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**Gender Diversity in Sport Leadership: A Review of United States of America National Governing Bodies of Sport**

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### Article

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1 "Gender Diversity in Sport Leadership: An investigation of United States of America National  
2 Governing Bodies of Sport"

3

4 **ABSTRACT**

5 This article examines gender diversity within the governance structures of the National  
6 Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) that fall under the remit of the United States Olympic and  
7 Paralympic Committee. This article employs Kanter's (1977) theory of Critical Mass to  
8 examine female representation within leadership positions held in NGBs. By categorising  
9 female representation into one of Kanter's four groups; *Uniformed, Skewed, Tilted* and  
10 *Balanced*, the article examines whether female inclusion in leadership has any impact on the  
11 NGB achieving gender membership benchmarks. Data were obtained from the USOPC's  
12 Diversity and Inclusion Scorecard. The results indicate that females are largely under-  
13 represented in leadership roles within NGBs. However, the data indicates a positive  
14 correlation between female representation in the leadership structure of NGBs, and the  
15 ability of the NGB to achieve female membership benchmarks. The study concludes that as  
16 well as supporting the ethical case for female representation, the findings highlight a clear  
17 business performance case for greater gender diversity.

18

19 **Key Words:**

20 Sport governance; Critical Mass; Gender Inclusion; Gender diversity on boards; National sport  
21 organisations

22

23 **INTRODUCTION**

24 The Olympic Movement has been successful in increasing the inclusion of women since they  
25 were first allowed to participate as athletes in the 1900 Paris Games (White & Kay 2006;  
26 Donnelly & Donnelly 2013; Burton 2015). More recently, Donnelly & Donnelly (2013)  
27 identified three gender milestones achieved at London 2012: 1) The London Games had the  
28 highest percentage of female athletes of any other Summer Olympic Games; 2) Every sport  
29 offered had female representation; 3) None of the participating countries denied women  
30 from participating in the games. Despite these recent achievements, advances in relation to  
31 female representation in management and leadership roles within sport has not followed  
32 (Burton, Grappendory & Henderson, 2011; Donnelly & Donnelly, 2013; Burton 2015; Women  
33 in the Olympic Movement, 2016; Adriaanse & Claringbould 2016; Adriaanse, 2017, Burton &  
34 Leberman 2017). Furthermore, the pace with which organisations are moving to increase the  
35 inclusion of women in leadership positions, remains slow (Burton, Grappendory & Henderson,  
36 2011; Burton & Lieberman, 2017).

37

38 Early attempts to achieve gender equality were pursued in 1994, at the time of the first  
39 international conference on Women and Sport held in Brighton, England (Hargreaves, 2000).  
40 Hosted and organised by what was then the British Sports Council, and supported by the  
41 International Olympic Committee (IOC), the aim of the conference was to accelerate the  
42 process of change that would address the imbalances and issues women face in their  
43 participation and involvement in sport (International Working Group, 1998). The outcome of  
44 the conference, The Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport (British Sports Council, 1994),  
45 focused on developing a sporting culture that enables and values the full involvement of  
46 women in every aspect of sport. Specifically, the declaration outlined ten principles to be

47 followed by all organisations and individuals responsible for, or who influence, the  
48 development or promotion of sport for women (IWG, 2009). Pertinent to this paper is the  
49 sixth principle, which identified the under-representation of women in leadership and  
50 decision-making positions in sport, and called for the development of policies and  
51 programmes to increase the number of women in such positions. Subsequent IWG  
52 conferences followed (Windhoek, 1998; Montreal, 2002; Kumamoto, 2006; Sydney, 2010;  
53 Helsinki, 2014; Bostwana, 2018), each with their own specific theme (Soysa & Zipp, 2019). The  
54 under-representation of women in leadership positions was revisited at the fifth IWG  
55 conference in 2010 in Sydney. A key outcome of this event was the 'Sydney Scoreboard'  
56 which aimed to increase female representation in leadership positions through the  
57 development of an online tool that documents and monitors female representation on  
58 executive boards of National Sport Organisations (NSOs) and International Federations, using  
59 three key indicators to assess the representation of women in leadership roles: board  
60 directors; board chairs; and CEOs (IWG, 2017).

61

62 More recently, the 2012 Los Angeles Declaration, focused on developing a sporting culture that  
63 promotes gender equality and enables the full involvement of women in every aspect of sport  
64 (Women in the Olympic Movement, 2016). Unanimously approved, the 'Los Angeles  
65 Declaration' stated that there is a need "to bring more women into management leadership  
66 roles" (Women in the Olympic Movement, 2016). Similarly, the IOC has identified that gender  
67 equality is key when establishing effective and stable management (IOC, 2017) whilst also  
68 recognising that gender equality is critical for the recruitment of future female leaders within  
69 the Olympic Movement (Women in the Olympic Movement, 2016). This recognition of gender  
70 equality can be seen in Rule 2, Paragraph 7 of the Olympic Charter, which proposes:

71 “to encourage and support the promotion of women in sport at all levels and in  
72 all structures, with a view to implementing the principle of equality of men and  
73 women” (Women in the Olympic Movement, 2016: 18).

74 As such, the IOC has established benchmarks for those organisations who are part of the  
75 Olympic Movement, requested that those bodies and organisations (National Olympic  
76 Committees, International Federations, National Federations and National Governing Bodies  
77 of sport) have a minimum of 20 percent of ‘decision-making positions’ designated for women  
78 by 2005; though this benchmark has not yet been achieved (Women in the Olympic  
79 Movement 2016).

80

81 Evidence suggests that increasing female inclusion within the leadership structures of sport is  
82 not a new initiative, with the extant literature examining a range of issues including:  
83 representation, gender relations, gender dynamics; power relations; gender structures;  
84 gender suppression and the impact of quota’s, and have been explored globally, Australia  
85 (Adriaanse & Schofield 2014, 2013; Sibson, 2010; McKay, 1997, 1992), Canada (Shaw & Slack,  
86 2002; Inglis, 1997; Hall *et al*, 1989), Germany (Pfister & Radtke, 2009; Doll-Tepper *et al* 2006),  
87 Kenya (Mwishuka, Gitonga & Wanderi, 2017); Netherlands (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012,  
88 2008, 2007); New Zealand (Shaw, 2006; Cameron, 1996), Norway (Hovdon, 2010, 2006, 2000;  
89 Skirstad, 2009, 2002) Syria (Megheirkouni, 2014), United Kingdom (White & Kay, 2006; Shaw  
90 & Hoeber, 2003; Shaw & Penny, 2003), and the United States of America (Schull *et al*, 2013;  
91 Burton *et al* 2011; Henry & Robinson, 2010; Hewery *et al*, 2004). Despite a plethora of  
92 research, female representation within sport leadership still remains low regardless of the  
93 growing evidence that greater gender diversity at the leadership level in organisations makes  
94 for success (Women in Sport, 2017).

95 Building on the work of Johanna Adriaanse, regarding gender equality in sport leadership,  
96 this article explored the inclusion of women in leadership roles within the National Governing  
97 Bodies of Sport (NGBs, hereafter) that make up the Olympic Movement in the United States  
98 of America. Using the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee's (USOPC) self-  
99 published 'Diversity and Inclusion Scorecard' along with data of public record (e.g. NGB  
100 websites), the study was guided by the following research questions: (1) What is the  
101 representation of women on boards (board directors, board chair and chief executive) of  
102 NGBs that fall under the remit of the USOPC?; and (2) What impact does the representation  
103 of women on those boards have on NGBs achieving their membership benchmarks?

104

#### 105 *A note on terminology*

106 It is important to highlight that different countries adopt different terminology when referring  
107 to governance procedures and structures. For clarity, this paper adopts the following  
108 definitions of NGB; Board; Director; Chair; and Chief Executive Officer: (1) NGBs are defined  
109 as private, self-appointed organisations, which are typically independent, that govern and  
110 oversee all related activities of their particular sport, through the common consent of that  
111 sport (Bell, 2009). In some countries, these may be referred to as National Sport  
112 Organisations (NSOs). (2) The 'Board' denotes a group of officials (i.e. directors) who are  
113 empowered through the organisation's constitution to provide oversight and govern the  
114 organisation. (3) 'Director' refers to a person who sits on the Board, either through election  
115 or appointment, depending on the organisation's articles of association. (4) The 'Chair' holds  
116 responsibility for leading the Board. (5) Organisations routinely appoint a paid 'Chief  
117 Executive Officer (CEO)', whose remit is the operation and performance of the organisation;

118 this individual, operating in accordance with the delegation of the Board, may be referred to  
119 as the general manager, managing director, or secretary general (Adriaanse, 2016).

120

121 National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs): The United States context

122 Unlike other countries, the USA does not have a ministry for sport or a federal department  
123 that oversees participation in international competition. The role of overseeing the USA's  
124 participation in the Olympic Games, Paralympic Games, Youth Olympic Games, Pan American  
125 Games, and Parapan American Games is performed by the United States Olympic and  
126 Paralympic Committee (USOPC). Officially recognized in 1978 with the passage of the Ted  
127 Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act, the USOPC became the body and voice of the  
128 Olympic and Paralympic Movement within the United States. In addition to the management  
129 and promotion of the Olympic Movement, the USOPC serves as an oversight organization of  
130 the NGBs. While not responsible for the daily operation of each individual sport they do  
131 provide support, and can dissolve NGB leadership if the USOPC feels the NGB is being  
132 mismanaged. While NGBs function under the umbrella of the USOPC, there is no consistency  
133 in how they are structured or how they operate, though they all have a similar mission: the  
134 promotion of their sport; training of elite level athletes; and nomination of athletes to the  
135 U.S. Olympic, Paralympic, Youth Olympic, Pan American and Para-Pan American Teams  
136 (USOPC, 2015).

137

138 In compliance with the Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act (ASA) (1978), the USOPC  
139 is required to submit a report to Congress every four years, detailing operations for the  
140 preceding four years. The report includes information in relation to the involvement of  
141 women, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and military veterans for each NGB and for

142 the USOPC itself. Such involvement includes programmes and initiatives for participation,  
143 athletes, governance and management activities. By signing the Performance Partnership  
144 agreement each NGB is required to submit its inclusion and diversity data annually to the  
145 USOPC's Diversity and Inclusion department (USOPC, 2018). Each NGB is given inclusion  
146 benchmarks unique to their organisation, which are generated from existing data specific to  
147 the NGB such as financial and human resources, popularity of the sport, and additional data  
148 from the U.S. Census and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The  
149 benchmarks are designed to provide an assessment and comparison of NGBs whilst taking  
150 into consideration the uniqueness of each organisation. Data are collected in relation to the  
151 diversity of the Board of Directors; standing committees; staff; membership; national team  
152 coaches and athletes; and developmental team coaches and athletes (USOPC, 2018). From  
153 the data, each NGB is provided a distinctive scorecard highlighting their efforts in achieving  
154 their inclusion benchmarks. Whilst there is an appreciation that there are limitations to using  
155 benchmarks as a measure for achieving gender equality, they provide a framework by which  
156 to monitor organisational progress towards achieving inclusion (Sisjord, Fasting & Sand, 2017;  
157 Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014; Sweigart, 2012).

158

159 The USOPC and all NGBs are federally recognized as 501 (c) (3) non-profit organisations and  
160 therefore do not receive financial support from the US government (Yoo and Hong, 2017),  
161 except for some funding for specific military programmes in the Paralympic games.  
162 Responsibility for generating financial resources to fulfil the NGBs mission falls on the NGB  
163 itself. NGBs secure funding through five channels. Firstly, the USOPC provides direct grants,  
164 or 'programming', directly to athletes and NGBs. 'Programming' funding is based on  
165 performance or potential performance (Yoo and Hong, 2017), which can make the grant an



166 unpredictable or inconsistent avenue for cash flow. Individual and Corporate donors are the  
167 second and third channels of NGB revenue. Individuals and Corporations are able to make  
168 annual or 'one-off' donations in return for a taxation deduction. Fourth is any commercial  
169 activity the sport can leverage through merchandise sales, licensing agreements or  
170 broadcasting rights. The fifth and final revenue channel is individual membership. This  
171 provides access for individuals to: participate in officially sanctioned events; additional  
172 insurance coverage; and other incentives, which can include sport specific publications,  
173 seasonal gifts and discounts to sports related products. An increase in individual memberships  
174 provides a twofold benefit to the NGB. Firstly, annual membership is an indication of the level  
175 of participation and interest in the sport. This aligns to a core aim of any sports NGB: to  
176 cultivate participation and engagement with the sport. Secondly, increased membership  
177 leads to increased financial revenue, which is particularly significant given that annual  
178 membership fees make up a considerable source of an NGBs annual financial support. Failure  
179 to achieve female membership benchmarks means that the NGB is missing out on potentially  
180 significant resources.

181

182 **Literature review and Theoretical Framework** Whilst there are notable female leaders in the  
183 political, economic and business industries across the world, there is still a significant gender  
184 imbalance in these areas. For example, the percentage of women on boards (all companies)  
185 in the United States is between 11-12 percent and has barely increased in the last decade  
186 (Hersh, 2016). Perhaps, it is not surprising that this trend is also evident in sport leadership  
187 and governance.

188

189 An effective leadership team, the Board of Directors, Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer,  
190 is crucial to any large organisation (Arzubiaga *et al*, 2018). It is the leadership team who has  
191 the strongest impact on decision-making, how the organisation runs, and its success (Erhardt  
192 *et al*, 2003). Studies suggest that organisations with mixed gender Board of Directors  
193 outperform organisations that have a Board of Directors made up of just one gender (Joecks  
194 *et al*, 2013; Torchia *et al*, 2011; Nielsen and Huse, 2010; Konrad *et al*, 2008; Branson, 2007;  
195 Huse and Solberg, 2006; Erhardt *et al*, 2003; Van der Walt and Ingley, 2003). When Fortune-  
196 500 companies, (a list of the USA’s largest and most valuable businesses based on their total  
197 revenue for the respective fiscal year), are ranked by the number of women directors on their  
198 boards, those in the highest quartile in 2009 reported a 42 percent greater return on sales  
199 and a 53 percent higher return on equity than the rest (Hersh, 2016). In addition, over 55  
200 percent of the companies that became inactive on the index had one or zero women on their  
201 boards (Hersh, 2016). In the UK, initiatives such as the ‘30% Club’, campaign for greater  
202 representation of women on FTSE100 boards with a target of a minimum of 30 percent, with  
203 the premise that a better gender balance leads to better results (30percentclub, 2017). These  
204 studies suggest a strong ‘business case’ for gender diversity in organisational governance.  
205 Indeed, the USOPC’s own operationalisation of diversity and inclusion specifically includes  
206 language regarding business performance: “The U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Family  
207 embraces the spirit of differences for better athletic performance and business results.”  
208 (USOC Diversity Working Group Recommendations, 2001). In 2016, women chaired just 7  
209 percent of International Sports Federations, held 19 percent of chief executive positions and  
210 only 16 percent were board directors (Adriaanse, 2016). Whilst there was a slight increase  
211 from 2012 of women chief executives (8%) and women directors (12%) globally, there is still  
212 clearly a significant under-representation of women in leadership positions (Adriaanse, 2016).

213

214 Women bring unique skills, knowledge and experience, which can positively affect  
215 organisational performance (Terjesen *et al*, 2009). Research suggests that organisations with  
216 higher levels of gender diversity display higher levels of innovation and greater attention to  
217 the concept of corporate and social responsibility (Joecks *et al*, 2013; Torchia *et al*, 2011;  
218 Terjesen *et al*, 2009; and Konrad *et al*, 2008). Moreover, research by Konrad *et al* (2008)  
219 identified that women bring a collaborative leadership style that benefits boardroom  
220 dynamics by increased listening, social support and win-win problem solving. Research also  
221 indicates that boards with higher female representation have better financial management  
222 and engage in less risky financial and management decisions (Ward and Forker, 2017; Hassan,  
223 Marimutthu and Johl, 2015; and Post and Harper, 2005). Furthermore, Terjesen *et al* (2009)  
224 found that women were significantly more active in promoting non-financial performance  
225 measures such as customer and employee satisfaction. The notion that women are more  
226 sensitive to other perspectives particularly resonates with the governance of NGBs, which are  
227 not-for-profit organisations. If research indicates the benefits of greater gender inclusivity in  
228 the corporate world, there is no reason to suppose these cannot be equally applicable to sport  
229 governing bodies.

230

231 As evidenced, research across the world has examined the representation of women in  
232 governance, both in sport (Mwishuka, Gitonga and Wanderi, 2017; Adriaanse, 2017;  
233 Adriaanse and Claringboould, 2016; Adriaanse and Schofield, 2014; Schull *et al*, 2013) and  
234 non-sporting contexts (Jose, Zehra, and Faizan, 2018, Haque, Faizan, Cockrill, 2017; Joecks *et*  
235 *al*, 2013). However, to our knowledge, no other study has specifically examined the

236 representation of women in leadership positions in sport, and the impact of this on women's  
237 participation (membership) of sport, which the present study aims to do.

238

### 239 **Critical Mass Theory**

240 According to Critical Mass Theory, a certain threshold or "Critical Mass" of group size is  
241 needed to be able to influence and affect change (Joecks *et al*, 2013). The roots of Critical  
242 Mass Theory, can be found in the works Thomas Schelling (1978) and Mark Granovetter  
243 (1978) who applied threshold models to understand collective behaviour. Kanter (1977)  
244 contributed to the development of Critical Mass Theory when applying threshold models to  
245 study the politics of gender and collective political action within corporate leadership  
246 structures. Over the last twenty years, 'Critical Mass' has gained wide currency among  
247 international organisations as a justification to bring more women into leadership positions  
248 (Schwartz-Ziv, 2017; Ben-Amar, et al 2017; Adriaanese and Schofield 2013; Joecks, et al 2013;  
249 Torchia et al 2011; Grey, 2006; Kanter 1977). Critical Mass has been used as a theoretical  
250 lens to examine the political voice of women (Scheurer, 2014; Childs, & Krook, 2009; Childs,  
251 & Krook, 2008; Chaney, 2006; Childs, & Krook, 2006; Studlar, & McAllister, 2002) and the  
252 promotion of women in the sciences (Deemer, 2015; Carrigan, et al 2011; Blickenstaff, 2005).

253

254 Adriaanese and Schofield (2013) and Adriaanese (2016), have used Critical Mass to examine  
255 the role of women in sport leadership. As this investigation builds upon the work of  
256 Adriaanese, Critical Mass Theory will also be adopted as a theoretical framework. Kanter  
257 (1977) argues that once critical mass occurs within the leadership structure, women can affect  
258 policy and create change as fully engaged participants, and not just as token representatives  
259 of diversity.

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Kanter (1977) established four classifications to determine the Critical Mass needed to cause influential change within the leadership structure: *'Uniformed; Skewed; Tilted; and Balanced.*

- **Uniformed Groups** are groups in which all members share the same (visible) characteristics. That is, with respect to gender, all members of the group are either male or female. Of course, *uniformed* groups develop their own differentiations but with reference to salient, external, master statuses, like gender, its members are similar (Kanter, 1977 p. 208). Uniformed groups are comprised of 100 percent of the same gender.
- **Skewed Groups** are groups in which one dominant type (e.g., males) controls a few (e.g., females), and therefore controls the group and its culture. The few are called “tokens”. Tokens are not treated as individuals but as representatives for their category (Kanter 1977 p 208). So while there might be the appearance of diversity as a result of having women in group there is a lack of opportunity for women to fully participate equally. Kanter (1977) and Joecks (2012) suggest that male-dominated, *skewed* groups comprise up to 20 percent women.
- **Tilted Groups** are groups with less extreme distribution. Unlike the *skewed* groups, minority members can ally and influence the culture of the groups. They do not stand for all their kind; instead they represent a subgroup whose members are to be differentiated from each other in their skills and abilities (Kanter, 1977 p. 208). Kanter (1977) and Joecks (2012) suggest that male dominated *tilted* groups are comprised up to 20-40 percent women.
- **Balanced Groups** are groups when the majority and minority turn into potential subgroups where gender based differences becomes less and less important. The

284 focus turns to the different abilities and skills of men and women (Kanter, 1977 p.  
285 208). Kanter (1977) and Joecks (2012) suggests that *balanced* groups comprise up to  
286 40-60 percent women.

287

288 Joecks *et al* (2012) and Torchia *et al* (2011) identified that it was not until a *tilted* classification  
289 is achieved that a minority group could influence the direction of an organisation. Joecks *et*  
290 *al* (2012) and Torchia (2001) identified 30 percent representation as the tipping point or the  
291 ‘magic number’ (Joecks *et al* 2012, p68) for Critical Mass to occur. Similarly, Konrad *et al*  
292 (2008) identified that whilst one or two women on a board can make a substantial  
293 contribution, increasing the number to three or more enhances the likelihood that women’s  
294 voices are heard and boardroom dynamics change.

295 Scholars support Kanter’s framework and contend that establishing Critical Mass has a  
296 positive impact on the performance and operation of an organisation (Adriaanese and  
297 Schofield, 2013; Mahadeo *et al*, 2012; Carrigan, *et al*, 2011, Torchia *et al*, 2011), Luckerath-  
298 Rovers, 2011; Carter *et al*, 2003, Erhardt *et al*, 2003). Sweigart (2012) identified that Critical  
299 Mass has developed a level of validity, evidenced by countries such as Norway, which compel  
300 publicly held companies to ensure that women make up at least 40 percent of their boards of  
301 directors. Similarly, in the UK, a mandatory code for sport governance denotes that NGBs  
302 have a 30 percent gender diversity requirement (Women in Sport, 2017).

303

## 304 **METHODOLOGY**

### 305 **Data Collection**

306 This study firstly draws on secondary data regarding gender distribution on board of directors  
307 of 45 NGBs collected via the USOPC Diversity and Inclusion Scorecard. Gender distribution on

308 boards of 45 NGBs was collected through the USOPC Diversity and Inclusion Scorecard. The  
309 rationale for examining NGBs was that their status represents the highest echelons of sports  
310 performance globally, with a responsibility for hundreds of thousands of people who compete  
311 or are physically active across the performance spectrum (Adriaanse, 2016). The NGBs  
312 voluntarily provide their diversity data to the USOPC's Diversity and Inclusion department  
313 annually, for the production of the USOPC Diversity and Inclusion Scorecard.

314

315 Data used in this article were accessed in December 2016 via two sources. Firstly, the USOPC  
316 Diversity and Inclusion Scorecard, which is self-published by the USOPC (latest published data  
317 at time of research). Secondly, data from public records, was accessed for verification  
318 purposes.

319

#### 320 **USOPC Diversity and Inclusion Scorecard**

321 NGBs in the USA are required to produce regular reports detailing their operations and  
322 demographic makeup, including the participation of women, people with disabilities,  
323 racial/ethnic minorities, and military veterans. The Scorecard measures the diversity and  
324 inclusion of the Board of Directors, standing committees, staff, membership, national team  
325 coaches and athletes, and developmental team coaches and athletes. Data regarding the  
326 percentage of female representation on the Board of Directors as well as the percentage of  
327 current female membership are taken directly from the Scorecard.

328

#### 329 **Data of public record**

330 Data of public record included NGB websites and individuals' social media accounts (i.e.  
331 LinkedIn). In order to clarify the gender of the Board Chair and Executive Director/CEO, data

332 of public record were examined. Although we acknowledge that gender is a socially  
333 constructed concept, and that it is possible that the gender of individuals is not correctly  
334 represented through the review of profile biographies, the study is partly based on use of  
335 public records interpreted in this way.

336

### 337 **Data Analysis**

338 The data from the USOPC Diversity and Inclusion Scorecard, along with the gender of the Chief  
339 Executive Director Officer and Board Chair, was entered into the Statistical Package for the  
340 Social Sciences (SPSS) to be analysed using t-tests to establish any existing and significant  
341 correlations. Independent samples t-tests were used to examine the difference between the  
342 chair of the Board of Directors' gender and percentage of female membership. A further  
343 independent sample t-test was conducted to explore significant differences between the  
344 gender of the CEO and the percentage of female membership. Finally, a correlation was  
345 conducted to see if there were any linear relationships between the percentage of females  
346 on the Board and the percentage of female membership. The magnitudes of correlations were  
347 0-0.3 (low), 0.31-0.5 (moderate) and greater than 0.5 (high) (Dancey & Reidy, 2004). The mean  
348 and standard deviation of the percentage of female memberships when the Chairperson and  
349 CEO are male or female, was calculated to investigate for any correlation.

350

### 351 **Limitations**

352 Whilst benchmarks have been used as a framework by which to monitor organisational  
353 progress towards achieving inclusion, in this case gender equality, there are limitations to the  
354 USOPC D&I scorecards (Sisjord, Fasting & Sand, 2017; Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014; Sweigart,  
355 2012). A benchmark by definition should be a comparison with a "standard" rather than



356 partial progress towards that standard. The current benchmarks are based on previous  
357 female inclusion data (e.g. athletes and employees) in each individual sport, rather than the  
358 population of women as a whole and therefore have the potential to continue past  
359 underrepresentation (Women Sports Foundation, 2018). A further limitation is that the data  
360 captured represents national team and national team development programmes rather than  
361 total number of females participating in non-NGB affiliated sport. However, unlike other  
362 countries the US does not collect national participation data.

363

## 364 **RESULTS**

365 Data indicated there was a total of 767 board members across all of the NGBs that are  
366 affiliated to the USOPC and 215 (28.03%) of those board members were female. Table 1  
367 shows female representation on boards of directors for the 45 NGBs. Data suggests that all  
368 45 NGBs had female representation on their Board of Directors, and therefore none of the  
369 NGBs were characterised as '*uniformed*' in their board structure. However, female  
370 representation on boards ranged from 10 to 75 percent with a mean of 29.6 percent. A total  
371 of 7 (15.56%) NGBs indicated female representation that exceeds 40% (i.e. a *balanced* board).  
372 Some of these NGB's achieved as high as 58.33 percent female representation). In addition,  
373 25 (55.56%) of NGBs showed between 20-40 percent female representation and are therefore  
374 categorised as *tilted* in their structure. The data indicate that two of the NGB's consist of  
375 female dominated *tilted* groups, showing between 20-40 percent male representation.  
376 Moreover, 13 of the 45 NGBs (28.9%) indicted less than 20 percent female representation  
377 thus falling within a *skewed* classification. Furthermore, overall, 26 of the 45 NGBs (57.8%)  
378 fall below 30 percent.

379

380 Only two (4.44%;) of the 45 NGBs had female CEOs, with one providing no data. Eight (18.18%)  
381 of the 45 NGB boards had a female chair, with USA weightlifting providing no data.

382 INSERT TABLE 1 HERE:

383 **Table 1:** Representation of women in leadership positions and percentage of female  
384 membership by NGB

385

386 ***Female representation in leadership roles and effect on membership***

387 A positive, moderate and significant relationship between percentage of females on the  
388 Board of Directors and the percentage of female members was found ( $r = .42, p < .05$ ). This  
389 suggests a higher percentage of females on the Board of Directors may result in a higher  
390 percentage of female members within the sport.

391 INSERT TABLE 2 HERE:

392 **Table 2:** Descriptive statistics of percentage of female memberships when the Board Chair  
393 and CEO are male or female.

394

395

396 Table two shows the percentage of female membership when the Board Chair and CEO are  
397 male and female. There was no significant difference found between male and female board  
398 of director chair and the percentage of female membership ( $t(37), -1.92, p > .05$ ). However,  
399 the means revealed that when a board chair was female there was a higher percentage of  
400 female members ( $M = 57.14, SD = 30.02$ ) in comparison to male board chairs ( $M = 40.91, SD$   
401  $= 20.34$ ).

402

403 When investigating the gender of the CEO, the data indicate that no significant difference was  
404 found between the gender of CEO and percentage of female members ( $t(37), -1.23, p > .05$ ).  
405 However, the means did reveal that in organisations that have a female CEO the percentage  
406 of female members ( $M = 65.12, SD = 46.84$ ) was higher than if there was a male CEO ( $M =$   
407  $43.90, SD = 22.68$ ). The high standard deviation indicates a wide spread of results but this may  
408 be symptomatic of the relatively small sample sizes.

409

## 410 **DISCUSSION**

### 411 ***Representation of women in leadership positions of NGBs***

#### 412 ***Board members***

413 Data suggests that all 45 NGBs had women on their Board of Directors therefore none of the  
414 NGBs were categorised as '*uniformed*'. However, the representation of women on boards  
415 ranged from 10 percent (USA Archery; USA Baseball; USA Judo) to 75 percent (USA Field  
416 Hockey) with a mean of 29.6 percent. Data from the Sydney Scoreboard, collected between  
417 2010 and 2012 indicated that the percentage of women on the Board of Directors for the USA  
418 was 24.3 percent (Adriaanse, 2015). In addition, the data indicted a global mean of 19.7  
419 percent of women board directors (*ibid*). The findings therefore suggest that there has been  
420 an increase in the percentage of women board directors in the USA since 2012, and this has  
421 continued to be above the global mean. In 2012, the newly appointed Director of Inclusion  
422 and Diversity at the USOPC was brought in to directly impact the 53 NGB's. The inception of  
423 the Scorecard meant that organisations were, for the first time, having to publish data relating  
424 to their overall performance in a public platform. By publishing the Scorecard the USOPC are  
425 demonstrating their commitment to diversity and a full level of transparency. The  
426 introduction of the Scorecard, could itself have significantly impacted upon how NGBs plan

427 inclusion and diversity initiatives, including those related to the involvement and participation  
428 of women. For example, USA Shooting have created a women’s coaching council to develop  
429 a pipeline plan to retain and advance women in their sport, which could explain why they are  
430 one of the NGBs identified here as having a *balanced* board.

431

432 25 (55.56%) of NGBs demonstrated between 20 and 40 percent female representation and  
433 are categorised as *tilted* in their structure. Interestingly, the data indicates that two of the  
434 NGB’s (USA Equestrian; USA Field Hockey) consist of female-dominated, *tilted* groups,  
435 showing between 20-40 percent male representation on the Board of Directors. Similarly, to  
436 male-dominated boards, female-dominated, *tilted* boards have high female membership and  
437 low male membership, which provides further evidence supporting the validity of Critical  
438 Mass, and the importance of creating gender-diverse boards to create gender-balanced  
439 membership.

440

441 13 of the 45 NGBs (28.9%) indicated less than 20 percent representation, falling within a  
442 *skewed* classification. This suggests that nearly a third of NGBs are still operating with a Board  
443 of Directors that are dominated by men, with few “token” females, who are merely there as  
444 representatives of their gender, rather than being viewed as individuals who are afforded the  
445 opportunity to fully participate and contribute (Kanter, 1977). Furthermore, 26 of the 45  
446 NGBs (57.8%) fall below 30 percent and therefore below the ‘tipping point’ whereby an  
447 organisation can benefit from gender diversity (Joecks *et al*, 2013, Torchia, 2011, and Konrad  
448 *et al*, 2008).

449

450 **Board chairs and CEO’s**

451 The data from the USOPC Scorecard indicates that eight (18.18%) of the 44 NGB boards had  
452 a woman chair, with USA weightlifting providing no data. Data from the Sydney Scoreboard  
453 (2012) indicated that the mean for the USA for women who held board chair position was  
454 11.1 percent (Adriaanse, 2015). Moreover, the global mean in 2012 was 10.8 percent. Similar  
455 to the representation of women on the Board of Directors, the percentage of women chairs  
456 has increased, from 11.1 to 18.18 percent. Furthermore, the data from the USOPC Scorecard  
457 highlights that only two of the 45 NGBs (4.44%); USA Fencing and USA Synchro Swimming)  
458 had women CEOs, with one (USA Roller Sport) providing no data. Although this indicates a  
459 slight increase from the data from the Sydney scoreboard, whereby there were only 2.9  
460 percent women CEO's, this still falls well below the global mean of 16.3 percent (Adriaanse,  
461 2015). While there has been some progress achieved, women are still under-represented in  
462 leadership roles, particularly in CEO and Board Chair positions.

463

464 ***Women in leadership positions and the impact on NGB membership and Funding:***

465 Results show that there is a positive correlation between the representation of women on  
466 the Board of Directors and the level of membership of women within an NGB. When NGBs  
467 that report having 30 percent or more gender diversity on their BODs are isolated, 70 percent  
468 of these groups meet or exceed their benchmark for female membership. The data suggests  
469 that the higher the percentage of diversity, the greater the likelihood of achieving the  
470 benchmark. When compared to the NGBs below 30 percent gender diversity, just over half of  
471 these organisations successfully achieve their requested benchmark. Of the NGBs which are  
472 classified as *Skewed* only 46 percent achieve benchmark. These findings further the argument  
473 that achieving a gender-diverse BOD is advantageous for the performance of an organisation,  
474 which provides additional support to previous research findings that females bring unique,

475 skills, knowledge and experience (Joecks *et al*, 2013; Torchia *et al*, 2011; Nielsen and Huse,  
476 2010; Konrad *et al*, 2008); Branson, 2007; Huse and Solberg, 2006; Van der Walt and Ingley,  
477 2003; Erhardt *et al*, 2003). In addition, there is evidence that greater gender diversity helps  
478 represent the potential and actual customer base (i.e. NGB membership) (Hersh, 2016; Glass,  
479 Cook and Ingersoll 2015; Dezso and Ross 2012; Herring 2009). It is important to note that  
480 achieving a gender-diverse BOD is more effective than appointing a woman to a token  
481 position of Chairperson or CEO.

482

483 This discovery could have an impact on the organisation's financial performance. As  
484 aforementioned, NGBs in the USA do not receive direct funding from the federal government.  
485 All resources come from donations and membership. This means NGBs rely more heavily on  
486 membership fees as a source of financial revenue. The findings in this article, along with the  
487 work of: Glass, Cook and Ingersoll (2015); Dezso and Ross (2012); and Herring (2009), suggest  
488 that greater levels of female representation in leadership positions helps to 'reach out' to  
489 females to participate in that particular sport. The greater the level of participation, the  
490 greater the number of memberships purchased, which means more financial resources for  
491 the NGBs operations. For example, by simply taking the stated annual membership fee of a  
492 NGB multiplied by the number of female members gained by achieve the benchmark, USA  
493 Judo (\$70 annual membership) would generate \$78,470 in new membership revenue by  
494 achieving their female membership benchmark. USA Fencing (\$75.00 annual membership)  
495 would create \$257,475 annually, while USA Boxing (\$65.00 annual membership) would  
496 generate \$684,320. These three examples illustrate the significant amount of funding that  
497 could be generated by achieving the female membership benchmarks set by the USOPC. This

498 research, along with literature presented in this article, clearly shows that achievement of  
499 these benchmarks will be more easily attained through more gender-diverse BOD.

500

## 501 **CONCLUSION**

502

503 This article examined the theory of Critical Mass in relation to women in leadership positions  
504 held by the 45 NGBs that are under the remit of the USOPC, in order to discover both the level  
505 of female representation and its impact on membership levels. The research reaffirms the  
506 litany of research establishing that there is still a lack of women in leadership roles in sport  
507 and that gender diverse leadership advances organisational performance. The results  
508 suggests that “*titled* roles” such as ‘CEO’ or ‘Chairperson’ are less important than having a  
509 Critical Mass of women on the Board of Directors, in relation to the participation of women.  
510 While these title roles may be more visible, the results suggest that having a Critical Mass of  
511 women within the Board of Directors has a greater positive impact on NGBs successfully  
512 achieving their benchmarks for female participation.

513

514 This is an important finding for two reasons. Firstly, the Board of Directors of NGBs need to  
515 ‘look into a mirror’ to see if the gender balance of the board accurately reflects that of the  
516 current membership (or the membership they are trying to achieve). If there is a true desire  
517 to increase the participation of women in sport, then, as the data suggest, it is important that  
518 the leadership structure incorporates women within the leadership landscape of that sport.

519

520 Secondly, the finding directly relates to the financial advantages of greater membership. The  
521 data suggest that NGBs that have greater levels of Critical Mass, by achieving a higher level of

522 gender diversity within the Board of Directors, are being more successful in achieving higher  
523 levels of female participation. As previously identified, NGBs in the United States are self-  
524 funded so the importance of increasing membership participation, as means of improving  
525 financial solvency, cannot be ignored.

526

527 The potential impact on membership rates and financial performance correlates with the  
528 priority of the USOPC Diversity and Inclusion vision of the US Olympic and Paralympic family  
529 ‘embracing differences for better athletic performance and business results’  
530 ([www.teamusa.org](http://www.teamusa.org)).

531

532 This article is a review of 2016 USOPC Gender and Diversity Scorecard data, so future work  
533 needs to establish longitudinal understandings of the key issues addressed in the paper. For  
534 example, gender diversity within the leadership structure within the NGBs under the remit of  
535 the USOPC. Further research will help establish any correlation between changes in in rates  
536 of membership and fluctuations in gender diversity on boards of directors. Finally, it will help  
537 monitor the movement of women in roles of leadership in sport.

538

539 Recommendations:

540 The ethical case for female representation in the governance structures of sport is  
541 undisputed. However, this research suggests that, rather than establishing a case of gender  
542 equality on moral or ethical purposes alone, the case for gender diversification should be  
543 viewed in terms of enhancing business performance. By altering the female inclusion  
544 framework from a discussion based solely on ‘equality’ to one that includes ‘performance’  
545 may create a shift in the inclusion of women in sports governance.



546

547 Along with a shift in the discussion, structural changes could be made. While quotas in the  
548 United States are not all that popular, they are not uncommon. In fact, the Ted Stevens Act  
549 specifically requires that 20 percent of the Board of Directors of NGBs under the USOPC are  
550 comprised of athletes who have represented that sport internationally, in order to ensure  
551 athletes' perspectives in management decisions. The USOPC could simply extend this  
552 approach, and model themselves on Norway and the UK, and require a Critical Mass of  
553 women on all decision-making bodies.

554

555 Finally, NGBs and the USOPC need to continue to develop and execute programmes that  
556 foster and promote women into leadership roles. More research is required to examine  
557 strategies to increase female inclusion in leadership roles within NGBs including, recruitment  
558 and selection policies, succession planning, gender dynamics, gender relations, cultural  
559 differences and longitudinal global comparative studies. It appears that until there are  
560 structural changes, or a change in the framework of how gender equality is discussed, the  
561 inclusion of women in leadership roles within sports management will continue to grow at a  
562 sluggish pace.

563

564

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