Conducting Sport Management Research with Marginalized and Difficult to Reach Populations: Lessons Learned

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Organizational research tends to draw upon the interpretations of a few select stakeholder groups, usually male upper-level executives, because they determine the direction of the organization and the behavior of organizational members (Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Frost & Stablein, 1992; Gergen & Gergen, 2000). Alvesson and Deetz (2000) also argued that most management research serves the interests of managers with power. Similarly, much of what we know in sport management is based on the input from select stakeholders. These include current consumers of sport services (e.g., male sport spectators, athletes), as well as those who manage or deliver those services (e.g., athletic directors, marketing directors, presidents of sport organizations). This traditional approach informs the mainstream and dominant view of sport organizations.

As Frisby (2005) noted, we need to broaden the sport management discipline to serve the interests of more people affected by sport. Examining the perspectives of marginalized people can be accomplished through adopting different paradigms, like critical social science, feminism, postmodernism, and post-structuralism in our studies (Edwards, Gilbert, & Skinner, 2002; Frisby, 2005). Another way is through including the voices, experiences, and insight from overlooked, marginalized, and hard to reach groups through the adoption of novel methodologies. By including the voices of all who are impacted by sport management practice (Edwards et al., 2002), ideas for promoting change and inclusion are generated. Those who exist in the margins of sport organizations, like support staff, part-time staff, volunteers and a wide-range of people who do not participate in sport or participate in non-traditional ways, very seldom have opportunities to contribute to knowledge production or sport program and policy development. New immigrants, international students, persons with a disability, and at-risk youth are a few of the groups of people who are typically excluded. Sometimes these groups are overlooked because they are hard to reach or find. Sometimes it is because communication is difficult because of different languages spoken and suspicion of university-based researchers. In all cases, there are particular ethical issues that need to be considered when engaging different populations in the research enterprise.

The purpose of this session is for a panel of sport management researchers to share their insight and experience working with marginalized populations in different research contexts.

Wendy Frisby will talk about her research with recent immigrant women, an immigrant service agency, and local, provincial, and federal sport policy makers.

Larena Hoeber will discuss her research with Aboriginal people volunteering in sport organizations. She will focus on specific cultural issues when researching with this group.

Jeremy Jordan will discuss his work with Back on My Feet (BOMF), an organization that engages the homeless population via a structured running program. Over the last two years, Jordan and colleagues have been assisting BOMF with their assessment of residential members, volunteers, fundraisers, and paid staff.

Lisa Kihl will discuss recent community action research with an urban parks and recreation center that aimed to create a safe environment for their youth participating a sponsored sports programs. Specifically, she will speak to power issues relating to suppression of data, administration’s marginalizing of staff, and including community members who were creating the unsafe environment to be involved in the solutions. She will conclude by discussing the benefits of carrying out this type of research.

Cathy Mills will discuss her research using photo-elicitation with young figure skaters. The use of photographs during interviews gave the researcher insight to the club from the skaters’ eyes, a perspective that is often difficult to access.

The session will begin with a brief overview of the panel members’ research project(s) involving marginalized populations. Next, members will be asked, by the moderator, to address the following aspects: (a) ethical issues of working with marginalized populations...
groups (e.g., gaining consent, maintaining confidentiality), (b) logistical issues of conducting research with marginalized groups (e.g., recruitment of participants, data collection), (c) power relationships between researchers and marginalized groups (e.g., whose voice is heard in the findings; who ‘owns’ the data), and (d) benefits of working with marginalized populations. The session will end with an opportunity for audience members to provide additional examples and ask additional questions of the panelists.

The anticipated goals for the session are: 1. To address concerns that researchers have about working with marginalized populations that are not always addressed in the literature or when researchers receive methodological training; 2. To share lessons learned gained from working with marginalized populations; and 3. To encourage more sport management researchers to work with marginalized populations.