

ANALYSING GENDER DYNAMICS IN SPORT GOVERNANCE: A NEW REGIMES-BASED APPROACH

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Abstract

Introduction

Increasing women's representation on boards is a contemporary challenge for organisations in general and in the realm of sport in particular. The majority of studies on women in sport governance have focused on questions of gender distribution, barriers for women to obtain decision-making positions and strategies of how to address them (for example, Claringbould & Knoppers, 2007; Pfister and Radtke, 2009). This presentation explores the dynamics of governance that prevail when women have actually gained a seat at the boardroom table. It focuses on the gendered dimensions of these dynamics with reference to boards of National Sport Organisations (NSOs) in Australia.

Theoretical background

The paper is based on a recent study, underpinned by governance and gender theory. Similar to Kanter's (1977) and Acker's (1990) views that corporate entities and institutions are not gender neutral, I argue that sport organisations are gendered. They demonstrate certain patterns of gender arrangements or 'gender regimes' (Connell 2009). According to Raewyn Connell who has developed this concept, a gender regime is characterised by four interwoven dimensions: production, power, emotional and symbolic relations. When applied to governance dynamics in sport boards, this concept permits identification of how gender works. In particular it discloses: the gendered division of roles and tasks on the board, the ways in which power and influence are exercised among men and women, and between them, the feelings of support/affection and dislike/hostility that prevail among them, and their cultural or symbolic understandings of gender.

Methodology

The fourfold model of gender dimensions provided the framework for both data collection and analysis. The study was conducted in 2009/10, involving in-depth interviews with board directors and chief executive officers (n=30; 12 women and 18 men) from six NSOs engaged in the governance of 'gender-neutral' sports. This paper reports

on the results of three NSOs. The selected case studies included the national governing bodies for a team sport, an individual sport and a sport that contains both individual and team events.

Results, discussion and conclusions

Preliminary analysis of the data indicates that gender dynamics were not uniform for all boards but rather played out in the unique context of each organisation. For example, while one organisation showed a traditionally, gendered division of roles for women and men on their board, the distribution of tasks in another organisation that was based on the professional background and expertise of the members meant that a rigid gender division of labour did not prevail.

The data also suggest that women's participation in sport governance is characterised by complex gender dynamics. On the one hand women are required to engage with ostensibly gender-neutral mechanisms of governance to advance the objectives of the organisation, while on the other they find themselves serving as bearers of a public policy agenda to advance "gender equity" in sport governance. These gendered dimensions of sport governance pose significant challenges for women in navigating their role as members of boards of NSOs. Men involved in the process play a critical role in advancing or obstructing their capacity to progress an equity agenda

The paper concludes with a discussion of implications of the study's findings for the advancement of gender equity in sport governance.

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