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In the months leading up to the 2014 Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) annual conference, I had several conversations with current AASP members (both students and professionals) about their thoughts on the upcoming conference. Not surprisingly to me, many members stated they expected AASP to be “the same old thing.” I believe they were implying that the focus would be on sport and performance, with little diversity within the conference program (e.g., among other areas of sport and exercise psychology (SEP), the presenters, as well as addressing multiculturalism within sport and sport psychology practice). Interestingly, many presenters discussed diversity and strategies for AASP to consider when addressing diversity and difference.

If It Were Easy, Everyone Would Do It

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Call to Action

In having three diversity-based keynote presentations at this year’s annual conference, I was asked to reflect on each presentation. I am pleased to have pulled a considerable amount from each keynote; the overall message I received was a call to engage multicultural competence and diversity within AASP and the field of sport and exercise psychology. However, such improvements cannot happen overnight, and in listening to each presenter, I can see how such change could systematically occur in the field.

Step 1: Which Type of Organization Are We?

In regards to their awareness/willingness to address LGBTQ issues in sport, Hudson Taylor (2014) described three types of athletic departments: (a) institutions that believe there are no areas for concern regarding LGBTQ student-athletes’ experiences in college sport; (b) institutions that cite there are no areas for concern because they do not have LGBTQ student-athletes; and (c) institutions that see strengths and weaknesses in their current system, and have a willingness to explore areas of growth.

Taylor’s (2014) description is directly applicable to the current status of AASP in terms of how it is addressing diversity. Since AASP’s inception in 1985, it has remained a predominantly white, male organization with little multicultural diversity, begging one to ask, “What type of organization are we?” Certainly, we would hope that we are the third type of organization, the one that is open to exploration and potential change. However, with little change in diversity among our organization, can we claim this to be true? Our first step is clearly to identify which type of organization



Conference attendees gathered during a poster session while at the 2014 Annual Conference.

we are and which we strive to become.

“Hard Work is Working Until You Get It Right” (Sheryl Swoopes).

I was particularly excited to hear Sheryl Swoopes share her experiences as an African American woman, mother, coach, and professional athlete. As a Black woman, I was particularly thankful to have a keynote presenter that looked like me, thus reinforcing my place in the world of sport and SEP. The most salient message I pulled from Swoopes’ presentation was that drive, sacrifice, and hard work supports success. Despite professional and personal setbacks, she has transitioned into a new role as a coach and is optimistic about her new role in collegiate sport.

Hearing Swoopes discuss her personal and professional ups and downs, I found myself wondering how her presentation related to AASP. I concluded that AASP and the field of SEP have a lot more to do in order to make our organization and profession progressive and influential. In wanting to offer the gold standard for certification and guidelines to practice in the field, what might we as a profession and organization need to sacrifice, develop, or even change?

Have We Gotten It Right? According to Swoopes (2014), “hard work is working until you get it right”, with this notion directly applicable to progressing as a profession. As an organization, I wonder

“ The overall message I received was a call to engage multicultural competence and diversity within AASP and the field of sport and exercise psychology. ”

what “getting it right” looks like for us. Is it having diversity across sport and sport psychology practice and/or more multicultural diversity amongst AASP members? I do not have the answer to this, but I continue to ask, “Have we gotten it right yet?”

Step 2: Having the Conversation

As a profession, it is questionable if we want to be part of a conversation that addresses diversity in SEP. In order to have a robust and progressive conversation on diversity, AASP must be willing to educate itself on areas of growth. There is a certain amount of fear associated with addressing what we are not doing well and what doing better looks like. Perhaps this means that we are “in the closet” as an organization and naming diversity as a primary area of professional focus is difficult.

Step 2: Having the Conversation

According to Taylor (2014), organizations and professionals in the field must take the first step to naming diversity as an area for growth. Naming it involves stepping back and identifying our shortcomings as

an organization and providing solutions to improve multicultural practice in our field.

Ways in which this objective can be achieved include (but are not limited to): (a) having an AASP diversity course that is available to members to introduce, educate, and develop cultural competence in SEP practice; (b) inviting a series of difficult dialogues among our members as well as our executive board that focuses on members becoming aware of their personal areas of privilege and subjugation, the experiences of minorities in sport and SEP, and conversing about what cultural competence in SEP looks like; and (c) having an open and honest discussion to evaluate AASP’s work on inviting minorities, diversity, and culturally competent practice into the fabric of our organization.

Step 3: Inviting In

In sport and exercise psychology, we want to think that mental skills translate across every aspect of sport, performance, and general athletic identity. However, do

mental skills address all aspects of sport and exercise performance? This question is best highlighted in Wade Davis' (2014) description of a moment when he was watching game film and remembered worrying about whether or not his gayness was noticeable by his team. Davis (2014) stated that when watching the game film he remembered thinking to himself, "am I playing gay... running gay...?" His memory perfectly reveals the need for culturally competent practice, just as athletes who have yet to invite the world into their sexual orientation will need more than mental skills training.

"Inviting In."

Wade Davis (2014) further discussed his preference for the phrase "inviting in" instead of "coming out" in regards to the experience of sexual minorities sharing their sexual orientation with others. I found this differentiation overwhelmingly profound. Davis (2014) stated that "inviting in" implies that LGBTQ athletes are making the decision to invite the rest of the world into their lives and that coming out of the closet signifies that an individual was in a "scary, dark place."

In reflecting on his differentiation, I wonder how this relates to AASP's commitment to diversity. Are we truly open and inviting to persons of particularly salient difference? How do we build a profession that is committed to inviting in minority and more diverse athletes, performers, students, and professionals? How do we teach the skills of developing a trusting relationship to future practitioners, addressing all aspects of identity, and playing in an

environment that may be unwelcoming to an athlete's area(s) of difference?

Conclusion

Attending each presentation, in one way or another, caused me to ponder whether or not AASP is doing the work to represent those we serve. Whether it was Swoopes' Performance Excellence Award discussion or Brett Smith's Diversity Lecture, each presenter addressed how AASP should consider progressing as an organization. In thinking about where we are as an organization and where we are looking to go, we must remember that this journey is not meant to be easy - if it were, every organization and community would be diverse and culturally competent. As the largest organization committed to applied sport psychology, it is our responsibility to do the "hard work." I encourage all of us to strive for increased cultural competency and to enhance the

diversity of athletes we serve. There is much work ahead of us – if it were easy, everyone would do it.

References

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