

MORAL DISENGAGEMENT AND SPORTS MEGA-EVENTS

1

1 **Abstract**

2 Human Rights issues such as freedom of speech, equality and displacement are repeatedly
3 connected with the hosting of sports mega-events. Governments and event organisers require
4 public backing to ensure these events remain sustainable; this study provides an explanation as to
5 how the general population continue to provide this support in spite of these concerns through
6 the framework of Bandura's (1991) social cognitive theory of moral agency. Four focus groups
7 consisting of 18 individuals who had attended a sports mega-event were carried out using a semi-
8 structured format, covering the topics of freedom, protection, access, equality and ability.
9 Subsequently, the data were analysed deductively using definitions of the mechanisms of moral
10 disengagement (Bandura, 1991). The findings provide preliminary evidence of moral
11 disengagement in members of the public who support sports mega-events. Implications for
12 Human Rights organisations and other key stakeholders are discussed.

13 **Keywords**

14 Moral disengagement, Human Rights, mega-events, Olympics, FIFA

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1 **Human Rights and sports mega-events: The role of moral disengagement in spectators**

2 Horne (2015) identified six Sports Mega Events (SMEs) as: the Summer Olympic Games, the
3 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup, the UEFA European
4 Championships, the Winter Olympic Games, the Commonwealth Games and the Pan-American
5 Games. Horne (2007: 82) stated that SMEs can have "...significant consequences for the host
6 city, region or nation" providing the opportunity for communication with billions of people as
7 they "...attract considerable media coverage." Although there is great scope for SMEs to have a
8 positive legacy, there is also the potential for them to be associated with negative consequences.
9 Numerous studies have highlighted the Human Rights (HR) issues associated with hosting SMEs
10 (for example, Brackenridge, Rhind, & Palmer-Felgate, 2015; Giulianotti & Klauser, 2010;
11 Horne, 2007; Lenskyj, 1996, 2004, 2008, 2012; Rowe, 2012; Smith, 2009). There has been
12 widespread reporting of these HR issues in connection with both previous and forthcoming
13 SMEs (for example, the 2018 and 2022 World Cups in Russia and Qatar respectively, Human
14 Rights Watch, 2015; Jones, 2015). Event organisers have also been criticised for their handling
15 of HR issues (Associated Press, 2014; Jennings, 2011). Despite the widely acknowledged
16 concerns connected with SMEs, public backing for these events endures. The purpose of this
17 study is to find evidence of moral disengagement (MD) in those who support SMEs. This will
18 provide a crucial first explanation for what is a cornerstone of the continued growth of SMEs and
19 the increasing financial prosperity of their governing bodies and sponsors. In addition, it shall
20 inform future MD research in connection with HR issues.**Human Rights and Sports Mega**
21 **Events**

22 Adams and Piekarz (2015) divided the HR issues associated with SMEs into five
23 categories derived from the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR):

1 freedom, protection, access, equality and ability. Freedom concerns issues such as media
2 restrictions; for example, the “Olympic Bubble” (Horne, 2007, p. 89; Lenskyj, 1996, 2004, 2008,
3 2012; Schausteck de Almeida, Bolsmann, Marchi Júnior, & De Souza, 2015). This concept
4 suggests that through flooding the host nation with positive rhetoric and by placing restrictions
5 on the use of certain phrases (such as, “Olympics” or “gold”) SME organisers not only ensure
6 maximisation of profits for sponsors at a cost to local businesses but also create an environment
7 of censorship, restricting criticism of the event. This classification also addresses the
8 compromising of individuals’ rights to protest, which was noted in connection with the Beijing
9 Olympics, where an application was required for this right, which came at great personal risk and
10 it was restricted to specified “zones” (Giulianotti & Klauser, 2010). Similarly it was highlighted
11 around the London 2012 Games, where protests were geographically marginalised (Giulianotti,
12 Armstrong, Hales, & Hobbs, 2015) or barred, including the long-standing anti-war protests in
13 Parliament Square (Bowcott, 2012). Given the contrasting influences of sport, the media,
14 sponsors, politics and security on those managing sports events (Emery, 2010) there are
15 logistical, financial, branding and governmental agendas to be satisfied. One area where this
16 dynamic may impact is freedom.

17 The widely reported issue of human displacement is covered under protection (Adams &
18 Piekarz, 2015). The Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) compiled figures for
19 numerous SMEs and revealed that, amongst others, 720,000 people were forcibly evicted from
20 their homes ahead of the 1988 Seoul Olympics and 1.25m individuals were displaced before the
21 2008 Beijing Olympics (COHRE, 2007). The frequency with which this matter arises is detailed
22 by Porter, Jaconelli, Cheyne, Eby and Wagenaar (2009) who claim, “Displacement is a defining
23 feature of the mega-event” (p. 395) in their research on the 2012 London Olympics and the 2014

1 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. This theme also concerns human trafficking for the
2 purposes of prostitution, street crime or begging, which is the subject of specialised control
3 measures before SMEs (for example, London Councils & GLA Consulting, 2011) and has been
4 highlighted for both adult and child populations (Adams & Piekarz, 2015; Brackenridge et al.,
5 2015).

6 The theme of access relates to the right to the presumption of innocence within an
7 impartial legal system (Adams & Piekarz, 2015). This was evidenced in Brazil, with authorities
8 bypassing the legal system, using extreme force to “pacify” favelas (shanty towns) in host cities
9 ahead of the 2014 World Cup (Amnesty International, 2014; Steel, 2014). COHRE (2007) also
10 noted this issue, reporting on the criminalisation of specific groups ahead of a number of SMEs.
11 One instance was the issuing of 9,000 arrest warrants for homeless individuals ahead of the 1996
12 Atlanta Olympics.

13 The fourth theme is that of equality (Adams & Piekarz, 2015). COHRE (2007) note that
14 consistently, minority groups and those from poorer socio-economic backgrounds are affected by
15 SMEs. Recent examples include indigenous Muslims ahead of the Beijing Olympics (Giulianotti
16 & Klauser, 2010) and those affected by the changes in the Brazilian favelas (Steel, 2014). Horne
17 (2007) comments on the tendency to promote values held by the middle-classes, such as the
18 leisure and business opportunities that accompany SMEs, as being beneficial for the general
19 population, when actually this ignores swathes of poorer people. Lenskyj (2008) exemplifies
20 this by noting that developments in and around Olympic sites inflate property prices and rents
21 which excludes those on lower incomes, breaking up communities. Smith (2009) explains that
22 SMEs “...may exacerbate urban social divisions, rather than heal them. The potential for

1 negative social consequences is now so well recognised that those representing the rights of
2 citizens are now seeking related assurances before events are even awarded” (p. 112).

3 These preceding themes relate to the fifth, that of the ability to maintain physical, social
4 and psychological well-being (Adams & Piekarz, 2015). SMEs affect numerous populations in
5 various ways, impacting on well-being. Given the Olympic charter sets out that Olympism
6 respects fundamental ethical principles and should be enjoyed without discrimination
7 (International Olympic Committee (IOC), 2014) and FIFA claims the World Cup tackles
8 discrimination and promotes equality (FIFA, 2014), the impact of SMEs on well-being is an
9 important human rights issue.

10 SMEs have therefore been associated with a range of human rights issues. However, the
11 public continue to support them through attendance, purchasing merchandise and watching on
12 television. Public backing also means that governments still desire to host SMEs and investors
13 and sponsors prosper from them through increased revenue, positive image and branding (Horne,
14 2007). There is little empirical research or theoretical basis explaining how they are accepted by
15 the supportive masses. Moral disengagement, as proposed by Bandura (1991), provides a
16 possible explanation for this behaviour and forms the theoretical framework for this investigation
17 into how SMEs are allowed to prosper in spite of stark reasons for the opposite

18 **Moral Disengagement (MD)**

19 Fiske (2004) defines MD as a process of convincing the self that ethical standards do not
20 apply to oneself in a particular context by separating moral reactions from inhumane conduct and
21 disabling the mechanism of self-condemnation. Firstly, the HR concerns that are outlined above
22 represent the inhumane conduct; secondly, the moral reaction to this conduct would be to
23 withhold backing for the SME or support the dissenting voices concerned with these issues and

1 thirdly, the disabling of self-condemnation comes in the form of MD allowing oneself to support
2 the SME in whichever form that may be.

3 The social cognitive theory of moral agency (Bandura, 1991) proposes that individuals'
4 behaviour is directed by the affectations that it will bring, actions that induce feelings of self-
5 worth and satisfaction are preferred to those that bring self-reproach. These emotional responses
6 are governed by the personal standards of right and wrong that have been developed by the
7 individual. Behaviour is evaluated against the situational circumstances and the individual's
8 values and regulated accordingly. As suggested by Bandura (1999), such sanctions are only
9 applied if they are activated. He proposed eight psychosocial mechanisms that are employed in
10 order to avoid self-sanctioning, allowing behaviour contradicting personal morals to occur
11 (Bandura, 1999); these are outlined in table 1.

12 Through the use of both qualitative and quantitative methodology, MD has been found in
13 broad-ranging areas, including: social behaviours, such as bullying (Pozzoli, Gini, & Vieno,
14 2012), aggression (Gini, Pozzoli, & Hymel, 2014; Li, Nie & Boardley, 2014) and meat eating
15 (Bastian, Loughnan, Haslam, & Radke, 2012), in corporations (Moore, 2008; Moore, Detert,
16 Treviño, Baker, & Mayer, 2012; White, Bandura, & Bero, 2009) and in atrocities and the military
17 (Bandura, 1999; McAlister, Bandura, & Owen, 2006). In a sporting context, it has been found in
18 relation to performance-enhancing drugs (Boardley, Grix, & Dewar, 2014; Boardley, Grix, &
19 Harkin, 2015) and aggression (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2010).

20 The rationale for the current research is that there is a gap in the literature explaining why
21 the public continue to support SMEs despite the widespread concerns connected with them and
22 that MD can provide this explanation. Examples are present in the literature which support this
23 argument. The public have been reported to use phraseology and themes entwined with the

1 rhetoric commonly espoused by organisers and sponsors (Lenskyj, 1996, 2004, 2008, 2012;
2 Schausteck de Almeida et al., 2015) which may suggest moral justification. Infrastructure
3 developments associated with SMEs, requiring the displacement of local people, are almost
4 universally described as “regeneration” (Olds, 1996). This suggests euphemistic labelling that
5 could be for the benefit of organisers, workers or the public. Waitt (2003) investigated public
6 opinion of the Sydney Olympics. Numerous controversies were reported, including inaccurate
7 public expenditure budgeting (Booth & Tatz, 1996), exorbitant costs (US\$1.3 billion), widely
8 reported corruption (Burroughs, 1999) and HR violations (Beder, 2000). Marketing themes
9 including international recognition, business opportunities and community spirit (Gratton &
10 Henry, 2001) were regarded as the biggest positives; however, expressions of what they were
11 exactly or how they manifest themselves were vague. Despite this, the Games were widely
12 supported and viewed as having both social and financial benefits, being seen as “fair” and
13 “inexpensive” (Waitt, 2003). . Literature on the management of SMEs aligns with such findings;
14 Smith (2014) notes that the “leveraging” of such events through tied-in initiatives based on
15 political strategies including increasing employment, sport participation, tourism and urban
16 development can create a concept of legacy without any real tangible benefit. These examples
17 suggest both moral justification and distortion of consequences are at play when considering the
18 effects of SMEs.

19 Furthermore, the former FIFA president Sepp Blatter, who when probed on the poor
20 working conditions for those building stadia for the World Cup in Qatar, which has claimed lives,
21 suggested FIFA held no responsibility for this, instead simply saying of the companies carrying
22 out the work, “they are responsible for their workers” (Associated Press, 2014). This

1 displacement of responsibility from the head of such a global sport, demonstrates MD that could
2 be reflected on a broader scale.

3 Recently, Greenhalgh, Watt and Schutte (2015) found MD applicable in a HR context, in
4 their study on endorsement for Australian asylum seeker policies. Pertinently, this work was the
5 first to find MD amongst people who did not personally carry out the actions but instead
6 supported the policies through their political standpoint or voting patterns. Thus, it is reasonable
7 to suggest that it could occur in the public who support SMEs through watching, attending or
8 purchasing associated merchandise, which would provide further evidence for this initial finding
9 and in a different context.

10 The literature highlights the number and variety of HR issues connected to SMEs and the
11 importance of public backing for those organising the event. Despite the extensive research
12 pertaining to these HR concerns, there is a lack of investigation as to why the public continue to
13 make these events sustainable through their support despite the associated consequences, leading
14 to a perpetuation of these issues. This study aims to add an important new dimension to the large
15 body of literature detailing HR issues and SMEs by offering an explanation for the continued
16 public support they, and consequently their organisers, receive in the face of evidence to suggest
17 this is unwarranted(Adams & Piekarz, 2015).

18 **Research Question**

19 It has been demonstrated that Bandura's (1991) social cognitive theory of moral agency
20 could provide an account for the backing of SMEs by the general population; therefore this
21 study, based upon the five HR themes drawn up by Adams and Piekarz (2015), investigated
22 whether there was evidence of the presence of MD in members of the public who support SMEs.

23

1 **Method**

2 **Participants**

3 Participants were selected based on the relevance of the topic, public support of SMEs, and
4 homogeneity eliciting the richest data (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999; Krueger, 1994; Richardson &
5 Rabiee, 2001). Consequently, to participate, individuals were required to have attended a SME
6 and at the time of that SME have been a London resident, in full-time employment and aged
7 between 18 and 30. Although divergent samples allow greater generalisability (Mason, 2002),
8 the novel nature of this study requires uniformity so findings can be drawn more confidently
9 relating to the population before comparisons are made to other samples (Jones, Brown, &
10 Holloway, 2012). This methodological approach was also utilised by Waitt (2003) in a study that
11 included Sydney residents. The participants in Waitt's (2003) study were recruited through
12 snowball sampling, an approach that supports increased homogeneity (Browne, 2005). The use
13 of social networks encourages pre-acquainted groups, which helps foster an atmosphere where
14 sensitive topics are discussed more readily (Browne, 2005; Kitzinger, 1995; Krueger & Casey,
15 2000). Consequently, 18 individuals were recruited (12 male, 6 female), aged between 27 and 33
16 ($M = 30.1$, $SD = 1.8$), of whom, 14 had attended one SME, three had attended two SMEs and
17 one had attended four SMEs. The events experienced by those taking part were the London 2012
18 Olympics and/or Paralympics (17 participants), a World Cup abroad (four participants), the
19 Glasgow Commonwealth Games (one participant) and a European Football Championships
20 abroad (one participant).

21 **Procedure**

22 Ethical approval was gained from the University's Ethics Committee prior to data collection.
23 Suggestions for the ideal focus group size range from three to twenty members (Krueger, 1994;

1 Morgan, 1997; Tang & Davis, 1995). Given the sensitive nature of the topics and the possibility
2 of larger groups becoming aggressive and inconsiderate (Tang & Davis, 1995), it was decided
3 that the groups would fall towards the lower end of the scale, numbering between three and six
4 participants. Consistent with Krueger's (1994) guidelines, after a pilot study was carried out, ,
5 further sessions were run until clear patterns in the data emerged and saturation occurred.
6 Following assessment and feedback, the pilot study resulted in a slight adaptation of the
7 interview guide to include further examples of HR issues and greater probing of individual's
8 views of their roles in the support of SMEs. Overall the feedback resulted in a smaller number
9 of interview questions. The process resulted in four focus groups being held, lasting between 40
10 and 60 minutes.

11 Each individual taking part received an information sheet detailing the purpose of the
12 study, the topics to be covered, their right to withdraw, the availability of their scripts after the
13 session and their confidentiality. Subsequently any questions were answered and each signed a
14 consent form.

15 Locations were chosen for their convenience for participants, with the majority taking
16 place in the home of one of those taking part. Attendees were informed of the location, together
17 with directions and timings. Each location provided a comfortable, quiet and private setting free
18 from interruption and distraction, as recommended by Kitzinger and Barbour (1995), with
19 seating arranged appropriately and light refreshments supplied.

20 The groups convened fifteen to twenty minutes ahead of the scheduled start time,
21 allowing group members who were unacquainted a chance to meet and talk ahead of the session.
22 Through conveying that the lead researcher himself had attended an SME on more than one
23 occasion and with understanding, positive body language and eye contact (Krueger & Casey,

1 2000), the aim was that participants would feel comfortable in relating how they felt regarding
2 support for SMEs and the associated sensitive topics. Conversely, it was also recognised that
3 although the lead researcher's personal experience with SMEs would enable the participants to
4 feel at ease, it should not allow a presumption of parallels between himself and others that could
5 create a bias or leading questions, in line with the self-awareness and reflection that increases
6 credence in qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Given that focus group members
7 conveyed their views unprompted and freely it was felt that an environment aligning with these
8 criteria was created.

9 Focus group sessions were recorded using the Smart Voice Recorder mobile application
10 (SmartMob, 2015) and followed a semi-structured format, allowing the lead researcher to cover
11 each area but with enough flexibility to probe lines of enquiry deemed important and produce
12 rich data (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1995; Mason, 2002).. A debrief followed each session, ensuring
13 all questions were answered and any comments regarding the data collection process were noted.

14

15 **Instruments**

16 The interview guide followed the five themes of HR issues connected with SMEs as described
17 by Adams and Piekarz (2015): freedom, protection, access, equality and ability, with each
18 defined for clarity. In order to aid discussion, examples were given for each and views were
19 sought; for example, under the access theme it was asked, "Ahead of the 2014 World Cup,
20 Brazilian authorities bypassed the legal system and used extreme force to 'pacify' some favelas
21 (shanty towns) and drug gangs around numerous cities. Is this acceptable? Why / Why not?"

22 **Data Analysis**

1 Each session was transcribed verbatim with participants' names pseudonymised. This was done
2 at the first opportunity to maximise accuracy and closeness to the data, ensuring an audit trail
3 could be formed (Boyatzis, 1998). Participants were also given the opportunity to assess the data
4 for its accuracy with regards to wording as well as context (Holloway & Brown, 2012). After
5 reading and re-reading the transcripts, the social cognitive theory of moral agency (Bandura,
6 1991) formed the framework of the deductive content analysis; previous theoretical research
7 dictates that this method is appropriate (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Initially, the transcripts were
8 reviewed separately by the authors, allowing any discrepancies in thematic interpretation to be
9 highlighted, discussed and addressed. Following procedures advised by Polit and Beck (2004)
10 after this immersion in the data it was then coded by the lead author on a line-by-line basis
11 according to applicability, or otherwise, to the categories (the eight detailed in the Manual for
12 Coding Modes of Moral Disengagement by Bandura (2006)) and a model was created. In order
13 to maintain consistency and reliability throughout the process of analysis, further meetings
14 between the authors were held allowing for collaboration of ideas as well as detection and
15 prevention of any potential bias (Shenton, 2004). Throughout the process a reflective diary was
16 kept by the lead researcher noting thoughts on the focus group sessions, emerging themes and the
17 overall procedure, heightening self-awareness and credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

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Results

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Evidence was found for the use of seven of the eight mechanisms of MD in members of the public who had supported SMEs: moral justification, advantageous comparison, distortion of consequences, euphemistic labelling, displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility and attribution of blame. These manifested themselves in various ways as displayed in Table 2.

1 **Moral Justification**

2 The most common mechanism, moral justification, was used in two contexts. Firstly, in an
3 overall sense, to offer ways in which SMEs as a whole create benefits for populations, justifying
4 support for them and secondly, to justify HR issues connected with SMEs. The former was often
5 conveyed in a general manner, both for SMEs held locally and abroad. P7 said this of London:
6 "...a lot of people probably got something out of the Olympics that hopefully they'll be able to
7 take on and pass on." and P4 detailed:

8
9 I think people should want to have the Olympics or the World Cup in their
10 country because I think they can be a force for good and it can be quite inspiring
11 to have it happening in your country and it's a showcase for the country as well.

12
13 The second context revealed perceived benefits of specific HR issues; for example it was
14 used to combat conflict regarding the human displacement. P9 demonstrated this when talking
15 about those affected by it: "...they would be in places with new housing, which is better than
16 where they were before, so you kind of hope that there's always a benefit." Similarly P17 noted
17 "...the joys of organising an Olympics in a Western democracy is that everyone who would have
18 lost their house to compulsory purchase would have been wonderfully compensated, you know,
19 recompensed in accordance with...fairness and justice." It was also found in relation to the
20 bypassing of legal procedures in pacifying the Brazilian favelas, P13 argued: "I think there was a
21 positive side for a hell of a lot of people in the favelas...who had their lives controlled or
22 blighted by the...by the drugs gangs." These cases illustrate how this mechanism allows
23 individuals to highlight real or perceived positives resulting from SMEs that enable acceptance

1 of other detrimental consequences. This was summed up through P7 discussing their support for
2 SMEs, admitting: “You paint a better picture in your head than reality.”

3 **Advantageous Comparison**

4 Support for the use of advantageous comparison was found in two circumstances; primarily in
5 relation to participants’ support of the 2012 Olympics through comparison with other SMEs and
6 secondarily to provide beneficial contrasts for SME related HR issues. For the first of these,
7 contrasts were typically drawn between the Games held in England and events held in China,
8 Brazil or Russia, with examples covering broad views, such as P14 contending: “do I know that
9 the London Olympics was....the benefits outweigh the costs? No, but I’m pretty sure that erm,
10 the ratio is better than somewhere, somewhere, like Sochi” and P7 explaining: “in Brazil there
11 were riots and things, literally...about why it shouldn’t be held there....there wasn’t the
12 depravity in the UK that Brazil had.” This included views on how they would deal with specific
13 HR issues; for instance, on the right to protest, P5 commented: “I tend to think that the country
14 are going to take harder lines, in terms of the way they police them...and I imagine China was a
15 lot worse than it was forthe UK.” It is worth noting that although this context frequently
16 arose, it was not accompanied by a tendency to boycott support for events held in other
17 countries.

18 The second manifestation of advantageous comparison saw rationalisation for the
19 consequences of HR concerns. This was exemplified by P8, when commenting on displacement
20 caused by development around the London Olympic Park: “...can’t believe that there are too
21 many infrastructure projects that...err...cause absolutely no chaos to anyone anywhere.” This
22 demonstrates how participants justified their actions by creating positive comparisons making
23 them appear more benign.

1 **Minimising, Denying or Distorting of Consequences**

2 The third mechanism found in explaining support for SMEs was minimising, denying or
3 distorting of consequences, which was common in two contexts, when discussing the HR effects
4 of hosting SMEs and when justifying the costs of such events. The first manifestation often
5 concerned development in Olympic areas, including human displacement and the subsequent
6 effect that higher rents and desirability have on locals with lower incomes. Again, this arose
7 regularly when discussing London 2012, primarily through viewing these issues as part of
8 something that was already taking place. This was exemplified by P12: “it was certainly
9 something that was happening anyway and is happening in other areas of London that aren’t
10 Stratford”, P2: “I mean it would have happened anyway, given the overall picture in London”
11 and P4 also commented:

12 ...gentrification means that poor people who live in the area will struggle to afford to live
13 there and the Olympics is a vehicle that has increased all of those things in a short space of time
14 than would otherwise have been the case but...yeah...the underlying problems.....problem still
15 exists whether the Olympics happen or not...

16 The second manifestation was again found mainly in connection with the London
17 Olympics, with financial consequences of hosting the Games seen as minimal as the money
18 would not have been used constructively. Regardless, P7 commented: “I mean what else would
19 they have done with that money....frittered it away probably on something else” and P3 voiced
20 similar beliefs about cost: “...wasn’t so much of an issue because, I mean this country has a bit
21 of a history of...of chucking money away on things.” P1 also demonstrated the belief that the
22 Olympic expenditure would have had little difference on core social issues:

1 nine billion pounds sounds like a huge amount of money, the government's total
2 budget is absolutely massive... like I said earlier, it could easily have gone on any
3 number of things...I don't think, in...in all the things they're committed to doing
4 in terms of education and health just had to carry on and y'know, that's dependent
5 on a lot of different things...I wouldn't have said here that it would have actively
6 affected those things.

7 **Euphemistic Language**

8 There was also evidence found of euphemistic language. In line with the work of Olds (1998)
9 this was connected to the building of SME infrastructure, often happening at the cost of human
10 displacement. On this theme, P18 noted: "...London is a better place for it and I think the
11 rejuvenation and that, was a good thing" and P16 used the phrase "You clear out the old for the
12 new...". Encapsulating the most frequently used term, P7 pointed out the Games "...regenerated
13 East London massively so..." The phrase "regeneration" was widely expressed by participants
14 in relation to the displacement issues connected to SMEs.

15 **Displacement of Responsibility**

16 Displacement of responsibility was a further mechanism that commonly arose. In the case of
17 public support this was done in three ways, firstly by placing responsibility for HR concerns
18 related to SMEs with governments rather than the sport, secondly by placing responsibility for
19 changing and supporting SMEs and their organising bodies with other agents and thirdly by
20 maintaining intentional ignorance. The initial context arose with various HR issues; for example,
21 the right to protest, with P8 noting: "I don't know if I would hold the Games
22 accountable....things like that....like that's going to be a government thing...maybe it is
23 a...slightly ignorant, head in the sand kind of approach" and P10 suggesting: "...I tend to hold

1 the...the Chinese government more to account for that than the Olympics...in my head...whether
2 that's...whether I'm right to do that, I don't know..."

3 With regards to the second form of displacement of responsibility, concerning support for
4 organisations such as FIFA and the IOC and their SMEs, displacement often occurred through
5 placing accountability for this with other bodies and governments. P14 commented: "I think
6 really it's up to countries and big sporting organisations to make a stand before the event...rather
7 than you know going to English, German, French fans and saying, 'well, are you going to watch
8 the World Cup?'" The third theme of this mechanism, the concept of wilful ignorance, allows
9 individuals to minimise cognitive dissonance relating to support for SMEs; P13 acknowledged
10 this:

11 They have extremely popular products in the Olympics and the World Cup and so
12 people probably, to an extent, are willing to, maybe, not find out as much as they
13 would if they were less popular or they just ignore it and that's why it keeps going
14 on.

15 Furthermore, when discussing the possibility of a World Cup being hosted in England in the near
16 future, these feelings were conveyed by P7: "I think I would just bury my head in the sand and
17 hope it was going to get reformed in a few years and go to the (World Cup) games." This
18 process demonstrates the workings of this mechanism and how it absolves the individual of
19 responsibility.

20 **Diffusion of Responsibility**

21 When participants considered their own role in supporting SMEs they demonstrated evidence of
22 diffusion of responsibility. P14's views display the perceived lack of personal accountability
23 concerning this subject: "...there's not much you can do as an individual, I mean you can boycott

1 it but is it really going to make any difference?” Similarly, the option of inaction was explained
2 by P8: “if I felt it would do anything I would happily not watch any of the events happening on
3 TV” and P6:

4 something as big as the Olympics, I know it’s really pessimistic but it’s gonna go
5 ahead regardless, well you know, unless there’s a huge mass...or...maybe that is
6 pessimistic...but with something as big as that, the government make so much
7 money, what sort of say does you or a small group of you have?

8 This demonstrates the nature of the diffusion of responsibility felt amongst a significant number
9 of the participants, in particular with regards to SMEs held in foreign countries where HR
10 concerns were seen as greater, as noted in the advantageous comparison category.

11 **Distribution of Blame**

12 Support was also found for attribution of blame, which centred around individuals’ behaviour
13 being blamed for harmful effects that occur for them; for example, P2 considered the pacification
14 of the Brazilian favelas: “I don’t know how else they could do it, if not...if not to instil
15 fear...cos, otherwise it’s not gonna get...be respected and then the rules aren’t gonna be
16 followed.” Similarly, restrictions on protests were justified by P17: “I feel slightly like, you
17 know, if, suddenly, the London Olympics became a series of minor protest groups trying to crash
18 on TV and interrupt things, I just think it would be an embarrassment.”

19 **Discussion**

20 This study, based upon the five HR themes drawn up by Adams and Piekarcz (2015),
21 found evidence of MD in members of the public who support SMEs. These findings lend support
22 to the applicability of Bandura’s (1991) Socio-Cognitive Theory of Moral Agency in this context.

1 This is the first study to find empirical support for the concept of moral disengagement as an
2 explanation for the persistence of HR issues associated with SMEs.

3 As explained by Fiske (2004), MD concerns the process through which individuals
4 convince themselves that ethical standards do not apply to them. The present study reports
5 evidence of MD with respect to SMEs. The social cognitive theory of moral agency (Bandura,
6 1991) helps to explain these findings. This theoretical approach would suggest that these
7 supporters of SMEs' behaviour is directed by the affectations that engagement with SMEs will
8 bring. Actions that induce feelings of self-worth and satisfaction are preferred to those that bring
9 self-reproach, such as perceiving SMEs to involve or enable immoral behaviour. These
10 emotional responses are governed by the personal standards of right and wrong that have been
11 developed by the individual. Engagement with SMEs will therefore be based on the situational
12 circumstances and the individual's values and regulated accordingly. As suggested by Bandura
13 (1999), such sanctions are only applied if they are activated and then separate moral reactions
14 from inhumane conduct and disabling the mechanism of self-condemnation. The HR issues
15 discussed in this study were found to represent the inhumane conduct. The 'moral' reaction
16 would be to not support such events. This theory would propose that, for these participants who
17 did wish to engage with SMES, self-condemnation needed to be disabled through the activation
18 of one of the mechanisms of MD. This then enables engagement with SMEs without
19 experiencing self-condemnation. The Socio-Cognitive Theory of Moral Agency therefore
20 provides an approach which facilitates the interpretation and explanation of these findings which
21 demonstrates the applicability of this theory in this context.

22 This study also adds further evidence to the limited pool of research that has shown the
23 mechanisms of MD to be present in individuals who support harmful actions without having

1 performed them personally. This may explain why dehumanisation was not found in this study.
2 Support for SMEs harms innocent parties as a side-effect of their taking place, thus it is an
3 indirect connection and as Bandura (2002) asserts, this mechanism is most commonly found in
4 direct situations, at the point of the victim, explaining its omission here. This also explains the
5 difference in outcome between this research and Greenhalgh et al.'s (2015) investigation into
6 support for asylum seeker policies that found all eight mechanisms as their topic of study directly
7 and solely concerned the victims, making dehumanisation more likely. Furthermore, in contrast
8 to this work, Greenhalgh et al. (2015) consider a subject where the victim is perceived to impact
9 upon the perpetrator, for example, through the allocation of public funds, alteration of culture
10 and eventual decreased standard of living. This provides an additional explanation as to why
11 these studies differ in their findings.

12 Investigating public support for different SMEs held locally as well as abroad has
13 allowed consideration of this behaviour to be moved beyond the social exchange theory
14 framework that formed Waitt's (2003) study on enthusiasm for the Sydney Olympics towards
15 one of MD. That is not to suggest social exchange theory is redundant in this research area,
16 indeed, the cost to benefit theme of the theory holds similarities to the moral justification
17 mechanism of Bandura's (1991) social cognitive theory of moral agency which has been found to
18 be salient in this work. Given these new findings, however, it appears valid to consider future
19 research in this area from a MD perspective.

20 A further alternative view generated from the findings of this study could be selective
21 perception (as part of selective exposure theory, Klapper, 1960) where individuals confronted
22 with material that is inconsistent with their attitudes, disregard or reinterpret the material to
23 reduce cognitive dissonance. In this case, participants supporting SMEs and being presented with

1 information that questions the morality of this attitude. With regards to this view, it is important
2 to note that participants not only engaged with SMEs but were aware of the connected ethical
3 issues, rather than ignoring or adjusting the information surrounding them. Subsequently, as was
4 particularly evident in the positive comparison, displacement of responsibility and dissolution of
5 responsibility mechanisms, MD was required to reduce cognitive dissonance in support for
6 SMEs, whether that was through attendance, viewing or other means. A key example was that
7 conveyed by P7 who suggested that ethical issues would not prevent support, including
8 attendance, at future events, with similar feelings demonstrated by P8, P16 and P17. Once more,
9 this is not to suggest that selective perception may not play a part in this area and indeed a
10 complex interaction between related but contrasting theories may explain the relevant thoughts
11 and behaviours at work.

12 One such example may be potential influences on disengagement, which would be a
13 further investigatory route worth exploring, perhaps including the effect of the local
14 environment. The description of the “Olympic Bubble” given by Horne (2007, p. 87) is that of an
15 environment filled with positive pro-games rhetoric surrounding the Games, where attempts are
16 made to marginalise dissenting or negative voice in a manner akin to censorship. He asserts that
17 as SMEs are not only opportunities for sponsors to advertise their products to huge audiences but
18 also a chance for countries to sell themselves to tourists and investors, during the bidding process
19 and build-up to SMEs public support is vital. It is during these periods that governments will
20 attempt to sway, in particular, local residents into consenting to the games (Lenskyj, 1996, 2004,
21 2008, 2012) with benefits (social, economic and cultural) being exaggerated and costs
22 understated. Selective exposure theory (Klapper, 1960) would explain how this material is
23 readily accepted and would also explain the subsequent strength of moral justification and

1 advantageous comparison in connection with London 2012, with the rhetoric leading to
2 disengagement. Again, it is important to note at this juncture that participants displayed a broad
3 knowledge of HR issues connected to SMEs both in London and in other countries so this on-
4 message atmosphere did not lead participants to become oblivious of concerns related to the
5 Games. This is an important factor as in order to morally disengage, there must be an awareness
6 of something to disengage from which raises two considerations. Firstly, could this rhetoric have
7 influenced tendency to, and method of, engagement? Participants brought up topics concerned
8 with the positives of the London Games on a regular basis, such as economic benefits and legacy.
9 Indeed, a tagline from the Games, the potential for the London Olympics to, "...inspire a
10 generation..." was offered as justification for public support by P16. This may be interpreted as
11 an example of the pervasiveness of these messages and their influence on disengagement. For
12 these reasons it is important to further investigate populations that are supportive of SMEs both
13 in their home country as well as abroad. Similarly further work could also target the effect and
14 prevalence of government and sponsor rhetoric in those who display MD and the role of
15 selective exposure theory. This investigatory path would help highlight the roles and
16 responsibilities held by those in positions of power, be that political or sporting as well as how
17 they may influence apparent mass acceptance of situations that may cross moral boundaries. In
18 addition to general social and political impact, such knowledge could help find a way to end the
19 issues mentioned in this study; for example ensuring responsibility is taken for the welfare of the
20 workers in Qatar.

21 A further related point is that as the participants were universally London-based it allows
22 explanations to be considered for the differing patterns of mechanisms used in connection with
23 locally held SMEs in contrast to those held abroad. Moral justification, advantageous comparison

1 and distortion of consequences were particularly prominent when discussing support for SMEs
2 held locally, whereas examples from SMEs held abroad appeared to draw a broader mechanistic
3 range. In addition to the influence of the “Olympic Bubble” this may be due to increased
4 proximity increasing responsibility (akin to helping behaviour, Staub & Baer (1974) or fewer
5 perceived causal mediators between perpetrator and outcome (Sloman, Fernbach, & Ewing,
6 2009). Paying to attend may be seen as being more directly affecting the issues than watching on
7 television thus moral justification, advantageous comparison and distortion of consequences may
8 have been more applicable in this circumstance. This requires particular consideration and
9 further work with a population that have attended a greater diversity of SMEs.

10 With regards to limitations, the sample in this study was homogenous in terms of age,
11 employment status and living area and was too small to consider any differences due to any other
12 demographic, such as gender. Therefore, although the nature of this sample helps us draw
13 conclusions from this specific population, future studies should aim to replicate these outcomes
14 in more diverse populations. This would allow greater understanding of differences between
15 those of contrasting generations and locations who are affected by SMEs and also allow
16 consideration of cultural differences in relation to morals. This is pertinent in MD research as it
17 relies on individuals contravening their moral code, which may or may not be uniform (Bandura,
18 1991). In this case the UDHR was used as a basis for the research and although this is an
19 internationally recognised guideline it does not preclude individuals from having a different
20 perspective. A common issue in this area is identifying precisely when one has morally
21 disengaged rather than simply acted in a manner he/she believed to be moral or perhaps fulfilled
22 a social desirability bias. However this is not to suggest there is no evidence of this behaviour.
23 As previously noted this research investigates MD from past, present and future viewpoints,

1 which is a strength that is unusual in MD work and allows a rounded perspective looking at
2 previous attendance and support combined with present attitudes and future intentions. It should
3 be considered, however, that despite this, such an approach does rely upon accurate recall and
4 predictions of feelings and behaviour. The use of focus groups in this study has allowed initial
5 exploration into this area; however future research could employ individual interviews to allow a
6 deeper understanding of how MD comes about in this context.

7 **Conclusion**

8 This study has found evidence of MD in members of the public with regards to support
9 for SMEs. It was demonstrated that in the face of widespread HR concerns that are connected to
10 such events, seven of the eight mechanisms of MD as proposed by Bandura (1991) were present
11 in participants' support of SMEs. Such indicators reveal how SMEs and their impact on wide-
12 ranging HR issues have been allowed to happen and continue to happen, at least in part, due to
13 their being afforded municipal backing despite broad acknowledgement of these associated
14 consequences. These findings open up a new area of research into a subject that has accrued a
15 great deal of political, public and media interest over recent years and one that provokes a great
16 deal of passion and debate yet has had drawn little explanation.

17 Contextually, it has also been suggested that these mechanisms may differ, depending on
18 the individual's connection with the tournament. Provisionally, this could include location of,
19 and attendance at, the tournament. Further research should now look to replicate the pattern of
20 disengagement in SME support amongst a wider sample and subsequently extend the
21 consideration of the circumstances that affect the differing mechanisms.

22 Importantly this study also adds to the minimal amount of research into MD with those
23 who do not carry out the actions upon the victim themselves, but support those actions through

1 indirect behaviour. This new direction in the literature illustrates the potential relevance of MD,
2 given the importance of public support in an array of high impacting contexts, including political
3 policy (as investigated by, Greenhalgh et al., 2015) and on international organisations such as
4 FIFA. The salience of MD within this context ensures that these findings have practical
5 implications. In particular, an approach which focuses on enhancing awareness of these HR
6 issues may be less effective in changing behaviour relative to strategies which challenge moral
7 disengagement and hence promote moral engagement.

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