CULTURAL DIVERSITY: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING SPORT PARTICIPANT CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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INTRODUCTION

A growing body of literature has focused on how sport organizations might manage diversity in the workforce (Cunningham, 2007a; Cunningham, 2007b; Cunningham & Sagas, 2004; Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999; Fink, Pastore, & Riemer, 2001). Another growing body of research has begun to examine sport marketers' efforts to reach a more diverse fan/spectator consumer base (Armstrong, 1998; Armstrong & Stratta, 2004; McCarthy, 1998). An extensive body of research in sport sociology has attempted to provide explanations for differential participation patterns in sport based on race and gender (Goldsmith, 2003; Harrison, Lee, & Belcher, 1999). Most of these researchers have identified socio-structural concerns as causes for a lack of diversity, such as environmental barriers and socio-economic status, as well as discrimination itself. However, little research exists that specifically examines diversity considerations in the context of marketing and promoting sport participation to primary consumers. This paper seeks to establish the importance of conducting culturally sensitive consumer behavior research in order to more effectively promote sport participation by ethnically and culturally diverse consumer groups.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY

Culture is a complex concept that encompasses shared ways of achieving meaning in people's lives. According to Coakley, "culture consists of the ways of life that people create as they participate in a group or society" (2007, p. 5). Culture thus includes ethnicity – that is, "the cultural heritage of a particular group of people" (Cunningham, 2007a, p. 83) – along with such things as the different meanings different groups attach to social undertakings like sport.

Diversity is also a complex notion that entails differences of many types, including physical attributes (e.g., race, sex, age, physical ability), social attributes (e.g., education, income level), and cultural attributes (e.g., beliefs, values, preferences). In addition to actual differences, perceptions of difference may play a role in diversity (van Knippenberg, De Drue, & Homan, 2004). Such differences may make a difference in organizational outcomes by affecting individual performance within a group, as well as group creativity and cohesion. Thus, diversity is perhaps best defined as "the presence of differences among members of a social unit that lead to perceptions of such differences and that impact…outcomes" (Cunningham, 2007a, p. 6). Diversity thus includes both demographic differences and cultural differences. According to Cunningham (2007a), these types of differences are likely to be interdependent, so managing diversity involves attending to both demographic and cultural diversity as interrelated phenomena.

In recent years, scholars have documented an awareness of the importance of increasing and successfully managing diversity in sport. This interest has been fueled by the recognition of legislative changes requiring equity as well as by rapidly changing demographics in America. Recent projections based on demographic data indicate that by the year 2007, the spending power of ethnic minority groups in the United States will

exceed $2 trillion, and that 49.9 % of the American population will be comprised of people from non-white ethnic groups by the year 2050 (Willis, 2004). As a result of these legislative changes and demographic trends, sport organizations have begun to explore ways to meet the demands of an increasingly diverse pool of potential employees, fans, and participants.

Typically, responses to the rising demand for accommodating increasing diversity come from two perspectives: a moral imperative or a business justification. Based on notions of social justice and ethically fair treatment of individuals, some scholars have called for sport organizations to proactively manage diversity simply because it is the right thing to do (DeSensi, 1994; Mai-Dalton, 1993). In the United States, legal barriers to sport opportunities have been removed by the passage of several federal anti-discrimination statutes including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Additionally, progress has been achieved by the courts as they have decided cases interpreting constitutional and civil rights in the context of access to opportunities in sport. However, ethical considerations can and often should go beyond minimum levels of barrier removal required by the law. While breaking barriers may partly overcome an ethnocentric worldview in which one cultural perspective is preferred and naturalized, eliminating exclusiveness falls short of embracing inclusiveness. According to Donnelly and Coakley (2002), physical activity providers ought to strive to be socially inclusive – which means going beyond merely removing barriers to participation to attempting to ensure that all potential participants are valued and respected. DeSensi (1995) asserts that sport organizations need to move beyond ethno-relativism, in which difference is accepted and adapted to, to a state of true integration in which differences are valued and promoted.

While the aforementioned scholars ground their recommendations in the existence of a moral imperative, others advocate greater effort to increase and manage diversity in order to further the survival and profit needs of sport organizations as business entities. They suggest that diversity is an asset that can be used strategically to gain a competitive business advantage (Fink, Pastore, & Riemer, 2001). An increasingly diverse society presents untapped new markets for sport organizations to target (Armstrong, 1998; Brenner, 2004; McCarthy, 1998). Greenwald and Fernandez-Balboa (1998) suggest that sport sponsors are beginning to de-emphasize elite sport and celebrity endorsements; instead, they are turning to grassroots sports phenomena, with a focus on local communities and participants rather than spectators, in order to gain long-term benefits by marketing to youth who will eventually become the major consuming audience. Moreover, sponsoring grassroots special events allows companies to target certain demographics and psychographics that are not easily reached due to market fragmentation resulting in part from increasing ethnic and cultural differences (Greenwald & Fernandez-Balboa, 1998). Thus, diversity initiatives are gaining acceptance as sound business and marketing strategies. The 2000 United States Census indicates that 28.2% of the U.S. population is comprised of Hispanics, black non-Hispanics, and Asians (Brenner, 2004). According to Brenner, "there is one certainty for any league with national reach and every team and event in a market with a significant ethnic population: If you don't have a multi-cultural marketing strategy now, you're missing the boat" (p. 16).

OBSTACLES IN MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY

The literature refers to three types of obstacles to successfully meeting the challenges of diversity in sport: difference itself, resistance, and failure to acknowledge the complex role of cultural (as opposed to merely demographic) diversity. Difference itself is problematic because of the tendency of people to prefer to interact with others they perceive as like themselves with respect to both values and demographic characteristics, or who belong to their self-defined in-group (Cunningham & Sagas, 2004). According to Cunningham and Sagas (2004), these homosocial forces contribute to a lack of unity unless difference is embraced or de-categorization of individuals occurs through increased interpersonal communication.

Resistance, both to diversity measures themselves and to change in general, is another obstacle to accommodating diversity. "Organizational culture is not quickly or easily manipulated and changed, because it involves understanding and sharing basic values and assumptions about the organization" (Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999, p. 293). Additionally, individuals have many reasons for resisting change, including emotional, social, status, economic, security, and perceived competence concerns (Gray & Starke, 1988). Thus, an organization's leadership cannot simply dictate successful culture change; rather, organizational culture is an ever-evolving, negotiated outcome of various intra-organizational interactions and shared experiences (Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999).

The difficulties presented by difference itself and by resistance to change are arguably more relevant to workforce diversity considerations than to attracting diverse consumers as sport participants. However, the third obstacle – failure to acknowledge the complexity of cultural diversity – has direct relevance in the context of organizational efforts to attract and retain diverse groups as consumers of sport. Efforts to target diverse market segments that are based on assumptions about consumer behavior grounded only on demographics are fraught with the potential to fail. Such assumptions are often based on stereotypes and ignore the role of human agency in embracing or opposing various facets of a culture. Nevertheless, personal characteristics that form the basis for demographic categorical data are the necessary starting point for understanding diversity. This is because demographics are surface-level characteristics that are easily observable and can act as markers for the deep-level diversity characteristics with which they are usually intertwined, such as attitudes, values, and cultural differences (Cunningham, 2007a).

Too often, demographic data collected on sport consumers has been limited to the categories of age, race, and gender. Obviously, many other types of personal characteristics are salient to decisions regarding whether or not to consume sport, either as a fan or a participant or both. Other worthy demographic categories to examine could include: disability, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, socio-economic status, parental status, life in a one- versus a two-earner household, educational background, national origin/immigrant status, language differences, and ethnic heritage (e.g., Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999; Fink, Pastore, & Riemer, 2001; Pons, Laroche, Nyeck, & Perreault, 2001). Additionally, psychographic variables are necessarily part of consumer behavior, and could include lifestyle preferences, group identification, values orientation, self-esteem/perceived self-competence, psychological traits, self-schema definitions, and learning/thinking styles (see e.g., Gladden & Sutton, 2005; Harrison, Lee, & Belcher, 1999; Pitts & Stotlar, 1996). Finally, it is essential to recognize the role of human agency in people's choices to identify with a culture, or with some facets of it and not others, or to create and identify with a cultural amalgam, or to create oppositional subcultures within a larger cultural context (Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999; Pons, Laroche, Nyeck, & Perreault, 2001). Cultural factors are linked to demographic categories, but often those linkages are expressed in ways that differ across geographic region, age groups or age-based generations (e.g., baby boomers versus generation X'ers), and real world contexts/ situations (e.g., sport versus work versus home), among others (Claussen, Ko, & Rinehart, 2007; Cunningham, 2004).

Over-reliance on the use of simple demographics to shape diversity initiatives frequently results in condensing people with widely varying ethnic heritages and cultural patterns into broad categories, conflating complex cultural diversity into uni-dimensional constructs. For example, using the broad category "Hispanics" would miss the fact that Hispanics in Dallas includes a predominance of people with Mexican heritage, whereas in Miami the same category consists largely of people from a Cuban background – a cultural heritage which might manifest itself quite differently from Mexican cultural expressions (Brenner, 2004). To address such issues, scholars and industry analysts have begun to call for research that, in addition to demographics, uses different approaches to analyzing diversity in sport contexts. These analytical perspectives include the following: decision variables – e.g., self-schema based versus utilitarian based decision making (Harrison, Lee, & Belcher, 1999; Kang, 2004); relational demographics (Fink, Pastore, & Riemer, 2001); compositional

demographics (Cunningham & Sagas, 2004); racial relations theory versus social structural explanations for consumer behavior (Goldsmith, 2003); psychographics and motivational constructs (Florenthal & Shoham, 2000; Lim & Turco, 1999; McDaniel, 2003; McDonald, Milne, & Hong, 2002; Shoham & Rose, 2000); and cultural characteristics (Brenner, 2004; Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999).

APPROACHES TO ANALYZING DIVERSITY IN SPORT CONTEXTS

ORGANIZATIONAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO DIVERSITY IN SPORT

Decision variables, relational and compositional demographics, and race relations theory have been used to examine diversity within sport organizations. Analyzing decision variables in linkage with demographics would involve analyzing whether certain groups, using self-schema, tend to envision themselves as a possible fit for a sport consumer role, such as a participant in snowboarding. The literature indicates that "possible me" self images are utilized to evaluate value-expressive products (e.g., action sports offerings), whereas people evaluating useful products (e.g., sports equipment) tend to utilize utilitarian decision making criteria. Additionally, individuals with high physical self-esteem are more likely to employ both self-schema and utilitarian processes in consumer decision making, whereas people with low physical self-esteem tend to use only utilitarian criteria (Kang, 2004). Harrison, Lee, and Belcher (1999) found that junior high school students' self-schema evaluations of sport participation options tended to align with stereotypes about gender-appropriate and race-appropriate sports.

Examining relational demographics enhances the traditional use of demographic data by adding consideration of relative demographic similarity to or difference from those in leadership positions in an organization (Fink, Pastore, & Riemer, 2001). This perspective might also be applied to evaluations of sport consumption options in which individuals might gauge potential enjoyment and/or success on the basis of relative demographic similarity to existing participants.

Compositional demographics is conceptually similar to relational demographics in that it relies on the similarity-attraction paradigm and social categorization processes (identification with an in-group in contradistinction to outsiders) to posit that individuals will be more comfortable and choose to affiliate with others similar to themselves in values and personal demographical characteristics (Cunningham & Sagas, 2004). Cunningham and Sagas (2004) found that using compositional demographics illuminated the negative consequences of diversity in a group, and suggested that to overcome the natural negatives of difference, efforts must be made to promote the valuing of differences and to encourage interpersonal communication that will result in de-categorizing individuals. Providers of sport consumption options that entail united participation (e.g., traditional team sports) might render their sports offerings more attractive by structuring participation accordingly.

Race relations perspectives involve analyzing diversity by adding group dynamics relative to race relations to consideration of socio-structural constraints on sport participation. According to this approach, socio-economic status and elements of social stratification like neighborhood inequality must be analyzed together with an examination of the cultural division of labor or struggles over racial hierarchies in order to acquire a more complete understanding of race differences in sport participation patterns (Goldsmith, 2003). Using this approach to examine racial differences in high school sports participation, Goldsmith found that low socio-economic status (SES) partially explained black students' lack of participation in sports whites tend to play more (e.g., swimming and soccer); however, high SES students also participated in the more "low brow" sports of baseball and football that blacks tend to play more. So SES alone was an unsatisfactory predictor of racial disparities in participatory sport consumption. It appears that high SES individuals are "omnivorous" when it comes to sport consumption; that is, they are willing to consume both "high brow" and "low brow" sports.

Adding an examination of the cultural division of labor to this inquiry attempts to discover whether there is a race effect on participation even if SES and other structural and environmental factors were equal between the racial groups. Utilizing this approach, Goldsmith found no race effects in the sports whites play more, which suggests that structural variables like SES and neighborhood inequality account for blacks' lack of participation in those sports. However, in sports blacks play more (e.g., basketball, football, cheerleading), there were also no race effects except for in basketball. In basketball, all other factors being equal, race relations in the form of a cultural division of labor – that is, in schools with a strong racial hierarchy – do predict high levels of black student participation.

Goldsmith (2003) explains that the cultural division of labor perspective posits that "the subordinate group reacts to high levels of racial hierarchy by developing an oppositional culture to demonstrate their superiority or equality with the dominant group" (p. 163). This implies that blacks use basketball as symbolic of black equality/superiority – which would take on greater importance in contexts where blacks experience greater subordination. Cultural studies theorists have asserted that basketball has become one of the most salient "symbolic representations of 'blackness' in popular culture" (Goldsmith, 2003, p. 163). That the cultural division of labor only predicts higher levels of black participation in basketball and not other sports that blacks play more than whites, like football, "suggests that racial hierarchy only creates cultural differences in activities that symbolically show the equality or the superiority of the subordinate group" (Goldsmith, 2003, p. 166). Goldsmith also found that as the proportion of blacks in the school population rose, race effects were stronger in channeling blacks and whites into stereotypical race-appropriate sports, which indicates that cultural differences are exacerbated by racial group competition. These findings suggest that in sporting environments with more diversity among potential participants, the importance of race-linked cultural factors as determinants of race-appropriate participation may rise.

Goldsmith's (2003) findings are lent support by recent research on diversity in college athletics settings that found dysfunctional diversity climates coinciding with highly diverse demographics (Cunningham & Sagas, 2005; Fink, Pastore, & Riemer, 2001). Realizing that this situation demands further explanation, Cunningham has called for research on diversity in sport to go beyond demographics to include analysis of diversity in attitudes, values, and cultural backgrounds (2007b).

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR APPROACHES TO DIVERSITY IN SPORT

So far, most sport marketing research that has been focused on ethnicity has failed to pay serious attention to cultural differences among subgroups (such as Cuban Hispanics versus Mexican Hispanics) within broad demographic ethnic categories, such as Blacks (Armstrong, 1998; Armstrong & Stratta, 2004), Hispanics (McCarthy, 1998), and Asians (Clarke & Mannion, 2006). Additionally, while giving mention to the role that might be played by variables other than demographics, in the end these studies were largely limited to demographic analyses.

From a marketing perspective, using psychographics (e.g., lifestyle preferences, attitudes, values, psychological traits, and motivational constructs) in addition to demographics is considered a more comprehensive strategy for understanding diversity in consumer behavior than simple reliance on demographics. However, the literature examining psychographics in sport tends to ignore potentially salient linkages between certain psychographic and demographic variables.

Lim and Turco (1999) suggested using psychographics to analyze diversity in sport consumption based on such variables as "coolness," quality, comfort with electronic media, and preferred uses of leisure time. McDaniel (2003) examined sport preferences relative to the psychological trait of sensation-seeking, and found that males preferred viewing violent-combative sports (e.g., football and hockey) over stylistic sports (e.g.,

figure skating and gymnastics), while females preferred to watch stylistic sports. However, the results also indicated that viewership of violent-combative sports was linked with the sensation-seeking personality trait for both sexes. Therefore, differences in sensation-seeking do not explain gender differences in viewing preferences for televised violent-combative sports. Additionally, McDaniel reported that white males had a greater interest in viewing violent-combative sports than males from ethnic minority groups, who preferred viewing violent-aggressive sports like basketball and soccer (as did female ethnic minorities). Whites of both sexes reported a significantly greater interest in viewing stylistic sports than did the ethnic minorities studied. As his focus was on reporting gender differences, McDaniel did not report links between the sensation-seeking trait and the viewing preferences of ethnic minorities.

Shoham and Rose (2000) and Florenthal and Shoham (2000) examined the role of the values of thrill-seeking, excitement, and security in Israeli sport participation choices. They found that in their predominantly male samples, thrill-seeking was a better predictor of participation in non-risky individual sports (e.g., biking, jogging, swimming) than enhancement of social standing, and a better predictor of participation in risky sports (e.g., parachuting, hang-gliding, deep water diving, and mountaineering) than security and self-respect. However, these values were not linked with ethnic or gender demographics in their reported results, probably because of the homogeneous nature of the population studied.

McDonald, Milne, and Hong (2002) identified a lengthy list of motivational constructs found in the literature, and suggested that these psychographic variables be used in addition to demographics in studying consumer behavior. Their list includes: physical fitness, risk taking, stress reduction, aggression, affiliation, social facilitation, self esteem, competition, achievement, skill mastery, aesthetics, value development, and self actualization. The authors found large variances between sports in the relative importance of these motivational factors to participants, but identified basic sport needs (aggression, competition, risk taking, and achievement) as central to both sport participation and spectatorship choices. Limitations of their work include that they neither analyzed risky, extreme-type sports, nor did they attempt to link the motivational constructs to demographic variables.

To summarize, the organizational and sociological literature on diversity in sport has tended to focus on demographic and structural variables, while the consumer behavior research has added psychographics; however, neither body of literature has adequately addressed linking such variables with relevant cultural considerations.

A CULTURAL DIVERSITY APPROACH TO DIVERSITY IN SPORT

In a notable exception to the typical research on organizational diversity in sport, Doherty and Chelladurai (1999) advocated the use of a cultural diversity approach to studying diversity in sport organizations. Brenner (2004) has called for the application of a similar perspective in the context of consumer behavior in sport. This approach expressly links cultural characteristics with demographic variables for the purpose of gaining an even more discerning analysis of the effects of diversity. Failure to do so can be costly. For example, the Dallas Mavericks "Tienda Program," designed to use local retail stores to sell tickets and merchandise in predominantly Hispanic neighborhoods, resulted in low sales because the Mavericks did not know that their Hispanic fans preferred to buy from traditional team distribution outlets (Brenner, 2004). In this way, making unexamined assumptions about the interests of demographically diverse groups puts marketing efforts at risk by neglecting the complex role of cultural factors. Thus, "marketing must make culturally relevant connections to be effective" (Brenner, 2004, p. 15).

Cultural diversity is an important complement to demographic diversity in that it reflects not just differences in personal characteristics, but also cultural factors specifically associated with those characteristics. "Cultural diversity reflects the unique sets of values, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations, as well as language, symbols,

customs, and behaviors, that individuals possess by virtue of sharing some common characteristic(s) with others" (Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999, p. 281). According to Doherty and Chelladurai (1999), culture as a set of shared understandings shapes the cognitive schemas people use in ascribing meaning, adopting values, and making choices about their behavior. Behavioral cultural expressions in turn reinforce that culture.

Diversity in cultural characteristics, on the other hand, can challenge the prevailing culture and necessitate organizational adaptation. Adding to the adaptation challenge for sport organizations is the fact that "individuals in a group vary in the extent to which they identify with its culture" (Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999, p. 281). That is, adopting values and identifying with a culture is a choice, not a given. According to Doherty and Chelladurai (1999), equating people's demographic information with their identification with a corresponding social group is a fallacy prevalent in the research literature. Instead, cultural identification may vary for several reasons: lived-in geographic region or country of origin (Armstrong & Stratta, 2004; Brenner, 2004); sensation/thrill seeking (Florenthal & Shoham, 2000; McDaniel, 2003; Shoham & Rose, 2000); and self-schema (Harrison, Lee, & Belcher, 1999; Kang, 2004). Additionally, one's cultural identity may consist of a patchwork of characteristics adopted from varied cultures (Pons, Laroche, Nyeck, & Perreault, 2001). Moreover, differences in the saliency of personal characteristics often depend on the cultural context in which a person is situated, the nature of some personal characteristics (immutable or easily altered or hidden), the relevant group's socialization processes and behavioral norms, and/or perceived challenges to some aspect of a person's cultural identity (Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999). As a result, the formation and existence of subcultures within an organization can be expected, and these subcultures are likely to undergo periodic reformulation as organizational leadership and personnel change over time.

Consumer behavior research can make good use of this cultural diversity approach suggested in the organizational diversity literature. In so doing, it is important to recognize that certain aspects of culture are typically emphasized more often than others. "According to Loden and Rosener (1992), individuals identify most strongly and persistently with the culture(s) associated with personal characteristics that cannot be changed, such as age, gender, race, sexual orientation, physical disability, and ethnic heritage" (quoted in Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999, p. 283). So, it is unnecessary for sport marketers to despair in the face of the overwhelming variety of subcultures that intermingle in potential desired markets.

Instead, sport marketers can use consumer behavior research aimed at identifying links between a demographic category and salient aspects of the corresponding culture, and can rely on the resulting data in targeting their desired sport consumer base. For example, a sport marketer could be effective using a link between ethnicity and behavior, if he or she knew that whereas Chinese-American ticket buyers in San Francisco prefer to buy their tickets well in advance of a sports event, some Hispanics groups tend to wait until the last minute before purchasing tickets (Brenner, 2004). Thus, early promotion efforts would succeed with the San Francisco Chinese, but not the Hispanic, population. A cultural diversity approach to consumer behavior highlights the importance of conducting culturally sensitive marketing research on target groups to find linkages like these.

Recently, Clarke, and Mannion (2006) noted the existence of differences within the Asian demographic category, but dismissed the importance of different Asian subcultures by suggesting that accommodating language differences would be sufficient to expand into the overall Asian American market segment. Sport marketers in the field, however, have recognized the inadequacy of such a surface-level "fix." According to Dave Howard, executive vice-president of business operations for the New York Mets, "It starts with the language, but you have to go beyond that and understand what is culturally relevant" (King, 2007b, p. 16). Consequently, the Mets, with a large Hispanic fan population, provide Spanish-language advertising and ticket sales, but also host a "Fiesta Latina" night with popular Puerto Rican music and a separate "La Noche de Merengue" night tailored to their Dominican fans (King, 2007b). Dario Brignole, director of IMG's Hispanic, Latin

American and soccer divisions, stressed the importance of going beyond language-based outreach in marketing to reach customs and ethno-cultural backgrounds. In his words:

> The key is to understand that because we all speak the same language, that does not mean we all like the same things. In the United States, you have Canadians, Australians, and British, and you also have Americans from the South, the Northeast and the West. All speak English, but they're all different. So why should Brazilians, Argentinians, and Dominicans like the same things?" (King, 2007b, p. 24).

A more nuanced analysis is enabled by the recent ESPN Deportes Poll on Hispanic sports, reported by King (2007b). This poll found that 67% of Hispanic sports fans who live in households where speaking Spanish is dominant are fans of World Cup soccer, compared to only 33% of Hispanic sports fans who live in predominantly English-speaking households (p. 19). Conversely, the NFL is popular with fans in 73% of English-dominant homes but only in 40% of Spanish-dominated homes (p. 19). These results indicate that level of cultural assimilation is a highly relevant factor in sport preferences for Hispanic fans. A similar conclusion was reached by Pons, Laroche, Nyeck and Perreault (2001) based on their comparison of French-Canadians and Italian-Canadians relative to their orientation toward ice hockey. Their results reflected:

> in the case of sporting events that the choice of events and the ways these sporting events are consumed and shared…is strongly influenced by the ethnic origin of the individual. But more importantly…all individuals in all ethnic groups do not react in the same way to sporting events because of the process and the pace of their integration into the host culture (p. 238).

These findings illustrate the importance of linking cultural factors, such as level of cultural assimilation, with demographic categories to acquire a more accurate, in-depth understanding of diversity in sports market segments.

PROPOSAL FOR USING A CULTURAL DIVERSITY APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING CONSUMER BEHAVIOR OF PARTICIPANTS IN AN ACTION SPORTS CONTEXT

The cultural diversity approach is perhaps especially appropriate in analyzing a phenomenon like action sports, in comparison to traditional sports, because of the fundamental nature of action sports as reflective of an alternative lifestyle. Understanding the action sports culture, and linking aspects of that culture with demographic data on participants and spectators, should provide rich insights into why the consumer base is what it is demographically with regard to diversity (Claussen, Ko, & Rinehart, 2007). That, in turn, should enable sport marketers to target the most receptive consumer groups most effectively.

Effective use of the cultural diversity approach should also provide information that might enable non-profit and/ or education-based action sports providers to create alternate "alternate sports" that will extend the reach of such opportunities to a broader base of potential participants. For example, we know that cooperation within the community is valued over competition by the Navajo (Boeck, 2007b; Coakley, 2003). Perhaps "team skateboarding" rather than individual competitions could be developed as a new "alternative sport" to be provided in areas with a high concentration of Navajo Indians in the population in order to attract those students to participate.

Many secondary school districts are now considering adding a few action or alternative sports to their traditional menu of sport offerings in an attempt to engage a higher percentage of students in physical activity. For example, the Oregon Interscholastic Snowboard Association is involved in sanctioning high school snowboarding club team competitions (Read, 2001). School districts would benefit from the availability of culturally informed consumer behavior research to use in deciding which alternative sport forms might attract

the most students, given their particular diversity mix. University athletics programs would also benefit by having such information available, inasmuch as they have been criticized for failing to consider the participation preferences of females from diverse ethnic groups when adding sports to move toward compliance with Title IX (Suggs, 2001).

If encouraging participation in physical activity for a broader spectrum of our nation's youth is one of our valued goals, then using an action sports cultural diversity profile in this fashion is not just an effective marketing tool – it might be legitimately considered an ethical obligation. However, very little data on ethnic diversity in consumers of action sports has been reported in the literature. The authors found only four references to spectatorship data that included ethnicity-based demographics (American Sports Data, Inc., 2004; ESPN Deportes Hispanic Sports Poll, 2007, reported in King, 2007b; ESPN Sports Poll, 2002; Messner, et. al, 1999). Furthermore, very few references to demographic categories other than age or gender were found that pertained to action sports participants.

Several authors have, however, discussed the culturally diverse values and attitudes of Generation Y (those born in 1982 or later), and of action sports participants, and have noted that action sports providers, advertisers, and sponsors view members of Generation Y as their primary target market (Bennett & Henson, 2003; Bennett, Henson, & Zhang, 2002; Bennett, Henson, & Zhang, 2003; Claussen, Ko, & Rinehart, 2007; Lim & Turco, 1999; Neuborne & Kerwin, 1999; Petrecca, 1999; Rinehart, 1998; Stapinksi, 1999). Generation Y (also known as the Millennial Generation), is thought to differ significantly from its predecessors, Generation X (those born in 1961-1981) and the Baby Boomers (those born in 1943-1960). According to Howe and Strauss (2000), each of these groups exhibits a distinct "generational persona" – a cultural "creation embodying attitudes about family life, gender roles, institutions, politics, religion, culture, lifestyle, and the future" (p. 40). These authors go on to say that Generation Y differs sharply from Generation X because the Millennials feel a special sense of purpose, are more sheltered, have higher levels of confidence and optimism, are less inclined to rugged individualism, are higher achieving, and are more inclined to support social rules and conventional values. Millennials tend to reject sloganeering and crass commercialism in favor of fact-based advertising and authenticity (Claussen, Ko, & Rinehart, 2007; Howe & Strauss, 2000). This attitude may explain their attraction to participation in action sports over the more commercialized (until very recently) "big-time" traditional sports.

Recent figures indicate that approximately 58 million members of Generation Y participate in action sports, including board sports, in-line skating, mountain biking, rock climbing, and trail running (McCarthy, 2001). Between 1990 and 2000, Generation Y participation in action sports increased (e.g., inline skating grew by 407% and skateboarding by 14%), while participation in mainstream team sports declined (e.g., soccer by 10%, softball by 41%, and baseball by 41%) (Youth Sports Participation Trends, 2004). Additionally, from 1987 to 2002, snowboarding participation increased by 221% and mountain biking by 309%, whereas volleyball participation declined by 33% and downhill skiing by 25% (American Sports Data, Inc., 2002). Approximately one-third of the sporting goods sold in the U.S. in 2003, totaling more than $14 billion, were related to action sports (Liberman, 2004). Generation Y fans helped the inaugural 2005 season of the Dew Action Sports Tour attract an average attendance over five events of over 46,000 live spectators, outdrawing the average attendance of all teams in the NHL, NBA, and Major League Baseball (except for the New York Yankees) (Nisenson, 2006). Members of Generation Y are projected to comprise 34% of the population by 2015, and their buying power is currently estimated at $250 billion per year (Gen Y, 2002; Raymond, 2002). Currently, 38% of Generation Y is non-white (Gen Y, 2002). Thus, this coveted market segment is quite ethnically diverse (Wolburg & Pokryvczynski, 2001; Stone, Stanton, Kirkham, & Pyne, 2001).

Because they have a financial incentive to use a cultural diversity approach to target a more diverse participant and fan base, the attempts by ESPN and NBC to commercialize action sports through the X Games, Gravity Games, and Gorge Games could actually assist in accomplishing both the business objective of making action sports financially lucrative for the networks, sponsors, advertisers, and athletes, and the moral imperative of extending sport participation opportunities to a broader constituent base. However, if these networks are making use of diversity-based information to target desired markets, their efforts seem to have been focused on age and gender data. It appears that only very recently have ESPN and the Sporting Goods Manufacturer's Association (SGMA) begun to collect demographic data on action sports participants that includes ethnicity. The 2004 release of the Lifestyle Segmentation Report and the Sector Analysis Report that are based on the Superstudy of Sports Participation commissioned by the Sporting Goods Manufacturer's Association include data on ethnicity (American Sports Data, Inc., 2004a & 2004b). Also, the TNSI sportspoll.com website indicates that ESPN has been collecting data on action sports consumption in recent years (ESPN SportsPoll, 2002). These data are for sale at the websites of the American Sports Data, Inc. and TNSI's sportspoll.com.

According to Claussen, Ko, and Rinehart (2007), data from these studies indicate that action sports participation is increasing among Generation Y Blacks, Hispanics, and Asian Americans. The Superstudy, which groups Hispanics and Blacks into one category called "Hip-Hop Generation" (Age 13-19), indicated that Hip-Hop participation in roller hockey was 2.45 times that of the total segment population, with skateboarding 2.6 times and BMX bike riding 4.29 times that of the total segment population (American Sports Data, Inc., 2002, p. 164). According to the same study, some of the greatest recent increases in sport participation for Asian Americans have been in action sports, including in-line skating, BMX bike riding, mountain/rock climbing, artificial wall climbing, kayaking, snowboarding, boardsailing, surfing, and wakeboarding (American Sports Data, Inc., 2002, pp. 232-234). For unknown reasons, the Superstudy did not group Asian Americans by age as it did for "MTV Nation" [Age 13-19, White Only] and "Hip-Hop Generation" [Age 13-19, Black/Hispanic].

Primary consumption of sport in the form of participation is thought to contribute to secondary, economic consumption by spectators and fans. Researchers in Spain attempted to ascertain the extent of the tie between sport participation and consumer expenditure on sport, and found that though education and age were important factors, there was not necessarily a strong overall relationship. However, their study was limited to subjects in Spain where sport is not as commercialized as in America; also, it focused on consumer expenditures relating to actual sport participation (e.g., equipment, clothing, instruction) and expressly excluded spending on spectatorship and fan-related merchandise (Lera-Lopez & Rapun-Garate, 2007).

Marketers in the sport industry are convinced there is a link between participation and expenditures by secondary consumers, as is evident in their efforts to promote sport to diverse target markets. The Sporting Goods Manufacturer's Association (SGMA) includes sports participation rate data in its market reports (see, for example, "The Hispanic Market Report 2006" reprinted in King, 2007b, p. 24). Carol Albert, the senior vice president of advertising, marketing development, and integration for the NBA, uses such data in targeting marketing efforts based on the idea that "Hispanic youth play basketball and grow into NBA fans" (King, 2007a, p. 25). The NBA, therefore, engages in grassroots efforts to develop this participant base into an economic consumer base by, for example, sponsoring renovation of basketball courts in Hispanic neighborhoods (King, 2007b). For similar reasons, Major League Soccer uses its MLS Futbolito grassroots participation program to attract nearly 100,000 participants and spectators per year (Garber, 2007). And since 2003, Nike has attempted to establish brand presence with Native Americans by sponsoring uniforms for the annual Native American Basketball Invitational tournament at a cost of $200,000 per year (Boeck, 2007a).

With respect to secondary consumption of action sports, as of 2001 viewership had increased each year for the X Games on ESPN and the Gravity Games on NBC. From 1997-98 to 2000-01, television ratings for all four major professional sports playoffs declined among youth ages 12 to 17 (Youth Sports Participation Trends, 2004). In contrast, the 2001 Gravity Games averaged a 1.7 household rating (about 2 million households) – up

from a 1.6 rating in 2000. The Winter X Games VI held in 2002 was the most-watched Winter X Games ever telecast on ESPN (Raymond, 2002). Most recently, King (2007b) reported results from the ESPN Deportes Poll on Hispanic sport indicating that 45% of sports fans in Spanish-language-dominant households follow action sports, along with 54% in bilingual and English-dominant homes (compared with 45% of sports fans in the general U.S. population) (p. 19).

Understanding why these demographic groups are increasingly attracted to participation in action sports could help sport providers more effectively reach individuals from these populations. However, understanding how salient subcultures within these populations (e.g., more or less culturally assimilated Hispanics) vary with regard to consumer preferences for marketing and promotion strategies and for different action sport offerings would make such efforts even more effective. The practical implications include the potential for more successful target marketing for action sports providers and the achievement of the moral objective of extending action sports opportunities to a broader audience of participants and spectators.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper has sought to demonstrate the importance for sport marketers and sport providers of supplementing the use of demographics with linked deep-level culturally relevant information when targeting marketing and promotional efforts to diverse groups of sports participant consumers. In particular, we proposed that the cultural diversity approach to managing diversity in sport organizations described by Doherty and Chelladurai (1999) be adopted when conducting consumer behavior research on diverse market segments of sports participant consumers. We used the example of diversity in action sports participants to illustrate how linking a cultural diversity perspective with the use of demographic information might be especially effective in that sport industry niche. The cultural diversity approach facilitates more nuanced (hence more accurate) analyses of consumer behavior. The resulting information can assist sport providers and marketers in more effectively attracting diverse groups of people to participate as primary consumers of sport, thereby achieving greater social justice while at the same time doing good business.

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