(Un)Doing Gender Inequalities in Sport Organizations

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Gender can be seen not only as a binary category but also as a performance or doing that is shaped by, and shapes organizational processes and structures that are deeply embedded in (sport) organizations in multiple and complex ways. The purpose of this paper is to explore strategies for addressing the undoing of gender in sport organizations with the use of an overarching or meta-approach. Strategies that aim to undo gender require a recognition of the complexity of regimes of inequality and the need to use incremental steps in the form of small wins while acknowledging change is not linear. The complexity and multiplicity of the gendering of sport organizations should, therefore, be considered a wicked problem. The naming of heterotopias can provide directions or goals for small wins and for addressing the wicked problem of the doing of gender in sport organizations.

Keywords: gender equality, sport leadership, small wins, wicked problem, heterotopia

Organizations, including those in sport, are places where gender is done, undone, and redone (Acker, 1990; Butler, 2004; Martin, 2001, 2003, 2006). Doing and redoing gender are situated practices that create or construct gender difference resulting in regimes of inequality, while undoing gender means gender difference is reduced/diminished in organizational practices (Kelan, 2018). Although research agendas have been proposed to further explore the complexities of how sport organizations are gendered (e.g., Burton & Keaton, 2024; Knoppers, McLachlan, et al., 2021; Markula & Knoppers, 2024), this paper explores novel ways to think about and approach these complexities, and propose strategies organizations can employ that could lead to undoing gender, albeit incrementally and, possibly, temporarily. We are not the first to suggest ways to change the doing of gender in sport organizations (see, e.g., Shaw & Frisby, 2006; Shaw & Hoeber, 2003; Sotiriadou & de Haan, 2019). We, however, propose the use of a metalens to look at the problem as a whole rather than exploring ways of changing specific gendered practices as other scholars have done. A focus solely on interactions and practices at the micro-, meso-, and macrolevels may suggest it is possible to create a checklist of policies that would address these practices within an organization. This rational approach assumes that once all the items are addressed, then the organization would have undone gender, that is, eliminated practices that produce difference. We draw

extensively on the extant literature to argue that this assumption is unfounded as organizations and gender (and its intersection with other power relations such as race/ethnicity, (dis)ability, and sexuality) are dynamic concepts and undoing gender in an organization is an ongoing and complex task. We contend that an overarching approach is needed that focuses on small wins, while we also frame the undoing of gender in sport organizations as a wicked problem, and point to heterotopic sites where the doing of gender is disrupted and subverted.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to explore strategies for addressing change in this "doing" of gender in ways that take the complexity of this problem seriously and to argue for the framing of the doing of gender in sport organizations as a wicked problem. We do so by drawing on literature in the area of management, sport, and gender, especially that which focuses on strategies for change that can contribute to undoing gender in (sport)organizations. We first explain the notion of small wins, that is, the need for a focus on incremental change. We then follow with the argument that despite small wins, the gendering of sport organizations should be considered a wicked problem; that is, undoing gender can be considered to be a complex problem that is endless and cannot be totally (re) solved. We end the paper with a few examples of heterotopias, sites where the dominant gender order is subverted, to reveal visible ways in which gender is undone.

Acker (1990, 2006) contends that the nature or type of primary activity of an organization is a strong determinant of how gender is done. This suggests that when an organization revolves around organizing or facilitating sport, then the ways sport is gendered contribute to the regimes of inequality in that organization. Specifically, extremely gendered organizations are those in which the core or primary activity is dominated by men and by practices of heroic or desirable masculinity. Tyler et al. (2019) justified the use of "extremely gendered" in their exploration of the overrepresentation of men in firefighting by arguing that when "an organization is so closely tied to particular notions of masculinity, then challenging this—through, for example, the greater inclusion of women —can be seen to challenge the existence of the organization itself" (p. 1206). Sport, especially men's sport, is an institution that is male oriented in thinking and doing and therefore its organization can be

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described as being extremely gendered (Kidd, 2013; Messner, 2011). Women are in the minority and occupy positions primarily in the periphery. As a result, the skewed gender ratio in leadership positions in sport, especially those associated with the core business, and the ways gender is done are discursively "legitimized as being 'natural' or 'normal'" (Bryan et al., 2021, p. 955). This doing of gender does not impact all women in sport organizations in the same way as it is also shaped by intersectional experiences, especially of those women who are minoritized by race, gender, sexuality, and/or disability (e.g., Burton & Keaton, 2024; Melton & Bryant, 2017; Rankin-Wright & Hylton, 2020).

A further complication to understanding the ways gender is (un)done in organizations is the complexity of defining gender (in) equality and of the ways to undo gender. The enactment of gender equality policies "is a political process of actors' ongoing contestation of the meanings of gender equality constructed within the law and policies and the informal norms that maintain the status quo in organizations" (Tildesley et al., 2023, p. 3). Tildesley et al. (2023) found that the implementation of gender legislation revealed how undoing gender can be conceptualized and addressed in various ways depending on the stakeholders that are involved. These ways often consist of changing or fixing women through mechanisms such as mentorships for them and unconscious bias training for all employees (Meyerson & Kolb, 2000; O'Brien et al., 2023; Shaw & Frisby, 2006). Such mechanisms target individual gender beliefs. Undoing gender can also occur by fixing the organization through structural solutions, for example, through salary equalizations, the use of quotas, and providing daycare (Benschop & Verloo, 2012; Meyerson & Kolb, 2000). The gendering of organizations can also be revealed by examining how gender is done through interactions and looking for ways to change those (Martin, 2003; Shaw & Frisby, 2006; Shaw & Hoeber, 2003). Projects of change to undo gender that consist of measures that focus on individuals, interactions, or structures have, however, been criticized because they "reinforce assumptions about gender that fuel inequality (e.g., the ingrained gender binary) and maintain the structural causes of inequality" (Wynn, 2020, p. 108). They also elicit resistance (Benschop & van den Brink, 2013; Benschop & Verloo, 2012; Meyerson & Kolb, 2000). This resistance can consist of opposing women's entry into previously masculine domains, challenging the authority of women in positions of leadership, or denying the negative effects of the gendering of sport organizations (Knoppers, Spaaij, et al., 2021; Tildesley et al., 2023). This broad variation in conceptualizing the undoing of gender and possible resistance to this means that changing the way gender is done cannot occur through an all-encompassing, direct intervention.

Small Wins to Effect Change

Bringing about change in the doing of gender in organizations may require another approach than direct organization-wide interventions. Chappell and MacKay (2021) argue that "transformative gender change rarely arrives through major ruptures or at 'critical junctures'; more likely, it will be achieved in incremental steps, . . .—a case of chipping away rather than sweeping away" (p. 327). Benschop and van den Brink (2013) have argued that the focus for attaining change should be on achieving small wins. The notion of small wins consists of making small positive, concrete changes or creating partial solutions that produce visible results (Weick, 1984). Small wins are "concrete, completed, implemented outcomes of moderate importance" (Weick, 1984, p. 43). Their accumulation over time can produce transformations

and reveal "a pattern that may attract allies, deter opponents, and lower resistance to subsequent proposals. Small wins are controllable opportunities that produce visible results (Weick, 1984, p. 43).

An organization could therefore work on undoing gender by using a small wins approach. This requires individuals to identify concrete organizational practices that contribute to gender inequities and then experiment with changing them (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Meyerson & Kolb, 2000). Such experimentation to bring about change is continuous because there is no definable endpoint. Changing "the way that work is defined, executed, and evaluated is an ongoing process" (Benschop & van den Brink, 2013, p. 8; see also Ely & Meyerson, 2000).

This strategy to bring about change in gendered organizations with a focus on small wins (Weick, 1984) is sometimes called tempered radicalism (Meyerson & Tompkins, 2007). The focus of small wins or tempered radicalism is to produce changes in organizational processes, structures, and practices as an alternative to trying to fix or change women. Small wins or an emphasis on tempered radicalism could consist of strategies and interventions to make positions of leadership in (sport) organizations more attainable for women and marginalized men.

Interventions that produce small wins may consist of relatively simple policies. For example, research has revealed that the ideas proposed by women during a meeting are often not heard until they are suggested by a man; similarly, men tend to interrupt women during meetings more so than the reverse (Briggs et al., 2023). A successful intervention resulting in a small win might consist of the implementation of a guideline that prohibits interruptions during a meeting while someone is talking or a guideline that individuals acknowledge who first offered an idea. Small wins as a strategy to undo gender requires researchers to work with managers or administrators of sport organizations to create actions that produce results that are visible and that might contribute to long-term change in the ways gender is done in an organization (Correll, 2017). As noted, the cumulation of small wins over time can produce transformative change (Benschop & van den Brink, 2013; Bleijenbergh, 2018; Correll, 2017; de Vries & van den Brink, 2016). These interventions must, however

> stretch the consciousness, the vocabularies and the practices that bear the imprints of social domination. The social engineering of dominant objectives and practices are at least balanced with a strong sense of a better world [. . .] grounded in a clear normative philosophy. (Correll, 2017, p. 545)

Below, we consider two types of practices that can produce small wins: performativity and participatory action research.

Practices Producing Small Wins: Performativity

According to Butler (1988), how gender is enacted and embodied is performative; that is, doing gender consists of "a stylized repetition of acts" (p. 519). Individuals become gendered through what they do. This "doing" is regulated and given meaning by individuals using available discourses. Discursive norms or "truths" can be challenged because they are incomplete and are always open to other interpretations that can challenge dominant norms. Performativity creates space to enact discourses in different ways and to subvert them. Discourses can therefore serve as an important resource for those wishing to challenge managerial discourses and their related practices to implement policies that could produce small wins (Spicer et al., 2009). Those working for change may, for

example, draw on discourses to deconstruct assumptions about gender and gender equality, or they may utilize discourses of shame to mobilize policy enactment and/or to engage in collective public protest/action (Spicer et al., 2009; Tildesley et al., 2023). Tildesley et al. (2023), for example, revealed how feminists used discourses of shame based on publicly stated commitments to gender equality to push university administrators to make changes that contributed to the undoing of gender. Similarly, Desjardins (2021) found that the countries bidding to host the 2023 International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) Women's World Cup situated their arguments in discourses of gender equality to represent themselves as "benevolent rescuers of struggling women's sport" (p. 1194). Small wins could also occur in changing the use of "men" and "ladies" in golf to "men" and "women" (Piggott, 2019) and in increased media coverage. For example, the record-setting number of viewers of the women's championship basketball games of the National Collegiate Athletic Association in March–April 2024 was not only due to the outstanding play of Caitlin Clark of Iowa but was also partially a result of equal (social) media coverage given to men and women with several women's games setting a record for viewers (while economic inequities remain) (Weaver, 2024).

As we argued earlier, sport organizations are extremely gendered in a hierarchical discursive binary way. A recognition of how discourses about gender are performed leaves room for their undoing through deconstruction, reconstruction, and destabilization (Kelan, 2010). Such moments of undoing can be seen as small wins that can diminish the gendering of sport organizations.

Practices Producing Small Wins: Participatory Action Research

The use of participatory action research (PAR) also can produce small wins since its methods enable researchers and managers/organizational stakeholders to work together to produce change via small wins in the ways gender is done in organizations. PAR consists of a group of researchers and stakeholders identifying a problem or a series of problems together, developing an analysis, imagining possibilities for change, and working to implement them. This type of collaborative work ensures commitment to the results.

A focus on change in organizational practices and processes rather than on individual gender ideologies makes the process of PAR complex (see, e.g., Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Meyerson & Kolb, 2000). To produce a small win in undoing gender through action research, researchers and stakeholders need to share understandings of what constitutes action and have the capacity to enact action plans. Those in positions of leadership must be part of this action project since they and their immediate context need to change as well. Through this collaborative work, researchers gain and produce experiential knowledge. This means members involved in the collaboration mutually learn about the structural constraints and organizational culture that together shape their lives.

Ackerly and True (2013) call for the use of a feminist approach to PAR to produce small wins. This requires focusing on practices of inclusion and exclusion, marginalization, and relationality (Frisby et al., 2005, 2009). Chappell and MacKay (2021) argue that a feminist approach requires a collaborative effort between feminists within the organization and those outside. Often, those outside the organization are feminist scholars, while those inside will also be feminists, but their position within the organization may require them to be tempered radicals. Such a collaborative effort means researchers who are outsiders should not

accept what we see from the outside at face value, but to undertake deep excavations within institutional settings to better reveal the layers of silence, and points of resistance and opportunity that confront "outsiders within" may not be so obvious at first glance. (Chappell & MacKay, 2021, pp. 10–11)

Scholar-outsiders also need to understand the institutional constraints that shape the action possibilities for tempered radical insiders. The insiders also need to critically reflect on their actions. Their first-person accounts, especially if they reveal movement, change, and incidents over time, can also serve as data.

An example of such a collaborative feminist effort that resulted in small wins was provided by Correll (2017). She described an ongoing project in which researchers worked with teams of managers to create and implement actions that would reduce stereotypic biases about women that were embedded in organizational processes. Together with these teams, she codeveloped tools that could be used to reduce gender biases. When these tools were applied, the results were measurable small wins. She chose to focus on small wins because

actions designed to produce small wins have the advantage of being seen as doable by supporters, while often flying under the radar of detractors. Attempts to solve larger-scale social problems, by contrast, are often seen as impossible to solve by supporters and are attacked by detractors. When a small win is achieved, it often creates new allies and makes visible the next target of change. (Correll, 2017, p. 735)

The analysis that shapes PAR should include a consideration of how gender intersects with other forms of social relations of power such as race, class, and sexual orientation and how these dynamics are socially constructed, sustained, experienced, and resisted (Bell et al., 2003; Frisby et al., 2005).

Complexity of Small Wins

The discourse of small wins needs to be examined critically. The notion of "wins" within a professional sport organization with a focus on profit may, for example, be assigned different meanings than in a local sport club where the purported value is social and nonprofit. In the former, an intervention may focus on undoing gender in job interviews possibly resulting in a small win (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). In contrast, for a local voluntary sport organization, a small win may be reflected in the change in the gender ratio in the assignment of more women to coaching/governing tasks and more men to emotionally supportive tasks/labor (Krahn & Safai, 2024). Not only does the context add to the complexity of small wins, but so does the degree of understanding among participants in a project about its objective. Without a mutual understanding of the concept, participants in the project may struggle in their collaboration. Those working for small wins within an organization need to be aware of "the precarious nature and marginal position of actors, norms, and rules that aim to challenge the gendered status quo from within" (Chappell & MacKay, 2021, p. 321). Policymakers and researchers also need to address how intersectionality shapes who "wins." Small changes or interventions may have a differentiated impact depending on race, social class, sexuality, and other social power relations and may even be counterproductive (Bell et al., 2003; Correll, 2017). For example, based on a study of athletic diversity and inclusion officers at Division I universities in the United States, Keaton et al.

(2023) concluded that the race-gendered identity (Black women) of these officers limited their agency. Similarly, a small win might consist of hiring a coach who is a woman of color. The small win of their appointment may, however, be negated by the extra emotional burden that is placed on her if, or when, she is seen as representing all people of color, such as when racist events occur (Gómez et al., 2023).

Positionality also shapes the possibilities of gaining a small win. Fotaki (2012) argues that a focus on gaining small wins predominantly through changes in organizational practices and processes overlooks the position of individuals. These practices and processes intersect with subjectivity and otherness. She contends that how gender is done occurs not only outside of individuals but is also internalized by the subject. This could also extend to the acceptance of normalized practices about gender and gender ideologies in extremely gendered organizations. Many employees may have a sport history, which may mean they have developed a habitus that disposes them to see gender inequity as normal or common sense (Knoppers, Spaaij, et al., 2021). This may mean that small wins are slow in coming.

The Challenge of Producing Small Wins

Small wins may in the long run also become losses as "gendered organizations tend to move back to an equilibrium when confronted with change" (Bleijenbergh, 2018, p. 131). Messner (2011) and Travers and Berdahl (2022) found that when gender was undone by the opening of positions of leadership to women and/or by constructing a softer masculinity, this masculinity was still based on a gendered binary hierarchy. The shift to a softer masculinity may be seen as a small win although it reflects not only undoing, but also, redoing gender.

Acker (1990, 2006) has argued that gender is done in organizations through interacting processes. Specifically, she referred to regimes of gender inequality shaped by the gendered division of tasks/work, by the identity work of members and their interactions, and through the use of symbols and images that reflect both the organization and its members. The interdependence of these dimensions means that change in one of these will affect the other dimensions as well. This interdependence may be especially true for those working in sport organizations (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014; Piggott & Pike, 2020; Shaw, 2006; Shaw & Hoeber, 2003). They may have identified with a sport as a child and attached specific gendered meanings to the sport, to the self as a participant, and to the sports club. This interdependence means that changes in one aspect of this regime go further than a specific change and can therefore disturb organizational equilibrium. Change in one dimension in the doing of gender in an organization may result in organizational members becoming disoriented such as not knowing which speech acts contribute to stereotyping of colleagues or assuming a woman was appointed only because she is a woman (Benschop & van den Brink, 2013; Benschop & Verloo, 2012; Pape & Schoch, 2023).

Some stakeholders may have a vested interest in the status quo because they have "incorporated gendered organizational norms, beliefs, and values in their own identity" (Bleijenbergh, 2018, p. 136). For example, Bleijenbergh (2018) described how senior white men in several organizations where she was part of a group involved in producing change disputed the findings and the analysis of the results. She concluded that

> resistance to gender equality change can be understood as an articulated defense of the organizational identity by organizational stakeholders . . . . This often requires the researchers to

become tempered radicals and negotiate acceptance within the norms and values of the dominant culture. (p. 136)

The notion of small wins refers to projects that are small or modest in scale to undo organizational gender. Even mere recommendations for change may meet resistance, however. This resistance suggests undoing gender in organizations is a complex and ambiguous problem. Resistance or dismissal of results may be due to the ways these findings and paths to change disturb organizational equilibrium as we argued above. Chappell and McKay (2021), in their reflection on the utility of a focus on small wins, acknowledge that small wins can erode. They argue that those working for change need to be aware of the "pendulum movement back and forward between small wins and losses, and the cumulative effect of these over time" (p. 322). This resistance tends to be greatest in extremely gendered organizations such as those involved in the organization of sport, although there may also be organizational members and stakeholders who wish to change the status quo. These findings suggest the production of small wins is not a linear process. Fotaki (2012) contends that the complexities of undoing gender inequality in organizations should be considered a wicked problem. In the following section, we expand on this perspective on the (un)doing of gender using the notion of small wins as a partial, incremental, or temporary solution to a wicked problem.

The (Un)Doing of Gender in Sport Organizations as a Wicked Problem

A wicked problem describes a societal or organizational problem that is complex, ambiguous, and difficult to (re)solve (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Since Rittel and Webber introduced this notion, a great deal of literature has focused on unpacking and applying this concept, demonstrating how wicked problems tend to be ambiguous, reflect uncertainty about possible solutions, and involve different perspectives on the problem (Head, 2022). This description applies to how gender is (un)done in organizations. O'Brien et al. (2017), who examined gender inequalities in organizations, concluded that

> workplace gender inequality persists because it is a "wicked problem" arising from interactions between multiple context-specific factors, it is both a symptom and a cause of other problems, with disagreement and ambiguity around what constitutes success in reaching gender equality. (n.p.)

Although individual, interpersonal, structural, and cultural levels at which gender is done may be distinct when examined analytically, they are often interrelated. Together they form regimes of gender inequality in daily organizational practices (Acker, 2006). This interrelatedness makes the undoing of gender a multidimensional and complex problem. van den Brink and Benschop (2012) speak of the gendering of organizations as a seven-headed dragon. O'Connor (2020) has argued that gender inequality in organizations should be designated as a wicked problem because the tentacles of gender inequality and the doing of gender tend to be part of the "normal" structure and culture of the organization and may therefore become invisible. Although invisible to some, the tentacles are experienced by those marginalized by how gender is done. Naming it as a wicked problem means policymakers, researchers, and those seeking to undo gender understand that their focus should not be on creating an all-encompassing solution but

on accepting the complexity of the problem and of the actors involved (Alfred & Head, 2017). The goal in undoing gender is to work on diminishing the multipronged tentacles of the seven-headed dragon that inscribe gender inequality in organizational structures and culture. Every aspect of these tentacles needs to be tackled if gender inequality is to be reduced and gender undone, albeit incrementally. This way of understanding gender inequality and doing gender as a wicked problem is congruent with the ways gender has been done, undone, and subsequently redone in sport organizations (Bryan et al., 2021; Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008, 2012; Messner, 2011; Travers & Berdahl, 2022).

Lönngren and van Poeck (2021) have mapped the literature that uses the concept of wicked problems. Their synthesis suggests that how a wicked problem is formulated is shaped by the perspectives of those identifying the problem and of those propos-ing solutions. This variation produces different perspectives on the problem, as research on the doing of gender in sport organizations has revealed. For example, a secondary analysis of data based on interviews with members of international and national boards of sport governing bodies found that members of national boards tended to attribute the underrepresentation of women on their boards as one that needed to be solved by women themselves (i.e., fixing the woman), whereas international sport organizations were inclined to hold sport organizations at the national level responsible for change such as the implementation of quota policies (i.e., fixing the organization) (Knoppers, Spaaij, et al., 2021).

How Does the Wickedness End?

Wicked problems are not only complex but also tend to be nonlinear and endless; that is, there is no clear definition of when a problem has been solved or resolved (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Although the meaning of gender equality has often been described in terms of the number of women in positions of leadership, various scholars (see below) have argued that although an increase in the number of women administrators may contribute to the undoing of gender, the presence of more women does not mean that gender has been mostly undone in the organization. Throughout their lives as employees in sport organizations, women continue to encounter practices/experiences of exclusion, misogyny, homophobia, and sexual harassment (e.g., Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Burton et al., 2011; Claringbould & Geldof, 2024; Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Fink, 2016; Greenhill et al., 2009; Piggott & Matthews, 2020; Piggott & Pike, 2020).

The lack of clarity about the durability of gender initiatives and the "end goal" for an organization to completely undo gender is also illustrated in research on boards of sport governance. Clar-ingbould and Knoppers (2008, 2012) found that although a con-certed effort was made to increase the number of women board members so that men and women occupied a similar number of positions, this initiative was not sustained over time. Once "equal numbers" were achieved, gender was no longer considered an issue, and subsequently, the board reverted to a large majority of men in the following election cycles, and thus ended up redoing gender. Similarly, structural changes such as provisions for the daycare of children of coaches and access to diploma courses do not necessarily mean that misogyny and homophobia are absent in coaching cultures (Barnes & Adams, 2022; Gosai et al., 2024). The doing of gender is woven into societal, organizational, interper-sonal, and individual dynamics making resolving or undoing gender seemingly interminable and complex. Such interminability and complexity are characteristics of wicked problems.

Invisibility of Men as Men

Another complicating factor that contributes to this wickedness is that gender inequality and efforts to reduce it have usually been associated with women. Their presence, even as tokens, in sport organizations and positions of leadership, is assumed to reduce gender inequality and suggests gender has been/is being undone. Most of the gender-focused research has therefore examined the experiences of women, and the solutions offered tend to focus on them; in contrast, very little research has been conducted on men as men. Collinson and Hearn (1996) have argued that the doing of gender in (sport) organizations is also shaped and produced by organizational cultures that require leaders to embrace discursive practices that celebrate desirable/heroic masculinity (see also Davies, 1995; Knoppers, McLachlan, et al., 2021; Messner, 2011; Travers & Berdahl, 2022). Often that desirable masculinity becomes normalized and the status quo in extremely gendered organizations. Practices of managerial masculinity become the common way of doing business/working (Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2005, 2008). A focus on men *as* men has largely been missing from this work focusing on the gendering of positions of leadership in sport organizations. Although a few scholars have focused on the ways men enact and embody desirable masculinity in sport (e.g., Curry, 1991; Messner, 2013; Pringle & Hickey, 2010), relatively few have explored how the doing of gender by men shapes organizational culture in sport and the role this culture plays in their overrepresentation in positions of leadership. This gap in the lack of focus on men as men in the literature about the doing of gender in sport organizations has meant the sport man-agement literature has primarily had a one-sided focus on positions of leadership in sport organizations.

Characterizing the doing of gender in sport organizations as a wicked problem means accepting the content and process com-plexity (briefly described above) and, therefore, its wickedness while simultaneously looking for ways to decrease the size of that wickedness. We emphasize that characterizing the doing of gender in organizations as wicked has a rhetorical function and does not mean changes in gendered discursive practices are impossible and that dominant gendered discourses cannot be inverted. Instead, defining the doing of gender in sport organizations as a wicked problem means understanding that trying to undo it is not a rational problem with an all-encompassing solution, but that gender could be (partially) undone through the cumulative effect of small wins. The focus of strategies for change is not so much on solutions as it is on reducing the size and presence of multipronged tentacles that embed gender inequality in the "normal" structure and culture of sport organizations.

Reclaiming Wickedness: Heterotopias

The use of the concept of wicked problems to point to the never-ending doing of gender in organizations can become a source of pessimism. It needs to be accompanied by a vision of existing possibilities, that is, actual spaces where the doing of gender is upended or subverted. Wickedness in the doing of gender in organizations can be seen as a problem while a feminist version of Foucault's (1986) notion of heterotopia can contribute to its undoing. Heterotopian spaces are concrete, actual places or spaces where the current gender order is subverted, suspended, resisted, or inverted (Bazin & Naccache, 2016). This notion of heterotopia is different from that of a utopia, which is an imagined place. Tamboukou (2004) used the notion of heterotopia to describe how

women's colleges originally became heterotopias for women students in various ways as they navigated a masculinist academic world. She concluded that "the effects of power were not as important as the subjective capacities that were being developed in women's attempts to resist the power that had made them what they were" (Tamboukou, 2004, p. 399). This suggests that in these "women spaces," gender was continually being undone. Similarly, Kannen (2014) contends that women's studies classrooms function as heterotopias due to the coming and going of a diversity of individuals into that "special" space. Their presence and actions "challenge and subvert how the space can be understood and its interaction with the "outside" social world" (p. 56). Do such places exist in sport?

Although exploring and analyzing gender heterotopias in sport are beyond the scope of this paper, we give a few examples where they may exist. Currently, many women's sport spaces may function as (temporary) heterotopias, places where the notions about women and their bodies that have kept women out of sport and leadership are visibly disrupted. The national women's football team of the United States launched a campaign for equal pay; in this manner, they subverted the idea that the performance of male athletes is financially worth more than that of female athletes (Stump, 2022). Spain's women's football team created a heterotopia by going on strike to effect the removal of the national coach due to his misogynist behavior. In so doing, these athletes challenged the idea that women must accept that misogyny is part of participating in sport. Men may dominate positions of leadership in sport, but competitions, travel, and practices are also moments in time when women interact with each other. In these moments, women's achievements, capabilities, and emotions are visible, and thus can be an example of performative change that challenges dominant (hierarchical binary) discourses about women's physicality and abilities that seek to limit them (Aanesen et al., 2020; Antunovic & Linden, 2015; Kavoura & Ryba, 2020; Meân & Kassing, 2008). Finley (2010) has revealed how women participating in roller derbies, for example, challenge dominant discourses about femininities and athleticism by engaging in a performativity that parodies these ideas. Roller derbies become heterotopias where dominant femininities are parodied and alternative femininities are constructed.

Heterotopias are also places where current discourses about whiteness and heteronormativity are challenged. According to Antunovic and Olson (2024), their research on communications about the Women's National Basketball Association found that "content about gender equality and racial justice circulated to varying degrees in a networked environment across athlete-produced content, news media, sponsor messaging, and league communication" (p. 73). Women's National Basketball Association athletes have often used their basketball platform to create a heterotopia that advocates for racial justice and gender equality. Another example of heterotopias is spaces where dominant notions of heteronormativity are challenged through the positive publicity given to women athletes who openly identify as lesbian and who are visible as being in committed same-sex relationships (Vinall, 2023). This stands in contrast to such identities and relationships being abnormalized. Some women's sport teams have produced spaces where heterosexist discourses are subverted or disrupted, and in doing so, these spaces become queer heterotopias (Ravel & Rail, 2006). Jones (2009) has argued that queer heterotopias are "places where individuals can challenge the heteronormative regime and are 'free' to perform their gender and sexuality without fear of being qualified, marginalized, or punished [. . .]" (p. 2).

A final example of the existence of heterotopias pertains to women working in sport who create their own networks. Although the number of female athletes has increased exponentially, there are relatively few women coaches, especially at the elite level (Knoppers et al., 2022). The establishment of formal support networks for and by women coaches can add to the self-confidence of women, making them more "knowledgeable and efficacious as both a person as well as a professional" (Norman, 2012, p. 233). In this way, these networks can also serve as heterotopias. Although many of the previously mentioned heterotopias may be spontaneous, localized, and/or temporary, they illustrate how women's sports at times can serve as heterotopias that are a wicked attempt to undo gender. These heterotopias serve alongside sites of small wins, together diminishing the wickedness of the doing of gender in and by sport organizations.

Conclusion

Rather than solely focusing on producing small wins to tackle the wicked problem of undoing gender, the practices of wickedness, as exemplified in heterotopias that undo gender, are a much-needed feminist endeavor. These heterotopias can provide directions or goals for small wins and enable those wishing to undo gender in sport organizations to recreate or reimagine social arrangements based on visions of what a sport organization in which current dominant practices of gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality as well as other social relations of power such as those reflected in ableism are almost totally undone would look like.

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