Safe for Whom and for What? Scrutinizing ‘Safe Sport,’ Inclusion, and Equity Policies of National Sport Organizations in Canada: An Intersectional Workshop

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In Western, over-developed, neoliberal nation-states, while there are growing calls both inside and outside academia for more intersectional engagement with various types of inequities, exclusions, harms, and injustices in the management of sport (e.g., Collins & Kay, 2003; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017; Shaw & Frisby, 2006; Spaaij et al., 2014; Walker & Melton, 2015), clear roadmaps on how to achieve this goal remain elusive, if not absent. Due to sport’s increasing prominence in public policymaking (Houlihan, 2005; Hoye et al., 2010; Thibault & Harvey, 2013), sport management scholars have pointed out the importance of critically analyzing sport policies and their underlying presuppositions (Chalip, 1996; Henry et al., 2005). In Canada, although national sport organizations have engaged in related policy development, the effectiveness of these policies in creating more inclusive, equitable, and less harmful sporting spaces is largely unknown or questionable (Donnelly et al., 2016; Frisby & Ponic, 2013; Howe, 2013; Tirone et al. 2010; Paraschak, 2013).

Inspired by, but also extending the conference theme on the significant role of scholars as change agents in racial justice, this workshop will include a group of scholars coming together to offer a set of analyses of the same “data” - a collection of safe sport, inclusion or equity-related policies in Canadian sport organizations. We have deeply engaged with specific intersections of oppression and our areas of expertise represent a range of fields rarely brought together in sport management, e.g., disability justice, Indigenous studies, Black feminism, critical race theory, critical gender and sexuality studies, critical trauma studies, and postcolonial theory (Bridel, 2018, Chen, 2020, Eales & Peers, 2016; 2020; Hall et al., 2020; Joseph, 2017; McGuire-Adams, 2018; Tink et al., 2020) - This “data” in question for this workshop derives from an ongoing research project: In Fall 2019, we generated a database of national-level, accessible, equity-related sport policies in Canada and collected screenshots or downloads of 143 policy documents. Nine of these were national policies, acts, or frameworks that outlined specific principles or guidelines, intended to govern the (in)actions of a large collection of sport organizations (e.g., Canadian Sport Policy, 2012), 134 were organization-specific policies (e.g., Judo Canada - Gender Equity Policy).

In this workshop, we will take the following steps to engage a contextualized, intersectional analysis. First, we will discuss how major systems of oppression (e.g., white supremacy, settler colonialism, ableism, transphobia, heterosexism) are naturalized and/or resisted within and through the ‘safe sport,’ inclusion, and equity policies developed by Canadian sport organizations. Next, we will highlight how the prevalent institutional logics (Thornton et al., 2012; Washington & Patterson, 2011) overlap, reproduce, and/or contradict each other as manifested in the constellation of these policies. Finally, we set out to envision what kinds of policy interventions might enable us to side-step the constant self-reproduction of colonial practices. Workshop participants will explore what they can do in their interactions with sport organizations or in the creation of policy to instead support deeply intersectional organizational change and create intersectionally anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-ableist, and trans- and queer-affirming sporting spaces.