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Building Capacity of Community Sport Clubs to Increase Female Participation

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Abstract

Despite the benefits of participating in sport as players and leaders, women and girls have lower participation levels than men and boys. This study adopted Millar and Doherty's (2016) process model of capacity building to describe community sport clubs' response to local government policy on increasing the number of women and girls as players and leaders. Data regarding the need to build capacity to implement initiatives to recruit and retain women and girls in community sport were collected through an online survey targeting managers of sport clubs ($n = 20$). Moderate levels of capacity were reported, however capacity building strategies did not align with clubs' specific capacity needs for initiatives to support women as leaders. Club readiness to build capacity to support women and girls as players was strong; nonetheless, club needs were somewhat addressed for these initiatives. Contributions to capacity building theory and implications for the clubs are presented.

Keywords: female participation, capacity building, sport clubs

Introduction

As a physically active leisure pursuit, sport has benefits for girls and women who participate as players and leaders, and their communities. On an individual level, playing sport is associated with mental, physical, and social benefits (e.g., Oja, Titze et al. 2015), and leadership in sport has been associated with mental, educational, social, and career benefits (e.g., Terjesen, Sealy & Singh, 2009). On a societal level, the involvement of women and girls in sport contributes to the economic, strategic, and social benefits of sporting organisations (e.g., Terjesen et al., 2009; Nielsen & Huse, 2010; Taylor, 2016), and community development (Schulenkorf, 2014).

However, there is evidence of the under-representation of girls and women as players and leaders in sport. In Australia, for example, girls and women are much less likely to participate in sport than boys and men (Australian Sports Commission, 2017; Sprinter Research Group, 2017). Further, only 21% of girls under the age of 15 participate in sport at least three times a week (Sprinter Research Group, 2017). In particular, fewer girls (under 15 years) and young women (ages 15-34) participate in sport-related activities and in team sports than their male counterparts (Australian Sports Commission, 2017). Similar trends are noted with regard to women in positions of leadership in sport. According to the Australian Sports Commission (2019), just 24% of all national sport organisations (NSO) directorships are held by women, while 17% of NSOs do not have any women on their board, and women represent only 11% of club presidents and 19% of CEOs. This under-representation has been attributed to individual (e.g., interest, perceived ability), structural (e.g., funding, programs), and cultural (e.g., societal norms) factors that may explain the compromised engagement and experiences of girls and women in sport (Australian Sports Commission, 2017; Casey, Eime, Payne, & Harvey, 2009; Doherty & Varpalotai, 2001).

Structural interventions in particular have evolved in an attempt to improve female participation in sport, including new programming and policy development. Relatedly, scholars have noted that when women are introduced to sport-based programming they are likely to experience increased psychological and behavioural involvement in sport overall, particularly among those who are new to the sport (e.g., Byrd, Hew-Butler & Martin, 2016; Cole & Ullrich-French, 2017; Wegner et al., 2016). Policy development and implementation is another intervention that is intended to guide and support such programming initiatives, and is often directed at addressing structural barrier to the participation and progression of women in sport (e.g., Myers & Doherty, 2007).

Indeed, awareness of gender inequity in sport continues to stimulate policy development within social and political contexts (Edwards, 2010). Gender equity refers to fairness of treatment for women and men according to their respective needs including conduct that is different yet considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities (Pavlic, Ruprecht, & Sam-Vargas, 2000). An analysis of successful national sport strategies for increasing the participation of women in sport demonstrated the value of policies aimed at improving gender equity in sport and programs aimed specifically at women (Hartmann-Tews & Pfister, 2003). One example is the widespread support for policies and practices associated with the 'norm of equity' embedded in Title IX in the United States (Druckman, Rothschild, & Sharrow, 2018).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the capacity of community sport clubs to implement policy that promotes the participation of girls and women as participants and leaders in this active leisure context. The findings inform strategy and practice with regard to gender equity in community sport, and highlight considerations for other socially-just policies aimed at promoting participation in active leisure (Shikako-Thomas & Law, 2015).

Policies to Increase Female Participation in Sport

Policies can provide a framework to address the lack of women and girls as players and leaders in sport, and specifically to frame gender equity targets (Green, 2006). At the same time, sport policies need to include a business-driven approach focused on achievement (Hartmann-Tews, 2006). If gender equity can be seen to attract funding or assist in winning bids to host tournaments, it will more likely be a focus of the organisation (Spaaij et al., 2014). In the United Kingdom for example, a mandatory code for sports governance was established with sport national governing bodies including the mandate of 30 percent gender equity for boards of organisations who seek funding from Sport England and UK Sport (Sport England & UK Sport, 2016).

Policies and programs to improve gender equity tend to be more successful when initiatives to support implementation are introduced simultaneously and are fully integrated (Pucher, Dill, & Handy, 2010). Examples include 'Actively Engaged: A Policy on Sport for Women and Girls' (Government of Canada, 2009), and the Council of Europe standards on gender mainstreaming in sport (Council of Europe, 2015). These two examples also include initiatives to assist sport organisations in building their capacity to implement the policies. What is unclear is the capacity of sport organisations to adopt these policies, and to encourage women and girls in their sport. Instead, the focus has been on outcomes and linking funding to organisations that have adopted these policies regardless of the level of their implementation (Shaw & Penney, 2003).

Building Capacity to Increase Women and Girls as Players and Leaders

To implement policies that encourage women and girls as players and leaders in sport, organisations need to have the capacity to institute related initiatives, or build the needed capacity to do so. Capacity building is ultimately about introducing planned changes within an organisation in response to new or changing situations in an organisation's environment (Millar & Doherty, 2016; 2018). Developed with a focus on sport and non-profit organisations, Millar and Doherty's (2016) process model of capacity building captures change at progressive stages throughout the capacity building process. The model depicts a strategic approach that begins with an assessment of whether an organisation has the capacity to respond to some environmental force (e.g., government policy). Where it is lacking capacity, certain needs may be identified and thus become the focus of capacity building efforts. In the non-profit sport literature, organisational capacity is often defined by Hall et al.'s (2003) dimensions of human resources, financial resources, external relations, planning, and infrastructure (Doherty, Misener, & Cuskelly, 2014; Misener & Doherty, 2009; Swierzy,

Wicker, & Breuer, 2018; Wicker & Breuer, 2011, 2013). Where any capacity is deficient, the focus of the organisation should be on building that capacity (Millar & Doherty, 2016).

Derived from the notion of readiness as an important component of successful organisational change (Joffres, Heath, Farquharson, Barkhouse, Latter, & MacLean, 2004), effective capacity building relies on an organisation's readiness to build capacity according to identified needs and then particular strategies for doing so (Millar & Doherty, 2016). If members are not motivated, willing or able to build capacity, or there is a lack of congruence between capacity building efforts and existing processes, members are likely to be resistant to, and potentially sabotage, the capacity building process (Bouckenooghe, Devos & van den Broeck, 2009; Millar & Doherty, 2018). Readiness for capacity building also includes an organisation's capacity to build and capacity to sustain the efforts, recognizing that capacity building is a resource-intensive process that relies on existing capacities in order to achieve short-term and long-term outcomes (Millar & Doherty, 2016).

Despite the policy-driven encouragement and direction to increase the participation of girls and women in sport, there is limited empirical evidence of the capacity of organisations to implement related directives, or the capacity building required to do so. Related to capacity to increase the participation of girls and women in sport, enthusiastic and knowledgeable coaches are a critical aspect of a welcoming sport club environment (Casey et al., 2017). Human and financial resources are also key factors and constraints in sport and active recreation clubs to being able to strategically plan for and develop programs to attract female participants (Hanlon, Morris & Nabbs, 2013; Rowe, Sherry, and Osborne, 2018). Although not specific to the participation of girls and women, the provision of sport facilities has been positively associated with participation rates (Eime et al., 2017), and formal engagement with a range of partners iscritical to the development and implementation of structured programs versus simply 'come and try' events that were not expected to sustain participation

(Casey, Payne & Eime, 2009). These studies highlight the multidimensionality of organizational capacity yet provide limited insight to specific dimensions that may be particularly meaningful to a sport club's ability to increase girls' and women's participation in sport. Thus, the current study relied on Hall et al.'s (2003) broad conceptualization of non-profit capacity, and more specifically its framing in the community sport context (Doherty et al., 2014).

To advance research and understanding about increasing female participation in sport, the current study adopted the process model of capacity building (Millar & Doherty, 2016) to identify whether clubs have the capacity to implement their Council's Policy initiatives around gender equity and meet its objectives, and to describe any capacity building undertaken in order to do so.

Several research questions guided this study:

1. What is the community sport club awareness of the Council's Policy directing them to encourage girls and women in their club?

2. What initiatives are clubs implementing to increase the number of girls and women as players and leaders?

3. What is the capacity of clubs to implement the initiatives?

4. What club engagement is evident in building capacity to increase the number of girls and women in sport?

5. What is the clubs' readiness to build capacity?

6. What is the perceived impact of capacity building to implement initiatives to increase the number girls and women in sport?

In addition to describing the capacity, and further capacity building, of the clubs, it was of interest to determine whether certain club characteristics and perspectives were associated with perceived capacity and readiness to build needed capacity. Thus, a further question was

addressed: Does capacity, and readiness to build further capacity, vary by club size (members), number of female participants in various roles (player, coach, official, etc.), number of female teams, and clubs' perceptions of the benefits of attracting and retaining girls and women in sport?

Research Context

The current research focuses on a local government, Moreland City Council (the Council), located in metropolitan Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. It was the first council in Victoria to prioritise the allocation and use of sporting grounds and pavilions to clubs in their region to promote active women and girls in physical recreation and leisure activities. . In 2008, based on the low number of girls and women who were sport ground users (8% of participants), and the lack of development pathways for girls and women in the region, the Council sought to address this gender inequity and build the capacity of sport clubs to recruit and retain women and girls as players and leaders. In 2009, a 'Sports Ground and Pavilion Allocation Policy' was introduced. The Policy requested seasonal sport clubs to be inclusive of women, juniors, people with a disability, and people from culturally diverse communities, or risk losing allocation of a ground to a club that was being inclusive. Aligned with the Policy was the introduction of professional development and club development workshops to provide managers of clubs with strategies on how to increase female participation.

In 2012, the Council reviewed its 'Allocation Policy' and broadened its scope from seasonal sports to include all sport clubs that leased Council facilities (e.g., tennis, soccer, cycling). At the same time, additional requirements for clubs were incorporated, including the requirement for (1) Junior sides and registered community sport development programs for juniors, and (2) Girls and women sides and/or registered community sport development programs for females. The Policy was renamed the 'Allocation and Use of Sporting Facilities, Ground and Pavilions Policy'. Aligned with this Policy, in addition to development

workshops, was the introduction of a grants program that provided funds to support development of women and girls as players and leaders. Every community government grant also gave priority to clubs that encouraged female participation. A Council fact sheet focusing on how to encourage women as players and leaders designed for clubs was also introduced.

The Policy was again reviewed in 2016 and states that leasing and allocation of Council facilities would only be provided to clubs whose membership provides opportunities within the club's respective sporting codes for junior sides, female sides, female development programs and initiatives, and female representation on club committees and/or boards. Clubs were granted a three-year phase-in period to work toward achieving the Policy objectives (2019/20). In addition to the workshops, grants, and fact sheet, was the introduction of checklists and a concession scheme. A "female friendly sports facility" checklist and an "inclusive club environment for females" checklist were introduced and targeted to managers to audit their club. A club sports ground and facility concession scheme that provides 10% discount to clubs who have competition teams with women and girls, and 10% discount to clubs who attend all club development initiatives were also initiated.

Since the inception of this Policy and associated programs, the Council reported a 175% increase in female participation at sports grounds, whereby the base of 8% increased to 22% in 2016/17. While the Council had been progressing strongly in this arena for the previous eight years, it was considered timely to conduct an independent review of policies relating to female participation in sport. One of the aims of that review was to identify the capacity of clubs to implement the Council's Policy focused on maximising and sustaining women and girls as players and leaders, and any evidence of clubs building their capacity to do so. The process model of capacity building (Millar & Doherty, 2016) was applied to meet these aims.

Research Sample, Procedure and Survey

All 82 sporting clubs in the Council region were invited to complete an online questionnaire, which was created via the online software Qualtrics Survey. To encourage participation, the Council sent emails to managers of these clubs inviting them to complete the online questionnaire. Invitations were also sent to managers through links in the Council newsletter, website, and club Facebook page. To encourage participation in the study, respondents could opt to enter a draw to win sporting equipment to the value of $500 (AUS).

The survey included items to gain demographic information about the club, which included sport and membership specific characteristics. The survey measured clubs' awareness of the Council's Policy and their engagement in initiatives to increase the numbers of girls and women as players and leaders, as well as their capacity to do so and in turn their capacity needs. To measure capacity needs, organisational readiness to build capacity, and the outcomes of capacity building, the questionnaire drew on the multifaceted Readiness for Capacity Building Survey that was informed by the process model of capacity building (Millar, 2015; 2016; Millar & Doherty, 2016). Participants rated their clubs' ability to adopt initiatives and programs to recruit and/or retain female participants according to the five dimensions of capacity (human resources, financial resources, external relations, planning, and infrastructure; Doherty et al., 2014; Hall et al., 2003), and by extension identify their capacity needs, if any. For a manageable survey addressing multiple concepts, the measurement of capacity was limited to a single broad item for each of these dimensions, rated on a 5-point Likert scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (to a great extent). Participants also rated their clubs' readiness for capacity building according to a single broad item for each of the three dimensions of organisational readiness, congruence, and existing capacity to build and sustain (Millar, 2015), and outcomes of capacity building. These were rated on a 7-point Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). To gain greater understanding of

the types of initiatives incorporated without limiting the respondent to the set of alternatives offered by the Council, open-ended questions were also asked (Reja, Manfreda, Hlebec, & Vehovar, 2003). For example, what is the most meaningful initiative/program you have implemented to recruit and/or retain females as players in your club?

The questionnaire was piloted with an expert panel to ensure online instructions and wording of questions were clear and logically presented (Leamy, Bird, LeBoutillier, Williams, & Slade, 2011), the commands were functioning, and to measure completion time. The expert panel comprised four academic and industry professionals recognised for their expertise in building the capacity of sport organisations. The four experts provided minor feedback to the questionnaire, including eliminating some demographic items to reduce completion time. In 2017 the online questionnaire was open for two months. Reminder emails were sent one month after the initial invitation to remind non-respondents to participate in the survey (Hansen, Fonager, Freund, & Lous, 2014).

Analysis

Data were screened to ensure that there were no invalid or unusable responses. Of the 32 initial responses to the online survey, we identified 12 that were either duplicates (e.g., two people from the same club completed the survey, in this case the survey completed by the manager was kept) or where respondents had consented to the study but did not complete the survey questions. Twenty surveys remained in the dataset after removal of these invalid cases; a response rate of 24%.

Descriptive statistics (frequencies, mean, SD) were used in the analyses and the findings represent a profile of capacity and capacity building for increasing the participation of women and girls in community sport clubs. Frequency percentages were calculated based on the number of responses received for each item. The number of responses to items was sometimes less than 20 due to missing data or skips in the questionnaire where items were not

applicable to some respondents. Descriptive statistics were calculated based on the average responses for each item. Further, bivariate correlation analyses were used to determine whether perceived club capacity and readiness to build are associated with characteristics and perspectives on attracting and retaining girls and women to the club.

Results

The results identify the profile of clubs surveyed and address the research questions guiding this study.

Profile of Clubs

A profile of the 20 clubs representing 11 sports provides insight to their size and the relative representation of teams and of girls and women as players and leaders (see Table 1). The clubs ranged in size from 50 to 1000 members, with an average of 246 members ($SD =$ 240.10). Just over half the clubs had female teams (55%, $n = 11$), with an average of 3.64 ($SD = 2.38$) teams per club. This is fewer than the number of clubs with male and mixed teams, and far fewer than the average number of those teams in each club. The majority of clubs served junior female players (85%, $n = 17$) through their female or mixed teams. Relatively fewer clubs served senior female players (60%, $n = 12$), and the average number of junior and senior female players at each club ($M = 25.29$, $SD = 27.06$ and $M = 27.50$, $SD = 10.42$, respectively) was far lower than the corresponding male players. In the sample, 50% of clubs had women serving as coaches ($n = 10$), 70% had women officials ($n = 14$), 95% had women serving on executive committees ($n = 19$), and 70% of clubs had women administrators ($n = 14$). The average representation of women as coaches, officials, committee members, and administrators in the clubs falls below, and sometimes far below, that of their male counterparts.

One-third of clubs (35%, $n = 7$) were reported to have had a slight increase in their participation numbers (and so slight increases in the average participation per club) over the

past four years, and particularly with regard to girls and women. The remaining clubs were

described as having no change in these numbers or experiencing steady fluctuations.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Respondents reported the importance of encouraging girls and women to be players

and leaders in their club, the benefits of doing so, and the extent to which their club actively

encourages this (see Table 2). There was strong agreement about the importance and benefits

of encouraging, attracting, developing, and maintaining the involvement of females in clubs,

and these clubs were actively encouraging girls and women and girls as players and leaders.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Club Awareness of Council Policy

According to respondents, 95% ($n = 19$) of clubs were aware of the Council Policy to

encourage women and girls as players and leaders in their club. Forty percent of clubs ($n = 8$)

had acted as a result of the policy, 40% ($n = 8$) were in progress of taking action, and 16% ($n = 3$) had not taken any action as a result of the Policy.

Club Initiatives to Increase Female Participation

Of the 16 clubs that were aware of the Policy and responding to this force, 87% ($n = 14$) noted the most meaningful initiatives to increase the number of women and girls as

players originated from their club rather than from an external source such as the Council or

their State Sport Association. Meanwhile, 94% ($n = 15$) noted the most meaningful initiatives

to increase the number of women as leaders also originated from their club. Examples of

initiatives undertaken to attract and sustain players included promoting social activities of the

club to women and girls, conducting programs at schools, and opening up the competition for

girls and women of all ages. Examples of initiatives undertaken to attract and sustain women

as leaders included approaching and encouraging female parents to coach, lead a program, or

become a committee member, providing training opportunities for these new leaders, and

introducing a "buddy" system with another leader to create a pathway for maintaining involvement.

Club Capacity to Implement Initiatives

In terms of the clubs' organisational capacity to implement initiatives to increase women and girls as players, respondents indicated there were moderate levels of each dimension of capacity (see Table 3). Financial capacity was rated lowest, and just below human resource capacity. Conversely, respondents reported the highest level of capacity was with regard to planning. There were similar levels of capacity for initiatives to increase the number of women leaders. Respondents reported that external relationships capacity and infrastructure capacity were relatively low and planning capacity was relatively high.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Capacity Building Strategies

With moderate levels of capacity, 80% ($n = 16$) of clubs were reported to have engaged in some degree of capacity building in order to be better prepared to attract, develop and retain women and girls as players. The various strategies identified in response to an open-ended question (and the respective capacity dimension addressed) included: advertising for a qualified coach and generating a "functional mass" of volunteers to offer more programs (human resources capacity); applying for grants to purchase equipment for women's programs (finance capacity); a "refreshed" strategic plan (planning capacity); and strengthening the club's sponsorship network (external relationships capacity and financial capacity).

A similar proportion of clubs (75%, $n = 15$) were reported to have engaged in capacity building in order to implement initiatives aimed at increasing the number of women as leaders. Respondents identified the following capacity building strategies: updating the strategic plan to focus on increasing women as leaders (planning capacity); providing female

and family-friendly facilities including inclusive activities (infrastructure); and promoting a

transparent nomination process (planning and development capacity).

Club Readiness to Build Capacity

Regarding the implementation of these strategies to build capacity for initiatives to

increase the number of women and girls as players, it was reported that clubs had relatively

high organisational congruence, organisational readiness, and existing capacity to build (see

Table 4). In contrast, readiness to implement strategies to build capacity for initiatives to

increase the number of women as leaders was relatively lower, particularly in terms of

organisational congruence between the strategies and current operations.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

Perceived Impact of Capacity Building

Respondents "somewhat agreed," that their clubs were able to build capacity to

increase player involvement (see Table 5). They reported that "to some extent" the initiatives

were expected to be sustainable and result in increased females as players in the long term.

Respondents also "somewhat agreed" that their clubs were able to build capacity to

implement the desired initiatives for female leaders, although to a slightly greater extent than

for players. They reported that "to some extent" the initiatives were sustainable and expected

to result in long term changes. When asked to provide reasons why initiatives may not be

sustainable or have a long term impact, respondents identified the challenge of external

factors. Specifically, competitor clubs offering member discounts or free membership, better

facilities, and funding opportunities for professional development of coaches and officials

were listed as factors that could limit the impact of their club's capacity building and

initiatives to increase female participation.

[Insert Table 5 about here]

Club Characteristics, Capacity and Readiness to Build

Bivariate correlations between each of the club characteristics listed in Table 1 and the perceived capacity variables (Table 3) revealed no significant association ($p > .05$). Correlations between these characteristics and perceived readiness to build needed capacity (Table 4) were also nonsignificant across all variables ($p > .05$). Further, no significant association was found between the clubs' encouragement and perceived benefits of attracting and maintaining girls and women as players and leaders, and perceived capacity or readiness to build capacity to do so ($p > .05$). The results may be limited by the small sample size, however they may suggest that clubs' capacity to implement initiatives, and readiness to build capacity to do so, may have little connection to the existing involvement of females in various roles. Nonetheless, the findings should be interpreted with caution.

Discussion

The process model of capacity building (Millar & Doherty, 2016) was used to determine whether clubs had the capacity to implement initiatives to increase female participation, their need and readiness to build capacity, the capacity building strategies implemented, and whether capacity building produced sustainable outcomes regarding recruiting and retaining girls and women as players and leaders. The rich data obtained from this study reveals that the sport clubs were aware of the Council's Policy, and that there were reasonably high levels of perceived importance and benefits of attracting and retaining women and girls. This is critical for the effective implementation of top-down policy (Donaldson, Leggett, & Finch, 2011).

These findings suggest that both the Policy and club awareness of the benefits of optimizing the participation of girls and women prompted capacity building that allowed the club to address those forces. However, despite the Council's Policy directives to increase the number of women and girls' teams, and women representation on club committees and/or boards, the findings also indicate that clubs were inclined to implement their own initiatives

rather than those externally recommended from the Council. The findings support the notion

that policy can prompt and promote action within community sport clubs (Skille, 2008), and

highlights the importance, of clearly articulating the targeted group(s) in a policy (Green,

2006; Pal, 2010). However, the findings also reinforce that clubs are likely to adopt and adapt

their own version of initiatives to address a given policy, in line with "local" conditions

(Skille, 2008; 2011).

Despite the acknowledged importance and benefits of attracting and retaining women

and girls, clubs in this study did not necessarily have the capacity to do so. Further, the

findings suggest that greater or lesser capacity to increase participation was not associated

with the perceived importance of doing so. Moderate levels of capacity in all five dimensions

indicate the clubs had a range of needs. Clubs perceived that their lowest levels of capacity

for initiatives to increase female players were human resources and finances, while their

lowest levels of capacity for initiatives to increase women leaders were external relationships

and infrastructure. Planning capacity was highest for initiatives for both players and leaders,

suggesting that clubs have this issue on their radar. Human resources and finance capacity

have previously been identified as critical elements of sport club capacity, including the

pursuit of gender equity (Casey et al., 2017; Hanlon et al., 2013), with evidence they can be

particularly challenging or vulnerable dimensions (Breuer, Wicker, & Von Hanau, 2012;

Misener & Doherty, 2009; Vos, Breech, Kesenne, Van Hoecke, Vanreusel, & Sheerder,

2011; Wicker & Breuer, 2011). Similar to previous research (Hanlon et al., 2013; Millar &

Doherty, 2018; Rowe et al., 2018), findings from this study further suggest that human

resources and finances may be a particular need when implementing participation-focused

membership development programs. This may be a function of the additional coaches and

officials, along with equipment purchase and facility rentals, that are likely required for such

initiatives as taking the programs to schools and adding competition opportunities for girls and women.

Relatively lower external relationships and infrastructure capacity for initiatives to increase women as leaders may be linked with reaching out to get new women involved, including through a range of partnerships (cf. Casey et al., 2009; Hanlon et al., 2013), and ensuring there is a place and fit for them in the club's operations. While Misener and Doherty (2009) found that external partnerships was a strength of the sport club they studied, other research indicates that this can be a challenging aspect of club capacity (Casey et al., 2009; Cousens, Barnes, Stevens, Mallen, & Bradish, 2006; Hermans et al., 2017). The clubs in the current study may not have had the external connections that would facilitate bringing in new leaders, if partnerships were focused on typical stakeholders such as the state sporting association, sponsors and facility providers (Misener & Doherty, 2013). Consistent with the process model of capacity building (Millar & Doherty, 2016), the findings support the notion that organisational capacity is multidimensional in nature and that capacity needs are specific to how the organisation chooses to address an environmental force.

Effective capacity building may involve a combination of strategies that target various capacity needs (Millar & Doherty, 2018; Nu'Man et al., 2007). In the current study, clubs implemented capacity building strategies that essentially targeted areas of greatest need for initiatives to increase female players, including generating a "functional mass" of volunteers (human resources) and applying for grants to support equipment purchases and strengthening their sponsorship network (financial). The strategy of providing female and family-friendly inclusive activities (infrastructure) targeted one of the greatest capacity needs for initiatives to increase female leaders, presumably with the intent of encouraging women to become more involved in the club and ultimately in leadership positions. However, the clubs also implemented strategies that targeted areas of relative strength rather than those that presented

a greater need. For instance, updating the strategic plan and promoting a transparent

nomination process targeted planning capacity, which was the greatest capacity asset for

initiatives to increase women as leaders. The clubs may have been better served by focusing

their capacity building strategies towards areas of greater need; specifically, external

relationships and perhaps infrastructure to a greater extent. The benefit of assessing capacity

across multiple dimensions is only fully realized if the selected strategies address identified

capacity needs (Sobeck & Agius, 2007).

      The findings also support the multidimensional nature of readiness for capacity

building. They provide further evidence that readiness varies across several dimensions in a

given context and based on the particular capacity building stimulus (environmental force and

response) (Millar, 2015; Millar & Doherty, 2018). The degree of organisational readiness,

congruence, and capacity to build/sustain varied between the efforts aimed at increasing the

number of female players and those aimed at increasing the number of female leaders.

Notably, readiness to build did not appear to vary in relation to the current involvement of

females in various roles in the clubs, nor the perceived importance of increasing that

involvement. Specifically, clubs were most 'ready' to build capacity to implement initiatives

to increase the number of female players, with fairly high perceived congruence between the

efforts to recruit volunteers and generate more funds and the club's existing processes and

systems. The perceived willingness and motivation of club members and existing capacity of

the club to build/sustain these efforts were slightly lower. In contrast, clubs were most 'ready'

to build capacity to implement initiatives to increase the number of female leaders in terms of

the willingness and motivation of club members to update the strategic plan, provide

inclusive facilities and activities, and promote a transparent nomination process. The clubs

had relatively lesser existing capacity to build/sustain these efforts, and they were seen as

particularly less congruent with the clubs' existing processes and systems.

The greater congruence with strategies that target capacity needs relating to increasing the number of female players is perhaps not suprising as it is what clubs typically do – serve players by offering programs (Nagel, 2008) – whereas making a place for, and recruiting, developing and retaining, new leaders may be perceived as extra work and greater change, and thus less in line with the club's current systems and operations (Cuskelly, Hoye, & Auld, 2006). Additional workload associated with capacity building was an indicator of lesser congruence with existing club operations in one of the cases reported by Millar and Doherty (2018). Interestingly, Millar (2015) found congruence to be the strongest indicator of readiness to build capacity in sport clubs. The difference may be that Millar's study examined capacity building for clubs to respond to a variety of environmental forces, whereas congruence with existing operations was relatively low in the current study with respect to strategies aimed specifically at increasing women as players and leaders. It may also be that men who are leaders in the club, and reluctant to give up their dominance, perceive increasing the numbers of women and girls as players as less intimidating than increasing the numbers of women as leaders (Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012). However, club members (and presumably the leaders, who were majority men; see Table 1) were relatively motivated and willing to build capacity to develop women as leaders, and felt they had many of the needed resources to do so. Again, capacity building needs, strategies and readiness to build are expected to be specific to the organization's response to the environmental force (Millar & Doherty, 2016).

The capacity building efforts undertaken by clubs in this study resulted in capacity needs being somewhat addressed. Needs pertaining to initiatives for women leaders were met to a slightly greater degree than those pertaining to initiatives to increase players. This is fairly surprising as readiness to build capacity was higher on all dimensions for recruiting a mass of volunteers and generating new funding in support of initiatives to increase the

number of girls and women as players. There was lower readiness to building capacity in support of initiatives to increase women as leaders in the club. It is possible that the clubs misread the challenge of building capacity for the player initiatives; that is, while club members were perceived to be willing and motivated to expand their volunteer and financial base in order to promote participation, this may have been a greater burden than expected, including with respect to their ongoing operations. This may also be reflected in the relatively lower expectation that the player initiatives will result in long-term changes. Capacity building is a resource-intensive endeavour that relies on the skills, abilities, and resources that an organisation already possesses (Cornforth & Mordaunt, 2011), and these may have ultimately been exceeded by the club when trying to build human resources and financial capacity. Nonetheless, external factors out of their control – including competitor clubs offering more enticing memberships – were also reported to have impacted the ultimate impact of club efforts to strengthen their capacity to offer their own initiatives to promote increased participation.

It is interesting that the clubs were perceived to do relatively better in terms of building capacity for their women in leadership initiatives when the strategies did not appear to particularly align with their indicated capacity needs, and there was relatively lower readiness to build. It may be that, here too, the clubs misread their needs and readiness for building capacity to implement the selected the initiatives to promote women leaders. Revisiting their strategic plan and enhancing their infrastructure capacity in terms of inclusive facilities were perhaps not as incongruent with current club operations as expected, and fairly effective in preparing the clubs for recruiting and developing women into leadership roles. The differences between the capacity building process and outcomes in support of increasing female players vs. female leaders may be a function of club perceptions regarding what is involved with each. It was suggested earlier that increasing the number of women in

leadership roles may be perceived as more intimidating, yet perhaps it is in fact a less difficult undertaking. Again, the nuances of capacity needs, readiness to build, strategy implementation and outcomes are likely specific to the environmental force(s) and selected responses to that (Millar & Doherty, 2016).

Conclusions and Implications

This study was the first application of Millar and Doherty's (2016) process model to investigate capacity building in the context of increasing female participation in the physically active leisure pursuit of sport. The merits of examining capacity building as a strategic process were supported, as identifying the environmental force (Policy for gender equity), the clubs' initiatives in response to that, assessing capacity needs and readiness to implement strategies to build needed capacity, and determining outcomes of the built capacity and further initiatives to address female participation are enlightening. The framework of organizational capacity specific to community sport (Doherty et al., 2014) and the capacity building model appear to be suitable to the study of capacity for gender equity as the multiple dimensions of capacity and readiness to build (each broadly conceptualized here) were identified. Importantly, there appeared to be variation among those dimensions depending on the focus on increasing female players or female leaders, highlighting the value of considering each of these dimensions. Nonetheless, some limitations to these conceptualizations are addressed below. Taken together, the findings advance understanding of the capacity building process and highlight implications for related practice in physically active leisure-based clubs, including in the context of gender equity policy initiatives.

The study advances theory and research by addressing the call for the examination of a specific external force and the associated organisational response with respect to capacity building (Millar & Doherty, 2016). In addition to support for the model in general, the current study highlights that capacity needs associated with a particular external force (e.g., the

Council's Policy for gender equity) may vary with respect to initiatives to address different aspects of that force; namely, to increase the number of female players and to increase the number of female leaders. Pucher et al. (2010) argue that initiatives in support of policy tend to be more successful when implemented simultaneously, however the current study reveals the potential multidimensionality and contrast in capacity needs for different initiatives. This further characterises capacity building as a context- *and* response-specific process. The findings also reinforce that capacity building is not a smooth or perfect process (cf. Millar & Doherty, 2016). Capacity needs and/or readiness to build may be misread by an organization resulting in compromised capacity building. According to the model, this should prompt a review of the perceived capacity needs, strategy(s) to address those needs, and/or aspects of readiness. This is addressed further in implications for the clubs.

Insight to the capacity building process in the clubs informs several implications for promoting female participation in the study sample. Again, as the clubs may have misread their readiness (on a number of dimensions) to build human and financial capacity as they intended, they should revisit that readiness and perhaps the original strategies (generating a greater volunteer and financial base). It is not clear whether this was happening with the clubs studied, and further indepth investigation could help to uncover these more nuanced steps. It is fair to conclude that the clubs had not been effective in increasing the number of female players and leaders at the time of the study, as only one-third indicated that their rates had increased and then only slightly. Room for continued improvement was implied, and may be realized over the long term with the implementation of club initiatives. As the clubs do (or do not) experience change in the participation and leadership of girls and women, they should continue to assess whether they want to address this, whether they are impelled to do so (by the Council's Policy and/or by social awareness), and their potentially changing capacity to do so (cf. Millar & Doherty, 2016).

There are also implications for the Council from a broader leisure activity-based club perspective, in terms of awareness and support of club capacity for gender equity (or other leisure policy) initiatives, and need to build capacity to successfully implement such initiatives. The Council should recognize that clubs are likely to adopt or adapt initiatives to their own conditions (cf. Skille 2008, 2011), and thus offer ideas, guidance and support as much as, if not more so, than specific tools and delivery mechanisms. The Council should make itself aware of the potentially different club needs for different initiatives, and not presume that aspects such as human resources and finances will be the most critical for every initiative. Awareness of specific needs can, in turn, inform the direction and support that the Council should provide.

While the findings are enlightening, there are some limitations to the study that may be addressed in future research. Broad conceptualizations of capacity and readiness to build were used in the current study and so there is merit in the investigation of more nuanced indicators of these concepts. Further, an exploratory approach may uncover additional and alternative aspects of capacity and readiness to build capacity to increase female participation in sport. The sample was limited to survey data from 20 sport clubs and thus future efforts may build on this study to examine capacity building to promote female participation through more indepth, as well as longitudinal, investigation of the capacity building process in specific cases. These approaches may facilitate confirmation and extension of the conceptualizations of capacity and readiness to build used here. These considerations may also be applied to the investigation of capacity building needs, readiness and efforts to address other social inequities and in other leisure activity-based clubs. In addition, future research may also identify the year clubs were founded to determine if capacity and readiness to build are more evident in established compared to newly established clubs, although a larger sample of clubs isrequired to enable statistical comparisons. A larger sample of clubs

would also enable further insight to club capacity and capacity building for gender (or other) equity initiatives that may be generated statistically; for example, is there a significant difference between capacity needs for implementing initiatives to increase girls and women as players and as leaders? Is there a significant difference between the dimensions of readiness to build capacity, and which of these is the strongest predictor of successful building? From the specific links considered here, a larger sample may also permit a more robust examimantion of whether various club characteristics are associated with capacity for gender equity and readiness to build. Importantly, future research should seek to further understand the capacity dynamics associated with initiatives for promoting participation of girls and women in physically active leisure pursuits.

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