Organizational Practices and the Engagement of Muslim Women in Community Sport

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Diversity

Abstract 2013-095

Friday, May 31, 2013

20-minute oral presentation (including questions)

Room 410

The role of sport in promoting equity through social inclusion has been anecdotally linked to the promotion of social integration, social justice, and the development of social capital within society. However, evidence linking social inclusion outcomes to community sports participation is limited, particularly in regard to women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities in the Australian context. There is, nonetheless, evidence linking community sport to social exclusion, division, social disintegration, loss of trust, loss of community co-operation, and feelings of alienation for some marginalised individuals and groups (Coalter, 2005; Elling & Claringbould, 2005; Tonts, 2005).

Women from culturally and linguistically diverse groups have long been identified as a marginalised group, with their systemic under-representation in community sport linked to non-inclusive practices of sport organisations, restrictive community attitudes and values, and a lack of culturally appropriate opportunities for participation (Benn, Dagkas & Jawad, 2011; Cortis, Sawriker & Muir, 2007; Foley, Taylor & Maxwell, 2011).

In the Australian context, despite a groundswell of policies, programs and other initiatives that have been put in place to address these matters, program outcomes have not been meticulously evaluated. Firm evidence of good practice in successful inclusion programs is required. This paper explores practices of social inclusion/exclusion in an Australian community sport setting. In particular, it aims to document the case of Muslim women living in a suburb of Sydney, and their relationship to a community sporting organisation. The paper explores how organisational policies, practices, programs and projects facilitate and/or inhibit the social inclusion of Muslim women.

An ‘interpretive’ qualitative research methodology was employed. A case study approach was adopted and information concerning inclusionary/exclusionary practices was developed through interviews, focus groups, secondary data and documentary evidence. Drawing on the work of Bailey (2005, 2008) the analysis employed a social inclusion framework encompassing spatial, functional, relational and power dimensions. The social inclusion framework represents both transformative and multi-dimensional processes that facilitate excluded non-participants to become participants and to become more engaged and reap greater benefits. The model can be applied at either the individual or organisational level. In this study an organisational level analysis is undertaken to investigate the dynamics of social inclusion in community sport for a specific minority community population, Muslim women.

Findings indicated a range of practices which facilitate social inclusion, including: flexible dress codes and the provision of Islamic sportswear; gender segregation at training and the provision of female coaches and referees; employing culturally sensitive facilitators to liaise with Muslim families and encourage the participation of women and girls; provision of culturally appropriate food and non-alcoholic beverages at games and social functions; opportunities to build competencies; portraying positive images of Muslim women and providing role models; assistance with financial costs and transport; team building activities within the club; and building partnerships with external organisations. These practices provided physical, social and economic access and a sense of belonging for the many Muslim women who become involved in the sporting setting as players, coaches, managers and administrators over recent years. Relational inclusion from the Bailey framework emerges as a prominent theme in the sporting setting, particularly the negotiation of Australian Muslim cultural identity and the development of cultural capital for individual Muslim women. Paradoxically, some of the practices that contributed to social inclusion for Muslim women resulted in social exclusion for some non-Muslim women.

Examining each practice from the multiple perspectives provided by the social inclusion framework allowed a thorough analysis to be made of each organizational practice in relation to Muslim women. The adoption of the social
inclusion framework enables an understanding the social inclusion/exclusion of Muslim women and provides an opportunity to build on existing sport management knowledge concerning social inclusion/exclusion in community sport contexts (Amara et al., 2004; Coalter, 2007; Dagkas & Armour, 2012; Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Long et al., 2002) and to expand our understanding of how cultural diversity can be managed in community sport contexts (Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999; Foley, Taylor & Maxwell, 2011). As a result of this research a need to explore how to ensure the social inclusion of specific marginalised groups without excluding other social groups in community sport and other contexts has been highlighted. An improved comprehension of the dynamics of social inclusion, including the complexities and nuances of inclusion processes indicates that inclusion is facilitated through a balance between actions which celebrate diversity and those which highlight differences.

References


