Exploring Current Debates in New Materialism, Post-Humanism and Actor Network Theory: Application to Sport Management?

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Socio-Cultural - Diversity (Other)
60-minute symposium, roundtable, or workshop
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Room: Napoleon A3

This symposium explores ‘everything you wanted to know and were afraid to ask’ about key ideas and methodological approaches informing current debates across feminist post-humanism, new materialism and actor network theories. Through presentations and discussion we invite participants to explore the possibilities for re-orienting onto-epistemologies informing sport management research. Across the broader fields of ‘sport’ and ‘management/organization studies’ there has been an impressive engagement with contemporary debates (post-humanism, feminist new materialism, actor network theories), which have questioned the ontological assumptions informing how individuals come to experience, know and manage in more-than-human worlds and organisations (Carlile et al. 2013; Fullagar 2017; Gherardi 2017; Pullen et al., 2017). Sport is conceptualised as both a material and discursive phenomenon (embodied, affective, semiotic) shaped by sociocultural, economic, environmental, historical and political forces that produce inequities. Such approaches articulate diverse methods of inquiry, engage with complex ethical issues as well as innovative representations that offer compelling insights into human experience and social change. These debates are yet to permeate sport management scholarship where there has been limited engagement with the possibilities of new theory-method approaches (for example, post-qualitative research) for knowing, doing and managing.

Most new materialist approaches work within, and importantly ‘against’, the humanist assumptions that inform many qualitative traditions, hence there are implications for the ‘doing’ of sport management research. However as Shaw and Hoeber (2016) argue, in order to advance our field we need to challenge our thinking and embrace alternative methods. The symposium aims to create a space for the exploration of complex ideas and dialogue about conducting research in diverse sport management contexts, applications and possibilities for change. Three presentations comprise the first part of the symposium:

1) Outline of the challenge to the ontological and epistemological assumptions of humanist traditions of qualitative research that have focused on understanding the meanings of human experience and engage with feminist explorations of affect, power and materiality that seek to undo dualisms (e.g. whiteness over blackness, masculinity over femininity and culture over nature) (Fullagar, 2017).

2) Discussion of the possibilities of using feminist new materialism within the field of gender and leadership and specifically the intersection of gender and ethnicity within sport management/governance (Knoppers, Hovden & Elling, 2018).

3) Exploration of thinking beyond ‘human experience’ to consider ontological questions about how ‘matter’ is thought and constituted through entanglements of human and non-human bodies, affects, objects and cultural practices (Fullagar, 2017). We discuss issues of power and privilege associated with horse ownership in the context of Olympic Equestrian Sport (De Haan and Dumbell, 2018).

The final reflexive section of the symposium will open up a broader discussion with those in attendance regarding the theory-method assumptions informing contemporary research within sport management, including those just presented.