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Psychology of sports in developing nations: An introduction

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Abstract

The International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology is actively seeking to enhance understandings about the research practices and projects from countries lesser known among English-speaking scholars. Within this introduction, the authors explore the possible barriers encountered by non-English-speaking sport psychology scholars residing in regions where submissions are sparse to Anglophone journals. Afterward, the authors introduce five accepted publications from Jordan, Botswana, Tanzania, South Africa, and Brazil. These submissions are the journal's inaugural special section devoted to research and scholars from "developing countries".

Keywords: Developing countries, diversity, inclusivity, research

Introduction

Within the field of sport psychology, certain countries tend to dominate the academic discourse within the domain's highest impact and best-known academic journals. It's worth noting that many mainstream sport and exercise psychology journals are English-speaking, a fact that has yet to be critically examined. Might these countries be considered developed, or, in the context of this special section, established countries within a professional sense? While the editors of this Special Issue do regard many of these countries as well-established, they do not necessarily consider them the only established countries in the field of sport and exercise psychology. There are numerous countries with a rich history in sport psychology research and practice that may not consistently exchange ideas and approaches with English-speaking countries through English-speaking journals. Monumental countries such as China, Russia, and the former East Germany are just a few examples of many more countries with highly developed research and practice in sport psychology. Within the International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, there is a special section dedicated exclusively to Chinese sport psychology scholarship, though this initiative represents only a small fraction of the diverse national perspectives present in the field.

A developing country is a socio-cultural and economic entity (i.e., a state), which is progressing towards a standard situation in terms of its economy, trade, living standard, and scientific production and exchange. Recent scientific understanding is primarily based in the developed Western world and may therefore overlook scientific perspectives from less-developed countries. Additionally, the scientific system of publishing and exchanging scientific results is predominantly situated within the framework of the Western world, potentially isolating so-called "developing countries" and the essential perspectives derived from these regions. Discussions regarding developing countries abound, focusing on nationwide characteristics such as the level of education, industrialization, and gross domestic product. These discussions are not clear-cut due to the controversies surrounding terms like "developed," "developing," and "underdeveloped". Moreover, the terms "developed" and "underdeveloped" have been subject to criticism, each implying a position that is either superior or inferior in a hierarchical sense, with certain countries centralized and others marginalized. Returning to classifications of developed versus underdeveloped countries, there is no universally agreed-upon criterion that differentiates such broad groups of nations. Editors and readers may have an intuitive sense of where a country belongs, but there are no rigid rules

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governing such classifications, as judgments are influenced by each evaluator's worldview.

Within the field of sport psychology, certain countries tend to dominate the academic discourse in the highest impact and best-known academic journals. It's noteworthy that many mainstream sport and exercise psychology journals are English-speaking, a fact that has yet to be critically examined. Could these countries be considered developed, or in the case of this first of two successive special sections, established countries, in a professional sense? The editors of this Special Issue do regard many of these countries as well-established, but not necessarily as the sole established countries in relation to the field of sport and exercise psychology. Indeed, there are numerous countries with significant and illustrious histories in sport psychology that may not consistently exchange ideas and approaches with English-speaking countries in English-speaking journals. Monumental countries such as China, Russia, and the former East Germany are just a few examples of many more countries with highly developed research and practice in sport psychology. Within the International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, there is a special edition devoted exclusively to Chinese sport psychology scholarship, though this effort represents only a fraction of the diverse national perspectives.

Upon close examination of the submission, acceptance, and rejection rates of the International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, it becomes apparent that submission trends have somewhat favored a select few of the established countries. These countries include the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada, with smaller numbers of submissions coming from scholars residing in non-English-speaking countries. Moreover, even fewer submissions are accepted from countries such as Greece and Germany, despite their strong publication record in English-speaking journals of sport and exercise psychology. A consistent trend across the most heavily published countries is that they are primarily English-speaking.

However, attributing submission rates solely to mother tongue simplifies the issue at the expense of fully understanding why certain nations submit to and gain acceptance in mainstream English-speaking sport and exercise psychology journals, while others do not. There are deeper factors at play that not only perpetuate submission trends but also limit an open exchange of research and practice within this globally recognized field—a much-needed exchange that is often not visible.

This issue is not unique to sport and exercise psychology but extends to the broader behavioral sciences. Arnett (2008) found that from 2003 to 2007, in the top journals of six subdisciplines of psychology, 68% of participants were from the United States, and 96% were from Western industrialized countries. This lack of diversity in research participants raises questions about the generalizability of findings to non-Western contexts. For instance, while much health psychology research on HIV involves American samples, 98% of the world's AIDS deaths occur in Africa. This discrepancy highlights the potential limitations of research conducted primarily in Western contexts when applied to non-Western populations.

Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) ^[8] reviewed cross-cultural psychological research and found that Western individuals were often at the extreme end in relation to most other cultures, suggesting that they may not be a universally representative norm. This underscores the importance of including diverse cultural perspectives in psychological

research to ensure its applicability across different populations.

Given the international nature of our society (ISSP) and the English language of our journal, which poses different challenges for authors from English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries, it is crucial to address these disparities and promote a more inclusive and diverse representation in sport and exercise psychology research.

1. Journals should include associate editors who are from non-English-speaking countries.
2. Journals should frequently invite special issues edited by non-English-speaking editors and including non-English-speaking authors.
3. International psychological associations should implement editorial mentor programs designed to assist international psychologists in preparing their manuscripts for English-speaking journals
4. Undergraduate programs in psychology should offer students at least two courses in anthropology or (where available) cultural psychology and encourage psychology majors to spend at least one semester abroad
5. Major funding agencies should support international research as well as provide graduate student and researcher fellowships abroad.

The first and second of these suggestions have been embraced by the editors of this journal since its inception. Although the International Society of Sport Psychology (ISSP) has yet to implement the third suggestion, during the production process of this Special Issue, we initiated pairing authors from emerging countries with experienced authors from English-speaking countries. The ISSP also encourages its members who teach sport psychology courses to support the fourth suggestion in their university programs. Several ISSP members have established sport psychology programs attracting international students and promoting part of their studies abroad, such as the European Master in Sport and Exercise Psychology, organized by ISSP and European Federation of Sport Psychology (FEPSAC) members. This program is detailed in a report by three students found in the Bulletin of this issue. From 2010 to 2016, more than 50 sport and exercise psychology students from emerging countries graduated from this Master's level program with the support of the European Commission, which provided full scholarships to study in this program. Two authors of the present Special Issue are graduates of this Master's program who later pursued doctoral studies at other international universities.

Several years ago, when the International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology was under the editorship of were invited to develop a special issue focused on de-colonized methodologies, a methodological approach prevalent in cultural sport psychology research (Ryba, Stambulova, Si, & Schinke, 2013) ^[3]. The guest co-editors mostly invited scholars from Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, and New Zealand to contribute manuscripts about marginalized identities and sub-cultures, with one exception authored by two Eastern European scholars (Stambulova and Alfermann, 2009) ^[9]. Although these submissions were primarily from Anglophone countries, where the journal continues to receive many submissions and accepted manuscripts, one example from the special issue focused on Canadian Aboriginal athletes and the methodological practices that could better incorporate local indigenous voices (see Schinke, Peltier, Hanrahan, Eys, Recollet-Saikonnen,

Yungblut *et al.*, 2009) [5]. Even within established English-speaking countries, there are diverse approaches that are often overlooked in our field.

Since the early call for underprivileged and less-heard-from voices, even within English-speaking sport psychology scholarship, this journal, reflecting the mandate of the International Society of Sport Psychology, has endeavored to solicit a broader base of diverse perspectives from the global profession. Efforts have been made to encourage submissions from the widest range of international countries in order to understand how to work with a much broader diversity of athletes based on nationalities, participants, and researchers. Practices from a diversity of countries might expand upon how and why a professional might (or might not) engage in and work within a certain way in a national sport culture and sub-cultural context. This desire for a more engaged international exchange that brings together diverse nations and understandings is imperative for the International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology. The ISSP Mission Statement, which guides this journal, is as follows:

The Global Association of Sport Psychology (GASP) is an organization dedicated to advancing research, practice, and development in the field of sport psychology worldwide. GASP is a multidisciplinary association of scholars whose research interests focus on various aspects of sport psychology. The association aims to (a) promote and support the exploration of human behavior within sport, physical activity, and health contexts; (b) facilitate the exchange of knowledge through newsletters, meetings, and a quadrennial congress; and (c) enhance the standards of research and professional practice in sport psychology. Additionally, GASP seeks to promote peace and mutual understanding among individuals from diverse backgrounds and nations. Members of the association include researchers, psychologists, educators, coaches, administrators, as well as students and athletes with an interest in sport psychology.

Examining the aforementioned mission, we direct the reader to the opening stanza, used to frame all of what follows beneath. The Global Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology is earnestly embracing the aforementioned mission, and as such, we are seeking to inspire scholars from developing countries to now step forward with research studies or broader approaches to research. These submissions are intended to broaden and enrich discussions among scholars regarding what constitutes excellent research and how perspectives and approaches to empirical research can be undertaken within diverse regions. The invitation to submit particularly targets what we term as developing countries. The editors of this Special Issue believe that developing countries are not merely in the process of emerging; they have already made significant strides! Instead, developing countries, as we refer to them, are nations that are beginning to establish a consistent presence within English-speaking journals, such as this one. Authors from these countries have already made forays into mainstream journals, but submission rates from developing countries remain low and have yet to become a consistent trend. To engage researchers from what we have termed "developing countries," we circulated the following special issue call:

Within this special issue of the Global Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, the co-editors aim to advance and promote scholarship from countries where sport and exercise psychology is beginning to gain traction. This includes regions such as the African and South American continents, Arabic-speaking countries, as well as select countries within

Asian and the South Pacific regions, and Eastern Europe, where minimal contributions have been made within mainstream Anglophone scholarship. Authors from these countries are encouraged to integrate their research with their contextual background. Specifically, this special issue aims to showcase the contextual backdrop of one's country in relation to their scholarship (Either a singular project or their broader scholarly endeavors). One might achieve this by considering the historical background and current state of sport and exercise psychology research within the country and by incorporating one or more of the following aspects: (a) accessibility to knowledge and international collaborations in scholarship, (b) linguistic/geographic barriers, and (c) cultural values and contributions to knowledge.

The contributions

What follows is the first special section focused on research in developing countries. After careful deliberation, the co-editors have decided to provide two successive special sections, rather than a single special issue. The aim is to encourage consistency in submissions from these developing countries. Within this inaugural special section, we have collaborated closely with scholars from Jordan, Botswana, Tanzania, South Africa, and Brazil. Below are excerpts taken directly from the authors' respective abstracts, along with supplementary commentary from the co-editors.

From Jordan, Saeb Al Ganideh and Amman Al Zaytoonah authored "The Magic of Soccer: Transforming Animosity into Love (An Empirical Study of Arab Fans and Major European Soccer Leagues)". This manuscript aligns well with the mission statement of our society, particularly the endeavor to foster peace and understanding among people from all countries. The authors explore whether Arab fans' support of European soccer clubs influences their feelings of animosity towards those countries. The results suggest that admiration for soccer clubs from England, Italy, and Spain correlates with lower feelings of animosity towards these countries. This research underscores the potential of soccer as a tool for promoting peace, extending beyond athletes to include fans.

Tshepang Tshube and Stephanie Hanrahan titled their manuscript "Sport Psychology in Botswana: A Prime Breeding Ground". They provide an in-depth account of sport psychology in Botswana, discussing its emergence, influence of cultural values, and role in national success in international sports. Despite being new disciplines at the University of Botswana, sport psychology and physical education play pivotal roles in enhancing individual lives and national sporting achievements.

Marit Sorensen, Maro Cypriano, and Glyn Roberts contributed "Gender Differences in HIV Related Psychological Variables in a Tanzanian Intervention using Sport". Their research focuses on disease prevention, education, and sport programming, addressing a pressing global health issue. By using soccer as a platform for HIV/AIDS education, they aim to reduce vulnerability and raise awareness, aligning with our society's mission of promoting a healthier world through sport initiatives.

Richard Gregory Cowden and Anna Meyer-Weitz authored "Mental Toughness in South African Competitive Tennis: Personal and Sport Participation Differences". Their study explores the level of mental toughness among South African tennis players, highlighting the importance of personal characteristics and sport involvement in mental toughness development. The findings emphasize the need for tailored interventions to enhance mental toughness in individual

athletes.

Finally, Fernanda Serra de Queiroz, Janaina Lima Fogaca, Stephanie Hanrahan, and Samuel Zizzi co-authored "Sport Psychology in Brazil: Reflections on the Past, Present, and Future of the Field". They provide insights into the development and challenges of sport psychology in Brazil, offering recommendations for future directions. Despite obstacles such as language barriers and accreditation issues, Brazil has the opportunity to leverage sport psychology in promoting athlete well-being and competitive success, especially with the upcoming Olympic Games in Rio.

These contributions offer local perspectives on the state of sport psychology in various regions and demonstrate the unique challenges and opportunities faced by scholars in developing countries. We invite readers to explore these novel approaches and topics, and we extend an open invitation to scholars worldwide to contribute to future special sections, fostering a more inclusive and diverse dialogue within the field of sport and exercise psychology.

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