From Conception to Praxis: Unpacking the Intersections of Philosophy of Science, Qualitative Inquiry, and Sport Management Research

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Method - Qualitative (Other)

20-minute oral presentation (including questions)

Session: Method/Qualitative

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Following the previous charges of scholars of sport management and sport sociology (Amis & Silk, 2005; Frisby, 2005; Newman, 2014; Shaw & Frisby, 2006; Singer, 2005; Skinner & Edwards, 2005), Cooky (2017) called for a public sociology of sport that would hold researchers responsible in ensuring that knowledge is both accessible and translatable from academe to the public sphere. Moreover, Cooky argued that this moral imperative, while earnestly intentioned, must be approached with an understanding of the contextual factors that allow for certain ways of knowing and research practice(s) to be privileged. It is in a similar vein that prompted Hoeber and Shaw (2017) to advocate for the paradigmatic underpinnings of sport management research to account for and incorporate a more critical-based methodological lens, which has remained relatively absent in extant discourse and praxis. More recently, a roundtable session from the 2017 NASSM conference (Singer et al., 2019) spoke to how qualitative research methods have remained relatively marginalized and underutilized within sport management scholarship, which can be attributed (in part) to little qualitative-based training in our doctoral programs (Nite & Singer, 2013) and an academic environment predicated on “market doxa” (Newman, 2014). In doing so, Singer et al. endeavored to break some of the long-held negative associations with qualitative inquiry and move towards a greater acceptance (and use) of said methodological approaches within our discipline.

Nevertheless, to adopt qualitative research methods into one’s research practice is to likewise hold a firm understanding of the philosophical anchor that undergird qualitative approaches. Developing an expertise in qualitative approaches and the philosophy of science parameters that anchor said approaches is an ongoing process that may take years of study and practice. However, this is not to place a value judgment on sport management researchers who decide to conduct and/or supervise qualitative research, but rather an intentioned call for those researchers to understand that in spite of either continued or newfound support for qualitative approaches, their respective research lens may be dictated by a (pre)existing post-positivistic research tradition – in other words, employing post-positivistic research practices within the confines of a constructivist qualitative approach (e.g., coding interview data into pre-determined thematic categories).

In all, the purpose of this conceptual endeavor is to provide sport management researchers at varying experience levels with a foundational understanding of how parameters associated with the philosophy of science anchor their scholarship. To do so is to provide an overview of parameters such as axiology, epistemology, and ontology, and how each are implicated (and located) through research paradigms (i.e., post-positivist, constructivist, critical-ideological) and across various qualitative research approaches. Additionally, discussion will be offered on what appears to be a disconnect between the theoretical perspectives (constructivist derived) and methodological approaches/decisions (post-positivistic oriented) adopted in our research practice(s), as well as how this can be mitigated through continued professional study and the expansion of training that students (from the undergraduate up through doctoral levels) receive in qualitative research methods and more broadly, the philosophy of science.