

Affirmative Action

MANAGING GENDER

Affirmative Action and
Organizational Power in
Australian, Canadian,
and New Zealand Sport

Jim McKay

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Preface



THIS BOOK EMANATED from an uneasiness I felt about an earlier one I wrote entitled, *No Pain, No Gain? Sport and Australian Culture*, in which I used a neo-Gramscian perspective to analyze inequalities of social class, race, and gender in Australian sport. Although I was convinced then—and still am—that a Gramscian position is fundamental for understanding some aspects of social inequalities in sport, I concluded that it could not explain gender inequalities satisfactorily. This was particularly evident in my investigation of state policies regarding sport. Although my study had been what Messner (1990a) terms “gender-conscious,” it had not been “profeminist” and, therefore, lacked the insights necessary to illuminate just how pervasively sport is both constructed by and constructs gendered relations of power.

In order to obtain a more nuanced understanding of gender, sport, and state policies, I conducted approximately 100 in-depth interviews with managers of a variety of sporting organizations across Australia. My main goal was to analyze how these managers were implementing affirmative action programs for women in sport organizations run by state and federal governments. As will be discussed in chapter 7, this turned out to be a controversial project, as some members of the Australian Sports Commission, which funded the investigation, attempted to discredit my findings. This outcome motivated me to compare the Australian context with countries that also had affirmative action programs for women in sport.

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Canada and New Zealand were obvious choices because the Canadian state's sport system, established in the 1960s, was a model for the Australian approach to national sports planning in the 1970s, while New Zealand drew on both of these countries' schemes when it created its national sports program in the 1980s. Moreover, the national agencies responsible for sport in each country—the Australian Sports Commission, Sport Canada, and the Hillary Commission for Recreation and Sport—have promoted themselves as “leading edge” organizations with respect to their affirmative action programs for women. Because I reside in Australia, I had neither the time nor the resources to complete in-depth interviews with a large sample of managers from a broad array of sporting organizations across Canada and New Zealand. Therefore, I decided to conduct in-depth interviews with most of the middle and senior managers in both Sport Canada and the Hillary Commission, as well as managers and members of the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport, an influential “arm's length” advocacy group in the Canadian state.

My investigation showed that current affirmative action initiatives based on the premise of “getting more women into sport” have either been marginalized, trivialized, or incorporated into the androcentric cultures that pervade sporting organizations, the media, and the state. When affirmative action does get on the corporate-managerial agenda in the state sector, it tends either to receive rhetorical attention or to be couched in terms of what it can do to improve efficiency, rather than as a substantive commitment to social justice. I conclude that unless current affirmative action policies are directed at changing both men and the androcentric culture that is deeply embedded in the gender regimes of sporting organizations, they are unlikely to attract and retain more women managers.

In the first chapter I indicate the relevance of profeminist research to sport. In chapter 2 I sketch the main components of the social constructionist perspective that I used in the

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study. In chapter 3 I adopt a relatively abstract and macrolevel perspective to describe how state-initiated affirmative action policies in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand have been shaped by both androcentric and corporate-managerial regimes. Chapter 4 is a concrete and microlevel analysis of gendered structures of labor, power, and cathexis in sporting organizations. I argue that women's underrepresentation in managerial positions in these organizations is due to institutional barriers that systematically favor men and disadvantage women. A key factor in this respect is that chief components of work cultures are determined by and for married men with wives who stay at home, raise children, and do unpaid domestic labor. Chapter 5 specifically focuses on men and women managers' attitudes toward affirmative action. Chapter 6 examines how male journalists ridiculed affirmative action initiatives in Australian sport. Chapter 7 discusses the gender politics of doing research on affirmative action in sport. The final chapter discusses the limits and possibilities of affirmative action policies for changing relations of power between men and women in sporting organizations.

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Michael Messner and Don Sabo, "Changing Men through Changing Sports," in *Sex, Violence and Power in Sports: Rethinking Masculinity*. Used by permission of The Crossing Press.

List of Abbreviations



ASC	Australian Sports Commission
ASRP	Applied Sports Research Program
CAAWS	Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport
HC	Hillary Commission for Recreation and Sport
HRSCCLCA	House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs
IOC	International Olympic Committee
NSO	National Sporting Organization
SC	Sport Canada

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One

Introduction

“THE SEARCH FOR MR. RIGHT”

AT 4 A.M. ON THURSDAY, September 24, 1993, millions of television viewers in Australia were watching tens of thousands of people who had gathered around a giant electronic screen adjacent to Sydney’s world-famous Opera House. Most of these people were hoping that the impending telecast from Monaco would reveal that Sydney had obtained one of sport’s most glittering prizes—the right to host the Olympic Games in 2000. The crowd fell silent when Juan Antonio Samaranch, a former minister of sport in Francisco Franco’s fascist regime in Spain and president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), one of the most androcentric organizations in the world, appeared on screen to divulge the winner. The atmosphere was tense while Samaranch opened the envelope and waited for what seemed to the observers like an eternity before declaring the winner. When he announced that Sydney had triumphed, Australians began patriotic celebrations that had not been seen since almost 10 years to the day, when in another historic sporting event, Australia became the first challenger to defeat the United States in the America’s Cup. In a portentously gendered statement, the then prime minister, Paul Keating, proclaimed that the outcome had put Australia “in the swim with the big boys.”

There was immediate speculation about who the predominantly male members of the state government, the Australian Olympic Council, and the city council would select as the CEO and members of the organizing committee for the

Games. In her “Corporate Woman” column for *The Australian Financial Review* (Australia’s equivalent of *The Wall Street Journal*), Sheryle Bagwell provided a short list of eminently qualified women whom she thought should be considered for CEO. Citing the contributions that women had made to the success of the tender, Bagwell (1993, p.17) opined that:

. . . I thought the Olympic movement was about fairness and equity. After all, what better place than the sporting field to underline the truism that the winner is always the person on the day, whatever the gender? I admit that there is not much of a tradition of women running Olympic Games around the world. But wouldn’t it be a great symbol for the Olympics that will herald in a change of millennium to have a women at the helm?

However, she was pessimistic that a woman actually would be chosen. As she noted, a Sydney newspaper had already set the gender agenda for the headhunters by dubbing the quest “The Search for Mr Right.” But Bagwell was optimistic that the selectors would at least include some women members on the organizing committee. Her idealism was dashed when the composition of the committee was announced a few weeks later. Just one of the fourteen members was a woman, who was only added at the last minute after the embarrassed selectors realized that they initially had chosen only men. This belated decision to include a token woman evoked a barrage of criticism: a headline in *The Australian* proclaimed, “Women Cheated by Games Team Choice”; a letter to the editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald* was captioned, “Insult To All Women”; the head of the Women’s Electoral Lobby said that the board was “a boring collection of Anglo-Saxon males.”¹

Putting thirteen men and one woman on the organizing committee for the 2000 Olympics is a graphic example of what Schein (1994) terms the “think male, think manager” mentality that pervades most organizations. But as I will attempt to