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WOMEN AND CHILDREN FIRST? CHILD ABUSE AND CHILD PROTECTION IN SPORT

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Abstract:

Child welfare and women's rights both feature prominently in contemporary debates on equal rights. Whereas gender equity has been a policy objective for the past thirty years in sport organizations, however, child abuse and protection have only recently emerged as a sport ethics issues. Arguably, child protection has now leapfrogged over gender equity as a policy priority. The chapter opens with a discussion of the role of children in sport in relation to opposing ideologies of social control and personal freedom, and outlines the development of child protection and gender equity initiatives in sport, including the establishment of the not-for-profit Women's Sports Foundation (UK) and the first national women in sport policy in England, and of a dedicated Sport England/NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU). The shift in theoretical focus from 'women' to 'gender' has been accompanied by a widening of the general social policy attention away from solely heterosexual interests. Sport organisations have responded comparatively slowly to the new rights agenda for gay men, lesbians, bisexual and transgendered people but it is argued here that the arrival of the CPSU not only gave huge impetus to the institutionalisation of child protection in sport but also forced sports bodies to address ethics and equity agendas more forcibly than they had done before. In this way, the issue of child protection has acted as a kind of ethical Trojan horse in sport. The paradox of child protection in sport, however, is that it has simultaneously drawn public attention to issues of abuse and exploitation and deflected attention away from the specific issue of women's rights in sport.

Keywords:

Sport, child abuse, child protection, gender equity, women's rights



Child welfare and women's rights both feature prominently in contemporary debates on equal rights. Efforts to combat trafficking and domestic violence, for example, have included adult women *and* children since age *per se* is not a defence against such forms of exploitation. Whereas gender equity has been a policy objective for the past thirty years in sport organizations, child protection has only recently emerged as a sport ethics issue, following several public scandals in swimming and other sports in the early 1990s.¹ The response of the state to concerns about child abuse in sport was initially slow but gathered momentum as the result of grassroots pressure and, arguably, child protection has now leapfrogged over gender equity as a policy priority. In this chapter, I will outline how child protection initiatives in England have developed since those early scandals and raise some questions about whether the focus on the children's rights agenda in sport has helped or hindered the development of gender equity and women's rights in sport.

The chapter opens with a discussion of the role of children in sport in relation to opposing ideologies of social control and personal freedom. It then examines the place of women in English sports policy and practice, revisiting some of the well-known feminist critiques of sport. Once child abuse in sport had been recognised, the institutionalisation of child protection occurred relatively fast, with a dedicated Child Protection in Sport Unit being established jointly by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) and Sport England in 2001. This development is described and the benefits and limitations of it are assessed and placed in a global context. The shift in theoretical focus from 'women' to 'gender' has been accompanied by a widening of the general social policy focus away from solely heterosexual interests to include the rights



of gay men, lesbians, bisexual and transgender people. It is argued here that this shift has not yet occurred in sport policy or practice because of the inherent conservatism of the institution and its continued political marginalisation. Child protection has acted as a kind of Trojan horse, wheeled into the centre of sports politics more successfully than women's rights (and gender equity) ever could be and, at the same time, opening up the ethics agenda more widely than ever before. The paradox of child protection, laid out in this chapter, is that it has simultaneously drawn public attention to issues of abuse and exploitation in sport *and* deflected attention away from the specific issue of women's rights in sport.

Children in sport

Sport has always been riven with class, gender, race and other social divisions. It is essentially a competitive activity and the striving for supremacy has masked these divisions in a false contest of assumed equals and so-called level playing fields.² As a social institution, sport shares many of its basic values with the Christian church. Indeed, in the nineteenth century 'muscular Christianity', whereby missionaries carried both bibles and footballs, helped to disseminate the virtues of both religion and sport.³ Sport was also used at that time in public schools and corrective institutions for children as part of the disciplinary practices that were consonant with the Victorian ideal of 'spare the rod and spoil the child'.

Parton argues that children were constructed by the Victorian Poor Laws as a delinquent threat since their destitute status rendered them social outcasts.⁴ It was not until the 1980s, when according to Franklin children's rights 'came of age', that legislation in Britain ceased to objectify the child and instead created the 'child-as-



subject', with the right for children to comment on their own lives.⁵ The 1989 United Nations (UN) Children's Charter was an international expression of the rights of the child, albeit it within a monocultural context.⁶ Whilst this has been adopted across almost all member nations, barring the United States and Somalia, its impact on practice has been variable.⁷ Lyon and Parton, for example, argue that the child is now legally defined in order to allow arms-length social and political control over the family.⁸ Since the mid-1980s, children have assumed more visibility in English society as their rights as citizens have come to be acknowledged. The citizenship status of the child, however, is still not fully embedded in all spheres of public life, nor in many private settings, since their capability as decision-makers is not universally accepted. In sport, for example, it is still rare to find children consulted or represented in the decision-making process, even in matters of direct concern to them.

The cultural construction of childhood varies between nations and because there is no universally accepted delineation between 'adulthood' and 'childhood', there are also anomalies and disparities between the rights and responsibilities accruing to these statuses. Variations in the age threshold for criminality, smoking, marriage, sexual relations, voting and gun use are just some illustrations of the age-related confusion of rights. Even within the sport community, age and rights are further confounded because 'junior' and 'senior' age definitions vary between sports. Adult athletes are frequently treated like children, with their freedom to socialise, eat, drink and travel curtailed by training regimes and coaches. At the same time, talented child athletes are frequently defined as adults, in relation to the expectations placed upon them to function and



perform at high level. It is therefore unsurprising that there is confusion about both moral and sexual boundaries in sport.

There has been a long association between sport/body and mind, including the adoption of sport within the nineteenth public school system as a mechanism of social control (*mens sana in corpore sano*). The discipline of sport was thus an ideological means to discipline the mind and heart. Ironically, as the child/athlete has been fragmented into her physiological, biomechanical and psychological self through sport science, so her moral status and its integrated personhood have often been lost. Sport science has perhaps been working, unwittingly, in opposition to the general children's rights movement, representing the child as raw material for performance enhancement.⁹ Whereas early twentieth century physical education focused on development *through* the physical, the most recent sport science credo - Long Term Athlete Development - effectively excludes any concern for individual moral reasoning or political autonomy in the developing athlete as a performance machine.¹⁰ The suppression of individual autonomy through coaching practice maintains the status of the coach-as-controller. Indeed, in his analysis of child labour in relation to labour laws Donnelly uncovered exploitative practices in sport that would never be tolerated in educational or employment settings.¹¹ Because of the laxity with which children's rights have been applied in sport, various other types of exploitation, such as sexual abuse, have been facilitated.

Women in sport

The history of women's struggles for recognition in sport has been fully and convincingly recorded by feminist sport historians and sociologists.¹² Whilst such authors have now corrected the record of women's invisibility in sport, they have not yet



succeeded in helping to transform the institutions that perpetrate exclusionary sporting practices. In England, there was no policy on women and sport until 1993 and even then the policy was the first ever to be rejected by the ruling Council when it was first presented for approval.¹³ Once accepted, and despite its relatively liberal tone, the policy became one of the foundation stones for international advances, leading to the Brighton Declaration in 1994.¹⁴ This Declaration is a ten point set of principles for women's sport which emanated from the 1994 Brighton international conference on women and sport. It addresses:

- Equity and equality in society and sport
- Facilities
- School and junior sport
- Developing participation
- High performance sport
- Leadership in sport
- Education, training and development
- Sports information and research
- Resources
- Domestic and international competition

The Brighton conference was followed by world congresses of women and sport in Namibia and Montreal at which international progress on the endorsement of the original declaration by government and non-government bodies was reported.¹⁵

Notwithstanding the significance of achieving an international template for women's sports development, critics of the Declaration argue that it, along with a number of parallel organizational and pressure group initiatives for women's sport, merely reflect, defer to and therefore perpetuate, a patriarchal sporting system.¹⁶ In its attempts to move from exclusion (not being allowed to play), to inclusion (being allowed to play but have no power), to equity (playing with parity), to transformation (humanising the structures and practices of sport) I would argue that British women's sport has become stuck somewhere between inclusion and equity.¹⁷

Although England and the other 'home countries' of the UK each developed sport policies for women and girls they left the patriarchal sub-structure of sport intact. A



couple of Regional Sports Council and Standing Conferences of Sport were brave enough to mention sexuality in their own policy documents but, in essence, policy formulations for women's sport stalled. This is because they were seen, in and of themselves, as radical within the institution of sport yet were hopelessly behind the times when measured against wider political and feminist developments. In short, women in sport were seen as relevant neither to sport (which was and is male) or to women (whose conservatives eschewed it as unfeminine and whose radicals eschewed it as anti-feminist).

Birrell and Theberge summarised the main aspects of cultural struggle facing women in sport in fairly familiar ways, as *social justice* issues (adapted below):¹⁸

- patriarchal privilege (sexism and male violence)
- unrestricted capital accumulation (classism)
- white skin privilege (racism and sectarianism)
- compulsory heterosexuality (homophobia)
- reproduction of privilege (social exclusion)

While ever women working within the sport community failed to connect with these wider social justice concerns then it is no wonder that their efforts for recognition and status went largely unrewarded. Heterosexuality is still an 'organising principle' in sport with sex segregation embedded in its constitutive systems and in the ideological and cultural domination enjoyed by heterosexual men.¹⁹ In recognition of this, a number of pro-feminists (male supporters of critical feminist analysis of sport) have attempted to reformulate our understanding of the gender order in sport and to draw attention to the cultural constructions of gender and sexuality that afford privilege to males but that *can* be reconstructed to challenge such privilege.²⁰ The politicisation of the female athlete has also been an ongoing project for radical feminist critics of sport.²¹ According to such critiques, only by challenging the depoliticisation that appears to be a by-product of the coaching process *and* by emphasizing the individual agency of the female athlete will



women's sport ever succeed in defining its own future. Importantly, it was these feminist researcher-advocates who prepared the way for pro-feminist men to receive acclaim for their 'gender work' in sport. What might subsequently have been lost in the process of acknowledging 'gender' in sport is the value of the pioneering work on 'women'. It is arguable whether the sudden rise of child abuse and protection up the sport policy agenda has helped or hindered the process of women's recognition and representation in sport. It is to this issue that we now turn.

Child abuse and protection in sport

The sexual exploitation of children has been one of the more successful radicalising issues in sport. Sexual exploitation and abuse are not, of course, new dangers in western society but they are relatively new to the sport community which has previously preferred to see sport as something of a moral oasis. Interestingly, the 'moral panic' generated by the issue is closely linked to homophobic fears about the breakdown of normative (that is heterosexual) morality and the nuclear family.²²

The traditional autonomy of the voluntary sport sector has effectively shielded it from external scrutiny and from the regulatory systems that characterise workplace industrial labour relations. Even major human rights legislation on behalf of children has yet to make an impact on certain exploitative sporting practices.²³ The permissive context of child exploitation - whether sexual, physical or emotional - in sport, arises from the symbolic separation of sport from social and legal regulation. Individual abuses take place within a network of personal and organisational relationships that are historically resistant to outside interference. These networks collectively place athletes, whether



children *or* adults, in an exploitative relation to authority figures and thus increase their susceptibility to exploitation.

David describes 1989 as a

... crucial benchmark in the field of child protection as it marks the year the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. For the first time ever, a legally binding international treaty recognized, to persons under 18 years of age, a full set of human rights ... [and] moved child protection from the traditional welfare approach to a more modern and dynamic one, the rights-based approach.²⁴

Notwithstanding the legislative force of the UN Declaration, David also suggests that “the promotion and protection of the human rights of young athletes in the context of competitive sport has received almost no recognition and has rarely been discussed...”.²⁵

Whilst recognizing the undoubted potential benefits of sport for children, in terms of health, well-being and self-determination, David identifies five main situations that have the potential to threaten the physical and mental integrity of child athletes: involvement in early intensive training; sexual abuse and violence; doping; economic exploitation through the transfer market and trafficking; and limitations on access to education.²⁶

Prior to the UN Declaration, throughout the 1980s, there was increasing public awareness of the problem of child abuse in UK society resulting from a number of serious disclosures and legal cases. A national telephone help line, the charity-funded ChildLine, was first established in 1986 and subsequently merged with the NSPCC’s own helpline service. In sport, some work on codes of ethics and conduct was done in the mid-1980s.²⁷ But child protection was not named as an issue in UK sport until the late 1980s.²⁸ Even by the early 1990s, there had been virtually no child protection work in UK sport organizations, and there was widespread denial of the issue. The arrest in 1993



of a former British Olympic swimming coach first brought child protection to the attention of sportspeople in a dramatic way. Paul Hickson was eventually convicted in 1995 for sexual assaults against teenage swimmers in his care over about a twenty-year period. His prison sentence - of seventeen years - was the longest ever sentence for rape imposed in an English court at that time (subsequently a sentence of twenty years was passed for sexual assaults by a man in the context of equestrian sport). What became known as 'the Hickson case' was a defining moment in the history of sexual exploitation in sport.

The moral panic around sexual exploitation in sport served to expose the processes of social control in sport. Many of those at the top of sporting organizations ridiculed allegations, claiming that cases of abuse were 'just a one-off' or suggesting that this was a problem of society and not one that sport itself could address.²⁹ Over a two or three year period during the mid 1990s, however, the fear of paedophile infiltration of sport grew to such an extent in Britain that many local government departments and governing bodies of sport began to develop their own, separate policy initiatives, duplicating both effort and resources. After several years of upward pressure on government sport authorities by those with little power, such as sports development officers, parents and club officials, a National Child Protection in Sport Task Force was convened by Sport England in 1999.³⁰ (At that time only about half of the governing bodies of sport that received government grants had in place a CP policy.)³¹ This represented a major breakthrough in the strategic efforts to deal with sexual and other forms of exploitation in sport. It led to a jointly-funded NSPCC/Sport England Child Protection in Sport Unit, which began work in January 2001 on implementing the Task



Force Action Plan.³² The primary functions of the CPSU, which is based at the NSPCC's National Training Centre in Leicester, are to:

- act as one-stop-shop for governing bodies
- develop policy and procedures
- operate a 24 hour helpline
- advise sport organisations on case management
- run a research group
- liaise with Government
- set national child protection standards together with Sport England
- assist funded sports to develop child protection policies and Action Plans
- accredit and quality assure training

The Unit addressed a number of these strategic priorities within its first year of operation including: the establishment of policy standards for sport bodies, the establishment of working groups for education and training, research and policy and functional relationships with a wide range of sports clubs, federal bodies and individual national governing bodies of sport.³³

A crucial stage in the acceptance of child abuse as a legitimate concern for sport was when 'paedophiles' - external to the sport system - were defined as the *cause* of the problem. Illicit (predominantly heterosexual) sexual relationships between under-age athletes and authority figures (mainly male coaches) had gone on for years and had been tacitly condoned but the moment 'the paedophile' became labelled as the folk devil, a perfect scapegoat was offered to members of sport organizations who then rallied together to express their growing concern about the external threat of sexual exploitation to children.³⁴ For some women who had observed first hand their past discriminations and sexual excesses against female athletes this hypocrisy was hard to bear.

[Insert Fig. 1 about here]



In addition to the false externalization of abuse threats, sometimes described as the ‘othering’ of the abuser, another consequence of the moral panic surrounding abuse in sport has been a preoccupation amongst some sport leaders with the possibility of so-called false accusations or false allegations against them or their colleagues.³⁵ The rights of the ‘professional’ thus appear to have been elevated over those of the child, despite very little empirical evidence to substantiate such concerns. One framework for understanding the dynamics of child protection in sport is offered in Figure 1.³⁶ This framework sets out four dimensions of protection that sport leaders or professionals should attend to in relation to child abuse:

1. **Protecting the athlete from others:** that is, recognising and referring anyone who has been subjected to abuse or sexual misconduct by someone else, whether *inside* sport (by another staff member or athlete) or *outside* sport (by someone in the family or peer group);
2. **Protecting the athlete from oneself:** that is, observing and encouraging good practice when working with athletes in order to avoid perpetrating abuse;
3. **Protecting oneself from the athlete or others:** that is, taking precautions to avoid false allegations against oneself by athletes or their peers or families;
4. **Protecting one’s profession:** that is, safeguarding the good name and integrity of sport, coaching, sport science and management.

This depiction of four dimensions of protection has a number of potential benefits. For example, as empirical evidence is gathered to support or refute the weight of concerns along each dimension, the model could be used to re-balance policies and practices for child protection in sport. In addition, it should assist with clarifying the



interests of the key stakeholders in a way that helps to: allay fears (of adults concerned about false allegations); focus the attention of leaders in sport on their referral responsibilities (abuses perpetrated outside sport); emphasize good practice (in coaching, teaching, sport science and so on) as a protective measure; and, most importantly, set protection within the broad context of sport ethics. There are examples of interventions in sport relating to all four dimensions, largely promulgated through education and training workshops from Sportscoach UK, the NSPCC and some of the major governing bodies of sport, including The Football Association. Since April 2001, all Exchequer-funded governing bodies of sport in England have been required to have in place a child protection action plan in order to qualify for grant aid.³⁷ This single change, alone, has had a major positive impact on the uptake of protective interventions. It has forced governing bodies of sport to engage with child protection with an intensity that some have found very challenging indeed. However, it has also helped to take many sport administrators through the ‘denial barrier’ that previously prevented them from accepting the possibility of child abuse in their sports.

Similar initiatives in sport are not easy to find outside the UK, although in Canada, where social welfare objectives in sport have always been comparatively strongly supported by state agencies, there are a number of local and national initiatives to support zero-tolerance towards harassment in sport and where the national equivalent of the UK’s Women’s Sports Foundation, the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women in Sport and Recreation (CAAWS), developed its harassment policies as long ago as 1994.³⁸ Interestingly, the Canadian Red Cross also published one of the first advice and procedures documents on child protection.³⁹ In Australia, a series of policy



documents on harassment-free sport was published in 1998 and has recently been followed by more recent policy directives on child protection.⁴⁰ European attitudes towards gender equity are much more advanced than those elsewhere, with state involvement in gender equity work since the 1980s and a long-standing European Women and Sport Working Group representing most of the established and some of the emerging European nations.⁴¹ The same cannot be said of child protection in sport. Here, the Council of Europe began to take an interest in 1997 through a national ‘survey’ (in reality, a set of self-report items from member states). Desk studies of sexual harassment of women and children in sport were commissioned by the Council of Europe in 1998 and 1999 and followed by the adoption of a directive at a meeting of European Ministers for Sport in Bratislava.⁴² A SPRINT seminar with 27 member states present was held in Helsinki in 2001 that attempted to cover issues of welfare and protection for both women and children.⁴³ The Council of Europe has acted more quickly on this issue than its counterparts in the European Parliament. Some Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) attended a reception in Brussels in May 2002 with staff from the NSPCC and the Child Protection in Sport Task Force, as a result of which child protection was proposed as a theme for the forthcoming ‘Year of Education Through Sport’ in 2004.⁴⁴ The International Olympic Committee, whilst adopting a set of proposals on harassment at its Paris conference on Women and Sport in March 2000, has not addressed child protection per se, perhaps overlooking the fact that some Olympic performers fall within the legal jurisdiction of ‘child’ in some countries.⁴⁵



Concern for the welfare of children and young people in sport is gradually surfacing in some non-European countries, for example through research work in Japan, but there has not yet been a coordinated effort to collate this work globally.⁴⁶

Gender equity in sport

Sport has been described as a prime site for the (re)production of heterosexual masculinity by many eminent feminists and pro-feminists.⁴⁷ The segregation of sports on grounds of sex is reinforced by powerful ideological and political mechanisms. The heterosexual imperative privileges particular expressions of masculinity above others and above all types of femininity, thus perpetuating the social domination of particular kinds of men and particular expressions of masculinity. However, in recognition of the pointlessness of a hierarchy of equalities (such as white, male, heterosexual over black, female, disabled) theorisation has recently shifted away from biologically determined differences to focus on culturally diverse and relational conceptions of gender and sexualities.

Alongside the shift in theoretical focus from 'women' to 'gender', social policy is also shifting to account for much more differentiated conceptions of sexual and gender identity (gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered) than were recognised under hegemonic heterosexuality. It is argued here, however, that this shift has not yet occurred in sport policy or practice because of the inherent conservatism of the institution towards matters of sex and gender and its continued political marginalisation.⁴⁸ Mainly driven by employment and legal concerns, active consideration is being given to the establishment in the UK of a single equalities body to replace the different commissions (such as the



Equal Opportunities Commission, Commission for Racial Equality and so on). In Ireland and Northern Ireland this has already happened with the setting up of the Equality Authority and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland respectively. The intention of such new bodies is to allow for multiple discriminations to be more effectively addressed and for more prominence to be given to previously marginalised equality 'strands'. The proposals set out six strands for a new UK body: age, disability, gender, race, religion and sexual orientation.⁴⁹ Sport England lists only three strands (or 'target groups' as it describes them) in its equity guidelines – "ethnic minority communities, people with disabilities, women" but it does acknowledge that "... inequality manifests itself in many ways and that these are not the only sectors of the population that are excluded."⁵⁰ Given the non-statutory status of sport and leisure and the private and voluntary settings of most sport clubs, it might seem impossible that sport could be brought within the spirit of these organisational changes. As with their child protection advocacy, however, the Irish have already led the way by stipulating compliance conditions for private sports clubs.⁵¹

Both sexuality and gender have been differently constructed for women and for men, with sports for men being congruent with masculinity and heterosexuality but sports for women being dissonant with both femininity and heterosexuality.⁵² Almost thirty years after Felshin first wrote about the female 'apologetic' in sport, women athletes still adopt overtly feminine clothing, jewellery or other trappings of traditional heterosexuality in order to rebut the threat to their (hetero)sexual identity posed by their participation in sport.⁵³



The project of maintaining the privileges of heterosexual masculinity in and through sport has been fiercely pursued by those who perceive equity as a zero-sum game, in other words white, middle class men who fear losing their power if diversity becomes an imperative for sport. Diversity has many faces but, for these privileged males, is most powerfully repelled if it comes in the form of women gaining prominence in sport, the exposure of homosexuality in sport, or by individual men's own failure to live up to the heterosexual masculine standard. The ideological challenges to men's dominance are thus managed through men's homophobic responses. In this way, as Griffin has demonstrated, all women in sport become labelled (and vilified) as lesbian, regardless of their sexual orientations and 'out' gay males in sport are deemed the most threatening of all since they embody athleticism yet express homosexuality.⁵⁴ They therefore present a direct challenge to the heterosexual imperative.

Individual and collective violence (through discrimination, harassment or abuse) constitutes one response to these perceived threats. The heterosexual imperative ensures that, even when men are absent, women in sport are under constant surveillance, with their adherence to social expectations being monitored. Dress, language, gestures and interpersonal behaviour are all targets for subordination and social control. If women choose to resist such control they hazard their access to competitive opportunities, funds or facilities since men control the financial and political infrastructure of sport.⁵⁵

Stereotypical notions of masculine and feminine have been traditionally split along the gender divide. More recently, however, queer theorists have examined the false binaries that characterise sport ideology, the male-female, gay-straight, win-loss relations of sporting practice. In general, however, the material social relations of sport are still far



behind queer theorists' analysis and politics.' The shift from 'sex' into 'gender' as a focus for theoretical and political debate, whilst giving a platform for more socially inclusive sports policy across *all* equity strands, has also masked lack of progress (and some would even argue regression) in *women's* rights. It is ironic, therefore, that the impetus for child protection in sport has gained in strength while that for women's rights has declined. For example, in 2001-02 a grant of £130k, plus a later top up of £15k, to the Women's Sports Foundation, the voluntary body that has promoted opportunities for women and girls in sport since 1984 "...appear(ed) to be the total amount of Exchequer funding committed by government (directly or through Sport England) to women's sport", less than the turnover of the CPSU in only its first year of operation.⁵⁶

Interestingly, in its annual accounts, Sport England lists a total contribution of £1,720k to 'Sports equity and social inclusion' but this is not disaggregated.⁵⁷ Further, Bennett reports that the English Federation for Disability Sport applied successfully to the TSB Bank Communities Fund but an application from the WSF failed with the organization being told that women were "too mainstream".⁵⁸

The relative deceleration of women's rights in sport, compared with the acceleration of child protection, may be due to the widely-publicised backlash against feminism and the women's movement.⁵⁹ The backlash argument is that equal rights are now perceived as a 1970s and 1980s issue and that equality is no longer a concern for civil society which is characterised by diversity, plurality, choice and contingency in gender relations. Whether an equivalent backlash will occur in child protection is an interesting question. Finkelhor's contribution to this debate suggests that there will be no



decline in public interest in child abuse and protection since its moral force is so powerful and enduring.⁶⁰

Conclusions

If sexual exploitation is only deemed to be problematic when perpetrated against children, then there is a hypocritical distortion of rights at work in sport. The phrase ‘child sexual abuse’ has been proven to be an effective motivational device with sport practitioner audiences who have, in contrast, shown limited concern about ‘sex discrimination’ or even ‘sexual harassment’. Equally, the use of the word ‘child’ instead of ‘athlete’ could be said to have detracted from wider concerns about athlete empowerment for *all* ages.

A rights perspective in sport could have a significant beneficial impact on sporting practices. For example, it could lead to the empowerment of individual athletes, better representation, reductions in their hours of training, increases in financial rewards and insurance protection, and better provision for their long term education and career planning. But a rights perspective that perpetuates a hierarchy of (in)equalities will do little to advance the cause of women in sport.

Child abuse has risen to consciousness within UK sport over a relatively short and inglorious few years. No advocate of children’s rights could argue against the advances in policy and practice that have accompanied this development, and the transformative effect that it has had on ethical reflection in sport. But it is important to recognize that a false hierarchy of inequalities favours nobody in the end. The relatively narrow focus of the CPSU on children, defined as under 18 years old, draws attention and resources away



from those over that age boundary, including many people with disabilities and, especially, adult women in sport. Child abuse is shocking and degrading and child protection, whether in sport or elsewhere, should be the right of every child. It may be too early to tell, however, whether child protection has hi-jacked sport as a strategic imperative but it certainly seems to have gained a firm footing in the UK, if not global, sport agenda.

Policies for women and sport, both in the UK and in Europe more generally, have not been as effective as they could have been because of apathy towards gender equity. Child sexual abuse, on the other hand, grabbed the media headlines in the UK and has the potential to open up debate on related rights issues across the equality 'strands'. As the rise and rise of sports ethics continues in response to the many violations apparent in modern sport (doping, fraud, exploitation, violence and others) it will be interesting to observe whether 'gender equity' succeeds where 'women in sport' failed. Child protection may turn out to be the lever for change that has eluded those groups seeking to promote women's rights in sport. At the same time it might deflect both attention and resources away from women's sport.

NOTES

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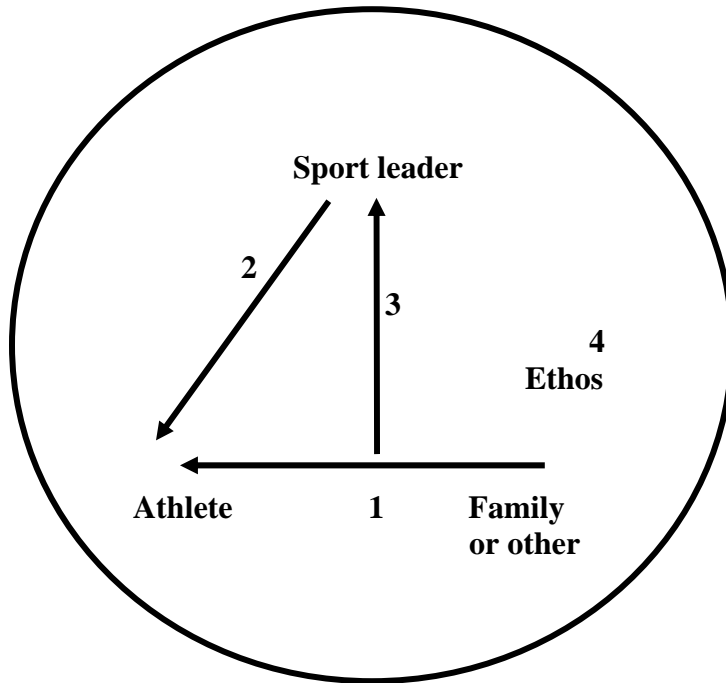
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Figure 1 Four dimensions of protection in sport



Where:

- Sport leader = the athlete's coach, teacher, physio or other authority figure
- Athlete = athlete in dependent relationship to sport leader/professional
- Family or other = primary carers, siblings, peer coaches and peer athletes

