Embedding Gender Justice in Higher Education: An Example from Sports Business Management

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Abstract
The gatekeepers to world sport continue to be men, supporting an environment which makes it complicated and difficult for women to enter and achieve sports leadership positions. Within a growth business sector supported by copious degree programmes globally, why is this the case? This paper reflects upon previous examinations of sports business management classroom experiences and aims to position gender equalities more widely as an institutional challenge. Exclusivities and inequalities are not bound by classroom walls but may permeate university space and culture more broadly. Strategies for social change and praxis are offered by way of tackling seen and unseen injustice(s) in educational practice. Five facets of gender justice (reflection, university ethos, communities, curriculum and language) are presented in the hope that educators can forge a pathway through to learning that tackles both the subtle and direct forms of inequalities. Universities are therefore encouraged to be gender responsible communities in the fight to catalyse educational, social and industry change.

Keywords: Equality, Gender Justice, Higher Education, Pedagogy, Sports Business

Introduction

The patriarchal hegemony that is associated with sports participation and the management of sport continues to be problematic when striving for gender equality. This fight is not only a concern in the realm of business but also to educational institutions offering degree courses feeding into the sports business sector. The lack of women in senior leadership positions in the sports industry (Hancock et al., 2018; Miragaia and Soares, 2017; Burton, 2015; Moore, 2008) has ramifications for other women viewing sports management as a viable career route for them. This in turn creates challenges for universities seeking to recruit and sustain women on their sports business management programmes.

Thirty eight years on from a discussion of the 'chilly climate' in our male-dominated classrooms (Hall and Sandler, 1982), there continues to be issues in our teaching and learning spaces (see Saunder et al., 2018) and evidence of resistance to gender equality in academic settings (Powell et al., 2018). The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to the 'bigger picture' (see Humberstone, 2009), namely the cultural

placement of sports business management courses, and thus to encourage universities to find ways to be active leaders in social change:

> *'because the sexist atmosphere of the sport industry is unlikely to change unless shifts occur in students' undergraduate experiences'* (Saunder et al., 2018, 77).

Here I will first reflect on previous examinations of sports business management classroom experiences before highlighting the usefulness of a gender justice approach to education. By doing so, I seek to encourage universities to act as *gender responsible communities* in the battle towards gender justice.

Review of literature
The concept of the 'chilly climate', describing 'patterns of inequitable treatment that, as they accumulate, inhibit women's confidence, self-esteem, and accomplishment' (Britton, 2017, 7), developed by Hall and Sandler (1982), has been applied to the sports business management classroom (see Morris et al., 2019; Saunder et al., 2018; Harris et al., 2014). Hall and Sandler (1982, 3) draw attention to the importance of both the institutional and classroom environment and report that a 'chilling classroom climate' is one that negatively effects both women (in connection to engagement, participation and career aspirations) and men (with regard to knowledge and understanding of gender equalities and peer relations), limiting their educational experiences. Injustices exist in our social, cultural and educational milieus which can complicate educational experiences:

> *'In reference to the intersections of gender and cultural or symbolic injustice, females as a group continue to suffer cultural domination, non-recognition and disrespect within an enduring patriarchal world that continues to devalue and demean activities connoted as feminine'* (Keddie, 2005, 86).

Differences in the treatment of women and men on sports business programmes were demonstrated in relation to imbalanced roles and workloads centred on group activities (see Saunder et al., 2018). Furthermore, as a departure from Hall and Sandler's (1982) work, Morris and others (2019) found that women learners were not treated unfairly in terms of engagement with lecturers, and 'showed a remarkably clear grasp of how to succeed' (Morris et al., 2019, 71) in their 'othered' situation. Despite this positive note, a complexity occurs when women students are accepting of the male-dominated classroom and are therefore complicit in its being (Clayton and Humberstone, 2007), acknowledging they would have to work harder to sustain their position (Harris et al., 2014) and being satisfied that the polarised classroom environment will set them up for the male-dominated sports sector (Morris et al., 2019).

Sports business management degrees are male-dominated (Hancock et al., 2018; Harris et al., 2015) which indicates issues for women choosing business-based programmes (Miragaia and Soares, 2017). It is acknowledged that universities must provide curricula that will prepare the students to excel in the workplace as 'highly trained professionals' (Kelley et al., 1994, 93) but the wider educational values associated with being at university are also significant:

> *'I begin to despair. After 30 years of feminist and pro-feminist writings which have critically analysed sporting cultures, not only highlighting women's diversity and lack of representation in sport, but also the debilitating effects on both men and women of 'hegemonic' masculinity in society and sporting cultures, I find in my small segment of academia that nothing changes. Or perhaps things are changing, changing for the worse'* (Humberstone, 2009, 257).

Humberstone's (2009) critique 'despairs' at the disregard for sociological teachings within sports management related subjects, amidst a changing and challenging Higher Education landscape. Humberstone calls for a critical space to be carved out for programmes to ensure that the teaching of gender equalities in and through sport is seen as integral to the 'bigger picture' learning of students. There is a concern that a move towards more business-focused modules, historically entrenched in hegemonic masculine values, inadvertently attracts male students and compromises the teaching of 'broader views' (Humberstone, 2009, 260). This business mould is then reciprocated in industry, whereby leadership roles typify gender norms and male dominance (Hancock et al., 2018).

Programmes that have a 'gender biased mindset' (see Cain et al., 2020, 5) may contribute to the on-going process of 'othering' that women students may experience (Saunder et al., 2018). Hancock and others' (2018) examination on the gendered perceptions of sports management students found that women see barriers to advancing in the sports industry, whereby men more strongly believed women were just not interested in achieving high-level positions. Other research evidences male students' resistance to knowledge that challenges the male patriarch and for them, gender simply meant 'women' (Clayton and Humberstone, 2007, 522). Despite all of these issues and challenges, women sports management students continued to feel excited about achieving a career in the sector (Harris et al., 2015).

Gender Equality in Higher Education
Miragaia and Soares (2017, 111) call for 'new pedagogical strategies' to be endorsed to ensure gender and gender equalities are embedded in the curriculum and argue that universities have a duty to 'balance' industry gender inequalities.

> *'Gender equality pedagogy aims for gender equality as a social value concerned with gender, power and hierarchy, which requires a vision of a*

gender equal society and commitment to it' (Ylöstalo and Brunila, 2018, 918).

Ultimately, gender equality pedagogy is flexible and allows for discourse shifts moving away from historical oppression and rigidity by 'creating spaces for teaching differently' (Ylöstalo and Brunila, 2018, 928). Shaw and Frisby (2006) problematise liberal feminist approaches to gender equity, namely the three 'frames' of 'fix the women' campaigns, the reification of gender binaries associated with 'value the feminine' projects and lastly the 'create equal opportunities' pathways. A different approach, that of gender justice, however, could be a useful pedagogical framework in which to combat these issues due to its broader scope and holistic approach to challenge inequalities.

Keddie's (2006) examination of masculinities and boys' educational outcomes evidences the importance of a gender justice perspective as a transformative power which utilises feminist principles to disturb the rigid gender binaries that can underpin stereotypical versions of gender and gender status. The idea is to 'challenge and rework' reified notions of gender within educational spaces, rather than 'normalize and reinscribe', in a critically reflective manner (Keddie, 2006, 111). Gender justice has not widely been applied to sports business management teaching but has been used as a critical lens in sports research (Pielichaty, 2021; Watson and Scraton, 2017) and in connection to schools and masculinities (Keddie, 2006; Keddie and Mills, 2009).

Gender justice is not a *feminist issue* but is important for social justice more broadly and it relates to the need for social, political and economic equality (Watson and Scraton, 2017). Fraser's (2007, 26) two-dimensional conception of gender maintains that both *distribution* (the 'political-economic face' connected to class and labour) and *recognition* (the 'cultural-discursive face' linked to status) must be addressed in order to make successful, positive steps towards gender justice. Fraser warns of androcentrism vis-à-vis gender injustice, namely 'an institutionalized pattern of gender culture that privileges traits associated with masculinity' which also transcends diurnal exchanges and the facets of popular culture (Fraser, 2007, 26). Considering this, both dimensions of gender, when applying this approach to pedagogic and structural powers at universities, should be endorsed. Keddie's (2005) work seeks to provide a gender justice framework utilising Fraser's (1997) transformative lens to examine whether educational initiatives are 'enabling or constraining a transformative redistributive and cultural gender justice' (Keddie, 2005, 83).

Gender Justice in Higher Education: Five Facets
Gender justice in Higher Education, needs therefore to be encompassed within a streamlined battle for equalities more broadly that involves making changes in order to uproot crystallised practices and processes that perpetuate myths focusing on gender stereotypes. Universities can be beacons of hope to demystify these

seemingly ingrained approaches and provide an inclusive environment for all learners. Shaw and Frisby (2006) offer an 'alternative frame' to challenge gender (in)equalities which is separated into three phases: self-reflection, narrative revision and experimentation. This first phase highlights the importance of managing the informal practices that exist within an organisation as well as looking at the outward projection of the institution. The focus on narrative, seeks to unearth the stronghold discourse has to present a particular representation of views culminating in an organisational culture. Lastly, the freedom to *experiment* offers educators scope and flexibility to trial new ideas in a proactive environment. These phases are useful when drawing together a stream of good practice that can be embedded in university culture.

Universities can become *gender responsible communities* and pioneers of gender equality through the active engagement, of what I will term: the *five facets of gender justice*. These facets are based on the literature collected for this paper and constitute an original offering to the field, and include: reflection, university ethos, communities, curriculum and language. As suggested by Shaw and Frisby (2006), on-going, dedicated *self-reflection* is cardinal to understanding how the university and all its constituent parts presents itself both formally and informally. For example, an initial step may involve an internal audit of the imagery and language used on universities' promotional platforms to understand how gender is projected and therefore imbued culturally by the organisation. Secondly, the *university ethos* and therefore its cultural philosophy and messages must incorporate and encourage social change and equalities. For example, diversity and inclusivities should transcend and underpin university life and its associated curricula (see Hancock et al., 2018); whereby 'difference' is viewed as a 'critical resource' rather than a problem to be fixed (Burke, 2017, 442). Thirdly, *communities*, be that students, educators, professional service colleagues, local schools, governors and ambassadors, must work in unity towards a shared vision for social justice and activism. These communities will each have their own role models who are often highly influential and should be visible and accessible to learners (see Saunder et al, 2018). School communities and universities have a responsibility to demonstrate that seemingly male-dominated programmes are 'open' to all learner groups. The *curriculum* (design and content) associated with teaching and learning must position gender equity at the pedagogical core (Shaw and Frisby, 2006), disturb gender-normative views (see Keddie, 2006), and allow for experimentation (Shaw and Frisby, 2006). This can be achieved by involving women guest speakers (see Hancock et al., 2018), avoiding male mainstream industry examples and having open discussions on gender stereotypes (see Harris et al., 2015). The final facet of *language* 'shapes perceptions' (Saunder et al., 2018, 77) and contributes to informal practices (see Fraser, 2007) that can impact on how inequalities are manifested and recycled. Therefore, 'alternative language practices' should be employed to resist normative views (see Keddie and Mills, 2009, 37). This includes an awareness of informal and formal discourse that could contribute to isolation or othering within and beyond the classroom.

Conclusion

Gender justice provides a flexible approach to teaching and learning, helping to redefine rigid gender binaries that can cloud social and cultural progress in Higher Education. All of the gender justice 'facets' outlined in this paper must work together to tackle both the distribution and recognition strands of sexism (see Fraser, 2007) and a focus on the subtleties of inequalities at each of these levels will assist in understanding how marginalisation occurs (Burke, 2017). Sports business management, here, provides the starting point for thinking critically about gender inequalities in the classroom and therefore industry. It is proposed that a gender justice approach to university life can help to achieve a broader movement towards gender equality.

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