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**“You only go from what you know”: The Reproduction, Resistance and Evolution of  
Gendered Recruitment and Selection Processes in English Sport Governance**

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**Abstract**

Within this article I draw upon Bourdieu’s theory of practice to explore the extent to which recruitment and selection processes within two English national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) reproduce or resist dominant gender power relations that privilege men and masculinity. I present and analyse findings collected through a multi-method qualitative approach of semi-structured interviews with female and male leaders and participant observation. I found that some processes aligned with existing research in the field, while others demonstrated evolving practices that have not previously been reported within the literature. This provided a chance to analyse why some gendered practices continue to be reproduced and/or resisted across different spaces, places, and times, as well as assess the extent to which changing practices are positively impacting upon gender equity within the leadership and governance of the two organisations. Whilst there were different findings across the two NGBs linked to differences in their histories, structures, and resources, I highlight the requirement for the implementation of innovative ways to transform androcentric organisational patterns of value that continue to impede gender equity within sport leadership and governance.

**Key words**

Sport governance, sport leadership, gender equity, recruitment and selection, Bourdieu

## **Introduction**

Despite increased action to promote gender equity in sport governance over the past decade, women sport leaders remain underrepresented and undervalued at all levels and across all continents (Evans & Pfister, 2020). Scholars have identified a wide range of reasons for continued male dominance in the sector, including gendered expectations, experiences, and opportunities at the micro-individual level (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008, 2012), gendered norms, stereotypes, and informal practices at the meso-cultural level (Hovden, 2010; Piggott & Pike, 2020; Shaw, 2006), and formal organisational structure, policy, and practice at the macro-structural level (Pfister & Radtke, 2009; author reference to be added post-review). Simultaneously, there is a growing argument for the benefits of gender-balanced leadership both within sport and wider society, including positive impacts on financial performance, corporate social responsibility, boardroom culture, and role modelling.

All sport leaders must successfully engage in recruitment and selection processes to be employed or elected into senior positions, meaning these organisational processes are particularly important to analyse when exploring gender inequity in sport governance. Within this article, I investigate the recruitment and selection processes of the boards and executive leadership teams of two English national governing bodies of sport (NGBs): England Golf and the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA). I draw upon Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice to analyse how they shape the opportunities and experiences of female and male leaders along gender lines. I identify findings that align with existing research that has found gendered selection and recruitment practices within sport organisations to privilege men and masculinity. This allows for an identification and analysis of similar gendered issues and challenges across different spaces, places and times. Importantly, I also identify changing practices within the recruitment and selection processes of the two organisations. This builds upon existing literature to provide new knowledge on how sport organisations are evolving the ways in which they recruit and select leaders and decision-makers, and the impact this has on gender equity within the governance of these organisation.

## **Gendered Recruitment and Selection Processes**

I define the recruitment process as procedures that lead up to the selection of a candidate for a role, including job/role advertisement, the application process, and the interview process.

Alongside the recruitment process, the selection process involves a panel being formed and decisions being made on both the shortlisting and hiring/election of candidates. Recruitment and selection processes become gendered when they profit one gender over others. Corsun and Costen (2001, p. 19) argued that there is a naturalness of fit to recruit male leaders because the rules of leadership ‘were established years ago by White, Anglo-Saxon, male “captains of industry”’. Hovden (2000, p. 17) argued that ‘leader selection is a very important micro-process in the web of organisational gender relations and *a site for identifying constructions of gendered substructures*’ (emphasis in original). In the sport sector, researchers around the world have found that gendered recruitment and selection practices privilege men and masculinity.

Research on sport organisations in England, Turkey, Spain, Poland, and Germany has found that there continues to be trends of homosocial reproduction where ‘old boys’ networks’ are extremely influential in the recruitment and selection of men with similar characteristics as them for board membership or presidency positions (Hartmann-Tews, 2019; Jakubowska, 2019; Karacam & Koca, 2019; Shaw, 2006; Valiente, 2019). Claringbould and van Liere (2019, p. 103) discussed how the presence of a majority of men ‘makes “other” bodies, especially those of women, more visible ... [and so they] become more vulnerable to being questioned’. Aligning with this argument, Shaw and Hoerber (2003) found within English NGBs that female senior managers were put under more pressure than male candidates during interviews to ensure their suitability for the role.

On the boards of national sport organisations in The Netherlands, Claringbould and Knoppers (2007) found that leadership selection was determined by dominant groups of men and was discriminatory to women in complex and contradictory ways. This was because male Board Members expressed their desire for more women to be recruited to the board, as they felt morally obliged to increase female representation, but wanted the board culture to remain the same. Additionally, in Norwegian sport organisations, Hovden (2000) found that board selection discourses were strongly related to skills associated with ‘heroic’ masculine traits, which meant that most female candidates were not seen to possess the necessary skills for the role. In Polish sport federations, Organista (2020) found that there were significant discrepancies between women and men in how they perceived barriers that prevented more diverse and gender-balanced boards. Whilst female participants indicated that selection policy was a barrier in women accessing board positions, male participants argued that women were not being elected because of a lack of willingness and proper commitment.

## Policy to Advance the Recruitment of Women in Sport Governance

In recent decades, an increasing number of strategies and policies have been implemented at the national level in England to increase the number of women recruited onto sport boards. Gender governance targets were first introduced in 2012 when Sport England set a target for 25% female representation on NGB boards by 2017 (Sport England, 2012). This was increased to 30% within a governance code jointly published by Sport England and UK Sport in 2016 (Sport England & UK Sport, 2016). At the end of 2017, it was reported that 55 out of 58 NGBs had achieved or were working towards achieving the gender requirement (UK Sport, 2017). In 2019, women made up an average of 40% of Board Members across Sport England and UK Sport-funded bodies (Sport England & UK Sport, 2019). These statistics demonstrate short-term, ‘fast-tracked’ success in targets increasing female representation in English sport governance.

Despite the introduction of gender targets having notable success in increasing the representation of women on English sport boards, statistics based on averages do not show the complete picture of gender equity. For example, in August 2020, it was reported that seven English NGBs had failed to meet the 30% gender target for sport boards and sanctions were not applied to these organisations (Rumbsy, 2020). There is also continued lack of representation of women in the most senior positions (e.g. President, Chair and CEO) and on the executive leadership teams of NGBs (author reference to be added post-review). Additionally, research continues to find that organisational cultures within English sport governance privilege men through androcentric patterns of value and gendered informal practices (author reference to be added post-review). Furthermore, increased representation has not been demonstrated for *all women*, with a severe lack of minority group representation in English sport governance (Sport England & UK Sport, 2019).

Whilst top-down targets (and quotas in other countries) are important steps forward in working towards increased female representation in national sport governance, it is clear from these examples that they do not go far enough in transforming deep-rooted gender power relations across all leadership hierarchies within sport organisations. Adriaanse and Schofield (2014) argued that quotas are essential for advancing gender *equality* through reducing the dominance that men have both in power and production, but gender quotas are not sufficient to advance gender *equity* within sport organisations because there are other gendered

dimensions operating simultaneously. Several scholars have found that quotas have received mixed or negative responses from both women and men working within sport governance. This is mostly based on arguments for hiring based on meritocratic rather than representational values, as well as concerns about women being seen as ‘token women’ (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2007; Claringbould & Van Liere, 2019; Sotiriadou & de Haan, 2019). Stenling et al. (2020) highlight challenges of the complexity of representational concerns in board selection processes because gender representation is not just weighed against merit but a wide variety of representation criteria (e.g. age, race, geographic location) and a wide variety of efficiency criteria (e.g. what a candidate brings to the board). Findings presented within this article contribute insight on the impact of the positionality of sport leaders on the nature of their opinions of positive action.

### **Theoretical Framework: Pierre Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice**

My analyses of gendered recruitment and selection processes in England Golf and the LTA are informed by Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of practice. A limited number of academics have used Bourdieu’s theory of practice to frame research on gender theorising within the sociology of sport, despite some feminist scholars emphasising the strengths of Bourdieu’s theory of practice in opening up new analytical perspectives for feminist theory (e.g. Kraus, 2006; McLeod, 2005). Within this article, Bourdieu’s theory of practice has been used because of its ability to reveal ‘more nuanced conceptualisations of gendered subjectivity, power relations, and transformations’ within recruitment and selection processes of two contemporary sport organisations (Thorpe, 2010, p. 203).

The theory of practice aims to aid understanding of how resources, processes, and institutions hold individuals within hierarchies of domination (Swartz, 2012). Gender is viewed by Bourdieu (2001, p. 62) as a hierarchical construct that is dominated by men because ‘the definition of excellence is in any case charged with masculine implications’ and the symbolic systems that profit men are legitimised and normalised. The theory of practice is formed of three key concepts: field, habitus, and capital. The field is a semi-autonomous, objective hierarchy constituted by individuals and institutions who follow the same sets of rules, rituals, and conventions that are authorised through the very act of individuals following them (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). English sport organisations are sub-fields composed of voluntary and paid governance hierarchies where sport leaders compete for professional

advantage (Everett, 2002). An individual's success in being recruited into an organisational sub-field is influenced by the extent to which they experience a 'naturalness of fit between disposition and position' (Corsun & Costen, 2001, p. 19). This relates to the extent to which an individual's (gendered) habitus is harmonious with the formal requirements of the organisational sub-field.

For Bourdieu (2000), the habitus is a system where individuals develop 'repertoires' and durable dispositions that are both 'structured structures', which are impacted by the behaviours and interactions of individuals, and 'structuring structures', which impact upon the future actions and behaviours of individuals (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72). Bourdieu (1990) uses the term 'dispositions' instead of 'rules' because habitus regulates behaviour outside of any explicit rules or laws, and outside of the consciousness of social agents. Gendered habitus develops when 'collective [gender] expectations . . . tend to inscribe themselves in bodies in the forms of permanent dispositions' (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 61).

The extent to which an individual's (gendered) habitus is harmonious with the requirements of the organisational sub-field during the recruitment and selection process is also proportionally influenced by the types and volume of field-specific capital they hold. Capital is a resource that generates power, and Bourdieu (1986) identified four types of capital: economic (income and wealth), cultural (artistic taste and consumption patterns), social (networks and relationships), and symbolic (authority, legitimation and prestige). Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualisation of cultural capital is split into three forms: the objectified state (cultural goods and consumption patterns), the institutionalised state (educational/professional qualifications and awards, and work experience), and the embodied state (long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body with regard to preference for cultural practices). Within this article, the theory of practice will be used to conceptualise the ways that the recruitment and selection processes of England Golf and the LTA hold individuals within hierarchies of (male) domination.

## **Methodology**

The findings presented in this article are part of a wider study that adopted an ethnographic approach in using multiple methods to explore the complexity of gender power relations within the leadership and governance of England Golf and the LTA (Reference to be added post-review; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The methods used in the wider study were 33 formal

interviews, 15 days of participant observation and the use of a range of documents to both contextualise and support data collected through interviews and observation. Data collection took place between October 2016 and May 2017. For this article, only interview and observational data is drawn upon. An ethnographic approach was adopted because of the study's aim to reveal 'unconscious actions that can inadvertently marginalise groups, or reveal how dominant agents wield strategies to maintain inequality' (Kitchin & Howe, 2013, p. 132). Although I adopted an ethnographic approach, this research cannot be classed as an ethnography because it lacks 'direct and sustained contact with human beings, in the context of their daily lives, over a prolonged period of time' (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 3). In organisational research, an organisational ethnography means becoming 'part of the day-to-day life of the organisation' (Kenny, 2008, p. 375). For this research this would have meant joining the two organisations as an employee, and such a request was not made possible.

This article focuses specifically on findings from interviews and observations that have been thematically grouped as relating to gendered recruitment and selection processes within England Golf and the LTA. England Golf became the unified NGB for women's and men's golf in 2012 after the merging of the English Golf Union and the English Women's Golf Association (England Golf, 2012). The LTA was established in 1888 and has always been the governing body for both women's and men's tennis (Walker, 1989). I selected England Golf and the LTA as research sites because they are large NGBs of long-standing sports that provide ideal sites for multi-layered organisational analyses. I valued the depth of conducting multi-level organisational analyses more highly than the breadth of a study conducting a surface-level analysis of a larger number of organisations. Furthermore, both England Golf and the LTA had achieved the 30% gender representation target for boards, allowing the research to offer insight on the extent that recruitment and selection processes are gender-equitable within organisations that meet gender governance requirements.

In addition to governing two of the oldest modern sports in England, England Golf and the LTA also both govern sports that have historically been dominated by white men of the upper-middle class. Within golf, dominant men have historically worked to maintain power through the exclusion of women and the working class from participation and voting rights (Hargreaves, 1994). Within tennis, dominant men have historically fought to maintain power through an unwritten code of sportsmanship and restrained behaviour, rooted in upper-middle class values that marginalised both women and the working class (Lake, 2015). Analyses presented within this article are situated within sports that have historically seen dominant men

resist any change that threatens their power and dominance. Therefore, achieving gender equity within the governance of these two organisations is a complex process that requires transformational change of long-standing, deep-rooted organisational habitus.

Tables 1 and 2 display female representation across the voluntary governance structures and paid workforces of the two organisations at the time of research.

**[INSERT TABLES 1 AND 2 HERE]**

Whilst both boards met Sport England and UK Sport's (2016) 30% gender target, stark vertical gender segregation was seen across their paid workforces, shown by the segregation of men and women in terms of seniority of position.

There were 33 formal participants who engaged in semi-structured interviews that lasted between 35 and 100 minutes. These individuals were female (n=14) and male (n=19) Board Members (n=13), Executive Leaders (n=14), middle-managers (n=3), and further employees of interest to the project (n=3) who could provide insight on gender power relations in the leadership and governance of the two NGBs. I interviewed and observed both female and male leaders to explore gender power relations from privileged and subordinate perspectives. All interviewees were white, middle class, and all bar one were non-disabled. The lack of race and class diversity amongst participants mirrors national trends of minority groups being underrepresented in sport governance (Sport England & UK Sport, 2019). I acknowledge that an intersectional approach to research on gender equity in sport governance is important, including analysing the practice of whiteness, however the focus of this research was primarily on gendered governance practices to enable the scope to conduct in-depth gendered analyses of the two organisations. I hope that future research in this field adopts an intersectional lens and fills some of the knowledge gaps on the intersectional experiences of women in sport governance that I do not address in this article.

I used participant observation as a supporting research method, which offered insight into sub-conscious elements of individual and organisational habitus. It also enabled development of rapport with participants and general organisational knowledge on things such as the jargon, the people, current organisational priorities, and current organisational challenges. In total, I observed 11 specific events across the two organisations in addition to time spent across 15 days conducting more general participant observation. Specific events

included board meetings, strategy meetings, council meetings, a departmental meeting, an induction day and a women's leadership event.

All interview and observation data were manually analysed using thematic analysis. Braun, Clarke and Terry's (2012) 'six phase approach to thematic analysis' was drawn upon as an analytic framework. First, I familiarised myself with the data by manually transcribing the interviews and thoroughly reading over all transcripts before starting the coding process. Second, I generated initial codes from the research questions, the literature, the theoretical framework, and the data itself. Third, I searched for themes by grouping codes that represented a patterned response to the data. I also developed sub-themes with up to three layers of analysis. Fourth, I reviewed potential themes throughout the coding process by renaming and relocating some sub-themes and developing extra levels of themes if the sub-themes were too general and needed extra layers of distinction. Fifth, I defined, named, and developed themes into a format that was used within the writing-up phase of the project. And finally, the sixth phase, 'writing the report', developed as themes were defined, expanded, deeply analysed, and made sense of.

Data was analysed separately for each organisation and subsequently brought together during the write-up phase as similar themes were drawn from each organisation. The CEOs of both organisations agreed that they were happy for their organisations to be named if individual participants remained anonymous. There is only one female executive leader at the LTA, so to maintain anonymity of this individual, I have described all of the female Board Members and the Executive Leader as 'LTA Leaders'.

## **Findings and Analysis**

Within this section I present findings on how gendered recruitment and selection processes reinforce and/or resist gender power relations within England Golf and the LTA. To clearly demonstrate the position and contribution of this article in relation to the existing literature, I have split the findings across two sub-sections: 1) the reproduction and/or resistance of existing gendered recruitment and selection challenges, and 2) evolving recruitment and selection processes.

### **The reproduction and/or resistance of existing gendered recruitment and selection challenges**

An analysis of findings that align with, and add knowledge to, previous research findings allows for a critical discussion on how and why certain gendered practices are reproduced and/or resisted across different spaces, places, and times. Findings within this section will be split across three themes: homologous reproduction, homophilous networks and positive action.

### *Homologous reproduction*

Researchers have previously found that homologous reproduction is a form of access discrimination where individuals in powerful positions recruit those with similar characteristics as them for sport leadership and governance positions (Hartmann-Tews, 2019; Jakubowska, 2019; Karacam & Koca, 2019; Shaw, 2006; Valiente, 2019). Within this research, homologous reproduction was discussed by interviewees across both organisations as a continued challenge in the advertisement and recruitment of paid roles:

I wonder whether some of the imagery, the way we describe it, the way we write about it, the way we advertise, whether that just means the people we're trying to attract ... never see it, or those that do see it, it doesn't quite resonate in the same way. (Michael, England Golf Executive)

It's a bunch of ... men making those decisions [about job advertisement] ... [and] you only go from what you know. (Colin, LTA Executive)

We need to ... stop recruiting people because they look like us, sound like us. (Natalie, LTA Leader)

Advertising is a key stage at which an individual decides whether they wish to apply for a position based on their perception of the role, the organisation, and the extent to which their gendered habitus and capital meet the formal and informal requirements of the job.

To attempt to overcome issues of homologous reproduction in the advertising process, interviewees within both organisations spoke of the importance of looking outside of traditional (male-dominated) recruitment pools to improve the gender balance of applicants:

The visibility of where that stuff goes is always a challenge ... and whether ... you're plugged into those networks is pretty much the biggest barrier to hearing about these things. (Liam, LTA Executive)

England Golf used recruitment agencies to position advertising “into the wider sport market rather than just the golf market [and] all the usual sort of golf people and golf organisations”

(interview with Daniel, England Golf Executive). Similarly, the LTA identified spaces to advertise outside of the traditionally male-dominated sports market and worked with non-sport-specific partners to identify potential female candidates:

We started advertising in things like school newsletters to get staff which encouraged a whole load of very talented people who stopped working to come back to work. ... So I think there is a lot of things that you can do to encourage females to apply and to become part of an organisation (Fiona, Middle-Manager).

In addition to the location of advertisements, Natalie (LTA Leader) also spoke of the importance of “educating people who are going to help us advertise ... and not doing one size fits all”. This included fully briefing recruitment agencies or head-hunters on the requirements of the job to ensure that gendered language or inaccurate descriptions of job roles do not deter women from applying. Natalie gave an example of recruitment agencies assuming that sport is “24/7”, which can deter women (and men) with domestic responsibilities from applying. Educating and monitoring the quality of both internal and external recruiters helps to move away from practices that unconsciously and unquestionably value the dominant male habitus, and towards practices that place higher value on the need for a diversity of skills, attributes and experiences amongst sport leaders.

Further actions being taken by the LTA to attempt to overcome issues of homologous reproduction included unconscious bias training, a ‘good recruitment practice pack’ for managers to use when hiring for administrative positions (observation, 7<sup>th</sup> March 2017), and ‘Induction Lunches’ which give new employees the chance to provide feedback on their recruitment experience (observation, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2017). These are positive examples of the LTA attempting to work towards ‘heightened consciousness associated with an effort of transformation’ (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 160). There are some limitations to these approaches, however. For example, academic knowledge on the effectiveness of unconscious bias training is still largely unknown and it is important that the impact of such training is evaluated to ensure that it is not just a ‘visible manifestation of organisational commitment’ (Williamson & Foley, 2018, pp. 356-357). Additionally, during the Induction Lunches feedback was not gained from those who were unsuccessful within the recruitment and selection process, and these are the individuals who are more likely to have experienced gendered or discriminatory practices. It should be noted that no strategies to reduce biased recruitment were being implemented by England Golf at the time of research.

The findings presented within this sub-section demonstrate that, consistent with previous research, homologous reproduction continues to present challenges in the recruitment processes of England Golf and the LTA. However, in difference to existing research, there was evidence that both male and female participants were consciously aware that homologous reproduction is an issue within recruitment. Furthermore, at the LTA, there were specific actions being taken to reduce unconscious bias and increase reflexivity of recruitment issues across the organisation. Given that there was only one female Executive Leader across the two organisations, the question then arises as to why homologous reproduction continues to be a barrier in achieving gender balance within sport leadership and governance positions? It is important to firstly note that the positionality of the interviewer (a female academic) and the topic of the interview (gender equity in sport governance) could have been influencing factors in shaping the responses of some participants. But regardless of this, the interviewees still demonstrated their consciousness of the issues.

Bourdieu's position on consciousness is that 'lucidity and deliberative capacity do not, especially in the moment of deliberation, grant one escape from 'non-conscious-determination'' (Mead, 2016, p. 60). That is, an individual can, to some degree, be aware of their habitual response before, during or after it occurs, but still orient themselves according to a normalised set of internalised socially structured criteria (the habitus) if the practice appears reasonable. In sport organisations, such 'reasonable' practice that reproduces gendered recruitment trends are often framed by arguments that greater weight/value should be accorded to meritocratic criteria (e.g. 'the best person for the job') rather than representation criteria (e.g. positive action towards supporting the recruitment of underrepresented groups) (Stenling et al., 2020). This becomes problematic when definitions of job suitability tend to privilege the capital held by men. I will expand upon these points in the following sections.

### *Homophilous networks*

Homophilous (same sex) networks have previously been found by researchers to be influential in the reproduction of male-dominated recruitment and selection for sport leadership and governance positions (e.g. Hartmann-Tews, 2019; Jakubowska, 2019; Karacam & Koca, 2019; Shaw, 2006; Valiente, 2019). Within England Golf, homophilous networks were reported to be influential in the recruitment of both Executive Leaders and Board Members, but this was not the case for the LTA. For example, Steve (England Golf Executive) discussed how he knew

all the men who interviewed him for his executive position through the networks he developed as both a golf player and administrator. He explained that:

I felt quite comfortable in there, I felt relaxed because I knew them all. And I felt like I knew them all quite well from seeing them at various golf tournaments and other golf functions.

Additionally, Mary (England Golf Board Member) reported that she had experienced the workings of the 'old boys' club' when recruiting for a different England Golf executive position:

We had a late application which I thought was appalling, it was a terrible one, but he was known to some of the other members of the group and they insisted on shortlisting him.

For board positions, homophilous informal networks were reported to be advantageous for both men and women at different times. For example, Sarah's (England Golf Board Member) application for the England Golf Board was the result of support given by a former female Board Member and other women with high-status within England Golf:

[A female Board Member] who was standing down ... approached me and said would I consider putting forward my name and be up for nomination? ... A number of other people I got to know in my regional rep role ... were [also] all very enthusiastic about supporting me. So that was why I went forward at that point.

However, Mary (England Golf Board Member) felt that male England Golf Board Members utilise homophilous networks more effectively than female Board Members:

It's so much easier I think for a man to get on a board than it is for a woman in a circumstance when there's no set numbers ... [because] men network and ... you've got to be an exceptional woman to want to be put forward by some of the men.

Additionally, Robert (England Golf Board Member) suggested that:

Sometimes men may target other men to come on the Board, well we've got ladies on the Board who maybe should be targeting other ladies.

Robert's suggestion is binarist and gendered, which is problematic when sport leadership and governance continues to be dominated by men, and so male networks and more powerful than female networks. Instead, individuals developing social capital that transcends gender lines can create more equal opportunity for advancement and influence within sport governance for male and female leaders (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

The differences in findings relating to the prevalence of homophilous networks within England Golf and the LTA within this sub-section are likely attributable to the different histories and structures of the two organisational sub-fields. Whereas the LTA has always been the governing body for both women's and men's tennis since its establishment in 1888, England Golf only became a merged body in 2012. This means that gender segregation is much more ingrained in the governance of England Golf. For example, the county structure of England Golf continues to be split by gender, which means that, at the time of research, male elected Board Members were elected from voting members of the men's County Golf Unions and female elected Board Members were elected from voting members of the women's County Golf Associations. Fields and their governance rules 'are the products of a long, slow process of autonomisation' (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 67), and so it is important to have a historical understanding of gender power relations when reviewing current gendered practice.

#### *Positive action*

Several previous studies have discussed the implementation of positive action in sport governance and the differing opinions and perceptions of sport leaders on this (e.g. Claringbould & Knoppers, 2007; Claringbould & Van Lie, 2019; Sotiriadou & de Haan, 2019). At the LTA, examples of positive action were being implemented for the recruitment of both executive and board positions, but not at England Golf. At the executive level, this was through ensuring there is always a woman on the shortlist for vacant executive positions. Natalie (LTA Leader) believes this is important because "people should see a woman against a man on any shortlist for a senior position, well, any position". Fiona (LTA Middle-Manager) discussed how, in order to ensure a woman is on the shortlist, the LTA insists that recruitment agencies make a particular effort to target women to apply for the position: "if you insist they give you women, they'll find the best women, so there's no harm in doing it". Mandatory shortlisting of at least one woman in the recruitment for executive positions goes some way in reducing the impact of potential gender bias in the shortlisting phase of recruitment. This has been found to be an issue outside of sport with managers using gendered assumptions or stereotypes to inform their decisions (Heilman & Eagly, 2008). However, mandatory shortlisting of women does not eradicate gender bias in the final selection of candidates, as quotas do.

At the board level, John (LTA Board Member) explained that the LTA did not even interview men for the most recent vacant Board positions to achieve the 30% gender target set out in *A Code for Sports Governance*:

The last time I recruited two more members that were both women and I didn't interview men. So they had no comparison against a man. And that's of course what happens in order to meet your diversity target ... what's the point in wasting anybody's time?!

This selection approach means there was no guarantee that the women appointed were more qualified for the position than eligible men. In this case, representation criteria were valued more highly than meritocratic or efficiency criteria to meet the target. This aligns with moral/democratic arguments that are based on the principles of equality and the fair distribution of power, resources, and opportunities as well as women having a right to participate as decision-makers.

Leaders in both organisations discussed their views on positive action giving preferential treatment to female candidates. Some expressed positive opinions:

If it comes down to two candidates in a position, maybe we need to be a bit bolder and braver... If there's not much between those two positions ... we should be going for ... the female person because that's starting to trailblaze already in that camp but it also gives us a gender representation at a senior level which we don't currently have. (Daniel, England Golf Executive)

Let's make sure we still hire who we think's the best person, but man let's think it through if it's close because there's other benefits that are going to come, not just whoever is running the department but what does that say to other women in the organisation and everything else. (Colin, LTA Executive)

My own view would be that ... unless there were quotas or, you know, strict rules ... it would be the men ... dictating who was on [the board] and it would be ... very difficult. (Mary, England Golf Board Member)

It can be seen that Daniel and Colin felt that positive action is the right approach if women candidates are equally as qualified for the role as male candidates, whilst Mary saw it as a necessary step to overcome uneven power relations during the recruitment process.

Others spoke of their concerns or dislike of positive action. For example, Rebecca (LTA Leader) felt that positive action is "dangerous because ... you need the best person for the job". Additionally, Phillip (England Golf Executive) spoke of how "it always worries me that there

can end up being almost sort of reverse discrimination”. David (England Golf Board Member) said that he “was totally against them” because “it should be the best person for the job”. Sarah (England Golf Board Member) felt targets and quotas “just create an ongoing myth that we’re different”. And Charlotte (LTA Leader) expressed that “just putting someone on the Board if they’re completely out of their depth and they don’t know what they’re doing ... doesn’t feel like that’s going to help anybody very much except tick a box”.

There were also examples of interviewees who had mixed opinions of positive action, such as Sue (England Golf Board Member), who explained how:

[I feel] mixed really because I think gender shouldn’t really come into it, I think you should be there on the merits, the skillsets that you’re bringing. ... And then my other thought is, well, I understand the importance and I’ve seen from first-hand how it’s improved when you do have a mix of people sat around a table.

Table 3 displays the nature of the opinions of the 24 Executive Leaders and Board Members across the two organisations who expressed an opinion on positive action to increase female representation on sport boards. The data has been split by gender and by position for male leaders but not female leaders due to anonymity considerations as there is only one female Executive Leader across the two organisations.

**[INSERT TABLE 3 HERE]**

Table 3 demonstrates that more interviewees expressed negative opinions than positive or mixed opinions, and two gendered trends stand out. The first is that more women expressed a negative opinion than a positive or mixed opinion, whereas more men expressed a positive opinion than a negative or mixed opinion. Again, the positionality of the female researcher and perceived social pressure for men to align with pro-gender equity views could be a factor here. The second key trend was that, of the men who expressed a positive opinion, the vast majority of these were Executive Leaders. Positioning the two organisations as sub-fields formed ‘of individuals who are competing for personal advantage’ helps to unpick the potential reasons for this (Everett, 2002, p. 60). This is because, within the field, actors seek, ‘individually or collectively, to safeguard or improve their position’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 101). For the male Executive Leaders, quotas for board positions did not impact upon the safety of their position within the organisation’s hierarchy and so their opinions were less influenced by

power struggles related to their own personal advantage. For the female Board Members, quotas associating women Board Members with tokenism could be seen to directly threaten their symbolic capital which can, in turn, affect the influence they have *within* the boardroom if they are not viewed as being there on merit. There was a mixed response from male Board Members, and this lack of strong alliance could be due to their own personal position not being threatened. This is because gender quotas tend to influence recruitment into vacant positions on the board rather than removing current Board Members from their positions. It would, therefore, be interesting for future research to gather the opinions of prospective male and female Board Members who are directly affected by gender quotas to see the extent to which these trends in opinion might differ.

### **Evolving recruitment and selection processes**

In addition to the reproduction and/or resistance of existing challenges relating to gendered recruitment and selection processes, there were also examples of evolving recruitment and selection processes within the two organisations. Within this section I will analyse the impact of these processes on gender equity in sport leadership and governance. The findings will be split across the two different leadership teams within England Golf and the LTA that each have different recruitment and selection processes: the Executive Leadership Team and the Board.

#### *Executive Leadership Team*

In recent years, English NGBs have undergone a process of transformation whereby they have moved ‘from volunteer driven entities to those experiencing the forces of commercialization and the infusion of paid staff to fulfil roles historically performed by volunteers’ (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2015, p. 492). Within England Golf and the LTA, this transformation has led to a shift away from recruitment practices being heavily influenced by social capital (the networks of those recruiting), and towards formal recruitment practices that position institutionalised cultural capital (educational/professional qualifications and work experience) as the most highly valued form of capital. This was demonstrated by the organisations using presentations, formal skills assessments, and psychometric tests (interviews with Daniel, England Golf Executive and Natalie, LTA Leader). The use of these assessment measures ‘constitute the individual as an object of knowledge’, which goes some way in reducing the impact of gender-bias in the recruitment process (Bergstrom & Knights, 2006, p. 356). The quality of the applicant is measured more objectively than traditional interview processes that are highly

subjective and influenced by unconscious bias. Despite this, feminists have criticised positivist, quantitative ways of measuring ‘objective knowledge’ because of their use of binary conceptualisations of gender and their failure to acknowledge difference and diversity (Connell, 1995). Therefore, the criteria applied to objective recruitment methods need to be appreciative of the strengths of different and diverse experiences, traits, and behaviours that are not attributed to one gender over others.

As mentioned earlier in this article, the high valuing of institutional cultural capital becomes problematic when definitions of job suitability tend to privilege the capital held by men. For example, when discussing the election of the President at the LTA, Jill (LTA Leader) spoke of symbolic capital being attributed more to candidates with experience in “highly professional jobs” from historically male-dominated sectors, such as banking, law, and accountancy, compared to “lower level” jobs within historically female-dominated sectors, such as administration. Additionally, high value was placed on experience of playing or coaching the sport to a high standard when recruiting for paid leadership roles:

One of the concerns when I applied for the job was, I didn’t play golf. And I’ve been at meetings where people have said we don’t want to be recruiting people into senior management positions ... who don’t play golf. (Michael, England Golf Executive).

Leaders in both organisations discussed some of the reasons why, overall, this is more advantageous for men than women:

Lots of people who play golf are attracted to work for England Golf and there are more men that play golf than women. (Michael, England Golf Executive)

Because there’s less women trying to make it to the elite level, ... there’s less of them falling out and therefore there’s less of them wanting to stay in sport and ... administrative ... head office-type roles. (Nathan, LTA Executive)

Some of the interviewees expressed their disagreement with sporting competency being perceived as synonymous with good leadership:

Sports organisations place far too much emphasis ... on sports ability ... [because] they might be great at golf but it doesn’t mean they’re a great Chief Executive. (Michael, England Golf Executive)

In sport, ridiculously, there’s this clarion cry all the time ... [that] you can only make a real difference if you come from the sport. I don’t accept any of that nonsense. (John, LTA Board Member)

Natalie (LTA leader) explained how the LTA have tried to move away from a culture focused on recruiting those with a tennis background towards an organisation with a greater interest in the administrative skills and experience of the applicant:

We've done a lot to ensure that ... first off ... you [are] competent to do the job you're employed to do, and then if ... you're just a tennis nut, that's great, but it's not the reason you're sat in an interview.

Moving away from recruiting individuals with extensive experience within the sport is an example of an evolving practice that importantly disrupts the reproduction of male habitus within the recruitment process by drawing in individuals who have developed perspectives, skills, and practices outside of the historically male-dominated field of sport.

### *The Board*

The recruitment and selection processes for the boards of sport organisations have previously been criticised for valuing social capital over the suitability of an individual for the role due to autocratic leadership, self-appointed memberships, closed voting systems, and absent ethics committees (Tomlinson, 2014). Despite social capital still playing a part in board election processes (as discussed earlier in this article), interviewees reported that this has been reduced over time through the introduction of more rigorous election processes. Joyce (LTA Leader) discussed how, previously, “the current President would actually ask somebody, just tap them on the shoulder and say would you be Deputy?”. Similarly, James (England Golf Board Member) explained that England Golf Board elections used to involve “somebody putting a hand on your shoulder” and saying, “well he looks alright let's get him to do it”. Recruitment processes for appointing Elected Directors are now more rigorous within both organisations as they involve official nomination processes.

At England Golf, a Member County must officially nominate a Voting Member (Councillor) to be an Elected Director, with the nomination being seconded by another Member County. At the LTA, Elected Directors must be nominated by at least six eligible Councillors. Although these recruitment processes require the individual to have developed ‘a durable network ... of mutual acquaintance and recognition’ (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 251) through holding high levels of social capital, this form of social capital is more attainable for women leaders as it is not centred around the social networks of a small group of the most powerful individuals in the organisation who have historically been men. These are examples of evolving recruitment and election processes as part of a broader push for good governance within a

sector that is becoming more ‘complex, commercial, multidisciplinary and high-profile in nature’ (Sport England & UK Sport, 2016, p. 4). Moving forward, longitudinal research will be important in critically evaluating the long-term impacts of evolving recruitment and selection processes in sport governance, and the extent to which they transform historic androcentric practices and contribute to genuine and sustainable increases in female representation in line with wider societal and sectorial change.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This study aimed to explore the extent to which the recruitment and selection processes of England Golf and the LTA reproduce or resist dominant gender power relations that privilege men and masculinity. It was found that some processes aligned with existing research in the field, while others demonstrated evolving practices that have not previously been reported within the literature. This shows how progress towards gender equity in sport governance is not a linear process, as organisations can simultaneously conserve and resist gender inequitable practices. The continued conservation of deep-rooted organisational habitus demonstrates how there is no ‘fast-track’ option for achieving gender equity in sport governance and organisations must be prepared to make long-term investments in becoming sustainably equitable.

Drawing upon Bourdieu’s theory of practice was essential in unpicking the potential reasons for the reproduction and/or resistance of gendered practices that align with previous research findings. For example, Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of the workings of the field indicate that the perceptions and actions of sport leaders in relation to recruitment and selection policy are directly related to their position within the organisational sub-field and their desire and attempts to safeguard or improve this position. In an applied sport governance setting, this highlights the need for careful consideration to be given to the composition of committees, teams or bodies that propose and make decisions on new strategies and policies to improve gender equity within sport organisations. Additionally, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and its relation to consciousness provides some insight into potential reasons for continued homologous reproduction through various stages of the recruitment process. Despite being conscious of problematic gendered practices, an individual can continue to orient themselves towards problematic normalised practices if they are perceived as ‘reasonable’. This interrelates with Bourdieu’s concept of capital, with ‘reasonable’ practices that reproduce gendered recruitment and election trends often being framed by arguments that greater

weight/value should be accorded to efficiency or meritocratic criteria that continue to privilege forms of capital held by men. Within the applied sport governance setting, and in line with feminist scholarship, this demonstrates a need for a better appreciation of the strengths of different and diverse experiences, traits, and behaviours that are not attributed to one gender over others within recruitment and selection processes.

New findings on evolving recruitment practices included evidence of the modernisation of recruitment processes within both organisations to focus more heavily on skills-based recruitment. Additionally, both organisations were trying to advertise roles outside of traditional sport pools and the LTA was taking action to attempt to overcome issues of homologous reproduction. Whilst these are positive steps in working towards more equitable recruitment and selection for sport leadership and governance positions, such reformed processes will not be genuinely and sustainably effective if they are implemented in disjointed ways that do not result in a complete transformation of the gendered logic of practice of sport organisations. For example, positive action can put the symbolic capital of women leaders at risk if they are recruited into an organisation with a habitus that continues to value the contributions of men more highly than women. Furthermore, widening the reach of job advertisements and unconscious bias training will not be effective if organisations continue to frame their recruitment practices around meritocratic and efficiency criteria and values that privilege applicants from traditionally male-dominated fields. Therefore, in addition to a focus on reforming formal recruitment and selection processes, there is also a need to find innovative ways to transform androcentric organisational patterns of value that continue to impede gender equity within sport leadership and governance. For organisations that take gender equity seriously, I suggest that a good starting place for this is auditing processes that identify gaps between desired organisational culture, practice and outcomes in relation to gender equity, and actual organisational culture, practice and outcomes. This would develop greater insight into where individual organisations are falling short of gender equity by their own identified standards and provide a targeted and bespoke approach to reform that considers the different histories, structures, and resources of individual organisations.

Despite England Golf and the LTA both meeting the national 30% gender target, there were significant differences in the findings between the two organisations, with much more evidence of the LTA implementing strategies to reform their recruitment and selection processes. There are a few clear reasons for this. First, the LTA had significantly more employees and HR resources available to implement new recruitment strategies and

programmes. This is both in terms of annual income and staff numbers. For example, England Golf had 86 permanent paid employees and only one member of staff solely dedicated to HR, whereas the LTA had 300 employees and a 10-strong HR department. Furthermore, The LTA's annual income in 2016 was £64,478,000 compared to £8,680,000 at England Golf. Second, the two organisations have different histories and structures which influence their board election processes, including the impact of the terms of the merger between the English Golf Union and the English Women's Golf Association in 2012 (see author paper for more information – to be added post-review). Organisational histories, structures and resources are important to consider when discussing gender equity in sport governance as they can impact upon the unique challenges that individual organisations face and the options available to them to overcome such challenges.

The differences in findings between the two organisations demonstrates that organisation-specific findings cannot be generalised to all English NGBs. That said, whilst different organisations require different approaches and not all organisations should be judged by the same criteria, it is important that any strategies aiming to make recruitment for leadership positions more equitable are as effective as they can be. More research from different angles is required to support this process. Useful areas for future research include investigating the gendered practices of recruitment agencies and head-hunters in recruiting sport leaders, the gendered experiences of unsuccessful candidates for sport leadership positions, and longitudinal studies assessing the effectiveness of changing recruitment practices.

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