Informal Gender Roles on Boards: The Effect of Emotional Labor on How Boards Function

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Abstract:

Gender has been an important independent variable in studies of governance, whether it has been used explicitly or implicitly. We have considered the broad contours of gender on boards, the impact of gender on prestige of the board (and vice versa), the barriers to women serving on certain boards, and the impact of gender on organizational effectiveness. This paper seeks to go one step further in dissecting gender as a variable; work on emotional labor points to a dichotomy in organizational work between techno-rational functions (setting budgets, creating policy, etc.) from emotional labor functions (mitigating conflict, understanding how people feel in order to create a productive environment, etc.) (Fineman 1993). Here we seek to understand how this theoretical dichotomy intersects with gender on nonprofit boards of directors. What are both the formal roles that women take up on boards as well as the informal roles? The result of this inquiry is an understanding of the types of roles that women in particular take up when working in the governance function.