

# Leadership and Gender Inclusion in Esports Organisations

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**Objectives:** Sport leadership is widely recognized as being gender-imbalanced and gender-inequitable. Unlike most sporting contexts, esports performance does not depend on physical abilities. This has led practitioners to argue that esports have the potential to become gender-inclusive sporting spaces. Yet, the marginalisation, discrimination and harassment of women is a well-known and well-explored issue in esports research. The aim of this study is to examine the extent to which Norwegian esports organisations are sites of reproduction of gender power relations that privilege men in leadership positions.

**Methods:** 11 semi-structured interviews with male and female leaders in Norwegian esports organisations.

**Findings:** Norwegian esports organisations are gender-imbalanced across all levels and positions. Gendered practices, cultures and structures exist at both the organisational and sector-wide levels. This has resulted in women leaders adopting coping and resistance strategies. Some of our findings mirror well-established findings in the sport management literature, whilst other findings are unique to the culture and developing organisational structure of the esports sector.

**Discussion:** We draw upon Acker's theory of inequality regimes to guide our discussion on the practices, processes, actions and meanings that maintain gender inequalities within esports organisations.

**Conclusion:** Norwegian esports is a developing and fragmented sector formed of young, under-resourced organisations. The emerging nature of the sector simultaneously influences the reproduction of male dominance and the potential for gender equity in its leadership. The extent to which the sector will realise this potential remains to be seen.