Three Lions On Her Shirt: Hot and Banal Nationalism for England's Sportswomen

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Journal of Sport & Social Issues (Accepted 4th April 2019)

Keywords: Banal Nationalism, National Identity, Women, Englishness, Gender

Abstract:

It has long been claimed that sport plays an important role in the formulation of national identity. Key to understanding this relationship is Michael Billig's (1995) concept of banal nationalism which is used in this article to examine national symbols that act as daily reminders of the nation. Specifically, the article discusses the relationship between Englishness and sport by drawing upon data from interviews with representative English sportswomen in association football, cricket, netball and rugby union. The article demonstrates the important role that (men's) sport plays in developing a sense of national identity in England and, in particular, one that is distinct from Britishness. Furthermore, the significance of national symbols are evidenced as banal reminders of national identity for England's sportswomen.

Introduction

Much has been written about the relationship between men's sport and nationalism, with Brentin and Cooley (2016) highlighting the wealth of scholars who have contributed to the discussion. Much has also been written about the relationship between sport and gender but, in this case, with scarce attention being paid to the relationship between women's sport and nationalism and national identities. This paper seeks to address these two relative absences by using Michael Billig's (1995) 'banal nationalism' and Tim Edensor's (2002) 'nationalism of everyday life' to examine the lived experience of women who have represented their nation – England - in international sport.

Now more than ever, England's women are demonstrating their worth in the international sporting arena. A bronze medal for the footballers at the FIFA Women's World Cup in 2015, bettered by a second place finish in the Women's Rugby World Cup in 2017. Not to be outdone, the cricketers won the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup on home soil at the home of Cricket, Lords, in front of a sold-out crowd in 2017; with England's netballers securing a first ever Commonwealth Gold Medal on the Gold Coast, Australia in 2018. These results are testament to the advances made by Englishwomen on the sports field in recent years, and have sporadically thrust England's sportswomen onto the front pages of the national press. Despite this, women are still discussed, and often presented, as outsiders in national sport, through their exclusion in academic works and their overall representation in the national press (Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2017). Whilst much work on sport and national identity has often analysed media coverage, little research includes or speaks to those very national subjects. As Skey (2009) articulates, we need to actually ask national subjects about their national identification, attending to the way 'social actors construct themselves as nationalised subjects' (Condor and Abell, 2006: 337). Subsequently, this paper aims to give a voice to England's sportswomen,

through a discussion of their experiences on the international sporting field as national representatives.

Conceptualising the Nation

For Harris (2016), the concept of the nation is open to interpretation, and the field of nationalism has seen numerous definitions and theories to begin to explain the phenomenon. Billig's influential conception of 'banal nationalism' (1995) was described by Skey (2009: 331) as 'perhaps the most influential study of everyday forms of nationhood'. Rooted in the modernist (and specifically constructionist) paradigm (as highlighted by Smith, 2001), and influenced by the work of constructionist nationalism scholars such as Anderson (2006) and Gellner (1983), his work has helped to stimulate a trend in nationalism studies towards examining the implicit, everyday, and sometimes micro-level creation and recreation of national identity (Hearn, 2007). Billig's ground-breaking study challenged those conceptualizations of nationalism that had focused on its emergence in extraordinary conditions, explaining that nationalism should also be understood as incorporated into banal, mundane, everyday life practices.

Billig concluded that within the nation, there exists unnoticed, routine flagging which serves to (re)produce the nation daily, in a different way from the 'hot nationalism' of warfare or, more recently, significant political or highly significant sporting events. In many discreet ways, the citizens of a nation are continually reminded of their belonging to the imagined national community, whether this is through statements from politicians, symbols on coins, national flags or simply by seeing a national flag hanging outside a public building. Billig (1995: 8) explains, 'nationhood is still being reproduced: it can still call for ultimate sacrifices; and, daily, its symbols and assumptions are flagged'. In drawing attention to this, and in

support of his argument, Billig offers a discussion of the differences between waved and unwaved flags. He claims that the 'unwaved flag, which is so forgettable, is at least as important as the memorable moments of flag-waving' (1995: 10). Subsequently, it is the unwaved flag that is a significant metaphor here, in the continuation of a sense of national identity. As Hearn (2007: 660) articulates, 'ultimately Billig's argument is not that banality reveals the true nature of nationalism, but rather the explicit ideological form, the stirring call to die for one's country is rendered more plausible by nationalism's banal presence'.

Billig's work has not gone without critique, led by Skey (2009: 335) who proposed that a major flaw in Billig's theory is that it 'assumes that a national media addresses a coherent national public.' Whilst Billig responded, explaining that the media 'does not transmit a single, coherent message about the nation' (p. 348) which the national population will interpret in different ways, he proposes that his theory was to focus on the unconscious that can include what is 'so familiar and habitual that it passes unnoticed' (p. 349). Despite his critique, (Skey (2009) did identify Billig's work as leading the way in a switch in focus from macro-scale theorising of the nation to more empirical based studies that focus on issues of representation, contestation, and localised meaning makings as well as more contextualised case studies. Billig, and later Edensor, have argued that most work on nations, nationalism and national identity only focuses on 'the spectacular, the "traditional" and the official' (Edensor, 2002: 17). However, according to Edensor (2002), we must not forget that, like nationalism itself, national identity is grounded in the everyday, mundane details of social interaction. Ordinary hints of nationality act to further imprint the nation onto the people, so that it is remiss to discount the subtle displays of nationhood that citizens encounter daily.

Sport and nationalism

It has been claimed that 'sport is clearly linked to the construction and reproduction of the national identities of many people' (Bairner, 2001: 1). For Billig (2009: 349), the 'ideology of nationalism could only triumph in an international world', and the structure international sport is seen to link with the 'geopolitical ideology of nationalism' (Polley, 2004: 11). Indeed, nowhere in modern society is everyday nationalism more apparent for the masses than in the male sporting realm, with the notion of sport and nationalism being rooted in concepts relating men and masculinity. Allison (2000) describes how the setting of men's international sport is especially relevant in inculcating national sentiment through the frequently displayed flags, the sung national anthems, the wearing of national colours and emblems, all by large crowds. Boyle and Haynes (2009: 143), like Bairner (2001) highlight how few other cultural forms lend themselves as easily as men's sport to being used as an indicator of national identity, with 'its visibility and focus on symbols, winning, competition, partisan fans – and, in team games, the necessity of collective struggle'.

Billig (1995) identifies how major sporting events – and he almost certainly meant men's sport - with waved flags and success celebrated by millions, act as a form of 'hot', or overt, nationalism. Important in this relationship between sport and national identity is the role of the media. He outlines the part that the press plays in flagging nationhood; 'all the papers, whatever their politics, have a section in which the flag is waved with regular enthusiasm. This is the sports section' (Billig, 1995: 119). Feminist scholars have long pointed to the dominance of men on these pages (Bruce, 2008). As such, Rosie et al (2004: 437) highlight how national newspapers in England are 'essentially national institutions which encourage their readers to see the world in general in specifically national, and masculine, terms, "re-mind" them of their own nation in particular and help them to think in patriotic terms about it'. In England, the national sporting press will make heroes of its (most likely male) sporting champions, and

fervently celebrate most national victories (Cronin and Mayall, 1998). As Porter (2004: 46) explains, consciousness of one's national identity is developed by shared experiences, and men's 'international sport plays a part in this process, even if most people experience it only indirectly through the consumption of mass-produced words and images'. Yet the nation that is 'flagged' through the popular press is usually distinctly male. In sum, therefore, men's sport provides an arena in which the nation comes alive, where Tuck and Maguire (1999: 27) suggest that international sports are forms of 'patriot games', allowing the individuals (who are often men) who represent their nations to become embodiments of the nation, or 'patriots at play', simultaneously defining and reflecting the national character, one that remains almost exclusively masculine in nature.

Sport, Nationalism, and Englishness

Sport has been identified as especially significant in the case of England, which exists in the world of nations as part of the larger United Kingdom, or Great Britain. It has been claimed that there was a need for the English to develop a more definite sense of themselves, away from a British identity (Kumar, 2003). Whilst it is beyond the scope of this paper to go in to the complexities of the discussions around England and Englishness, and the United Kingdom and Britishness, research suggesting a decline in British identity (Heath and Roberts, 2008) also highlights the importance for the English to establish a distinct English identity. But where is this to be located? Gibbons and Malcolm (2017) highlight the significance of the relationship between sport and national identity as central to Englishness. According to Robinson (2008), England exists more in imagination than it does anywhere else, although one place where it does exist is on the sports field, with sport one of the most important spheres for observing English national distinctiveness (Gibbons and Malcolm, 2017). Furthermore, this relationship is again inextricably linked to notions of masculinity. With men's international sport filling

TV screen and national newspapers weekly, perhaps it can be argued that men's sport in England becomes both a hot (for example, biennial international football tournaments) and a banal (for example, international 'friendly' fixtures) signifier of national identity. Central to this relationship, clearly, is the role of men's sport in imagining the English nation. Indeed, the rise in English popular nationalism has often been attributed to a specific men's sporting event – the European Football Championships in 1996.

According to Aughey (2007: 204), 'it may be no coincidence either that English flag-waving has been most dramatically on show at and around those venues which have integrated most efficiently popular culture and commercial success – sporting events'. Euro '96 is often considered a defining moment in demonstrating the recent increase in displays of English nationalism with the flag waving of English fans during the tournament (Aughey 2007; Kumar, 2003; Paxman, 1999). Kumar (2003) claimed that this brandishing by the English at football matches of the St. George's cross does indicated a rise in a specific English, as opposed to British, national consciousness, or at least a recognition of the distinction between the two. What is clearly key here, then, is the role of sport – and notably men's football – as central to this shift, which highlights the extent to which this imagined Englishness is itself distinctly male.

With reference to national men's football teams, Giulianotti (1999: 23) claims, 'at internationals, the team embodies the modern nation, often literally wrapping itself in the national flag'. However, the players who embody the nation only represent a small minority of the national collective. According to Rowe, McKay and Miller (1998), it is men who are the representatives of national character, and thus national identity can be established through the achievements of men. Harris and Clayton (2007) are explicit in their claim that the football in

which the nation is imagined (Anderson, 2006) is that played by men. For them, through the media, the high level of expectancy that is often placed on English sports teams radiates 'a patriotic, masculine vibe' (Harris and Clayton, 2007: 214). For example, whilst Harris and Clayton (2007: 213) have also proclaimed football as the national English sport, they state that this has allowed it to 'embody the nation's collective claim to authority in a power relations sense and, as such, provides the ideal arena for the creation of heroes and figures of hegemonic masculinity'. We then see the nation in masculine terms and a development of a masculine Englishness (removed reference), and this is significant in England where sport is one of the only social institutions that separates, or marks out as different, the home nations within the UK. With sport being so central to the development of an English national identity, it is obvious that women should be positioned as outsiders to this relationship (Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2017).

This masculine emphasis is continued with the branding of the England men's football team as the three lions. The three lions are taken from the royal coat of arms of England, and the use of the lion as a national symbol dates back to Richard the First, or Richard the Lion-heart, in the twelfth century (Vincent et al, 2010). It was Richard the First's military exploits and subsequent death in battle that led to the nickname of Lion-heart, and forms the basis of the prototype brave, courageous English hero with lionheart spirit (Vincent et al, 2010). Adopted by the Football Association (FA) upon its formation in 1863, the logo is featured heavily in FA marketing and promotions, which thrust it into popular national consciousness. Polley (2004) highlights how an England football team that is then wrapped in a historical symbol of Englishness such as the three lions becomes an attractive way for many people to express their sense of belonging. The male lion-hearts of the English men's football team, with the three lion's emblem on their shirt, then provide an avenue for the rest of the nation to demonstrate

their national identity. In some instances, we can see this as an overt, hot nationalism but in other aspects perhaps there are banal aspects at play - what better way to inculcate national sentiment in a banal way that have a hit, popular song called three lions on a shirt, in preparation for Euro '96 (Lightning Seeds, Baddiel and Skinner, 1996), which served to embed the three lions mantra in popular consciousness (Aughey, 2007. Furthermore, those three lions serve to act as a banal symbol of English national identity for the nation.

Bringing Women into Sport and National Identity

As noted, it is men's sport that is central in the relationship between sport and the nation. This is in large part the result of the social construction of the nation, which is inextricably linked to hegemonic forms of masculinity. For Nagel (2008, p.900), 'the idea of the nation and the history of nationalism are intertwined with the idea of manhood and the history of manliness'. Throughout history, men have controlled, fought for and represented their nation in all areas of society. However, McClintock (1993) contends that all nations depend on powerful constructions of gender and thus, despite the dominance of men to the nation, it has been argued that in the gendering of nationalism, 'women's bodies are the boundary of the nation, and the bearers of its future.' (Whitehead et al, 1993, p.1).

Women have participated in national and various state processes and practices; as biological reproducers of ethnic collectivities, reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups, transmitters of culture, signifiers of national differences; and participants in national struggles (Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989). This framework highlights not only the practical but also the symbolic nature of women's national positioning. Clearly, the gender politics of nations and nationalism are complex, 'including both the gendering of the nation as female and the construction of women as mothers of the nation, responsible for its physical, cultural and social

reproduction' (Pettman, 1996, p.187). Yuval-Davis (1997) has been central in writing women *into* stories of nationalism, and outlines how hegemonic theorizations about nations and nationalism have treated gender relations as irrelevant.

Both the nation and sport then rely on social constructions of masculinity and femininity as framing devices, and REMOVED REFERENCE draw attention to the masculine construction of Englishness in sporting contexts. The relationship between women, the construction of nations, and the reproduction of national identities remains generally under researched, which serves to write women out of literature on sporting nationalisms too (removed referenced). Given that the literature on women and sporting nationalisms is woefully underdeveloped, as a result their experiences have seldom been directly addressed.

Performing National Identity

If we consider sport to be a powerful signifier of the nation and of nationalism, both banal and 'hot', then we need to address the following question: What about the athletes? Edensor (2002) introduces the concept of performing the nation, which is especially relevant to the role of elite athletes who represent their nations. He argues that the concept of performance 'enables us to look at the ways in which identities are enacted and reproduced, informing and (re)constructing a sense of collectivity' (Edensor, 2002: 69). For Edensor (2002: 69), national identities are '(re)produced by using the metaphor of performance'. There are of course symbolic spaces in which national identities are played out such as national landmarks and sports grounds (Edensor, 2002), but also important here is the role of national colours and symbols associated with national performance. Repetitive performances result in memory and identity becoming inscribed on the body. As a consequence, performing a national identity becomes banal in character at least in the eyes of the performers themselves. The 'performance of national

identity becomes second nature to the habituated "actor"', i.e. the athlete who performs national identity every time she competes (Edensor, 2002: 71). Symbols (re)produced by performers become sites of importance for the national population during 'grand occasions when the nation and its symbolic attributes are elevated in public display'. So, while fans may see sporting events as expressions of hot nationalism, bringing the nation into the national consciousness, for those very performers, sporting nationalism becomes banal in terms of its significance.

As noted, although Billig's work has not escaped criticism, it retains contemporary significance when considering the nation. Skey (2009) highlights that Billig's work is still relevant for contemporary studies that attempt to explore how the nation frames 'the ways in which people understand who they are, the nature of the world they live, how they relate to others and what counts as important'. As embodiments of the nation and as performers of national identity, representative athletes become ideal subjects for examining the way in which national sporting symbols are banal in character.

Methodology

Much of the research that is concerned with national identity in sport utilizes a methodological approach which analyses the role of the media in (re)producing a sense of national identity (e.g. Maguire and Poulton, 1999; Tuck, 2003). This has often continued the banal, repeated presentation of men as symbolic of the nation (with the notable exception of Wensing and Bruce, 2003). Whilst international sport can be seen to act as a site in which multiple identities are performed – sporting, national and gendered, little research has addressed either the role of women in this regard, or the role of the very national representatives who embody the nation in sport. Again, when such research has been conducted, the athletes in question have tended to be men (Tuck and Maguire, 1999; Tuck, 2003; McGee and Bairner, 2011). As national

representatives, elite athletes are central to most people's experiences of sport and national identity, and are the embodiment of the relationship between sport and imagined national community. Following Tuck (2003), and McGee and Bairner (2011), the present study demonstrates the need to ask those athletes who act as representatives of the nation about their identities and sense of belonging.

This paper draws upon a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with 15 English sportswomen from cricket, association football, netball and rugby union in 2011 and 2012 (see Table 1). At the time of interview, the women had a combined total of 562 senior appearances in representative sport. Amis (2005: 105) explains that interviews offer a depth of information that permits a detailed exploration of particular issues, as the interviewer 'attempts to gain insight into the inconsistencies, contradictions and paradoxes that are a quintessential part of our daily lives'. The sports were carefully selected; netball, football, cricket and rugby were used because in these sports, unlike others, there is not usually a team that is representative of Great Britain (except for the unique situation of a Team GB women's football team at the 2012 Olympics). It was felt that this unique position of being identified as English by their sporting representation gave the participants a distinct view of English national identity and its separation from Britishness.

Underpinning this research is an awareness of the performative, and thus fluid and contextual, character of national identity. There can be an assumption that nationalism and national identity are essential elements of English life, when they are contingent on a specific moment in time. As such, it is important to note that at the time of interviews in 2012, the United Kingdom was in the midst of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations and the forthcoming

London Olympics Games, which was presented in the media as a positive portrayal of England/Britain (Black, 2016).

As elite level athletes were the subject of this research, it was essential to identify a number of gatekeepers before full contact could be established with all participants (McGee and Bairner, 2011). The position of the researcher as a student at a university with a strong sporting tradition provided an initial base of elite level athletes that were easily accessible through sporting networks and contacts. The women who were initially contacted were then able to pass on information about friends, and this snowballed into the participant base. As Seale and Filmer (1998: 139) explain, this was of sampling 'can be a very helpful way of gaining access to people who, without such a personal contact, might otherwise refuse to be interviewed'. Snowball sampling, although contradictory of many underlying assumptions about sampling (often linked to positivist notions of reliability and validity), has a number of advantages for studying populations such as elites (Atkinson and Flint, 2003).

Atypically, the participants in this research project are identifiable due to their visibility as elite, international level, sport participants. Flick (2006: 50) explains that 'the issue of confidentiality or anonymity may become problematic when you do research with several members of a specific setting'. It is much easier to identify the 'real' person from the context information included in quotations, particularly in a setting such as elite, international level sport. Similar to McGee and Bairner (2011), it was decided to make a virtue of this and feature the interviewees as themselves in the research, named, and contextualized with personal details so that their sporting lives could be fully retold. As such, following institutional ethical approval and participant consent, it was established with the participants that they would feature in the research as themselves; they would be named, and the personal details about their

sporting lives would be retold in full. Whilst anonymity can protect the participants, but it can also deny them "the very voice in the research that must originally have been claimed as its aim" (Parker, 2005: 17). This strategy was also an important way by which to achieve a central aim of the study – to give a voice to England's sportswomen.

Interviewed as part of a wider study on women's sport and national identity (removed reference), the key focus of this section of the research was on the importance of sport to national identity. Interview questions were structured accordingly and were aimed at exploring the role of sport and national identity in general, as well as female athletes' own experiences of playing sport. With specific relevance to this essay, there was also scope to discuss the importance of symbols to national identity, by asking what these symbols mean to the women who represent their nation. Interviews were conducted in a neutral location selected by the participants, such as coffee shops or staff rooms at their place of work, and the interview duration varied from 50-90 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and then subjected to a thematic analysis. The first phase of data analysis involved re-reading of the interview transcripts, to generate initial codes which centred predominantly on women in sport, national identity and Englishness. The data was then coded and further organised into sub-themes, one of those being banal and hot nationalism in sport. These sub themes contained a discussion of the significance of men's sport to a sense of nationhood, the position of women in this debate, and the significance of national sporting symbols and emblems.

Narratives of England's Lionesses: Englishness Flagged Through Men's Sport

A key theme that was noted by most of the sportswomen was the centrality of sport to English national identity. Not surprisingly, the athletes often used football (as consumers in this instance) to imagine the nation, thereby helping to confirm Harris and Clayton's (2007) claim

that national men's sporting events in England become symbolic of the nation and, thus, represent expressions of hot nationalism (Billig, 1995).

> 'I guess football is a big part of making people English' (Karen Carney, Football).
>
> 'I'm pretty patriotic, when I watch England play football' (Beth Morgan, Cricket).

As Karen and Beth evidence, the type of sport that is imagined - even by elite female athletes - as central to Englishness is men's sport, and specifically men's football. Stacey, a netballer, also discussed the role of football:

> 'I think English people have quite like, a different kind of pride and passion towards lots of things...I could never quite understand the way men go absolutely nuts over football…, I think that's a massive part of a male English identity' (Stacey Francis, Netball).

As Hobsbawm (1990: 143) noted, 'the imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people'. It is implied however, that this team consists not just of *any* people, but of men. It remains that the national sporting arena is one dominated by men, and it is these men's sports teams act as hot, or overt, signifiers or symbols of the nation. National identity is then constructed, established and confirmed through the achievement of male sports stars. Harris and Clayton (2007: 214) explain that, subsequently, 'male sports stars emit the masculine status of the nation's men', and as such it would seem that the Englishness that is most often imagined is masculine (removed reference). Men's football provides a tangible representation as to what it means to be English. However, the sportswomen involved here also recognize that their own position in sport plays a part in defining what the English nation means to them. These ideas will now be explored in more detail.

English Sportswomen Flagging the Nation

The conflation of Englishness and Britishness is common (Kumar, 2003). However, because sport often serves as an arena by which English national identity becomes 'real' (Robinson, 2008), for England's representatives it provides an avenue to clarify their thinking and understanding of England as a distinct nation. For example:

> '[Playing for England is] when I recognize [being English] more, because when you are coming up against another country you are like, 'yeh, we are England'.'(Sophie Bradley, Football).

While men's sport enables England to conceptually exist, sport played a key role in symbolizing the women's own sense of belonging. By playing for England, this allowed the sportswomen to embody Englishness, or, more specifically, perform as symbolic flags for the English nation. By wearing their dress, or their kit, and being part of the England set up, they began to recognise their national identity. However, while international sport represented an environment where many of the women identified with England, outside of sport there remained the possibility of identifying as British, highlighting the fluid, multiple nature of their identities. Some women described this multiple notion of national identity:

> 'I would say that's quite difficult actually, because I would say British, yeh. That's what I would say. Probably within my sport that's quite different, I'd be English because I'm playing for England. But generally, if someone asked, I'd say British' (Beth Morgan, Cricket).

The women often echoed Robinson's (2008: 220) sentiment that sport is the place where 'Englishness and Britishness no longer merge'. Despite this, one thing that remained clear was that representing England served as a signifier of their English national identity:

> 'For me as an England player, viewing myself as a true English person, it's really important.' (Claire Purdy, Rugby)
>
> 'I think you definitely feel more English after representing England at something' (Tammy Beaumont, Cricket)

Sports grounds provide symbolic spaces in which national identities can be played out. Edensor (2002: 69) identified ways in which national identities are '(re)produced by using the metaphor of performance'. Repetitive performances result in memory and identity becoming inscribed on the body, and thus performing a national identity results in that identity becoming part of the performer. In this way there is a sense of hot nationalism as well as a banality to the role of sport in generating a sense of national identity. It was evident throughout discussions with the sportswomen that this idea of repetitive performance of national identity, through representing their nation on the sports field, resulted in Englishness being inscribed onto them. However, they also performed an overt Englishness when they pulled on the shirt.

National colours, the singing of the national anthem and the symbolic three lions or red rose were central to the heightened sense of national identity experienced by the women during international representation. The interviewees explained how sport often increased the importance of a national dimension to their sense of identity:

> 'I'm not one of these people that gets the national flag put on my bicep, and I'm not huge on St. Georges day or things like that, but when it comes to playing for England…then I'm hugely, hugely patriotic.' (Claire Allen, Rugby).

Sport again appears central to imagining England and Englishness, providing a symbolic space for Englishness to be lived out. We have seen how international sports are forms of 'patriot games', with individuals who are engaged in these activities becoming highly visible 'patriots at play', as active embodiments of the nation (Tuck, 2003). For Tuck (2003), the main source of national pride stems from personal experiences on the sports field. Similarly here, representing England enables the players to develop a sense of belonging to the nation, feeling a 'part' of England, and the opportunity to embody the nation on the field of play.

> ‘If someone said to me are you patriotic, I’m probably not patriotic, but I am the moment I have got the red and white on.’ (Olivia Murphy, Netball).

A former England captain, Olivia highlights the way in which sport serves to create a strong sense of national identity, but also the banality of national identity in an everyday setting. Essential to this relationship between athlete and nation is the wearing of national colours via their sporting uniform, as national symbols enhance the importance of symbolic spaces. For many, these banal aspects of nationalism ultimately serve to remind the women of who they are and whom they represent (Billig, 1995). Through their sport, the women become engaged in the process of national flagging (Billig, 1995), as representatives of the English nation.

The repetitive performance of national identity, through representing their nation on the sports field, not just in international competition but in the day to day practice of training, resulted in Englishness being inscribed on them – they performed Englishness whenever they pulled on the shirt or dress. This is consolidated through the wearing of national colours and national kit, which demonstrates the ways in which the women become ‘wrapped in the national flag’ (Polley, 2004). We see here the sportswomen describing a performance of Englishness, with sport being important to both their national identity and who they identify as. For these women, national identity becomes part of their everyday life – the symbolic reminders of nationhood through sport becoming habituated within them, as actors or performers of the nation.

The Three Lions: Symbolising the nation

> ‘The red and white [flag]. The three lions’ (Tammy Beaumont, Cricket).

For many of the participants, receiving their first playing kit or tracksuit was also an important moment in their sporting careers, and one that they all remember. Not only that, but, like the

national anthem, the national kit and the symbols associated with English national representative sport, specifically the three lions, serve as further banal reminders of the women's national identity.

> 'Every time you wear your England shirt, in the media we're the England women's team, on my cricket bag it's the England women's team…so you are always reminded of that fact that you are representing England.' (Katharine Brunt, Cricket).

The three lions are central to English sporting nationalism, providing a symbol by which the nation is imagined and sustained. For the participants in this study, the three lions are symbolic of their national identity and the values they carry within English society more generally.

> 'Putting on the shirt, wearing the three lions…going in there and seeing your kit hanging up with my number and name on, it's such a dream.' (Karen Carney, Football).

The cricketers and the footballers (who carry the logo on their national sporting uniforms) mentioned the 'three lions' when describing the kit:

> 'When I first pulled open the box that we get and you see your name on the back of your shirt with the three lions on the front it was a really special moment.' (Tammy Beaumont, Cricket).
>
> 'The whole national anthem, the three lions, it all adds in to that united, we are playing for our country.' (Beth Morgan, Cricket).

Following the symbolic role of the three lions in English history, the FA adopted the three lions logo, and displayed it prominently on the front of the English football shirt (Vincent, Kian and Pederson, 2011). The symbolism has been very important to English sporting nationalism (Crolley and Hand, 2006), and is demonstrated in the popular song 'Three Lions (Football's Coming Home)' (Vincent, Kian and Pederson, 2011).

As Katharine states:

> ‘The three lions are important, I know a few lads who have got them tattooed on them…I know [England cricketer] is getting it done actually, she’s just getting the one lion, which I keep having a go at her about, because it’s all about the three lions.’ (Katharine Brunt, Cricket).

Asked if she would consider getting a tattoo of the three lions, Katherine responded:

> ‘I don’t think I need to…it’s cool that you want to show how proud of it you are, but I don’t think I need to. I mean I show it every time I pull on my shirt, and I’ve got that shirt for life.’

Clearly, the three lions as a symbol of England are very important, not only for the women interviewed but also for their colleagues and male counterparts. Not only this, though, is the idea that once you have earnt the three lions, you have that forever, like the unwaved flag hanging outside the proverbial public house. Beth further indicates the symbolic role of the three lions in imagining Englishness:

> ‘I think we’re quite lucky having the three lions, I know every nation has their own kind of emblem but I think the three lions is really kind of epitomises England. We talk about the shirt as the three lions and you know you really want to put the three lions on…so I think it does have a real…significance.’ (Beth Morgan, Cricket).

For these women, the three lions crest is symbolic of representing England. Furthermore, Beth indicates that the three lions are also symbolic of the type of Englishness they are expected to display – brave, courageous lion-hearts (Hand, 2002). Indeed, England’s football captain Faye White was described as a ‘lionheart’ in one media article in 2011. Initially dubbing her a ‘tough girl’, Jonathon Brown then went on to write: ‘England skippers of all kinds have long enjoyed a lionheart tradition. Faye White is no exception.’ (Brown, 2011: 12). The three lions are

initially symbolic of England because of the men's football and cricket teams, but this symbolism has been transferred to the women's game. The media have picked up on this in their reporting of the women's game. However, the term is often gendered and transformed to 'lionesses': 'Hope and glory for Lionesses' (Clarke, 2011: 53). Although the women are represented as the lionesses in the press, it is the three lions that acts as the sustaining national symbols.

The Red English Rose: Symbolising the nation?

The rugby players highlighted the role of the rose in symbolising English national identity. The women, however, have not always worn the rose on their shirts. Due to a merger between the English governing bodies for rugby, the Rugby Football Union for Women (RFUW) and the Rugby Football Union (RFU) in 2009, the kit for representative teams became standardised. As a consequence, the use of the English rose, which is the same as the rose worn by the men, appeared on the shirts of England's women's rugby players (alongside the word 'women'). The rose is evident in the use of the term by the media in headlines following England's World Cup final defeat: 'Trampled rose: England fall short' (*The Guardian*, 2010). Despite this, the rose appeared to be a contested symbol for the women, perhaps because of its relative lack of symbolic significance for the concept of Englishness within sport. Sarah was asked her for thoughts on the importance of this emblem:

> 'On our first cap we get presented with a real rose, the night before…so the rose starts right from your very first cap…I think it's quite symbolic which I think it quite important within sport…no other sport has the same emblem, so that's something you associate with rugby and with playing for your country.' (Sarah Hunter, Rugby).

However, other members of the squad do not have the same emotional attachment to the rose as Sarah:

> ‘The rose? Erm, everyone always bleats on about it, like in team speeches, you know, “for the rose girls”. I don’t, I like it I do like it but it’s not, I wouldn’t say I really identify with it. But I like the fact that it’s on our shirt.’ (Claire Allen, Rugby).
>
> ‘Some people really say that, you know, the red rose, and they get pulled to it…that’s not really a pull for me, it doesn’t matter what I’m wearing I’m the same underneath, so yeh, it doesn’t really matter.’ (Charlotte Barras, Rugby).

Despite this, Claire commented:

> ‘I don’t know whether you know, the RFUW used to, we didn’t have a rose before, we had a bud… …I think even with the bud…it was still important, because then it was only going to be a certain amount of people wearing that kit…All of the kit, the symbol on it, means that you are a good player, you are representing your country.’ (Claire Purdy, Rugby).

The lack of attachment to the rose may stem from the fact that, at the time, it was a relatively new addition to the women’s kit. Claire indicates that both the bud and the rose carry the same symbolic meaning as the three lions and the red dress – that you are representing your country. However, what it does highlight further is the cultural significance of the three lions to English national identity.

Discussion: Hot and Banal Nationalism in International Women’s Sport

This study offers a discussion of the experiences of England’s elite sportswomen, drawn from netball, association football, cricket and rugby union, highlighting the importance of those very things that come to symbolise Englishness. International sport may represent overt nationalism for the masses, but for these women, wearing the three lions or the red rose is a routine practice which emphasises and brings into being their sense of who they are, in national terms. Playing sport for England represents a taken-for-granted performance of national identity for these

women. Thus, central to this research is a discussion surrounding those seemingly banal aspects of nationalism in sport – national symbols, flag, colours and emblems. The extent to which the three lions and the cross of St. George symbolise England, and remind England's sporting stars of their nationhood is brought to light. Skey (2009) highlights that Billigs work is so relevant for contemporary studies that attempt to explore how the nation frames 'the ways in which people understand who they are, the nature of the world they live, how they relate to others and what counts as important' (Reicher and Hopkins, 2001: 3). This study adds to the current literature that has utilised banal nationalism, whilst also introducing a different angle to current discussions; namely, giving a voice to those very people who are involved in the flagging of the nation – national sport stars.

Edensor (2002) argues that one of the most powerful forms of popular national performance is to be found in sport. Furthermore, international sport represents a stage on which women can actively perform their national identity (Edensor, 2002). While popular discussions of banal nationalism often focus on the reading of media texts (Billig, 1995; Bishop and Jaworski, 2003; Yumul and Özkirimli, 2000), this study has drawn upon the experiences of a group of female athletes, thereby demonstrating a marked change in the focus of research on the relationship between English national identity and sport (Bishop and Jaworski, 2003; Tuck, 2003). Very few research studies have looked at international sport as a site for inculcating national identity from the perspective of the very actors who embody or signify the nation. Watson (2017) highlights the way national identity emerges through processes of 'imagining', 'constructing', 'reproducing', and 'inventing'. Central to this is the positioning of sport as a site of national identity (re)production (Billig, 1995; Edensor, 2002; Watson, 2017). At the start of this paper, we see confirmation of the importance of sport to the participants' national identity. This is particularly relevant regarding the separation of British and English national identities, which

are often conflated and confused. Furthermore, the women highlighted how their own sense of national identity was heightened during the periods of time that they represented England, supporting Robinson's (2008) contestation that England exists on the sports field, if nowhere else.

This study provides compelling evidence of the use of national symbols to reinforce national identity and feelings of belonging. For many of the participants, receiving their first national playing kit or tracksuit was a memorable and highly significant moment in their sporting careers. National colours and symbols, specifically the three lions, served as important markers of identity. Despite often being identified as 'hot' signifiers of nationalism (Billig, 1995; Bishop and Jaworski, 2003), during major sporting events, such symbols served to act as banal reminders of the women's national identity, constantly signifying who they are (and are not) and whom they are representing. For these women, the badges are symbolic manifestations of the imagined community, and their national identity was consolidated through the wearing of national colours and national kit, which demonstrates the ways in which the women become 'wrapped in the national flag'. Furthermore the Three Lions are also symbolic of a type of Englishness that they are expected to display – that of brave, courageous lion-hearts (Hand, 2002).

The language used by the sportswomen who participated in the study highlights a sense of ownership of the nation. The symbols associated with national sport are used for a variety of ends – in this case, to reinforce national identity and feelings of belonging – and are (re)produced by performers as sites of importance for the national population as a whole, especially during 'grand occasions when the nation and its symbolic attributes are elevated in public display' (Edensor, 2002: 72). For the consumers of sport, this represents a form of hot

nationalism, but for the performers, these very symbols (the national anthem, the three lions, the rose) in some instances become banal in nature, worn everyday on their training wear as well as their shirts. Of course, there is a 'hot' notion in the emotive, grand occasions of world cup finals and international representation, but also a banality in the idea that once you have earnt your international honours (symbolised through the three lions or the rose), that cannot be taken away – an imaginary, banal, flag for the women.

Maguire and Poulton (1999) offer us the term 'patriots at play' to describe the men who embody their nation on the football pitch, with Jarvie and Walker (1994) questioning whether the men representing their nation in sport are only patriotic for the ninety minutes (or eighty, or 5 day) patriots. However, the position of women in this debate has only recently been explored (removed reference). During international sporting competition, the relationship between women's sport and national identity becomes much more complex than previously thought. Wensing and Bruce (2003) found that common media conventions of women's sport (such as the downplaying of sport) are 'bent' in order for the women to be represented as strong and powerful national champions. Moreover, whilst the women's status as national heroines may only be transient, e.g. for eighty or ninety minutes, their positioning as such persists. Claire Purdy, an international rugby player, clearly demonstrated the importance the women attach to their sporting careers: 'It will be with me forever, because that's what I am, I'm an England player.' In this role, they have a legitimate role to play in flagging the nation, as active embodiments of Englishness on the sporting field. The women in this research demonstrate how national symbols play a key role in flagging the nation with the wearing of national colours and emblems acting as banal reminders of nationhood. As Skey (2009: 334) states, through 'everyday (re)production of national identity through banal signifiers, our attention is focused on the fact that is generally the daily forms of life, lived in and understood in relation to the

world of nations, that underpins the more visible (and sometimes virulent) aspects of nationalism'.

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