Religiosity, Democracy, and Gender Equity on National Olympic Committees

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Socio-Cultural - Diversity (Olympic Sport) Friday, June 8, 2018
20-minute oral presentation (including questions) 10:50 AM
Abstract 2018-186 Room: Sable D

Introduction
The under-representation of women in leadership positions is one of the most significant issues facing sport management practitioners and academics today (Burton, 2015). As a result, researchers have examined various reasons for the lack of women in leadership roles, including self-limiting behaviors (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007), discrimination from decision makers (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012), and power and organizational culture (Shaw & Frisby, 2006), among others.

Purpose
Largely missing from these analyses is a focus on macro-level or societal influences. That is, even though various scholars have theorized about the influence of societal and institutional arrangements (Burton, 2015; Cunningham, 2008; Knoppers, 1987), empirical examination of these relationships is lacking. The purpose of this study is to focus on country-level variables, democracy and religion—factors that have a potential influence on equity and inclusion (Stockemer, 2011)—on women’s representation on the boards of National Olympic Committees (NOCs).

Theory and Hypotheses
Democracy represents an “institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote” (Schumpeter, 1962, p, 269). The more democratic the country, the fairer the distribution of power and resources, and the closer legislative administrative positions are to the people. Further, gender equity is prioritized in many democratic countries (Beer, 2009). Thus, we hypothesized a positive association between the democratic principles in a country and gender equity on NOC boards (H1). In a similar vein, religious affiliation, among cross-cultural effects of deep-level diversity, fosters national legacies and historical ideologies upon traditional religion identity (e.g., Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam). Such religious tenets in turn influence gender equity (Schnable, 2016). As such, we hypothesized a negative relationship between a religiosity and gender equity on NOC boards (H2).

Method
To answer the research questions, we used several archival datasets. First, we collected the number of board members and their gender from the Rio 2016 Olympic website. Then, other open-sources were included from the Worldwide Governance Indicators 2016 (WGI) provided by the World Bank’s website, as well as the Economist Intelligence Unit’s (EIU) Democracy Index 2016 (DI) barometer.

Results
We used multiple regression analysis to test the hypotheses, with the size of the Olympic program in the country (number of athletes, number of board members) serving as the control. The controls were not significant, accounting for 4% variance (p = .09). The independent variables accounted for 15% unique variance (p < .001). Democracy was positively related to NOC board gender equity (b = .31, p = .003), supporting H1. Religiosity was not related to board gender equity (b = -.09, p = .36), and thus, H2 was not supported.

Discussion
Results demonstrate that the representation of women on NOC boards is associated with democratic principles in the country. Thus, in addition to micro- and meso-level factors, macro-level factors influence gender equity. From a practical standpoint, sport managers should remain mindful of the findings but also note that environmental influences can be offset or buttressed by organizational policies and actions.