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Gender and Sport Changes and Challenges

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The Role of Men in Advancing Gender Equality in Sport Governance

Introduction

Data on the Sydney Scoreboard, a web-based tool that monitors women's representation on sport boards globally, indicate that gender equality in sport governance has not yet been achieved. The Sydney Scoreboard shows that only four of 44 countries have more than 30% women directors on the board of their National Sport Organisations (NSOs) (International Working Group on Women and Sport, 2012). They include Cook Islands (50.5%), Fiji (32.5%), Norway (39.4%) and Sweden (32.1%). On the lower end of the scale, the Sydney Scoreboard shows that five of the 44 countries have less than 10% women on their sport governing boards which are Bangladesh (5%), Croatia (7.8%), Czech Republic (9.8%), Poland (8.4%) and San Marino (9.5%). Women's representation on NSO boards in the majority of the listed countries on the Sydney Scoreboard varies between 10 and 30% (International Working Group on Women and Sport, 2012). Overall, these data provide evidence that women remain clearly under-represented in sport governance. The rationale to focus on women's representation in NSOs is that they are the national governing body for their specific sport and it is at this level that important decisions are made for hundreds of thousands physically active people, men and women, in their country and those that want to be active.

Research in the corporate domain has suggested that gender diverse boards can lead to more competent boards contributing to good governance (Branson, 2007; Erhardt, Werbel & Shrader, 2003; Huse & Solberg, 2006; Nielsen & Huse, 2010; Singh & Vinnicombe, 2004; Terjesen, Sealy & Singh, 2009; van der Walt & Ingle, 2003). A comprehensive review of research on women directors on corporate boards, conducted by Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009) and including more than 400 publications in the past 30 years, found that corporate governance was improved when women were appointed to boards because they brought value-adding talents and represented stakeholders who had previously been excluded. Further, a recent study (Nielsen & Huse, 2010) concluded, the ratio of women directors (number of women directors in relation to total number) is positively relat-

ed to board effectiveness and strategic control. The case for gender equality on boards in the corporate sector is now solidly established.

A growing number of studies have emerged to examine and understand women's under-representation in sport governance. Researchers have examined this issue in a range of countries, for example, in Australia (McKay, 1992, 1997; Sibson, 2010), in Canada (Hall, Cullen & Slack, 1989; Inglis, 1997; Shaw & Slack, 2002), in Germany (Doll-Tepper, Pfister & Radtke, 2006; Hartmann-Tews & Pfister, 2003; Pfister & Radtke, 2009), in the Netherlands (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2007, 2008), in New Zealand (Cameron, 1996; Shaw, 2006), in Norway (Fasting, 2000; Hovden, 2000, 2006; Skirstad, 2002, 2009), in Scandinavia (Ottesen, Skirstad, Pfister & Habermann, 2010) and in the UK (Shaw & Hoeber, 2003; Shaw & Penney, 2003; White & Brackenridge, 1985). The majority of these studies have explored questions of distribution, such as the ratio of women directors, barriers for women to obtain director positions and then recommending strategies to address these constraints. Several studies have also used a relational gender perspective and investigated how gender works – the underlying gender/power dynamics – on sport boards. This line of investigation has disclosed important reasons for the lack of gender equality on sport boards.

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the underlying gender dynamics on boards of NSOs and in particular, the role of men on sport boards. It is based on a recent study conducted with Australian NSOs. The theoretical framework focuses on the concept of a *gender regime*. Using a gender regimes approach is a marked departure from previous studies and represents a new contribution to the field of gender and sport governance. A gender regime is characterised by four interwoven dimensions: production, power, emotional and symbolic relations (Connell, 2009). When applied to governance dynamics in sport boards, this concept permits identification of how gender works. The gender regime (Connell, 2009) on the board of one of the five NSOs involved in this study has been identified as *gender mainstreaming in process*, the most conducive pattern in advancing gender equality when compared with those prevailing on the board of the other four sport organisations and will be used as a case study. The research questions are: i) What are the gender relations that characterise the composition and operation of this sport board in terms of a gender regimes approach? ii) What is the role of men on this board in advancing gender equality in sport governance?

The chapter is organised in the following way. First, I critically review several salient studies on gender and sport governance and present the

conceptual framework of the study drawing from the concepts of organisational management, gendered social practices and gender regimes. Second, I outline the methods of the study. The study involved an audit of the gender distribution on boards of NSOs in Australia as well as in-depth interviews with board directors and chief executive officers (CEOs) of selected NSOs. Third, I present and discuss the results for the board of one NSO as a case study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of implications of the study's findings for the advancement of gender equality in sport governance.

The Role of Men in Obstructing and Advancing Gender Equality

One of the barriers for women to obtain a board position identified by several studies has been the male-dominated culture in sport organisations and the role of men (consciously and sub-consciously) to maintain their privileged position. For example, several researchers (Radtke, 2006; Shaw, 2006; Sibson, 2010) found that some male board members actively prevented women from gaining or maintaining a seat at the boardroom table. This occurred when women were given less opportunity than men to contribute and develop, were being excluded from the male networks, or through intimidation and/or sexual harassment. Other studies have revealed that men can control boards by framing the process of recruitment and selection in a manner so that the male-dominated culture on the sport board is maintained (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2007; Hall et al., 1989; Hovden, 2000). This happens when male board members select women that “fit” to recreate themselves. Hovden (2000), examining leadership selection in Norwegian sport organisations, found that the selection discourses strongly reflected male-centred images of corporate leadership skills. The term “heavyweight” was used as a metaphor of preferred leadership skills. Hovden (2000) explained how these skills were associated with heroic, powerful, masculine characteristics but perceived as gender neutral. The common strategy of searching in networks of friends and colleagues for potential board members recreated the existing gender structure.

On the other hand, Claringbould and Knoppers (2008) introduced a new perspective by asserting that men can play a significant role in the “undoing” of gender meanings to behavior or tasks. They examined how board members of national sport organisations in the Netherlands engaged in “doing and undoing gender in sport governance” (Claringbould

& Knoppers, 2008, p. 81). Male directors *did* gender when they described male and female qualities but *undid* gender when they allocated stereotypical behaviours in atypical ways, for example by allocating women to the role of being responsible for the development of high performance sport or being chair. The authors emphasised that influential men can become change agents by using their position to bring about change. Claringbould and Knoppers' approach represents a change from a focus on the way in which men can obstruct gender equality to one in which men can advance gender equality in sport governance.

Conceptual Framework: Masculine Ethic in Organisational Management

The pioneering work of Rosabeth Kanter entitled *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1977) heralded the beginning of a range of studies investigating gender relations in organisations. Based on ethnographic research of a large corporation in the USA, Kanter argued that the role of managers is profoundly masculinised since rationality and efficiency were the *raison d'être* for their position. Paraphrasing Max Weber, she wrote: "The spirit of managerialism was infused with a masculine ethic" (Kanter, 1977, p. 20). According to Kanter masculine ethic can be identified as a collection of characteristics including a tough minded approach, strong analytical abilities, a capacity to set aside emotional considerations, focus on task accomplishments and cognitive superiority in problem solving. Another related and salient finding of Kanter's work was that men who managed maintained the masculine ethic of management by recruiting people who fitted in, who were "their kind". In this context Kanter introduced the concept of "homosocial reproduction" (1977, p. 54), meaning managers reproduce themselves in their own image through selecting prospective managers on the basis of social similarities. Kanter (1977) proposed that it was the structure of the corporation and not individual characteristics that caused gender inequalities. Women's problems occurred because they were placed in dead-end jobs at the bottom of the organisation and exposed as tokens at the top.

Acker (1990) further developed this perspective by introducing the concept of the gendered organisation. She stated that organisations are *not* gender-neutral and should be viewed as sites that are patterned in their very constitution by a distinction between male and female, masculine and

feminine, in relation to their basic components, that is, structure, ideology, policy and practice, interaction and identity. This constitutive patterning, according to Acker, simultaneously reproduces gender inequalities since the distinction that characterises it necessarily involves hierarchical differentiation of values along gendered lines. She asserted: “Images of men’s bodies and masculinity pervade organisational processes, marginalising women and contributing to the maintenance of gender segregation in organisations” (Acker, 1990, p. 139).

Since the publication of Acker’s paper there has been extensive and vigorous theoretical discussion of the concept of gender in this context. One of the dominant threads in this development has been the idea that gender is indeed a social process but one that brings the bodily reproductive distinction between men and women, male and female, into being in such a way that the differential relationship involved is not necessarily hierarchical and unequal (Connell, 2009; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Ferree, Lorber & Hess, 1999; Kvande, 2007; McNay, 2000; Moore, 1994). This allows for the possibility of gendered social practice that does not reproduce gender inequality and that, in fact, may advance gender equality. The question that arises here is how can we distinguish between social practice that advances gender equality and one that frustrates or obstructs it?

Connell’s Four Dimensional Model of Gender Relations

According to Connell (2009) the key to understanding gender is to move away from a focus on gender differences to one on relationships between and among men and women at a number of levels including a personal and institutional level. She (Connell, 2005; 2009) further explains that systematically determining where and how people “do gender” depends on being able to identify a pattern of practices associated with four main areas of social life. The combination of these and the pattern of gender relations produced by it, is what Connell calls a “gender regime” (Connell, 2009, p. 72). The four dimensions of a gender regime are the:

- a) *gender division of labour*, that is the way in which production or work is arranged on gender lines including the division between paid work and domestic labour;
- b) *gender relations of power*, that is the way in which control, authority, and force are exercised on gender lines, including organisational hierarchy, legal power and violence, both individual and collective;

- c) *emotion and human relations*, that is the way attachment and antagonism among people and groups are organised along gender lines, including feelings of solidarity, prejudice, sexual attraction and repulsion;
- d) *gender culture and symbolism*, that is the way in which gender identities are defined and gender is represented and understood, including prevailing beliefs and attitudes about gender.

Although four structures of gender relations can be distinguished it does not mean that they operate in separate ways. They are interwoven and constantly interact with each other.

From this perspective, the social practices involved in producing gender in organisations at any one time occur within already existing patterns of practice that have been established over time. These shape the parameters for possible action. Action, in turn, can cause such limits to change. Such an approach permits the possibility of identifying how organisational processes, such as sport board governance, are gendered and whether the configurations identified reproduce gender inequalities or promote gender change. Accordingly, it was chosen as the preferred approach for conducting a study of how gender works in the governance of sport organisations. Schofield and Goodwin (2005) have demonstrated how this model can effectively be used to analyse the gender dynamics in organisations. Their study identified the various gender regimes that prevailed in several public sector institutions in New South Wales, Australia. In their conclusion they state that their approach and method can be adopted by researchers to analyse and identify gender dynamics in other organisations. This fourfold gender model provides the theoretical framework for the present study.

Method

The research design for the study was a comparative case study of five NSOs and included two stages. Stage one involved an audit of gender distribution on the boards of 56 NSOs that received public funding from the Australian Sports Commission (2008) at the time of the study. The main purpose of this stage was to get important benchmark data on the gender distribution on boards of Australian NSOs and to use this data to sample participants for the next stage. For the second stage of the study I conducted in-depth interviews with directors and CEOs (n=26; 9 women and 17 men) from five NSOs. The following criteria for sampling were used.

The governing bodies of sports that traditionally favour participation of one gender such as the football codes, cricket, netball, softball and synchronised swimming were excluded. In addition, based on the information gathered in stage one of the study, only sport organisations that had members of both genders on their board were considered for participation because the aim of the study was to examine interactions within and between the genders. Another criterion for selection was that directors had served on their respective boards for a sustained period of time, which was a minimum of 6 months since it would be difficult to gauge the perspective of board members with limited board exposure. Sample size was determined by data saturation which is the point when additional data are being collected that do not produce any new themes or recurrent topics (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006).

I used a semi-structured interview schedule to guide the in-depth interviews. The fourfold model of gender relations, as previously described, provided the framework for the interview schedule. The schedule was informed by the topic list used in Schofield and Goodwin's study (2005) with public sector institutions in Australia. Further, I considered the questionnaires and checklists used in three other studies on women on sport boards (Doll-Tepner et al., 2006; Henry et al., 2004; McKay, 1992). Interview topics included role and tasks of the directors, status of the role, influence and authority on the board, contributions and qualities of directors, conflicts or challenging situations along gender lines, understanding of gender and gender equality. As part of the interview I also asked for and collected documents in relation to gender equality on boards of these organisations such as an annual report, constitution and strategic plan. A pilot study was conducted with four directors (three women and one man) of a national sport organisation which was a different organisation from the ones that participated in the main study. After the pilot interviews the interview schedule was slightly adjusted. Some questions were added in relation to comparisons between board members along gender lines and meanings of gender and gender equality in order to get more explicit data on these topics. All interviews were conducted face-to-face either in the office of the sport organisation or another location mutually convenient to the interviewee and interviewer. The duration of the interviews was between 20 and 90 minutes with an average of 52 minutes.

All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Each transcript was then read to identify and code any comments or responses that were relevant to a particular category of Connell's framework of gender re-

lations. This type of coding has been referred to as concept-driven coding, which uses codes that have been developed by the researcher based on theory prior to data analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Similar to Schofield and Goodwin's research (2005), Connell's model was adapted to work as a data analysis tool by formulating the four dimensions as questions to be applied to the interview data. The first category, production relations, was addressed through the question, what are the roles and tasks on the board in terms of men and women? The second category, power relations, became the question, who exerts influence in the organisation's governance and whose authority prevails in the process? The third category, emotional relations, was applied to the data analysis as, who do board members like to work with, who do they dislike? The final category, symbolic relations, was operationalised by becoming the question, how did respondents understand the meaning of gender and gender equality? I then re-read the data gathered under one category and identified any sub-themes. For example, I coded the following sub-themes of production relations: positions on the board, involvement in board subcommittees, link of work on board to professional or sporting background and comparison along gender lines. This type of coding represents an inductive approach. Amis (2005) has argued that using both a deductive approach (theory inspired) as well as an inductive approach (data inspired) can be fruitful because it allows for gaining a creative insight from the data without reinventing concepts that have been proven useful previously. Subsequently, structured on the four categories of gender relations, case studies were drafted with the analysis of the preliminary results for each NSO, five case studies in total of approximately 3500 words each.

Case Study: The Regime of Gender Mainstreaming in Process

In this section, I present the results for one of the five case studies: sport board E. The gender regime in this organisation has been characterised as *gender mainstreaming in process*. This regime provided a strong basis for gender equal governance. Sport board E was the only one of the five sport boards involved in the study that demonstrated this particular gender regime. The board of the other four organisations showed a more traditional gender regime in which masculine hegemony still prevailed. It is for this reason that sport board E is used as a case study to i) analyse the gender relations that characterise the composition and operation on this board and

ii) identify the specific role that men directors play in advancing gender equality in sport governance.

Sport board E is the governing body of a national organisation representing a popular Olympic team sport in Australia with approximately 120,000 members at the time of the study (Annual report). Sex disaggregated data indicate that, in terms of participation, the majority (52%) of players were women but the sport was also prominent among men. At an international level the men's and women's national teams have considerable success as they both consistently rank among the top nations in the world. The board of this sport organisation included nine directors, six men and three women. The male CEO was not part of the board but usually attended board meetings as a non-voting member. The following is based on interviews with the president, the CEO and three directors, two of whom were women and three were men. The results are structured on the four dimensional model of gender relations which are production, power, emotional and symbolic relations.

Production Relations

The role of president was held by a man. In addition to attending to general board matters, each director was expected to assume responsibility for tasks relating to their knowledge area. Governance was structured largely, according to the expertise or professional background of board members. The women board directors' areas of expertise and tasks were as follows: the vice-president, who was a qualified accountant, focused on finances. The male CEO explained her role:

She is vice-president and she also heads up ... finance ... and given her expertise in finance she has been a great asset there. We are going through a process of just reengineering how we manage our finances and report on our finances as an organisation and she has been pivotal to that. (She gives) investment advice as well and (advice on) how we manage investments. So in terms of her skill set, (she is) very good, but importantly, beyond that, she is a very good strategic thinker. She is very good at process, and very knowledgeable about ... (the) sport and competition as well. So she brings a full range of skills to the board and contributes on every level basically.

Further, the woman director who worked in sports administration, particularly in elite development, was responsible for the high performance area of the sport and the third woman director, who had a Master's degree in Business, was responsible for developing relationships with stakeholders and sponsorship. The male CEO commented on the contribution of the latter director in the following way:

She is ... a very good stakeholder manager, so whether that be with prospective business partners or with the international body when they are out here and hosting them with functions. And ensuring that we are aligning ourselves well to, I guess, the powerbrokers of the sport and perceived in the right way, she is very good at that networking and positioning the national body in that way.

The male president contended that all three women directors were particularly valuable for their contribution in cultivating relationships and consulting with stakeholders:

... I use (them) more for ... talking to people and eliciting responses. And I don't know whether it is just the makeup of our board but (while) a couple of the male members ... are quite good, ... each of the girls (is) very good at talking to people and getting answers out of people, probably because they listen better than men do.

The expertise of the men on the board, and the tasks they performed in relation to it, were concentrated in several key areas, namely, business, law and corporate governance. All directors but one had a strong background in the sport they governed.

It is evident that the distribution of portfolios and tasks of the organisation was based on individual professional experience, a point emphasised by all the interviewed participants. However, since there were six men and three women on the board, the majority of the roles were taken by men; therefore the division of labour was male dominated. Further, it is also apparent that a significant gendered division prevailed in the work of the organisation in relation to its communication with a wide variety of stakeholders.

Power Relations

Women's representation on the board was 33%. This percentage had been stable over the past few years partly due to the constitution which contained a clause that "No one gender is to constitute less than 3 of the board's membership and at least 2 of each gender must be elected members".

In regard to hierarchy or status on the board, the male president's view was that each member brings their own expertise and skills to the table. All are equally important, as he said:

... I mean even as president I don't play on ... status ... I have run teams all my life in business and status is the worst way to run a business. The best success I have always had is actually (when) people are equal and think equally and every view is important, and as soon as you bring hierarchy and status in, good ideas often get lost. And so ... what I try to do is make sure that the board is a team of equals, but recognise that certain people have attributes and skill based areas where they will be the experts ...

This perspective was supported by other directors as one of the women who participated in the study commented:

... I would be saying that (this sport organisation) should be looking at what collectively ... the board equals, and certainly I have got some qualities that absolutely contribute to that whole as does every other board member but in different ways ... so I wouldn't compare us as apples and oranges but we all make up a fruit salad.

On the other hand, all interview participants reported that two board members were especially active and influential in terms of their contribution to the organisation. One, according to interview participants was a woman who distinguished herself by asking many critical questions in relation to good governance and she had also brought several new members to the board. The male president was also identified as particularly dynamic. Both demonstrated a proactive approach towards the state associations by influencing some of their nominations. They provided advice and guidance on the sort of qualities and expertise needed on the national board. In sum, in view of the high ratio of male directors and the position of president and CEO being held by men, the power in this organisation was male

dominated, however the female minority exercised influence through their significant board positions.

Emotional Relations

Participants characterised the board as cohesive and democratic; one in which all voices were heard and respected, including those of women. Despite having different perspectives on board matters, once a decision had been reached, the directors supported each other. As one woman director stated:

... I think there is, the board is terrific. We all have a view and we will all debate it and we are all even happy to back each other's judgement if someone else feels a little bit more strongly about something. Very open, very honest, very strong have good discussions, and then also a willingness to actually support other people's direction as well.

The mutual respect and collaboration was also emphasised by the male CEO who pointed out how well regarded and respected the female finance director was. Another, relatively new, woman director, whose view on a particular board matter was sought and accepted, stated:

And look ... (in) my first month on the board, I had the good fortune of being given a project to take recommendations from a Sports Commission review of the sport, the National High Performance Network, put that into an implementation plan format through consultation nationally and seek board approval for the content of the plan and strategies moving forward, which included recruitment of a new position. ... So I feel very well supported and I felt like I had a really good opportunity to put my strength to the test and certainly that was all well received.

Further to the board's emotional relations it is noteworthy that two women directors were openly gay to which the male CEO commented:

It is something (in the) history of the sport; ... it is just part of the sport and so it is accepted as that. And actually I will say further to that as an example, Michelle brought her (same sex) partner to the (championships) and obviously felt comfortable bringing her partner into that environment, and again you know no issues and no comments, and it is just normal behaviour as it should be.

The woman director agreed that her sexual orientation was accepted which is evident when she stated:

I have certainly not experienced any discrimination or anything other than you know really being a person that is, you know, in a relationship with three kids.

In addition to alluding to a climate of respect and collaboration, several directors mentioned the enjoyment that they experienced from being part of the board. Overall, the emotional relations on this board can best be described as cohesive, supportive and satisfying.

Symbolic Relations

In reply to the question about the meaning of gender equality, the directors gave a range of answers. The male president understood gender equality in terms of men's and women's ability to listen to, understand and accept the views of the "other" gender. One woman director mentioned that gender equality involved a certain way of thinking:

it stems through a mindset so I think you need men with a gender equity mindset, you need women with a gender equity mindset as well. So it is as much about the gender of people as well as their (mindset) ... so you need people on the board when decisions are being made that will think about both men and women, and see it as of equal importance and weigh up the decisions.

Yet another meaning was offered by a woman director who replied that it involved equitable contributions being made by men and women at every level of the sport. On the other hand, one of the men on the board suggested that gender equality meant equal access by both men and women involved in the sport to financial and human (such as quality coaches) resources.

The participants not only demonstrated a clear understanding of gender equality but also a strong commitment to it. For example, the male CEO acknowledged the importance of the gender clause in the constitution (a minimum of three directors of either gender) to ensure adequate men's and women's representation on the board. One woman board member agreed and mentioned that she would not have stood for the board without the

clause because she would not have liked to be part of an election, a competitive process. She said:

I think the thing that I would emphasise is having that ratio on a board designated specifically for whatever the minority is that a group is trying to address, so whether it be gender or ... whatever it is, I think that allows a space for people to feel confident to have a go ... There is a reason that we have you know minority representation in a number of areas and I think that is the space that allows for people to feel confident and therefore contribute on more of a level plane. So I think that is extremely important.

The gender clause in the constitution was instrumental not only to provide space for women directors and actively recruit them but also to maintain a percentage of at least 30% female representation. To summarise the symbolic relations, gender equality was understood as equitable contributions and participation by men and women at every level of the sport.

A summary of the gender relations on the board of sport organisation E based on Connell's four-structure model can be viewed in Table one.

Table 1: Gender relations on the board of sport organisation E

| Gender relations | Characterised by |
|-------------------------|--|
| Production | Male dominated |
| Power | Female minority exercised influence through their significant board positions |
| Emotional | Cohesive and supportive team |
| Symbolic | Gender equality understood as equitable contributions/participation by men and women at every level of the sport |

Discussion

The findings of this case study reveal that gender operated in diverse and complex ways on the board of sport organisation E. The complexity of the gender dynamics derived from the way in which roles were allocated on the board, power and authority were exercised, emotional relations between directors were played out and in particular, the manner in which gender and gender equality were understood. Overall, the gender regime in this sport organisation privileged men. They comprised six of the nine

director positions and occupied the most influential roles of president and CEO. However, the gender dynamics also demonstrated two other salient features. First, the female minority exercised influence through their significant board positions. Second, the male president and CEO played an instrumental role in support of women. They promoted an organisational culture in which both women and men could contribute and develop. Their attitude reflects an approach of gender mainstreaming which, according to Rees, is one “to transform organisations and create a culture of diversity in which people of a much broader range of characteristics and backgrounds may contribute and flourish” (1998, p. 27). The specific role of men on the board warrants further discussion.

In terms of the gendered division of production, power and authority, the male president and male CEO were significant as they exercised considerable influence and power. The findings indicate that both men demonstrated acute awareness and commitment to gender issues. Organisational leadership was characterised by overt and unequivocal support for the advancement of gender equality. As proposed by Claringbould and Knoppers (2008), men can play an important role in the doing and undoing of gender meanings to behaviours or tasks. On the one hand, the male president in sport E *did gender* by allocating stereotypical female tasks to the women directors on the board such as cultivating relationships and consulting with stakeholders. On the other hand, he *undid gender* by asking women directors to assume roles traditionally undertaken by men – in this case, the positions of finance director and the director responsible for high performance athletes. It was the president’s view that the distribution of tasks should be based on individual expertise and not gender.

In terms of emotional relations, the board of sport organisation E was cohesive with members respecting and supporting each other. The cohesion was evident when one relatively new woman director mentioned the support and enjoyment that she experienced as being part of the board. She commented on the positive climate on the board in which she had been given an opportunity to contribute and her input had been well received by the other board members including the six male directors. Further, support by men for women was apparent when the male CEO commented on the high regard and respect the board had for the woman finance director. This is in stark contrast to other studies in which men did not support and cooperate with women directors. For example, Sibson’s study (2010) found that some male board members blatantly excluded women directors by limiting their participation, input and influence in decision making. Radtke

(2006) reported that several women directors in her “drop-out” study felt obstructed by male colleagues to carry out their duties. In addition, they experienced the power games, infighting and incivility in interpersonal relations on the board as repulsive. Radtke (2006) found that these women cherished values, such as collaboration and support, which were at odds with the behaviour that was prevalent in the sport organisation. Hostility and division among board members ultimately were the main reasons for these women to “drop out” of sport governance. So it is evident that a cohesive team on the board in which men and women support and respect each other is conducive for gender equality on the board.

Further, in regard to symbolic relations, the findings indicate that gender equality was understood as equitable contributions and participation by men and women at every level of the sport including representation on the board. It is noteworthy that the directors of sport organisation E assumed responsibility for gender equality on their board which is a very different approach from directors in other studies who attributed women’s under-representation overwhelmingly to women themselves. In terms of McKay’s distinction (1992) between external and internal barriers, that is, organisational factors and those associated within women themselves, findings of several other studies (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2007; Henry et al., 2004; Hovden, 2006; Pfister & Radtke, 2009; Radtke, 2006; Shaw & Slack, 2002) indicate that directors generally understood women’s under-representation in terms of the latter. They believed that factors such as the lack of suitable, qualified women (“can’t find women”) and women’s unwillingness to be nominated or to assume leadership positions were the main reasons for women’s under-representation on their board. It was women themselves, they believed, who had generated the problem through their individual choices, priorities and competencies, all of which were beyond the control of the organisation.

By contrast, directors of the present study assumed responsibility as an organisation to address the issue of gender equality on the board by demonstrating their commitment to the gender clause in the organisation’s constitution. None of the interviewed directors or the CEO in this sport organisation expressed resistance to the gender clause, in fact, the male CEO expressed overt support for the clause. In line with the findings of a study on women in the Olympic movement (Henry et al., 2004; Henry & Robinson, 2010), the results of the present study indicate that the adoption of a quota for the percentage of women on boards has had a positive effect on women’s representation on the board. The findings suggest that one of the

women directors in sport organisation E emphasised that this clause was instrumental in her being elected on the board. She felt that the clause provided space for women directors and functioned as an incentive to actively recruit women. She emphasised that without this clause it would have been unlikely that she would have become part of the board. It is evident that the clause supported by the male directors had a positive impact on gender equality on their board. Nevertheless, the gender quota was perceived as a maximum rather than a minimum value since numerical parity of men and women on the board had not yet been achieved.

The significance of the role of men in gender equality processes has been acknowledged in the context of gender politics on a world scale since the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women (Connell, 2009). The need to actively involve men and boys in gender equality work based on the premise that gender equality cannot be achieved by women alone. Reasons to engage men include that they often control the resources which are required for the work but more importantly, men will also benefit from gender equality (United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, 2008). Including men in the advancement of gender equality is fundamental.

Conclusion

Although a growing body of research has contributed to the knowledge and understandings of the under-representation of women in sport governance, the present study has contributed by disclosing how gender works on boards of NSOs using a *gender regimes approach*. This study has demonstrated how Connell's gender regimes framework (2009) can be used as an effective analytical tool to identify how gender works in sport governance and the role of men as a foundation for determining the barriers to and opportunities for the advancement of gender equality. The gender regimes approach provided a systematic and transparent method for analysing qualitative data to disclose the underlying gender dynamics on boards.

Analysis of the gender relations that characterise the composition and operation on sport board E indicate that despite a male-dominated division in production and power relations, the female minority exercised influence through their significant board positions. They were overtly supported by influential men, namely, the president and CEO. In terms of emotional relations the board was a cohesive team in which directors enjoyed working

together. In addition, directors understood gender equality as a notion that exceeded numerical parity of men and women on the board and included a gender perspective across all aspects in their sport.

What then are the implications of the study's findings for the advancement of gender equality in sport governance? Based on the case study of sport board E the findings suggest that men can play a critical role in advancing gender equality in sport boards in the following ways. First, men's support for gender quotas is an effective organisational strategy to ensure women's presence on the board. Second, influential men directors can "undo" gender by allocating women to assume significant board roles and responsibilities which were traditionally held by men. Occupation of such positions by women is foundational to gender equal exercise of power and authority in the decision-making of boards, especially related to the directions they propose for the development of the organisation and the allocation of resources. Third, active endorsement of and support for women by men on boards, particularly if these men hold leadership positions, is highly effective in advancing gender equality. Establishing collaborative and supportive relations among women and men on boards is vital in progressing gender equality. Fourth involves men directors' understandings and explanations of gender inequality in sport governance. Recognition and understanding of the organisational and governance dynamics in producing the board's gendered composition – rather than women themselves – is essential to the advancement of gender equality in sport boards. Proactive commitment to and action by board members towards the achievement of gender equality in board membership is crucial. It is critical to emphasise here that none of these structural dimensions on its own is sufficient to advance practice of gender equal governance. Rather, it is the *combination* of each of these dimensions that appears foundational to advancing gender equality in sport governance.

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