The National Sports and Society Survey Methodological Summary

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The 2018-19 National Sports and Society Survey (NSASS) was designed to be a unique social science data collection effort to enable quantitative research on important but under-researched issues. In particular, its intent was to provide comprehensive empirical evidence of sports involvement patterns and contexts, sports-related public opinions and ideologies, and indicators of well-being, social patterns, and the more general social contexts of adult Americans ages 21-65. Respondents were also asked to report on the sports involvement histories and contexts, family and school experiences, and health and well-being of a child between 6 and 17 years old if they had such a child who also shared a residence with them. A targeted sample of 4,000 adults was established using members of the American Population Panel (APP) so that important subgroup analyses could be undertaken, and to allow for follow-up interviews to be conducted with sufficient numbers in today's climate of declining survey responses. The NSASS was designed and enacted by Prof. Chris Knoester (PI), with support from the College of Arts and Sciences, the Sports and Society Initiative, and CHRR at The Ohio State University. CHRR worked closely with the PI to design the study, navigate Institutional Review Board protocols, construct and polish the survey instrument, program the online interface, and collect, document and disseminate the data.

Design

In an effort to obtain relevant life course information and offer quasi-longitudinal data, the NSASS focuses on asking adult respondents about their current thoughts and well-being, their experiences over the past year, and their experiences while growing up. Thus, the bulk of NSASS questions focus on two time frames in the lives of adult respondents: a) while growing up (focusing on ages 6-18, for sport-specific questions), and b) over the last 12 months. Also included, however, are questions on sports experiences (e.g., sports injuries; sports mistreatment) that occur between these two life course stages. Additionally, the NSASS collects intergenerational and child-focused information from adults who report living with a biological or adopted child of their own by asking adult respondents about a randomly chosen focal child. Just over 20% ($N = 805$) of the final NSASS sample ($N = 3,993$) provided information pertaining to a focal child.

The NSASS was undertaken as an online survey that drew respondents from the American Population Panel (APP), a panel of adult US residents who have agreed to take part in research surveys. The panel was started by CHRR in July 2017 and continues to grow through ongoing in-person, online, telephone and email campaigns. In August 2018, when the first 500 cases were drawn, the APP consisted of approximately 11 thousand individuals across all 50 US states. In January 2019 when the survey push took place to get a further 3,500 respondents, the APP had grown to over 21,000 individuals. In the end, 22,077 APP members were invited to take the NSASS and about 18% of the invitations resulted in a completed survey. From those who responded to the invitation and clicked through the survey landing page, about 55% completed the survey.

The NSASS had originally been planned as a telephone survey, but the growth of the APP allowed for a larger sample to be recruited and for funds originally allocated for telephone interviewing to be reallocated as compensation to NSASS participants for their time and effort. Although we originally aspired to achieve a relatively balanced survey along common social demographics, with oversampling of underrepresented groups, we ended up needing to transition the NSASS into a more traditional quota sample when it became apparent that it would not be possible to recruit 2,000 male respondents within the few months that were targeted for data collection. With financial and time pressures in place, the decision was made to continue to efficiently collect the full $N = 4,000$ quota, despite its likely contribution to unbalanced social demographics, since the full quota would still allow for substantially large subgroup sample sizes, necessary information to enable considerable focal child analyses, and an ability to still present a legitimate opportunity to conduct follow-up interviews with a relatively large sample.

Creating and vetting all questions for the NSASS survey instrument followed a multistage process that took close to two years. The questions were proposed by the PI, Prof. Chris Knoester, based on his perceptions of the need for social demographic, sports-related involvement, sports involvement context, public opinion, and well-being and social pattern indicators. These perceptions were frequently informed by conversations with consultants. When possible, the survey questions drew from extant questions and scales from previous surveys that offered evidence of validity and reliability. In this endeavor, the PhenX Toolkit collaboration (phenxtoolkit.org) and publicly available survey documentations were used. The instrument was refined through testing, focus groups, a phase one and phase two pilot study, and special scrutiny by both sport scholars and survey research experts. Finally, each question was carefully vetted by the PI and survey research experts at CHRR for their potential inclusion, and edited for clarity. Each stage of this process is elaborated upon below.

First, brainstorming and conceptualization of the usefulness of potential survey questions occurred. This process was primarily a function of the strategizing, researching, interests, and knowledge of the PI. Some early collaboration with prominent sport scholarship, survey research, and public opinion polling experts also occurred. Second, a complete draft of the survey instrument was completed. Third, the instrument was programmed into CHRR's "Survey" web interface, and tested online by more than 100 college students, sport scholars, survey research experts, and other adults who offered feedback about the wording, appropriateness, and clarity of each survey question—as well as the survey experience, as a whole.

Next, a team of seven core survey research experts, including multiple social science PhD's who have vetted dozens of prominent social science surveys, carefully scrutinized each question in the survey and collaboratively edited for clarity, efficiency, and correspondence with established survey research questions. Concurrently, we conducted a few informal focus groups with a more general cross-section of the American public to ensure that questions would make sense to not just college students and substantive experts.

We then conducted a pilot study with 50 respondents, gathered further feedback from the core group of sport scholars and survey research experts along with more than 100 different college students. We refined the survey instrument one more time and then initiated a phase two pilot study with 500 APP respondents in the Fall of 2018 with the intention of expanding this second pilot into the final NSASS sample data. After we found our second pilot study approximated expected time-to-completion preferences and raised no serious red flags, we then moved to full fielding in January 2019.

Data Collection

Data collection therefore extended from the Fall of 2018 through the Spring of 2019 until the sample quota of 4000 US residents between ages 21 and 65 years of age was met. APP members were invited to participate in the NSASS via email and/or text messages, depending on their expressed preferences when they joined the APP. Our invitations emphasized our desire to survey people from all different backgrounds, regardless of level of interest or involvement with sports. Although accommodations were offered for respondents to complete the NSASS via interviewer-assisted means or via a hard copy with paper and pencil, all respondents utilized the self-directed online survey format. Respondents received \$35 for participating in the NSASS and the survey took about one hour to complete, on average. Typically, respondents answered around 400 questions.

In the end, NSASS respondents represented all 50 states as well as Washington, D.C. Yet, consistent with the social demographics of the APP at the time, NSASS respondents were disproportionately White (73%), female (72%), and Midwestern (36%). They were also more highly educated than the US population at large as only 13% had a high school education or less. However, the large subsample sizes for many different social demographic categories (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, education, sexuality) offer unique and important analytic opportunities for even rarely studied groups (e.g., individuals who identify as nonbinary, as a sexual minority, etc.). Also, post-stratification weighting techniques are being used to offer more appropriate estimates of the descriptive characteristics of all U.S. adults.

Dozens of research projects using the NSASS are currently underway and involve collaborations between scholars at multiple institutions. These projects are shedding light on how people are involved with sports over their lives, the circumstances under which they are doing so (or not), the factors that shape their experiences, and why all of these patterns matter. They are offering insight into how we might better understand and advocate for sports in society, based on empirical evidence. For further information about the NSASS, please contact the PI of the NSASS, Prof. Chris Knoester (knoester.1@osu.edu), or visit the NSASS website (<https://nsass.org/>). For further information about the American Population Panel, please contact CHRR Director, Prof. Elizabeth Cooksey or visit the APP website (<https://americanpopulationpanel.org>).