NEGOTIATING MULTIPLE IDENTITIES IN THE FIELD OF SPORT MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Aim of Abstract
Individuals are often involved in many social groups and hold numerous social identities (Stoner, Perrewé, & Munyon, 2011; Stryker & Burke, 2000). These identities can be multiple, shifting and competing (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008). Stoner et al. acknowledged the presence of peripheral identities, where the hierarchy of these identities varied from situation to situation. For example, it has been found that those who study sport fans do not typically reveal their own sport fan identity in their research (Schimmel, Harrington, & Bielby, 2007). Shifting between peripheral sport fan and sport researcher identities may significantly influence an individual's feelings of self, which subsequently influences their behaviours (Organ, 1997). Thus, sport management researchers may need to acknowledge and negotiate their multiple identities to determine how emotions, actions, and reactions to variable peripheral identities influences what they research and how it is researched. The aim of this abstract is to critically explore the negotiation of multiple identities of two individuals within the academic sport management field to determine if and how multiple identities influence the research process.

Theoretical Background
Sport management researchers may possess multiple peripheral identities that include being an academic, researcher, teacher, service provider, as well as being a sport fan (Schimmel et al., 2007). Furthermore, it may be assumed that the adoption of specific peripheral identities varies within certain contexts. A sport management researcher's sport fan identity may be suppressed because it is either assumed one would be a sport fan or because there is a negative connotation attached to this identity in the academic context (Schimmel et al., 2007). Interestingly, Stoner et al. (2011) noted that individuals who manage their peripheral identities based on other people's perceptions of them often possess conflicting feelings and reactions when the peripheral identity is put to use.

Furthermore, the hierarchy and preference for peripheral identities is in constant flux (Stoner et al., 2011; Stryker & Burke, 2000) where the negotiation and silencing of the sport fan identity may marginalize an identity that can inform sport research and theory (Schimmel et al., 2007).

Methodology and Research Design
Collaborative self-ethnography (cf. Alvesson, 2003; Buford May & Pattillo-McCoy, 2000) was used to uncover the multiple identities of two female sport management researchers. For approximately a year and a half, the co-authors documented and reflected on their identities as women, sport scholars, and sport fans. The authors took field notes and pictures during their trips to professional sport events in the summer and fall of 2010. At this time, both authors reported back to one another on how they felt at various sport events and the experiences they had as female sports fans. After several events were attended, the researchers came back together to discuss what they had seen, heard, and felt. All of their discussions were tape recorded, and transcribed verbatim. The recorded conversations lasted one to two hours, and often came back to the co-authors' struggles with multiple identities. Over the term of data collection, the discussions evolved and key themes were recorded and discussed at length. Although the experiences were unique, it was clear that multiple identities played a large role in influencing their individual attitudes and decisions as sport management researchers.

Results, Discussion, and Conclusion
The findings highlight that individuals in this context possess multiple identification targets, where context seems to play a large role in shaping peripheral identities. The researchers did not feel they had "lost" their sport fan identity in the academic sport management setting; however, they did acknowledge that that these identities were often negotiated and overshadowed by their researcher/academic identities. Further, perceptions of need to negotiate identity varied when the researchers were among males versus females in that negotiations seemed more prevalent and purposeful among female sport management colleagues and other female sport fans. Both individuals reflected on how these peripheral identity negotiations influenced what and how they conducted research in the sport management field.

The negotiation of multiple (sometimes conflicting) identities surrounding being a female sport fan and a female sport management researcher highlights the need for academics to be self-reflexive during the research process (Schimmel et al., 2007). Specifically, suppressing sport fan identity may contribute to further polarization between (1) theory-based sport research and (2) research that makes practical contributions (Schimmel et al., 2007). Creating a harmonized balance between sport fan and sport researcher identities by acknowledging the influence of our sport fan identities could potentially enhance theory regarding how sport is experienced and consumed. This and other implications will be discussed.

References:

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