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One sport, One achievement, One perspective

One sport, One perspective, One achievement:

Gender parity at the

Muaythai World Championships, 2018.

A thesis

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of the requirements for the degree

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Abstract

Gender equity has been the focus of research across the sports landscape. Given the ongoing privilege of the masculine male in sports, achieving gender equity is a challenge. This disparity is especially so concerning combat sports, where women, as legitimate participants, is still a struggle.

Amongst the scarce research on gender parity and combat sport, there is little focus on the negotiation and achievement towards gender equity in Muaythai. The fact that Muaythai is a sport premised on Thai warriors and their battlefields and that it arises from a culture/country where the subjugation of women continues to exist makes it a fascinating site to examine for progress in gender equity. Significant shifts in participation parity have been achieved for women in Muaythai further renders this sport a fascinating area for inquiry. The question of gender equity achievement in Muaythai is a previously undocumented story, and this question is what drives this thesis.

Using a case study methodology, I examine the crucial influencers in the achievement participation parity in Muaythai as an international sport. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with IFMA Management Committee, an autobiographical account of my own experiences as an athlete and committee member, and documents of record from committee meetings, I detail the key enablers identified as being crucial to the achievement of gender parity for participating elite athletes.

The results indicate that governing bodies need to take heed of the three critical enablers identified in driving social change to create change in combat sport:

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1. Equitable changes (including changes to uniform, and equality in staging, rules and medalling)
2. Transformational leadership
3. The political climate and a global desire for change
4. Participants in this study suggest that combat sports organisations will continue to struggle around gender equity and participation parity unless governing bodies take decisive action. Thus, robust and transformational leadership is needed, while understanding the complexity of the environment in which such endeavours take place.

While the key enablers reported in this thesis have been central to Muaythai, this research provides only one example of how to facilitate change and given the limited research on the processes that support gender parity in combat sports limits generalisations across other sports. Instead, this thesis aims to yield some direction for other organisations to take if they desire to enhance female participation.

Keywords: Women, sport, participation parity, gender equality, gender parity, equity, Muaythai

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“Equality is not a concept. It’s not something we should be striving for. It’s a necessity. Equality is like gravity. We need it to stand on this earth as men and women, and the misogyny that is in every culture is not a true part of the human condition. It is life out of balance, and that imbalance is sucking something out of the soul of every man and woman who’s confronted with it. We need equality. Kinda now.”

Joss Whedon (Producer, Writer, Director)

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to all the women and men who have worked alongside me, helping to create opportunities for women to participate, officiate, and lead in the sport of Muaythai. To the entire management team at the IFMA and in particular, to the President, Dr. Sakchye Tapsuwan; the Secretary-General, Stephan Fox; the Director, Charissa Chan Tynan; and my dear friend in Muaythai, Niamh Griffin, thank you all for believing in me and giving me the opportunities to make a difference and follow my heart.

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I want to acknowledge and thank my supervisors, Associate Professor Kirsten Petrie and Professor Lisette Burrows, from the University of Waikato. Their belief in me and enthusiasm enabled me to initiate and develop my research. Their genuine support was what I needed to believe in myself and to take my achievements one step further so that others may also benefit from them.

I would also like to acknowledge the nine interviewees that gave their time, expert opinions, and honest, reflective narratives so that I might piece together a basic understanding of the success achieved by the IFMA, participation parity for elite female athletes at the international level. Though this specific example of gender equality (in the form of participation parity) may have been an anomaly, it is certainly reflective of the huge and undisputed increase in female participation in this traditionally male-dominated sport. It is the cohesion and trust within this group that has allowed us to grow and learn together and continues to support me as I push my blatant agenda of gender equality at all levels within the sport of Muaythai and possibly outside of it as well. I want to acknowledge and thank you all.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Chapter one will entail my backstory within Muaythai to further the readers understanding of how I position myself within the research as a participant and witness to the achievement. I will give a brief history of Muaythai, including a section focused on female inclusion. The introduction chapter will also cover how inequality for women has been reflected in Muaythai, and explain what participation parity means for this research. Furthermore, I will outline why researching and recording this achievement matters, how it will contribute to the literature, and end with the outline of this thesis.

Muaythai and me

My first introduction to Muaythai was in 1992 when, at 21, I passed through Thailand on my way home to New Zealand after some time living abroad and then again during a fun sparring session at my brother's dojo. The organisation included two martial arts, Muaythai (Thai boxing, originating from Thailand), and Zen Do Kai (ZDK) - freestyle karate (originating from Japan). Needless to say, my brother, who practised ZDK, firmly put his sister in her place and bruised my ego along with it. Hence my choice to learn Muaythai rather than train ZDK with my brother. Sports was my 'life', previously having competed at representation level in several sports including, Gymnastics, Swimming, Springboard Diving, Football (Soccer), and Rugby (when women's rugby was in its infancy).

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After joining the Muaythai 'side' of the training at my brother's dojo, I quickly came to love the challenge and sheer physicality of the sport - to be blunt, I loved hitting things, it made me feel empowered and in control. It was not long before I was competing in the 'square' ring, and winning a good number of my bouts. I loved the style of the sport. The fluidity of its movement felt like a graceful dance but at the same time courageous and deadly.

In 2002 I returned to Thailand to train. I had heard of a camp that trained female athletes - the World Muaythai Council (WMC) Camp in Lamai on Samui Island. It was here that I met Stephan Fox. He was hosting an International Federation of Muaythai Associations (IFMA) World Championship (WC) in Bangkok and told me I *must* go. No other kiwis were attending as the WMC/IFMA was not formally inaugurated in New Zealand. Ironically, I unintentionally ended up being amongst the handful of women who competed in the first IFMA WC to include female fighters on its official programme. While there, I also attended the Referee and Judges course as well as the Trainers course and a Thai Sports Massage course. I met and tagged along with Niamh Griffin, the IFMA Sport Director, offering assistance where needed. At a meeting, after I finished competing, I was asked by Stephan Fox to start the IFMA, WMC New Zealand. I set about building a New Zealand representative team, with the help of my trainer - Ben Ahipene. We travelled to Bangkok to the 2005 IFMA WC, where I attended as the Coach of the New Zealand Team (co-ed). In 2006, Ben attended as New Zealand Coach, and I competed again and worked as the Team Manager. I returned in 2007, where I once again coached the New Zealand team and started an informal international

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working group for women. In 2009 and 2010, I participated as the New Zealand Team Manager.

Additionally, in 2009, the IFMA held an Open World Cup at the Arafura Games in Darwin, where I competed and managed the New Zealand team. Over the years, my IFMA medal count included one Gold, one Silver, and one Bronze. In Bangkok, 2009, I started and Chaired the IFMA Female Commission.

In April 2010, I travelled to Iran as part of the IFMA Organising Committee for the Open Asian Champion President's Cup. There, I learned that women were not allowed to train with men unless they are family, nor were they allowed to compete at that tournament. In May 2011, at the Arafura Games, I was elected to the position of Oceania President. Later in 2011, I attended the IFMA WC in Tashkent. Here, five Iranian women were unable to compete in the WC because the IFMA rules did not allow women to wear body coverings or a Hijab in the ring. In 2012, I became the first female IFMA Vice President by vote. I returned to Iran in May 2012 to learn more about the needs of Muslim women and their desire to be included in our sport. After this trip, I began an initiative to change the rules of the traditional competition uniform of Muaythai.

In April, of 2013, I co-signed the first Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the IFMA and the United Nations (UN) Women (Asia Pacific) to aid in their campaign to Stop Violence Against Women and Girls. In 2014, the official IFMA rule book included the uniform changes. In 2014, I travelled to Mumbai with Elisa Salinas to learn about a new methodology (the Tanishka project) that was making an impressive impact on driving positive social change in

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the state of Maharashtra. Later that year, I was invited to Mexico City as a guest of Elisa as she launched her female empowerment programme called The Women's Project and implemented her version of the IFMA's successful Sport is Your Gang (SIYG) social programme. While there, I assisted in cementing an MOU between the Mexican Muaythai Federation and the South American UN Women. In 2015, I received an invitation to represent the IFMA at an Alliance of Independent Recognised Members of Sport (AIMS) meeting, which was an honour, being one of the few females at this high-end sports meeting.

I was a keynote speaker at the annual IFMA's Athlete conference in 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. In 2015, I worked with a close friend to assist in initiating the MOU between the IFMA and United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) - Asia Pacific). In 2017, I travelled to Baku representing the UNESCO (Asia Pacific) as a guest speaker at the 4th International Forum of Intercultural Dialogue, speaking on intercultural dialogue from a sports perspective.

In 2018, in Cancun, I proudly announced at the General Assembly that we, the IFMA, had achieved participation parity for women with a ratio of 48% women to 52% men, across the same weight divisions. I felt proud to be a critical part of achieving this milestone. It was after this announcement that I started to wonder, what was it specifically that enabled this accomplishment? Could this be repeated for female referees and coaches in Muaythai? Was I personally a crucial part of this positive change? Did this mean the IFMA was on its way to achieving

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gender equality in Muaythai? Moreover, could we learn something from this successful change that could be replicated by other sports?

The history of Muaythai

Muaythai has been a part of Thai history and heritage for hundreds of years.

Many different versions of the history of Muaythai exist, but all sources agree that Muaythai was the primary and most effective method of self-defence used by Thai warriors on the battlefields of conflicts and wars that occurred countless times throughout the history of the nation now known as Thailand. The first known practise of Muaythai as a sport occurred during the reign of King Prachao Sua (1697-1709 A.D.). (Muaythai. Sport, n.d., para.1)

The king would often fight incognito in local village contests held when the nation was at peace. Often he would order his army to train in Muaythai during these periods. It was because of this, that loosely organised competition started sprouting up around the country. As Muaythai became a favourite sporting pastime for the Thais, training camps began to develop throughout the country.

In the early 1930s, Muaythai was officially codified, with rules and regulations being created. Round contests were introduced along with an original eight divisions based on international Boxing. Queensbury rules boxing gloves replaced the rope bindings on the fighters' hands. (Muaythai. Sport, n.d., para. 2)

Over the years, Muaythai has continued to develop, with more weight divisions added, and other rule changes taking place. In the early 20th century, Muaythai, professional and amateur, started to grow as an international sport. However, it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that foreigners started travelling to Thailand to train and compete in Muaythai (Dort, 2011). Since then, Muaythai has grown as an international sport and developed into a form of self-defence for

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civilians and is now commonly used in fitness programmes worldwide (Muaythai. sport, n.d., para. 3).

The history of women in Muaythai

A rise in popularity of female Muaythai first appeared in the seventies, and it was mainly linked to the United States of America (USA) Soldiers (GI's - Government Issue) who enjoyed betting on female bouts. Females would compete in bars and night-time establishments until a combination of political factors drove its decline (Dort, 2011). When the USA GI's left the country, their departure caused the disappearance of the audience and income simultaneously, and female Muaythai numbers declined. The skill and level of female Muaythai, at that time, were generally low when compared with their male counterparts, but with the reduction in regular competition, female Muaythai quickly waned. A few local bar fights with untrained girl athletes as a form of entertainment for local men remained. However, women's Muaythai did not completely die out.

Muaythai had been present in the 1960s and 1970s before its increase in popularity. The involvement of women in Muay Thai and other public arenas of Thai society has a direct link to the industrialisation in the 1960s and 1970s and the globalisation (Dort, 2011, p. 2.2.1).

By the 1990s, women had begun the practice of moving to Thailand to live and train. However, most competition occurred between foreign women, all living in Thailand. In 1999 and 2000 the IFMA staged one female bout during each of their respective World Championships. These were 'professional' matches that were fought without padding and not included on the official programme.

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In 2000, Niamh Griffin of Ireland competed against Thailand's Daoprasuk. Niamh went on to be a pioneer for female Muaythai in Thailand and internationally. This occurrence facilitated Niamh's journey from athlete to an administrator as she went on to help build Muaythai as an International Sport. Niamh was also part of a team of athletes, including female athletes, who travelled to Kazakhstan to compete at the IFMA WC in 2003, even though Kazakhstan did not allow female athletes of their own to participate.

The first female athletes to compete in the IFMA WC as part of the official programme competed in 2002 in Bangkok, at the fifth IFMA WC. The percentage of male to female athletes that year was 99.95 % male and 0.05% female (N. Griffin and A. Birch, personal communication, 2019, August 13). The female athletes included me and were mainly from western countries. Only two female athletes were from Thailand, even though Thailand was the host country, and Muaythai is their national sport.

Sixteen years later, in 2018, the ratio of elite male to elite female athletes had grown to 52% male and 48% female (www.ifmalive.com). The athletes included a diverse mix of women from both western and non-western countries and various racial, religions, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Women, sport, and inequity

It is no surprise that the main barrier to achieving gender equality for women in sport is that “the sports system orientates itself according to male values and norms” (Palzkill & Fisher, 1990 p.221). History demonstrates the existence of sexual segregation and discrimination in sports.

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Women first participated in the Olympics at the 1900 Paris Olympic Games, but only in sports that were socially acceptable for women to compete in, such as Golf and Lawn Tennis. It was not until the 2012 Olympics in London, over 100 years later, that women were allowed to compete in the ultimate of the Olympics' masculine sports, Boxing. However, a restriction was in place for women to three weight divisions compared to their male counterparts' ten weight divisions.

The support and attention given to athletes or sports are based primarily on the sex of the athlete or team of athletes (Palzkill & Fisher, 1990). This discrimination raises two questions:

1. Are women 'inferior' in sport, or are they just under-resourced and deliberately discriminated against to maintain male domination?
2. Can women attain parity in any area of sport or its governance if equality of conditions and opportunities do not exist?

Furthermore, is equity required to achieve equality and/or parity?

The social construction of male and female gender has contributed to women viewed as inferior to their male counterparts across most sports but, in particular, sports that are deemed masculine, 'men's' sports, such as Muaythai, Sports, and Athletics in particular (the birthplace of the athlete), have traditionally been restricted to and associated with males, masculinity, and the 'manly domain' (Wilde, 2007). Wilde (2007) noted that Woolum (1998) and Sherrow (1996) identified a similar pattern pointing out that sport involving strength, competition, and team sportsmanship were deemed masculine for centuries. Even though the

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sport has evolved for women over time, many girls and women avoid participating in sports dominated by these masculine traits (p.3).

With this framing, it is not surprising that women continue to struggle to access gender equality in any sport. One widely criticised example for female athletes is financial support, which is far below the standard afforded their male counterparts. The percentage and type of media coverage women receive in sport is another notable example. This perception was reinforced by Fink (2015) when he noted that “female athletes and women’s sport are still woefully under-represented in all types of media and sportswomen are rarely acclaimed solely for their athletic abilities” (p. 331). Unjustly, women are touted more for their feminine attributes; their bodies sexualised rather than admired for athletic ability, skill, and talent.

Consequently, women are seen this way in life outside sport too. In other words, men who control their environment define women’s position in sport and society. I agreed with Gordon-Moershel (2013, p.1) when he inquired, “does questioning the ‘natural ineffable order’ of things interfere with male patriarchal hegemony?” Morshel’s question prompts me to ask, does allowing the changes needed to achieve gender equality and participation parity in sport and their relative organisations provoke fear in those who currently hold the power positions? Furthermore, is this fear the main barrier to achieving gender parity? Recent research by Connell (2018) agrees that fear is indeed the reason, and she states that to “fix this, we should make men more afraid. However, I am not sure if I agree with the second half of her statement. Instead, my experiences have led me

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to believe that partnerships founded in mutual trust and respect will lead to equality.

Gender parity (participation)

Gender parity, for this research, is defined as having equal numbers of male and female athletes participating in the same weight divisions of Muaythai at the IFMA WC. Throughout this thesis, parity will refer to participation parity for competing elite women unless stated otherwise. For most of the individuals involved in Muaythai's sport, achieving gender equality in any domain does not mean being superior to men. It simply means being given an equal chance and the same opportunities in the sport as men.

When women are given the same opportunities to compete in the same arena, at the same time, under the same conditions, with the same rules, media coverage, financial backing, and organisational support, then gender equality for competing athletes occurs. Simply put, equal numbers = parity, equal opportunities + support = equality, and the processes needed to attain either is termed equity. Furthermore, future gender parity has only been achieved for elite athletes meaning it is still to be achieved in other domains of Muaythai, such as coaching, refereeing, managing, and governance.

Notably, the achievement of gender parity for participating elite athletes may have been an anomaly, and any future reproduction may not be possible. I stress, achieving participation parity for athletes does not mean gender equality has been achieved for all women participating in Muaythai. However, parity achievement suggests that gender equality is possible in any area where parity has

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been achieved. Moreover, achieving equality in the future, in any domain of Muaythai, is likely dependent on the implementation of equitable processes.

From 1998 - 2001, at the IFMA WC, there were no female divisions on the official programme. Specific moves had to have taken place throughout the 16 years between 2002 and 2018 to allow women to have equal access to this male-dominated space, thus attaining participation parity. For a female to feel welcome and supported when she starts to train, and then feel safe and included as she continues participating and competing in this male-dominated sport depends upon the people occupying the spaces she is practising in: In particular, the environment and the attitudes of the people in those spaces are pivotal to her desire to continue on this path. To achieve gender parity, the women must first develop both the necessary skills and experience to attend the IFMA WC. Women must have opportunities and support over a sustained period to gain the essential skill level necessary. They must also have access to the same quality equipment, experienced trainers, and competition level to compete internationally.

Gender parity for athlete participation is not a new concept; female participation percentages close to 50% had already been achieved across-all-sports at the: The Youth Summer Olympics in 2014 (49.2%) and 2018 (49.7%); the Youth Winter Olympics in 2016 (46.6%). There had been a steady increase at the Winter Olympics with the female percentages recorded in 2014 (40%), 2018 (41%); the Summer Olympics came close in 2012 (44%) and 2016 (45%), with the IOC predicting (pre-COVID) 48.8% at their 2020 Summer Games (olympic.org). Although gender parity for adult athlete participation at the Olympic Games is

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within reach, like in the sport of Muaythai, achieving the same goal of gender parity in numbers for officials, coaches, administrators, and women in governance is still a distant goal/dream.

Having witnessed an unprecedented change within the sport of Muaythai, it is notable that sport can be a powerful force for collective social change and has the power to transform lives on many levels (Kaufman and Wolf, 2010). “Sport can act as a catalyst for social change, affecting the life of participants beyond the playing field or gymnasium by bringing people together, even people in conflict” (Lyras and Hums, 2009, P. 7). The achievement of Muaythai’s success reiterates that “the transcendent power of sport is apparent all around the world” (Lyras and Hums, 2009, p. 7). This type of success drove world organisations such as the UN, UNESCO and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to use sport as a driver for social change, particularly in the area of gender equality. The UN “incorporated sport as an important element in the pursuit of its Millennium Development Goals” (Lyras and Hums, 2009, P.7). It is also a focus of the UNESCO's Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport (MINEPS) conferences and their recently developed, 2017 Kazan Action Plan (KAP). The latter is a plan designed to drive policies in all UN nations to promote empowerment and equality for women and girls using sport as a vehicle. The desire to drive gender equality is why there is so much research around the success of the United States of America’s 1972 policy document, known as Title-IX. The impact of these documents on international sports organisations alone is not enough to create a complete turnabout; still, it is a starting point.

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If driving gender equality is such a strong international focus, then achieving parity in numbers for women competing in the traditionally male-dominated sport of Muaythai is an achievement that warrants further research. Identifying the critical enablers that allowed Muaythai to achieve gender parity in such a short time might lead to defining a replicable set of criteria. Many studies look at what inhibits the success of gender equality in sport. However, this will not lead to developing a set of implementable criteria to enable the changes required to achieve gender equality.

Shaw and Leberman's (2015) research shifted the focus away from identifying the 'brick walls' to achieving gender equality in sport, and instead, focused on identifying the enablers to achieving success. Focusing on identifying the key enablers that led to gender parity for Muaythai athletes will allow the future application of the identified enablers to achieve similar gender parity success in other Muaythai domains, i.e., officiating, coaching, administration, and governance. By applying the newly identified enablers to a different domain in the sport of Muaythai and monitoring its success or failure, we can test the viability of using these enablers as criteria for achieving gender parity and potential equality in other sports.

Identifying the key enablers to achieving the dramatic change in Muaythai's cultural and gendered norms is crucial. Driving positive social change in gender parity is a possible starting point for achieving gender equality altogether. Furthermore, the potential to use these enablers or identified criteria to influence other sports similarly is also probable. The enablers will identify where

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equity needs to be applied to develop a sustainable social change in gender equality, suggesting an impact on the possibility of achieving gender equality for adult and youth participants in all male-dominated sports in the future.

This thesis will attempt to discern the methods used to achieve this remarkable result from the IFMA Management Committee's perspective. A collaborative narrative approach was adopted to ensure the research represents various perspectives about critical moves contributing to this success and driving positive social change. These collected narratives will identify the common themes and replicate the achievement of IFMA's gender parity. Adriaanse and Schofield (2013) agree with Vertinsky and Hedenborg (2018) that the collection of *situation-specific narratives* is important for research into understanding and identifying obstacles and enablers to cultural change such as gender equality.

From a critical paradigm, the historical and learned assumption that men are superior to women drives the social constructs that define and dictate a woman's place in sport and society are driven by (Messner, 2019). My research seeks to understand how these social constructs aim to overcome to permit participation parity for athletes in this particular sport and time frame. A long term goal is to develop a transformative tool by researching and identifying success markers in achieving gender parity and to work toward achieving sustainable social change for adults and youth of all sports.

Thesis outline

Chapter one introduces the sport of Muaythai, its history, and background information on how women, Muaythai and inequity have progressed over the

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years. Chapter two reviews literature relating to gender norms, gendered sports culture and gender norms specific to Muaythai. It Also covers organisational change, change leadership, women in governance, and the importance of incentives, rewards and parents in the process of the cultural changes that occurred in Muaythai. Chapter three details the research design, method, participants, interviews, timelines and procedures, how the data was analysed and any ethical considerations. Chapter four discusses the three common themes identified as Key Enablers in achieving gender parity for elite athletes at the IFMA World Championships in Cancun, 2018. These themes include:

1. equitable changes including a) changes in uniform, and b) equality in staging, rules, and medalling,
2. transformational leadership, and
3. the political climate and a global desire for change.

Chapter five is the discussion which details how the findings discussing why the three key enablers are important, how they link to relevant theory and the critical moves that led to creating gender parity for participating women. Finally, chapter six, the conclusion, is a synopsis of the research project, including its findings, limitations and suggestions for future areas of study.

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Chapter Two: Literature Review

There is minimal research that addresses women in Martial Arts and even less in Muaythai. In their literature review, Mohumad et al. (2017) agreed with Follo and Giovanna's literature review (2012) summarising that there was a "deficiency in research surrounding the female martial arts practitioner" (p. 707), a fact that five years later can still not be debated. Although there is some research on male Muaythai martial artists, there is a significant "lack of research examining the experience of female practitioners and the histories that surround female artists' " (Follo and Giovanna, 2012, p. 707).

Follo and Giovanna (2012) asked the question, "where is the female martial artist?" and they answered it by stating, "she has been hidden from research" (p. 715). They found evidence to support that it is only very recently that the female practitioner has been "taken from obscurity and examined" (p. 715). For the female Muaythai athlete to reach the level of skill and experience needed to become an elite athlete, she must challenge gender norms and empower her female body and mind, also "challenging hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity" (Follo and Giovanna, 2012, p. 715). In their view, the quest is to find, uphold, and promote more modern-day sporting heroines on a global stage that will start to challenge and perhaps drive positive change within sport and society.

Unlike other contact sports but similar to some other combative sports, female martial arts practitioners challenge the gender norms that require women to be victims and men to be the protectors. This challenge of gendered norms is why the empowerment experienced by female martial arts practitioners needs to be researched further. Like no other male-dominated sport, Martial arts could challenge the natural gendered culture of perceiving the female as the victim. Exploring this

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relationship expands the literature of women in martial arts, but most importantly, it provides researchers with a venue to challenge gender norms. (Follo and Giovanna, 2012, p. 715)

Leadership, changing cultures, and gender norms

There are still far fewer women than men in senior positions in sports organisations (Acosta and Carpenter, 2000; Hall et al., 1990; Hovden, 2000; Inglis et al., 2000) (Harris, 2009, as cited in Lewis, 2019) Koca et al., 2011 note that “many authors have claimed that masculine-oriented organizational cultures, which are characterized by hierarchical authority, independence, autocratic leadership styles and top-down communication (Helgesen,1990; Klenke, 1996); Maier, 1999; Marshall, 1993) are barriers to women’s career advancement (Dainty and Lingard, 2006; Dainty et al., 2000; Marshall, 1993; Simpson, 1998)” (P. 595).

The governance of each organisation plays a crucial role in deciding the unique culture and positioning on gender-roles and stereotypes. Shaw (2007) suggests that the ‘deep structure’ of an organisation entails the “collection of values, history, culture and practices that form the unquestioned ‘normal’ way of working” (Rao et al., 1999, p. 2). In order to make any changes to the way the organisation operates, the “organisations need to be able to question their cultures and values in order to recognise how they might work towards some form of equality” (Shaw, 2007, p.432). By highlighting the importance of equality to the active and effective functioning of the organisation (Shaw, 2007), change might be possible. Leaders need to question the culture and organisational goals to drive change in culture and gender norms.

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Leadership and change. Leadership in sport is comparable to business leadership, and leadership styles come in a variety of forms. According to Goleman (2000), there are six main styles of leadership: Autocratic, Democratic, Laissez-faire, Paternalistic, Transactional, and transformational. Anderson et al. (2015) further expanded on these six styles developing new styles such as ideological, pragmatic, authentic, ethical, spiritual, distributed, and integrative public leadership. However, “research into leadership styles has identified the ‘transformational’ style of leadership, as opposed to the ‘transactional’ or ‘laissez-faire’ leadership styles, as the style with the most potential to ensure effectiveness” (Antonakis et al., 2004; Bass and Riggio, 2006; De Mascia, 2015; Judge and Piccola, 2004; Knights, 2016)” (Rindfleish, 2018, p. 191).

Allport (1954) suggested that four principles are necessary to achieve positive and significant change towards equality. He went on to develop a theoretical framework that discussed intergroup contact suggesting that contact between diverse groups (any collection of people with different physiognomies, including race, ethnicity, and sex) is the most effective ‘medicine’ against discrimination, racism, and prejudice (Allport, 1954). Notably, according to Lyras and Hums (2009), Pettigrew and Tropp in 2006 added a fifth principle to Allport’s four. These five principles include: “(1) equal status among the members of the groups, (2) common goals as the purpose and the framework of the contact; (3) intergroup cooperation that helps all groups reach their goals, (4) support from the authorities, structures, and institutions of a society, and (5) friendship potential” (Lyras and Hums, 2009, p. 9). If Allport’s suggestion that these elements (or

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principles) must be present so change can happen in an organisation, it stands that the IFMA must have achieved all five. To further this point, Allport's criteria for change are also relevant, and potentially pivotal, in creating change in the 21st-century sports arena. Therefore, the question one has to ask is, did IFMA have all five principles and did this contribute to their success in changing the cultural and gender norms in Muaythai? Consequently, how do the five principles relate to the identified key enablers?

Gendered sports culture. In recent studies, Davis and Dekert (2018) have researched the shifting and historical gendered view of females as fighters in Muaythai. Rennesson (2011) took it one step further in the area of gender and sport and explored the transgender athlete and their struggle against the gendered view of Muaythai. More relevantly, Muaythai provides young boys with an embodied curriculum in Thai manhood; thus, non-male defined gender will struggle against the gendered nature of the sport and the male-dominated culture. According to Rennesson (2011), it is widely accepted in Thailand that the sport of Muaythai is a vehicle for the “development of a strong, manly physique, the mastering of one's strength and violence, and learning to be self-reliant” (p. 4). Kitiarsa (2005) further confirms that these values and skills lead Thai boys to master manhood.

The ‘Evolution Theory of Change’ that alters global norms manifest the evolution of gender roles and sex stereotypes (Messner, 2019). After all, retired male fighters worldwide are becoming fathers to daughters and wish to share their love of sport (in this case, Muaythai) by passing on their knowledge and skills.

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The passing on of skills to daughters is a platform from which changes to the gendered culture of Muaythai organically occur. Messner (2018) agreed with this assumption when he identified that fathers have begun to discover the discrimination and resistance against girls participating in ‘boys’ sport first hand. He goes on to suggest that, inadvertently, these fathers will become “overnight equity activists when they find suddenly that their daughters are being denied access to their sport or have been offered substandard playing fields or unqualified coaches” (p. 60).

Women, martial arts, and Muaythai culture. Until recently, within the last 10-15 years, most of Thailand has allowed competitive participation in Muaythai solely by one sex - male. This situation helps explain why literature relating to Muaythai and women is virtually non-existent.

In 2017, Mohamad et al. published a literature review on the sport of Muaythai and found that there was very little research had been done on the sport, in any field. Indeed, they found just 18 published articles outside the realm of sports science, and of these, ten discussed sports medicine/injuries. Notably, “no sports science-based studies have been performed on female Muay Thai athletes or practitioners” (Mohamad et al., p. 623). Therefore, this research covers a broad range of search that includes literature on women in all martial arts to ensure there would be relevant sports literature to review.

A collection of interesting narratives were gathered and described by Vertinsky and Hedenborg (2018). These narratives look at the feminist perspectives on sport and its physical culture. Notably, feminist scholars as

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authors of the Palgrave Handbook of Feminism and Sport, Leisure and Physical Education published in 2018 added to the multiplicity of studies by, for and about women and girls providing new historical work on women and physical culture practices.

As a result, Vertinsky and Hedenborg (2018), compiled a “wide-reaching collection of methodologically sophisticated studies about female physical culture addressing lesser-known accounts of women in sport and physical cultures such as jujitsu, judo, hunting and pelota” (p. 488). Although no conclusions were drawn, the collection was able to present global historical studies of female sport and physical culture that deconstruct Western dualisms and bodies of knowledge, showcasing a broader historical range of studies, and a greater span of new and challenging historical methodologies (Vertinsky and Hedenborg, 2018).

Women, sport, and sport organisations

Women in sport. The paper entitled ‘Supremacy and subversion: gender struggles in sport’ published by Connell (2012) discussed the “feminist antidiscrimination struggle that led the USA to create the National Policy/Document, the infamous Title IX” (1972) and how it impacted female participation in primary and secondary school and college sport. Connell (2012) questioned why the sport is an enmeshed arrangement of stereotypical assumptions that “deliver privilege to men, not only in attention but” also in the “hard advantages of money and institutional power” (p. 178). Connell (2012) goes on to point out that it is not just a matter of culture but also a “matter of

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economics, social power, institutional arrangements (e.g., the work/home relationship) and emotional life” (p. 178), that affect women, their rights, support, and opportunities in sport and its organisations.

Sport and organisational change. Koca, Arslan, and Hulya Asçı (2011) discuss a case study on ‘Attitudes toward Women’s Work Roles and Women Managers in a Sports Organization in Turkey.’ They address the influence of traditional gender roles, the “old boys’ network,” and how often women who aspire to leadership positions within the sport have been pushed aside because of the control men hold at nearly all sports administration levels and governance.

I agree with Messner’s (2018) view, where he explains the organisation of sport from a different perspective. He believes gendered sports and equal opportunities within the sport are not, in reality, creating gender equality as we commonly believe gender equality to be, but rather, segregation where opportunities are only available within a sex-segregated sports world. This stance may explain why Muaythai was able to achieve parity for athletes but not for referees, coaches, officials, and in governance positions, the female athletes compete against themselves. Messner (2018) believes this is the current process by which sport is organised, and he terms it ‘hard essentialism’. Hard essentialism refers to a traditional gendered approach that ensures the “integration of girls and women into sport takes place within an almost entirely sex-segregated structure.” Put simply, “equal opportunity for girls and women in the sport thus far has been engineered by men mostly using a ‘separate but equal’ strategy, where male and female bodies, assumed to be naturally different, are sorted into separate binary

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categories.” (Messner, 2018, p. 56). He is, therefore, insinuating that men will succeed in holding onto the power in all sports that are considered masculine or neutral and, even perhaps, those considered feminine. On the other hand, women may only have the opportunity to succeed in holding power in sports deemed feminine.

Tamminen, Holt, and Neely (2012) suggest women will gain more opportunities if they compete alongside men at the elite level of male-dominated sports, believing the opportunities will present themselves as women gain the respect and admiration of their male counterparts. Tamminen, Holt, and Neely (2012) insist that aspects of growth gained in the adversity of becoming an elite athlete (non-gender specific), such as the realisation of strength, gaining new perspectives, and developing the desire to help others, will better equip each individual for learning the skills needed to lead in their sport. I suggest that their conclusions have significant implications for the next generation of female athletes wishing to move through into officiating, administrating, coaching, and the governorship. By firstly competing to an elite level, these women will gain the skills needed for successfully leading men (and women). These skills will allow women to face and overcome the same, or very similar, adversities as the men during a competition, in this case, the Muaythai ring.

Women, gender, equality and sport. There is no argument that women are discriminated against in sports, particularly masculine sports. Maybe this is because very few women have participated in so-called masculine sports, until recently. Though there is literature covering gender equality and sport, and gender

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equality in general, there is little to no research that explores the effects and consequences of women's engagement in combat sports or how it relates to gender equity or equality.

Recent research by Connell (2012, 2019) suggests that gender roles can change. Citing her works from 2009, Connell points out an essential truth about gender. "Gender is not a fixed system, but a complex, historically changing and tension-ridden structure of relationships, always open to change" (p. 178). Indeed Connell is correct as examples exist in Muaythai. The entire IFMA Executive Board was comprised solely of men until 2009 when I became the first female Executive Board member, and in 2011, I became the first female Vice President. In 2019, two out of the seven Vice Presidents were female (28%), and five out of 31 Executive Board members were women (16%). While the numbers do not stack up to create equality in numbers, change is happening. However, it is a slow process dependent on many factors.

I am afraid I have to disagree that men are superior because of their greater strength, power, and speed, preferring to side with Connell (2012) when she questions this assumption. Chalabaev, Sarrazin, Fontayne, Boiche, and Clement-Guillotin (2012) explored this same issue, leading them to define the difference between sex stereotypes and gender roles. "Though they share similarities, they are not identical: stereotypes refer to descriptions (e.g., men participate more in sport than women) and gender roles refer to prescriptions (e.g., men are supposed to participate more in sport than women)" (p. 138). Sex stereotypes lead us to believe that men compete in sports that "involve masculine

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characteristics, including physical contact, face-to-face opposition, strength, or aggressiveness; feminine sports involve feminine characteristics, such as expressivity, grace, or aesthetics” (p. 138), leading to the belief that only ‘butch’ (masculine) women participate in sport, suggesting that ‘normal’ women did not participate in masculine sports. Furthermore, the negative influence of social and other media forms lowers many girls’ expectations which leads them to choose not to participate in masculine sports for fear of being labelled masculine or a ‘boy’.

It is a long-accepted argument that gender identity is related to sport participation with “female participants being seen as mostly androgynous or masculine” (Chalabaev et al., 2012, p. 138). Conversely, “there are a few European countries where women report exercising more than men, such as the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries.” This notion leads Chalabaev et al. (2012) to question if the influence of girls’ participation may have a direct link to political norms and values held within these countries, all of which have strong female role models and leaders. It seems likely that the few females who hold positions of power in sport do so in organisations where the sport’s governorship remains a ‘man’s world,’ with little real gender equality. Sadly, this is the ‘norm’ women must deal with in the sport.

Interestingly, many female leaders in international sports federations were participants before moving into other positions, including officiating, administration, and management, from where they were voted or appointed into a governorship position (AIMS Conference, personal communication, August 10, 2015). This trend suggests that for other women to attain similar positions, they

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need to follow similar pathways to those of their female and male counterparts. I wholeheartedly agree with Tamminen, Holt, and Neely (2012) when they suggest that the adversity elite athletes experience creates the opportunity for growth that results from united experiences that create a unique ‘shared bond’. The shared bond may lead to the appointment of athletes that may later become members of a sports body or board upon retirement from competitive sport or coaching, officiating, or managing.

Women in governance in sport. A woman who steps into a leadership position in sport does so from a negative starting position. Rothauser (2018) reiterates:

Any position in the male-dominated sports arena is tough for a woman to overcome, both from professional critics and the fan base that the sport entails. Society assumes that male sports will be left to males, and female sports will be left to females. Once this boundary is crossed, criticism often follows. (p.1)

We know these gender norms still exist in abundance in male-dominated sports. However, Rothauser (2018) recognises “society is changing to be more inclusive and ignore old norms” (p. 3).

Adriaanse and Schofield (2013), and Vertinsky and Hedenborg (2018) looked at gender in sport governance and physical culture practices of women. They identified obstacles to cultural change for gender equality and the importance of linking narratives specific to their situations to help study women as they struggle for equality. It is no surprise that men’s ratio to women in directorship and other power positions within governance is far from equal. Conversely, the “weight of statistical evidence supporting the business, economic,

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social and moral case for more women in leadership roles has never been stronger” (Rindfleish, 2018, p. 198), suggesting there is an inconsistency with the data.

If there is evidence supporting women in governance, why are there still so few women employed there? It could be attributed to a woman’s success in a ‘man’s world’ needing a ‘champion’ in the form of a respected, influential male leader. The book, ‘Championing Women Leaders Beyond Sponsorship’ by Janjuha-Jivraj (2016) discusses the importance of having a champion to help support a woman through her career journey. This championing might make all the difference to women trying to carve out a career in sports governorship. Moreover, although Adriaanse and Schofield’s (2013) careful analysis of data revealed that the existence of established proof supporting gender diversity, the research did not describe how the women on those boards attained their positions of power, or if they have any power at all. Again, if the proof is in, ‘why do the current numbers not reflect this?’ This area merits further research to understand better the process women go through to attain a governorship position.

The answer may lie in an organisation's attitude and desire to be proactive in facilitating change. Swinney and Horne (2005) proposed that proactive organisations can overcome inequality. They define a proactive organisation as “most likely to be active in systematically challenging racism” (as cited in Hylton and Totten, Table 3.5, p. 59) which is simply another example of inequality. Therefore, suggesting that organisations that are proactive in systematically

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challenging gender inequality will be successful in overcoming it. However, they point out that these organisations are generally in the minority.

Incentives and rewards in sport

It is undebatable that sport is big money and comes with massive financial rewards and opportunities. I agree with Connell (2019) when she reasons that it is the fear of losing power, and the lion's share of the financial rewards (some countries receive large monetary gifts and sponsorships from their governments for winning), that drives men to fight against gender equality and it is this fear that inadvertently leads to the oppression of women. This loss of power appears to generate a defence mechanism in most groups of individuals. Messner (2007) concurs that masculinity, identity, and violence in sport reflects the precious and natural part of the masculine but not feminine sport. This viewpoint may be another consideration when explaining why they protect their sporting domains so adamantly. I have experienced first-hand this fear and the resulting oppression in my life. Because of this, I eagerly agree with Connell (2012) when she noted that in order to understand this phenomenon, there needs to be more work going forward.

Undeniably, global capitalism is a paradigm in itself, but it cannot stand alone from European society's development. I believe some of Europe's developing countries (middle and eastern Europe) helped drive the acceptance of women in Muaythai. These countries desperately want to be a part of the global society and gain from the wealth that global capitalism offers. To do this, they must demonstrate their readiness to accept new western norms, in particular those

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around gender equality development. Many incentives for the men in Muaythai are fiscal and include the glory of recognition on the global stage of sporting excellence. If the inclusion of women in the team means a greater chance of obtaining these rewards, then the reward for these countries is twofold, glory and global advance.

Parents' influence on stereotypes and overcoming them

It would be remiss of me if I failed to discuss the changes that the athletes' families would like to occur in sport. There must be support and encouragement from home to enable the growth of gender equality in sport. The influence of globally accepted sex stereotypes and gender roles on participation in masculine sports play an important role in shaping parents' views and behaviours (Chalabaev et al., 2012). Moreover, these views influence parents' consent in allowing their child to participate.

Parental influence affects children's involvement in sport "through different processes, including social modelling, perceptions of their children's competence and the value of sport participation, or the emotional support and positive sport experiences they may provide to their children" (Chalabaev et al., 2012, p. 139). "Boris, Sarrizin, Brustad, Trouilloud & Curry (2002), and Fredericks & Eccles (2005) all support the view that parents play a huge role in the transmission of stereotypes and gender roles to their children" (Chalabaev et al., 2012, p. 139). Messner (2018) terms this 'soft essentialism'. Soft essentialism encompasses "the ways in which adults' gendering of kids reflects and naturalizes

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the gendered work-family divisions of labour and power in their own families.” (p. 56)

Some female Muaythai practitioners inevitably ‘rise above’ societal influence of stereotyping; however, Chalabaev et al. (2012, p. 140) agree that an ingrained belief of stereotypes might negatively influence their performance at a subconscious level. Conversely, Aronson, Fried & Good (2002) noted that:

Studies have shown that stereotype threat effects may be “turned off” under several conditions, and notably when stereotyped individuals are presented with positive role models (e.g., McIntyre, Paulson, & Lord, 2003) or when they adopt a malleable theory of ability. (p. 143)

Chalabaev et al. (2012) believe that studies show the effect of a stereotype may still influence an individual even if they do not believe it themselves. If “the presence of the stereotype in an environment may be enough to affect cognitions, motivations, and behaviours” (p. 139) then conversely, the absence of this stereotype would suggest the opposite and present the opportunity to overcome traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

Summary

As previously mentioned, in the broader field of female martial arts, “it cannot be debated that there is a decided lack of research examining the experience of female martial arts practitioners” (Follo and Giovanna, 2012). There are no scholarly articles on female Muaythai athletes and their histories. However, a limited number of female Muaythai athletes tell their stories via Facebook and Instagram threads. This field shrinks further when it comes to women in Muaythai; only two online Blogs exist. One, a thesis I could only find

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online in her blog, entitled 'Sport, Tradition, and Women in Muay Thai' written by Lois Dort (Life of Lois) uploaded in April 2011. The other is entitled 'Under the Ropes,' which discusses women's issues in Thailand and includes articles on Muaythai and women. When searching for any literature on women in positions of power or governance in Muaythai, I found none. Nor did any current literature exist on women in governance in any other martial art. I believe this will be the first thesis written that includes views from women in a governance position in the sport of Muaythai or any other martial art.

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Chapter Three: Research Design

Introduction

“Qualitative inquiries involve asking the kinds of questions that focus on the why and how of human interactions... leading to understanding the unfolding lives and perspectives of others” (Agee, 2009, p. 432). This research project is a qualitative ethnographic case study aimed at evaluating the achievement of participation parity for women in a sport recognisable as masculine or male-dominated. “Qualitative research is about seeing out variations and not controlling the variables, as in quantitative research” (Erlingsson and Bysiewicz, 2017, P. 98). The research is ethnographic, meaning it was made possible by collecting narratives set in individual cultures within Muaythai which also has its own culture and customs—noting that the participant also comes from a variety of countries and cultures and has many mutual differences. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narratives are “a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus (p. 20)” (as cited in Clandinin, 2006, p.46).

The method used is a mixture of focused narratives collected through interviews and my own story: an autoethnography. The interview method addresses some of the validity threats posed by other qualitative methods, such as the questionnaire or survey. These threats include misinterpretation of the question or its intent, misleading questions, the social conditioning impact on answers, the

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participants' inability to understand or answer the question, and a lack of recording space or availability of 'best fit' for answers (Le Floch, 2004).

The study is interpretive by nature, and my unique perspective heavily influences my position as the researcher. Putnam and Banghart (2017) define an interpretive approach as one that encompasses:

“social theories and perspectives that embrace a view of reality as socially constructed or made meaningful through actors' understanding of events. In organizational communication, scholars focus on the complexities of meaning as enacted in symbols, language, and social interactions” (p. 1).

As the Chair of the International Female Commission (now known as the Gender Equality Commission, 2019), I have aimed to increase female participation in the sport of Muaythai. I bring this experience and perspective to my research methodology.

Method

The research method included informal (non-recorded) conversations, semi-structured interviews, and autoethnography. This research follows on Shaw and Leberman's (2015) elaboration of a shift in focus away from solely identifying the 'brick walls' to achieving equity in sport, to identifying common enablers. I aimed to draw out the stories behind the success markers in the achievement of gender parity in Muaythai using semi-structured interviews that allowed the interviewees to tell their own story in their way. Semi-structured interviews use an incomplete script leaving room for improvisation (Myer & Newman, 2007). “Goffman (1959, 1961) believed the face-to-face interview to be a social exchange” (as cited by Myers & Newman, 2007, p.3) and because of the

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nature of the relationship between me (the researcher) and the interviewees, this method best suited the existing relationships.

In line with Ellis and Bochner (2006) three critical features of analytic autoethnography: I am a full member of the setting. I am committed to developing theoretical understandings of gender parity, equality, and equity as a broader social phenomenon. I will be visible as a community member in the proposed text/s and will include informants beyond myself. My involvement as a vital influencer of this achievement will influence how I view the data as my view is, according to Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p. 24), “filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity of both my participants and I.”

As a member of the organisation and observer of the achievement, I am part of the subculture, with an emic perspective. Wundt’s (1888) emic perspective on understanding culture is applicable here. Emics are ideas, behaviours and other internal elements that are culture-specific (Triandis, 1998). As the purpose of this research is to draw out culturally related changes that occurred over time, it is emic in perspective. I am defined as an insider researcher, meaning I am both a participant and the researcher of the changes that lead to the achievement of gender parity for athletes (Triandis, 1998).

From a critical paradigm, the social constructs that define and dictate a woman’s place in sport and society, in general, are driven by the learned assumption that men are more talented and capable in sport and business (governance) than women.

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Research design

This research employs a mixed-method approach in collecting the data to gain an accurate overall picture of events and informants and their impact on enabling the changes made over the 16 years leading up to gender parity achievement. Nine participants were identified through initial project consultations with the current IFMA Management Committee and other key actors within the sport of Muaythai at the IFMA Open World Cup during the Arafura Games (IOC recognised multisport games) in Darwin, May 2019. The nine identified participants interviewed in the study were drawn from current and past international Management Committee members that have been involved in or witnessed the process from 2001 -2018.

The initial consultation informed the shaping of the questions used in the semi-structured interviews. None of the consultation interviews was transcribed or used beyond identifying the interview participants and informing the formulation of the questions for the nine participants' semi-structured interviews. Common themes (key enablers) and possible links to past research and theories were briefly explored and reported in this thesis.

Policies and relevant milestones from the IFMA and other international sporting bodies were reviewed in line with methods used by Skirstad (2009). From this review, two timelines, one internal (IFMA) and one external (IOC) were compared. The timelines document factors relating to women in sport that may have influenced the IFMA's success. Finally, an autoethnographic account of my

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own experiences of involvement in the process was completed to ensure contextual understanding and ensure voice transparency.

As an athlete in attendance at the first IFMA WC that included women, the first female National Federation President (2002), the first female Continental President (Oceania, 2011), the first elected female Executive Board Member (2011), and the first elected female Vice President (IFMA, 2012), and the instigator and Chair of the IFMA Gender Equality Commission (2009), my own beliefs and perspective will have influenced my interpretation of the interviews and their transcripts. As a researcher, I have endeavoured to be neutral in my analysis of the data collected but acknowledge that it is not possible to truly be so. Readers need to recognise that my personal lens colours interpretations, and conclusions.

Ethnographic research of this nature inevitably involves some interpersonal power relationships. All of the people interviewed are known to me and considered friends. As a liberal feminist researcher who is influenced by structural-functionalism and gender conflict theories, I was aware that I needed to work in a culturally sensitive way and be particularly mindful of respect and reciprocity (Wheaton, 2017). I believe that social facts, including laws, religion, values/morals, customs, and rituals all play a crucial role in shaping our society.

Participants

Due to this study's nature, it is unlikely that the participants' identities can remain anonymous. Therefore, each participant has agreed to publish their name,

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nationality, country of residence, length of time, and positions within the IFMA organisation.

Table. 1.

Table of information about the nine interviewees plus me.

Name	Position/s within the IFMA	Nationality	Citizenship	Country of residency	Year/s with the IFMA	Other positions held
Dr. Sakchye Tapsuwan	President	Thai		Thailand	Since 2003	Ex-President of AIBA (Thailand)
Mr. Stephan Fox	General Secretary	German	Australia	Thailand	Since 1995	Vice President of SportAccord President of AIMS
Mrs. Charissa Tynan	Director	Thai		Spain	Since 2009	Sport Director
Dato. Muhammad Shahnaz Azmi	Executive Board member Chair of the Education Commission	Malaysian		Malaysia	Since 2006	President of Malaysian Muaythai Federation
Mr. Mervyn Tan	Chair of the Legal Commission	Singaporean		Singapore	Since 2005	General Secretary of FAMA (Asian Muaythai federation)
Dmitry Putlin	Executive Board Member Chair of the Technical Commission	Russian		Russia	Since 2002	Vice President of the European Federation President of the Russian Federation
Elisa Salinas	Vice President Chair of the Youth Commission	Mexican		Mexico	Since 2014	President of Pan-American Muaythai Federation President of Mexican Muaythai Federation
Dr. Erdogan Aydin	Chair of the Medical Commission	Turkish		Turkey	Since 2009	Board member of the Turkish Muaythai Federation
Niamh Griffin	None currently	Irish	Australia	Ireland	2001 - 2009 2016 - 2019	Former IFMA Sport Director Former IFMA Chair of the Media

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						and PR Commission
Sue Glassey	Vice President Oceania President Chair of the Gender Equality Commission	New Zealander		New Zealand	Since 2002	Former New Zealand Muaythai Federation President

Eight of the nine participants had been with the IFMA management team for a minimum of 10 years. The participant group consisted of three women and six men. My perspective, as the tenth participant, will increase the women's participation to four. This study that has a 40:60 ratio of women to men includes four out of the five continental federations: Europe, Asia, Oceania, and Pan-America, excluding Africa. My inclusion added New Zealand to the country list and Oceania to the list of continental federations. The ownership of my voice is as identifiable as I can consciously make it.

Interviews

The research employs semi-structured interviews to ensure that authentic narratives were collected. To counteract possible barriers Price (2002) developed a ladder question technique for choosing appropriate levelled questions using a framework that anticipates discomfort allowing judgment of the appropriate time to move forward into the deeper and more invasive questions. This technique was followed by ensuring that the initial open questions used were not invasive. The initial questions focused on the actions taken, followed by questions about knowledge, and finally, around values and beliefs. In contrast to Price (2002), the interviewees were not strangers to me as the researcher. However, to remove any

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barriers concerning the expected level of respect for my position, it was important to establish trust and honesty by asking the questions in a progression.

Data collection came in various forms, such as minutes, organisational and online documents from the IFMA and the IOC. These data provided information on any possible linked occurrences regarding rules and policy. Appendices A, B, C, and D are copies of participant interview questions and information sheets.

Procedures and timeline

An initial consultation question was put to six IFMA official/management personnel from Iran, Australia, Germany, Thailand, and Ukraine at the Arafura Games in Darwin, May 2019. The question asked of each of the six consultants was: Can you identify any critical influences on female participation in Muaythai and its dramatic increase over the last 16 years in the IFMA or at the national level in your or other countries? The consultation question aims to identify key people or moves to inform the interview questions common to the success of attaining participation parity for women in Muaythai. The themes identified from the consultation interviews were:

- policy changes, internal and external to the sport, implemented at the international and national level
- key people and countries that influenced participation numbers
- key catalysts of female participation, nationally and internationally
- key influencing events, nationally and globally
- critical barriers to achieving participation parity in the past and sustaining it in the future.

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Once these were coded, the interview questions were formulated, and nine possible participants were identified, plus myself.

Next, each identified participant's national and continental federation were then contacted and informed about the study, given a copy of the interview questions, the Waikato University Ethics Committee's letter of approval, an overview of the research and the informed consent form outlining their rights and responsibilities during the study. Consent was requested via a simple email reply stating their approval to allow the study and approach the identified participant/s. Once permission from each identified country and the continental federation was obtained, the nine identified possible interviewees were contacted via email to ascertain potential interest in participating. They were given an overview of the study, the Waikato University Ethics Committee's letter of approval, a list of the proposed questions, and the informed consent form outlining their rights and responsibilities during the study and interview. Upon obtaining an email reply giving consent, a second email was sent out to propose possible interview dates and times.

Eight out of nine of the interviewees replied that they would be attending the IFMA WC to be held in Bangkok, 20 - 30 July 2019. Upon arriving in Bangkok, an interview schedule was confirmed, and each interview was undertaken and recorded on Voice Memo. Each individual completed a consent form and was verbally reminded of their rights and responsibilities during the study, the interview, resulting transcripts, and case study write up. Each participant was emailed a copy of questions one month before their interview and

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given a paper copy at the beginning of their interview. The majority of the interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 20 and 30 minutes each. The interviews were conducted in the Technical Delegation Office next to the main IFMA Office on the second floor of the Ambassador Hotel on Sukhumvit Soi 11, Bangkok.

The questions posed verbally were summarised in order to encourage individual stories rather than closed answers. The interview questions' verbal summary was stated as: What were the key catalysts, events, and policies that drove this phenomenon? What were the past and possible future barriers that needed or need to be overcome in order to sustain gender participation parity? Each participant was encouraged to tell their story from their unique perspective so that each individual's discourse could be freely expressed. A signed copy of the consent form was collected, and a second copy was emailed to each participant. All Voice Memos were copied from the researcher's phone to the computer, and originals were deleted from the phone.

The interviews were then sent to a company that specialised in transcribing. The company and individuals transcribing acknowledged, via email, a confidentiality agreement. Upon receipt of the transcriptions, the researcher listened to the recorded interview and corrected transcripts where necessary. The transcriptions were then emailed to each participant to confirm, alter, or correct any information needed for correction or clarification. Upon completion of its final draft, this thesis was emailed to each of the nine participants to check and

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confirm that any information relating to them did not need any further changes, clarifications, corrections or alterations.

Ethical Considerations

The sample pool from which the participants were identified included a collection of individuals who worked together at the same or similar power level within the governance level of Muaythai. The power imbalance between them and the researcher (me) is low. Even though driving equality for women is an essential element to Muaythai gaining and maintaining its status as an IOC recognised sport, as a researcher, I have to recognise that there may be some unease amongst the participants. Some interviewees may not feel comfortable talking about the constraints to female participation or their personal opinions (if they contradict the IFMA culture) on any necessary changes made to create greater inclusion and participation for women in Muaythai. As I continue as the current Chair of the IFMA Gender Equality Commission, and as one of the seven IFMA Vice Presidents, the power is given to me by the IFMA President, Secretary-General, Director, and the Member Federations (National Federations) will have the potential to affect my relationship with the participants as an unbiased researcher. The participants might have told me what they thought I wanted to hear and, therefore, may not have given their honest thoughts freely. The fact that I have purposefully driven female empowerment within Muaythai at many levels might influence the interviewees' answers.

It was important to ensure that I did not use my position within the IFMA to lead the interviewees when asking questions and seeking answers. "Bond

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(2000) refers to this as “ethical mindfulness,” which contributes to “an ethic of trust” (Bond, 2006) in our relationships with research participants and ourselves” (as cited by Etherington, 2007, p. 600). I attempted to remove this power imbalance by using familiar places and casual surroundings to create a more equal and comfortable setting, e.g., in the Technical Delegates room, a room where we all hold an equal footing. Due to time considerations and participants under pressure to carry out their regular tasks during a world championship, I conducted some interviews in places other than the interview room. Two interviews were in an eating establishment due to time constraints. Interview times were flexible and easily adjusted to suit the interviewees’ needs.

While it is unlikely that this research and its findings will be beneficial to individuals in this organisation, it may well impact policy debate about gender equality or equity issues, which may indirectly affect the organisation and participants of this study.

Data Analysis

This narrative inquiry is aimed at “not to find one generalisable truth but to ‘sing up many truths through narratives’” (Byrne-Armstrong, 2001, as cited in Hunter, 2010, p. 1). Analysis, according to Erlingsson and Bysiewicz (2017), is a “reflective process of working and reworking the data” (p. 95) from interview transcripts to reveal connections and relationships. “Once condensed meaningful units are coded, it is easier to get a bigger picture and see patterns in the codes and organise them into categories.” (p. 95). From these categories, I defined my

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themes. I used descriptive labels to identify connections between the condensed meaning by shortening the text while still preserving the core meaning.

The next step, in line with Erlingsson and Bysiewicz's (2017) methods, was to group the labelled codes into categories and then further group the categories into themes by identifying common underlying meanings. The themes developed from the analysis of each participant's perceptions of the changes that took place to enable the increase in female participation to the level of parity. Participants contributed definitions on further possible challenges in maintaining athlete participation for women. By using intuition from tacit knowledge of the IFMA Management Committee, I (the researcher), helped clarify and contextualize the categories and themes, focusing on identifying contributing past actions at the individual, community, International Federation, and National Federation levels.

I used Rosenthal & Fisher-Rosenthal's (2004) process of analysis of narrative biographical interviews as I attempted to "deconstruct the data collected and look for themes and sub-themes, in order to build up a theory grounded in data" (as cited in Hunter, 2010, p.1) that explained how gender parity was achieved in Muaythai at the elite level in 2018, over 16 years. Using the interview transcripts, looking at rituals, routines, and language, I identified some outside influences, policies, and international and national events that influenced the achievement.

One difficulty when analysing the data and drawing out themes was to not, inadvertently, give voice to only those who have the same views as me, thus

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silencing others' oppositional opinions. "It (reflexivity) permeates every aspect of the research process, challenging us to be more fully conscious of the ideology, culture, and politics of those we study and those we select as our audience" (Hertz, 1997, as cited in Etherington, 2007, p. 600). Any failure to position me within the context of the research, particularly within the organisation's positional hierarchy, could lead my intended audience to be misled. This issue highlights the ethical dilemmas related to "equality and power that challenge researchers to make transparent the values and beliefs that lie behind their interpretations" (Etherington, 2007, p. 600).

To maintain rigour, the participants went over the resulting themes and further commented. Collaborating with others during analysis allowed the ability to tap into multiple perspectives and made it easier to see variations in the data, this also contributed to the rigour of my study (Erlingsson and Bysiewicz, 2017). Finally, a link to the identified themes with current and past literature, and conclusions were drawn and recorded.

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Chapter Four: The Findings: The Three Key Enablers

Introduction

Driving equality by achieving gender parity for participating elite female athletes in a combat sport, zero per cent to 48 per cent in 16 years is the achievement that prompted me to interview nine IFMA Management Team members to identify key themes. The nine interviewees were from an array of countries and had all witnessed the changes in gender parity and equality from a management (IFMA) perspective. Dr. Tapsuwan, the President; Mr. Stephan Fox, the Secretary-General; Mrs. Charissa Tynan, the Director; Dato Muhd. Shahnaz Azmi, Chair of the Education Commission; Mr. Mervyn Tan, Chair of the Legal Commission; Mr. Dmitry Putin, Chair of the Technical Commission; Ms Elisa Salinas, Chair of the Youth Commission; Dr. Erdogan Aydin, Chair of the Medical Commission; Miss Niamh Griffin, Former Chair of the Media and PR Commission; Miss Sue Glassey, Chair of the Gender Equality Commission. Next, this thesis applied the identified themes to research how the IFMA was able to progress parity and equality for women in Muaythai.

Across all nine interviews, it was clear that the following three themes were pivotal in developing gender parity for female athletes:

1. equitable changes including a) changes in uniform, and b) equality in staging, rules, and medalling,
2. transformational leadership, and
3. the political climate and a global desire for change.

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The findings that follow were drawn from my experiences, the interviews with the above-named participants, and the documentation and policy records available on the IFMA and IOC websites.

Key enabler one a: Changes in uniform

An essential move in achieving parity was changing the rules regarding the in-competition uniform and protective equipment that prevented many female athletes from competing or competing safely. This concern was addressed in several ways, including through rule changes. These changes involved a) the inclusion of body coverings and a sports hijab, b) improved in-competition safety equipment, and c) identical competition uniform to the men. Each change in conditions and their implications for driving gender equality are replicable.

The inclusion of body coverings and sports hijab. As a member of the Executive Board, I and the research participants, including the President (Dr. Tapsuwan), individual members of the Executive Board, and the Secretary-General (Stephan), recognised that discrimination prevented many women from participating in Muaythai. When five women from the Iranian team were barred from competing at the 2011 WC in Tashkent, this discrimination became publicly evident. At the time, the IFMA rule book did not allow for any extra coverings to be worn when competing. This rule clashed with the cultural laws dictated by the Iranian government, which demanded females cover their legs, arms, and head/hair. As Stephan recalls,

“the need to change the rules to ensure the inclusion of Islamic women brought to light the cultural differences and (then) lack of unity within

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the IFMA Executive board” (Stephan, personal communication, July 26, 2019).

Changing the traditional uniform went against the Thai culture but not changing it went against the IOC Charter that ensures inclusion for all, without discrimination.

It was obviously something we had to push through, to ensure that Islamic countries could participate under new rules including the hijab, etc. Because of this, Islamic countries have started to develop female Muaythai, and today we have many Muslim women on the medal table. (Stephan, personal communication, July 26, 2019)

A negotiation between the Female Commission (led by myself), the IFMA President, and ‘his’ (then) Technical Commission took place in response to the exclusion of the Iranian women’s team in 2011, a trial period allowing full-body coverage. The trial period was set for two years and allowed full leg, and arm coverings (in white or beige) and the use of a full sports Hijab (white/beige). The trial was implemented at the IFMA World Championship in 2012, after being passed, firstly by the IFMA Executive board, and then again by a vote by the Member Countries at the IFMA General Assembly (IFMA GA Minutes, 2012, St Petersburg).

While the trial was initially in response to the plight of the Iranian athletes, the issue of uniform extended beyond this team. At the 2014 World Championships in Langkawi, a referee prevented a Dutch athlete from competing because her leg coverings were black and not white, as stipulated in the trial ruling. The athlete’s team had tried their best to source white leggings; however, these were not available in Langkawi, as this colour is not generally worn by

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Muslim women who make up the island's local population. I was nearby when this incident was happening and stepped into the ring, using my 'position of power' as Vice President and Female Commission Chair to instruct the referee that the match would continue with the athlete dressed how she was. There was a massive roar of agreement from the mainly Muslim audience and, in particular, shouts of happiness from the Turkish team.

Following the above-outlined instance, in 2016, suggestions were made on further negotiations and trials, and in 2019 the colour black was formally included in the official rules. The inclusion of black coloured coverings was a comparatively easy negotiation, and I believe a shift in mindset within the IFMA Executive Board led to a lack of resistance. The initial formalisation of new rules made Muaythai accessible to Muslim women for the first time. As Dr. Erdogan noted at his interview stated:

After the Langkawi World Championships (2014) when the IFMA formally accepted the hijab for female athletes, it gave much relief to the Turkish female fighters that wanted to compete but could not be in their National Team... it's something deep inside their heart, and their religion, and when you take it away, it's taking away their right, by doing this, doors are open, and trust is built. (Dr. Erdogan, personal communication, July 24, 2019)

Improved in-competition safety equipment. The implementation of a Female Commission gave the female athletes a voice. The newly formed Female Commission reported to the Executive Board the issues they believed to be the main barriers to gaining equality. (IFMA FC Minutes, 2009 & 2010). Amongst the issues brought forward was the lack of adequate in-competition safety equipment.

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Until 2010, the IFMA rules stated that women must wear a breast and groin protector. At the time, most females competed (in their home country) without protection as the protective equipment available was limited and of poor design. The host country was to supply in-competition equipment (IFMA Rules and Regulations, 2010). The number of women that competed in Thailand (often the host country in the early years of IFMA WC) during the early 2000s was low. Notably, men supplied their protective equipment, although the host countries were required to provide a small selection for athlete use to ensure non-discrimination related to access.

The Female Commission was able to implement these safety-equipment based rule changes within a short two-year period. The rules were formally changed in 2012 (IFMA Rules and Regulations, 2012) stating that women could supply their safety equipment, in line with the men's rules, and the host was to provide a small selection (of better quality - specifics were stipulated in the rule book) for athlete use. Interestingly, because women did not commonly wear protection, while men did, it could be said that the women were responsible for providing their protection, not the IFMA. However, it was a lack of clarity in the rules that had created the inequality.

The change in rules ensured that the in-competition equipment by the host came from specific suppliers, who could guarantee a certain standard. However, due to the variety of breast sizes, only a limited style of protection equipment was made available. Nowadays, females, like their male counterparts, supply their protective equipment. This move gave the women more control over the

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equipment they used but did not discriminate against the athlete that might not be able to source this equipment themselves; it is not available in some countries. Dr.

Tapsuwan confirmed that:

“now more females are coming and taking part, is a better thing, better than before... some of them train for fitness, but some of them train Muaythai (competition)” (Dr. Tapsuwan, personal communication, July 24, 2019).

The objectification of women as athletes. The athlete uniform is essential to all sports, and these uniforms can shape how female athletes are perceived and treated. The IFMA uniform holds the letters of the competing athlete’s country, the shorts and singlets are from sponsored suppliers and exhibit the various logos of the sponsors and the event itself. Essentially, the uniform must allow the athlete to move, be comfortable, and perform. The uniform presents the athlete to the viewers; it is how the world perceives the sport and its athletes.

In Thailand, in the beginning, women were not allowed to practice or compete in Muaythai. It was a sport that showed strength and courage, and dominance. It was a sport for men, not women. Niamh explained that:

“Thai’s genuinely believed that if a man fought in the same ring as a woman, he would be seriously injured, or even worse ... It sounds crazy to us, but that is what they really believed” (Niamh, personal communication, August 26, 2019).

The women who competed in Thailand came mainly from overseas.

“When I was fighting (in Thailand), I mainly fought foreigners, and almost all the Thai’s I fought were trained by their fathers or brothers” (Niamh, personal communication, August 26, 2019).

To generate more interest in female athletes, the decision-makers (at the time) decided female athletes would wear a sports bra for a top at the 2010 world

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championship. The idea was to increase the popularity of the women's Muaythai and to identify the fighters as female. The male-heavy Executive Board unwittingly followed gender normative views highlighting the all too familiar objectification of women in sport. Notably, the original design of Muaythai uniform allowed an athlete to perform without restriction, and the men wore no top.

The introduction to the requirement to wear the sports bra met with the disagreement of the female athletes, as they felt that the new uniform identified them by sex, as a 'female' athlete, not purely as an athlete (cited by a member of the Commission, IFMA FC minutes, 2010). Notably, many competing females chose to wear the male singlet top in defiance.

As a former IFMA athlete myself, I felt naked and exposed if I wore a sports bra in the ring, and I believe the more a female athlete is sexualised, the less she is seen as an athlete and the more she is seen as a sexual object. (Sue)

An interesting side note, this all occurred before the hijab and body covering rules were investigated; however, once investigated the female athlete's feeling of being exposed or naked was common to both situations.

The Female Commission raised this gender discrimination issue during the IFMA Executive Board meeting, and it was decided at the General Assembly (IFMA GA minutes, 2010) that from 2011 the women would wear identical uniforms to the men. As the former Chair of the IFMA Media Commission, Niamh agreed, noting that:

“it is essential that the media presents women as fighters, not as sexual beings” (Niamh, personal communication, August 26, 2019).

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More recently, at the 2019 Female Commission annual meeting, there was a consensus that when you look between rings,

“it is hard to tell if it is a man or a woman competing in the ring. I had to check to see. The women looked the same as the man, so good (skilled)” (stated by a member of the Commission, FC Minutes, 2019).

Key enabler one *b*: Equal staging, rules, and medalling

The potential for gender equality increases when a sport portrays the female athletes as having an equal footing to their counterparts, the observers, audience, coaches, officials, management, National Federations, and other stakeholders take notice. After 16 years of transformation, the IFMA deliberately changed three main aspects of the Muaythai competitions to ensure the female athletes were on par with their male counterparts, these were a) staging, b) governing rules, and c) medal processes and worth. The following section discusses the significance of each of these changes and their impact on parity.

Equality of staging and media coverage. Perception, central to change, was demonstrated when the IFMA changed their competition set-up to highlight both male and female bouts equally, which subconsciously forced the audience and stakeholders to recognise the athletes as equals.

For female athletes to gain equality both in and out of the ring, they must be afforded the same opportunities as their male counterparts. If there is a stage (ring) perceived as the ‘top’ ring, female athletes must have the same access to compete in it as male athletes. However, when Muaythai athletes, male or female, are assigned to the rings of lesser standing, they too are seen in the same light - of lesser worth. Niamh explained that:

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“The idea of relegating females, that came from Thailand...Thailand is built on the segregation of men and women, and this comes from a deeply ingrained belief system” (Niamh, personal communication, August 26, 2019).

In 2002, the participation of first female athletes in the IFMA WC saw the use of two rings: an A-Ring, and a B-Ring. The A ring was the stage for all the top bouts, i.e., Men’s A-Division officiated by top referees and judges. However, the B-Ring staged the female bouts and the lesser B-Division bouts with the remaining less-experienced officials. This acute segregation saw women not only had to make do with less ‘limelight,’ but more importantly, could sometimes cost them their match.

At the 2002 Finals Day, the disassembling of the B-Ring left only the A-Ring for the finals. Sadly, there was only one female final, that consisted of Thailand and Australia's top female athletes as compared to ten or so male finals. However, the attendance of Thailand's well-loved Princess and the Princess Cup awarded added significant success to this female final. At the time, it was a massive success for the IFMA, having the finals day televised, a member of royalty in attendance, and by showcasing a female bout, the IFMA had achieved prime time television coverage of female Muaythai competition. This significant step for women’s Muaythai is an achievement worthy of great note and gratitude. Conversely, Sue noted that the remaining female athletes did not reflect this gratitude; instead, they asked questions such as:

“why was there only one female final? My male counterpart (same weight division) had their final aired; why not mine? This did not seem fair.”

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Over the next few years, word travelled, and more women came to compete at the IFMA World Championships. The number of female athletes (mostly foreign, farang¹) attending the Championships grew steadily. However, the pattern of female athletes being relegated to the outside ring (stage), with lower-level officials continued.

Once again, the female athletes brought this to the Female Commission (IFMA FC minutes, 2009) and pressed for fairer in-competition conditions, and an ongoing battle lasting from 2009 to 2016 began. As the competition grew, the number of rings increased from two to three or four rings at each championship. The need for greater integrity across the rings increased, and with that, greater demand for even dispersion of experienced referees and judges increased.

Concurrently, as participation increased, so did the need for media coverage; this increased parallel with advancing social media platforms and access to technology. The advancement facilitated equal coverage for little to no extra financial output, and thus the ability to achieve equality (of media coverage) was available. However, the media coverage and top referees' main focus remained on the centre ring until 2017, when Niamh took up her position as Chair of the Press and PR Commission (media). Concurrently, Dato Shahnaz took over the ring allocation. Arguably, the focus on equality for female athletes and referees would not have happened so soon if the Chair of the Press and PR Commission was not female.

¹ Farang - Slang for foreigners in the Thai Language.

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Dato Shahnaz (Vice President of IFMA and Chair of the IFMA Education Commission), a firm believer of equality, in all its forms, designed an electronic system for assigning athletes to their ring, ensuring the process was random rather than deliberate. The change to the random ring assignment system affected the allocation of athletes and referees alike. This system resulted in the deconstruction of the prestige affiliated with the A-Ring. Simultaneously, the technology needed to film and produce cost-effective quality video footage of the action had improved considerably. It also guaranteed that each ring had full media coverage, live-telecasted to the web; previously, only the A-Ring received a live feed. The combination of these events had a significant impact on the perception of athlete equality and worth.

The ability to provide coverage to all rings at a low cost was instrumental in ensuring that the new method of ring allocation was successful. As technology rapidly developed, access to the live stream, scoring, draws, programme progression, via phones became the new method of communication, allowing all stakeholders to see any fight at any time, providing equal access regardless of gender or 'Ring' level.

Equality of governing rules. Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that the equality seen in male and female athlete's rules was mainly due to the desire to maintain the sport's tradition and the need to adhere to the top-down policy. As there is no direct competition between the male and female athletes, the nine interviewees' consensus was that there was no opposition to the women and men having the same rules. The rules of Muaythai are the same for

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both men and women as they are competing in the same sport. For Dmitry, the current Chair of the Technical and Rules Commission, the development of equality for athletes was easy. He emphasised that:

“it has happened by itself ... because they (women and men) do not compete for the same job... they are athletes, they are female athletes against females, and they have their own individuality” (Dmitry, personal communication, July 25, 2019).

In-competition rules might be one issue on which both sexes agree, i.e. once women were allowed to compete in Muaythai competitions. The in-competition rules, being organically equal from near the beginning of international competitions, have remained the same - the same number of rounds, the same round length, the same scoring. Later, changes included the same ring, the same referees and judges, and the same medal ceremonies. A significant rule inequality that remained until very recently involved opportunities available in IFMA competitions to further athlete development and career pathways.

The male athletes, until 2019, had two divisions, A and B, and the females had only one, A. As the talent pool of female athletes grew, the ability gap grew too. The men had a ‘development’ division, but the females did not. Consequently, female athletes removed themselves from the competition entirely because of relative inexperience and safety considerations. Female athletes brought the complaint, “female athletes do not have a career pathway in the same way that men do” to the Female Commission (IFMA FC minutes, 2012). From 2016, when the Youth WC was formally introduced by the IFMA, young female athletes (17 years old) were forced to move from junior to senior level (18 - 40 years old)

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competition without a bridging B competition division. While junior male athletes transitioned through the B-division, gaining the experience needed to compete safely in the A-division.

The Female Commission argued the above issue with the Executive Board for close to eight years. The inequality was notable; the IFMA rules were not in line with the IOC Principles and Charter. The arguments against female athlete's rights to a transition pathway were denied on many agendas over many years. However, the IFMA's acceptance as a provisionally recognised sport (by the IOC) ensured all its rules, regulations, and procedures needed to be in line with IOC stipulations. Dr. Erdogan explained that:

We once discussed a proper transition from having a B-division to having no B-division, or from B-division to A-division. How do we want to do this transition? But now it is very easy, under 23 for men and women, not A class and B class. As a governing body, we have to have a platform for them (the women). (Dr. Erdogan, personal communication, July 24, 2019)

Finally, a solution was formulated, and in 2019, rule changes were suddenly announced, entered into the official rule book, and immediately implemented.

Medals, processes, and worth. Medals and medal ceremonies are the culmination, the pinnacle of achievement for an athlete, and simultaneously they present an opportunity to promote equality. For ten years, until 2012, female and men's B-Division athletes did not have a medal ceremony on the main stage and instead were simply handed their medals by their team manager. This inequitable practice was reinforced when female's medals were not included in the medal tally count for Top Team of a championship.

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In contrast to other processes of change led by female athletes, the Russian Federation's President, Dmitry Putin, a male, initiated this change. Including female medallists in the medal tally count came from Russia's desire to ensure dominance. As the 2012 host country, they were accountable for the success of their event. Securing the Top Team prize was critical to their victory. For Dmitry, the idea of equality was not central to driving this rule change. During his interview, he explained that:

“women and men are not equal; they are different so they cannot be equal! In sport - it is not possible!” (Dmitry, personal communication, July 25, 2019).

What was evident was that:

each country is for themselves! They are selfish in their own way because when they realised that the addition of women to the Top Team tally meant they could bring back more medals for their country, and maybe improve their overall ranking, things changed. (Stephan, personal communication, July 26, 2019)

Conspicuously, they were not the only country that thought this way. From 2012 - 2018, for Turkey, adding women to their National Team was

“a good way of getting medals because (at the time) there were not many female athletes from other countries” (Dr. Erdogan, personal communication, July 24, 2019).

This recognition demonstrated that adding women to the medal tally has driven many countries to train female fighters seriously.

“It was a very cold, rational decision that was made, and it has been to the benefit of girls and women” (Niamh, personal communication, August 26, 2019).

In turn, this has led to an organic change of thinking for coaches and federations alike.

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“National Federations started to realise, on their own, the importance of female inclusion...Now the Thai team sees women from outside of Thailand winning gold medals, so they ask, “why not our girls?” (Dr. Tapsuwan, personal communication, July 24, 2019).

Notably, the staging and medal recognition and ceremonies were mentioned consistently during the interviews, but its significance received different views. The men saw these changes as something that happened along the way but not as a significant move toward creating greater gender equality. Conversely, the female interviewees saw this step as extremely significant; these momentous changes over contentious issues of discrimination were not substantial to the male psyche.

“I don’t know exactly what we did, but I know that we introduced rules, and everything, to make it easier for them (the female athletes)” (Dr. Erdogan, personal communication, July 24, 2019).

Accordingly, it could be implied that male defeat is downplayed rather than remembered as significant to the achievement of gender parity for women. Dato Shahnaz exemplified this when he stated that:

“You (Sue) are the main person pushing for equality, and the Board (Executive) listens to you, but at the end of the day we make the changes, the policy has to come from us (the IFMA Executive Board)” (Shahnaz, personal communication, July 24, 2019).

Mervyn (Chair of the IFMA Legal Commission) sums it up well when he noted that:

What is the difference between a male or a female standing on the rostrum, taking that medal, and bringing home that national pride? A medal has no sex; there is nothing to say its male, female, transgender, whatever; everybody will be proud, end of story, telling them (the National Federations) that ‘you have equal opportunity, not an equal opportunity for women, an equal opportunity to get a medal. There are more chances for your country to get a medal when you have women. The full weight ranges are filled, when women come to participate -

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So why are you short-changing yourself? You will be a great coach, a great team, a great nation when those five ladies bring home medals. (Mervyn, personal communication, July 24, 2019)

What was required to achieve change?

The last two enablers, two and three, were crucial in facilitating the cultural change in gender parity. After analysis of the transcripts, it became clear that factors linked to the final two Key Enablers were required to implement the cultural change that took place successfully. A common theme occurring in key enabler two was transformational leadership. While key enabler three encapsulated the effect of the historical context during which the change took place, i.e., the sporting and global political climate and the international desire for driving gender equality. The enabling factors of change are these three main factors: 1) A charismatic transformative leader that empowers, and 2) a diverse and dedicated team of loyal leaders. Both of which must understand and negotiate influencing political climates while navigating factor 3), the ever-changing global norms. In this section, I discuss these three critical aspects of achieving change.

Key enabler two: Charismatic transformational leadership

Both charismatic and transformational leadership depend on the leader's ability to influence and inspire others to be 'better,' tapping into their beliefs and values systems that motivate them to work for the greater good of others. These styles of leadership work as the leader rally is all, in service of a common goal by engaging their moral compass (STU online, 2018, para. 8) In Bass's (1985) interpretation transformational leadership has four key elements, idealised influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and individualised

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consideration (Bussinesballs, 2020, para. 3). These translated to the leader of the IFMA (Mr. Stephan Fox) having an a) inspiring vision, b) gaining trust and loyalty, and c) motivating and empowering others. Drawing on the nine interviews, plus my account, I will provide illustrative examples of these features of transformational and charismatic leadership.

Inspiring vision. Having a clear common goal - ‘to become an international IOC recognised sport’ was pivotal in creating a cohesive and driven team. An inspiring vision requires a clear goal; this is critical to creating the motivation needed to ensure all stakeholders are working collectively toward the same end game. Without a clear vision, understanding of the ‘brick-walls,’ and the long-term commitment required to achieve the unified objective, it is impossible to secure the engagement needed to succeed.

“You have got to understand, we (the IFMA) started from an almost minus situation; because of the nature of our sport, as well as its country of origin” (Mervyn, personal communication, July 24, 2019).

For women, the first step came in 1997. Female Muaythai athletes were rare, mainly due to access. Women could not compete in the same rings or stadiums as men; they were relegated to bars and touted as entertainment for men rather than a sport for women. Leading the IFMA, Stephan opened the first female stadium at Rangsit, where they began a Muay-Ying (female Muaythai) programme. By 1999 the IFMA was starting to promote female bouts themselves, and in 2002 the first official female tournament was held as part of the IFMA World Championships in Bangkok.

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“It was when we decided we want to have the five rings, and we wanted to become a fully-fledged international sport that things really started to change” (Mervyn, personal communication, July 24, 2019).

“With a sport, you follow international norms... I think this was important; this is when we started to dictate policy, slowly in the beginning obviously because we did not want to upset the apple cart” (Mervyn, personal communication, July 24, 2019).

“If you look at the Olympic movement in general, obviously, there are gender policies pushed through by the IOC themselves, which are passed down to the international federations” (Stephan, personal communication, July 26, 2019).

Stephan’s Charismatic style of leadership can be clearly seen as he explains his vision.

To be IOC recognised means resources, career programmes, anti-doping programmes, and Olympic values, the chance to use the power of sport to practice Olympic humanity, using different social programmes to help challenged youths to move forward; to maybe have a better tomorrow, and to bring smiles to faces which have lost them. It is very important to be part of the Olympic movement because it reminds us every day of the Olympic values - it is very important because it reminds us of what the Olympics stand for in regard to friendship, excellence, and fair play. I think it makes our athletes and coaches proud to have the right to be part of the five rings, but at the same time reminds them of their responsibilities of being part of this Olympic family. (Stephan, personal communication, July 26, 2019)

Building trust and loyalty. A strong bond is crucial to successfully build trust and loyalty between a diverse group of individuals that stem from all walks of life. The mantras the IFMA follow are, ‘One World, One Muaythai’ and, ‘Muaythai; we are family.’ The deep bond developed between the men and women of IFMA has bridged the gender gap arising from their multicultural origins.

Building an IFMA family has been central to creating loyalty, trust, and a cohesive drive. The majority of the personnel holding Executive Board and

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Commission Chair positions have been with the IFMA since the beginning, or near to it. They grew together, changing as global norms changed. Leaders of National Federations with deep-seated beliefs stemming from heavily gendered societies have changed.

Just ten years ago, people like A and B (names omitted) were saying ‘never, ever will we bring girls’, and now you see them, when they have a girl who they are really proud of, they are like ‘this is my girl.’ It is really nice to see. (Charissa, personal communication, July 25, 2019)

I cried, the first championships I went to in 2016 (after an 8-year break) because I could never have predicted that women would be trained and taken seriously as athletes, not from the disrespectful way we were treated at the first IFMA I went to. (Niamh, personal communication, August 26, 2019)

However, at the highest level, there is still evidence of gendered thinking,

We are not equal, we are different, and that is why we must not try to reach gender equality. I am not against it because how can we be against the thing that will, in any case, things really change, the world really changes, every year, and it moves toward gender equality, and it is impossible to stay like it was before. (Dmitry, personal communication, July 25, 2019)

Even though some high-powered men still do not believe in gender equality, the trust between the men and women holding power positions is strong enough for them to have faith in each other and support each other’s needs while working toward the betterment of the sport. The same people have grown together over 10-20 years, and even though

“There are new people here and there, it is the same type of people because we handpick them, they have to be our kind of people” (Charissa, personal communication, July 26, 2019).

“For men who have come from countries where things are more gendered, in a way, you have to have more respect for them for overcoming their prejudices or setting them aside rather than

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overcoming them” (Niamh, personal communication, August 26, 2019).

The Management Committee and Executive Board have worked together to achieve gender equality for their athletes, and in doing so, have started to generate gender equity at this level of their sport. ‘Muaythai people’ are passionate about their sport.

Muaythai has a unique quality in that it is not only a sport; Muaythai is a way of life, and it is a system on how to behave. Muaythai people are all different. Look at all the champions; they are so different, one is tall, one short, one fat, one skinny, one with muscles, and one without. Muaythai is like life; everybody has their own way (of doing things), and Muaythai gives us this opportunity. (Dmitry, personal communication, July 25, 2019)

The acceptance of diversity within the sport spills over to accepting diversity within the Executive Board and hierarchy of the sport. The values built into Muaythai also become values to live your life by. Values instilled in stakeholders filter down from the top - similar to values learnt within a family.

When you look at IFMA and the people working in the IFMA, the majority I can see are female, and this gives the female athletes the thought ‘this is the place for them.’ They feel safe and comfortable to come and join IFMA and feel in the IFMA family straight away. (Dr. Erdogan, personal communication, July 24, 2019)

Each individual, whether from a Commission, Management, Executive Board, or National Federation of the IFMA played their part in the achievement of parity; working together, trusting that each focused on the same goal in their own way was crucial to achieving success.

Motivating and empowering others. Choosing, motivating and empowering the right people was key to the IFMA’s success in attaining gender parity for female athletes.

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“Before diversity comes empowerment... we put a lady in charge of certain things, others will learn to accept it after a while” (Mervyn, personal communication, July 24, 2019).

Creating a policy that demands the inclusion of women is only one part of the answer. Those women must have the support of the right people; it is paramount to its success. Then this will filter down to the next level, National Federation and the Officials level.

The policy changes were in the IFMA itself; we are family. So, in the beginning, it was the male who had to ensure that in the countries, the predominant men of Muaythai had to help the females get through the ranks to make sure that they all get the opportunity. (Stephan, personal communication, July 26, 2019)

Dr. Erdogan explained, having the right key people is essential, “key people, for women, that is you (Sue)” (Dr. Erdogan, personal communication, July 24, 2019).

Regrettably,

You will still get those idiots that will take their secretary and put her name in because they know they can control her, but others, they will ask ‘who have we got?’ Some have a woman who has been to seven championships or is a senior referee or maybe a medallist. (Mervyn, personal communication, July 24, 2019)

“But beside empowerment, there is also enforcement, which means firstly there was some failure and then you have to put out enforcement to show that you mean business” (Mervyn, personal communication, July 24, 2019).

A decisive and influential step was engaging a Female Commission and a female as Chair of the Press and PR Commission. Dr. Erdogan tells how the IFMA led the way,

It has always been important we have females in the commissions, females in the management, female Vice Presidents and Continental Presidents. I can give you names like Charissa the IFMA Director and Janice the Athlete Commission Chair... everywhere you look, you can see a woman. (Dr. Erdogan, personal communication, July 24, 2019)

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Dr. Erdogan recounted, “I remember many times you (Sue) saying, ‘no, it should be like this,’ this brings results, and this makes people understand, and you (Sue) do not just say it and leave - you follow it up! You have a mission! (Dr. Erdogan, personal communication, July 24, 2019).

The empowered female Chair of the Media Commission stated that:

It's really important that the media presents women as fighters, having pictures of them training, of them fighting, of them talking about their wins, and celebrating as athletes. It is natural that if I do a post about a top male athlete, then I would also do one about a top female too. (Niamh, personal communication, August 26, 2019)

When the IFMA demonstrated confidence in females as leaders, the National Federations started to follow suit organically. They could see that having women in power worked and it exemplified the new norm, the new way to a better future for their beloved sport. Russia is an excellent example of this as:

“their media person is a female and she goes out of her way to promote women because she has that awareness of Russia as a gendered society” (Niamh, personal communication, August 26, 2019).

However, for this trend to continue,

“We need more females to be administrators, leaders, presidents, coaches, and referees” (Dr. Tapsuwan, personal communication, July 24, 2019).

None of this would have been possible without a decisive strategic plan. Many of the changes that occurred happened at the behest of Stephan Fox. It was himself (the charismatic leader) that guided and controlled the direction the federation moved in. His commands and public support drove the actions fundamental to the federation’s advancement and its fight for gender equality.

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Key enabler three: Political climate and global change

Key enabler three is the contextual nature of change. The current context situated this change, the advancement in gender equality in the sport of Muaythai (internal context), sat within a fast-changing political and global climate that called for gender equality (external context). It was international entities like the IOC (sport-specific) and the UN (global governance) that dictated new global norms, including percentage quotas for leadership and power positions within international sporting bodies. The external context included 1) global organisations, and the internal context included 2) the IFMA Management Committee itself.

The influence of global governance. The influence was noted in documents such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal's (SDGs), the MINEPS (Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport) adoption of UNESCO's Kazan action plan (a Foundation of the Global Framework for Leveraging Sport for Development and Peace), and the IOC's requirements for achieving the status of Olympic recognition (as a sport). The IOC's stipulation of a minimum 30% female quota in an Olympic Sports' management team highlights practices and policies driven by the IOC. The goals of the UN (including UNESCO and UN Women) have led to new international norms designed to work toward female empowerment. However, this change in historical context would have little effect unless the international organisation's goals lined up with the leadership's personal goals.

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The filter effect (policy change at the top filtering down through the various levels of an organisation) is evident as the IOC dictated policies and practices, influencing from the top down. “The objective of the IOC is key, the IOC has made a big difference because they tell the National Olympic Committees (NOC) of each country, and the NOC of each country tells the sports authority of that country stating that:

‘this is the policy for this country.’ This is the same for all IOC sports” (Dr. Tapsuwan, personal communication, July 24, 2019).

The Olympic Charter demands gender equality in all sports that become or are Olympic.

If you look at the Olympic movement in general, obviously there are gender policies pushed through by the IOC themselves, which obviously passed down to the international federations, and in turn, it was expected of our Member Federations. In the beginning, we did not really push female participation. Now we really encourage having a 50/50 ratio. (Stephan, personal communication, July 26, 2019)

This is seen in sports like Judo,

if you go and download photos of their World and European championships; they have exactly the same number of photos of the men and the women, they give the same prominence. Everything is done that way because they have been an Olympic sport for so long. (Niamh, personal communication, August 26, 2019)

The drive to create equality is within the IOC culture, and it goes straight to the heart of the organisation.

The policy is critical, and this is why Stephan and I (Mervyn) started to look at our constitution, and we put in a quite a few changes, and we filled out the percentage requirement for females at the top level, for the IOC, and for gender equality; and that brought about a whole new change in perspective to the sport. (Mervyn, personal communication, July 24, 2019)

Nevertheless, just changing policy is not enough,

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“Working together with organisations outside the sporting world; UN Women, UNESCO, etc., helped with the development and it also helped break cultural barriers” (Stephan, personal communication, July 26, 2019).

Stephan explained that:

being IOC recognised means ‘nothing and everything’ because, at the end of the day, it means nothing if you do not use it... We must continue to promote the Olympic values, live them, and at the same time practice Olympic humanity; to use the power of sport, and use the different social initiatives to help challenged youths move forward; to maybe have a better tomorrow. (Stephan, personal communication, July 26, 2019)

Interestingly, not all interviewees saw the IOC as being pivotal in driving gender equality. Dmitry suggested that it was the nature of the sport itself that has brought about these changes. When he stated,

In my opinion, the world is changing, the way of life and women request that they must be, maybe more tough, and maybe more independent, maybe more strong, and all these characteristics are what you get when you train Muaythai. And Muaythai is not just a sport; it is a way of life. (Dmitry, personal communication, July 25, 2019)

Dmitry was suggesting, that for Russia, it was the women themselves demanding that they be part of this global shift in gender equality that facilitated the change.

A committed, diverse, and dedicated management team. Partnerships and collective efforts within the IFMA demonstrated how the unification of international goals, collective organisational goals, and personal goals resulted in achieving ‘common good’ and positive growth for the IFMA.

The change process needs a driver,

“you have people like Stephan Fox, who is driving it for very pragmatic reasons” (Niamh, personal communication, August 26, 2019).

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But it also needs patrons to act as catalysts. During any transition, there is a need for an individual that could work with the traditional Thai men, the power holders, to make the changes necessary for the transition to take place.

You have to remember that back then the IFMA Executive Board was dominated by old Asian men, I'm sorry if that sounds racist, but; their ideas were gendered, and IFMA had to pacify them. You could not shock them too much; they were already shocked at the idea of a woman in the stadium. It had to be a slow process. (Niamh, personal communication, August 26, 2019)

It appears to have been Dr. Tapsuwan's consistent pressure and coercion in the background that smoothed the way for a range of changes to happen. As Stephan noted that:

"We are fortunate in our organisation to have a President who understands sport on all levels, and despite his 'young' age, opens wider and wider up and understands much more what needs to be done" (Stephan, personal communication, July 26, 2019).

Niamh reinforced this view by stating that:

Dr. Tapsuwan is very forward-thinking, shockingly so for a man of his age and generation. He was able to bring a lot of the older Thai's onside, and sort of convince them that this is the way we have to do it now, but he was fighting against thousands of years of tradition. (Dr. Tapsuwan, personal communication, July 24, 2019)

Another example of fighting the power holders was when I chose to take on a group of highly ranked Thai men pushing to change the traditional Thai Muaythai uniform. I had fought male dominance and the sport's patriarchal nature during my entire career. I understood how hard women had to fight to get even an ounce of the access, opportunity, or support male athletes received freely. My goal was to ensure that the next generation of female athletes did not face the same

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discrimination and alienation that I had. Luckily, I had excellent trainers that encouraged, supported, and promoted females competing in Muaythai. Moreover, in governance, I had the support and trust of both Stephan and Dr. Tapsuwan.

Being IOC recognised was the IFMA's primary goal, and to do this, they were required to have made considerable inroads towards attaining and promoting gender equality. However, this requirement did not become significant until after I had already spent years fighting for female rights, with prolonged results. When it became apparent to the top men that gender equality was a significant player in attaining IOC recognition, the speed at which things progressed increased substantially. Ironically, we were still years ahead of other sports, also trying to gain IOC recognition, and this meant we had an advantage, which was critical to our success. As my personal goal became more in line with the IFMA's goals, resistance melted away. Notably, the time these two sets of goals took to line up also allowed for relationships to strengthen and a deep sense of trust to develop. It could be argued that this was a significant factor in the change of pace and acceptance of ideas.

From my view over the years, I have noted that:

“each Commission Chair had values and personal goals that aligned with the IFMA's goal.”

The Chair of the Medical Commission wanted the sport to be cleaner and safer, and in line with IOC requirements, WADA compliance became a significant focus. The (then) Chair of the Press and PR, as a female, wanted to ensure coverage of male and female athletes was equal. The Chair of Technical and Rules

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wanted to ensure there were safe career pathways, and the sport retained its integrity and traditions. The Chair of Education wanted the sport to have a clear learning pathway in all domains of the sport. The Chair of Legal wanted the necessary changes to be permanent, enforceable and transparent. Remarkably, all the Chairs worked for free, showing their love of the sport and the importance of unifying their goals. Each Chair's personal goals were driven by their values, beliefs, area of interest, and skill. Each Chair was from diverse and varied cultural backgrounds and of various nationalities.

Importantly, aside from their personal goals, they all wanted one thing, Muaythai to become an IOC sport. This goal was provisionally recognised in December of 2018. It was a goal that would not have been attainable had this group of moralistic, dedicated men and women not worked together so trustingly and so cohesively.

“We truly unified under one leader, transforming organisational culture for the good of the sport” (Sue).

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Chapter Five: Discussion

A sustainable future for gender equality in Muaythai.

“The reason for change does not have to start from somewhere noble - it just needs to start” Anon.

The research question investigated was: What were the Key Enablers and who were the key influencers in achieving participation parity for women at the elite level in the amateur sport of Muaythai between 2001 and 2018 (16 years), from the perspective of the IFMA Management Committee?

Introduction

This study demonstrates a clear correlation between the three identified key enablers and the participation parity attainment for athletes as it related to gender equality.

The three key enablers were identified by evaluating nine semi-structured interviews and then linked to the available literature. Unfortunately, little relevant literature was available, with most research in Muaythai centring around sports science and injuries, and the gendered nature of the sport. There was no literature on how to change the gender imbalance in male-dominated martial arts or other sports. However, researchers Lyras and Hums (2009) suggested that when females and males work together, they improve gender equity in sports results. Moreover, outside of the sports realm, Allport (Cited by Lyras and Hums, 2009, p.8) stated that “contact between diverse groups (any group of people with different characteristics, including sex, ethnicity, and race) is the most effective “medicine” against racism, prejudice, and discrimination.” When diverse people come

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together with the desire to enact change and in the presence of Allport's (1954), 'five' principles are present, then change will follow.

Why identify enablers?

Other studies have looked at barriers to achieving gender equality in sport management. This study followed Shaw and Leberman's (2015) shift in focus away from identifying the 'brick walls' to achieving gender equality in sport and instead focused on identifying the enablers to achieving success. The idea of using enablers rather than barriers gives rise to the possibility of producing replicable conditions. Applying the identified enablers to the new goal of achieving similar success in gender parity in other domains of Muaythai, such as officiating, coaching, administration, and National Federation governance can lead to similar changes. If similar results are reproducible, then there is a future possibility of building a replicable methodology to create gender parity and equality successfully in other sports.

The relationship between the key enablers and the resulting gender equality changes aligns with Allport's principles for achieving positive and significant change. The three key enablers identified included were:

1. Equitable changes, split into two sub-themes a) changes to the uniform and b) equality in staging, rules, and medalling,
2. Strong leadership and a collective goal, and
3. The political climate and global change.

Three of these relate to all of Allport's four principles, "(1) equal status among the members of the groups, (2) common goals as the purpose and the framework of

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the contact; (3) intergroup cooperation that helps all groups reach their goals, (4) support from the authorities, structures, and institutions of a society, *and* (5) friendship potential - added by Pettigrew and Tropp in (2006) at a later date” (Lyras and Hums, 2009). These five will be referred to as Allport’s ‘five’ principles.

Allport’s principles and the three key enablers

This study’s findings discussed the three key enablers, linked evidently to Allport’s study that detailed specific criteria needed for social change towards equality. The IFMA had all ‘five’ of Allport’s principles for social change. Therefore, following Allport’s intergroup contact theory as a vehicle to facilitate gender intergroup acceptance, it could be argued that the IFMA was destined to achieve a dramatic change in cultural and gendered norms. A significant step in replicating the IFMA’s gender parity results for athletes comes from determining what these three key enablers look like in Muaythai. Researching the identified themes, labelled key enablers, has led to a more comprehensive understanding of what these enablers entailed.

Researching and labelling criteria specific to the success of achieving gender parity for athletes in Muaythai may allow the proposal of a set of new sport-specific principles. Furthermore, the application of these new principles might be used in the future, in other domains of Muaythai, e.g., officiating, coaching, and decision-making at the National and International Federation level. Additionally, identifying replicable criteria potentially yields implications in

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driving gender parity and also equality in other martial arts and possibly other sports.

Key enabler one. Key enabler one relates to Allport's principle one, described as the need for equal status among groups. The implementation of a Female Commission will perpetuate this principle by giving women and girls a voice, and to be taken seriously. The empowerment of the female voice led to changes in areas where inequality already existed in Muaythai. These changes included uniform changes to improve safety and include women regardless of religion, changing the inequity of the medal processes, ceremonies, and staging during a competition, and changing rules that generated unequal career pathways for competing women and girls.

Key enabler two. Key enabler two related to Allport's principle two, common goals as the purpose and framework of the organisation and the added fifth principle, potential for friendship. Key enabler two identified four common categories: Charismatic, transformational leadership, building a trustful, cohesive and loyal team, having collective goals and clear vision, and empowering and supporting others. This principle suggests that Allport's theory of creating social change by reducing discrimination across cross-cultural groups was significant in creating change in the gender norms of Muaythai.

Key Enabler three. Key enabler three related to Allport's fourth principle, which focuses on support from authorities, structures and institutions of society. It also related to the historical context that the change took place within. Without global organisations such as the IOC and the UN (including branches, the

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UNESCO, and the UN Women), these changes may not have happened, or might not have occurred so rapidly. Their policies and practices highlighted the need to drive gender equality, and because of this, goals such as the UN's SDG's and UNESCO's Kazan Action Plan not only exist but are highlighted as being essential to driving positive social change, globally and nationally. More specific to the sports world, the IOC dictated changes such as female board member quotas to all its recognised sports, forcibly placing women in management positions. However, gaining support from the right people in these newly appointed positions was critical to women's success.

Predictably, success for women working at the top level of sport will filter down to the next level, but the time frame and scope of this impact were not achievable without key enabler two.

Creating equality successfully

From a critical paradigm perspective, the social constructs that define and dictate a woman's place in sport and society are driven by the historical and learned assumption that men are superior to women (Messner, 2018). The implementation of focused equity must be applied to driving gender equality and for a change in mindset. The implementation of focused equity must be applied to drive gender equality and to change this mindset. Equity can only be achieved when those at the top are firstly empathetic to the situation and willing to give up a percentage of their power "challenging hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity" (Follo and Giovanna, 2012, p. 715). This result aligns with Messner's (2018) findings that "'equal opportunity' for girls and women in the sport thus far

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has been engineered by men” (p. 56). The IFMA’s accomplishment of gender parity for female athletes may have only been possible because the women compete amongst themselves and not in a mixed capacity. Suggesting that the resulting parity may have been attained because of an unconscious use of Messner’s (2018) “‘separate but equal’ strategy, where male and female bodies, assumed to be naturally different, are sorted into separate binary categories.” (p. 56).

If this is true, it should follow that female coaches, referees, managers, and officials will develop expertise organically as they move from competing to officiating, in a pathway similar to what their male counterparts have followed for years.

This segregation during competition may also have made it easier to portray female athletes on an equal footing as male athletes. Notably, when it comes to the management and decision-making in Muaythai’s sport, segregation is not practised. Further investigation into the growing equality within Muaythai’s governance is needed to ascertain if this results from changing perspectives due to the drive to obtain IOC status through driving gender equality or if other factors have come into play.

Notably, for men, the organic process leading from competing to officiating in a sport is repeated to manage the sport. Tamminen, Holt, and Neely (2012) suggest that the adversity elite athletes experience creates the opportunity for growth that results from united experiences. These experiences create a unique “shared bond,” demonstrating that the adversity an athlete faces creates the space

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for potential growth and consequently might build a future pathway for these athletes to become leaders in their sport's world. The men who hold management positions in sport do not get there overnight; they worked their way to the top, generally after spending years competing in the same sport themselves. It could be proposed that a woman's rise to power may also result organically over time, by merely following similar pathways to the men. As more females participate in sports alongside men, they will share an increased number of significant experiences. This commonality of entwined growth and development will create an essential shared bond. Trust will be solidified as they move into officiating, management, and administration positions, thus allowing women to take up power positions within a sports board or federation in a way that is supported and endorsed by their fellow officeholders.

Most men did not receive their positions on a 'silver platter' and nor should women be. The right to a position of power must be earned, but in order to earn a position, the opportunity and support must first be made available. Adriaanse and Schofield's (2013) careful analysis of data revealed that the proof supporting gender diversity on boards has now been firmly established, which suggests that the opportunities are now there for women, and it is up to them to stand up and take them.

Sports organisational change and equity

As evidence in the Muaythai example provided, the 'fight' for equality requires:

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1. a top-down approach as exemplified by the changes such as female percentages forced upon sports bodies by global policies;
2. the support and empowerment of the women who take on the positions offered;
3. a pathway created by the sports federations in response to the increased number of women participating in that sport; and
4. a non-sex-segregated competition model.

Success will create positive female role models in competition and positions of power. “Studies have shown that stereotype threat effects may be “turned off” under several conditions, notably when stereotyped individuals are presented with positive role models (e.g., McIntyre, Paulson, & Lord, 2003). Equity can be provided by holding non-sex-segregated competitions.

Though Muaythai has separate male and female competitions, they are held as one big competition, together, side-by-side. For men and women, boys and girls, the world competition and qualifying continental and national competitions are run concurrently, as one. The support and standing of both men and women, or at the Youth Championships, boys and girls must be portrayed and accepted as being of equal importance.

The power of leadership for change

Having the right leader is critical to effecting change. Leaders need to be able to address the complex and hidden barriers to progress toward gender equity and diversity by clearly understanding what those barriers are, knowing the

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current and best practice methods to address them, and taking personal responsibility for them (Rindfleish, 2018, P193).

Because of the closeness that develops as one practises and competes in the sport of Muaythai, the bonds that individuals share, their trainers, referees, and management develops organically into deep-seated respect. The nature of the sport demands respect. The ability to get into a ring and face an opponent, fighting with all your skill and relying on a supreme fitness born of dedication and sacrifice, commands a kinship and bond that crosses both cultural and gender boundaries. Having a leader or team of leaders who intimately knows and understands the profound commitment and sacrifice, fear, and depth of attachment to the sport paves the way for a Charismatic leadership style. The trust established allows the development of the faith and confidence in the leader to enact change that will benefit the sport they love so deeply.

The confidence expressed by a Charismatic leader that holds sacred the unifying goal as they work to achieve it promotes conviction, loyalty, and the support of his/her followers. The allegiance that develops from this process, not defined by gender, encourages faith and confidence in change's transformative nature. The belief that the change will be highly beneficial, even if it goes against personal values and stereotypes, wins out because of the shared bond that has developed. Because of this, the achievement of gender parity would not have been possible without the right leader at the top. Even though this leader did not choose gender equality as his purpose, it was a result all the same. Being open to

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challenging one's values and putting the collective goal above personal beliefs is needed to attain success, which applies to all leaders within the organisation.

To go from no female participants to a 48:52 split in a male-dominated sport involves radical cultural change “the type of leadership required to bring about such change would be a highly transformational style with the ability to galvanize all members of an organisation behind the aims and outcomes for such a large cultural change” (Rindfleish, 2018, p. 189). The IFMA leadership has transformed from a male-only management group to a more sex-balanced leadership. The top two most active leaders (not including the President) are Stephan Fox (Secretary-General) and Charissa Tynan (Director). These two work together side by side, leading the IFMA daily. Lyras and Hums (2009) suggest that when females and males work together, an improvement in gender equity (in sports) results.

The leadership style used at the IFMA is an amalgamation of three main traditional styles and one new one. From the least representational to the most: One, Paternalistic leadership, where a definite family has developed, led by Mr. Fox. Two undercurrents of Transactional leadership style incorporated the use of a common goal, highlighting those who worked hard toward achieving this goal, thus creating a reward system. Three, the Transformational leadership style was used to challenge and inspire stakeholders to pitch their ideas to their leader, Mr. Fox, who, in turn, empowered them to use their individual goals to work towards and support the primary goal of the organisation.

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Finally and most dominantly, a Charismatic leadership style where Mr. Fox's vast knowledge and self-promoting, high energy personality led his followers, treating them as individuals who were working toward the same goal - to become an Olympic sport. Conversely, his underlying pragmatic nature did not drive gender equality issues because of a deep-seated ideology. More precisely, he believes in creating a better future for all and sees gender equality as a progressive result of change rather than a reason for it.

New issues revealed

Going forward, if a sport has all three key enablers in place and Allport's 'five' principles are present, then gender equality, as a result of driving gender parity by generating gender equity, should occur. This research paper has only described how the achievement of gender parity was possible for female Muaythai athletes at one point in time. However, if the IFMA continues in the same vein, following the same practices, they could develop gender parity and continue to drive gender equality in other domains of the sport.

The question that remains is, are these conditions replicable? How much of this occurrence can be attributed to careful planning and what is attributed to luck and context? Are any of the policies and procedures replicable? Was Mr. Fox, the leader, critical to the transformation, and if so, could his impact be repeated by another person?

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Chapter Six: Conclusion

The end can be a new beginning

“Achieving gender equality requires the engagement of women and men, girls, and boys. It is everyone’s responsibility.” - Ban Ki-moon (UN Secretary-General)

Conclusion

The attainment of gender equality in the form of parity for participating athletes in a male-dominated sport is a success that cannot be ignored. For a masculine sport to go from having no female participants at any level of the sport to having a 48:52 percentage split a mere 16 years later warranted investigation. Achieving such a dramatic cultural and gender norm shift has implications for supplying answers to the global issue of how to drive gender equality in sport successfully.

The research aimed to identify crucial moves that led to the achievement of participation parity for elite athletes at the World Championships in 2018, Cancun. Nine of the IFMA Management Committee members (past and present) were interviewed and recorded, along with my account of the change. The transcribed narratives were coded and categorised, facilitating the identification of common themes. These three identified themes (including two sub-themes) were labelled as the key enablers. The three key enablers included were: 1) equitable changes, 2) strong leadership and a collective goal, and 3) political climate and global change. Key enabler one had two sub-themes a) uniform changes, and b) changes in staging, rules and medaling.

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Identifying enablers was critical to the research because it lay the foundation for creating a transformative tool. The identification of replicable moves rather than focusing on brick walls meant that a set of criteria might be drawn out of the study to allow similar results in other domains of Muaythai. Understanding how this success was achieved will contribute to identifying processes that need to be put in place to overcome social constructs that define a woman's place in sport and possibly society. Changing the historical and learned assumption that men are superior to women is needed to attain gender equality. If we can understand how this was achieved in one context, we can potentially apply what was learnt in other contexts and study the results.

Each of the three key enablers detailed several categories within them. Key enabler one entailed equitable moves taken that relates to uniform changes, and rules, staging and medalling. Uniform changes included the option of a sports hijab and body coverings under traditional competition uniform. This change allowed for the inclusion of women and girls of Muslim faith, meaning a large percentage of the global population could now participate. The second uniform change related to the improvement of in-competition safety equipment and the rules of its supply. The change to the uniform ensured that female athletes received the same presentation as their male counterparts. This step eliminated the prevalence of the sexual objectification seen so commonly in sport and left Muaythai itself as the main 'object' being witnessed. When the audience saw an athlete competing, they were no longer easily differentiated by sex.

The second category of equitable changes related to:

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1. the staging - the use of a centre ring as a hierarchical approach to stage positioning;
2. the rules regarding the number of available competition divisions - meaning that the men had an accessible career pathway, but the women did not; and
3. medalling - ensuring the women were afforded a true medal ceremony in line with the men and that their medals were counted in the Top Team prize tally.

The changes to these areas ensured equitable practices were followed in competitions, nationally and globally. Interestingly, the men drove the changes to the inequity of medalling and ceremonies. Their need to dominate is one of the characteristics that drive the coaches and National Federations' presidents to all vie for the most gold medals. To fight and to win, to return home, the victor is pivotal. The IFMA World Championships allows for this style of victory through its most converted prize, overall Top Team. Winning this Top Team accolade is based on the medal tally with Gold being in chief position. Adding women's Golds to this medal tally changed how female athletes' worth was viewed. It is a great honour for the country that wins Top Team, as they have the greatest number of World Champions in their team and consequently their home country. This is translated to fiscal reward, fame, and ceremony in many countries (especially in middle and eastern Europe) on their return home. This often tangible and patriotic incentive begets tremendous accolades and rewards that reflect success in the 'men's sports world'. It carries prestige and honour, not dissimilar to winning on

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the battlefield in times of old, and the men return as heroes. Powerful men will fulfil their own needs to earn/collect a reward that epitomises and reinforces their masculinity. When the medal tally includes those won by the women, these men and their respective countries unwittingly become vehicles that drive positive social change and gender equality.

Key enabler two entailed the importance of effective leadership and the equal importance of having a collective goal. A Charismatic leader rallied the troops to buy into his vision, inspiring and motivating them to work hard to achieve it. The transformational nature of the IFMA's leadership challenged and inspired its leaders, empowering them to use their individual goals to work toward the primary goal of the organisation. By empowering and supporting others, an opportunity was afforded to the leaders to share a common bond, creating the potential for friendship which contributed to the building of a trusting and loyal team.

Key enabler three covered internal and external influences, creating an understanding of the historical context and what was needed to negotiate it. The external influences of global entities such as the UN and its subsidiaries and the IOC affected change through a top-down policy approach. Following the new global norms was a must if the IFMA wanted to become an IOC recognised sport (their collective goal). The internal influences were the desire of the IFMA Management Committee, or lack of, to follow the new norms set by the global institutions such as the IOC and the UN. The buy-in from the Management

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Committee was critical to achieving change. Having a team that was diverse, committed, and dedicated to achieving change was paramount.

Each key enabler was linked to literature, and a strong comparison was noted between Allport's (1954) principles of change for overcoming prejudice and discrimination and the three key enablers. Allport identified four main principles, and Pettigrew and Tropp added a fifth in 2006. The first principle recognised creating equal status among groups as important. The second noted a common goal was crucial and the third and fourth entailed intergroup cooperation and support from those in power positions and institutions of society as being relevant. The fifth added principle described the need for the potential for friendships to occur.

There has been a little real movement in other domains of Muaythai, and the majority of National Federations still need to address the issue of gender parity and equality for officials, coaches, and administration. Notably, team management (especially in positions viewed as power positions) are decidedly lacking in female numbers, which could be because all boards are still typically male-heavy in the Muaythai world.

However, the IFMA assisted female athletes (youth and senior) in overcoming negative stereotypes, conscious and unconscious. The IFMA achieved this by ensuring the environment in which females compete in is supportive of their elitism. Moreover, female success is celebrated in the same way as their male counterparts at all levels of the international sport's organisation. By ensuring the

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Muaythai environment continues to stay supportive in the future, achieving parity in numbers in all of Muaythai's domains is possible.

Lastly, three essential elements for creating gender normative change in sports organisations were identified. The change required 1) a top-down approach, 2) a supported career pathway for women, and 3) the use of a non-sex-segregated competition model. Number one has recently been put in place mandating National Federations to update their Constitutions to be in line with the IFMA's. Number three is already taking place in the majority of Member countries. However, number two supported career pathways for women is where most national Muaythai organisations fall short.

I believe it was my personal experience as an athlete competing in a masculine sport that allowed me to face similar adversities to Muaythai's male athletes. I found that the adversity I faced helped equip me with the skills to succeed in a man's world. Competing in the ring in a masculine sport is not so different from competing in the boardroom. The respect I earned as a competitor flowed through my status as a leader and power holder in the IFMA. Notably, the achievement of parity at the international level does not equate to parity being achieved at National level.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include the fact that only one case of achievement was studied. Thus, there is a need to repeat this research on a second similar gender parity achievement. This study could include the replication of the same key enablers in a different domain of Muaythai, e.g. refereeing. This limitation

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leads to the questions: Can the same conditions and key enablers be replicated, in the same sport, or perhaps in another male-dominated sport or martial art. Just how pivotal is the leader to the success of this achievement. As the current international context is similar to the IOC and the UN (despite COVID-19) now would be a suitable time to replicate this study.

Future research

Future successful implementation of a replicable process and its criteria could fuel the development of new ‘methodologies’ (ways of approaching problems) in the sporting arena. The next step would be to test the application of these criteria within the same sport in a different context (refereeing, coaching or officiating). This future research would be necessary in order to assess the reliability and validity of the newly identified criteria, the three key enablers.

Furthermore, future cross-sport research would enable comparisons between sports and reiterate the substance of a new methodology. The development of a new methodology to generate positive social change in gender equality for international and national sporting organisations has significant future benefits for all people and countries involved in sport, both at global and national levels.

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Appendix 1. Information sheet for participants



THE UNIVERSITY OF
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Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

I am a master's student from the University of Waikato of New Zealand, conducting a project about achieving gender parity in participation at the Elite level at the IFMA (International Federation Muaythai Amateur) World championships between the years of 2001 and 2018. My positions within the IFMA include Vice President, Continental President (Oceania), Chair of the Female Commission, Management Committee, and Executive board member. At a National Federation level, I am a New Zealand Muaythai Federation (NZMF) Executive board member. I would like to interview you for this research project. I am interested in your personal experiences and opinion about the topic, such as:

- What policy changes internationally and nationally contributed to the change?
- Who were the key drivers of this change?
- What were the key countries that helped enable this change?
- What were the key catalysts internationally and nationally in creating the increase in female participation, in general, and to an elite level?
- What were the key events/tournaments or otherwise that influenced the increase in female participation?
- What or who were the barriers that needed to be or still need to be overcome in order to create and sustain this change in participation percentage?

Please read this information sheet carefully before making your decision to participate. The interview will be audio recorded. It is important that you know that you can:

- Stop the interview at *any* time.
- Withdraw from the study at any time. This includes before, during, or after the interview. Withdrawal after the interview (up to three weeks after you receive the transcripts of our conversation) can be achieved by informing myself, the researcher, or one of my supervisors directly, by email or personal message via text or direct social media messaging.

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- Ask and further questions about the study which may occur to you during the interview.
- Be given access to your individual transcript.
- You will not have to answer *any* questions you don't want to.
- If you choose to participate, you are given the opportunity to decide how you would like to be represented in this research (i.e., by name or not, by country or not, by position within the IFMA or your country's Federation or not.)
- If a translator is used, they will be subject to a confidentiality agreement and will not be able to disclose any part of the conversation during the formal interview.

I would like to make you aware that it is highly likely, given the nature and size of our sport, that you will be identified whether you are directly identified by name, position or country, or not.

After the interview, I will send you a transcript of our conversation. Please check the transcript to ensure that you are happy with the information that you have shared with me. You can add, amend, or delete material from the transcript. A copy of the summary of my findings will be shared with you once the project is completed.

Contacting the researchers: If you have any questions or if you have any concerns about ethical matters or other issues related to the research, please contact either myself or my supervisors.

Researcher: Sue Glassey, +64210650114 or suewglassey@gmail.com

Supervisors from the University of Waikato, New Zealand: Professor Lissette Burrows,

Lissette.burrows@waikato.ac.nz; Associate Professor, Kirstin Petrie, Kirsten.petrie@waikato.ac.nz

Use of information: The data collected will be used in research articles and presentations published in academic journals and will be read mostly by university students, researchers, and academics. The data will be presented to groups within universities and perhaps at academic conferences.

Records: All records from the interviews will be kept confidential. They will be archived for five years and then destroyed according to the University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Regulations. The audio recordings will be kept in a secure location for the duration of the research process. Any other use of the audio recordings will not occur without your permission.

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Thanks again for considering this invitation to share your personal opinion and cultural insights about the sport of Muaythai and its achievement of attaining gender parity in participation.

This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Waikato under HREC2019#02. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be addressed to the Secretary of the Committee, email humanethics@waikato.ac.nz, postal address, University of Waikato, Te Whare Wananga o Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240.

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Appendix 2. Letter seeking permission/approval



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

LETTER SEEKING PERMISSION
/APPROVAL

Dear President, Executive Board, and Management team of the IFMA,

I would like to introduce the research project being undertaken by myself as a master's student at the University of Waikato, New Zealand. The research will attempt to understand the phenomenon of gender participation parity by answering the following research question.

What people and processes constrained and enabled the amateur sport of Muaythai to achieve gender parity in participation at the IFMA World Championships in 2018?

It has been decided, via project consultation, that interviewing eight to ten members from the IFMA management and/or governance team would be the best method to research how IFMA achieved gender parity in male/female participation at the World Championships in Cancun, 2018.

In order to do this, I will need to recruit the participants and then interview them if they are interested in being part of this research project.

After consulting with IFMA members (with verbal permission granted by Stephan Fox), the following list of possible participants was assembled, and I am writing to seek permission to approach the individuals listed below. Further to this, I will seek permission from both National and Continental Federations involved before approaching the individual to gauge their interest and consequent permission if they express interest to participate. The interviews will be conducted, with your agreement, during the upcoming IFMA World Championships in Bangkok, July 2019.

Dr. Sakchye Tapsuwan	IFMA President
Stephan Fox	IFMA General Secretary, AIMS President, and Sport Accord Member
Charissa Tynan	IFMA Director
Dmitry Putlin	IFMA Executive Board Member, European Muaythai Federation (EMF) Vice President, IFMA Technical Commission Chair, and Russian Muaythai Federation (RMF) President

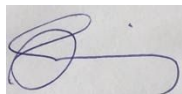
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Dato Shahnaz Azmi	IFMA Vice President, Malaysian Muaythai Federation President
Elisa Salinas	IFMA Vice President, IFMA Youth Commission Chair, Pan American Federation, and President & Mexican Muaythai Federation President
Niamh Griffin,	Former IFMA Media and Communication Commission Chair, Former Sports Director of IFMA
Dr. Erdogan Aydin	IFMA Executive Board Member, IFMA Medical Commission Chair, IFMA International Technical Official (Referee)
Mervyn Tan	IFMA Executive Board Member, IFMA Legal Commission Chair, and General Secretary of the Federation of Amateur Muaythai Asia (FAMA)

A reply to this letter via email is sufficient to indicate permission. Please indicate in your reply that by giving permission, you understand, the IFMA organisation will be identified in the findings and summary report for this research project.

I look forward to working with you and your members collaboratively on this research project.

Yours sincerely,



Sue Glassey

Swg8@students.waikato.ac.nz

+64 210650114

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Appendix 3. Informed consent form for participants



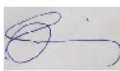
INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

I have read the Information Sheet for Participants and have had the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

1. I understand that I can withdraw from the project up until 3 weeks after receiving my transcripts.	
2. I understand that I can decline to answer any particular question in the study.	
3. I understand I can refuse discussion on an issue.	
4. I understand that I can refuse the recording of any part, or whole, of the interview.	
5. I understand that the researcher will send me a transcript of my interview, and that I have the right to delete, change, or add to my comments made during the interview.	
6. I understand the researcher will keep all records from the interview confidential.	
7. I understand that all data will be achieved for at least five years according to the University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Regulations	
8. I consent to the data being used for publication and teaching purposes.	
9. I have discussed the representation of my identity in the research and I would like to be identified as/by 	
10. I understand that I have been given the opportunity to decide how I will be represented in the findings of this study, and <i>any</i> published or unpublished work will reflect the choice I have made regarding the representation of myself as a participant. <i>See point 9.</i>	
11. I understand that if I have any concerns I can contact Sue Glassey on swg8@students.waikato.ac.nz , or her supervisors Professor Lissette Burrows, Lissette.burrows@waikato.ac.nz , Associate Professor Kirstin Petrie, Kirsten.petrie@waikato.ac.nz	

Please complete the relevant details below:

Signed: _____
 Date: _____
 Full name: _____
 Age & gender: _____
 Nationality: _____
 Country of residence: _____
 Position/s within the IFMA _____
 Email address your conversation transcripts to go to: _____
 Researcher's name: Susan Wilhelmina Glassey (Sue Glassey)

Signature: 

Please, make a copy of this form for your own records and return a further copy to me on swg8@students.waikato.ac.nz

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Appendix 4. Letter seeking permission/approval



CONSULTATION QUESTION/S

Can you identify any key influences on female participation and its dramatic increase over the last 16 years in the IFMA or at the national level in your own or other countries?

APPROXIMATE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Regarding the change in female participation at the IFMA World Championships from zero to 48 %, between the years 2001 and 2018

Key policies

- What policy changes internationally and nationally contributed to the change?

Key people

- Who were the key drivers of this change?
- What were the key countries that helped enable this change?

Key catalysts

- What were the key catalysts internationally and nationally in creating the increase in female participation, in general, and to an elite level?

Key events

- What were the key events/tournaments or otherwise that influenced the increase in female participation?

Key barriers

- What or who were the barriers that needed to be or still need to be overcome in order to create and sustain this change in participation percentage?