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Abstract

This study examines the factors that can be associated with social justice advocacy in the field of sport and explains why the activists get involved in the social justice advocacy. The authors implemented a phenomenological research approach, interviewing 12 active social justice activists. In drawing from Moeschberger et al.’s model for awareness and engagement (Moeschberger et al., 2006), the authors suggest a congruent definition of social justice advocacy, explain how the participants learned about social injustice (direct experience, indirect experience, and indirect contact), identified three major themes (Increased awareness, atypical experience, and emotional response) for the involvement in social justice advocacy, and describe what activities the participants get engaged in (Raising Awareness and Changing Attitude, Engaging in Activity, and Encouraging Others). The results of this study provide more in-depth understanding of social justice advocacy in the field of sport.
Introduction

Individuals continue to face numerous social injustices on the personal, group, institutional, and societal levels (Rothenberg, 2007). This is why many people desire that more emphasis to be placed on social justice (Pitkin, 1981). In fact, over the past several decades, scholars from various fields including economics, education, law, philosophy, psychology, social work, and sociology have paid increased attention to social justice (Cohen, 1986; Miller et al., 2009). Moreover, as globalization has dramatically influenced society, people now need to socialize, execute their work and live with the diverse individuals that are encountered daily. Therefore, it is not surprising that many scholars and practitioners have realized that there is a need for promoting diversity and social justice, focusing on equity, and social change (Sleeter, 1996).

Unfortunately, there are still many different types of injustices in this society, and there is no exception for the field of sports. Sports have reflected and reinforced various hegemonies of oppression and inequality in our society such as racial, gender, sexual
orientation, and social class prejudices (Eitzen & Sage, 2009). Those prejudices and inequalities have negative influences on sport as a whole. Many empirical studies have supported that there are still numerous inequalities and prejudices in the context of sport, such as injustices on race (Hylton, 2009; Singer, 2005), gender (Schmitt, Ellemers, Branscombe, 2003; Acosta & Carpenter, 2014), sexual orientation (Thomas, 2013; Cunningham, Sartore, & McCullough, 2010), social status (Greenya, 2013), politics (Douglas, 2012) and money (Parker, 2012).

Moreover, this pattern of inequality has stimulated many researchers and athletes to realize that social change effort within their field of interest is critical. In responses, many athletes have used their positions of fame and popularity to ask their fans to get involved in social justice advocacy. Now, it is not difficult to see athletes and scholars deeply committed to social justice advocacy in the field of sport. Most recently, San Francisco’s starting quarterback, Colin Kaepernick, refused to stand during the national anthem to protest the racial discrimination in the United States (Cooky, 2017). His protests received tremendous attentions from media and other football players and precipitated a discussion in the United States about athlete activism, nationalism, and the role of athletes in sports. Along with Colin Kaepernick, even Michael Jordan recently published an article for The Undefeated. He indicated that he can no longer stay silent against shootings of African Americans and the targeted retaliatory shootings of police officers (Jordan, 2016). Michael Jordan, without a doubt, is considered as the greatest basketball player of all time and his voice can have huge impact on people.

These social justice advocates have influenced our society and changed social injustices. Given that it is crucial to understand why such individuals get engaged in
social justice advocacy and how we can encourage more people to commit to social change and participate into social justice advocacy. However, the factors that influence one’s attitude toward social justice advocacy have not been fully examined. Therefore, by understanding those social justice activists’ experience, how they first got engaged in social justice advocacy, and what factors encouraged them to tackle social issues, we could understand ways to inspire more people to get engaged in social justice advocacy. Thus, the purpose of this study was to describe the psychological processes associated with activists’ interest in and commitment to social justice and why they get involved in social justice advocacy.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Social Justice Advocacy and Activism**

According to Toporek and Williams (2006), social justice bears the implication that the spreading of advantages be fair and equitable to all people, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability and appearance, social class, or religious beliefs. The notion of social justice can be extended into almost all of the contexts of society and life. Generally, social justice endeavors to ensure that opportunities are distributed fairly to as broad a group of people as possible. Once disparity of opportunity is recognized, people become committed to change social injustices and ensure equity in order to correct the perceived lack (Toporek & Williams, 2006).

Although society has undergone great strides towards mitigating social injustices, many scholars from various fields reported that social injustice continues to exist (Benn, Pfister, & Jawad, 2011; Grossman, 2014). Also, Tatum (1997) identified the seven categories of underrepresented groups, including race/ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual
orientation, socioeconomic status, age, and physical/mental ability. Underrepresented groups may experience mistreatment, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence, although the degree and form of these aspects of oppression may differ across different groups (Young, 1990). In the context of sports, Frey and Eizen (1991) argued that mainstream sport reflects and reinforces dominant hegemonies of oppression and inequality such as racial, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, and other social prejudices. These inequalities and prejudices are quite harmful to sport and generate many negative effects on various aspects of sports.

As a result, many researchers and athletes realized that social change effort within their fields of interest is necessary. Therefore, many social justice advocates attempt to eliminate social injustices and try to achieve justice in the society. Individuals may take on the role of activists in a variety of ways. Some begin through small involvement, such as helping with a street stall or attending a public meeting. Gradually, they become more engaged over the years, becoming regular participants or even full-time activists. In fact, the term activism and advocacy are often used interchangeably, and they overlap. But, they also have different meanings. An activist is a person who makes an international action to bring about social or political change. In the field of sports, an athlete activist can be defined as an amateur or professional athlete’s practices that promote progressive social change. One of the great examples would be Nancy Hogshead-Makar. She is a former competition swimmer who represented the United States at the 1984 Summer Olympic. She is also a life-long advocate for access and equality in athletics and is an internationally recognized legal expert on sports issues. Like Nancy, there are numerous social justice activists in the field of sport. Their efforts have impacted our society and
community and have tackled many social issues. Whereas an advocate is one who speaks on behalf of another person or group. Indeed, advocacy can be considered as something that is done by or on behalf of the oppressed people in an effort to win concessions from a dominant group (Bundon & Clarke, 2015). One of great examples is Peter Roby who has been advocating on behalf of people who are less fortunate. Therefore, it is crucial to understand why such individuals, both advocates and activists are interested in and engaged in promoting social change in order to encourage and inspire others to become involved and create an injustice-free society. Moreover, we argue that social justice advocates may define social justice advocacy differently. Thus, the first research question guiding this examination is:

**RQ1:** How do activists define social justice advocacy?

**A Model for Awareness and Engagement**

In this study, we were interested in describing the psychological processes associated with activists’ interest in and commitment to social justice and the reasons why they get involved in social justice advocacy. In order to achieve this, we draw from Moeschberger and his colleagues’ model for awareness and engagement (Moeschberger et al., 2006). They identified movement through four components. These four components were: (a) contact with a reality of oppression in which one group abuses the power it wields over another group and conflict results as an outcome of the oppression; (b) increasing awareness, formulating an efficacy to create change, and understanding the role oneself holds in relation to this change; (c) developing a deeper understanding of the historical and social contexts in the situation; and (d) actively engaging and participating in the processes necessary for change. Also, Moeschberger et al. (2006) indicated that the
components of the model were not linear in nature and rather than an individual experiencing awareness and engagement to facilitate social change in a progression, the components continually interact with each other influencing the decisions an individual makes.

The first factor in Moeschberger et al.’s (2006) model is contact, which may be either direct or indirect, with a situation deemed to be unjust. In other words, individuals may learn about the injustice through direct experience or through listening to another person’s experience, hear a news report about an incident of racism, or have a friend who has been passed up for a promotion at work because of her or his gender. Others may experience such injustices firsthand. The sheer amount of injustice and conflict in the world is overwhelming and it can easily cause individuals to feel powerless to react once they have been made aware of them. Therefore, it is crucial to understand social justice activists’ first contact with injustices. As such, the second research question guiding the examination is:

**RQ2:** How do activists learn about social justice?

The second factor in the model is the increased awareness. Once individuals learn about the social issue, their awareness could be increased (Moeschberger et al., 2006). Increased awareness can be accomplished in a variety of ways. The most common way for awareness to take root is usually via an encounter with a social situation that is deemed unjust or unfair. Some kind of personal investment is felt during this encounter meaning that the victim of this injustice was either the person in question or someone he/she cares about. Because of the emotional connection, the injustice cannot be ignored. Also, the individual’s motivation can be lifted by an optimistic sense that change is
possible, that engagement in working towards the change is worthwhile, and that involvement makes sense from a certain standpoint, such as personal or cultural beliefs regarding what is considered fair, regardless of the amount of social pressure against working towards such change (Corner, Warren, Close, & Sparks, 1999). Furthermore, the chance of engagement in working towards social justice increases if an individual feels a sense of responsibility for being part of a society that has been allowing the injustice to persist (Zelezny, Chua, & Aldrich, 2000). In addition, individuals who recognize and understand their own abilities and resources will feel a greater sense of empowerment, which allows them to contribute towards social causes (Fetterman, 2001).

Following an individual’s contact with an issue of injustice, the next step is often the search for understanding from a historical and/or cultural context regarding the origins of the injustice. Contexts are the key to understanding the dynamics of a situation where there is conflict or oppression. An individual or group may choose to partake in behavior that appears on the outside to be self-defeating, counterproductive, or even incomprehensible in nature. Rather than providing such negative labels to such behavior, it is important to conceptualize the person or group in context, identifying the underlying structural sources and differentiating them from individual sources of the problem. Therefore, the third research question is:

**RQ3:** How do activists get involved in social justice advocacy?

The final piece of the model proposed by Moeschberger and his colleagues (Moeschberger, 2006) involves identifying and engaging in participation. Current and former athletes and scholars have been involved in social justice advocacy in many different fashions. This can be accomplished through enhancing their knowledge and
ability to cooperate with others while actively changing the targeted injustice to a just situation. The end result of this process is that members of oppressed groups gain greater control and influence over their present and future circumstances (Martin-Baro, Aron, & Corne, 1994). Thus, the fourth research question guiding this investigation is:

**RQ4:** What activities advocates are involved?

**Method**

**Research Design and Setting**

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that can be associated with social justice advocacy in sports and therefore, using the purposeful sampling approach is appropriate to achieve the goal, as Morse insisted (1991). It is crucial to select samples deliberately in the initial stages of the study. Since this study is aimed at examining why and how individuals engage in social justice advocacy in sports, we selected potential interviewees purposefully.

According to Patton (1990), all types of sampling in qualitative research may be encompassed under the broad term of “purposeful sampling.” He argues that “qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases, selected purposefully” (p. 169). Patton (1990) laid out fifteen strategies to assist in selecting cases. The strategies suggest researchers to purposefully select their samples that best fit the study at hand. Among fifteen strategies, we specifically implemented snowball or chain sampling to gather names of potential participants who could provide rich information. Especially, in regard to social justice advocacy, selecting active social justice activists within field of sport would allow the participants to share their experience, thoughts, and strategies. These participants were subsequently asked to recommend other activists for
this study. In this manner, we were able to include potential participants who were endorsed by their peers. Therefore, snowball or chain purposeful sampling was appropriate in this setting.

**Participants**

For this study, 35 social justice activists in the field of sport (e.g., Eli Wolff, Lawrence Cann, Nancy Hogshead-Maker, and so on) or scholars studying the sport industry (e.g., Mary Hums, Pat Griffin, Richard Lapchick, Ellen Staurowsky, and so on), were purposefully selected and asked to participate in interviews for this study. Of this sampling frame, 12 activists agreed to take part in this study and were willing to share their experiences (see Table 1). These participants were subsequently questioned as to what factors influenced their social justice advocacy and the reasons behind their becoming involved in social justice efforts. The activists discussed their own experiences in their own words and offered some unexpected data.

**Procedures and Data Sources**

First, the interview guide was developed to capture the participants’ attitude and experiences in regard to social justice engagement in the field of sports. Specifically, based on the theoretical framework, we developed an interview guide consisting of questions regarding social justice advocacy.

The initial contact of all of the potential participants was accomplished via email. In that first email, the selected activists were informed of the nature of the study and asked if they would consider in participating. Additionally, with subsequent approval from Human Subjects Review Board, they were asked if they would allow researchers to use their own name on our study. If they replied with an affirmative answer, we
determined a mutually agreeable time and date to conduct the interview over the telephone and email. Admittedly, there are some immediate drawbacks to interviewing by phone and email as non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions and body language, cannot be observed by the interviewer. However, they also can be free-flowing and enriching as well as practical. The phone interviews were semi-structured, and the participants were free to speak as much as they liked on any one question. These conversations were digitally recorded and then transcribed in their entirety. All the interviews were approximately twenty to thirty minutes in length, depending on the individual.

Moreover, a few participants were interviewed via email exchange. In fact, research has shown that an asynchronous email exchange encourages participants to discover and revisit their visions into their developing professional identities, allowing them to move back and forth through their narratives, thinking about their responses, drafting and redrafting what they want to write (Mann & Stewart, 2000).

Also, in order to have a better understanding of the participants, their backgrounds and their areas of interest, a document analysis was conducted. This allowed the researcher to know more about their previous achievements.

**Data Analysis**

Following the first interview, the analysis of the data commenced. This was accomplished in the following manner. We first re-listened to the interview to gain some first impressions and initial thoughts. Then the interview was slowly transcribed verbatim. The transcript was carefully read, and doing so provided further thoughts...
concerning the interview. This process enabled researchers to become familiar with the
details of the responses provided by the participants.

In order to locate the themes for this research, open coding was used. According
to Schwandt (2001), open coding is “a procedure that disaggregates the data, breaks it
down into manageable segments, and identifies or names those segments” (p. 26). This
was accomplished by pouring over the details of the transcripts, interview notes and
supplemental information revealed by the search and analysis of documents of the
participants work. We then used to research questions as guides to come up with general
themes, which were then broken up into more concrete concepts. If themes were similar
and could not be used alone, they were combined in a process known as axial coding
which relates initial themes to one another (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The resulting list of
themes will be elaborated on in the Results section where quotations of note will serve as
credence. This method of reporting the results is known as selective coding as defined by

**Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline four ideals that serve to illustrate the
trustworthiness of a study. These ideals are credibility, confirmability, transferability, and
dependability. In order to ensure the first ideal of the four, a researcher may have to do a
triangulation of the data and undergo peer debriefing, and member checking (Lincoln &
Guba, 1985). In this study, triangulation was accomplished by interviewing not only
scholars, but current and former athletes. Moreover, while interviewing the participants,
we reiterated their response to make sure we understood correctly as a member checking
and once the transcription was complete, we sent the transcript to the participants to
confirm their responses were correctly transcribed. Next, in order to ensure dependability, we detailed the methods and procedures section and asked third-party individuals to serve as auditors for this study. Then, in order to carry out confirmability, we kept a reflexive journal to understand my perspectives and opinions after each interview. Finally, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability can be achieved by providing a thick, rich description of the research setting and thus researchers can carry out similar studies in different settings. Therefore, in order to satisfy this notion, we provided detailed information about the research procedure and settings.

Findings

Definition of Social Justice Advocacy

First, we asked participants to define the word, ‘social justice advocacy’ with their own words and two major themes were identified. The first theme emerged was the Social Conscience, which is a sense of reasonability or concern for the injustices and social problems. Courtney Szto believed that social justice advocacy is a responsibility that individuals need to try to make a better world and Ellen Staurowsky defined social justice advocacy as follows:

Social justice activism means that if there is something that someone is inspired to change something. If they believe that there’s something that is unfair or something that negatively impacts others in a way that is unjust.

The other theme identified was the Champions of a Cause, which was related to the activists’ engagement in advocacy for people who are unable to stand up and speak for themselves. Activists such as Peter Roby, Richard Lapchick, and Nancy Hogshead-Maker, consider social justice activism as an action for underrepresented individuals who do not have power or voice. Peter Roby noted that:
Trying to do whatever you can, whether it is in your professional life or your personal life to undo some of those injustices and advocate for people who may be feeling the effects of inequality in some way.

His statement was similar to former Olympian medalist, Nancy Hogshead-Makar’s idea, which she expressed in the following way:

*Social justice activism means speaking truth to power for those that cannot speak for themselves. It means not just pointing out the problem, but holding decision-makers accountable. It means risk.*

Given that, social justice can be defined based on the two themes that emerged in the study, *the Social Conscience and the Champions of a Cause*. We can define social justice activism as “advocating for people without power or voice, while also cognizing a sense of responsibility to combat the problems and injustices of society.”

**Learning about Social Justice**

The first research question was how the activists learned about the injustice, which inspired them to become activists in the first place. According to Moeschberger et al.’s model for awareness and engagement (Moeschberger et al., 2006), one of the four factors is a contact with injustice. However, the contact does not need to be direct contact. In this study, three themes were identified: *Direct Experience, Indirect Experience and Indirect Contact*. Most of the participants indicated that they have experienced unjust and unfair treatment based on their race, gender, and sexual orientation at early in their lives.

**Direct Experience**

Peter Roby realized that injustices exist in the world based on race when he was young and that his parents also strongly influenced aspects of that realization. He explained:
So, I guess being an African-American male, I think you are just more automatically sensitized to those issues in society because they impact you, maybe more personally.

Along with Peter Roby, many other activists experienced injustice based on race, ability, sexual orientation, and gender. Eli went on to say:

*I was able to see the differences in the disparities and what little support and infrastructure was available for athletes with disabilities. So that was sort of a social justice issue that I first got interested in.*

*Indirect Experience*

Other participants, including Richard Lapchick, indirectly experienced injustice in society. One of the social justice activists, Richard Lapchick, was strongly influenced by and learned from his father. Other participants also mentioned that family members, co-workers, friends, and environment had a strong influence on them when it came to shaping their awareness of injustice issues in this society. The following is from Richard Lapchick’s experience:

*My earliest memories as a child were of people displaying their unhappiness with my father and there had been hateful ways because he had signed the first Black player in the history of the NBA in the 1950. So, I saw many people reacting negatively to him.*

While family is important, the experiences of friends and co-workers can also provide the inspiration and provocation for a person to become an activist. Mary Hums had a heartbreaking episode that shaped her advocacy. She had a colleague who was one of her coaches and they used to ride a bike together. One day, they went for a ride and unfortunately, there was a huge accident and her coach was hit by a truck. As a result, her coach was severely disabled for the next 20 years of her life. Thus, Mary Hums got engaged in social justice advocacy for people with disability.
While direct and indirect experiences could easily be separated and categorized, most of the participants indicated that they have experienced both indirectly and directly. The findings are consistent with Moeschberger et al.’s (2006) model in that contact played an essential part in developing awareness of social injustices. We also recognized that there was evidence of indirect contact, meaning that they learned about the injustice issues without having any direct or indirect experience. Spencer Wood was influenced by someone involved in advocacy, showing that raising awareness and encouraging others is a crucial part in creating new activists. Spencer went on to say that:

*When I was a sophomore, an older guy on our team was involved in male athlete against violence... I was interested so I talked to him about it a little bit and then from there he recommended that I send in my application to replace him the following year.*

Thus, just as direct contact with injustice could prompt people to be socially active, so too do instances of indirect contact.

**Involvement in Social Justice Advocacy**

The next research question focused on understanding how activists got involved in social justice advocacy. Three major themes were identified, *Increased Awareness, Atypical Experience,* and *Emotional Response.* Importantly, we found two more factors that expand Moedschberger et al.’s (2006) model.

*Increased Awareness*

When activists experienced and/or learned injustice in our society, they increased their own awareness of the injustice to have a deeper understanding of the issue, understand their role in the issue, formulate an efficacy to create change, and become motivated to engage in the activity. Peter Roby provided an example of how some activists become educated on an issue by stating that he received training to become more
knowledgeable regarding issues that were influencing diversity and conflict resolutions. Along with Peter Roby, Tyler Spencer, Mary Hums, and Spencer Wood indicated that they educated themselves.

Other activists also started to get involved in ways that went beyond just educating themselves. They became motivated to formulate efficacy to social change, understanding their responsibilities to do so. Pat Griffin shared her first experience addressing a wider audience on the change she hoped to see:

*I started getting braver and I wanted to have a bigger platform to effect sports in a much broader way. I know that the first time I spoke out publicly about homophobia and sports and women sports in particular, was in 1981 at a conference in D.C. It was very controversial and viewed a pretty crazy thing to do, because no one was talking and using the word lesbian in public in relationship to woman sports...*

While activists endeavored to make a change on social injustices, they often find themselves encountered with great challenges and difficulties. Ellen Staurowsky and other activists explained that they suffered for a cause. Ellen Saurowsky narrated:

*I was also very fortunate because I never did lose my job. I do know of other women who have and who were kind of so threatened that they just stopped speaking up.*

Not all activists confronted threats to their life, property, or livelihood, but nonetheless may find themselves facing criticism. Along with Spencer Wood, Courtney Szto was criticized for using soccer to assist and provide opportunities for children living in poverty in Africa. Courtney Szto said:

*Explaining to people how sport could be used as a tool for development was difficult and often drew criticism like, “these kids don’t have food or water but we’ll give them soccer? Or “why go to Africa and help when people need help here?”*
However, not all reactions to activists are criticism. Courtney Szto stated that she has received recognition for her writing on social media sites. In addition, Eli Wolff indicated that he received a lot of support as he stated:

*I would say people have been generally supportive, especially on issues of inclusion. You know, trying to gain more access and more opportunities for people with disabilities and other things around this sport development. Social change in sports, human rights. Mostly, I’ve been supportive of a lot that.*

**Atypical Experience**

In addition to the *increased awareness*, other participants spoke of atypical experiences - a theme beyond that of Moeschberger et al.’s (2006) model. Although we realized that the atypical experience could have raised their awareness of the issue, the experiences are unique in and of themselves. Mary Hums’ atypical experience led her to see the efficacy of sport and physical activity for people with disabilities. As she noted:

*I saw how sport played a role in and how sport helped her become sort of as complete a person as she could be given that she was severely disabled. Just little things like playing catch with a soccer ball or into a pool. So, I saw first-hand, what sport can do for persons with the disability.*

This atypical experience led Mary Hums down a path that has become her lifelong work where she advocates the rights of physically challenged athletes. Along with Mary Hums, other activists also indicated that unusual experiences led them to become lifelong activists fighting against social injustices that people encounter.

**Emotional Reaction**

Next, we found the importance of emotions in determining what created the desire to get involved in advocacy and social change. A strong emotional connection or reaction must be involved in one’s advocacy. Newspapers and other various media are full of events. These may evoke a surge of pity or momentary feelings of outrage, but without a
strong emotional connection, they are not likely to encourage anyone to take an action to make a difference. Pat Griffin used negative emotions as a motivation to fight for the cause of LGBT individuals. She relayed:

*There was a singer named Anita Bryant who was very popular and very outspoken against gay people having non-discrimination rights and so on and I can remember that was a real spur for me it really made me want to be more active in doing something to ensure that lesbians and gay men would have more rights and in particularly in sports because that was my area*

In short, we identified three factors, increased awareness, atypical experience, and emotional reaction, to explore how activists got engaged in social justice advocacy. This finding expand Moeschberger et al’s (2006) model by adding two other factors, atypical experience and emotional reaction.

**Social Justice Activities**

Research question 3 understands what activities participants are engaged. In fact, many social justice activists have engaged in social justice advocacy in many different ways. Some work as individuals while others work for an organization. The activities they are engaged can manifest in different manners. We found that activists raise awareness and change negative attitudes, engage in various activities, and/or encourage others to get involved in social justice advocacy.

*Raising Awareness and Changing Attitudes*

Most of the participants stated that they raised awareness of injustice and tried to change the prevalent attitudes of society on the issues that they felt to be unjust. Some activists working at a university taught classes and gave lectures on the issues in various settings, while other wrote about the issues in printed and online forums. Mary Hums was
one who highlighted the importance of media in providing inspirational role models in sports that could help enact social change. Mary Hums stated:

*It's representing a person with the disability of someone to be pitied as opposed to someone who is meant to be admired for athletic ability. So, that's the kind of a discussion that we're currently trying to frame with conventional media outlets. The feel good stories are nice. But, but what methods are they portraying, as opposed to portraying an athlete with the disability as an athlete, first? So, those are okay, I could probably go on.*

Moreover, Courtney Szto has taken advantage of the popularity of social media as a tool to educate the younger generations. She has been using her blog and other online media to highlight social justice issues. She noted:

*Earlier this year, I created a social media site/account called Offside Plays. It is inspired by the Everydaysexism initiative that tries to expose the prevalent nature of sexism and harassment. It is mostly used to highlight instances of racism, sexism, homophobia and/or other forms of discrimination in sport, physical activity, and health but what I would like it to be is more of a story-sharing platform similar to Everydaysexism.*

It is essential for an activist to find a way to raise public awareness about an injustice and to change the attitudes of society. Whether it is via the media, online forms, classrooms, or simply word of mouth, the activists have taken actions to change the pervasive attitudes and behaviors, creating more just words.

**Engaging in Activity**

All of the activists were excited to share their work with the authors. This could be considered an extension of their desire to raise awareness. Agreeing to the interviews and participating in this study was another way for the activists to spread the word about social problems and the actions they undertook to change the issue. In fact, all of the participants have been engaged in activities in various ways. Peter Roby, for instance, discussed his activity:
I have agreed to serve as the Co-Chair of the White Ribbon Day Campaign here in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts again this year. So the White Ribbon Day campaign is an initiative to engage men in the discussion and the solution around the violence against women. Where men are asked to take pledge to do all they can to not provoke, allow, or support any issues or efforts that would result in violence against women. My goal this year is to galvanize this community here at North-Eastern, but also to engage any other players in the world of sport here in the Commonwealth to join me in raising our voice on behalf of eliminating that violence against women.

All of the activists work hard to bring about changes through a variety of means that goes beyond simply raising awareness in others. Raising awareness and engaging in activity to stimulate social change were two of the three factors that emerged in this study.

Encouraging Others

The participants engaged in social justice advocacy by addressing the issues and encouraging others to get involved fighting against injustices. In fact, all of the participants indicated that they encourage other people to get involved in their activism and start different projects to change social problems. Eli Wolff stated that he actively tries to motivate the younger generations to get engaged in the activity:

So, I think, for me I've also been getting more interested in like innovation and (you know), new kind of advocacy innovation projects. So you know, part of my interest, longer term how young people and sort of incubate their ideas and kind of like that next generation of advocates and activists

Along with Eli Wolff, Spencer Wood and Peter Roby also highlight that they use different ways to encourage many other people to get involved in the activity to change the world. Other activists also spoke of how they encouraged others to be involved. Ellen Staurowsky focuses on students, encouraging them to “feel like they are difference-makers”. Blake Skjellerup also works with young people, empowering them to be more involved. He stated:
I encourage others to be involved with making the world a safer and more positive place for LGBT teens to grow up in. By using my voice and actions, I encourage others to be proud and positive in who they are, and to let that be the message.

Encouraging others to make a difference is one of the best ways to gather more like-minded people who in turn will work towards change. As more people become aware of injustice issues, raise awareness among others, and advocate for social change, we expect to live in a society where social injustice issues no longer exist.

In drawing from Moeschberger et al.’s model for awareness and engagement (Moeschberger et al., 2006), we were able to define social justice (RQ1), explore how activists learn about social injustices (RQ2), how activists got involved in social justice advocacy (RQ3), and what activities they are engaged in (RQ4).

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that can be associated with social justice advocacy in the context of sport and describe the psychological processes associated with individuals’ interest in social justice advocacy. Although there are many articles, examining social justice issues, there was no congruent definition of social justice advocacy. Using participants’ narratives, we were able to develop a definition of the term. Social justice advocacy can be defined as “advocating for people without power or voice, while also recognizing a sense of responsibility to combat the problems and injustices of society.”

Next, we asked a question to understand how they had learned about the issue with, which they are involved. We identified three factors, direct experience, indirect experience, and indirect contact. Most of the participants indicated that they were influenced by events directly or/and indirectly experienced themselves, but also were
impacted by the indirect contact with injustice. In fact, all of the activists were inspired to
take actions based upon either directly or indirectly experiencing the injustice or having a
friend, relative, or co-worker who was either affected by the injustice or was in the field
already working to combat the social problems.

In addition, we discovered other factors that motivate the activists and what
courage them to get engaged in social justice advocacy. Three factors were identified,
including increased awareness, atypical experience, and emotional responses. We
expanded Moeschberger et al’s (2006) model by adding two more factors. By
understanding the influential factors, we can use them to encourage others to shake off
apathy about injustice and get involved in social justice advocacy.

Then, we identified three factors, raising awareness and changing attitude,
engaging in activity, and encouraging others, to answer what kind of activities the
participants were involved in and how they became engaged in those activities. Although
these three major factors were emerged, activities they are engaged in were quite varied.
All of the participants understood their role in combating social injustice. In fact, we
interviewed 12 activists from various fields in sport. Not all of them had the same field of
interest. Their areas of interests include ability, gender, social class, race, and sexual
orientation issues. The work they were engaged in was clearly impacted by their
experience, either direct or indirect. This is consistent with Moescherger et al’s model
for awareness and engagement (Moeschberger et al., 2006).

Finally, engaging in social change can be very challenging because it can be
sometimes very controversial and others can threaten advocates for doing this. Some of
our participants were considered as academic-activists and they could have lost their academic jobs because they were actively engaged in social change. As Ellen noted:

...I brought it up and there was a lot of pressure around that because there were concerns that I might get fired because I would not stop bringing it up until things changed.

Given that researchers and advocates have fought against social justice issues even though they were threatened to lose their jobs.

**Contribution, Limitation, and Future Direction**

When it comes to contributions, we interviewed 12 activists from diverse fields in sport. Most of the research focusing on social justice activism concentrates on one specific issue, area, or activists who engage in similar injustice issues. However, in this study, we interviewed activists from different fields, including former and current athletes and scholars. Those activists have varied interests when it came to injustice issues and endeavored to mitigate inequalities in such areas as race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and social class. Therefore, we are confident that the results provide more generalized understanding of social justice advocacy in the field of sport. Despite the fact that all the participants interviewed were related to the field of sport, it can also be extrapolated that the results found in this study can be applied to other fields as well.

Moreover, interviewing very active scholar advocates in the field of management and former and current Olympic athletes can provide a better understanding of social justice advocacy in the sport field. Their experience and activities can strengthen our field because many young scholars and athletes would be influenced by them. This can encourage many sport management scholars and students to pay more attention to social justice advocacy and the benefits of engaging in social change. Therefore, we believe that
the contributions from this study can provide activists with the tools needed in encouraging others to get involved in social justice advocacy.

Although this study revealed why social justice activists got involved in the social change, there are some limitations that may have had an effect on the findings. First, we consider the number of participants as a limitation for this study. Although we reached out to 35 potential participants, there were only 12 agreed to take part in the interview section of the research. We believe if we were able to interview more activists, our results could have been more strong and generalizable.

Most of the interviews in this study were conducted via telephone with three being done solely by email. These two methods of gathering the narratives have the same limitation. They made it impossible for a researcher to see their facial expressions and body language that could reveal additional, unintentional information that might provide further clues as to the participants’ internal feelings. Contact only through email exchange has the additional limitation of only being the written word. The researchers could not notice any laughter or sighs which could also provide clues to how the speaker feels. Furthermore, in the case of email, the participant has a chance to edit themselves. This could change what they say to merely what they want to project (Mann & Stewart, 2000). Although this study has some limitations as we admit above, these limits can open up future research avenues. In addition, we believe that finding the psychological and environmental factors that are associated with one’s social justice advocacy can be a great tool for researchers and advocates who wish to understand the topic of social justice advocacy in the field of sport.
Given the findings from this study, there are a lot of future research avenues for researchers. First, a future researcher can extend this study by interviewing more people from the fields of activism that we did not include such as religious beliefs and nationalism. We believe that interviewing more diverse activists would strengthen our results and the social justice literature.

In addition to interviewing more individuals, a participatory action research approach (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) could also provide more in-depth understanding of how people started and why people continue to get involved in social justice advocacy. A researcher can collaborate with the well-known activists and actually get involved in and spend time with them. By doing so, she or he can understand from their own perspectives and learn others better.

Moreover, in drawing from the awareness and engagement model (Moeschberger et al., 2006), we conducted phenomenological study. Hence, it is also possible that future research use the quantitative research methods to understand many other individuals’ awareness of social injustice and involvement in advocacy. It is also very important to understand how to encourage many others to get involved in social justice advocacy. Specifically, quantitative researcher methods can be implemented to determine whether participants feel the urge to become engaged in social justice advocacy. It would be a great way to determine and rank in terms of importance which factors influence the participants most when they are pondering getting involved in social justice advocacy. Therefore, conducting quantitative research can extend this tremendously.

Taking all of these possible avenues of research into consideration, this study opens up numerous possibilities for future research. Researchers can draw upon this as
the basis to begin their own studies for the factors that inspire and individual to become involved in social justice advocacy.

References


