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Carless, David and Douglas, Kitrina (2024) Arts-based research and social justice in sport and leisure. In: Routledge Handbook of Sport, Leisure, and Social Justice. Routledge.

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Routledge Handbook of Sport, Leisure, and Social Justice, Stefan Lawrence, Joanne Hill,  
 Rasul Mowatt  
 Routledge  
 ISBN (Print)9781032485607  
 16 May 2024

Accepted 20<sup>th</sup> March 2023

## Arts-Based Research and Social Justice in Sport and Leisure

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### **Introduction**

The importance of social justice research is well recognised in current times, in particular the need for innovative studies that intervene into the complex challenges faced within twenty-first century societies. Research that makes a difference. Research that works with, on and around the political, economic and sociocultural obstacles that can conspire to inhibit change where it is most badly needed. As the chapters in this Handbook demonstrate, the importance of social justice scholarship across the field of sport, leisure and physical activity is recognised. Here, too, researchers, scholars and activists work in ways that strive to make a positive difference.

In this chapter, we consider the utility of arts-based approaches to social justice research and reflect on examples of two film-based projects in sport, leisure and physical activity. We engage with public responses to these examples, demonstrating the personal, social and cultural meaning and impact of the work and showing how arts-based research can generate community, solidarity, and personal or social change. We propose that arts-based research offers a means to radically democratize social justice research and scholarship.

### **Why Arts-Based Research?**

Researching human experience – particularly within complex cultural, socioeconomic and political contexts – has never been an easy endeavour. The number of books, journal articles, online resources and research methods courses produced each year provide testament to just how challenging *doing* socially responsible research can be. Feminist (e.g., Ritchie & Barker, 2005), indigenous (e.g., Kovach, 2015), queer (e.g., Zeeman, Aranda & Grant, 2014), disability (e.g., Goodley, 2016) and performative (e.g., Denzin, 2003; Gergen & Gergen, 2012) scholars call us to work in ethical ways towards social justice for those who are oppressed or discriminated against on the basis of gender, race, sexuality, disability or economic disadvantage. These writers, and others, provoke us towards greater awareness of voice, visibility and representation of wide-ranging minority, disadvantaged or oppressed people.

We are challenged to incorporate within our studies what might go unsaid, those aspects of human experience that may be at the borders of what can be expressed (e.g., Butler, 1997) and to avoid excluding felt and spiritual experience (e.g., Dewey, 1934; Freeman, 2014). At the same time, we are asked to ensure our research is accessible, so it may be communicated to wider audiences in engaging ways (e.g., Research Councils UK, 2017). With specific regard to social justice, Koro, Cannella, Huckaby and Wolgemuth (2022) ask:

How do we shape our inquiries to call out injustice? How can critical qualitative research call for justice and create possibilities for just transformations? How can critical scholarship be theorized, designed, and practiced with justice as the orienting focus within (en)tangled times, materials and material injustices? (p. 564)

Together, these are mighty challenges. How might we – as sport and leisure researchers – respond? Arts-based methodologies offer one set of possibilities.

Arts-based research comprises a diverse range of methodological approaches that work in radically different ways in the service of personal, social and cultural understanding and transformation. It responds to Denzin's (2003) challenge to re-animate the social world by privileging accessibility, engagement and multidimensional sensory interaction. It opens up alternative ways of thinking, feeling, relating and experiencing through diverse creative means of communication.

Although a substantial literature on art-based research now exists (e.g., Bagley & Cancienne, 2002; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Belliveau & Westwood, 2016; Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2007; Foster, 2016; Haywood Rolling, 2013; Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013; Knowles & Cole, 2008; Leavy, 2009, 2018; Liamputtong & Rumbold, 2008; McNiff, 2008), little had been published when we began our research journeys in the late 1990's. Within our fields, few if any examples of arts-based research were evident. Our methods were not therefore developed from textbooks, but instead through exploration, as we creatively responded to challenges faced by participants experiencing mental ill-health (e.g., Douglas & Carless, 2014), homelessness (e.g., Douglas & Carless, 2015), or aging (e.g., Douglas & Carless, 2005, 2013). Learning through working *with* participants has affected how we live our lives and changed in fundamental ways how we *do* research. It strengthened our commitment to social justice across our work.

### **Arts-Based Research for Social Justice**

Like many researchers, arts-based researchers work towards social justice through any number of avenues, which may include education, informing policy, influencing culture, or activism. In practice, however, it is often the case that philosophical differences, paradigmatic controversies, and the relative valuing of different forms of research mean that arts-based work is better suited to striving for social justice through particular channels.

While the insights arts-based research offers are certainly research informed, it is often undervalued – seen as secondary or ‘lower quality’ – within the contexts of evidence-based medicine (EBM) and evidence-based practice (EBP). Arts-based approaches offer something different – something we term *evidence-based understanding*. We use the term evidence-based understanding as an umbrella for the ways arts-based research promotes different kinds of insights than those typical of EBM and EBP.

First, insights from arts-based research tend to be generative (Gergen & Gergen, 2012) rather than prescriptive. EBM and EBP are often directive of a particular course of action, thereby closing down choices. While at times this is useful, at other moments it serves to impoverish an individual’s response. Arts-based research is more likely to leave audiences with a question that provokes or suggests possibilities for action, thereby opening up new or context-specific responses.

Second, given the research methodologies that are most highly prized within EBM and EBP (quantitative, positivistic, scientific), the insights that are produced tend to be rational, logical, propositional forms (Chadwick, 2001). Arts-based research offers different kinds of insights. Here, embodied, local, contextual, experiential forms are prevalent, drawing on multiple senses and emotional intelligence. These forms of knowledge, while impossible to pin down or state in words or numbers, can be no less important in working for social justice.

Third, by more highly valuing technical knowledge (Cole & Knowles, 2008), the forms of knowing that support EBM and EBP are often exclusive and inaccessible to non-academic audiences. While academic audiences may be able to put this information to good effect, many members of the public are likely to disengage from the research. It is inaccessible to them. At times, this may cause little harm – technical knowledge is consumed by professionals who process, utilise or apply it across practical scenarios. At other times,

though, it can serve to sustain or deepen the divide between ‘professional’ and ‘Other.’ Examples of this polarisation or separation can include ‘doctor/patient,’ ‘expert/novice,’ ‘teacher/student,’ ‘rich/poor,’ ‘educated/practical.’ This can breed damaging power differentials, entrench inequality, and disenfranchise certain groups from awareness of and power over processes that impact their lives. In the long term, individuals or groups can be enforced into silence or passivity regarding issues that shape their lives.

Fourth, Barone and Eisner (2012) write of how arts-based research is unique as a methodology because it is the only form of research that offers audiences an experience. By, for example, stimulating multisensory engagement, taking audiences into a particular place, activating audience member’s memories, or preserving polyvocality through allowing space for multiple and sometimes conflicting voices. These qualities can offer a kind of vicarious experience which encourages us to step outside our preconceptions (e.g., the dominant narratives that constrain thinking), challenge what we think we know, and help us develop empathy, even seeing our own involvement in a new way (e.g., seeing ourselves as ‘the bad guy’ in a way that is not threatening but enlightening).

While these characteristics may be valuable across a number of domains, within social justice arenas they are of particular importance. Together, the arguably unique qualities of arts-based research can together help promote engagement, inclusion, diversity/plurality, participation, dialogue, respect, empathy, and democracy.

Frank (2000) argued that “more knowledge may be less important than a clearer sense of value” (p. 363). New theories and facts do not help us with the ethical question of what to do with what we know. On this basis, “The challenge for intellectuals is to help people make policy, clinical, corporate, and personal decisions in a milieu of profound dislocation” (p. 363). This is a further way arts-based research can contribute to social justice within sport and leisure. Positioning ourselves, as researchers, in different relationships with ‘data,’ our

participants, their experiences, et cetera, has a tendency to open up new ways of seeing and construing appropriate responses. In a similar vein, the ways that arts-based products take audiences into different *kinds* of engagement with participants' lives and the sociocultural contexts where they unfold, can provoke new insights, questions, reflection and/or action in others.

### **Film and Social Justice**

Given there are so many genres under the arts-based umbrella, we focus in more detail now on one approach – filmmaking. There are several reasons why we consider film to be a particularly fruitful way forward for researchers in sport and leisure who are committed to social justice. First, film is culturally omnipresent in 21<sup>st</sup> century and, as a result of the technological revolutions of recent years (e.g. YouTube, Vimeo, Instagram), widely accessible. Second, film combines multiple genres (e.g., moving image, sound, music, narrative/story) which can provide high levels of emotional and sensory engagement. Harris (2018) suggests that: “Video-based research offers us the most affective, primal, and thorough rendering of the complexity of human life, which is the core business of all research” (p. 449). Third, social justice concerns are probably more developed in film than in any other art form.

Weaving together multiple genres in myriad ways, films powerfully evoke wide ranging emotional, sensory, and/or intellectual experiences. In some films, it may be the cinematography that accrues recognition. In others, it may be the soundtrack. While in others, it may be the storytelling that takes centre stage. Informing these decisions are costs and preferences of the producer and director and of course other issues related to the purpose/s of the film.

Within the British film industry, the individual perhaps most recognised for social justice is director Ken Loach. When *I Daniel Blake* won the Palm d'Or at Cannes Film Festival in 2016, Loach said in his acceptance speech: "Cinema has many traditions, one is to be a cinema of dissent and a cinema to represent the interest of the people" (Loach, 2017). Likewise, producer Rebecca O'Brien, said: "You can tackle injustice, by making films. You can be at the heart of politics, without being a politician" (Loach, 2017).

Across a six-decade career, Loach has made a succession of gritty films that tackle social injustice. His film *Cathy Come Home* – a story about homelessness, unemployment and mother's rights to keep their children – screened for the first time on BBC television on 16 November 1966 to 12 million viewers, ¼ of the UK population at the time. *Cathy Come Home* was voted in a reader's poll in *Radio Times* as the 'best single television programme' ever made and in 2005 it was named by *Broadcast* as the UK's most influential TV programme of all time. Through increasing public awareness of homelessness, it was a catalyst in the formation of the homelessness charity *Crisis* in 1967.

Like social science research, an idea for a film can begin with one individual being challenged by a social issue. We see this in *Blue Jean* (2023), an example of a commercial film release exploring social justice concerns within sport. Director Georgia Oakley, who self identifies as queer, was inspired after reading about the bravery of a group of lesbian activists who in 1988 abseiled into the public gallery at the House of Lords to protest Section 28 (a now repealed British law which silenced conversations around homosexuality in schools). Oakley pitched her idea to the commissioning editor/director of BBC Film and was given the go ahead. Oakley and co-director Hélène Sifre then travelled to Newcastle, UK (where the film was shot in 2022), to talk with and interview over 50 people affected by Section 28. "I could tell by speaking to these women that no-one had ever given them the time of day," says Oakley. "They'd been on these personal battles with their own history through their whole



lives” (Tabbara, 2022). With financial backing from iFeatures and BBC Film, a six-week shoot took place in Newcastle in 2022 and the film was released in early 2023. Here the director was also the researcher, incorporating first person narratives to weave a compelling story.

Although feature films are a wonderful way to engage audiences with social issues, they come with a hefty price tag that is beyond the budget of most researchers. Further, screenwriters may rewrite important details to tell a type of story more likely investments will be returned at the box office; this can create tensions in research contexts. Perhaps the closest form of film to social science research therefore is documentary. Here, there is an expectation that ‘real facts’ are used and if participants’ voices and images can’t be used, they are performed by actors. Within the documentary tradition there are numerous experimental forms, blurring of boundaries and weaving together image, sound, and narrative. And some documentaries are made with modest budgets and production costs.

Our filmmaking has been broadly positioned within the experimental documentary tradition given that we incorporate personal narrative, songs/music, poetry and imagery. To illuminate how researchers might move from peer reviewed article to film, we now consider two examples.

### **Example 1: *The Long Run***

*The Long Run* began during David’s doctoral research (Carless, 2003), created from narrative interviews with Ben, a 36-year-old man with severe and enduring mental health difficulties. We felt from the outset that there was much to be learnt from Ben’s accounts of his experiences of physical activity within the context of mental ill-health and, on that basis, went on to publish two papers based on his interviews. The first (Carless, 2008), featured a structural narrative analysis which is theoretically dense and inaccessible to all but a limited

academic audience. The second (Carless & Sparkes, 2008), used an approach that David developed during his PhD to create a first-person story. Despite featuring an accessible story, to negotiate peer-review we were required to present an academic argument for our use of a story form. This made the piece less accessible to most people. In addition, of course, both were published in academic journals which the public are unable to freely access.

### *The move to film: Our process*

We share Saldaña's (2018) view that distilling a first-person narrative into a recorded monologue can be helpful stepping-stone into filmmaking. However, film is more than speech. As we have explored elsewhere (see Douglas & Carless, 2020a), music, songs, ambient sound, spoken word and, of course, moving image also matter. Film relies on multiple genres coalescing to tell a story which stimulates the senses to provoke new ways of thinking, feeling and knowing. This multisensory engagement is perhaps key to the ubiquity and power of film as a medium for entertainment and communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The first deliberate step in making this film was to move from the *written* word into the texture and sound of *spoken* word through recording David voicing the story. Hearing a story back – as opposed to reading it off the page – takes us into a new level of embodiment, extending felt sense and thereby introducing tone, pitch, and in the process evoking new emotions and meanings.

Having recorded Ben's story, we moved into the visual domain, seeking out appropriate footage to thicken the spoken account. One example of how we achieved this is the sequence of the film shot during a 10K race held in Bristol city centre. Despite the challenges of filming in a busy public space, Kitrina had an intuitive sense that footage of this public event might be important. And in the act of *doing the work* – in this case, filming – something profound happened: we gained a sense of the possibilities of life *when you get to join in*, when you aren't stigmatised, discriminated against or denied access. The runners

were not professional athletes, they were just ‘normal’ people, all ages and sizes, colours, ethnicities, and abilities, joining together in community. Witnessing, filming and editing these images began to change how we understood Ben and his running. Like many others, Ben had been *excluded* in numerous ways as a result of his mental health condition: excluded from work, excluded from liberty, excluded from leisure, and excluded from sport.

Crowds packed the final stretch five or six deep, cheering the runners as they crossed the line. Those last few yards of the race were particularly magnetic to us, watching people running alongside others, holding hands and raising their linked arms as they crossed the finish line *together*. It reminded us of how Ben talked about running with his mate, saying: ‘We done it!’ We were unprepared for the intensity of feelings captured in these moments of moving image.

A further stage in our process was the incorporation of music and songs during the editing process. Using one of David’s original songs from our music library meant we didn’t need to record something new or have to negotiate copyright. Once added to the project pane and aligned with the narrative, the piece took on a new integrated form. Put plainly, the physicality in the song recording – a passionate voice and powerful attack on the guitar strings – dovetailed with the story and images. The lyrics (‘I’ve got your needs at the front of my mind/I put your dreams alongside mine’) provoke and rouse us to consider our obligations, responsibilities, what comes with privilege and opportunity. The song amplified the images, raised the energy and generated a sense of hope.

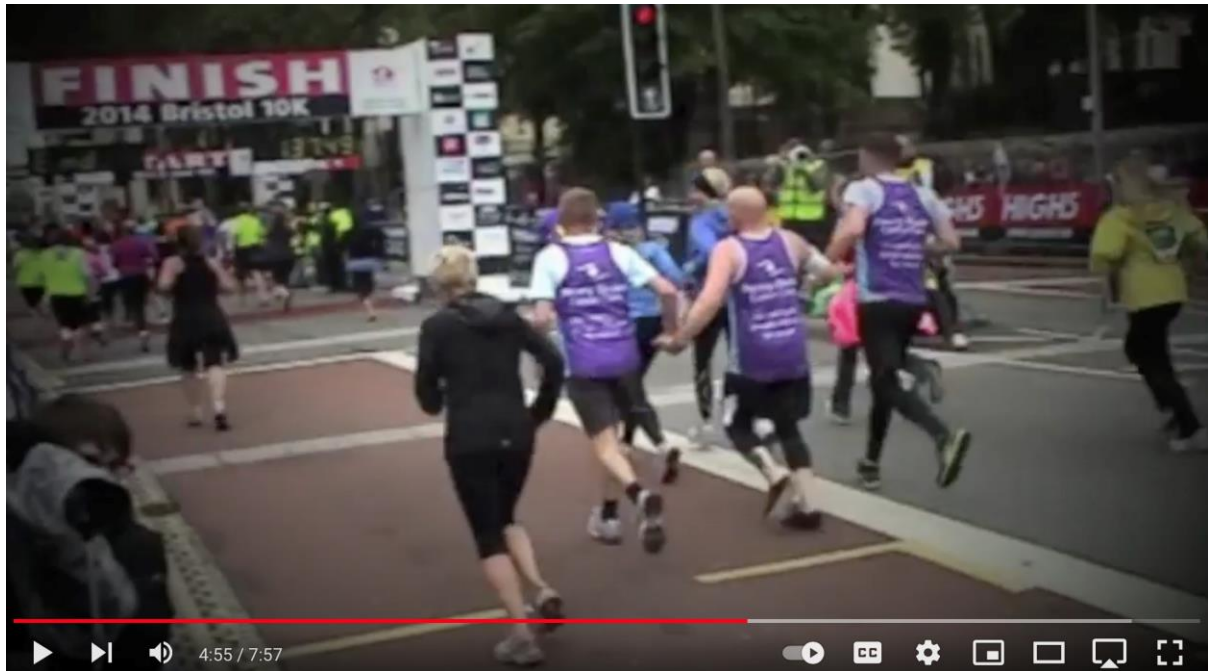


Image 1: A scene from *The Long Run*

### *Viewer Responses*

The primary purpose of arts-based research is not, in our view, to create good art. Rather, it is to create art that does good in the world – that achieves something constructive for someone somewhere. The important question for us, then, is not “Is this a good film?” but “What is this film good for?” The way to discern this is by seeking and listening to the responses of others to our work. We have done this for our arts-based research which utilises story, song, and live performance approaches (see Carless & Douglas, 2010, 2011; Douglas & Carless, 2008, 2020b). Here, we share and reflect on some responses to *The Long Run*.

This first response is from Alan (shared through an interview), a soldier on the ‘Battle Back’ programme for wounded, injured and sick military personnel:

See if someone has never had a panic attack in their life, they say they can understand what it’s like, but I don’t think they can. If I get a panic attack I get tears streaming down my face, and I can be an emotional wreck, my eyes are welling up. It [*The Long Run*] was quite, my eyes got a bit watery there watching it, stuff like that I can relate

to, it means a lot to me. See, being in the army, they can't see what's wrong, people kind-of look down their noses at you. So people with mental health stuff will keep it to themselves and that's the worst thing you can do. You end up just bottling it up inside. What makes me worse is looking at myself in the mirror, and at what I used to look like, but if I can get that thinking through my mind [he points at the screen] like that man on there [pointing again] its never too late to do something, to get back into it. You see, when you have anxiety and panic attacks it feels like your life is over. Watching that video, it's given me a wee boost to get back running, 'cause if he can do it, I can do it. I like watching stuff like that. The video was good for me, it was powerful, I can relate to it a lot.

Evident in Alan's words is a strong sense of identification with Ben, even across difference. While they are different people, in different situations, who have never met, Alan discerns shared experience around both physical activity and mental health. Perhaps most important is "a wee boost" – motivation, optimism, hopefulness, a sense of possibility which Ben's personal story as shared in the film has unlocked for Alan.

A second response is from Alex (received by email), a mental health service user:

... Its very true about the right meds. Has a massive difference not only on outlook but in some ways your character or at least behaviour. Which one is cause/effect i'll never know. Very touching vid for me too as i ran a marathon a few years ago with the aim of curing myself. My doctor laughed when i told him that was why and sadly he was very right. At least in my lifetime there'll be no cure, just management.

Anyway glad you made it. Always good to teach people the inside story ...

Here, Alex's response also demonstrates how another's story told through a film can provoke reflection on one's own experience, in this case medication and healthcare. A film about one person's experience can also be a stimulus for viewers to consider more general political or

power issues, evident in this comment (posted on YouTube) about sociocultural attitudes (e.g., stigma) towards those with mental health difficulties:

Thanks for being the voice of those who are prejudiced and discriminated in the society. this gives us the opportunity to think from the person suffering from mental illness perspective, an idea on how they suffers through a song...i loved the ending so much...simply beautiful...

Finally, what of the ability of *The Long Run* to provoke change? While change – social action, meaningful impact – are outcomes many of us hope from our research, they are not always forthcoming. So too with film. There is, however, evidence that films like *The Long Run* can have effects, albeit small-scale, local level changes. One example of this was a student who was provoked by the film to pursue a change in his own medication (see Douglas & Carless, 2020a). This change, he informed us, precipitated a sufficient improvement in his health that he was able to pursue postgraduate studies. For us, small scale personal change is important and is one response to the question How do we change the world? Answer: One person at a time. Judging by some responses, this hope is important to many of us researching in areas of social justice:

Thank you for putting this out there! Your work and research gives me hope that there will be more opportunities to create and study impact through documentary film, particularly for social change. Thank you also for your vulnerability and bravery in sharing your voice and story. (YouTube comment)

### **Example 2: *Gwithian Sands***

Our second example is *Gwithian Sands* (Douglas & Carless, 2013) a 4 minute 36 second song, written by Kitrina, that we used as the basis for a music video. Both the song and the film concern the life story of one participant from our research with women in

Cornwall commissioned by the Women's Sport & Fitness Foundation (WSFF). The WSFF, as a women's advocacy organisation, were interested to learn about the health and physical activity of women over 60 in areas with health inequalities.

Two areas of England stood out in deprivation indices, the north east and south west. Given we were from the south west it seemed economically prudent to study the population closest to where we lived, Cornwall. While many people think of Cornwall as being a beautiful tourist destination, it is also an area with some of the lowest incomes and highest house prices. Sport England had some statistics about women's physical activity, but these applied more to women who played sport. Our remit therefore was to learn about the lives of women who didn't self-identify as 'sporty'. How was their health? What physically activity were they doing? What barriers and challenges existed for them to being or becoming physically active? We carried out ethnographic research, living in Cornwall for extended periods of time, and as part of the research conducted focus groups and interviews with 30 women aged between 60 and 84.

For Bresler (2006), "The aesthetic inquirer is at the vortex of the movement, actively seeking connections" (p. 94). This description aligns with how we do research: witnessing, experiencing, feeling, thinking and creating in diverse ways and genres, as the topic dictates. However, the WSFF considered that deviating from a traditional research report might be counter-productive to their interests. This was a contentious issue for us, because without an arts-based element, we felt the story we could tell would be less rich, less complex, less evocative and, therefore, less impactful. This was our first commissioned project post-PhD, so we were keen to satisfy the funders. But we also felt a degree of liberty to follow hunches and experiment. As a result, we completed the project with a wonderful resource of poems, songs and stories. Together we shaped these into a performance ethnography and CD titled *Across the Tamar* (Douglas & Carless, 2005).

Our first performance was to a packed village hall of participants and locals. We shared the formal report and a live performance of *Across the Tamar*. And we asked those present for feedback. While WSFF wanted a traditional report, what would the participants feel was appropriate? We had no idea. Unreservedly, we were told that although both forms portrayed women's experiences faithfully, those present preferred *Across the Tamar* as it communicated their emotions in ways that the report could not. The report was therefore, in their eyes, less authentic.

Through numerous performances and analysis of audience responses (see Carless & Douglas, 2010, 2011) we came to understand more fully what an arts-based research product offers over a written report. However, there were two obstacles with performing the research that were difficult to overcome. The first was that a performance required us to be there in person. The second was that touring is expensive and therefore requires significant funding. For this reason, we recorded and produced an audio CD. While the CD became a great resource, it lost an embodied dynamic. Seven years later, though, it was a different story: we had both attended a film making course and were more prepared to try (at least) to explore what film might bring to our embodied understanding and communication.

### *The move to film: Our process*

The processes that comprise filmmaking as research are less well understood than most other forms of qualitative research (Douglas & Carless, 2020a). Gupta (2019) describes six steps behind her filmmaking process: select sociocultural phenomena for conscious raising, collect participants' anecdotes of lived experience, code and thematise the data, translate data into cinematic language, produce a film, promote the film. This kind of preordained procedural approach does not work for us. For example, we do not know before we begin a project how we will move forward and we are much more likely to be led by



emergent aspects (such as physical environment, social interactions, soundscapes, etc.) Thus, our films might arise through exploring the stories of participants, by what is provoked in us visually within an environment, or in response to something missing.

In the case of the *Gwithian Sands*, we were provoked to ‘construct a world’ for the viewer that is ‘cognitive and immersive and sensuous’ (Yacavone, 2014, pxvi). Here, those watching are invited to experience *for themselves* – in this case, how women in Cornwall experience life in Cornwall. This ‘world’ is of course in part created by our filming, direction and editing, thus is a ‘virtual’ world. However, it is also an ‘actual’ world, you can go there and observe it. Our aim was not to literally follow the song’s visual cues but, rather, to expand what was an already powerful audio portrayal, by ‘thickening’ the audience’s sensory experience through, for example, introducing visual elements alongside a strong narrative arc. Until we actually shot, edited and produced the film, we didn’t know what that the end product would look like. It emerged through the *doing*.

On this point Merleau-Ponty (1964) suggested that a carefully crafted film enhances the viewer’s perception as aspects of life that can be missed or taken for granted are seen anew. Merleau-Ponty (1964) looked to cinematography to bring out “the fine grain of real life whose aesthetic value may have been lost from sight” (p. 58). The aesthetic quality is both ‘felt’ and pre-linguistic, and we attempted to become attuned to this by immersing ourselves (yet again) in the environment while being guided by an internal compass which was being evoked by the music and song to create a visual horizon. That is, we allowed the work that had already taken place in our bodies, through doing the research as well as performing the song (see Carless, 2022), to be placed anew within the context, with the particular place the participants lived and described.



Image 2: A scene from *Gwithian Sands*

### *Viewer Responses*

As mentioned above, an important aspect of the films we make is audience response and our confidence comes from viewers telling us the film is meaningful. Many YouTube comments refer to the song being ‘catchy,’ viewers becoming ‘caught up’ in the film, some listening several times. For example:

I naturally tend to look at the comments on videos I watch because I like to understand other people's opinions. I think what has been said in the comment section is so true. As I was watching the video, I got very caught up in it. Right at the end when the single line, 'She's just a wife', it really hits home the message. I can only emphasis what has already been said; a great deal has changed but women still face social pressures today. The history of Cornwall is fascinating and I feel that this video pays tribute to that, in wonderful symbolism of those who paid their lives.

For one, this was because the song “stirred something very deep inside me of my own roots and identity.” For another, “I wanted to thank you for making this available to listen to here

on Youtube. The print copy of the lyrics were helpful, but hearing the song really brought your whole concept together.”

A second common response suggests new awareness of women’s lives. For example, what women sacrifice to bring up children and how contemporary women should be better off:

[translation from French] this video and song touches me both by text and by voice. The subject covered is not necessarily easy to deal with and doing it in song is a very original and affordable way for everyone. The condition of women at that time in Cornouaille was undoubtedly the same here in the Breton countryside. Few of them had access to education. As you say so well, they were above all wives, mothers and sisters whose role was duty. Today, even if the condition of married women is much better, if they have access to education, good jobs and therefore a certain autonomy, they are under a lot of pressure because we are still far from gender equality. Women. Are they freer than before, I doubt it and I wonder about the share of the weight of cultural heritage and this universal notion of natural and visceral attachment that some women have towards their offspring that they accept while acknowledging that this constitutes a "brake" to their personal achievement. But all this is a real debate on the status of women and your song opens a door.

These responses suggest the film opened up conversations about contemporary women’s lives. Among the international responses was a man from France who wrote he would like the lyrics and tabs so he could learn the song and play it to his community. As such, the film provided a vehicle to allow the song to take on another life of its own, being sung and shared by others to support advocacy and understanding about women.

*Gwithian Sands* was the first research film we made. It showed us how, by making a film publicly available via YouTube, multiple impacts can result. It has been used in lectures

and seminars, it provides a resource to help people who work in their communities, it opens a door to provoke conversation, and it can motivate others on their social justice journey.

### **Social Justice or Social Impact?**

We conceptualise social justice as a concern with transforming the deepest societal problems of economic, racial, or gendered injustice through critically addressing issues of power and inequality. In short, speaking truth to power. Lessons from filmmakers might, however, offer a more nuanced perspective to inform our work as filmmaker-researchers in sport and leisure. This concerns a distinction between *social justice* and *social impact*. Ortner (2017) describes the difference between these two aims by reflecting on two US-based socially oriented film collectives, Brave New Films and Participant Media:

The more radical Brave New Films follows what is clearly a social-justice agenda, critically addressing issues of power and inequality, while the more classically liberal Participant Media pursues a social-impact agenda, addressing social problems as technical problems to be fixed. (p. 531)

For Ortner (2017), a social impact project differs from a social justice project because it “starts from the social and political status quo and asks how people’s lives can be improved within the existing limitations” (p. 535). On this basis, social impact may be achieved without serious engagement with existing political, economic and/or power structures. This kind of project, then, is open to criticism for “trying to fix the world without fixing the politics” (p. 534).

At this point in time, having engaged in a series of film-as-research projects over the past decade or so, we take the view that both goals are worthy. Ideally, we work to produce films that are not neutral about social justice issues but, instead, speak truth to power. But we

are also pleased to produce films which lead to more practically oriented action, promoting personal or social change within existing political and/or economic structures.

### **The Future of Social Justice Film in Sport and Leisure**

At the core of many researchers' practice is a genuine concern and care for the people and communities we research. Finding ways to communicate what we learn while expanding avenues for social justice requires us to extend our imagination about *how we do research*. Against the philosophy of conveyor-belt research currently flourishing in the neoliberal academy, 'slow science' advocates remind us about the importance of developing and sustaining long-term relationships with the people and communities we research (Koro-Ljungberg & Wells, 2018; Scheurich, 2018). Hitting tight budgets and short time frames can come at the expense of these relationships. Without which, Spooner (2018) suggests, it is impossible to improve social justice.

In our experience, filmmaking is a slow way of doing social research. It is impossible to embrace filmmaking – whether through collaborations with filmmakers or through making films as researchers – and achieve quick results. The processes involved demand time and commitment as the two examples above demonstrate. The rewards of both the process (the diverse skills, aesthetic sensibilities, practical steps) and the outcomes are worthy of this investment. As Harris (2018) notes,

video is not only a method (a tool, an approach) but also more than that, as it increasingly extends theoretical frames, which means we not only *do* research differently but also *see* the practice, role, and responsibility of research differently.

Video-based research can serve different scholarly functions, address different social relations, and suggest new knowledge creation as it goes. (p. 440)

The need for commitment over time does not only apply to filmmaker-researchers, but to professional filmmakers too. According to one Hollywood-based social justice-oriented filmmaker: “Maybe, just maybe, we might make some difference in the world. But it ain’t gonna happen overnight” (Ortner, 2017, p. 535).

Producing films that achieve social justice (or, for that matter, social impact) is a tall order – not just for researcher-filmmakers in sport and leisure, but also for professional filmmakers. It is from the experiences of these organisations that we might take a final lesson. Ortner (2017) again:

In an ideal world of socially conscious filmmaking, a film that powerfully addresses a contemporary social or political issue would work as a direct provocation to audiences, causing them to go out and take action ... It is increasingly accepted, however, that a film’s sociopolitical implications may need to be amplified and driven home by additional mechanisms if it is to bring about some kind of change in the real world. (p. 530)

While Participant Media began by relying on the persuasive power of the film itself (in line with their motto *a story well told can change the world*), over time its strategy shifted to building more active partnerships to promote impact (Ortner, 2017). In short, creating a campaign. This multistrand approach seems to us to be both realistic and achievable. As researchers, academics and teachers, we are ideally placed to initiate and run educational, public engagement, and event-based campaigns alongside releasing our research-based films. Indeed, some of us are already doing this through online and face-to-face seminars, conferences and events with students, colleagues, and the general public. By improving and extending this work, the social justice and social impact agendas in sport and leisure can only be strengthened.

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