

A Review of the Brunel International Research Network for Athlete Welfare (BIRNAW)  
International Symposium, **Brunel University, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2013**

Prior to the 8<sup>th</sup> Researching Youth Sport Annual Conference, the Brunel International Research Network for Athlete Welfare (BIRNAW) held an international symposium. BIRNAW is a group of international researchers who are working together to promote athlete welfare through research and consultancy. The network was launched in July 2010 and has continued to grow with members from all over the world each year. This network builds on the pioneering work conducted by Professor Celia Brackenridge (2001) in the Centre for Youth Sport and Athlete Welfare (CYSAW) at Brunel University that has done much to tackle abuse prevention. Dr Daniel Rhind (Brunel University) has collaborated with Brackenridge (Brackenridge, Kay & Rhind, 2012) and now coordinates the international symposium. This particular event was held at Brunel University in the Heinz Wolf Building, comprising of many key international researchers and practitioners in the field of sport (from Norway, Canada, Belgium, USA and Denmark) who presented and shared their wisdom and expertise.

Dr Daniel Rhind opened the symposium with an enthusiastic introduction, during which he showed a DVD (Owton, 2013) entitled: Sexual abuse in sport. His introduction set the tone of the day, whereby he encouraged us to walk away from the event with two things that we were going to action that had inspired us. The first stimulating and well-known speakers included Professor Kari Fasting (Norwegian Institute of Sport) and Professor Celia Brackenridge, both of which are pioneers, researching and making significant differences in the field of child protection and athlete welfare in different parts of the world. Kari's focus was on collaborative research: challenges and pitfalls across cultures. Her workshop engaged us with discussions of the issues of transferability when working across cultures. Celia's workshop was entitled: Dancing with the devil: the politics of working with sport organisations. During her workshop she drew from nearly 30 years of experience in the field, to pinpoint specific research protocols that should be addressed (e.g. a clear research brief, a steering group, anticipating disclosure, intellectual property, sticking to deadlines) when doing research for sporting organisations. She also shared her C.A.R.E rule outlining what her roles involves:

Consultancy: 30%

Advocacy: 30%

Research: 30%

Embargo: 10%

These workshops enabled us to discuss these aspects through our own current involvement in sport research and applied work in sport, and were a good springboard into the presentations that followed.

Elaine Cook (Civic Sport Group, Canada) presented: Cultural norms in youth sport: what are they and how do we know? Then a new energetic researcher, Emma Kavanagh, was accompanied by Dr Ian Jones from Bournemouth University and presented research on: #cyberviolence: developing a typology for understanding virtual maltreatment in sport. They showed some particularly shocking examples of abuse through twitter. We also had expertise from various stakeholders and on the legal implications in the field of child protection in sport. For example, Professor Steve Greenfield presented work on: Concerns about litigation within youth sport, and Sally Proudlove, from the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU), presented: Enhancing parental behaviour in youth sport and guided us towards various useful videos available online. In particular, she selected a video called 'My Magic Sports Kit' with an underlying strong and evocative message to parents to allow children to enjoy their sport (Available: <https://thecpsu.org.uk/resource-library/2013/my-magic-sports-kit/>).

Dr Misia Gervis (Brunel University) presented: Developing mental toughness or emotional abuse? Her research showed that emotional abuse was evident in coaches' behaviours who try to develop mental toughness. She echoed similar thoughts (and evidence grounded in her research) that are voiced by other sports psychologists who equally share suspicions of the notions of mental toughness in sport (see Gilbourne & Anderson, 2011). Dr Abbe Brady (Bournemouth University) was accompanied by Emma Kavanagh and presented: A framework for humanisation and dehumanization: exploring its potential for research and practices within athlete welfare. Specifically, they drew from work by Les Todres (Galvin & Todres, 2013) called the lifeworld approach. They explained the process (and the language) of how this could be employed when working with athletes. Dr Dean Ravizza (Salisbury

University) presented his extensive work: Protecting children through sport in Uganda and Dr Mike Hartill (Edge Hill University), who is known for his work on sexually abused male child athletes (Hartill, 2012) shared the large and expansive EU project which is due to start soon: Sport respects your rights. Dr Ashley Stirling (University of Toronto), known for her work on maltreatment in sport (Stirling, 2009), presented: Empower + creating positive and healthy sport experiences: A coach education module written to safeguard athletes from abuse and harassment in sport. She drew from Kolb's learning cycle to explain how this informed the coach education module that she developed. Dr Gretchen Kerr (University of Toronto) presented: Safeguarding youth in sport: Lessons learned from the education sector and Tine Vertommen (University Forensic Centre, Belgium) presented her work entitled: Sport, a game with boundaries: Handling sexually transgressive behaviour via the flag system. The flag system was handed out to us during the presentation and we were able to engage in the examples; the examples tested our own knowledge of what was deemed appropriate behaviour in sport.

Notably, there was quite a presence from Canada at the symposium. Dr Ashley Stirling expressed her hope in the UK system and trusted that Canada would soon follow suit. Indeed, another well-known researcher in the field of child protection in sport was Professor Sandra Kirby (Kirby, Greaves, & Hankivsky, 2000) from the University of Winnipeg, Canada. Her presentation was entitled: Sport Campaign by the Canadian Centre for child protection. Whilst outlining the state of affairs in Canada, interestingly, she highlighted that there might be a relationship between ADHD and PTSD and posed the question: Is ADHD sometimes PTSD? This is a question that has kept my brain ticking...

The closing of the day involved Dr Daniel Rhind suggesting ways for us to collaborate, and involved the launching of the Celia Brackenridge Collection: Research and advocacy archive 1974-2013. The day's symposium consisted of talks from an array of experienced researchers, practitioners, and stakeholders and much of the work shared was very well received and supported by those working in the field of child protection in sport. The inspiring and stimulating day highlighted and addressed very serious issues, with much of the research showing how it had been able to 'make a difference'. Nonetheless, there is still much more to do, in both research and applied fields in sport, and everyone agreed to work

towards continuing to do so. It was an exceptionally valuable experience for me and I look forward to seeing what progress in the future of such valuable work.

## References

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