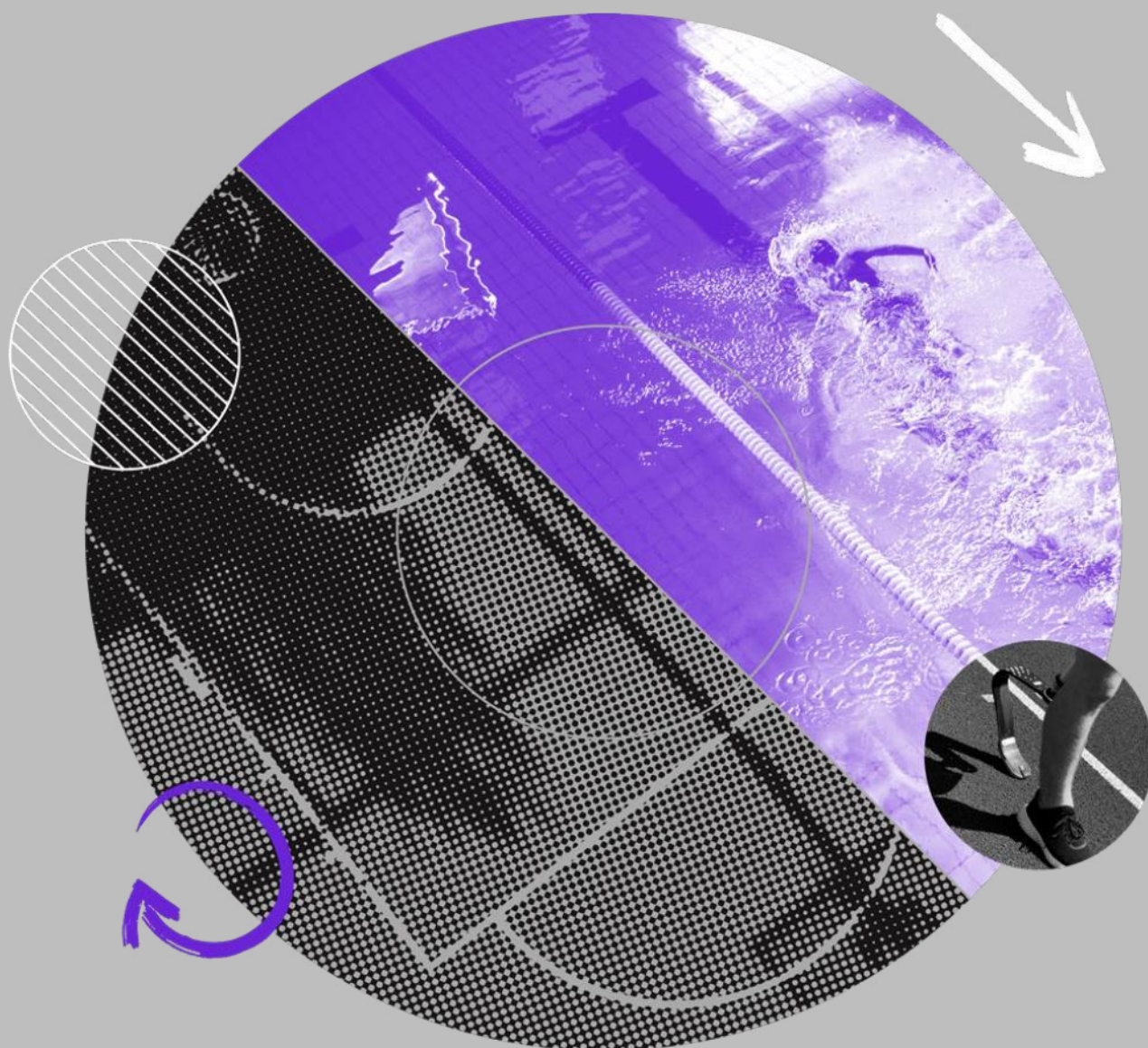


GOVERNING GENDER INCLUSION: LEVELLING THE FIELD IN AUSTRALIAN SPORT



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GOVERNING GENDER INCLUSION IN COMMUNITY SPORTS CLUBS

Study aims: To better understand how the sport sector can support gender equity within Australian sport. The project is seeking to understand how different policies, resourcing and support that aims to improve gender equity in community sport impact on the everyday practices of clubs, volunteers, coaches and players.

METHODS

From February 2023 to July 2024, we interviewed 42 club leaders and members across seven sporting clubs and one sporting association. We completed nine observations across the clubs in this study including at trainings, games, come and try days, meetings and celebratory rounds. Sporting codes represented in this study include basketball, soccer, cricket, Australian Rules Football, tennis and hockey. The clubs were based in metropolitan Melbourne, except one club which was situated in regional Victoria. A further four participants from different sporting clubs were interviewed, but since only one interview was conducted at these clubs, they are not representative of the club as a whole and therefore were left out of these results.

Sporting clubs who were deemed progressive in gender equity were contacted to participate in this study, and therefore these findings are representative of such clubs. This report provides some of our key findings and recommendations across all the clubs who participated in this research study.

If you wish to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Nadia at nadia.bevan@monash.edu

KEY FINDINGS

Our key findings across all the sports clubs and association involved in this study are outlined below.

Conflation between gender equity and gender equality

When seeking to understand people's perception of gender equity, around half of our participants spoke to gender equality. This shows that community members may not know the difference between gender equity and equality, with many people speaking about equality across participation numbers specifically. Club and association leaders driving this space tended to have more of an understanding of the meaning of gender equity, using the term 'opportunity' quite frequently. It is important club leaders and members recognise the difference between gender equity and equality because by understanding the gender equity, it helps to address the ingrained causes of gender disparities, leading to meaningful and sustainable progress toward gender equality.

Newer clubs are creating inclusive environments

Two clubs involved in this study were newly developed sporting clubs, i.e. established in the last five years. They had both faced different structural barriers to their participation in their respective sporting codes. Although both clubs had - and continue to - confront challenges, they both were able to develop more dedicated inclusion opportunities particularly for diverse identities of girls, women and gender diverse participants. Being able to create their own culture, usually led by women - and gender diverse participants (in one club's instance) - has helped to embed an inclusive environment across the entirety of the club.

Perception of some sports to be more equitable

Some people perceived their sport to be further along the gender equity path when comparing their sports to other sports, notably hockey, basketball and tennis. Because of this perception, gender inequities sometimes are missed. Although this was generally accurate across playing participation numbers, gender disparities were still found at these sports at an officiating level, where traditional gender roles were perpetuated (e.g., coaches were more likely to be men).

Gender equity policies/strategies

A couple of clubs had dedicated gender equity or equality policies/strategies; however, most clubs did not have these embedded into their strategies. Alternatively, some clubs stated that inclusion was a core value, without a supportive document demonstrating how girls/women and gender diverse participants are included.

An 'everyone is included' approach

Many sporting club leaders and members believed their club to be inclusive, without demonstrating how they were inclusive – they just were. They may feel they are inclusive, however often when clubs do not have deliberate and dedicated practices in place, they are inadvertently being exclusive. This is especially prevalent considering sport has historically and presently privileges certain population groups (i.e. white, heterosexual, cisgendered, able-bodied men) more than others. A concerted effort must be taken to ensure that clubs are indeed practicing and prioritising those who may not be currently represented in your club.

Specific club leaders paving the way

One or two leaders were generally driving gender equity at their club, which means that it is likely not embedded across the club. This was particularly evident when club members and other leaders discussed that 'everyone is

included' or that they do not see any barriers for girls/women in their sport/club (as indicated by the key finding above). If such leaders were to leave the club, the priority on gender equity may dissipate.

Sporting community education

Several clubs described wanting more equity/inclusion/diversity education, either for themselves as leaders or for their respective community. One club who is leading the way in gender inclusion was happy to conduct education sessions with other sporting clubs around them to try and create awareness around gender inclusion and using non-gendered language. A number of people spoke to wanting more education and guidance from peak bodies on sporting participants who are transgender, non-binary and gender diverse.

Responsibility of gender equity

As part of the wider community, everyone viewed a sporting club as having a key role in supporting gender equity in the community.

Diverse identities

Some clubs were thinking about how to ensure they engage diverse identities of girls/women, such as culturally diverse women, and/or people who are gender diverse. However, only one club thought about how to do this across different identities (e.g., someone who may identify as a woman, with a (dis)ability, and First Nations) and believed they could improve their work in this space. People with (dis)abilities were mostly referred to through programs separate from the mainstream sporting participation or how people who are neuro-diverse are included.

Future of gender equity in sport

There is a desire for more dedicated human and financial resources to support clubs in gender equity. As volunteers, club representatives involved in this study wanted to do this work, but at times felt stretched and had competing priorities for their time. Peak sporting bodies, leagues and associations need to be embedding gender inclusivity in their policies, practices and processes, and in turn, promoting and supporting local sporting clubs to do the same.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the clubs and association involved in this research aim to support girls and women, with some clubs focussed on including people who are gender diverse. This was often driven through some key leaders. We have developed some general recommendations that may support your club with gender equity.

Gender equity policy/strategy.

A girls and women policy/strategy ensures that a commitment and direction for gender equity is written into the club so when leadership changes may transpire, the commitment remain embedded as a core focus of the club. We recommend a dedicated girls and women strategy/policy in addition to any other inclusion and diversity strategies or policies. Further, policies provide a formalised document to refer to when dealing with people who may not align with the clubs' values of being inclusive. Having written policies shared with the club, accessible on the website and on display in club rooms also promotes to the club members and wider community that you are an inclusive club and take such matters seriously. The policy/strategy could include a gender quota. This quota can be an aim for the committee in relation to the committee break-down, coaches, and/or participant numbers. Having a quota which is discussed at committee/board meetings can be a goal to work towards, and something that reminds the committee and community members that gender equity is a priority. This policy is a starting point to enacting gender equity.

All levels of participation.

Participation should be analysed across all levels: players, committee/board, coaches, umpires/referees, team managers and so on. It was clear across all sports that there are still gender disparities in some key roles. For some, this was uncontrollable due to their respective league or association needing to do further work (e.g., umpires). However, sporting clubs can ensure they focus on what is in their control. For example, developing pathways for junior girls through to senior's and helping to develop and support women coaches. Transparent processes and flexible options for participation may support more women in leadership roles.

Direct consultation.

Sporting clubs/associations should consider directly consulting with girls, women and gender diverse participants of the club to get their perspective and experiences. This can be done through a survey, focus group and/or through regular discussions. A dedicated time to speak of these sorts of things may be important for clubs to ascertain what may support a gender inclusive environment (perhaps with some food supplied).

Diversity.

Often girls and women were discussed in a homogenous way, that is, all having similar needs, opportunities and expectations. Some club leaders were able to describe how they engage with diverse identities of girls/women and gender diverse participants, however, when this was done, it was usually relating to one type of identity (e.g., culturally diverse women). It is important to think beyond all girls/women and people who are gender diverse having similar needs or expectations. Someone may identify as a woman, ethnically diverse, low socio-economic status and have a disability – all of which add additional barriers to sporting participation (across all levels).

Most clubs stated they would be supportive of diverse identities, except did not explicitly describe how they did this. Some club/association representatives explained they would converse directly with community members to understand their needs, but this was usually once they were already involved in the sport. Further, some club representatives went directly to engage with community groups (e.g., First Nations or culturally diverse community members).

Education on such topics may be important, especially for club leaders such as coaches, but also for the wider sporting community so micro-aggressions from are minimised. Having a no tolerance policy, with a clear process of actionable steps, and key, trained people to enact the policy will be important to creating safe, inclusive and welcoming sporting environments.

Gender diversity.

Two clubs actively promoted and included people who are gender diverse, however other sporting clubs wanted more guidance around players who are transgender, non-binary and/or gender diverse. Often sporting clubs are confined to their peak bodies policies on gender inclusion. Gender inclusive policies, processes and practices can still be implemented by club leaders. For example, adopting non-gendered language can help create a supportive environment. Educating yourself and your sporting community through dedicated workshop/education sessions, such as those by [Proud 2 Play](#) may also help to understand different perspectives and experiences and ways to support gender inclusion in your club.