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### Girls Do Sport

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# ethical space

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Ethics used to be a specialist subject situated within schools of philosophy. Today it is viewed as a language and systematic thought process available to everyone. It encompasses issues of care and trust, social responsibility and environmental concern and identifies the values necessary to balance the demands of performance today with responsibilities tomorrow.

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## Girls Do Sport: Mainstreaming the space of transformative educational contexts in Scotland

*The Girls Do Sport (GDS) project was a small-scale yet innovative pedagogical approach to journalism learning and teaching recognising the need for students to engage in professional practice in a dynamic, real-life setting. This was intended to prepare them for a career in the media while offering the opportunity to engage in meaningful discussion around gender representation. Larrondo and Rivero (2016) suggest 'gender mainstreaming' into journalism education is essential in recognising women's role in the media and responding to concerns over inequality. The GDS project aimed to go beyond this by engaging with male sports journalism students about how they view women's sport. We believe in the transformative power of active learning and treating our students as individuals – partners and potential leaders in their fields and professions – and GDS allowed students to grow in ability and confidence. It provided students with industry-relevant skills and facilitated a 'gender mainstreaming' ethos for students and teaching colleagues to challenge, enhance and develop their own professional practice and skills in this regard.*

**Keywords:** Scotland, sport, journalism, pedagogy, praxis

### Introduction

The issue of media representation and coverage of women's sport has been widely discussed and researched over the decades (e.g. Bruce 2015; Franks and O'Neill 2016; Weedon et al. 2018). The gender equality debate across

politics, culture and art is currently high on the UK media's agenda with campaigns including #MeToo focusing on the treatment of women, as well as how they are represented. All learners and communicators – students, educators, journalists – access information, research and policy contexts and undertake critique in interactive and digitally-enhanced cultures of learning across Scotland's nurseries, schools, universities and colleges (Frith and Meech 2007; Evans 2014). Our study emerges from within a largely teaching-focused 'locally serving' university experience. The learning environment across Scotland's post-1992 higher education sector is one of inclusion. Nevertheless, certain programmes remain skewed by gender, ethnicity and class. At the University of the West of Scotland (UWS), the undergraduate journalism student profile remains dominated by challenges of the largely 'local recruitment pool' with the sport focus route heavily populated by young white males with many recruited from areas of socio-economic deprivation.<sup>1</sup>

The prevalence and privileging of gendered sporting histories more generally along with a wider collective disposition to the historicising of Scottish social and cultural life is an important backdrop to how sport is experienced across sectors, geographies and identities. Scotland's broader nation ontology is complexly experienced as 'other' – positioned as a 'modern nation' variously in line with or in contention to an Anglo-British hegemony – and more recent socio-political events such as the 2014 Independence Referendum and the recent rejection of Brexit by the country's electorate have offered and consolidated Scotland's ambitions, choices and challenges as a nation, a community and a communicative entity (Williams 1976). Compare this, for example, with a quite different debate over England's national identity in the context of the Brexit controversy (see Domeneghetti 2018). Current narratives about an enhanced, social democratic, collective 'Scottishness' – championing hybrid, negotiated identity and inclusivity – is a key backdrop to young people's understanding and experiences of how sport is posited, accessed, negotiated and mediated in Scotland, not least within an educational setting.

Through a case study on the Girls Do Sport project (GDS), this account more broadly discusses how Scottish Higher Education facilitates communicative space for ethically underpinned discussions around gender equality – in particular in the area of sport – by offering an empathetic yet robust media practice learning and teach-

ing environment, not least for sports journalist students. The joint project between UWS and Scottish Women in Sport (SWIS) investigated the issue of sports journalism and gender and how a venture reporting on women's sports achievements informs and potentially impacts the narrative and perception of women's sport by male sports journalism students. Looking at communication ethics as an approach to encourage open discussion and critical analysis, the GDS project presented eleven male sports journalism students with the goal of reporting on training, performance, competition and ambition in nine sports: the same definers associated with male athletes.

The project aimed to shift the narrative story telling of women in sport from what McGregor (2000) described as a passive reporting of sportswomen as 'wives, mothers or victims' to active competitors. Teaching future sports journalists to reject the hegemonic status quo and heralding an age when athletes are reported on without resorting to gender stereotypes lay at the heart of the project's ethos. By focusing on women's sporting success, the GDS aim was to give women's sport a platform not offered by the mainstream media and generate discussion around the ethical issues surrounding the marginalisation of women's sport. As Harris and Skillen (2016: 92) note: 'In Scotland, as in many other nations across the globe, female athletes remain under-represented and marginalised within much sports media reporting.' Despite these ingrained reporting tendencies, sports journalism is being taught and experienced within new spaces and as 'informed praxis' in Scotland as elsewhere (c.f. Bernstein 2002; Mensing 2010). Our case study is offered in contribution to wider exchange, sharing and informing from local and particular levels of practice as 'best' or otherwise (Weedon et al. 2018).

This paper recognises four key arenas of ethical space: gender, sport, media education and Scottish narratives of transformation. Of particular focus is the contextual reality of teaching and learning and a related ethics of journalism as contingent on frames of collective identity of Scottishness as gendered, and defined by shifting national tropes of belonging, expression and confidence (Scottish Government 2019). To begin we examine narratives of sport in Scotland as transformative. This is followed by an account of the GDS project and a comment on the educational ethics of this Scottish journalism practice case study. We conclude with some reflections on the interface between journal-

ism and the media's transformative potential in reference to gendered praxis of both sport and nation reporting.

### **Sport in Scotland: The transformative potential**

Scotland unquestionably identifies strongly as a sporting nation and sport is an expanding and significant framework in Scotland's economy, its polity and cultural expression. Sport is crucially recognised as a key sector ameliorating social inequalities, promoting inclusion and diversity and underpinning community and individual health, wellbeing and confidences (Horrell et al. 2012) as these examples from policy narratives illustrate:

- We see a Scotland where sport is a way of life, where sport is at the heart of Scottish society and has a positive impact on you and your community.<sup>2</sup>
- Sport has played a fundamental part in the development of Scotland as a nation. It is also fun and contributes positively to the development of both mental and physical wellbeing. For our size, Scotland has a proud and long history of producing more than its fair share of world class competitors in a wide range of sports, many of whom become role models and an inspiration to us all.<sup>3</sup>

The ambitions of a fitter, healthier and successful nation intent on realising core national ambitions of sport for change (MacMillan 2017), sport for success<sup>4</sup> and sport for inclusion inform learning cultures. For example, Scottish Sports Futures (SSF) uses inclusive sport and physical activity as a tool offering young people 'transformative ways to learn about physical and mental wellbeing, goal setting, teamwork and active citizenship'. Other examples include Girls Do Sport<sup>5</sup> and Scottish Students Sport.<sup>6</sup> The example of GDS is examined and offers an insight into how education contexts provide spaces to examine, explore and express the education context of Scottish sport as both a mediated context and as lived experience (Shilbury et al. 2013). The national narratives of cultural identity, social justice, inclusion and transformation are informed by and responsive to all sector realities and sport is no exception (Bairner 1996; Haynes and Boyle 2008; Jarvie 2003a, 2003b). Furthermore, as already noted, the relationship between identity, politics and sport is an important one for Scotland yet not without considerable complexity as Whigham et al. (2019) make clear:

However, despite the widespread academic agreement that sport acts as an important

form of Scottish cultural nationalism and a medium for the expression of distinctive Scottish nationhood, the vast majority of analyses have also stressed that any attempts to conflate these expressions with support for Scottish political nationalism and/or the cause of Scottish independence are highly flawed (Bairner 1994, 1996, 2001, 2015; Jarvie 1993, 2017; Jarvie and Walker 1994; Kowalski 2004). Nonetheless, the lack of synergy between sporting and political nationalism in the Scottish context does not mean that sport has remained free of the influence of political debates and causes.

To be brief, the relationship between narratives of sporting success and wider national and, indeed, gendered confidences has already drawn informed comment (Rowe 2013). Education as both a vehicle for and an expression of success is noted. But how we tell our stories in Scotland is itself a focus of debate and the expression of variously civic nationalism, social enterprise and social justice are important aspects to what increasingly constitutes a 'Scottish' story.

It is, therefore, useful to draw in full from Ann Traver's editorial paper on ideas of sport as transformative and visionary: critiquing the privileging power of sport in Scotland as it continues to reinforce and normalise various inequities not least in terms of the production and consumption of sport in Scotland as everyday praxis within a commodified global-sport nexus (Travers 2013: 3):

Writing about social justice issues in any context can be a grind and those of us who toil in the field of critical sport studies are no exception. The racism, misogyny, heterosexism and transphobia that collide with the celebration of European diasporic morality (Lemert 2002) and the normalization of inequitable capital accumulation in much amateur and most professional sport reflect and reinforce anti-egalitarianism cultures and practices in every sphere of life. It is hard to catch a break in terms of unravelling the privileging power of Whiteness, masculinity, heterosexism, and class, and it becomes challenging at times to remember what it is about sport that many of us are so attached to.

Sport – as industry, policy, education and media – is unquestionably aligned with issues of identity (class, gendered, ethnic and national) as well as the pressures brought by demands to align across sector demands and meet within sector ambitions. In Scotland, tensions arise

between what might be considered a civic and communitarian ethos and that of individualism and the neo-liberalism frames which, in part, structure Scottish sport. And these 'are not different from those values that impinge upon and penetrate Scotland itself' (Jarvie 2013). Despite these challenges, we consider Scotland as a site for considered reflection – indeed, as a site for transformative potential – in terms of how sport is accessed and experienced. Tackling inclusion and equality in sport in Scotland has received considerable policy focus with SportScotland reviewing its equality work and priority areas under-pinned by a commitment to show 'greater leadership', to 'influence' and 'drive the changes needed' to address inequalities and ensure everyone has the opportunity to become involved in sport.

The focus on an enabling and transformative environment as underpinning Scotland's national sports narratives of inclusion and innovation is worth noting. This integrated focus is echoed in Scotland's education narratives of attainment, success and confidence. As we have already noted, telling and doing stories of inclusion and success are key mechanisms for transforming media and sport practice. Furthermore, the interface between sport and wider narratives (of culture, communication, economy and politics) in Higher Education is a key space where critiques of gendered sport experiences are rightfully worthy of their 'place', however messy – a point well made by Rowe (2012: 19-20):

Of key significance, then, is what happens to sport when it is communicated extensively, and, especially, the meanings and uses of mediated sport. This is because, as Lawrence Wenner (2007) has consistently argued, sport communication can never be contained as a 'pure' insulated practice and representation of physical play. It is always the bearer of sociocultural meaning, perpetually a vehicle for 'dirt' in the sense that, as metaphorical 'matter out of place', it is readily sprinkled around and attaches itself to a range of extra-sporting phenomena.

Within Scotland's education context the focus on successful learning typified by confidence, empathy and effective communication is scaffolded from pre-school to postgraduate experience. So too is the ambition for enhanced cultures of enabling, collaboration, leadership, well-being and resilience. What follows is a short account of the GDS project presented as a case study for shared learning reflection.

**Girls Do Sport: A case study of transformative journalism praxis**

The joint project between UWS and SWiS sought to offer a platform for women's sport by celebrating success from up-and-coming athletes to women at the top of their game. In an attempt to re-dress the balance of women's sports coverage – in particular under-representation on television – the partnership aimed to produce nine TV programmes to be streamed on the SWiS website under the umbrella title Girls Do Sport.

We offer GDS as a case study for pedagogical reflection: it represents the opportunities available and an exemplar of a catalyst for changing the narrative around reporting of women's sport through both practical journalism application and critical understanding and evaluation of media representation of women in sport (Fink 2015; McGregor 2000). This representation, widely accepted to illustrate women's portrayal, is covered in five techniques: gender marking, heterosexuality, appropriate femininity, infantilisation and downplaying sport. Using the classroom as an interventionist setting, we created an environment in which women's sport would be treated in the same way as male sport ensuring there was no 'them and us' scenario and, in doing so, facilitated an ethical space which allowed a positive bias and criticality around how women are represented by the sports media. The case study is also informed by the local and national context of Sport, Gender and Education (learning) inclusion agenda and ambitions in Scotland as outlined in brief above.

Bryman (2012: 68) maintains a case study should only be reserved for an approach in which 'the case' is the focus of interest 'in its own right' and this paper is singularly focused on the work conducted by students on this project and, therefore, all deliberations are centred on the GDS project, mission, outputs and results. The GDS approach was unique: a first in Scotland in terms of bringing together educationalists, sports governing bodies and policy makers to discuss a way forward which embraces the multi-platform digital media landscape which has offered minority sports the ability to broadcast to the world through web-streaming. The project offers a small yet valid benchmark opportunity of examining the 'gender mainstreaming' frame both within journalism education in Scotland, and as an exemplar for wider critique.

The project was embedded in a third-year module – Sports News Production – of the

UWS BA (Hons) Sports Journalism degree. The twelve students were assigned two from nine sports: athletics, boxing, roller derby, hockey, tennis, sailing, gymnastics, squash and basketball. By immersing the students in a real-life project, the innovative pedagogical approach recognised the need for students to engage in professional practice which was both transformative and dynamic. Through working with external stakeholders, students and teachers became aware of the need to offer guidance and support to each other and in doing so recognise improvement in their scholarship and professionalism (Bryman 2007). The students reported on each sport, interviewed female athletes and their governing bodies, created video packages and provided research for the television programmes recorded live with audience and studio guests. The module's learning outcomes and assessment required a portfolio of written and broadcast materials explicated through the GDS content.

The programmes were produced across the twelve weeks of module delivery and uploaded to the SWiS website. As well as providing the students with access to sport governing bodies and athletes, the project aimed to widen discussions around women's sport and media coverage and to foster new ideas for sports coverage within the predominantly male cohort (eleven male and one female student enrolled on the module). Three female BA (Hons) Sports Journalism graduates presented and there were three members of staff from the Creative Industries School and a producer who oversaw the final outputs. Communication with external stakeholders (e.g. Scottish Tennis, Scottish Athletics and Scottish Hockey) beyond SWiS were crucial in regard of professionally engaging with students, coordinating film locations and sporting events as well as supporting the practice-led research ethos informing the promoting of women's sport.

Delivering a programme on Sports Journalism in Scotland where the students are predominantly male has, unsurprisingly, meant students have largely reported on male sports and their 'sport of choice' was invariably football. Issues and debates around the area of gender in sport are studied in core modules including Sport and The Media and Global Issues in Sport looking at both the media's coverage and representation of women's sport and female athletes in a male-dominated industry of sports journalism. How this is progressively and meaningfully articulated through university journalistic practice and ethics remains a challenge but using

class-based interaction, practice and reflection we seek to offer some small insight to addressing this.

By way of illustrating the pedagogical context of the GDS experience we note here some of the outcomes of the project within the standard measures and evaluation of HE module education. So, for example the response rate to the 2017-2018 Module Evaluation Questionnaires (MEQs) was 100 per cent and this full return is suggestive of the students' own confidence and commitment to critiquing their learning experience. Students were invited to respond to the following standard indicators:

- teaching;
- learning opportunities and engagement;
- assessment and feedback;
- organisation and management;
- learning community and learning resources;
- student voice.

The MEQ results were in line with previous academic sessions as the module has always been well received. Students have been facilitated and encouraged to identify innovative approaches to telling and doing stories. In the 2017-2018 delivery with the GDS focus there were initial discussions within the class about the nature of sharing (and reporting on) women's sporting successes and the perception and profile of women's sport in Scotland generally and beyond. This learning context acted as a space for critique and an opportunity to explore bias, gendered norms and discrimination agenda. Important to note here is that the students did not negotiate in advance their learning for this module: the GDS project focus had been agreed before the start of the academic session and the students were presented with GDS as their required module learning and assessment project. Students on this module have always been directed to choose an alternative sport to football when producing content to develop their knowledge of more minority sports making GDS the perfect project. Our initial concerns (based on past teaching experiences) that male students, in particular, would question being 'forced' to cover women in sport were unfounded as the MEQ's qualitative data show:

- 'Could see myself reporting on women's sport in my career.'
- 'No difference between covering women or men's sport.'
- 'Took me out of my comfort zone and acted as a big confidence booster.'

- 'Opportunity to work on women's sport and produce your own show on the studio.'
- 'Being part of an exciting TV project which has opened up new opportunities and ideas to grasp.'
- 'Developing an understanding of sport which previously was of no interest or enjoyment to me.'

These qualitative expressions from the students reflect a broader millennial generation experience arguably less conscious of issues around gendered privileging and representation by the media as struggle and rather more as opportunity. This does not mean discussions around women's representation by the media and within sporting contexts are no longer necessary or critically informing of media teaching and learning practice, however. As well as promoting women's sport presented by women, the main aim of the project appears to have been realised in terms of offering insight into ways of changing the narrative. This approach examines whether male students reporting on female sport could discern differences in their approach or execution and the qualitative results suggest the students regard 'sport as sport' irrespective of gender.

One final observation on pedagogical outcomes from the project was the significant number of the students involved in the GDS project who chose to examine women's sport as part of their final year research project. Diverse project themes included women's sports commentary, women's sport club media and media representation of women in sport. There can be no definitive causal connection shown between the GDS experience and students' final year project selection. However, these were encouraging signs for the future of both sporting journalism discussions around gender in Scottish sport as well as the direct impact external stakeholder tie-ins can have that engage with and productively inform the experience and praxis of the media and creative industries 'classroom setting' today.

The project aimed to shift the narrative story telling of women in sport away from the passive reporting of sportswomen identified as wives and mothers to competitors. The symbiotic relationship between sport and the media has meant women in sport have been portrayed more by the way they look and their roles beyond the sporting arena. This has created the primary narrative of women's sport being on the margins of sports coverage and consumption (Messner, Dunbar and Hunt 2000). Future focus in Scotland must be to continue key work

and fully and innovatively critique the nature of this bias – not least in terms of wider Scottish social democratic agenda and a confident and informed Scottish media culture that is nevertheless responsive to addressing inclusion and bias (c.f. Golding 1994). The brief set by SWiS for the television programmes' content was to focus more specifically on sport engagement, training, competition and outcome and reject the traditional gender marking of men's sport as the event and women's as women's events. Removing these stereotype frames and limiting the possibility of comparison with male athletes provided a 'new space' whereby GDS could redress some of the imbalance in media representation and give women a platform.

While there are more women sports presenters and reporting on women's sport, in particular football, there is still work to be done in terms of good practice before the conversation about sport moves progressively beyond the inequities of gender. The GDS's mission was to put female sport at the centre of the media conversation – highlighting their achievements unadulterated by the key criticism directed at sports media of 'trivialisation and sexualisation' of female sports athletes (Trolan 2013). The project sought to re-dress some of the balance around the under-representation of women's sport by the mainstream media, not least in Scotland but also crucially actively informing the journalism education context (Mackay and Dallaire 2009). Consequently, there was positive bias generated by having female sports journalism graduates 'front' (lead and present) the shows as even when there has been a perceptible rise in women's sport by the wider mainstream broadcast media, men are often the lead chair with women as the co-host.

A key aim of the GDS project was to encourage and engage more women into sports journalism roles and to empower young women to consider a career in sports media. As the weeks unfolded in and out the classroom it became clear the GDS project was a bounded and managed space where ethical engagement with equality and diversity was implicitly embedded in a community of practice focused on women's sport in Scotland with the ambition of teaching future sports journalists to reject the hegemonic status quo and herald an age when athletes are reported on without journalists 'resorting' to gender stereotypes. Zelizer's (1993: 219) often-cited description of 'journalists as interpretative communities' would, therefore, underpin the moving beyond habit, old norms and praxis to a new and transformative landscape where both producers and consumers of sports media

are conscious and informed of past legacies and normalise inclusion and equality by default.

### Conclusion

We believe in the transformative power of active learning and engagement and treating our students as individuals – partners and potential leaders in their fields and professions – and GDS allowed students to grow in ability, confidence and provided them with industry-relevant skills and practice. As one student commented, the GDS project 'Took me out of my comfort zone and then acted as a big confidence boost.' It is our shared view education should be about changing narratives, questioning and challenging the status quo and the GDS project encapsulates these beliefs, creating assessment criteria which meets industry needs while recognising shifting journalism pedagogies (Longinow 2011). As Evans (2014: 83) argues:

... it is possible for universities to develop dispositions and qualities required of good journalists, such as curiosity, scepticism, tenacity and 'news sense' which are considered by some practitioners to be innate. Whilst some predispositions may remain immutable in individual students, data suggests it is possible to develop other dispositions and qualities through the learning process, particularly through exposure to strangeness and troublesome knowledge.

Following Travers' (2013) invitation to 'unravel' and Rowe's (2012) frame following Wenner (2007) of the need to situate sport communication as something that is messy and does matter, our discussion has highlighted how a repositioning of the context and narrative of things once wholly considered 'strange' or, indeed, 'troublesome' (women's sport) is possible in both the ethics and space of journalism practice education and as indicative of wider collective inclusionary ambitions in and for Scotland.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> UWS is widely recognised as one of Scotland's leading institutions in widening participation in higher education. In 2016/17, 25.9 per cent of Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants at UWS (1,300 students) were from the 20 per cent most deprived postcodes and 48 per cent (2,406 students) were from the 40 per cent most deprived postcodes. See [http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/outcome-agreements-1819/UWS\\_Outcome\\_Agreement\\_2018-19\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/outcome-agreements-1819/UWS_Outcome_Agreement_2018-19_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> SportScotland (2015) Raising the bar: Corporate plan 2015-2019. Available online at <https://sportsotland.org.uk/media-imported/1568147/raising-the-bar-corporate-plan-2015-19-lweb.pdf>, accessed on 19 March 2019

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Government (2014: 24) The continuing development of Scottish sport – including the impact of independence. Available online at <https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20170702013540/http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2014/05/7927/downloads>, accessed on 19 March 2019

<sup>4</sup> See for example the debate record of the legacy of

Commonwealth Games success 2014. Available online at <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/sp/?id=2018-05-01.6.0>, accessed on 5 February 2019

<sup>5</sup> Available online at <https://www.girlsdsport.co.uk/>, accessed on 10 April 2019

<sup>6</sup> Available online at <http://www.scottishstudentsport.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Scottish-Student-Sport-Strategy-1721.pdf>, accessed on 10 April 2019

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