Where are we now? A review of research on the history of women's soccer in Ireland.

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It is a common fact that women's sport and leisure history, especially in male dominated spheres, and more specifically football, have been ignored by many academics. However, in recent years there have been major developments in digital technology that have changed the nature of the type of research that can be done. Access to tools to facilitate field research are relatively cheap and with the high volume of digitisation projects that have taken place over the last few years as well as the increasing number of born digital resources that have been published, there are new opportunities. In relation to women's soccer in Ireland, this paper asks the question – where are we now? The argument will review the current literature on this subject and outline potential approaches for future research.

Keywords: Ireland, indoor football, women's football/soccer, oral history, digital resources

Introduction

There are a variety of global, regional and local campaigns to try and bridge the gap in gender representation in society. Some of these are specific to sport, and others are more far reaching campaigns, such as HeForShe. In 2016 the online campaign Manel Watch was established, it is made up of a collective of Irish academics who aim to fight against the constant male only panels and lack of gender parity in Irish academia, history, arts, culture, politics, radio as well as TV.[1] More recently in October 2018, the campaign 20x20 was launched which, aims to increase media coverage, female participation and attendances at female sporting events in Ireland by twenty percent by the year 2020.[2] These campaigns give us a chance to reflect on the legacy of female participation in society and especially in sport. Sport is an important part of Irish society it 'permeates all aspects of social life and has achieved economic, cultural, historical, political and symbolic significance'.[3] This article will concern itself with Ireland, which has often been

neglected in the academic literature on gender and sport. In relation to women's soccer in Ireland, this paper asks the question – where are we now?[4] The argument will review the current literature on this subject and outline potential approaches for future research.

Past Research

In the UK, the first academic research into the history of women's football was undertaken by Melling and later built on by Williams.[5] Williams's publication *A Game for Rough Girl's* looked at English and international perspectives in women's football.[6] Although, there is very little reference to Ireland in Williams work the methodologies outlined can easily be applied to a more localised case study. Sociologists, Caudwell et al. have noted that much of the academic research into women's soccer has come out of the increasing public profile of the sport and competitive successes of national teams such as, the U.S.A and Germany.[7] An article published in 2018 reviewed the trends in literature published on women's soccer in all disciplines except sports science.[8] The article has highlighted that since the publications of the first articles in 1998 in the history and sociology field, the number of publications has increased steadily over time and is discussed in a wide variety of academic fields.[9] This was a global review and it identified two articles from Ireland, sixteen from England, three from Scotland and eleven others from all over the UK.[10] The article didn't clearly define Ireland as there are two different governing bodies on the island of Ireland, the Irish Football Association (IFA) and the Football Association of Ireland (FAI), it is slightly confusing what research about Ireland was included in the Ireland or UK category. However, to date there has been only three academic articles published related to the history of women's soccer in the Republic of Ireland.[11] None of these articles were written by people affiliated with history departments but rather an academic from a business school, a sociologist and the author

of this article who is a librarian and a member of a local oral history group. The first two articles looked at soccer since the formation of the Women's Football Association of Ireland in 1973 and only referred to the work-based teams that were established before the establishment of a formal governing body for the women's game. The third article focused on an indoor football league that ran in Drogheda, Co. Louth from 1966 to 1967 that was made up of female work-based teams. All three of these articles focused on soccer in the Republic of Ireland, to date there has been no articles published on the history of women's soccer in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, there is a play written by Tara Lynne O'Neill about women's participation in Northern Ireland during World War I that will be produced by Lyric Theatre, Belfast with the current working title of *Suffragettes of Football* but at the time of writing there was no date set for the premier. As there are very few secondary sources related to women's experience of sport in Ireland during World War I a lot of archival research was done before writing the script.[12]

The 20x20 campaign slogan is 'if she can't see it, she can't be it', but history should be an important part of this campaign as many people believe that women's sport is a relatively new phenomenon. The Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) has been at the forefront of Irish memory institutions to try and tackle these myths. It organised a travelling exhibition in July 2017 that focused on women in sport from the late nineteenth century onwards and has actively called for deposits on women's sports from Northern Ireland.[13] Sports history in Ireland has been dominated by studies of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) but in recent years there have been a number of articles and books published on Irish soccer. This shift started in the 1990s after the success of the Republic of Ireland men's team. Hannigan's publication *The Garrison Game* and Cronin's publication *Sport and Nationalism in Ireland* helped promote the study of soccer in Ireland in the late 1990s and more recently, Curran has been leading

this change.[14] Curran has co-edited a special edition of the academic journal *Soccer & Society* based on Irish soccer as well as organised a number of conferences in Ireland.[15] However, without institutional and financial support from funding bodies progression in this area of study, especially in relation to the dearth of research into women's experience of the sport is limited.

Toms has noted that 'sport history in Ireland has grown immensely since the start of the new millennium. The book which marks the beginning …Mike Cronin's Sport and Irish Identity published in 1999'.[16] Indeed, history is the most popular monograph genre for publishers based in the Republic of Ireland. In a sample of sports publications from 2012 to 2018 obtained from the British National Bibliography (BNB), seventy-five percent of the publications had the word history either in its title or its description while the other twenty-five percent were biographies.[17] However, as Liston has highlighted on many occasions that participation in and the study of sport is very much a 'male preserve' in Ireland.[18] This is also reflected in the BNB data as a very small percentage of the monographs were authored/co-authored by women over the six-year period. Out of the 208 titles reviewed only three and a half of the books were entirely about women. The half being the *Six Nations, Two Stories*, it recounts the 2015 competition which, was won by both the men's and women's teams.[19] It must be noted that 2018 saw the publication of the first autobiography of a female GAA player, Cora Staunton as Gaelic football is the most popular football code in Ireland for women.[20]

In the twelve years since Bourke published her article on women's soccer we have not moved on very far. The rest of this article will outline viable approaches that could easily be applied to documenting the history of women's soccer in Ireland.

Potential Research Methods

Developments in digital technology has enabled researchers, whether they be independent or affiliated with an institution, access to more resources. In addition, the tools needed to create resources to fill the gaps that exist in current repositories is more affordable. Today a standard smartphone can have all the tools needed to collect data for a research project. This section of the paper outlines potential resources and approaches that could be applied to document the history and development of women's soccer on the island of Ireland as well as other underrepresented sports in both jurisdictions. Rather than being an exhaustive list, it suggests the most accessible methods that can be applied to bridge the gaps that exist in our current knowledge. These methods can be exploited by researchers with varying levels of technical skills, involve low cost technology nevertheless, the main requirement is time and adequate funding for dedicated personnel to conduct this research and for long term preservation planning.

Potential 1 – Using web archives in research

Web archives are a relatively new digital resource for researchers, the first web archives appeared in the mid-1990s. However, 'for historians, and researchers in many other humanities disciplines, web archives remain largely an unknown, and certainly underused, primary source'.[21] The archive can be used just like other published research sources along with other physical and/or digital resources or it can be used as the main source to answer a research question. Recently, there have been a number of edited publications that outline how researchers from different disciplines interact with the web and web archive content, as well as giving suggestions for future use.[22] There are many web archives around the world established by national institutions, university libraries and private vendors, each with varying access restrictions depending on institutional policy or legal mandates.[23] As most publications transition from print to online only, it

seems impossible to give a true representation of the history of the later part of twentieth century onwards without referring to any web archive content.[24] This section of the paper will address how web archives in the UK, Ireland and internationally can be utilised by researchers exploring the history of women's soccer in Ireland.

The UK Web Archive is made up of the six UK Legal Deposit Libraries and aims to archive, preserve and give access to the UK web space.[25] There are four collections with varying accessibility restrictions.[26] The UK Web Archive was established in 2004 and began selectively archiving UK published websites on a permissions basis in 2005. It was only when the Non-Print Legal Deposit Regulations were introduced in 2013 that the web archive was able to start running an annual crawl of the UK web domain and manually select any UK published content without permission from the site owner.[27] Since 2005 the UK Web Archive has built curated collections on various subjects including Sport. There is a dedicated Football collection that aims to archive content from all the various football codes that exist in the UK. The collection was established in 2017, with a focus on soccer, rugby and Gaelic football. It is hoped that this will be a comprehensive repository for football clubs across the UK including, Northern Ireland as well as other sources that contextualise developments in society through football.[28]

Insert Figure One and Two

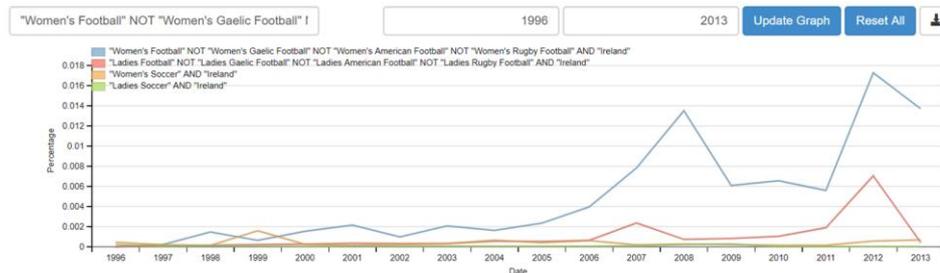**Figure One**

A screenshot from Shine Trends of the search term - "Women's Football" AND "Ireland", "Women's Soccer" AND "Ireland", "Ladies Soccer" AND "Ireland", "Ladies Football" AND "Ireland"

Figure Two

A screenshot from Shine Trends of the search term - "Women's Football" NOT "Women's Gaelic Football" NOT "Women's American Football" NOT "Women's Rugby Football" AND "Ireland", "Women's Soccer" AND "Ireland", "Ladies Soccer" AND "Ireland", "Ladies Football" NOT "Ladies Gaelic Football" NOT "Ladies American Football" NOT "Ladies Rugby Football" AND "Ireland"

The UK Web Archive in partnership with JISC and the Internet Archive acquired the JISC UK Web Domain Dataset (1996-2013). It includes all .uk websites archived by the Internet Archive. The dataset covers the time period prior to the UK NPLD Regulations 2013 coming into force and runs from 1996 to April 2013. There are four derived datasets that can be reused by researchers' wishing to conduct big data analyses of the JISC UK Web Domain Dataset.[29] An output from the Big UK Domain Data for the Arts and Humanities project was the historical search prototype tool called Shine. Shine sits over

the JISC UK Web Domain Dataset and links out the Internet Archive.[30] This allows users to search the dataset and refine their search using various facets or to do a general trends analyses of the content by using keywords followed by Boolean search terms to narrow the results as well as refining the date range.[31] In Figure One the search term ("Women's Football" AND "Ireland", "Women's Soccer" AND "Ireland", "Ladies Soccer" AND "Ireland", "Ladies Football" AND "Ireland") was applied and a sample of up to 100 resources can be examined by clicking at a point on the graph.[32] This general search term can be narrowed down by interchanging the term "Ireland" with "Northern Ireland" or "Republic of Ireland". It is unlikely that any content published directly from the Republic of Ireland would be included in this dataset as it would not be on .uk top-level domain. However, soccer is an international sport that often gets reported on outside of the original sporting jurisdiction. When searching web archive content, it is important to include both "football" and "soccer" in your search terms. Even though, the term football is synonymous with soccer in Britain, government documentation refers to the sport as soccer as a way to clarify between the different codes of football popular in the UK.[33] Thus any search queries using the term football will return results that are not soccer. In Ireland, these terms are used interchangeably by people as Gaelic football and rugby union are also extremely popular sports. Figure Two has a slightly narrower search term ("Women's Football" NOT "Women's Gaelic Football" NOT "Women's American Football" NOT "Women's Rugby Football" AND "Ireland", "Women's Soccer" AND "Ireland", "Ladies Soccer" AND "Ireland", "Ladies Football" NOT "Ladies Gaelic Football" NOT "Ladies American Football" NOT "Ladies Rugby Football" AND "Ireland").[34] Visually there seems to be little difference in the results on the graph but by clicking on different points there is a slight difference in the number of results. This is more noticeable in the search term ("Ladies Football" NOT "Ladies Gaelic Football"

NOT "Ladies American Football" NOT "Ladies Rugby Football" AND "Ireland") as the governing body for women's Gaelic football is called the Ladies' Gaelic Football Association (LGFA).[35] There is still a big debate in the UK around the use of the terms women's or ladies' football. In July 2018 Birmingham City Ladies was the latest Women's Super League club to change their name to Birmingham City Women. The club believes that the 'new name reflects Blues' position as a leading club in the sport and is representative of a modern view on language and equality'.[36] By using Shine, researchers can trace the popularity of the terms women's or ladies' football on the .uk web space, who is using them and how this has changed over time.

The UK Web Archive is the largest web archive in the UK, but it is not the only one. There are three other web archives in the UK that hold resources relevant to documenting the history and development of women's soccer in Northern Ireland. These are the UK Government Web Archive (UKGWA), UK Parliament Web Archive and the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) Web Archive. The National Archives runs the UKGWA, Parliamentary Archives runs the UK Parliament Web Archive, these web archives store copies of government and parliamentary documents related to UK sport that were published online.[37] PRONI archives websites on a selective basis 'about Northern Ireland, or a subject that is of social, political, cultural, religious or economic significance and relevance to Northern Ireland'.[38]

In the Republic of Ireland, the National Library of Ireland has been running a selective web archiving programme since 2011. It estimates that in any given year over 80% of websites will be lost or changed. It builds collections on a number of political and cultural issues that reflect society in Ireland, such as, general elections, referenda and centenary celebrations.[39] Nevertheless, collection development is limited due to the lack of any legal

deposit regulations for non-print materials like they have in the UK and other European countries.[40]

It is still possible to trace previously published online content if the exact URL for that source is known, through the Time Travel Mementos service. This service is like a union catalogue for web archives and links to open access web archives around the world. However, if the search returns no results it is possible that that specific URL was never archived.[41] The web is an integral part of daily life and it would be impossible to give a true historical account of the 1990s onwards without using web archives.[42] Although working with web archives is still challenging, there are lots of use cases available and methodologies are still developing.[43]

Potential 2 - newspaper collections and digital research methods

Newspapers are perhaps traditionally the main source and in rare cases, sometimes the only source for sport historians to work from. However, even today the recent achievements of women's sport are not as well documented in newspapers as their male counterparts which, will cause problems for future historians interested in women's sport. Rouse highlighted that at the turn of the twentieth century in the popular paper *Sport* that 'it was the scenery, rather than the action, of course, that women were expected to feature'.[44] This attitude is also present in some newspaper articles in Hunt's research into women's sport in Victorian Westmeath. However, there were many articles published in Westmeath newspapers during this period that focused on the action of women's and mixed gender sporting events. These reports mainly focused on the elite in society as they had the free time and means to access sports such as, tennis, golf, hockey and camogie.[45] The codified rules for the various types of football popular in Ireland were only developed in the late nineteenth century, the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) was established in

1879, the Irish Football Association (IFA) was established in 1880 while the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) was formed in 1884.[46] Due to the popularity of the GAA and their subsequent rules to ban members from playing 'foreign sports', the spread of soccer and rugby union in Ireland was limited to urban centres.[47] Nonetheless, reports of women's matches that were part of a tour of the British Ladies in Belfast in 1895 and Dublin in 1896 do appear in newspapers.[48] There is also a report of a women vs men match being held in June 1896 in Lurgan, almost one month after the British Ladies tour to Dublin in May 1896 and possibly the first record of Irish women playing the sport.[49] Touring sides from Britain was not uncommon with a number of other high-profile matches. Even after the FA imposed a ban on women playing soccer on FA grounds in England in 1921 and encouraged other Associations to follow suit, there were several other tours arranged between Irish and Scottish sides in the late 1920s. In 1927 a team called Rutherglen from Scotland played a series of friendly matches against Edinburgh Soccer Girls in Belfast, Derry, Dundalk, Dublin and Cork with a match against a local side in Dublin.[50] Newspaper reports were not always consistent in how they named the clubs, the Irish Independent referred to the touring Scottish teams as Rutherglen Ladies' F.C. vs. Edinburgh Ladies F.C..[51] Newspaper reports from one of their Dublin fixtures in this tour refer to the Scottish team as Rutherglen and the local side as a Dublin team.[52] The Evening Herald even calls them 'Dublin's first ladies soccer team' and along with a team photo names all the players while the Irish Times does not give much insight into who they are except for the reference to Miss Clarke's penalty shot.[53] From looking at Scottish newspapers we can see that after the tour of Ireland, several Irish women travelled to Scotland to play a series of Ireland vs Scotland matches in 1927 and 1928.[54] As mentioned before there has been no thorough examination of women's soccer history in Ireland, we know very little about how these early matches were organised and if there

were any formal clubs that did not get reported in the newspapers and we cannot trust if a newspaper report labels a team or a match as the first. A local newspaper report in summer 2018 ran with the headline 'Dundalk FC ladies team - the first Irish international team - trying to organise a reunion 50 years on' when referring to a friendly match held in Wales in 1968 between Dundalk Ladies and the Corinthian Nomads from Manchester but as outlined in the previous paragraphs this was not the first international match that an Irish team was involved in.[55]

We know that women's soccer was at its height of popularity in Britain in 1921 when the FA imposed its ban, but we do not know what impact this had in Ireland. Newspaper clippings show that during the Rutherglen tour through Ireland in 1927, that they played in a FAI affiliated ground in Dublin.[56] There were possibly other clashes between Irish and Scottish sides in the 1930s and competitions between Belfast sides were still running in 1932.[57] After this point there seems to be a very long gap till women's soccer starts again in the late 1960s. Initially, this was through five a side indoor football leagues then progressing on to outdoor soccer and Gaelic football.[58] We do not know for certain why there is this long gap but earlier legislative changes such as, the 1935 Conditions of Employment Act which, led to the restriction of what employment women could partake in and the 1937 Constitution that stated that a woman's place is in the home, certainly had a big impact on women's lives.[59] Article 42.1 of the Constitution still states that:

> By her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties within the home.[60]

It is possible that there will be a referendum on whether to retain or delete this section of the constitution in the near future.[61] Further research is needed to know the full impact of

these legislative changes on women's sport in the Republic of Ireland. There are many questions that remain to be answered such as, was there a decrease in the number of women who participated in the well-established sports such as, tennis, golf and camogie or did it just curtail the development of newer sports like soccer? In addition, there has been no real comparison of how women's sport developed after partition. Tynan has stated 'if press reports are an indication of the presence and popularity of ladies' football it would appear to have been more of a northern phenomenon' but the lack of newspaper reports in the south are not necessarily an indication of its absence.[62]

Toms has stated while researching the history of soccer in Munster that 'it was rare in the in the hundreds of column inches about soccer in the pages of the Evening Echo, and all of the other provincial newspapers' to report anything related to women's involvement in the sport.[63] Although, there is not a high volume of news reports about women's involvement in the sport, there are a significant number during certain decades in the early part of the twentieth century to warrant further investigation. This would be a very daunting task for a lone researcher, as it would take decades to review every news publication from cover to cover. Reviewing Irish newspapers still involves manual searching as not all newspapers are digitised and there may be some issues with the quality of digitisation of some editions. The author did not trawl through all the newspapers to find the reports of the women's matches cited above but learnt of these from other researchers who were kind enough to share their research. Researchers interested in the early period of men's soccer may have come across reports of early women's football during their research. As these reports are usually not of significance to the research questions they are investigating, there should be a way to share the knowledge gained with the wider community.

Consequently, some researchers have come together to run a short collaborative crowd sourcing project. The aim of the project is to get as many of the known citations of women playing any code of football prior to 1973 in one place that can then be shared with the research community. Governing bodies for soccer and Gaelic football in Ireland were established from 1973 onwards. Nominations will be gathered online through a Google Form and this data will then be transferred to an online mapping platform to visualise what newspapers were reporting on women's football, where these papers were published from and when they were published. Through the map visualisation it will be easier to identify trends in where and when reports were appearing. A crowd sourcing project is not a permanent solution to the problem at hand but is a way to start a conversation with the Irish sports research community as this subject area can no longer be ignored.[64]

The data collected in the crowd sourcing project could also be used to explore new research methods developed to interrogate vast digitised newspaper collections. The British Library Labs project has worked with a variety of researchers from different fields to support them to interrogate many British Library datasets including the British Library eighteenth and nineteenth century digitised newspaper collections.[65] Projects have included 'developing strategies to retrieve information often from 'messy cultural heritage data' of varying sorts – including Victorian jokes, information about political meetings, and patterns of reuse and plagiarism – from databases of historical newspapers'.[66] Messy cultural data is data that computers would find challenging to analyse, from unclear data in specific fields such as '[1950?]' to Optical Character Recognised (OCR) errors when identifying words such as 'Doj' instead of 'Dog' (the letter 'g' has been incorrectly identified as a 'j'). These researchers used different techniques, most of which required manually gathering a sample of the types of news articles they were trying to identify to help identify patterns in the data. These could then

be translated into computer code and used to find similar relevant articles over a larger corpus. Programming code was often developed in Python, R or C++ that was then used to run over a large corpus of the newspaper digitised collections, which brought back results that had attempted to match the original query /articles originally identified.[67] This process often meant lots of iteration, tweaking variables and trying again, until the quality of data found was deemed acceptable to consider further investigation.

The success of these research techniques depends on being able to identify unique features consistent with specific search criteria, e.g. the newspaper (e.g. 'title', 'issue', 'date', 'page', 'column', 'article' etc.) the page, the column, words patterns in the articles and specific target words, the quality of the OCR text, often it contains errors and is derived from technology used in the digitisation process (this can be affected by the original quality of the image page captured and the maturity, quality, reliability accuracy of the OCR software being used). Occasionally the code that was written to find relevant articles could be classified as employing 'machine learning' techniques (e.g. when looking for Black Abolitionist performances or finding Poetry in eighteenth Century newspapers).[68] This would often require 'ground truth' data to be captured first, which would often have to be manually derived and cleaned up (i.e. examples of what they are looking for would then need to be 'cleaned' or transcribed correctly, i.e. any OCR errors were corrected). This was then used to train artificially intelligent computational models to find what was being looked for. This again often required lots of tweaking running code to fit things in the corpus, examining the results and sometimes going back and forth in order to try and get fairly reliable results. Running these search queries, often brings back many false positives and requires further manual intervention to filter the data collected. Many of the researchers who were involved in these projects had no previous

experience of writing code but were able to develop these skills with the support of the British Library Labs project.[69]

A key output in the forthcoming collaboration between the British Library and the Alan Turing Institute, Living with Machines, is developing computational models that can be reused by other researchers, including historians, using the same or similar digitised resources. While, these models are geared towards use within a project where historians will collaborate with and have access to the expertise of computational linguists, data scientists and others, other historians with a basic knowledge of domain specific language may utilise these methods, especially if they collaborate with others with these skill sets.[70] Although these techniques are relatively new, there is great potential to apply these methodologies to digitised Irish newspapers from the early part of the twentieth century to identify reports of women's football matches and comments of female audiences at men's football matches.

Potential 3 - Oral History

As noted above it is very difficult to find women's experiences of sport as participants and spectators in any of the traditional resources used by historians of male sports. Williams has highlighted that while researching the history of women's soccer in England for her publication *A Game For Rough Girls*, there was no central archive to consult, instead she had to rely on access to private collections and first hand accounts from former players and others involved in the game.[71] Thus, the only methodology that can effectively fill these gaps in the national memory is oral history. Oral history has been one of the oldest forms of history even if the term 'oral history' is relatively new.[72] Tosh & Lang have long argued that in relation to the history field that 'oral sources merit more attention than they currently receive from the profession at large'.[73] Sangster has found

that 'oral history is especially useful as a means of probing the subjective areas of experience and feeling' as these cannot be found in traditional resources.[74] Using oral testimony has enriched the output of sport studies, consequently creating additional resources that can benefit the research community interested in women's sport if they are made accessible.[75] When the Oral History Archive in the Department of Sociology at University of Essex was established, 'at least five times as many major publications came out of it as the original research team could have produced'.[76]

Skillen and Osborne have cautioned that the needs of the researcher must be balanced with the needs and wishes of the communities being studied.[77] Borland has direct experience of being challenged by an interviewee on her interpretation of a memory that was shared during an interview, this made her more aware of the need to reflect on the power dynamic of whose story gets told in the final written text. She has stated that 'our scholarly representations of those performances [memories shared], if not sensitively presented, may constitute an attack on our collaborator's carefully constructed sense of self'.[78] Thus, it is important that the findings of the research conducted should be shared with the participants through the course of the project rather than at the end when there is no room for meaningful dialogue.

The *GAA Oral History* project ran by Boston College was not only the biggest sports related project but it was the biggest public history project to ever take place in the Republic of Ireland.[79] During the project '790 interviews were conducted with approximately 1,300 GAA fans, players and administrators between 2009 and 2012'.[80] Although not to this scale, oral history was also utilised by other sports researchers who used it to explore research questions related to Irish soccer history and the GAA.[81] The Boston College project serves as a model that others could follow to document the history of sports and communities not well represented in traditional sources. This is especially

true for minority sports that don't have an existing governing body such as, the indoor football leagues that ran in Ireland in the late 1960s. These leagues were unique in that GAA players were able to play a sport more like soccer than Gaelic football and were not penalised under Rule 27 which, banned their members from participating in foreign sports. Women were also actively encouraged to participate and this was the springboard for many soccer and Gaelic football teams in the region.[82]

Oral history was an important element in the author's previous research into the indoor football leagues in Drogheda, as there was very little reporting on the competitions in the local newspaper. Oral history interviews helped to establish 'the facts' by using grounded theory, once the same answers to the same questions started to appear it was likely that it was true. The semi structured interviews had four to five themes such as the place, the setup, getting started, the games and then a few additional questions for male participants on their opinions about women competing in the leagues. However, this was a very narrow approach to the interview process and when the project was expanded to cover the experiences of players in the neighbouring town of Dundalk, a broader life story strategy was used. The life story is an interdisciplinary method, once the story is recorded it can be analysed using a variety of theoretical frameworks.[83] Life story interviews can be condensed into an hour, a few hours, a day or even a number of days over a longer period of time. The time taken for these interviews varies from the interviewee's availability and willingness to talk as well as, the interviewer's skill at keeping the discussion going. The benefit of taking this approach in relation to women's soccer is that the researcher can get a better understanding of the external factors that influenced why someone got involved in a sport and whether they stayed involved in it. The next set of interviews conducted gave an insight into the individual experiences of the female players from both a rural and urban background as well as that differences in sporting

opportunities for women which, is not well documented in the current literature in Ireland. Williams, Hargreaves and Fletcher have touched on this subject from an English perspective but more local case studies in football are needed.[84] In addition, these interviews uncovered more detail on the influences of participants workplaces and/or sports clubs they were involved in before playing football, the style of their team uniforms as well as the relationship between indoor football and the traditional sport camogie.

The participants from rural county Louth interviewed to date were all involved in camogie before taking up indoor football. Unlike the GAA the Camogie Association did not have a longstanding ban on members playing foreign sports. The 1934 Camogie Congress introduced a ban on foreign sports, but this was removed completely by the early 1940s.[85] However, the 1967 Camogie Congress passed a motion that meant that any members playing hockey or football would be suspended from the Camogie Association for a period of twelve months. Indoor football was included in this ban and many camogie clubs and officials in county Louth were affected.[86] A short article in the *Dundalk Democrat* lamented that 'the only competitive sport left for the many of the fair sex is (or so it seems) indoor football'.[87] In the case of the north Louth indoor football team interviewed in this project their camogie club lost the Louth Senior Championship title in 1967, a title which they held from 1958 to 1966, due to the suspension of their key players.[88] After serving their suspension they returned to play camogie for their local team and won many more Louth Senior Championship titles. The players interviewed from mid-Louth highlighted that their camogie club never recovered from the suspensions and was disbanded as they and many others from their team played indoor football. Indoor football acted as a springboard for organised outdoor soccer and Gaelic football, the mid Louth interviewees moved onto soccer and played for Dundalk Ladies. Soccer was better organised in the towns of Dundalk and Drogheda but there were few opportunities in the

countryside as the focus was on Gaelic football.[89] When they tried to organise a Gaelic football club in their local parish, they were blocked by the parish priest who preached from the alter that 'there was to be no women's football in the parish'.[90] It is only through the use of oral history that we can really understand Irish women's footballing experiences. Other sources used by sports historians can't tell us why someone chose to play sport and why they chose soccer over other sports, why they continued or stopped playing that sport.

Rouse has stated that 'the huge increase in the number of women playing all manner of sports in Ireland in the last decades of the twentieth century and the first decades of the new millennium stands in stark contrast to what went before'.[91] However, if future historians were comparing the two periods with the exact same resources, they would face the same issues as women's sport is not well documented in newspapers and not many records make it to an archive. Women's football governing bodies were not formed in Ireland until the 1970s but the games had been developing since the mid-1960s and as they existed outside a formal governing body there is very little evidence of their existence. Nevertheless, this period of history is still within living memory and through a national oral history programme it can be documented to fill the gaps in our knowledge of how the sport was organised and experienced by different sections of society. However, this is time sensitive and it will not be long before this period of history is lost forever if there is no action taken soon.

Conclusion

The lack of historical research into women's experiences in sport in Ireland is not surprising considering the general attitude towards women's participation and the lack of media coverage it receives.[92] The 20x20 campaign has resulted in the leading media

bodies discussing the need for a cultural shift in how people perceive female participation in sport from a young age right through to the media coverage elite sports women get.[93] Nevertheless, it will be some time before the lasting impact of this campaign can be assessed.

The author will continue the oral history research into indoor football leagues that ran in Co. Louth in the mid-1960s. This research will explore further the relationship between indoor football and the Camogie Association and what impact this had on both sports. As mentioned previously, a small group of researchers have come together to highlight the variety of newspaper articles that have reported on women's involvement in Irish football prior to the establishment of the Women's Football Association of Ireland in 1973. The results of this project will be shared with the research community towards the end of 2019 and will hopefully prove to be a useful resource for future exploration of this subject.[94]

This article has outlined a number of potential areas for future research that could be applied to women's soccer and/or other sports. It is only when the history of women's soccer is documented that it can be analysed using a number of theoretical approaches. However, this shouldn't be seen as a subject that should only be examined by female researchers but should be a collective effort from across the sports research community in collaboration with memory institutions from a local to a national level. The Women's Football Association of Ireland will turn fifty in 2023, hopefully by then we will be closer to understanding the history and development of women's soccer in Ireland.

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