

A Gendered Focused Review of Sports Diplomacy

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Introduction: Origins of the term sports diplomacy

The definition and function of sport in international politics is interpreted and operationalised in many ways. At a global level, organisations such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF), and the United Nations (UN) engage with political entities to further their mission and purpose. A crucial point of difference is the recognition of members of these organisations. In 2020, the IOC recognised 206 National Olympic Committees whilst the UN recognised 193 states. The difference in numerical recognition and the definition of recognised political actors varies between the UN and the IOC. Further to this, there are differences between nations' and territories' political and sporting footprint. For example, the United Kingdom (UK) is recognised in the IOC and the UN as a unified state and National Olympic Committee. Yet, in the CGF, the home-nations compete as England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, and each have a lead body for Commonwealth sport (such as the Commonwealth Games Wales). This evidence around recognition illustrates that a political entity's sporting and political footprint may not be globally unified or consistent.

In academic literature, this is furthered by scholars of diplomacy who see classifications of territories, and their participation in international community activities, as potent to both the international (sport/non-sport) organisation and the territory. At a national level, the link to diplomacy extends to how different sport and political entities represent, negotiate, and communicate with each other (Beacom 2012; Dichter and Johns 2014; Murray 2017; Dichter 2020). Brentin and Tregoures (2016) illustrate this explicitly in Kosovo's case and their use of representation at sporting organisations, such as the IOC, to gain international community recognition and a pathway into the UN state membership. Although not members of the UN, the function of sport for Kosovo has served the purpose of growing the nation in terms of recognition and identity. Hassan (2018) develops the debate about sport being used as a 'Trojan horse', as many state-based activities interlock with sport to further political agendas such as strategic influence, economic performance, and international image. As discussed by Brentin and Tregoures (2016) and Hassan (2018), sport and politics in a complex age involve a range of actors, outcomes, and activities.

A growing phrase and area of exploration is that of sports diplomacy. Murray (2017) argues that academics have not engaged fully with the connection between sport and diplomacy until

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recently. In the early to mid-2010s, a raft of Special Issues in peer-reviewed journals, such as *Diplomacy & Statecraft* and a Special Issue commissioned to focus on 'Diplomacy and Sport' (Rofe and Dichter 2016), peppered sport and diplomacy-based academic fields with the connection between the two concepts. Further to this, edited book collections and monographs emerged on specific sport organisations, such as Dichter and Johns' (2014) collection on *Sport, Statecraft, and International Relations since 1945*. In the past decade, the growth in literature demonstrates a heightened and coordinated academic effort to conceptualise and empirically analyse sports diplomacy activities.

A disputed element of the origin of the phrase, sports diplomacy, is how it is positioned against other diplomatic concepts, such as public diplomacy, nation branding, and soft power (Zintz and Parrish 2019; Dichter 2020). While a thorough debate of definition and position is beyond the scope of this chapter, the phrase's tenants involve international relations between nations and territories, non-state actors, and individuals across the broad spectrum of global sporting activities. In a recent European Union (EU) commissioned report, the importance of harnessing the 'unconventional' and 'soft power' tools of sports diplomacy was a key aim for the body to 'amplify key EU diplomatic messages' with traditional and an expanded understanding of 'agents of this diplomacy' (Zintz and Parrish 2019, p. 3). The EU's knowledge emphasises the focus on the means and processes of exchanges, not necessarily the message or the outcome. Sport, in this sense, becomes the vehicle for a message or agenda. This idea is well versed in historical examples of Ping-Pong diplomacy between the United States and China (Hong and Sun 2000), ice hockey during the Cold War (Soares 2007, Leichtová and Zákavský 2021) or global relations and boycotts of sporting events in isolating Apartheid South Africa (Cornelissen 2008).

At a cursory glance, academic scholarship, thought and practice are seldom considered with a sustained gendered lens. In this chapter, such a lens is used to view how particular spaces are informed by bias or dominance towards men's or women's perspectives and/or experiences. A trope connected to sport and politics is that it is male-dominated, and that women and girls are often excluded or face challenges in accessing organised sport (Adams 2016; Sherry and Rowe 2020). Black and Peacock (2013, p. 711) make the precise point that up until the recent decades, the IOC have been (and remains, to a considerable extent) 'an "old boys club" with membership heavily drawn from aristocratic circles and prone to brokering backroom deals through elitist power networks'. Although the IOC has made efforts around gender equity and equality since 2013, there has still not been a female President out of the nine to date. Sherry and Rowe (2020, p. 1) agree with this sentiment around gender and international sport, stating that the recent increased attention and growth has been due to the historically bad and poor opportunities in women's sport. Desjardins (2021) argues further that recent strategies from international sports organisations and event bid committees often fail to acknowledge the policies and practices that disenfranchised women's sport in the first place. This lack of accountability raises doubts on the authenticity of actions by multiple stakeholders who have historically not supported women's sport. Building on the points raised in this section about diplomacy and using a gendered lens in understanding sports spaces, this chapter now turns to studies on academia and industry to consider whether sports diplomacy fits the male-dominated trope and if there are shifts towards gender equity.

Gendered review of sports diplomacy literature

So far, this chapter has consciously included and highlighted sports diplomacy scholarship by prominent female academics, such as Heather Dichter and Scarlett Cornelissen. However, beyond highlighting female authored scholarship, this chapter includes a thorough gendered

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review of sports diplomacy literature. As previously mentioned, this chapter includes data from two studies. This section is based on an integrative review of sports diplomacy peer-reviewed journal articles. Conducting integrated or systematic studies of existing literature allows for patterns and trends to empirically emerge and support or challenge anecdotal thoughts about a field of research (Schulenkorf, Sherry and Rowe 2016; Jenkin et al. 2017; Walzel, Robertson and Anagnostopoulos 2018; Hanlon, Jenkin and Craike 2019). An integrated academic literature review of the phrase 'sports diplomacy' was conducted, which collected 224 peer-reviewed journal articles between 2000 and 2020, and analysed through varying quantitative and qualitative points using NVivo software. One aspect of the review was to consider gendered elements involved in sports diplomacy-focused academic research as well as exploring the authorship and governance of sports diplomacy in academia.

Firstly, each peer-reviewed journal article was catalogued against the lead researcher's gender (male or female). The findings demonstrated that lead researchers' gender extended the previously recognised trope of a male-dominated sport and political space into the sports diplomacy academic space. Of the 224 peer-reviewed journal articles reviewed, 22% had a female lead author, and 78% had a male lead author. This is a grim statistic at face value and shows a male-dominated academic field in the past two decades. Moreover, the proportion of female to male lead authors is consistent and not improving in terms of balance (see Figure 13.1). As discussed elsewhere, the gender imbalance in wider academic publishing is being considered (for example, Taylor and Francis Editor Resources and Author Services n.d.; Martínez-Rosales et al. 2021) and is prevalent in other academic spaces too, as discussed by the Taylor and Francis case study on 'The Clinical Neuropsychologist' (n.d.). Concerning sports diplomacy, based on the statistics and trends in this integrated review, male lead authors' dominance continues to prevail.

A further finding of the integrated review was to catalogue the most frequently published journals. From the 224 peer-reviewed journal articles reviewed, the most frequent journals were: *The International Journal of the History of Sport* (43), *Sport in Society* (20), *Diplomacy & Statecraft* (13), and *Journal of Sport History* (11). Of these four journals (as of January 2021), out of the four lead editors, one was female, and out of 20 listed executive editorial committee (or equivalent) members, four were female (and two represent the same person on two different journal committees). Two of the four journals had 100% male lead editors and executive editorial committees. Again, as highlighted above, these are grim statistics about the gender balance on the four editorial boards; moreover, this continues to the trope of the male dominance in the governance of academic publishing (Taylor and Francis Resources and Authors Services n.d.; Martínez-Rosales et al. 2021). This gender-focused aspect of the review of the articles' authorship and journals' governance is vital for many reasons. This chapter holds academic practices as accountable as diplomatic practices and looks at the academic space through a gendered lens. It further reinforces the ever-present male-dominated tropes in sport into areas within academia, such as publishing. Specifically, it empirically demonstrates the male-dominated outputs and governance connected to sports diplomacy peer-reviewed journal articles and journals.

Beyond the administrative and authorship aspects of the integrated review, a number of the articles featured females in the research focus. As discussed here, the role of females in sports diplomacy activities in this scholarship varies. Notably, there are trends of female-dominated sporting spaces, such as diplomatic envoys or athlete tours. Many of the pieces look at historical cases and bring to life experiences of women in sports diplomacy, mainly focusing on female athletes during the Cold War. Brown (2015), Cervin (2015) and Dyreson (2019) discuss the importance of sporting females in the era of the Cold War, in particular, their role and value in cultural diplomacy programs and contexts. Brown (2015) challenges the

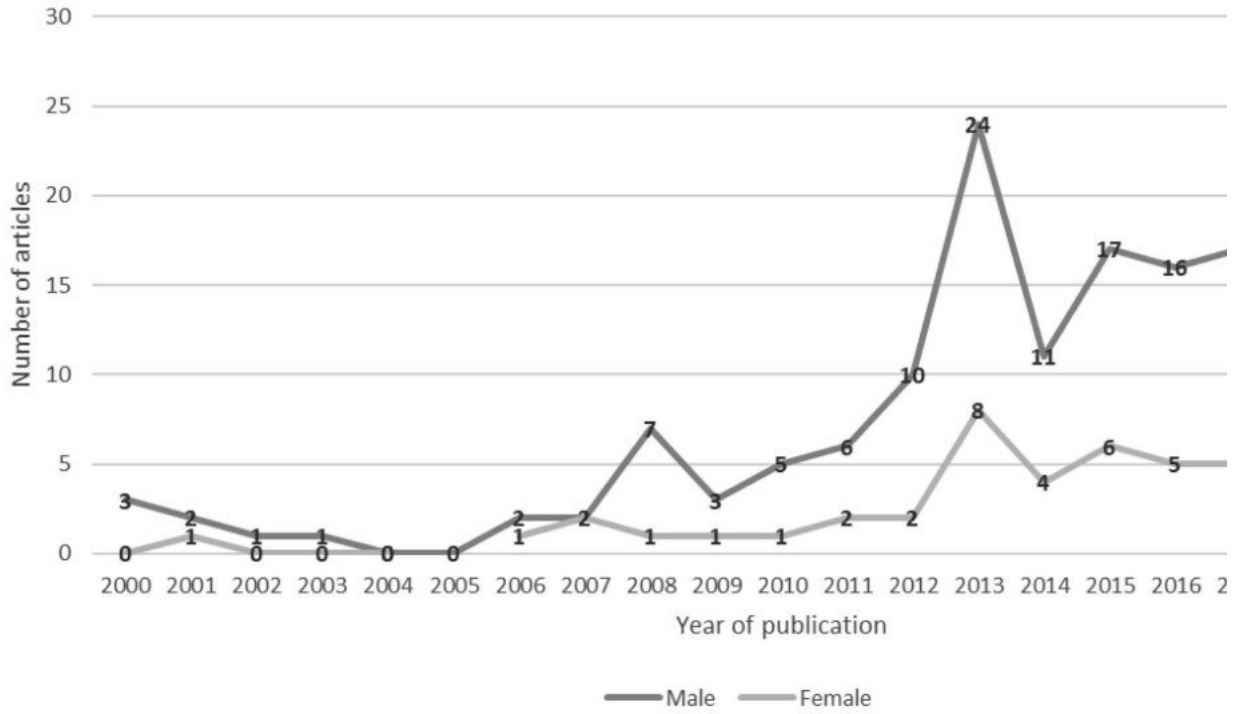


Figure 13.1 Lead Researcher Gender (articles from 2000 to 2020)

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limited presentation by Cold War scholarship to how women participated in the American State Department goodwill tours in the 1950s. The tennis players Brown discusses moved beyond domestic images of wives and mothers into highly skilled and accomplished women amateurs on global tours. In a similar vein, Cervin (2015) focuses on the Soviet Union and Romanian gymnastic teams' tours of America and Australia in the 1970s as a form of Cold War cultural diplomacy. The gendered nature of the athletes and sport in media representation, such as being demure and non-threatening guests, contributed to the diplomatic role and gymnasts' popularity. Again, media representation features heavily in the Dyreson (2019) piece, as the author documents a Cold War romance between American athlete Harold Connolly and Czech athlete Olga Fikotova, after the 1956 Olympics. The American State Department tracked and leveraged the romance and 'in the Connollys, American cold warriors discovered the perfect couple for promoting this ideological concept [of personal liberty]' (Dyreson 2019, p. 44). The three pieces here demonstrate the use of females as athletes, guests and promoting ideological concepts. However, there is little engagement in the literature with females as leaders or political actors.

Beyond the East-West dichotomy, other historical pieces focus on China (before the 1970s and the Ping-Pong diplomacy episode) and the 'Two Chinas', where female athletes represented the 'strong body-mind heroine image' (Kuo 2019, p. 375). Shuman (2013) uses media images to demonstrate types of representation of, and communication about, female athletes. In the context of the Games of the New Emerging Forces in the early 1960s, the representation of friendship and honour between Asian, African, and Latin American nations is depicted by a cartoon image of three female athletes with different skin tones: a 'China shirt represents the Chinese athlete' and symbolically she is the central Table and the winning athlete (Shuman 2013, p. 270). The role of female sports and athletes is valued in promoting friendship and communicating images of strength. Although there are contrasts between how the different athletes convey feminine or national ideals, based on the different diplomatic and ideological aims of the varying nations, there are commonalities to female athletes' visual and media use in sporting competition and tours in the historical scholarship presented here.

There are notable omissions, too, as few articles reference females as political or sport leaders, and most articles focus on female athletes or female bodies, which reflect stereotypical female ideologies (Shuman 2013). This chapter does not suggest that there are no studies on females in governance or leadership roles, as this is a burgeoning area of published research (e.g., Pfister 2019; Piggott and Pike 2020; Banu-Lawrence, Frawley and Hoerber 2020). However, the contemporary sports diplomacy literature included in the integrated review used as the basis for this chapter was mainly limited to national sports organisations or comparisons between national sports organisations or regions. In the contemporary sports diplomacy literature included in this review, women's sports are featured as part of the empirical or conceptual framework, i.e., a component, not the central focus. For example, in Abdi et al. (2018, p. 370; 2019), women's sport is positioned as a form of soft power and a 'form of Sports Human Capital'. In their data collection methods, the authors collected expert responses through a survey about sports diplomacy, of which 36.77% were female. Further to this, in a monitoring and evaluation study of a USA Government and University-based SportsUnited 'Sports Visitors Program', the researchers differentiated the participants by gender to compare results (Baker et al. 2015; Dixon et al. 2019). The articles here demonstrate the rise of including demographics of people involved in their research. While neither of these studies went beyond a male/female gender reporting or focused centrally on gender elements, both highlighted the relevance of gender in terms of forms of sport and people's experiences in sports diplomacy activities.

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Other contemporary pieces cited female athletes' participation at elite sport mega-events or large single sport events (e.g., tennis Dumitriu 2018). Beacom and Brittain (2016) and Postlethwaite and Grix (2016) use the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games as markers of symbolic female participation and agendas by the IOC and International Paralympic Committee (IPC). Notably, at the London Games, female athletes from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Brunei, and Qatar participated and promoted this through mass media and sporting organisation communication channels. The connection made by both pieces here is to the extent to which international sports organisations can influence competing states' social and moral policies, i.e., female and disability empowerment. The different moral missions set out clearly by the IOC (in its Charter and codified through Olympism) and the IPC (in its mission and vision) include elements of inclusion and equality, therefore a prime point of discussion for the dynamics between sport and diplomacy. For example, it is significant that a state, such as Saudi Arabia, which has limited rights for women in their domestic policy landscape, has acquiesced through sport to engage with gender participation and equality (Chatziefstathiou and Henry 2012; Postlethwaite and Grix 2016). To understand further, the contemporary practices of organisations and states must be considered; thus, the following section will turn from a gender-focused review of academic work to that of sport diplomacy practice.

Gendered review of sports diplomacy activities (Australia and UK)

This section will review and compare a selection of gender-based sports diplomacy activities from Australia and the UK. Sport and diplomatic activities are synonymous with these nations both historically and in the contemporary era (Murray 2017; Woodward 2020). Yet, few academic studies have attempted to compare the how, what, who, and why of sports diplomacy in Australia and the UK. With sports diplomacy more broadly, the Australian Government recently launched the second iteration of their *Sports Diplomacy 2030* (DFAT 2019, p. vi), a national sports diplomacy policy document projecting an 'even more successful' national sports sector and continued source of national pride. A year later, the British Council (2020, p. 42) – a UK Government grant in aid receiving organisation – commented that 'surprisingly', the concept of 'sports diplomacy' has not, to date, attracted as much attention in the UK as it has in other countries.

Pertinent to this chapter is the similarity in ideologies around female empowerment, gender equality and equity between Australia and the UK. Our analysis of responses to an online survey and interviews with Australian or British-based individuals connected to the field found that in relation to both Australian and UK practitioners, the viewpoint on gender and sports diplomacy was a conscious objective to explore and emerged as a theme of discussion. Firstly, of the 33 survey respondents, 13 were female and 20 were male (a mixture of UK and Australia public sector, private sector, and third sector middle or senior managers). In the interview study, five were female and eight were male. How many male or female voices the project wanted to collect was not predetermined, as the focus related to expertise. However, it is notable that the gender balance was reasonable here and can be attributed to the sports diplomacy, as opposed to a pure diplomacy, focus of our project. With this in mind, the tracking the gender balance of participants has been a conscious feature throughout. Secondly, based on the survey responses and integrated literature review, a question was included in the interview guide to directly ask interviewees about the male-dominated trope associated with sports diplomacy and whether this is particularly true in activities directed towards female empowerment. The following discussion represents a triangulation of the integrated literature review, publicly accessible document analysis, survey responses and interview responses. In the empirical data presented below,

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if publicly accessible, then the sources are referenced. Where survey or interview data is used, the voices are presented through pseudonyms. This has been pre-agreed with the research participants to protect their anonymity whilst acknowledging their role in practice.

Based on rich sporting histories on the international stage, Australia and the UK have cultural and political similarities and connections, in particular, as to how they approach elite and grassroots sporting activities (Beacom 2008; Maynard 2009). For example, there is a connection between them and the Commonwealth, particularly leadership, participation, and hosting the Commonwealth Games (Australia in the Gold Coast in 2018 and the UK in Birmingham in 2022). Further to the historical Commonwealth connections, the two nations both share popularity for sports, especially rugby union, cricket, and netball. This popularity domestically has galvanized a zeal from both nations to host international sporting events, such as the Olympic and Paralympic Games (most recently Sydney 2000 and London 2012) or women's sport World Championships such as the Netball World Cup (most recently Liverpool 2019) or the Women's FIFA (Federation Internationale de Football Association) Football World Cup™ (awarded to a joint bid between Australia and New Zealand for 2023).

Given these cultural and political similarities in sport, plus a growth in investment in women's sport in the past decade, it seemed prudent and valuable to explore these two countries. Firstly, through an exploration of the role of Australian and UK women in international sport governance, particularly in the leadership of international sports organisations. Notably, in the UK, there are explicit sports diplomacy activities connected to the UK Sport strategy and investment around international relations, where an *International Leadership Programme* fosters talented individuals to 'attain leadership positions in international sporting organisations' as a mechanism to support 'the UK to have a strong, respected and supportive voice in international sport' (UK Sport, Online). In both the survey and interviews, this investment in people was raised, in particular, concerning promoting gender-specific agendas. One interviewee described:

And we, as a global citizen in the UK, and while I say this broadly, our moving into the new strategy, we want to see more women around the table of leadership in international sport... And that's [just] not British woman, that is women, women around the world.

(Public Sector, UK)

Further to this comment, despite the investment mentioned above, other interviewees noted the effort and expertise needed for an individual to negotiate and bid for such roles, especially a female. As noted here:

I think it is really good to see somebody ... like Laura McAllister trying to gain election for the FIFA [Federation Internationale de Football Association] Council. I mean, anybody that even runs for election is quite impressive to get to that point; but if she manages to pull that off, I mean that is going to be a tough gig ... in what I would say probably a largely male culture.

(Non-Governmental Organisation/Private Sector, UK)

The example cited by the interviewee is the 2020/1 bid by Professor Laura McAllister to become a member Union of European Football Association's representative for women on FIFA's ruling council, and thus 'the first woman to have played the game to be elected to such a position' (British Council Wales 2020; Wales Online 2020). The narrative in these examples showcases the diplomacy it takes in getting any person, more so a female, elected to the leadership spheres of international sport.

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The UK national federations and state bodies are working in a more synchronised manner to help UK females obtain such roles. To date, the UK currently has four women who lead international federations (Zena Wooldridge, World Squash Federation President 2020 to present; Liz Nicholl, International Netball Federation President 2019 to present; Dame Louise Martin, Commonwealth Games Federation President 2015 to present; Kate Cathiness, World Curling Federation President 2010 to present). In the biographies and press releases for these roles, the women are credited as the 'first female president of an Olympic Winter Sports Federation' or the 'first female to hold this office in the history of the Commonwealth Sports Movement' (World Curling, Online; Commonwealth Sport, Online). The efforts and diplomatic activities of enabling women to bid for and gain these roles demonstrate a direct, gendered sports diplomacy effort from the UK. Moreover, given that the feats are associated with 'firsts', they also demonstrate the effort a woman must invest for these positions, which appear far more significant than their male counterparts who seemingly benefit (and have been benefitting) from the historical male culture in international sports federations.

Australian counterparts, both male and female, acknowledged other efforts and diplomatic activities in non-international federation settings, particularly around Australian support for sport-for-development activities in the Pacific Islands. A direct strategic priority for Australia is to 'strengthen communities in the Indo-Pacific' region, and it is delivered through many initiatives, including promoting 'gender equality', whilst also creating 'leadership pathways and increasing participation of women and girls in sport', such as the *Pacific Sport Partnerships* (DFAT 2019, p. 11). In an interview with an Australian stakeholder who directly engages in these activities, there was a substantive acknowledgement of cultural differences and authentic partnership building, the fundamentals of diplomacy to develop the gender initiatives from policy into practice. The interviewee reflected:

And then you are adding the cultural complexities and dimensions as well and, how do you respectfully and thoughtfully approach these issues in different countries where concepts around gender and gender roles are still, are different to ours. And I guess approaching it in non-judgmental ways, otherwise there will just be breakdowns of relationships and the inability to form partnerships that are actual partnerships.

(Non-Governmental Organisation/Private Sector, Australia)

Here, similar to the integrated review pieces, there are sensitivities to the role and interpretation of gender between countries, plus how this can genuinely contribute to 'actual' partnerships, rather than merely being symbolic. An important question that warrants further research is how indigenous populations view the 'west-knows-best' approach in relation to sport diplomacy? As in addition to resisting gender-based transformations, there could be anti-colonial resistance and, thus, objection to Western support and guidance. Given the rich and diverse communities and cultures in the regions targeted by Australia and the UK, more must be done to understand indigenous women's perspectives and gender-related challenges. For example, the approach outlined by the interviewee above may empower indigenous women to lead the change, but more needs to be done to account for indigenous voices and how they view and engage with external, Western-based sports diplomacy activity. A limitation of the study presented here is that we did not contact or interview people in countries where Australia and the UK have sport programmes; therefore, we suggest future studies consider this and include more diverse voices.

The Australian strategies around sport and diplomacy alongside extracts about practice show an increase in bringing sports diplomacy activities as a way and means to reflect on differences and opportunities to further particular strategies and ideologies around gender. An Australian

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interviewee shared an example of success in this area around female participation in non-athlete roles in the Pacific Games, stating:

Yes, it [sports diplomacy] is dominated by male voices. Although we believe we are having success in changing that, for example that the last Pacific Games, the... programme in its entirety was completely run by females... it was 100% females involved, in terms of the administration of the event.

(Third Sector, Australia)

The success measurement here is not about there simply being female participation in the Pacific Games. It is reframed around female involvement in the administration and organisation of the event. Similar to the framing of administrators and leaders by UK Sport in international sport governance, the interviewee here sees it as part of their organisation's role to change the male voice domination and promote female involvement in organisation and leadership roles at more local level, i.e., the Pacific Games and in the Pacific nations. Again, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore the culture of the Pacific region; however, elsewhere scholars have noted how many Pacific Nations have not traditionally embraced the female involvement in sport or societal administration and governance (Khoo, Schulenkorf and Adair 2014; Kanemasu and Molnar 2017). This type of gendered agenda and activity between Australia and the Pacific Islands is reflected on further by one interviewee, who, similar to Hassan (2018), uses a 'Trojan horse' analogy:

It [sport] is also, I use that term again, a Trojan horse for gender equality. It is a space where people are much more open to that sort of gender participation... sport has some unique advantages in that regard.

(Private Sector, Australia)

The points and activities raised by both UK and Australian interviewees speak to using sport to promote and influence international sport and particular strategic regions. A distinct difference between the diplomatic practices and the diplomatic academic literature is the operational and strategic use of gender and women in leadership or administration by industry, as opposed to literature, which centres on depicting and using female athletes for diplomatic means. What needs to be unpacked further are the similarities and differences between UK and Australian practices, plus to hear views from indigenous populations who engage with sports diplomatic activities delivered by Australia and the UK.

Conclusion

The snapshot of academic literature from the field of sports diplomacy showed some problematic trends around continued male-dominated authorship, studies and gatekeepers in the area. However, we also highlighted excellent examples of female-authored pieces and work that focused on females in the sphere of sports diplomacy. Nevertheless, far more can be done to acknowledge, consult, and develop academic infrastructure and voices to promote more research on women and sports diplomacy and increase the number of female authors and editors. In the latter section of this chapter, a snapshot of practice from Australia and the UK supports the trope that sports diplomacy remains male-dominated. However, the strategies and activities by the two nations are using sport to challenge such tradition. The UK has explicit strategy and practices for promoting and enabling females to attain positions of power in international sport. In Australia,

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the focus is on strategic partnership with the Pacific region and using different initiatives to promote gender equality. Diplomacy (explicit or implicit) is needed across the activities of these two nations to navigate some of the challenges and complexities of global sport or regional relations. Here, the evidence and analysis demonstrate how Australia and UK-based practices are attempting to counter the tropes that sport and politics are male-dominated, especially around leadership and decision making. Beyond Australia and the UK, there is a trend across international sports to increase balanced gender representation in leadership and decision making tangibly. For example, the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations governance review now includes a measure of gender representation (ASOIF 2018). Such efforts and actions indicate an emerging challenge to male domination, and sports diplomacy offers a way to consider this, especially between nations and cultures. Based on the above, this chapter argues that there is a clear need for future studies and practice to use a gendered lens to inform their thoughts and actions. This type of approach would allow for more nuanced thinking in how sport is studied and led, and how sport diplomacy is practiced in local, national, regional, and global settings.

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