

Physical Activity and Sport Research with People with Impairments: Oppression-Empowerment Continuum

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Abstract : Research in the area of physical activity and sport, while becoming multidisciplinary, is still dominated by post-positivist approaches that have the tendency to position the researcher as an expert and the participant as subordinate thereby perpetuating an unequal balance of power. Despite physical activity's and sport's universal appeal, their historic practices have excluded particular groups of people who assumed lesser forms of human capital. Adapted physical activity (APA) is a field that has responded to those segregations with specific application and relevance to people with impairments. Nevertheless, to date, similar to physical activity and sport, research in APA is still dominated by post-positivist epistemology. Stemming from this, there is gradually growing criticism within the field related to the abundance of research 'on' people with impairments and lack of research 'with' and 'by' people with impairments. Furthermore, research questions in the field are most often pursued from a single axis of analysis and constructed by non-disabled researchers. Concurrently, while calls for interdisciplinary approaches to understanding disability are growing in popularity, there is also a clear need to take an intersectionality-informed research methodology to understanding physical activity and sport and power (im)balances therein. In other words, impairment needs to be considered in conjunction with other socially and politically constructed and historically embedded differences such as gender, race, class, etc. when analyzing physical activity and sport experiences for people with impairments. Moreover, it is reasonable to argue that non-disabled researchers must recognize and theorize ableism in its complicated intersectional manifestation to show the structural constraints that disabled scholars face in the field. Consequently, this presentation will offer an alternative approach that acknowledges and prioritizes the perspectives and experiences of people with impairments to expand the field of APA. As such, the importance of broadening epistemologies in APA and prioritizing an appreciation for multiple bits of knowledge of people with impairments through intersections of social locations (e.g., gender, race, class) will be considered.

Keywords : adapted physical activity, disability, intersectionality, post-positivist, power imbalances

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