

CHANGING THE VISUAL LANDSCAPE OF WOMEN'S SPORT

October 2016

The Women's Sport Trust aims to raise the visibility and increase the impact of women's sport in the UK. We achieve this through the promotion of role models, stimulating media coverage and encouraging greater funding. We are the leading UK charity focused on using the power of sport to accelerate gender equality.

This is the first in our occasional series of "Insight to Action". We are developing this series of short pieces to share the insight that guides our work, to highlight great case studies of how others are making change

happen and how we are accelerating action in women's sport.

The main outcome highlighted in this insight piece is the establishment of "Visual Guidelines for Sporting Women". These were drafted by Getty Images and Women's Sport Trust and refined with a live audience at an event hosted by the BBC as part of Women's Sport Week in October 2016. Getty Images and WST are actively promoting the guidelines in the media and sending them to over 200,000 professional photographers.



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VISUAL GUIDELINES FOR SPORTING WOMEN

Sport appeal not sex appeal

Focus on the skill, strength, speed, passion and drama of the sport instead of how the athletes look

Mix it up

Capture a diverse mix of athletes participating in a wide range of sports

Keep it real

Authentic, credible imagery that represents the athlete as she'd want to be seen

Play your part

Everyone involved in the production, reporting and consumption of sporting imagery to take responsibility for the changes they can make

More is more

Increase the number of images taken and seen

Be bold

Be creative and push the boundaries, seek out new talent and new audiences



HOW WE DEVELOPED THIS INSIGHT



The Women's Sport Trust has always put the importance of imagery at the heart of its mission. In 2012 it was what we saw of the strength, competence and performances of female athletes at the London Olympics that led to our establishment as a charity. We have developed our understanding into the factors affecting the imagery of women's sport in the UK over the last 3 years through our **Sport is Beautiful campaign** and the industry expertise of our Visual Campaigns Director, Danielle Sellwood.

In October 2016, as part of Women's Sport Week (#WSW16) we brought together 90 leading figures who spanned four main categories:

PRODUCERS

Those that construct or distribute imagery. Media, editors, photographers, film-makers such as the BBC, Sky, Sport Magazine, Input Media and Channel 4

ATHLETES

A diverse group of athletes from a range of sports, including Maggie Alphonsi, Tanni Grey-Thompson, Jenny Jones and Donna Fraser

LEADERS

People from sport and business who have the power to change demand and influence creative briefings, such

as senior representatives from Virgin Money Giving, Citi, Sport England and Premiership Rugby

CONSUMERS

A spectrum of people who consume women's sport in the media

Hosted by the BBC at Broadcasting House, the event featured an industry panel discussion, a spotlight on four trailblazers and an audience debate on how women's sport is and should be visually represented in the media, by brands and in sponsorship campaigns. Based on this analysis we then developed a "new visual standard for women's sport". This was a tangible output that was immediately shared, using the hashtag #calltheshots. This trended number two on Twitter on the night and reached just under 6 million people.

OUR EXPERT PANEL:

Jane Ratcliffe, Chairman of MediaCom Sport and KR

Maggie Alphonsi, former England Rugby Player, World Cup winner and media commentator

Chris Grubb, BBC Sport Editor and Producer

Danielle Sellwood, former GB canoeist and Director of Visual Campaigns, Women's Sport Trust

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE IN THE VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN'S SPORT ?

Our panel and audience made compelling arguments for how the sports, media and branding sectors can make changes in the representation of women's sport.



“Celebrate the sport, celebrate the athlete, celebrate the diversity”

Danielle Sellwood, Director of Visual Campaigns, WST

1. FOCUS ON ABILITY, NOT APPEARANCE

Stereotyping of women athletes is commonplace. Despite areas of progress, the representation of women athletes often focuses on appearance and this reflects a narrow ideal of what is 'beautiful'. This reinforces the same messages in the mass media around women being valued for their appearance. There is a link between this representation and the damaging effect felt by many women and girls on their body image and the pressure to look perfect:

- **Girlguiding research shows** that 93 per cent of girls aged between 11-21 years agree that women are judged more on appearance than ability;
- **A 2014 BT Sport study** revealed 80 per cent of female athletes feel pressure to look a certain way.

Sports imagery should focus on the athletes ability; demonstrating what a range of women's bodies are realistically capable of, how hard they are working and portray the appearance of women athletes honestly. In this, the industry should take note of Unilever. With one of the largest international advertising budgets, they set the trend by pledging not to use sexist imagery because they found that women did not relate to these images.

2. BEWARE OF 'CLICHÉS'

Presenting women athletes – both visually and in words – is about creating authentic stories that people can engage with. It is about recognising the many aspects of an individual's life, without resorting to stereotypes and clichés and narrowly pigeonholing people as, for example, a mother, a girlfriend, wife or partner. The challenge is to tell real and varied stories with images, about individuals and allow the athlete to have a say in how they are represented.

3. SEX DOESN'T SELL SPORT

Women athletes are sometimes featured in provocative or scantily clad 'sexy' poses. As an example, since 1998, only 18 of **Outside Magazine's** 223 editions have featured women in their cover photos. Of these 18 cover photos, only four include women wearing sport appropriate clothing. This is despite Outside having a female readership of 30%.

Academic research from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, demonstrates that sex does not sell sport, whether the athlete is a man or a woman, and that the public perception of their athletic ability is diminished.

Whether the imagery of women athletes is illustrating sporting stories or being used by a brand to promote products, the power of the athlete and

sport association is lost if sex is used to sell.



4. PRESENT THE FULL DIVERSITY AND BREADTH OF WOMEN AND SPORTS

Women athletes come in all shapes and sizes and with varied abilities. Dominance of a one-dimensional view of women, in terms of beauty and ability, can result in women athletes being negatively judged if they do not fit this ideal.

The imagery of elite women athletes, as well as women and girls participating in grassroots sport and fitness activity, needs to be authentic and to reflect the genuine diversity of people taking part. Every woman and girl in the UK should be able to see role models they can associate with. Normalising the idea that all women and girls do sport will have an impact on the activity and participation levels of the nation. Diversity provides a richness to imagery and can result in beautiful and well produced advertising campaigns - as the #ThisGirlCan campaign from Sport England and campaigns for brands like Dove, have ably demonstrated.

5. RESPOND TO DEMAND

Consumers are making their voices heard through spending power and social media; people power matters. It is clear from editors and producers that there is a demand for powerful, interesting and varied stories of women athletes and responding to this makes audience and business sense.

Swiss cycling brand **Assos** was widely lambasted by both male and female customers worldwide for promoting their women's products on provocative and scantily clad models rather than athletes – as they did for the men's range. The brand bowed to the public pressure and had a complete re-brand for the women's range. It engaged with cycling communities in the US and UK and reconnected with its core customer. In the UK it held a re-launch event and discussion at an influential cycle store, Look Mum, No Hands, in association with the Total Women's Cycling website. This public engagement and high profile change of direction has led to significant press coverage and increased respect from the cycling community. Whilst it is too early to quantify the effect on sales, there is no doubt that this brand's profile has sky-rocketed due to the exposure.

It can work to take a stand, to “call it out” and demand better imagery. Equally it matters to reward and acknowledge

where good, positive imagery is used and when brands step up.



6. EVERYONE NEEDS TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

Our participants were clear that everyone with a role in the representation of women athletes has a part to play in making a shift and needs to take responsibility for the content that is produced.

This encompasses the brand that commissions, to the athlete that takes part, the governing body that supports, the photographer that makes and the editors, producers and distributors who get the images out there. Individual and collective action must be taken to break the cycle and set a new norm: challenge stereotypes and clichés, ask “why like that?” and consciously break long-held habits.



7. WOMEN PHOTOGRAPHERS MATTER

Women photographers remain a tiny minority in sports photography. This is a systemic issue and will take time and deliberate effort to address – for example in encouraging more female photography students, stimulating a debate about how work is commissioned and how photographers are hired. It is evident that increasing the numbers of women behind the lens will provide more varied ways to see and cover athletes in general and women's sport in particular. As part of their commitment to a new standard for the visual representation of sporting women, Getty announced a new funded internship for a woman photographer and will continue to engage with WST to find ways of actively promoting women and their work.



HOW ARE PEOPLE ALREADY DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY?

THE PRODUCER & DISTRIBUTOR: **Rebecca Swift, Creative Director at Getty Images**

Getty Images are the largest global photo agency; with over 200 million image assets available. Getty works with over 200,000 contributors and covers over 30,000 sports events every year. At the Rio Olympics Getty captured 1.5 million images and at Sydney in 2000 (pre-digitisation), Getty captured 6,000 images.

Getty announced how they are intending to change the industry from within and how, in partnership with the Women's Sport Trust, they are taking responsibility for changing the visual landscape by:

- Curating a new iconic '**Best of Women's Sports**' editorial collection, featuring the world's top sportswomen in action. The collection will be freely available to schools, universities and not-for-profit organisations and there are plans for a touring exhibition.
- Launching a new collection on gettyimages.com dedicated to the development of premium creative imagery that reflects the diversity of female athletes and the vast range of sports

in which they participate. The collection will promote a redefined visual representation of sportswomen in the commercial sphere and serve as a resource for marketers, advertisers and media for use in their campaigns and communications.

- Commencing in July 2017, Getty will offer a 12-month paid internship for an up-and-coming female photographer. Based in their London office, the successful applicant will work with Getty Images' global sports team.

All these initiatives are designed to inspire and educate people, while breaking down limiting stereotypes. They will promote fresh, relevant and aspirational imagery of sporting females, informed by a set of guidelines that both the Women's Sport Trust and Getty Images hope will become an industry standard.

"We are a passionate advocate for the realistic representation of all through imagery, and we are thrilled to be partnering with the Women's Sport Trust to redefine how people view women in sport and female-led sports through imagery. As a keen sportswoman myself, this initiative is close to my heart and I'm really looking forward to seeing the impact this partnership will have on the visual landscape."

THE PRODUCER: Lukasz Warzecha

Lukasz is a leading sports and adventure photographer and has worked on 5 continents in the last few years on assignments including National Geographic, The North Face, WL GORE, Mountain Equipment, Petzl and Black Diamond. Lukasz regularly shoots women athletes across a range of sports including in recent years, Sophie Christiansen, Karen Darke and Sarah Ridgeway. Top climber Shauna Coxsey has chosen to work almost exclusively with him.

Through Polished Project, Lukasz successfully pitched and produced the **Wild Women series** for online adventure channel Epic TV, specifically to address the lack of women's representation in adventure content. Although it was difficult to sell initially,

Wild Women has now been viewed 1.5 million times.

As a commercial photographer, Lukasz has made a clear business decision to portray women athletes authentically, based on three key lessons:

- Everyone involved in image making (e.g. photographers, editors, publishers) have a huge responsibility as the gatekeepers about how women are portrayed
- There is no set way to capture the image of a woman athlete – reflect the true values of the individual athlete/s and their sport
- Authenticity is key and the bedrock of any working relationship with an athlete – by gaining unique access you can build trust and knowledge of their skills and needs



THE ATHLETE & LEADER: RFU, Nigel Melville, Director of Rugby Development and Sarah Hunter, England captain

To support the development of the England women's rugby team the RFU used the platform of Women's Sport week to launch a new brand identity for the team, the Red Roses. With a compelling **new video** as its centrepiece, it is hoped that this powerful identity will create a real connection with a growing fan base and encourage the participation of women and girls in the game.

In 2017 England will defend their Women's Rugby World Cup title and the new brand is designed to inspire more people to get involved whether playing or supporting the women's game. The red rose is an iconic image for English rugby and the RFU are using this brand and associated imagery to represent the England women's team as "strong, relentless and glorious".



THE PRODUCER AND LEADER: England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), Jim Dowling, HSE Cake, Rob Calder, ECB

In 2017, the England and Wales Cricket Board will host the ICC Women's World Cup and they recognise the crucial importance and opportunity associated with such a high profile international event. Up to 9 months will be invested in raising awareness and the profile of the competition as this is critical to ticket sales, media coverage and public engagement. In discussing some of the specific challenges, Dowling raised the issue about the general public's lack of knowledge of the England players or those from other leading nations, as they are not household names like their male counterparts.

Inspired by women in positions of power worldwide – from politics to through to music – the campaign centres on the provocative and punchy strapline:

"WHO RUNS THE WORLD?"

It features photographs of captains from the leading nations, bold typography and iconic locations – including the Long Room at Lords; a space women have only been granted access to for the last 20 years.

TRAILBLAZER SUMMARY



Each of the four trailblazers provided tangible evidence of what can be achieved with a deliberate focus on creating fantastic imagery of women's sport. It is hoped that they act as a signpost and stimulant for other individuals and organisations to play their part in evolving the visual landscape of women's sport.

You can watch the trailblazers presentations on [**WST's YouTube channel**](#)

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