

# Embracing Interdisciplinary Research: An Epistemological Argument for Critical Inquiry in Sport Management

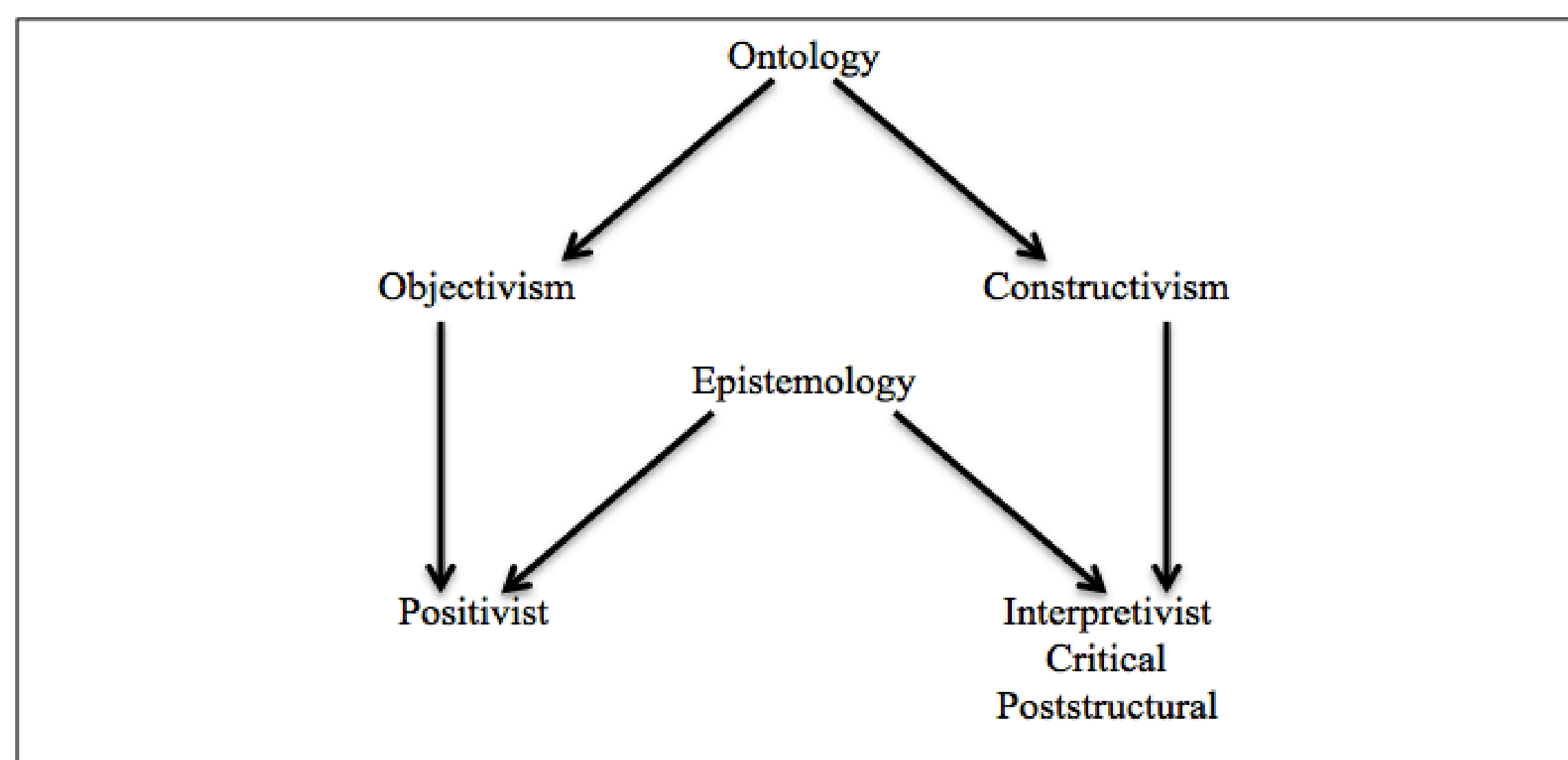
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## Introduction & Purpose

- One problem in sport management is a lack of interdisciplinary research and varying viewpoints on how research should be conducted.
- In recent years, however, scholars in the field have called for true interdisciplinary research, recognizing the need for varying epistemologies and methodologies to provide a more critical inquiry into sport management.
- **The purpose** of this poster session is to provide an overview of the epistemologies used in sport management research, arguing for interdisciplinary research and a more critical approach in the future.

## Epistemological Review

- **Ontology**: the theory of nature of social entities; *what one knows* to be reality. Two categories: objectivism and constructivism.
- **Objectivism** follows that there is an objective, absolute reality or knowledge in the world, just waiting to be discovered.
- **Constructivism** follows that there may be multiple realities, constructed by the individuals participating in them.
- Ontology shapes one's epistemology.



## Epistemological Review

- **Epistemology**: theory of knowledge; *how one knows* reality; "a stance on what should pass as acceptable knowledge" (Bryman, 2012, p. 711). Four basic paradigms: positivist, interpretivist, critical, and poststructural.
- **Positivists** (ontological objectivism) believe there is an absolute right and wrong, one reality to be discovered.
- **Interpretivists** (ontological constructivism) believe there are many ways to interpret, or construct, reality, depending on one's standing and viewpoint in the world. There is not necessarily an absolute right or wrong.
- **Critical** researchers (ontological constructivism) recognize that there are power differentials at play in interpreting the world. Where one sits in various hierarchies in society can significantly affect how one interprets the world.
- **Poststructuralists** (ontological constructivism) seek to eliminate binaries and boundaries, going beyond structure.
- Epistemology drives methodology.
- **Methodology** is the theory of how inquiry should proceed; *how one figures out* reality. This is how a researcher designs a study, which could be through controlled experiments, observations, creating hypotheses, etc., and how a researcher chooses to analyze data.
- **Methods** are the tools a researcher uses for collecting data (e.g. surveys, interviews, observations).
- Quantitative: "how many"
- Qualitative: "how"
- Mixed-methods

## Arguing for Critical Inquiry

- Much sport management research is done from a positivist paradigm, using quantitative methods.
- Frisby (2005) called for the use of multiple paradigms and viewpoints:
 

"One of my key arguments is that if we are to fully understand all dimensions of sport management, we need research to be conducted from multiple paradigms. The paradigms we operate from as researchers, whether it is positivism, pragmatism, interpretivism, critical social science, post modernism, or a combination of these paradigms, shape the questions we ask, the methods we use, and the degree to which our findings will have an impact on society" (p. 2).
- Research can and does have a direct impact on students, practitioners, corporations and society. Thus, Frisby (2005) suggested a turn away from mainly positivist research:
 

"The type of knowledge we produce will be restricted if we rely too heavily on any one" of the paradigms (p. 2).
- Frisby (2005) concluded with the notion that critical work is often left to the sociologists, but those in sport management need to be doing this type of research as well.
- Amis and Silk (2009) advanced this argument, very specifically focusing on how sport management researchers should be using a critical lens and called for qualitative methodologies:
 

"Too often our work in sport management has been presented as neutral and value free, with little regard for the historical, social, political, and cultural context in which the work takes place" (Amis & Silk, 2009, p. 4).
- Amis and Silk noted that sport management is "dominated by brazenly hypercommercial enterprises and spectacles that make no effort to disguise their cardinal objective of delivering entertaining products designed to maximize profit margins" (2009, p. 4).

## Recommendations

- Embracing a critical framework can help the field. While continuing to focus on *management*, there is a way to be critical and incorporate the voices of the marginalized to help managers in their role of building and sustaining sports organizations.
- Amis and Silk (2009) suggested methods and methodologies that have a critical framework, including participatory action research (PAR) and feminist participatory action research (FPAR); utilizing longitudinal data; and hierarchical linear modeling.
- There is not always a need for the positivist ideals of reliability, validity, and generalizability. In fact, generalizability is *not* the best when comparing different people and communities; in a diverse society, it is acceptable and ethical to put things into a localized context.
- Sport management has historically been an interdisciplinary field, and Amis and Silk (2009) concluded their argument by noting that, as such, there is a need to embrace interdisciplinary approaches, including varied methodologies and methods, specifically critical thought.

## References

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