

He For She For Board Room Equity

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Many measures to achieve gender equality in sport governance have focused primarily on the underrepresentation of women and how they experience this (Burton, 2015; Claringbould & Knoppers, 2013). A common approach to balancing boards of directors has emphasized gender equality through the creation of women's groups/commissions and the identification of gender targets/quotas. Although this might have changed the gender ratio, it can perpetuate the idea that gender equality is the issue and that it only affects women. The gender equality target driven approach to 'change' does not explicitly encourage men to collaborate with women or to be involved in changing a male-dominated governance culture and producing gender equity. Since men numerically dominate top level boards of National Olympic Committees (NOCs), International Federations (IFs) and National Federations (NFs), they play an essential role in undoing gender. Therefore the research question driving this investigation was: 'What can men do to change the gendering of sport governance?'

We investigated dynamics of gender and sport governance in the Netherlands and Australia. Both countries and their NOCs have had extensive campaigns that target the appointment of women in governance. We also selected national and international boards of governance in two sports. These sports were selected based on (a) the gender ratio of sport participation, (b) the board having the goal of attaining gender balanced membership, and (c) our access to the organisation and permission to work with them. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with male and female members of their executive committees. The interviews focused on meanings assigned to gender and practices used to recruit women and to keep them (Acker, 1990; Claringbould & Knoppers, 2013). We asked board members to describe how they have attempted to facilitate gender balance and to undo gendered board culture. We used probes to further explore what respondents think/thought and have done. All interviews were conducted in English, audio taped and transcribed.

We first used axial coding to sort the data and to identify possible themes pertaining to the research question followed by selective coding in which we assigned quotes to themes (Boeije, 2010). The research team then discussed and, at times revised, the results of the sorting process. This thematic analysis involved reading and rereading data several times to check and confirm the relationship of various codes to emerging themes. The resulting themes were: using ideologies of essentialism, accepting and resisting top down structural change, using advocacy, and, (un)doing gendered meeting cultures.

Results show that a consistent strategy used to argue for gender diversity was the use of essentialism that constructed women and men as two separate categories. Each category was attributed different abilities. Respondents seemed to assume that the presence of this complementarity would influence meeting or board culture. For example, the presence of women was seen as an asset to a board because their presence could make the board a friendlier place and reduce the competitiveness of and between some men. The use of quotas was believed to stimulate or force organizations to work harder to find women. The quotas however, also created a tick box exercise. Once a sufficient quota was deemed to have been achieved, women were often no longer specifically targeted in recruitment strategies. Male board members described how they used their networks to identify and support female applicants. In addition, although the presence of women was felt to shape the culture in positive ways, both male and female respondents indicated that this does not mean women experience that culture as welcoming them.

We conclude that male board members primarily focused on creating gender equality rather than gender equity. They actively recruit women to fill positions but there is little evidence that they do much to change the context/culture in which that governance takes place. We end by reflecting on how gender can be undone in (sport) governance. We do so by citing recommendations presented by our respondents on ways men can contribute to the undoing of gender in sport governance in ways that go further than recruitment and by drawing on strategies described in the scholarly literature.

References

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