

BRITISH COUNCIL – ETG CONFERENCE - Adding value for our clients

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International experience counts – Celia Brackenridge

Thank you very much for the honour of your invitation. Before telling you a little about my work, my life and my international links let me ask you a question.

Is sport serious or trivial?

In 1972 at the Munich Olympics 11 Israeli athletes were gunned down by terrorists. The next day the games continued. Celebrated journalist High McIlvanny wrote that it was like holding “**a circus in a graveyard**” ... If you had been the President of the IOC at that time, would you have suspended the Games or carried on?

I am here today because of almost 30 years of experience in the world of sport, from all angles – as a former international competitor and Captain of England and Great Britain women’s lacrosse teams, an international coach and referee, a PE teacher, then College and University lecturer ... but, I guess, most of all because I now work in the field of **child abuse and protection in sport**. This may seem like a bizarre topic but it is one of growing importance in the UK and Europe and one which poses many challenges to the international sporting community.

As I wander through a personal story I will try to show you how the work that you are doing – day in, day out – has helped me both directly and indirectly.

- **Who am I?**
- **What do I do?**
- **How did I get here?**
- **How does your work count?**

Who am I?

Since January of this year I have run my own company, specialising in research-based consultancy in sport and leisure. I can no longer run or play squash as my joints have been destroyed by sport. But as my body has declined my brain has become increasingly active as I ponder the purpose of sport in the world today.

What do I do?

- Supervise PhDs and occasional teaching
- Research for sport organisations
- 5 year project for The FA monitoring impact of child protection in football
- Advocacy, activism and committee work

How did I get here?

PE teacher - at College in late 60s, missing out on an entire generation of student riots, political activism, the anti-Vietnam movement, the beginnings of feminism

Being an **international athlete forced me to look at the world differently** and to become **increasingly aware of inequality**... I visited other countries, mostly privileged, but also saw a lot of cultural divergence even in the relatively affluent world of my sport – lacrosse... in the USA we stayed in the best houses and saw high society... in Australia we stayed on farms with toilets at the end of the garden. En route to Australia we saw, albeit briefly, the worst of poverty in Bombay and the opulence of Bahrain. Even within the United States, I asked my hostess in Philadelphia to take me to the ghetto – she agreed provided we rolled up the car windows and did not stop ... I realised then that there the having the same language as the UK did not mean the US had the same culture.

By the early 1980s I was captain of both the England and Great Britain teams, with over 50s international ‘caps’ (we don’t say capped but knickered!) I had begun to read critical sport sociology for my lecturing job – picking up again a passion for social science that I’d developed at university... I began to read novels from the women’s movement – *The Bleeding Heart, The Women’s Room, Flying*... I met with female colleagues who been feminists and male colleagues who had been Marxists... I read Jean Marie Brohm’s and Bero Rigauer’s crushing critiques of modern capitalist sport ... and through all this I gradually pieced together an analysis of the world that had passed me by in the 70s and a realisation that .

- **Feminism = a package deal**
- **Race, poverty, violence, class oppression**

Founder member of the Women’s Sports Foundation and, later, WomenSport International

Playing sport led directly into my international contacts – attended conferences, met with like-minded people – developed collaborations – served together on advocacy groups

...
international contacts
feminist awareness and activism
international research
policy change

Sex discrimination – harassment – abuse: In the mid 1980’s awareness of **discrimination** led me to look at harassment and a small step from there took me to research on abuse. Indifference, indignance and widespread denial meant that I had an uphill battle to persuade British sport organisations that there was an important issue here. Only by working with colleagues overseas was I able, eventually, to chip away at the establishment to the point that they realised that something had to be done. Work with colleagues in Canada, The Netherlands, Denmark and Australia has helped to build a picture of the extent and seriousness of abuse in exploitation ... this has, at last, led to the setting up of a dedicated Child Protection in Sport Unit inside the NSPCC, co-funded by them and the UK Government (through Sport England). Now, every exchequer-funded

sport organisation has to have in place a child protection action plan before the money is released. This single change, alone, has had more impact on the climate of protection in sport than all the work of the previous 15 years. MEPS have been lobbied about using child protection as a theme in the next year's Year of education Through Sport.

How does your work count?

My most successful collaboration has been with a colleague in Oslo ... Professor Kari fasting at the Norwegian university of Sport and PE. Together we have conducted large study of sexual harassment among Norway's elite female athlete population, from which we have given papers in Sweden, the US, Canada, Australia, Hungary, and many other places ... from a small British Council grant that kick-started our first few meetings, we have since been invited to advise the Council of Europe on the development of anti-harassment measures in sport, have spoken at a conference of 26 member states last year in Helsinki, have persuaded the IOC to adopt a resolution to address sexual harassment and abuse in sport.

The very opportunities that you create for people like me to conduct research, visit other countries, exchange ideas and influence social policy have a significant impact on practice.

Without your work, day in day out, oiling the wheels of international relations, people like me would not have the opportunities that we do to make vital links, to spark ideas, to nudge policy development and governments and – in a small way, to enhance social justice.

Visited 3rd World Congress on Women and Sport in Montreal in May... mainly white, western middle class audience, many interested in sports development for women and girls. One West African speaker said girls are not sent to sport or exercise groups in her country because:

Thinness = poverty

Thinness = AIDS/HIV

Sports clubs = rape and sexual abuse by coaches

How does this challenge western thinking about sport?!

Conclusions

Weighed down by what Mrs Thatcher called 'middle class guilt' and or 'political correctness' – but that I call global consciousness

Don't think of my self as particular post-colonial

Still benefit from the privileges of the west BUT can do something

What can I do? What can you do?

You can only do what you can do...

So do it well and realise that it's a small but positive contribution – the old adage of local action and global change only with respect to social justice rather than ecology.