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Citation:

Didymus, FF and Barnes, JS and Arnold, R (2012) Conference reports: The 13th FEPSAC European Congress of Sport Psychology. *Sport and Exercise Psychology Review*, 8 (1). 66 - 70.

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Conference Reports: The 13th FEPSAC European Congress of Sport Psychology

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About the authors

The authors are second year PhD students in the School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences at Loughborough University. Although the authors have collectively attended a variety of international conferences, this was their first experience of a FEPSAC congress. Under the umbrella of sport and exercise psychology, the authors have varied research interests. Jemima is researching social comparison processes in physical education, Faye is exploring the cognitive and affective aspects of organizational stress in sport performers, whilst Rachel's research focuses on organizational stressors in competitive sport.

Introduction

Sport psychology enthusiasts from around the globe gathered in Madeira, Portugal for the 13th FEPSAC European Congress of Sport Psychology between the 12th and the 17th July 2011. The congress theme "Sport and Exercise Psychology: Human Performance, Well-being and Health" provided researchers with a forum to present their scientific research, whilst offering support to those involved with service provision to both athletes and their associated personnel. The congress programme boasted nine parallel symposium sessions (367 presentations), six poster sessions (384 posters), and five inspiring keynote speeches presented by Professor Sheldon Hanton, Professor Andrew Sparkes, Professor Anne Marte Pensgaard, Professor Elisabeth Rosnet, and Professor Margarida Matos. The poster sessions in particular provided delegates with the opportunity to discuss their research, share knowledge, and reflect on their ideas. With 632 delegates attending from 49 countries, there were ample opportunities to engage with other attendees from Europe and around the world. Exciting additions to the FEPSAC academic programme this year were two pre-congress workshops. These sessions provided those who attended with the opportunity to learn in an informal environment and we hope that interest and attendance at similar activities will continue to develop in the future. Given the variety of research that was presented at the congress and the noteworthy social activities that were available, the task of choosing a few standout sessions to discuss in this review was a challenge! Nevertheless, we have each chosen one of our highlights from the congress, which we will now discuss in turn.

Congress Highlight – Faye F. Didymus

The symposium that I found particularly fascinating was organized by Costas Karageorghis and was entitled "We Will Rock You: The Multifarious Effects of Music in

Exercise and Sport.” This novel session addressed music use in both exercise and sport settings. The first of the four presentations was delivered by Leighton Jones who gave the audience a captivating insight into the effect of music tempo preference on exercise heart rate (HR). Leighton discussed how the relationship between exercise HR and music tempo preference is punctuated by both linear and non-linear features. Leighton encouraged the audience to think about how individual differences and motivation, for example, might be influential in this relationship. A highlight of this presentation was the imminent lines of research, which Leighton discussed with enthusiasm and are testament to the potential of this research area.

Xavier Sanchez then presented his preliminary research on the role of lyrics in music and how they may influence psychophysiological performance outcomes. Xavier discussed the notion of whether music with lyrics is more motivational and/or performance enhancing than the same track without lyrics. Of particular intrigue was whether the presence or absence of a lyrical component manipulated either psychological or physiological outcomes (or both) and if so, the implications of this for applied settings. It was interesting to listen to Xavier extend these discussions to consider whether a musical track would have the same motivational and/or performance enhancing qualities when dubbed in a different language.

The third presentation, delivered by Professor Tony Morris, outlined the different effects of relaxing versus arousing music on imagery rehearsal for dart throwing. This research provided attendees with two novel perspectives; first, the focus on a relatively unique sport and second, the examination of different genres of music and their effect on throwing performance. Tony also discussed the similarities and differences in performance outcomes when comparing the use of familiar and unfamiliar music in auditory imagery rehearsal. It was assuring to see the triangulation of self-report and psychophysiological measures of anxiety and arousal to provide a comprehensive picture of the story being told.

The final paper, presented by Costas, demonstrated the effects of synchronous music on running performance in elite athletes. To complement and extend Tony’s research on relaxing versus arousing music, Costas focussed on motivational music versus music that was neutral in terms of its motivational qualities. A particularly memorable moment in this presentation was when Costas played the Queen favourite “We Will Rock You.” The room came alive with a positive ambience, which was testament to the real-life application of motivational music as a performance aid. On conclusion of the presentations, the floor was opened for questions. Of interest was Costas’ defence of the applied implications of the collective findings. Here he highlighted that sport performers can remember music accurately

(±4 beats per minute) after practising auditory imagery and thus, the laboratory findings presented may have significant implications for the field as further complementary and extending studies are conducted.

To summarize this symposium, the research presented was both novel and intriguing. Taken collectively, the results provide understanding that could be particularly useful when considering musical accompaniment in applied settings. The use of music in sport and exercise settings adds a contemporary component to the traditional toolkit for psychological performance preparations. Bouts of uplifting music sprinkled between captivating speakers kept the audience thoroughly engaged in and excited by scientific research; a momentous achievement for 18:00 – 19:30 on a warm Friday evening in Madeira!

Congress Highlight – Jemima S. Barnes

The session that I found particularly engaging was the “Youth sports participation: What really does matter for them?” symposium. This series of presentations was arranged by Professor Maria João Almeida and delivered by a group of students from the University of Madeira and the University of Minho. Maria opened the symposium highlighting the importance of understanding children’s participation in sport and physical education (PE) so that progress can be made in increasing and sustaining children’s involvement in physical activity.

The first two studies presented in this symposium by Joana Osório and Professor Almeida utilised qualitative methodologies to investigate persistence in youth sports and PE, and parental involvement in children’s experiences of physical activities. Their preliminary results suggested that the quality of a child’s sport experience can influence its persistence in competitive sports and that the importance of the parents’ involvement differs according to the child’s age.

Following these two presentations, Dulce Marques focused on childrens’ motivation and barriers to participating in PE. The two main reasons children gave for not taking part were medical grounds and lack of equipment. Additionally, gender differences were found with boys attending more PE classes, reporting higher levels of motivation, and indicating higher levels of ‘liking’ of PE. Diogo Neves then took to the floor to discuss peer influences in adolescent sport participation. The findings suggested that encouragement from peers was related to higher levels of involvement in sports. More specifically, when friends complimented an individual’s performance in an activity, the adolescent receiving the compliment was more likely to participate regularly in organised sporting activities. Ana Rodrigues finished the presentations offering insight into why adolescents drop out of sports.

Reasons for ceasing participation (e.g. beliefs about the health-related benefits of participating in exercise) differed between participants who were grouped by participation level into athletes, former-athletes, and non-athletes.

The symposium concluded with an interesting discussion about Madeira itself and the collective findings of the research that was presented. This dialogue highlighted the importance of considering the uniqueness of situations, the influence of culture, and how different economic circumstances can affect research. Dulce Marques explained that Funchal, the capital of Madeira, has a higher level of investment than the rest of the island which, in turn, influences the facilities and opportunities for young people to participate in physical activity. This was echoed by Professor Almeida, who explained that there are limited funds available to invest in equipment for schools outside of Funchal, which has created a need to develop school PE programmes with the limited resources that are already available. Increasing levels of physical activity in PE is thought to be particularly important within Madeira, because more than 70% of the participants in Diogo's research reported no participation in physical activity other than in school PE lessons. The importance of the laws surrounding physical activity was also highlighted in this symposium when it became evident that, in order to provide training sessions, coaches in Madeira must be fully qualified. This is in contrast to the UK where unqualified parents can set up and run local sports clubs. Whilst the importance of qualified personnel must not be underestimated, the laws surrounding coaching qualifications do mean that Madeira has less sports clubs and physical activities available to children. Overall, the symposium was a stimulating and thought-provoking experience that underscored the need to consider factors such as laws and economics as well as peers and parents when carrying out research if it is to have applied benefits and implications.

Congress Highlight – Rachel Arnold

The symposium that sparked an interest with me was organized by Professor Mike Weed entitled “Innovation in Method and Theory in Sport and Exercise Psychology: Getting out of the “So What” Quadrant.” The symposium began by outlining the three traditional parts of the research landscape. These are “applied research” (driven by considerations for the application of knowledge), “curiosity-driven research” (driven by an interest in the area), and “user-inspired research” (research which seeks to develop new knowledge, but with an eye to its potential use). The presentation then unearthed the opposite to user-inspired research, which was suggested to be named a “so what?” quadrant that typically tells us nothing new and has limited implications. The presenters took it in turn to explore the extent to which

innovation in method and theory in this area is sufficient to lift research out of the “so what?” quadrant.

First to reflect on this question was Brett Smith who discussed the extent to which methodological innovation in qualitative research in sport and exercise is adequate to generate new knowledge. Of particular interest here was the advice provided by Brett in his conclusion, that as researchers we cannot ignore innovation since the discipline, research grants, and high quality journals all depend upon it. That said, Brett also acknowledged that we cannot just discard conventional methods. Instead, he encouraged researchers to use their imagination and take risks in order to develop a methodological toolbox that will enable the creation of new knowledge through qualitative research.

Taking a more specific look at the field of exercise psychology, Professor Martin Hagger was next to take the floor, exploring if theoretical integration in motivational theory is leading to more user-relevant knowledge. Martin argued that by reducing redundancy and eliminating gaps in theories, researchers can increase theoretical parsimony to ultimately generate a more effective understanding of exercise behaviour. This advance in theoretical integration will not only make knowledge more relevant for users, but can also inform interventions that aim to produce clinically-significant changes in exercise behaviour and adherence. It was interesting in this presentation to see Martin’s application of these ideas, when he suggested how the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Self Determination Theory could be integrated to provide complementary explanations of exercise behaviour.

To conclude the symposium, Mike Weed discussed how researchers need to make theory more clear and comprehensible to policy makers if they want sport psychology work to be relevant to wider fields. He began by discussing how some aspects of various models and theories (e.g. the transtheoretical model of behavioural change) have gained currency among policy makers when examining the process of sport engagement. However, Mike advised that many of these models and theories are incomplete as total explanations of sport engagement since they do not consider certain factors (e.g. barriers). To overcome this issue, Mike outlined some innovative translation research that brings together theories of motivation with barriers research to develop a comprehensive and complete model of sport engagement, that is also simple and intuitive enough to be adopted by policymakers and fully escape the “so what?” quadrant.

Iain Greenlees closed the symposium by initially channelling discussions between the audience and the researchers and then introducing his amusing and entertaining highlights from a previous search of “the most pointless research” website. This concluded the

symposium on a light-hearted note; a fitting way to close out a session on a sunny north-Atlantic island!

Closing Thoughts

The 13th FEPSAC European Congress of Sport Psychology was an invaluable experience for us and other sport psychology researchers and practitioners worldwide. In the closing ceremony, Fransisco Fernandes (Regional Secretary of Education and Culture) encouraged delegates to see Madeira for more than Cristiano Ronaldo and the infamous wine that is offered on the island! Personally, we will remember Madeira for the fantastic scientific and social experience that was FEPSAC 2011; a week that will be fixed in our memories for many years to come. The success of the congress is testament to the congress manger Nelson Teixeira, the organizers, the management council, and all attendees. A distinguished mention must also be given to the superb team of students and lecturers from the University of Madeira who ensured that delegates were welcomed and that the congress ran to time. It is clear, both by the 800+ abstracts that were received for the congress and the strong sport and exercise psychology community in attendance, that this field of research is flourishing. As a result, in the closing ceremony Paul Wylleman (FEPSAC President) discussed a potential “thematic” FEPSAC congress in 2013, alongside the traditional quadrennial FEPSAC Congress (to be next held in 2015). It is with great enthusiasm and renewed excitement that we say we hope to see you there!

Each author contributed equally to this report.