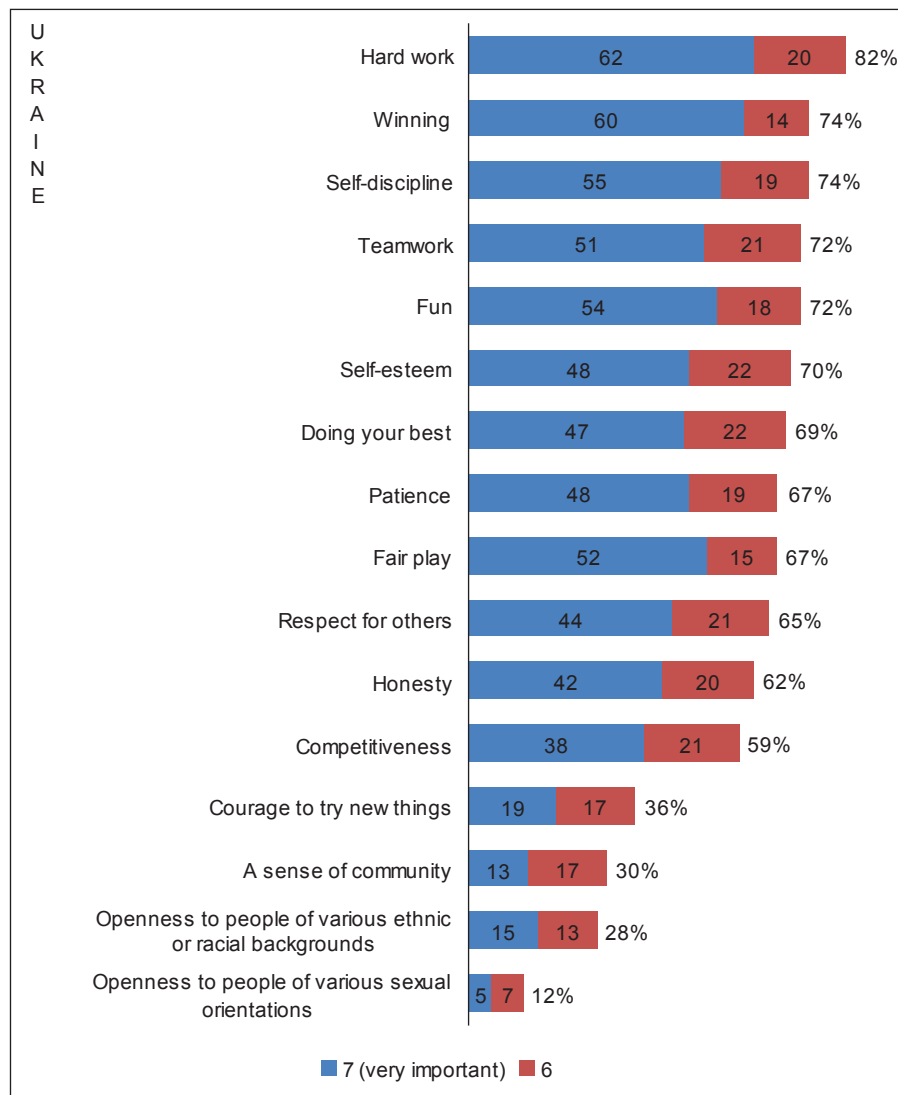


Figure 8. Importance of values in sport (opinion of Ukrainian adults)

Source: own study

The next block of questions was intended to clarify public opinion of the importance of values in sport and the extent to which sport actually shapes these values. It is revealed that the U.S. adult population as a whole (Fig. 7) believes that sports have values such as “the ability to show one’s best qualities” (83%), “teamwork” (83%), “respect for others” (83%), “fair play” (83%), “honesty” (83%), and “fun” (81%).

According to the survey in Ukraine, the most important qualities in sport are “persistence” (82%), “desire for victory” (74%), “self-discipline” (74%), “satisfaction” (72%), “teamwork” (71%), and “self-esteem” (70%) (Fig. 11).

Thus, we can see that the opinions of the populations on the important values in sports differ drastically. Only “teamwork” is a universal value, as teamwork is the only value chosen by both the American and Ukrainian adults. It should be emphasized that unfortunately for the Ukrainian population, such virtues as “honesty” and “fair play” occupy much lower positions in the ranking of values in comparison with the American population. At the same time, “the desire to win” is the most important for the Ukrainian respondents, while it places last among Americans (24%). It is also worth noting that the value of sport in terms of “openness to people with different sexual orientations” was selected by only 12% of the respondents in Ukraine (taking last place – 16th – by a big margin), with 52% of the Americans ranking it in 14th place. That is, the adults in Ukraine do not evidently see sport as having the potential to form a positive attitude towards sexual minorities.

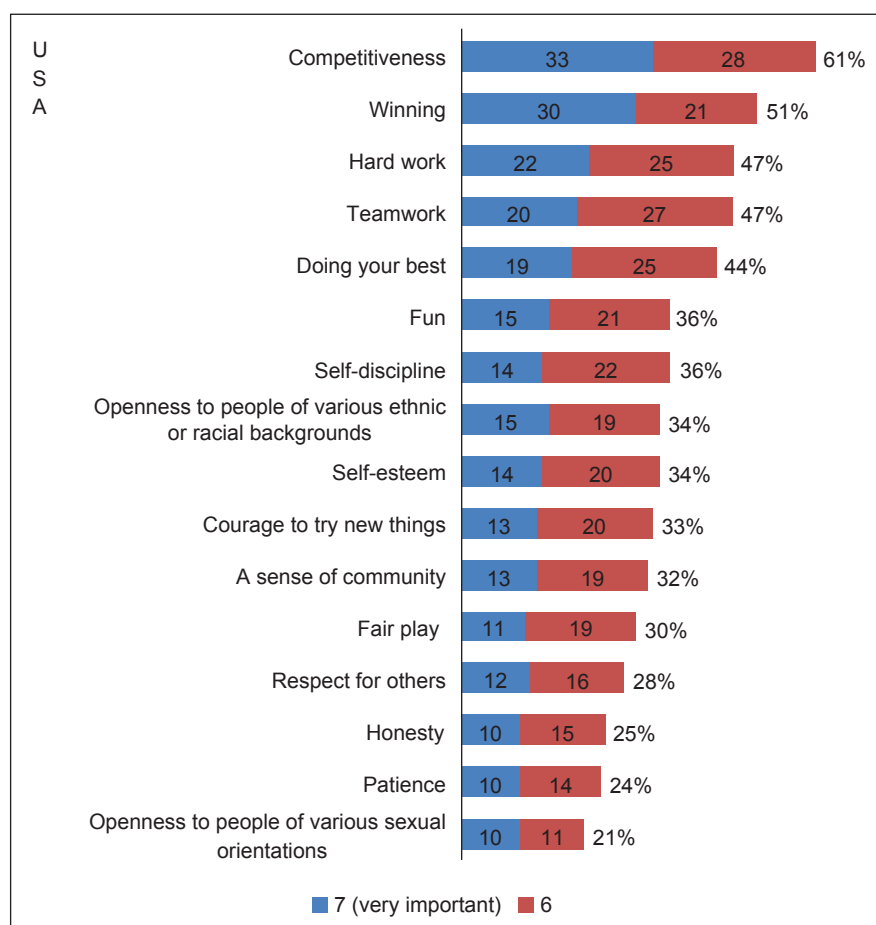


Figure 9. Formation of values by sports (opinion of adults in the USA)

Source: U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, “What Sport Means in America: A Survey of Sport’s Role in Society,” 2010, p. 16, f. 9

The next question was to find out to what extent sport actually shapes each of these values in children (Fig. 9, Fig. 10). The adults used a 7-point scale for evaluation. We took into account only the highest rankings, namely 6 and 7.

Therefore, “competitiveness” and “the desire to win,” which were selected in the previous question by the U.S. adults as the least important qualities in sports (ranking in the last two places among 16 values), took the radically opposite positions in leading the ranking (competitiveness 61%) and second place (desire to win 51%). Third and fourth place were occupied by “persistence” (47%) and “teamwork” (47%), whereas 44% of respondents said the “ability to demonstrate one’s best qualities” took fifth place. At the same time, “honesty” and “fair play” were among the important qualities, but unfortunately the U.S. adults do not believe sports shape them sufficiently (Fig. 9).

It is worth noting that the adult citizens of Ukraine (Fig. 10) identify practically the same leading values as the Americans – the values that in their opinion sport actually forms in children. Among the top five were “aspirations to win” (75%), “perseverance” (70%), and “ability to demonstrate one’s best qualities” (68%). Such important virtues for life as “honesty” and “fair play” received quite low results.

Thus, we see that the U.S. adults differentiate values more often. They highlight the values they consider to be important for sport and the ones sport actually shapes in young people. Often, these do not coincide. Meanwhile, these are practically the same values for Ukrainians. Only their placement in the ranking differs.

The next block of questions was answered only by those respondents whose children were involved in sports systematically.

Adults were asked to choose the five values (out of fifteen) they considered to be the most important for children to learn in the process of participating in sports and to indicate how well their expectations were fulfilled (Fig. 11, Fig. 12).

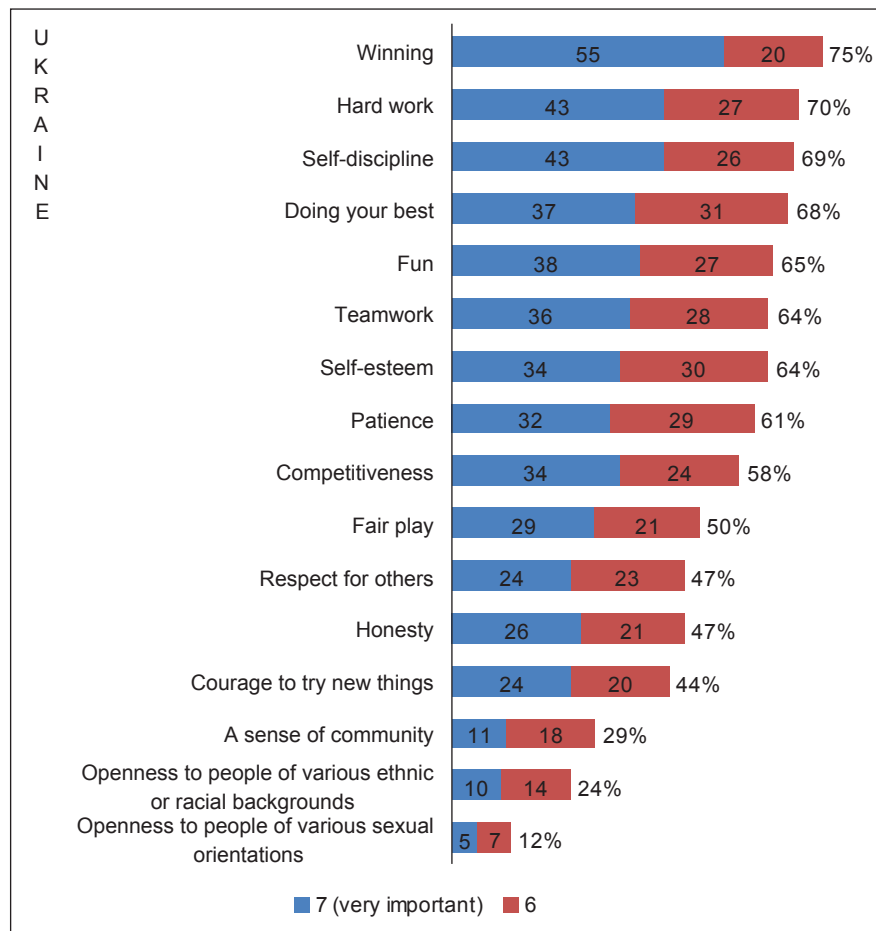


Figure 10. Formation of values by sports (opinion of adults in Ukraine)

Source: own study

According to the results of the survey, similarly to their American counterparts, the Ukrainian parents also believe that sports should teach a child to have fun (47%). Also, the top five values in Ukraine were “self-discipline” (43%), “perseverance” and “self-confidence” (39% each), and honesty (29%). The last places were occupied by “the feeling of belonging to the community” (4%) and “competing without going beyond the rules” (10%) (Fig. 12).

Therefore, the common values chosen by the largest number of respondents in both countries were “satisfaction” and “self-confidence.” It is worth noting that values such as “adherence to the rules of fair play,” “honesty,” “respect for others,” “learning to work as a team,” and “developing self-discipline” took equally high positions in the responses of adults in both the U.S. and Ukraine. The biggest differences related to adults’ views on such values as “learning to be persistent” (Ukrainians ranked it 3rd, Americans ranked it 11th) and “the ability to demonstrate one’s best qualities” (10th for Ukrainians and 2nd for Americans).

Another question was answered only by respondents who participated in sports on their own. The purpose was to find and compare the opinions of the U.S. and Ukrainian adults about the importance of certain factors in sports (Fig. 13, Fig. 14). The adults had to rate the importance of each of the factors listed in the questionnaire on a 7-point scale (where 7 is very important, 4 is medium, and 1 is not important). We took into account only those factors that were rated/assessed/judged to be very important (this means respondents considered these factors to be the most significant).

As we can see, the U.S. adults found that it is important for them to be satisfied/have fun (82%), while 81% had the ability to demonstrate their best qualities. “Positive impact on health” (72%) was ranked only third, followed by “improvement of physical and volitional qualities” (70%) and “decent performance” (69%). Thus, all five factors received more than 60% of the responses of U.S. respondents (Fig. 14).

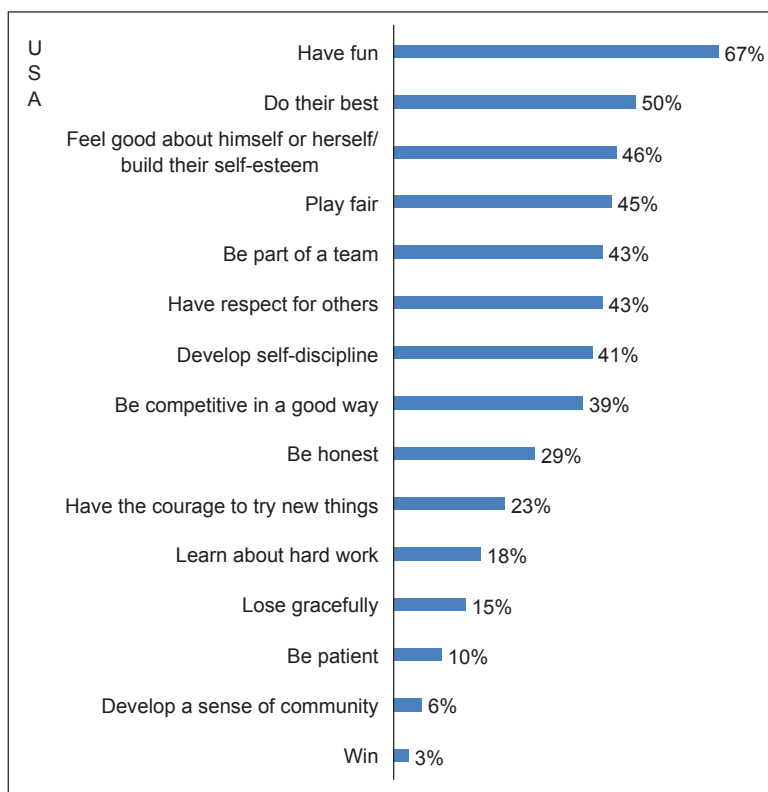


Figure 11. Values parents expected their children to learn while participating in sports (opinions of adults in the U.S.)

Source: U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, “What Sport Means in America: A Survey of Sport’s Role in Society,” 2010, p. 32, f. 23

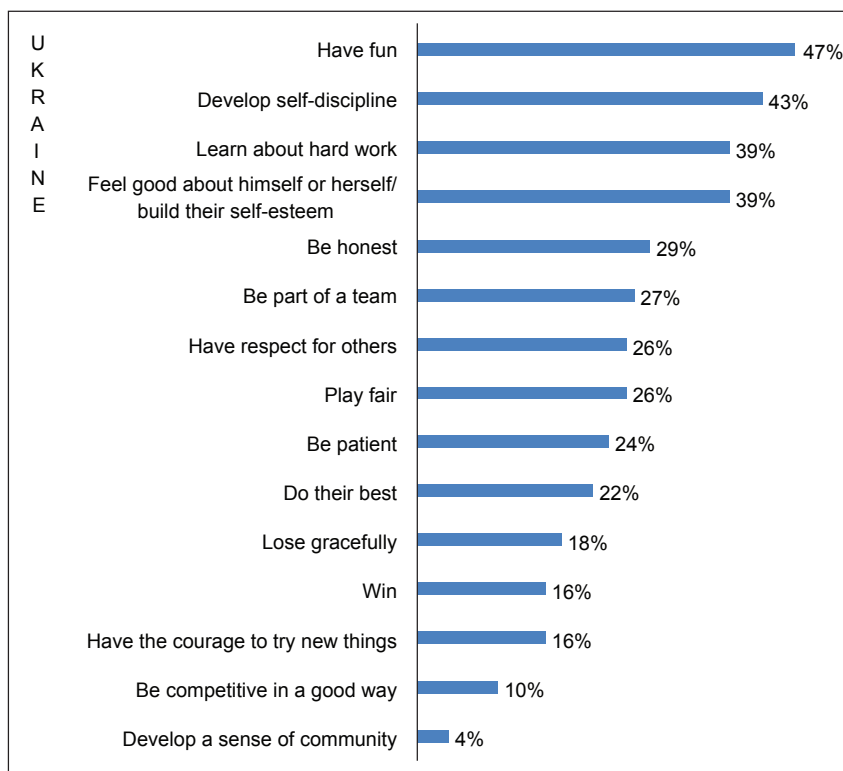


Figure 12. Values parents expected their children to learn while participating in sports (opinions of adults in the Ukraine)

Source: own study

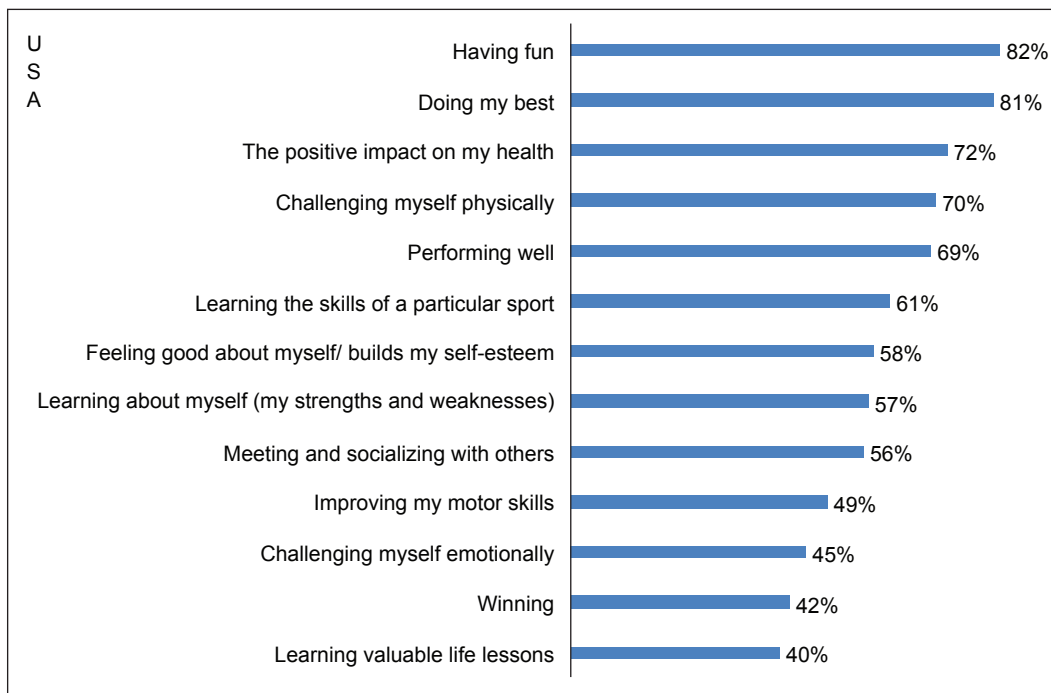


Figure 13. The importance of factors (values) in sport (opinion of U.S. adults who participate in sports)
 Source: U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, “What Sport Means in America: A Survey of Sport’s Role in Society,” 2010, p. 26, f. 16

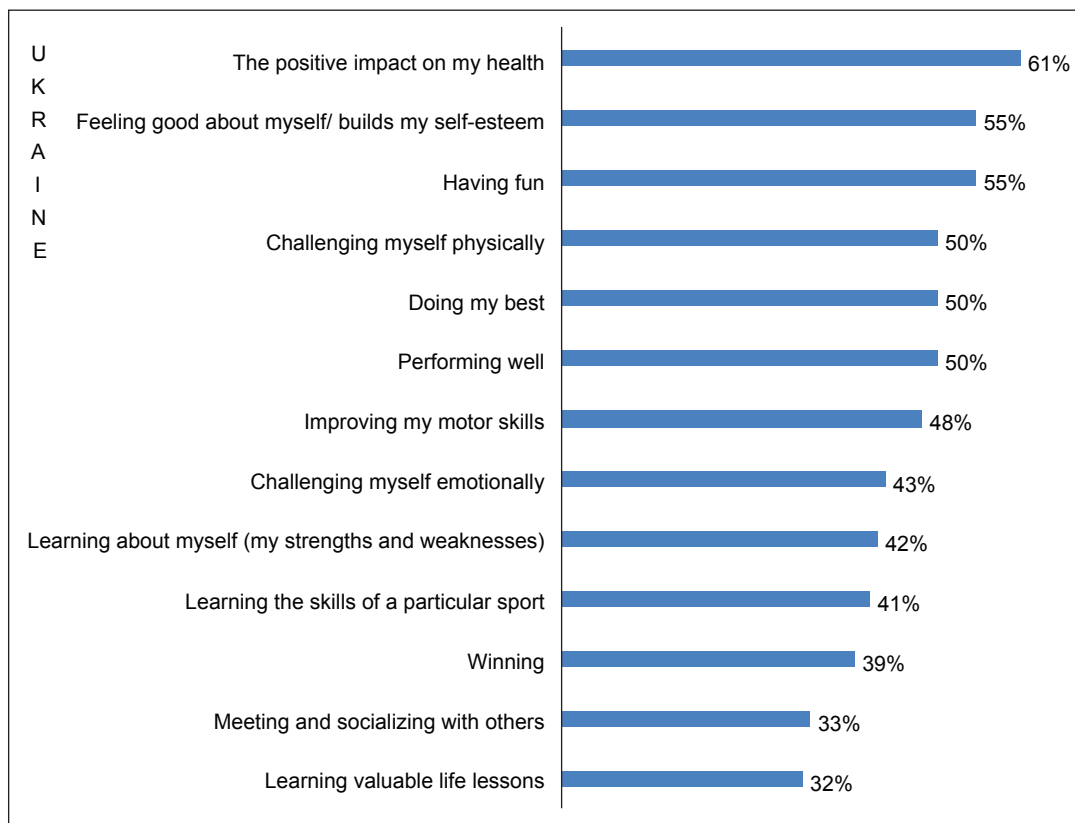


Figure 14. The importance of factors (values) in sport (opinion of Ukrainian adults who participate in sports)
 Source: own study

The analysis of the Ukrainian respondents' answers showed that the only factor receiving a little more than 60% was "positive health impact." All others were almost equally important to Ukrainians: "well-being (improvement in self-esteem)" received 55% and "satisfaction" received 50%, as did "improvement of physical and volitional qualities," "ability to demonstrate one's best qualities," and "decent performance" (Fig. 14).

Therefore, as you can see, the adults who participated in sports identified almost the same dominant factors in sports. The main difference is that for Ukrainians, the most important were the factors related to the promotion and preservation of health, although having fun was also important. For Americans it is somewhat to the contrary, as they placed the hedonistic motive of pleasure first by a significant margin.

Discussion

The results of cross-cultural comparisons show that adults in both the United States and Ukraine believe the impact of sports on children have a greater potential than their actual impact.

The universal value is that the citizens of both countries agree on the importance of playing sports for pleasure and joy and understand that sports bring people together and shape the community. However, for Americans more than Ukrainians, it is also important that playing sports is an effective way to reduce crime among the youth, as is evidenced by the large number of state programs in place in the country. In addition, for Americans, unlike Ukrainians, sport remains a cradle of history and tradition, probably linked to the efforts of immigrants to preserve their identity through sport.

Parents in both countries believe that different kinds of sporting activities have considerable potential for forming positive values in their children, but in the opinion of the respondents, they so in different ways.

Unfortunately, unlike the Americans, our Ukrainian compatriots do not see the potential of school and university sports, as well as sports activities organized by the community, in forming positive values (axiosphere) in young people, which may explain the low level of popularity of these types of sports in the country in general.

The cross-cultural analysis conducted revealed the difference between the views of the citizens of both countries on the importance of certain values in sport. As can be seen, such virtues as "honesty" and "fair play" are less important for Ukrainians compared with Americans, but "the desire to win" was ranked higher by Ukrainians (and took last place with Americans). In addition, the Ukrainians do not see the importance of sports in shaping the perception of sexual minorities, which can be accounted for by the high level of religiosity in Ukraine.

Another universal value is teamwork, which ranked among the top five in both countries.

Similarly, both the U.S. and Ukrainian adults highlighted the values they would like to be instilled in their children. High places were also taken by "pleasure" and "self-confidence." The greatest differences were about values such as "learning to be persistent" and "to show one's best qualities."

Also, it should be noted that in both cultures, the adults who are systematically engaged in sports generally point to the same factors that are important to them during exercise. However, the hedonistic motive, to a greater extent, is more important for Americans than for Ukrainians, for whom the factor of "health promotion" prevails.

Conclusion

In today's multicultural society, each nation has its own models of culture, including physical education and sport, with its unique value-oriented structure. Thus, the results of the cross-cultural study among adults in the USA and Ukraine indicate that there is both an identical idea of certain values in sports and a different vision due to, in our opinion, the divergence of cultural traditions and the status of sports in the countries. We believe that these results can serve as a basis for various domestic educational initiatives to promote and increase the participation of the Ukrainian population in sports and to broaden their understanding of the potential of sports, particularly in schools, to form positive values in the youth.

The next challenges are to conduct cross-cultural comparisons with other countries and to identify universal factors influencing the formation of values among the youth.

Conflict of interest. The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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