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Such, E. (2013) Olympic inspiration? Young people, sport and family life. East Asian Sports Thoughts: The International Journal for the Sociology Sport, 3. 159 - 185. ISSN 2221-9358

Olympic Inspiration? Young People, Sport and Family life

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Abstract

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games were considered a resounding success. Legacy, in particular, the promise to 'inspire a generation' formed a key part of the bid for hosting the Games and has dominated subsequent public debate. The current study interrogates this assertion by examining the views, thoughts and experiences of young people four months on from London 2012. Thirteen young people aged 12-18 were interviewed in an exploratory study of the ways in which they made sense of the Games in the context of their everyday lives, in particular in relational, family and peer settings. The findings revealed an awareness of the 'inspire' message and various levels of engagement in it. Most importantly, it showed deep relationality in the way mediated sport was experienced and interpreted, suggesting a family practices and intimacies approach is useful when examining the process rather than the structure of the legacies of sporting mega-events. The paper concludes with a series of theoretical, methodological and sport policy challenges that directly relate to the way family relationships are accounted for in these interconnected spheres.

Key words: Olympics, Family, Young People, Sport, Practice, Intimacies, Mega-Events, London 2012

Introduction

The topic of 'legacy' has dominated London 2012 public debate in the United Kingdom (UK). This stems from an expressed commitment by organisers and government to an infrastructural, sporting and socio-cultural long-term impact of the like no host city has ever pledged to

achieve, nor has attained in practice (Weed *et al*, 2009; McCartney *et al*, 2010; 2013). The ambition is either brave or foolhardy, depending on the perspective and the evidence-boundedness of the beholder. The primary legacy goal was encapsulated in the slogan for the Games, launched within 100 days to the start of competition: 'Inspire a generation'. The slogan became ubiquitous owing to saturation marketing and a seeming wholehearted adoption of the aspiration by competing athletes, the media and the general public alike. Behind the slogan lay a more substantive commitment to a sporting and physical activity legacy for children and young people in the UK and the world (cf. the International Inspiration programme http://www.london2012.com/join-in/education/international-inspiration/). This commitment formed a key part of London's bid to host the Games presented in Singapore in 2005. In the words of Chair of the London 2012 bidding company (Lord Sebastian Coe) at the time: "[we want to] reach young people all around the world and connect them to the inspirational power of the Games so they are inspired to choose sport". The notion of a sporting legacy from the Games found such prominence it became a primary imperative.

The London Games were almost universally praised, certainly from a domestic perspective. The quality of the event itself and the performance of the athletes were key signifiers of a successful Games. It did not take long after the Games, however, for attention to turn to legacy promises and a critique of their resilience. Public discussion turned to how best to ensure enthusiasm for sport was maintained beyond the event. Issues of infrastructure dominated debate: providing for school sport and volunteering networks, conserving playing fields, increasing sport club and coaching capacity all found prominence. Initial research on sports and physical activity participation produced at a national level (England) was promising, showing a substantial increase in participation over and after the period of the Games (DCMS, 2012). Local government also reported a surge in the use of council sporting facilities (Local Government Association, 2012). Taking a more longitudinal approach, recent research has revealed a mixed picture of increasing demand for sport but a fragile funding and volunteer environment (Sport and Recreation Alliance, 2012; 2013).

At this stage of assessing legacy-by-results much emphasis is placed on participation, policy and funding, quite understandably. Also at this juncture, however, lies a significant conceptual, evaluative and analytical gap. It is not an unfamiliar one - the dichotomy of structure and process. While attention is drawn to the social and economic structural legacy, the inseparable and crucial issue of the *processual* legacy remains relatively untouched. This is particularly important when considering the fundamental characteristics of legacy: sustainability. For sporting practices and behaviours to remain sustainable and move beyond any short-term 'Wimbledon', 'festival' or 'demonstration' effect, there must be a fuller understanding and examination of the processes through which 'inspiration' translates or does not translate into (sustainable) action (see Girginov and Hills, 2008, for a useful account of aspects of a processual legacy).

This is where the foolhardiness versus bravery dualism re-appears. Evaluations of all previous Olympic Games points towards no or a negligible-at-best effect of the Games on sport participation (Coalter, 2004; ippr/Demos, 2004; DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002; London Assembly, 2007; Sport and Recreation Alliance, 2013; Weed *et al* 2009; McCartney *et al*, 2010). But as Weed et al (2009) quite rightly report, no other Olympics has explicitly courted the goal of increasing sporting and physical activity participation. They also highlight the commonly held misconception that 'demonstration' encourages existing non-participants to engage in sport essentially in a 'trickle-down' effect, particularly in the long-term. A content and discourse analysis of policy, politician and stakeholder statements broadcast in the media pre- and during the games would be instructive in this regard as the themes of presentation seemed indeed to be premised on observation of supreme athletic achievement leading to participation among the wider population. Considered bodies of research highlight the naivety of this hypothesis (London Assembly, 2007; Weed *et al*, 2009). Weed *et al* (2009) also point to the likely preconditions enabling a more likely sporting, or more broadly, physical activity legacy. In other words, they highlight context and process and challenge accepted popular and seductive orthodoxies about the participation benefits of hosting a sporting mega-event.

The broader sports and physical activity participation literature is helpful in unpicking the social and individual processual factors that

enable, constrain and maintain engagement, although this is not always explicitly linked to the ways in which this may inform mega-event policy and legacy planning. This includes a broad range of academic disciplines with variable foci. Psychological research, for example, informs an understanding of how individuals begin or maintain involvement in sport using theories of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) and the transtheoretical model (Marcus and Simkin, 1994); linked to this, 'interventions' research presents evidence of how to increase individual physical activity engagement (e.g. Baker *et al*, 2011; Biddle and Mutrie, 2008; Shaw *et al* 2011); sociologically-oriented research has done much to theorise and critique the power-dynamics of mega-events and their 'legacies' (Horne, 2007; Dolles and Södermanb, 2008); and, policy-focussed/-applied research has surveyed and addressed participation outcomes and legacy policy directions (e.g. ippr/Demos, 2004; London Assembly, 2007). Little work has focussed on what could be called mid-range practices and processes that link the structural and the individual in physical activity and sporting behaviour, particularly in relation to specific, one-off, culturally (and globally) absorbing events (Roche, 2000) such as the Olympics. The following review of literature and presentation of evidence from a primary study of young people and London 2012 attempts to tentatively address this omission by viewing engagement through the lens of everyday family and personal relational life. This is achieved firstly by scanning the academic terrain and assessing the broad range of research and theory that informs this novel approach. This includes an outline and evaluation of the literature in a rich field of study: that of the 'family practices' and 'personal life' field in the sociology of family life. The second substantive element of discussion relates to evidence retrieved from an explorative study of young people's engagement with London 2012 in the context of their everyday family and peer-related lives. The concluding discussion attempts to draw together these existing works and emerging evidence to suggest future directions for empirical work, theoretical development and policy thinking.

Sport and Family life

There are several strands of research that highlight the link between family life and the sport and physical activity of children and young people. The literature is not, however, as extensive and theoretically developed as one might think, particularly given the criticality of family life to almost every aspect of children and young people's embodied worlds. Research in the social science of sport and leisure are particularly useful in unpicking of the ways in which family life enables the sporting activity children and young people. It is notable that there is a less developed literature on constraints beyond the highlighting of particular socio-structural correlates such as low income, low parental education levels and poor access to leisure and sporting facilities. Tess Kay's (2000) study of young talented sportsmen and women in the UK noted the very high levels of financial, practical and emotional support provided by family members (notably parents) and some of the effects of this on the internal family dynamic. Kirk *et al*'s (1997a; 1997b) study in Australia also reflected this finding and identified the complex patterns of family scheduling required to enable sports participation among high performers.

'The family' has been described as a crucial 'socialising agent' (Kay, 2000: 152) with regard to sport and in Sharon Wheeler's (2011: 235) terms requires a 'family culture' of sport to increase children's propensities to participate. Extrapolating her analysis Wheeler suggests that 'sporting cultures' are transmitted through families. Borrowing from Bourdieu and building on Birchwood *et al*'s (2008) study, she describes these cultures as 'habituses' - "a set of 'deeply rooted predispositions' that is shaped by their social context and transmitted via socialization in the family" (Wheeler, 2011: 237). She goes on to demonstrate that the parents in her study were goal-orientated in relation to their children's sports participation, "and employed a set of strategies and practices in order to achieve such goals" (Wheeler, 2011: 235). In work with Ken Green, such strategies are reported as relating to a practice of middle-class 'investment' in their children's 'sporting capital' and thus engaging in a process of middle-class social reproduction, a process they see as accelerating over the past 30 years in the UK (Wheeler and Green, 2012).

Psychologically oriented research and physical activity and sport 'interventions' studies have also examined the relationships between family life and child/young person sporting engagement, adding a slightly different dimension to our understanding of the phenomenon. Although largely using the individual as the unit of analysis and often tied to principles of child and talent development, psychologically-oriented studies demonstrate how moderate parental involvement enhances children's enjoyment of and enthusiasm for sport and that parental role-modelling of sporting behaviour further encourages child participation (Power and Woolger, 1994). Parental expectations and espoused values such as achievement, hard work and being active are all identified as correlates of increased physical activity participation among children (Côté, 1999). Biddle *et al*'s (2005) systematic review of correlates of adolescent girls' physical activity identify the supportive of the role of the family in girls' participation but note it as an understudied area and that: "there appear to be no physical activity social support interventions for youth that include family-based methods" (Biddle *et al*, 2005: 429). This clearly limits any multi-disciplinary understanding of the relationship between family dynamics and sporting participation. It also limits the potential for sport event legacy policies to adopt a family orientation with any confidence.

The state of knowledge in this field can be further criticised for focusing largely on elite/higher level perfomers and, by default, middle class children. Child and young person participants at the 'introductory' or 'tester' end of the continuum are far less studied. The family and relational settings in which these children and young people reside are as a consequence poorly understood. More recent theoretical and empirical developments in family studies would also serve to critique a simplistic emphasis on 'socialisation' into sport in the family, highlighting reciprocity, mutuality and negotiated relational intimacy. Similarly, the field of the social study of childhood would also seek to de-emphasise the 'child development' perspective of children and young people and seek to establish the subject as an active agent in the process of engaging (or not) in physical activity and sport rather than as an object engaged in adult-led, linear and staged development. These critiques are interconnected as contemporary child and family studies influenced by sociology have

emerged in parallel and under similar conditions of disciplinary development in the Academy.

Family Practices and Personal Lives

David Morgan (2011a) refers to the shift in family studies as a 'turn' - a refocusing of studies of family life from explorations of the institution of The Family to examinations of 'doing family'. This has been informed by broader sociological theoretical and empirical developments such as the emergence of feminism, ethnomethodology, post-modern thought and the 'autobiographical turn' (Morgan, 2011a). The end result has been a rich vein of theorising and primary research on 'family practices' (Morgan, 1996, 2004, 2011b) namely studies of family life that evince:

- "An attempt to link the perspectives of the observers and the social actors;
- An emphasis on the active or 'doing';
- A sense of the everyday;
- A sense of the regular;
- A sense of fluidity or fuzziness;
- A linking of history and biography" (Morgan, 2011a).

Although catalysed by the work of Morgan, further developments have ensued with additional insights developed on 'personal life' (Smart, 2007; Smart and Neale, 1999) and 'intimacy' (Jamieson, 1998; Gabb, 2010). All of these approaches highlight the interconnectedness of individual experiences and how they are interwoven across the lifecourse (Gabb, 2010). In other words, they adopt a relational perspective. Researchers have sought to establish understandings of the dynamics of relational life in the everyday. This has been approached, in part, because of a recognised shift in patterns of intimacy (Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Jamieson, 1998) and growth in family diversity. Taken as a whole (which would displease some the exponents of the various strands of theory!) the turn in family studies has driven attention towards the manifold ways families are created and recreated by continuous processes of caring and intimate relations. It has effectively "debunked any unitary basis of 'the family'" (Gabb, 2010:16).

While not necessarily adopting the explicit sociological language of these developments, studies of sport and physical activity within the field of social study of sport and leisure have adopted - to greater or lesser extents - the principles and frameworks of the family practices approach. Kay (2000) in the aforementioned study clearly acknowledged the dynamic processes of negotiation of sport in the context of family life and in her study with Ramon Spaaij highlights the cultural specificities of family life and their effect on the sporting activities of individuals targeted for international development sporting programmes (Kay and Spaaij, 2012). Dawn Trussell, Susan Shaw and Don Dawson in a Canadian context have highlighted how sport and leisure is a forum for 'doing family' (Trussell, 2009; Shaw and Dawson 2001, 2003/04). Research on fatherhood identifies the dynamic process of fathers' engagement in 'doing fatherhood' through sport and leisure (Coakley, 2006; Kay, 2009; Harrington, 2006; Jenkins and Lyons, 2006; Such, 2006). Research with dual-earner families highlight how leisure is negotiated dynamically and relationally within families (Such, 2006; 2009). The challenge for sport and leisure research is to more explicitly engage in these contemporary academic debates; debates to which the field can contribute considerably. As a step towards this, the study in question adopts a 'family practices' approach; locating physical activity and sport engagement of young people and families within a broader framework of family practices that are rooted in everyday life.

The Study - Methods

To examine the issue of the Olympic 'inspiration' and relationality, a small, explorative study was established. The primary research aim was to explore the meaning and outcomes of sporting inspiration for young people as a consequence of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games from a relational perspective. To achieve this aim, research questions focused on the extent to which young people were 'inspired' by the Games both in terms of their attitudes and behaviour. Moving on from individual effects, the study then asked if 'inspiration' influenced parents, siblings or friends and if so, how. Young people were also asked about the ways in which inspiration was manifest in their practices and in their relationships with

their friends, peers and family members and what, if any, were the outcomes of any engagement or disengagement from the Games (i.e. action or non-action in terms of physical activity and sport). Finally, and what proved to be more ambitiously, the processes by which action/non-action were negotiated with family and friends were also explored, focussing on the dynamics of parental and peer support.

The study was qualitative in nature, owing to the explorative basis of the topic under question. The young people in the study were accessed through sports clubs in the North West of England and the East of Scotland in the winter of 2012-13, about six months after the summer Olympics. The locations and target group were strategically chosen. Firstly, there has been much criticism that the Olympic legacy reach would extend only to the South East of England. The selection of locations responds to that critique. Secondly, the young people in the study group were mostly casual sports participants; none were elite athletes. This places attention on a much under-researched group and specifically targets a group of young people for whom the 'inspire' message was intended. Finally, the sports clubs accessed were located in low- to mid- areas of social deprivation. Much existing work focuses on young people in middle class families and the current research sought to broaden this remit.

Thirteen young people were interviewed for the research. Interviews were conducted individually, in pairs or in small groups, depending on the preference of the young person. The study group were aged 12-18 years and was mixed in terms of gender (six young women and seven young men). Following recommended protocols and standard ethics procedures (Shaw, C. *et al*, 2011; Social Research Association, 2003), young people aged under 16 had to have the consent of their parents to take part in the research. The informed consent of all participants was sought and the young people in the study group chose their own pseudonyms for the presentation of the work. All interviews were audio recorded in a quiet, private setting, were transcribed in full and analysed with the assistance of the qualitative data management software NVivo 10. Analysis consisted of coding data thematically according to the topics emerging from interviews. Nodes that contained large quantities of data under broad codes such as 'friends' were subject to more focussed coding depending on content (e.g. 'friends -

important or influenced' and 'friends - not influenced or interested'). Connections between categories were made by way of a process of axial coding (e.g. data relating to 'sporty individual' were related to data on 'sporty/non-sporty family') and a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning was adopted.

Preliminary Findings

Analysis of the data revealed a range of responses to London 2012 and the message 'inspire a generation'. Reflecting much work in the social study of childhood, there was not a uniform pattern to how young people consumed and experienced the Games and the relational context within these experiences were interpreted and assigned meaning. If an argument for including children and young people as participants in sport and physical activity research still needs to be made then this finding in itself provides reinforcement. The results presented below highlight different facets of the impact of London 2012 on young people starting with what and how televised sport was consumed during the Games and their different levels of engagement with it. Analysis then moves on to establish young people's understanding of the key legacy promise of the Games: Inspire a Generation. A discussion of the meaning of this idea for young people is presented alongside evidence reporting its influence on individual attitudes and behaviours. A relational setting for the consumption and reaction to the Games is then presented with young people's narratives of how, if at all, the Olympics influenced parents, siblings, other family members and friends. More general discussion about the relationality of sports participation follows, presented in the words of the young participants in the research.

Watching the Games

The young people in the study engaged variably in watching and getting involved in the Games through the media from a very low to a deep level of engagement. Although some reported they did not watch the Games, they still referred to seeing 'snippets' (Jill, aged 12, 5.12.12) and were able to recall certain high-profile events or sports such as the cycling,

swimming or football. Such was the overwhelming coverage of the Games on the main free-to-air broadcasters (BBC for the Olympics and Channel 4 for the Paralympics), this finding is not surprising. This also raised the issue of 'coverage fatigue':

> Well my parents aren't really into it. I think my mum started off liking it but then by the time it had been on all day every day she got a bit bored, a bit ... I talked to her on the phone and she's like ' we're watching the Olympics AGAIN'. I'd say 'was it good?' she was like 'yes it was good but it was on AGAIN'. [laughs] So I think she was getting a bit sick of it. (Jolie, aged 14, 12.12.12).

While this blanket coverage may have been welcomed by a large section of the (sporty?) population, it by no means guaranteed universal applause and has the potential to disengage those for whom sport is of little interest.

Almost all of the young people in the study could recall particular athletes and key events during the Games. The most frequently recalled athletes were British and gold medal winners: the heptathlete Jessica Ennis, the endurance runner Mo Farah (with the celebratory 'MoBot' a particular talking point) and the cyclist Bradley Wiggins being regularly cited examples. Many were track and field athletes but events such as the gymnastics, BMX, rowing, table tennis, badminton, tennis, Paralympic track and field, football, volleyball and swimming were all mentioned. The sprinter Usain Bolt was by far the most remembered of the non-British stars of the Olympics. The opening and closing ceremonies also made a lasting impression on some of the participants along with the torch relay, indicating that not all the recalled aspects of the Olympics were sport-based. The following comment also links the Games to its function as a promoter of national identity and pride:

> The opening ceremony like and the ending ceremony was quite nice cos it showed like how Britain's developed over the years and it makes you think how much you've accomplished so it was like if everyone else can do stuff then why can't we do stuff. So that bit was cool (Jolie, aged 14, 12.12.12)

The young people in the study tended to cite Olympians and Olympic sports to which they had some attachment in a sporting, or on one occasion, a personal connection:

> Interviewer: Do you remember any of the other athletes?
> Goalkeeper (aged 12, 5.12.12): Oh definitely Mo Farah and Jessica Ennis, that was big, big time because I do athletics running and when she was doing the 200 I was thinking I do that, I do that.
> Interviewer: So you said [Mo Farah, why do you remember Mo Farah?]
> Tim (aged 13, 12.12.12) Because I do his kind of running, he's like a good role model, yeah, and I think he did really well winning both of them [10,000m and 5,000m].

This reflects another finding relating to the 'sporty-ness' of the respondent and, from a relational perspective, the respondent's family and in some cases friends. Interest and engagement was undoubtedly higher if the young person took part in sport themselves and if parents were interested in or took part in sport. Reflecting this, many of the interviewees revealed that watching the Olympics was a family-based phenomenon:

> Interviewer: Who would you be watching it [the Olympics] with?
> George (aged 13, 12.12.12): Probably most ⋯ prob ⋯ well more midday to evening everyone would watch it because everyone would be up. But early in the morning my mum and my brother wouldn't be up yet so it was me and my dad like watching things in the morning and then come midday, mainly evening we watched it as a family.

Further illustrating the relational element of watching the Olympics , Laura commented on how she consumed different sports depending on the interest of the co-watcher:

> I was on holiday so while most of the gymnastics was on and I was with my grandparents and my grandma knows one of the gymnasts, who - male gymnasts - who was in the team. So we watched like the whole of the gymnastics bit while I was on holiday and ... didn't really watch that much with my parents 'cos

> they weren't interested in it but I did watch a lot with my grandparents 'cos they were like everything revolved around it (Laura, aged 14, 12.12.12)

Although there is limited evidence as to how young people and families consume mega-sporting events, this finding speaks to evidence in other areas of leisure studies. David Morley's (1986) ground breaking study of family television demonstrated the different roles and functions television had within the family. Chamber's (2012) exploration of the video game console the Wii, reveals how co-playing is a key attribute of the leisure good and is promoted as a way of reinforced positive family-leisure time. Other sports- and physical activity-related studies and research on family holidays highlights the dominant family discourse of 'doing things together as a family' and the high value placed on these activities for family togetherness and bonding (Such, 2006; Trussell, 2009; Shaw and Dawson 2001, 2003/04; Kay, 2009; Thompson et al, 2009; Wheeler, 2011).

The reports provided in the current study, however, were of family practices not parental discourses which have often been demonstrated to be idealised visions of how family ought to be rather than how the everyday messiness of family practices is lived out. As Jacqui Gabb (2010) comments in her discussion of Lynne Jamieson's conceptualisations of intimacy, "there is a complex relationship between stories and lived experiences ⋯ the authentic self and the story of self are often separable" (Gabb, 2010, p.73). This was neatly demonstrated in Thompson's (2009) study of parental physical activity narratives. While highly valued at a conceptual level, "most parents reported their families did little or no physical activity together as a family unit" (Thompson et al, 2009, p.265). Sedentary activities were, however, highlighted as a family activity the most popular of which at a national level is, of course, watching television (Seddon, 2011). Ultimately, engagement in the Games was through TV coverage (although two of the interviewees had attended live Olympic events), was consumed in a family setting and was contingent on the interests of the young person and their family members.

Inspired by the Message?

The young people in the study were generally familiar with the tagline to the Games: Inspire a Generation. Asked about its meaning, the young people in the study largely cited its intent to engage people in sport through the demonstration of Olympic prowess. They also seemed acutely aware that they, as young people, were targets for the message:

> I think it means like inspire younger people to join in sports and even if they're not athletic, then give it a go and, yeah, take part in activities (Oscar, aged 12, 5.12.12)

> They want you to get children into the sport instead of, because there's like lots of technology now, I really think they're trying to get children of their seats and doing all this sport that they see on the telly. And maybe they might become Great Britain or anyone, any other country's top sport athletes (Goalkeeper, aged 12, 5.12.12).
> Interviewer: What do you think they're trying to get across [in the slogan]?
> Jordan (aged 18, 7.12.12): Well for younger kids to take up more sports.
> Interviewer: Yeah, why do you think they want to do that?
> Jordan: Well maybe to keep them off the streets, like if there's people that does make trouble, try and get them into an environment like this [sport club], like this kept most of my friends off the streets as well, so …

Embedded in these responses is an interpretation and understanding of the motivation behind the slogan on behalf of the organisers: to get young people active, to get them away from technology, to get them 'off the streets'. This observation evinces the work of Val Gillies (2011) who comments on the politicisaiton of personal life. Following her argument, the slogan 'inspire a generation' and the meanings inherent can be seen as part of a process of promoting a project of the self that is physically active; of 'competent (future adult) personhood'. Young people are certainly the target of such state-sponsored projectisation because of growing concerns about child obesity and inactivity and the future health risks it implies (cf.

Rich *et al.* 2012; Gillies, 2011). The relevance of young people's understanding of tagline of the Olympics is that, while not necessarily critical, young people are by no means oblivious to the intent of organisers. In George's (aged 13) words: "they want to do the best to inspire young children because technically they always say like we're the future". It is young people's futurity that, from a policy perspective, places a premium on their value as targets for legacy messages.

When extending discussion to the extent to which the respondent themselves felt inspired by the Olympics there tended to be a largely positive response, with some more resounding than others:

> Jordan (aged 13, 12.12.12): [I found it] a little bit inspiring like I wanna start swimming. Georgia (aged 13, 12.12.12): Yeah, I will carry on swimming.

> Oscar (aged 12, 5.12.12): it made me want to play sports a lot more ⋯ Which is why I've started Saturdays badminton and ⋯ I'm just really enjoying sport at the moment.
> Goalkeeper (aged 12, 5.12.12): They inspired me to keep going because you've got to be very fit to do all these sports and at the start I was finding it very difficult and I was thinking, keep going, just imagine if you were, if you could see loads of people watch you on TV doing your favourite sport. So I got fitter and I find it a lot easier now.

Some commented on the impact of the Paralympics on how they felt about their own sport and achievements:

> The Paralympics, I know it's not the Olympics, but the Paralympics as well when ... that sort of like inspired me 'cos it's sort of like well, they've had like disabilities and they've thought 'I want to do it, so I'm going to do it', so nothing's stopped them so like it inspires me to keep trying even if stuff's in the way (Laura, aged 14, 12.12.12).

Again, the least sporty of the study group and those that watched the smallest amount of the Olympics on the television found little to be inspired by the Olympics.

There also seemed to be broader 'inspirational' benefits of the Games beyond the young person. Participants reported noticeable change in some of their friends sporting orientations and practices and sporting activity among other young people since the Olympics:

> Goalkeeper (aged 12, 5.12.12): I've seen loads of children even actually playing tennis and badminton on the streets, which you don't really often see.

> Tom (aged 12, 12.12.12): A lot of people in my class have started doing more sport now. A lot of people have joined the football club, loads of people have joined badminton.
> Paul (aged 18, 7.12.12): Aye, a lot of my friends have started playing football again, some of them stopped for a bit but now they're back playing football.

Others cited parents becoming more active and also parents showing more interest in the sporting lives of their children:

> Well my dad's really sporty because he's always enthusiastic for me to do well and he's always taking me like to my games at Wigan and trying to see me at badminton and everything but ⋯ And my mum, yeah, she's starting to do a lot more because ⋯ It's really inspired us like to do more sport and to think we could be there one day (George, 13, 12.12.12).

> I mean my sister has started badminton on Tuesdays most of the time now because she only like came every four weeks-ish, so she's started coming every week. My mum, we have a dog, so she walks it and she likes going jogging sometimes. ⋯ She does more now. ⋯ Which is bad for if I'm going with her because I can't keep up! (Oscar, 12, 5.12.12)

The inspiration effect in terms of the deeper family dynamic was variously reported. Some cited greater parental support for sporting activity;

> I think my mum and dad were a bit more enthusiastic about me and my brother doing sports now. Like before obviously they were supportive always if we wanted to do something but now like, I don't know how to describe it, like before my mum and dad cos like my brother does a lot of sports, I'm not really sporty but my brother does a lot but they were like saying 'enough's enough' cos they had to take him somewhere like every day and they didn't have time but now they're like making time for things more and they're a bit more enthusiastic about us doing things (Laura, aged 14, 12.12.12).

Others felt a little more discouraged:

> Georgia (aged 13, 12.12.12): My Mum was like, 'Georgia, this is what you can be like if you carry on with a sport'. I was like 'okay' [disbelieving] [everyone laughs]
> Interviewer: What do you ... I mean what's your reaction to that when your mum says ...
> G: Well, cos I used to do swimming and I had to stop and erm I was saying to my mum like 'I wished I'd carried it on' and she went ' well, if you really find something you like and stick to it then someday you'll end up in the Olympics, with like doin whatever you like'.
> Interviewer: Do you think you might ...?
> G: I don't know [laughs]

This highlights the potential danger identified by Hindson *et al.* (1994) that rather than encourage participation, the demonstration of world-class athletic achievement can reduce self-efficacy and thus discourage participation. As Laura (aged 14, 12.12.12) expressed: "I was like, 'wow, I can't do that' basically what I thought about the whole thing it's like 'oh God, I'm rubbish at everything'".

The most interesting insight gained from the young people when asked about the impact of the Olympics in general and 'inspire' message in particular was the relationality of the responses. Mums, dads, brothers, sisters, grandparents, step-siblings and friends - the totality of their intimate

lives - were involved in the interpretation and application of their observations and emotional responses to their own sporting lives and the sporting lives of those around them. This highlights the embodied relationality of sport and physical activity in the lives of young people, an observation to which policy is not blind but could certainly make better use of to improve effectiveness. The young people here were engaged in a dialogic relationship; one which was extended in narrative when the research prompted and probed questions about more general familial engagement in sport and physical activity.

Beyond the Olympics: Personal Life and Relationality at the core of Sporting Engagement

As the literature outlined in earlier sections reveals, the sporting activities of children and young people are strongly attached to the practical and emotional support provided by (usually) parents. This is applicable in particular to children and young people engaged in sport at the more serious and committed end of the participation continuum (Kay, 2000; Wheeler, 2011). The young people in the current study for the most part confirmed this finding.

> Interviewer: And they're [family] interested in your sport?
> George (aged, 13, 12.12.12): Yeah ⋯ [my dad] takes me to all the training and matches ⋯ he's always there when he can, like even if he's working he's always trying to get the day off just to see me My dad influenced me to play football. ⋯ My granddad, he just wants me to stick at it. Sometimes like I can't be bothered but I just go. Because I don't want to chuck it away. (Paul, aged 18, 7.12.12)

> Well they [parents] always take me to training and stuff, like all the time and they just, like Tom said, congratulate you when you win and stuff, and if you lose, they still congratulate you and say like, oh you, what you've done well. (Tim, 13, 12.12.12)

Supporting young people's sport constitutes 'emotion work' (Hochschild, 1979). Parents were often reported as critical cheerleaders and

counsellors that enable on-going participation. In George's (aged 13, 12.12.12) words: "My mum and dad are always there supporting me and it gives you that boost, like if you're not doing well and then they're like cheering your name, it's just like don't give up. ⋯ Carry on, no matter how bad things get". Other family members were also cited as primary influences:

> The Olympics has inspired me but my main inspiration is my grandma. ⋯ She's interested in what I do and she, she's like, I don't know she just really like talks to me about stuff that I could work on and it really helps (Tom, 12, 12.12.12).

Tom's comment highlights one of the key indications of the study that while the Olympics had an immediate and emotional impact of many; the more consistent and important everyday influences were located in their relational or intimate lives. This finding is inextricably linked to the earlier finding that the Olympics was consumed at a relational, familial level. Without this relationality sport was experienced at the periphery of the everyday. Jill (aged 12, 5.12.12) for example was not interested in the Olympics; found what she did see as a bit disappointing; played only occasional and casual sports ("badminton, and that's it"); and, lived in a non-sporty family: "he [dad] never does things like that unless we go on the beach or play a game of footie or something like that". It is little wonder she did not feel 'inspired' and spoke of only individual motivations to play badminton:

> I just thought it myself and thought 'that'd be good'. Because I like to learn something new, because I don't go to any sports club that's why so I thought that'd be nice, I like the sound of it, it sounds really good. And when I first went to it I thought it was amazing so I kept going (Jill, aged 12, 5.12.12).

A relational factor outside of family life that could mitigate against this risk of disengagement lay within the friendship or peer networks of young people. A discussion with largely non-sporty young women with largely non-sporty parents revealed the following:

> Georgia (aged 13, 12.12.12): When you start a sport you have like a few friends at like the club you go to and then like 'cos you go there more often you go you make more friends and then like ... like in my badminton club - Laura will know - there's people like that are loads better than us and like the more friendly you get with them the more you want to be like as good as them so you try and push yourself. Cos my friend Rebecca has been going for 5 years and she's like really good at badminton so I'd like to be like her.
> Interviewer: What do you think Laura?
> Laura (aged 14, 12.12.12): Yeah, when I joined I was, Georgia was already there, erm Georgia was already friends with Rebecca but now that I've gone, I've made friends with Rebecca as well and now because I've got to know her and I've got to know Georgia better as well like it's inspired me to be like more like, cos obviously Rebecca's better so ... be more like her.
> G: If she knew we were having this conversation about her! [Laughs]
> Interviewer: And you said friends too?
> Jordan (aged 13, 12.12.12): Yeah, 'cos it's like if you like all the rest of your friends all go to like a club or something and then you come back after school like the next day to school and they're like talking about how funny it was and like how much fun it was and it's like 'oh, why don't I do it?' so I can, I know what's going on. What all the fuss is about. So you kind of want to join so that you can join in with all the fun and conversation.

This exchange is revealing in that it highlights the centrality of personal relationships outside of family life that encourage engagement. Thompson *et al* (2009) found that in their study the onset of young adulthood signified a time of greater and growing independence among their study group. They suggest that this is a period of reduced parental influence "suggesting that dual parent and friend approaches to increasing physical activity may be particularly effective at this age" (Thompson *et al*, 2009: 271).

Discussion and conclusion

The explorative study described reveals a series of theoretical, methodological and policy insights. The examination of young people's engagement in the Olympics and the 'inspire' message provides interesting conclusions and (inevitably) raises a whole host of additional challenges. Firstly, the young people in the study, who were non-elite participants in sport, revealed that there was a range of involvement in terms of watching the coverage and in terms of being moved by the coverage. While watching the Olympics was perhaps difficult to avoid, it is noteworthy that the 'inspire a generation' message seemed to find its audience and in some way influence attitude and in some cases behaviour. This is impressive from a social marketing perspective; from a sports participation perspective the real test is in the longevity of the attitudinal and behavioural shift. As previous scholarship has revealed, coordinated, long-term behaviour change and social marketing campaigns are required to making a lasting difference to behaviours (e.g. the ParticipACTION campaign in Canada). The question remains if the London 2012 legacy programme is up to the task. Legacy planners of other events such as the Glasgow Commonwealth Games in 2014 (McCartney *et al*, 2013) and the Rio 2016 FIFA World Cup would be wise to pay close attention to issues of process as well as structure in the timeline of legacy outcomes (Reisa *et al*. 2013).

Secondly, it was unsurprising that the 'sportier' young people and their families appeared to be more amenable to the 'inspire' message, imposing what economists would call 'deadweight' on any impact analysis. What was more surprising was the deeply relational way the Olympics was consumed and reflected on. Watching the Olympics on television was a practice that had an embodied and affective element that was a way of 'doing family'. The reports of families cheering on Team GB finalists and then adopting this as a catalyst for reflection on their own sport and physical activity was instructive and provided a tantalising taste of the internal working of family relationships. Insufficient data were achieved, however, to establish the deeper, negotiated and relational processes through which reflections and actions developed, ebbed and flowed. Gabb (2010) wonderfully elucidates the value of a mixed-methods, more 'embedded' approach to family life that

could act as a route to revealing what has been missed in the current study. The methods she proposes would undoubtedly help dig deeper into how mediated sport is consumed within families and how family relationships are formed and reformed through sport and leisure. Such an approach could include observation methods, diaries and deeper, possibly psycho-social approaches to depth interviewing. Combined data in these ways would enable the multidimensionality of intimacies to be interrogated and provide a 'wider angle lens' (Gabb, 2010:185) to relationality in sport and physical activity: one that has been missing in this and many other analyses of sport and leisure in family and intimate contexts.

Thirdly, the current study implies that additional theoretical and policy insights can be gained by scholars and policy makers adopting a more processual/relational approach to sport and physical activity. For example, Coalter (2004) and others have been highly critical of the simplistic 'trickle down' effect espoused in policy and points to an absence of evidence to support such a theory. This study, and the relational approach it adopts, perhaps points to potential 'trickle through and around' effect. The theoretical stance is a precondition to arriving at this tentative conclusion. Sport was conceptualised and revealed to be consumed within a complex and messy range of relationships with family life at its core. Within this network, mediated messages were variously received, discussed, ignored, recognised, interpreted and understood. In some cases it was felt by the young people in the study it was also responded to. It is a clear example of the intersection of the public and private; spheres within which actors practice and re-form both family and sport. The Olympics could be usefully seen as something which crossed the public/private divide - working its way through and around the private or intimate lives of citizens. What cannot be elucidated through the data (owing to limitations of the methodology) are the fine grain processes through which action or non-action was arrived at through relationships. This presents a challenge to the field and to policy.

This exploratory study takes us a little further in our understanding and our approach to examining the legacy promises of sporting mega-events. The concept of relationality and the importance of family adds a hitherto unrecognised dimension in the 'critical pathways' (McCartney *et al.*

2013) of events like the Olympics delivering impacts on individuals, communities and societies. It is perhaps fruitful therefore to continue to push the boundaries of theorising in the family/sport arena and so too the sport policy arena. Whilst warning that the personal lives, family practices and intimacies approach to understanding family life has less popular and political appeal than the 'grand narratives' of, for example, family decline and breakdown, Carol Smart (2007) also highlights the need for family-based research to continue to develop its relevance in public debate by highlighting its intersection with, among others, cultural life. The Olympic Games and sport in general could, of course, be at the centre of such a challenge.

Acknowledgements

The author is extremely grateful for the financial support of the Carnegie Trust and Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh in conducting this research. Thanks also go to Premier League 4 Sport in England, the community sports provider in East Scotland who helped with the research and to Chris Sellar for his assistance in conducting interviews with young people in Scotland. Unlimited gratitude goes to the young people who took time to participate in the research.

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