Ethical Considerations in Sport Management Research Methodologies

Brenda Riemer, Eastern Michigan University
Annelies Knoppers, Utrecht University
Ellen Stanrowsky, Drexel University

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Sport management is a broad field that includes multiple areas, such as communication, economics, law, marketing, management, media, policy, socio-cultural issues, finance, and ethics. Due to the broadness of the field, multiple research methodologies are utilized. While multiple methodologies can present rich data for the field, it is imperative that researchers use appropriate methodologies in a study and reflect on ethics of collecting and presenting data. In this roundtable we wish to reflect on ways to navigate ethical issues in sport management research. Although we all may have been introduced to the topic of ethics and perhaps may even teach about it in research methodology courses, ethical considerations ask continual reflexivity as we explore new areas in our research. Questions that pertain to the researcher-subject relationship are continually evolving in both quantitative and qualitative research. In this round table we begin by critically looking at sport management research and the use of personality and sex role inventories in quantitative research and the actualization of the promise of confidentiality and anonymity in qualitative research. Currently, for example, there is discussion about the use of personality tests for employment selection. Morgenson et al., (2007) point to issues of their low validity in predicting job performance. Yet such tests (e.g. BPI, MMPI, Big Five) have been used in both management and sport management research. In addition, personality tests require an interpretation by expert professionals. Do those working in sport management research generally have the expertise to interpret results in keeping with the purpose of the test? The same could be said for use of sex role inventories such as the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1974). These have been used to look at gender differences in leadership, even though there is data critical of their use (Fernandez & Coello, 2010).

The researcher-participant relationship in qualitative research, especially in the methods used to collect data and how the data are described and analyzed, is even more visible than that in quantitative oriented projects. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) contend that qualitative research “can be used to help create and imagine a free democratic society” (p. x). Yet, as Brinkmann and Kavle (2006) have argued, a relationship of power plays a large role in interview situations since the interviewer defines the situation and decides which questions to ask and which probes to use. In areas such as market research, the results may be used to manipulate buyers of goods. The interviewer or researcher also decides how to define the participants and present their thoughts in the ensuing publication. Is confidentiality and anonymity still possible when reviewers demand and/or reader understanding of a paper require a great amount of detail about respondents?

Issues of access and truthfulness play a role in both quantitative and qualitative research. Linstead et al. (2014) discuss truthfulness in studying the dark side of the organizations and the ethical dilemmas it can pose. By dark side they refer to behaviors by organizational members (micro level) and the organization itself (meso level). They point to topics such as organizational deviance,systematically distorted communication, the dark side of leadership, discrimination and symbolic violence. These are all topics that may be part of sport organizations and need to be studies. Accessing sport organizations for such research may not be easy. How truthful are we in gaining access, especially when exploring the “dark” side of organizational practices in sport? To what extent do we inform participants about the underlying purpose of the chosen methodologies, the results and the subsequent publications?

In this round table we present three provocative papers that have a focus on ethics in common: the use of personality /sex role tests in quantitative research, the construction of confidentiality and anonymity in qualitative research and the negotiation of access when studying topics of deviance. Initially the discussion will focus on the issues raised by these papers; in the latter part of the discussion we open the discussion to issues dealing with ethical questions raised by those in attendance at the session.

References


