

Running head: EXPLORING TABOO ISSUES

Exploring Taboo Issues in Professional Sport Through a Fictional Approach

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Abstract

While the need to consider life course issues in elite sport research and practice is increasingly recognised, some experiences still seem to be considered too dangerous to explore. Consequently, stories of these experiences are silenced and the ethical and moral questions they pose fail to be acknowledged, understood or debated. We present here an ethnographic fiction through which we explore a sensitive set of experiences which were uncovered during our research with professional sportspeople. Through a multi-layered reconstruction, the story reveals the complex but significant relationships that exist between identity, cultural narratives and embodied experiences. After the telling we consider how the story has stimulated reflective practice among students, researchers, and practitioners. While there are risks involved in writing and sharing taboo stories, the feedback we have received suggests that storytelling can be an effective pedagogical tool in education and professional development.

Keywords: professional sport, ethnographic fiction, abuse, sexuality, narrative, story

Exploring Taboo Issues in Professional Sport Through a Fictional Approach

In recent years we have been researching, through a qualitative life history approach, the lives of high performance athletes (see Douglas, 2004; Douglas & Carless, 2006; in press; Carless & Douglas, 2009). During this time there has been growing awareness that both research and practice in elite sport have tended to focus on narrowly defined performance outcomes to the extent that more holistic life course issues are missing from the curricula of undergraduate and professional development programmes (Knowles, Borrie & Telfer, 2005; Van Raalt & Anderson, 2007). We have observed elsewhere (Douglas & Carless, 2008a, 2008b) that this narrow focus mirrors the culture of elite sport in general where success is defined on the basis of performance outcomes, with little or no regard for the success of the person or the sporting community in terms of (for example) mental health, personal development or improved interpersonal relationships. While there may have been a “palatable philosophical shift” towards a more holistic person-centred approach (Miller & Kerr, 2002, p. 143), little has been done to translate this philosophical awareness into practice. This is particularly noticeable in “taboo” or “dangerous to explore” areas (Marshall, 1995, p. 3) which are often excluded from research and practice in elite sport.

In light of the multidimensional nature of experiences in sport, Sparkes (2002) suggests qualitative researchers may have no option but to tell different kinds of tales if they are to adequately represent their research. Storytelling through fictional forms of representation is one alternative tale which we have used in response to the dilemmas our research has raised (see Carless & Sparkes, 2008; Douglas & Carless, 2008c). It is not our intention here to debate the benefits of fictional approaches as these have been addressed elsewhere (e.g., Coles, 1989; Clough, 2002; K. Frank, 2000; Sparkes, 2002; Watson, 2000). However, we recognise that storytelling can provide unique insights into human experience because, as Frank (2000a) observes, storytellers

offer those who do not share their form of life a glimpse of what it means to live informed by such values, meanings, relationships, and commitments. Others can witness what lives within the storyteller's community actually look, feel, and sound like. Storytellers tell stories because the texture of any form of life is so dense that no one can describe this form of life; the storyteller can only invite someone to come inside for the duration of the story. (p. 361)

In this article we aim to show how storytelling can be an effective pedagogical approach to uncover and explore taboo and silenced issues in sport through promoting and facilitating reflective practice¹. To do so, we present an ethnographic fiction titled *That Night* which Kitrina developed in the wake of a series of interviews and conversations with one particular participant, a professional golfer with a significant tally of prestigious international tournament wins. The fictional approach, in this instance, offers a cloak of anonymity which we consider an ethical necessity given the experiences recounted in the story. Through telling this story, we provide an alternative picture of professional sport which is currently missing from the sport literature. Following the telling, we explore the reflections the story stimulated among researchers, practitioners, and students.

That Night

“Yeeasssssss!” came the loud shout as fourteen football fans leapt to their feet simultaneously cheering and spilling drinks in the process. England were through to the world cup. Shouts of “Get in there my son!” “Way to go!” “Na-na-na-na-la-la-la-la-oooayoo, we’re in the world cup!” echoed around the room in songs, dances, chants, high fives, hugs and whoops of laughter and joy. Of course these weren’t just football fans, they were six of

¹ We understand the term *reflective practice* to encapsulate a broad range of processes through which practitioners learn through examining their experiences (both professional and personal) and change or adapt in response to what has been learned. It is integral to professional and personal development because it encourages greater awareness of not only one's competencies and areas of weakness but also one's biases and attitudes (Moon, 2004; Bolton, 2005). Despite the importance of reflective practice, Knowles, Borrie, and Telfer (2005) write that few educational programmes in sport actively nurture reflective skills.

Europe's leading women golfers, seven caddies and a husband, all crammed into Val Simmons' hotel bedroom to watch the match live.

The game ended and the group, still in high spirits, began to leave the room. Some had early start times the next day, others lingered a little in order to make calls to absent friends and share the moment. A few caddies made arrangements with their bosses for the next day's pro-am and, of course, plans were made to follow the England team to France.

Val, winner of the Toninka World Cup of women's golf for the third time, had been pinned in the corner of the sofa with three of the 'boys' for most of the second half as she, Graham, Mark and Dino became sardines in the premium seats right in front of the telly. Well, it was her room after all and being host didn't mean she wouldn't want to bag the best seat. Two other caddies sat at their feet resting their backs against shins while Ann Hathaway, European number one for the second successive season, Jill Reynolds, winner of this week's Honda Classic, and Arja Kalinin, rookie of the year, clung to a large armchair close to the main screen. Other players and caddies hung, perched and plopped in different positions, as the evening progressed and as their seats were nabbed during pee stops and drink refill moments.

The celebrity group had started the evening early, recounting stories of the day's play before the intensity of the match took over. Large quantities of the sponsors wine had been consumed along with ample quantities of coke – the drink not the drug. The mini bar was an empty shell, room service trays cluttered the corridor and McDonald's leftovers overflowed from a bin ill-equipped to handle these festivities.

The party spirit had been buoyed by this being the final day of the tournament and though the players couldn't fully relax, due to the sponsor demanding the pro-am after the tournament, they none-the-less gave it a good go. Most of the group who would have hangovers the next day were caddies – the players who were not so good at limiting their alcohol consumption were well practiced at handling its after affects.

“Right, I’m off,” Arja said to Val, getting to her feet and gathering keys, purse and room card. Her caddie Dino piped up,

“Yep me too, I’ll see you at the range at 8,” he said to his boss. Then, turning to Jill, he smiled and slapped her on the shoulder: “Well done mate!” Pointing his finger and in a serious tone he said, “Now, no drinking too much, you gotta play with the sponsor tomorrow!” Jill raised her eyes and hand grabbing Dino’s arm to pull herself up.

“No! I’m off now too, I need my bed,” she said and with that she threw her head back and downed the last of her vinho tinto and headed for the door singing and wiggling her very large derriere. The remote control TV switch was in Val’s hand and sensing the party was over she flicked it off in readiness for turning in and tossed it onto the empty chair nearby. But she was still slightly pinned in by Jill’s caddie Graham so she didn’t move, she just laughed and cracked jokes with her mates as they departed.

What had seemed a very natural position for watching a football match with a room full of friends suddenly took on a different tone as Graham and Val became the only two remaining spectators in the now dimly lit bedroom, still pinned together on the sofa. Now, she suddenly felt very vulnerable and very ill at ease. While during the match her conversation had flowed, the tempo of her words and the volume of her squeals were blasted high, now, her words and humor dried as her radar began picking up signals which scared her.

“So,” Graham said putting one arm around Val’s shoulder and simultaneously sucking the dregs from his Becks. This move didn’t need him to change position, he had been partly leaning all over Val for the last hour. Her shoulder in front of his, his arm round her shoulder, his arm on her knee, a huge hug when England scored, but so too were everyone else’s bodies pressed and interlinked: *then* it wasn’t strange or out of place. If this move could have been misunderstood as being friendly or even ambiguous, his stealth missile question erupted and left no doubts:

“Are you a dyke then Val?”

His face was barely inches from hers, she felt her cheeks turn hot. She wondered what the caddies had been saying. She had short hair, short legs, hadn't slept with any of them, didn't have a boyfriend. What they *might* have been saying about her panicked her into an immediate response, but it was the wrong one.

"No! I'm not a lesbian," she blurted out. Had she had more time to think, and had she been more articulate and clever with words, and men, she might have said: "*What if I am, what if I'm not, I'm not sleeping with you and it has nothing to do with sexuality. You're a drunken fat slob now get outta here, or I'll get Dino to boot you out.*" Hemmed in by his questions and by his body, she had no resources to joke off his question and any physical movement away from him, at this stage, would suggest that she *was* the very thing she wanted to deny.

She wanted to deny this to him and she wanted to deny this to herself, for it was a question she was struggling with. She wanted to deny it to Graham because she had suddenly become very scared of him, very tiny in comparison to his bulk, not that he was fat, he was just big and very, very strong and she was aware of his body heavy against hers. She also felt his word carried a lot of weight in their clique elite group. So she asked,

'Why d'you ask, what do you mean?' in an attempt to restore her self and keep him from affirming his conclusions. But she wasn't really listening for a response, her body had started remembering. Graham had been drinking and his breath smelt of beer, she sucked in this stench and her memories intensified, clouding the moment.

"Val love," her mother had asked, "can you pop to the store for me?" Late ... one afternoon. A big, strong, muscley man grabbed, held, forced ... he stank of beer, he pinned her in the corner, "Shut up or I'll shut you up ... I know where you live ... OK, put your hand there kid, yeah, that's it," he groaned and pressed her closer. "Come with me, yeah, that's it, that's it, no, slow now ... ooh luv."

“I mean,” Graham said drawing his face even closer to hers and slowly running his tongue across his lower lip, “do you like girls, or,” his eyes diverted to her shoulder where his hand flicked a smidgen of dust, “do you like boys?”

Had she had her wits about her, or a sarcastic tongue or more confidence in a situation like this, or even less need to be accepted by and feel part of ‘the gang,’ she might have chosen a different tact, but it was late, she’d had a few beers, she didn’t want to be a lesbian and had no way of proving it. But, she felt she had to somehow do just that, *prove* that she wasn’t.

“I like boys” she stuttered unconvincingly, looking him in the eye.

“Yeah?” he said moving his mouth to her ear and whispering, “but how much do you like boys? Do you like them a little or do you like them a lot?”

He began to lick her ear and put his hand between her thighs running his palm slowly up and down against her bare legs, each time going a little further. She wished she’d had the protection of jeans but she was in shorts.

“I ... I ...”

“Are you sure your not gay?” he said, this time taking the back of her head in the hand that was around her shoulder and in one movement thrusting his tongue into her mouth. Shocked by the force of his move but still mindful of how a rejection might be construed, she was compliant with his desires. But in her mind she was shouting “No!” Shouting loudly, shouting at the man who abused her thirty years ago and shouting at this man now, shouting for help, as she had done many times before if ever someone she liked drew near or touched her.

She longed to feel close, to be touched, caressed, to have someone love and care for her, to feel *normal* like other women, but her nightmares kept coming back, every time someone she fancied made a move she blew it and still she shouted, “I’m not a lesbian, I’m not a lesbian, I’m not, I’m not, I’m...” But out of her mouth no sounds penetrated the silent soulless

room. She repeated the mantra to herself with such venom and desperation that she began to question whether she was or not.

His mouth tasted of beer, his tongue was forceful. And so it began. She relived the memories of her twelve year old self and *that* man, just like Graham was now. She kissed him back still telling herself that in doing so she would prove that she wasn't a lesbian and it might all be OK, it might make it alright, she might feel the love that was missing from her life.

“Care to go a little further then?” he asked turning his body round to be square on to her with his knees sliding down and separating her firmly pressed together knees, “if you're sure your not queer that is.”

Val tried to speak.

“Well ... I ...” She wanted to be touched, she wanted to be close to someone, she wanted so much, but she didn't want this. She needed something, some little hope of who she was. Some little hope ...

Graham wasn't a gentle man. Thinking of seduction or beauty were far from his mind. He was horny and he'd been rubbing up against Val all night and now he wanted a shag and to get some sleep. In that order.

While continuing to thrust his tongue down her throat he began to pull up her shirt, tear her bra away from her breasts. He didn't bother to take garments off, just thrust them out of the way in order to move from her mouth to her breast and onward in his conquering of her body. Val just hung on like a limpet, at times gasping in pain, which Graham, of course, interpreted as wimps of delight for which he was responsible.

On and on it seemed to go, tearing at her body, thrusting himself through her silence, and still she shouted, “I'm not a lesbian, I'm not a lesbian.” And then, like a plane landing he collapsed down on top of her and gave a deep groan and became motionless.

The sofa was now an uncomfortable perch so he pulled himself out of Val, off the sofa and lay on his back on the floor, remaining motionless again for a moment.

“Ah, fuck,” he said finally before bringing his arm up to his eyes, illuminating his watch in the process. “Fuck,” he said again. “I’ve gotta get going.” He lay on the floor, hoisting his pants and jeans up in one motion and then rearranged himself before zipping up his flies and getting to his feet.

“I gotta be off, thanks for that, you OK?” he asked bending down to kiss Val’s forehead but not noticing the tear that was running its course across her face. “I’ll see you tomorrow, thanks for that, I gotta go.” And he was out of the room.

Val wanted to curl up into a ball and die, but she needed to vomit and so staggered awkwardly to the bathroom where she threw up immediately, grabbing the toilet bowl to steady herself as she wretched out her guts, her pain, her stupidity, her worthlessness, her hopelessness, and then, she collapsed on the floor and sobbed and sobbed and sobbed.

Graham ran into Dino and Phil in the corridor.

“Ah, Graham,” Phil said putting his arm around his friend’s shoulder as much to steady himself as it was to get close to his mate. “What you been up to? Coming for a game of pool?”

Graham’s hand, in an obvious fashion, went directly to his crutch where he massaged his genitals while his facial expression simultaneously produced a huge smile and raised eyebrows.

“You bastard, you haven’t?” asked Dino.

“Nahhh, course not,” he said, laughing and raising both hands. Then he turned and joined the others in their walk into the snooker room.

“You fucker!” Phil laughed.

“Yeah, I know,” Graham chuckled, “and you owe me ten euros Phil.”

“What, is she?” Phil asked setting the balls up on the table.

“Yeaah,” Graham said, sorting out a cue from the rack and quickly chalking its tip, “definitely a member of the finger in the wall club.” He pulled the cue back and hammered the white ball into the pack. “She’s a dyke, gentlemen, a lesbo, and not a very good shag.”

Reflections on the Story

On Writing and Sharing the Story

Crosswaite and Curtice (1994) argue that researchers have a duty – an ethical obligation – to ensure the best possible use of their data. We have felt this obligation particularly heavily with this research. Before considering fiction, we tried other ways of representing the findings including case study, life history, and confessional tales. We were, however, dissatisfied with these attempts to represent what we experienced as ‘witnesses’ of another’s life story (Frank, 1995). Somehow the specific requirements of scientific and realist forms of writing (see Sparkes, 2002) seemed to remove the possibility of a fair and ethical portrayal. Part of the reason for this, we came to understand, is that these forms tend to exclude much of the ‘messiness’ (Smith, 2002) inherent in lived experience.

How then, we asked ourselves, might we convey the sense of a participant who tries – but is unable – to describe her experiences of sexual abuse? How could we represent snippets of conversations ‘blurted out’ almost incoherently over several years? These conversations were often *not* the result of pre-arranged, tape-recorded, transcribed, triangulated interview procedures. Instead, difficult and painful stories were shared at a time when *the participant* (not the researcher) was emotionally ready or had reached the point that she needed to reach out to someone who would listen. At these times, we felt it unfair to return with notepad and tape recorder in order to ‘tick methodological boxes’. Later, while we found ourselves with evidence documenting the trauma and abuse which had occurred, we (of course) had little in the way of the statistical, material, or theoretical ‘proof’ which scientifically-minded reviewers, editors, and policymakers often demand.

Like Frank (1995) and Smith (2002) we had witnessed a silenced story that needed to be told, one that was “unrecognised or suppressed” (Frank, 1995, p.137). We felt uncomfortable pathologising the teller, recounting her stories as ‘detached experts’. Instead, we sought to put her experiences in context in a way that might lead others to stand with her, understand her difficulties, and appreciate their own role in events of this kind. Fictional writing offered us the best chance of achieving this aim. Richardson (2000) argues that writing is not *just* writing but rather a dynamic creative practice, a method of analysis, enquiry, discovery and interpretation. In this regard, the creation of fiction is one way a writer/researcher deepens her knowledge of human behaviour through stretching the limits of her imaginary visions. We document, in our minds, the minute details of our characters, their movements and glances, as well as what they feel, hear, see, touch and imagine and then we recreate them in order that others can see.

It has been our practice before publishing our stories to gain feedback from those who we feel can provide sensitive but critical insights. To this end, we have shared this story informally with several colleagues and friends. Additionally, in September 2008, Kitrina presented the story at the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences Annual Conference and in a research seminar at Leeds Metropolitan University, UK in November 2008. Kitrina also read the story during an invited lecture in October 2007 to second year BSc sport and exercise science students at Exeter University, UK. After the students had provided written feedback about their responses to the story, Kitrina adopted the role of facilitator to invite students to share their responses in open group discussion. In what follows, we draw on the responses we received following these presentations to explore how this particular story encouraged and facilitated reflective practice.

Incorporating Self and Story

Written responses show that the students found the story to be a powerfully emotive and authentic account. For example:

Appears true, sounds as if it did happen. Awful to realise how cheaply others value someone's emotions and self respect. Very emotional and hard hitting. Cruel. Even if this is fiction it could so easily be a reality.

Many students reflected in a way that included an emotional or affective element; in other words, they shared how they *felt* instead of (or in addition to) what they *thought*. One student's comments exemplify this:

Oh my God. That was horrible, unbelievable, I feel so sorry for Val, and so angry toward Graham, the bloke that had sex with her. It was disturbing how vulnerable she felt and how her need to fit in with the 'gang' allowed her to let it happen. I have shared similar feelings – a need to fit in – from peer pressure, narratives that have been told. Val clearly had past events which were contributing to how she felt and her confusion about her sexuality ... probably not made any easier by the fact that stories like these are silenced so often.

The inclusion of emotional reactions and the experience of "similar feelings," as in this response, has links with O'Connell's (2008) observations regarding the ways reflection can increase emotional intelligence and thereby strengthen therapeutic relationships in healthcare contexts. From the perspective of narrative theory, emotional responses signal a move away from *thinking about* the story in an analytical and distanced fashion towards *thinking with* the story (Frank, 1995). Ellis and Bochner (2000) characterise thinking with a story as "allowing yourself to resonate with the story, reflect on it, become part of it" (p. 753). Central to this kind of reflection is a process of *incorporating* the story within one's own life through "expressions of empathy with the storyteller and a sense of identification with the events, motives, or orientations" (Douglas & Carless, 2008b, p. 42). Through this process, we suggest, the boundaries between self (listener or reader) and other (story character) begin to be bridged in a way that can facilitate a deeper level of understanding and empathy.

Responding emotionally – *feeling something* as a result of the story – brings a certain degree of physical involvement to the listener/reader. This is particularly evident in David's reflections on (first) reading and (later) hearing the story:

The story made the events of the rape feel very real to me. I felt extremely uncomfortable, it was almost too real and fitted, for me, with the kinds of attitudes towards women which I have come across in hyper-masculine contexts like sport. Hearing you read the story subsequently at two conference/seminar presentations I have felt equally uncomfortable. I feel this discomfort in an acutely physical way. I feel hot, I feel my face burning and my body twisting and tightening with (I suppose) anger, disgust, even shame. Both times I wanted you to stop reading.

For us, some kind of embodied response – as opposed to disembodied cognitive thought – is key to the way stories can add a further dimension to reflective practice. Through emotional and affective processes the events of the story and the character's life are literally incorporated within the body: the reader/listener makes a felt connection with the experiences of the character. In this way, as Etherington (2007) notes, we bring our own experiences to a story:

Even when we read stories, we might silently fill in the gaps with our own assumptions and beliefs. The stories that are told and received are therefore influenced and informed by what tellers as well as the audience bring from their own lives and contexts. (p. 600)

Incorporation of self and story through reflection (i.e., connecting one's own life to the character's life) signals a potentially important practical and educative benefit in that a new question becomes relevant: *What should I do?* This is demonstrated in the following response from an academic colleague:

I was totally hooked from the first line and, through the text, saw the scenes move from joy-like to sordid and felt the angst and the confusion and the tension and the sorrow. Good writing makes that possible. I wanted to ask that guy questions like ... what right

do you have ... I was made angry. I asked myself what could I do ... say I had walked in afterwards and heard the vomiting and saw the distress ... what might I say ... how might I react in a physical sense (no hugs ... hugs ... I have just no idea). I asked myself what kind of 'connection' would I need to have made with that player for her – next morning – to reach out to me for help and I asked myself what form that help might take ... If I asked those questions then others will maybe ask similar ones ... if that kind of reaction is one of your aims for the writing then the material has done its job.

These words provide an example of emotional responses at an embodied level triggering questioning and reflection on one's own practice. For us, this is an indication that a valuable form of reflective practice has been facilitated and supported by the story.

Taking an Ethical Stand

Instrumental to the process of active reflection was the provision of space for 'other voices' and perspectives to be heard. In this regard, Frank (2000b) observes that a story offers its readers a picture of things that allows us to see everything else differently; we 'get it' in the sense of seeing producing understanding. The picture itself does not convince us; rather it destabilizes our old ways of seeing and thus allows new images into our awareness. (p. 149)

That Night appears to have destabilized students' previously held assumptions about gender, sexuality, and power in sport. As one student wrote, the story provided "a small insight into the struggles that sportspeople, especially women, have in confronting their sexuality – a taboo subject in sport." Students also began to understand that it was possible for an individual to act completely differently depending on the context, that is, "Someone who was confident in sporting life wasn't really confident in herself as a person." Commonly, students said this wasn't the type of story they expect to hear from a successful professional sportswoman.

Many students appeared to want to distance themselves from Graham and his actions to align themselves with Val. For example:

Disgusting feeling toward Graham. Sympathy and understanding for Val. Not a comfortable story to listen to or accept. I feel quite queasy ... Hard to listen to, to hear a woman feel so trapped and abused, feel so helpless and confused, and a man be so arrogant, disgusting and overpowering – to abuse his physical strength, really not expecting to hear that sort of narrative in the context of sporting narratives.

(I) feel disgusted and angry at the man's behaviour and at the attitudes and stigma that surround lesbianism. I feel sorry that the woman feels she had to do that to hide her uncertainty about her sexuality. It makes me angry that someone she knows would treat her like this and that the other guys would talk about it as though they have a right to know about her.

These responses document individuals engaging in ethical reflection on specific moral issues raised by the story. In so doing, most arrived at a clear ethical stand which rejected Graham's actions and expressed support for Val's situation.

Students' ethical reflections on the story were not by any means simplistic or isolationist. In other words, some expressed complex or ambiguous responses to the story which connected their own lives with cultural expectations concerning (for example) masculinity. In one student's words:

It does make me think how it may be seen as OK. I'm not saying it is fine by any means, but lads will be lads, and if they feel they've just had an easy shag of course they will gloat about it to their mates. From this story I can only hope that this never happens to any of my female friends and that they have never felt as vulnerable as Val did in this narrative. That man had no right.

Through a combination of the story and the group discussion which followed, insights were shared which deepened collective understanding regarding why and how an individual in sport may feel insecure about her body or sexuality to the extent that she is coerced into unwanted sex. Such disclosures led some (male) students to make a paradigm shift which might not have occurred had the individual read the story alone. The following comments from one individual provide an example of this, the first comment written before discussion, the second after:

I struggle to see who would benefit/be educated by this ... you could possibly read many similar stories in high street fiction or even view it in Hollywood movies – I am not sure this story tried to highlight any original concepts although it is well written and emotively narrated ... sorry!

I suppose on reflection and after discussion it raises questions on the perception of sexual orientation in sport and ‘accepted’ norms, it highlights that elite sports people have their own life narratives that aren’t all necessarily ‘happy’ stories and it did raise numerous interesting discussion points amongst the group – so maybe (!) that is all the purpose it needs! Thank you.

These comments illustrate how prior to hearing the views of other group members some students failed to see the pedagogical potential of the story. Such a change in understanding, we believe, is noteworthy and testifies to the power of stories to stimulate group reflection and learning.

For some students the story had a poignant message:

(I was) close to tears during the end of the narrative, extremely shocking, but perhaps this is due to the taboo nature of what the narrative exposes. I think it gives others hope in hearing stories like these.

The potential of the story to provide hope was only documented in the written responses of a small number of female students and was not raised during discussion. We might speculate that the story provided hope because some students had personal experience of abuse and had felt a degree of 'reflected' support from their peers who showed solidarity with Val and disgust at Graham's actions. Our concern remains that such individuals might experience further trauma through hearing the story, but these comments along with the following e-mail (received by the course leader) suggest that while being painful the story may provide a valued benefit to someone with experience of abuse:

Just emailing to express how today's lecture really affected me. All afternoon I've been thinking about it, can't really get it out of my head. For me, I found the narrative read towards the end extremely hard to listen to, I found myself not able to respond, overwhelmed by emotion, due to being able to really relate to the woman. I'm not really sure what to do now, I'm even in two minds as to whether I should send this email, because it almost says too much. But your lectures have taught me if anything, that to tell a story is to help another or give others hope, and for that reason I'm so grateful that I have taken this module.

In our view it is through engaging with and reflecting on ethical and moral dilemmas in ways that connect individual experience to particular socio-cultural contexts that some of the most important learning outcomes arise. This learning is perhaps particularly necessary among practitioners in sport (e.g., coaches, sport psychologists) as the reflections of one colleague suggest:

When psychologists grasp the notion that in any moment in any day this type of scenario might unfold and that when they meet an athlete the fact that they don't just meet a performer but rather someone who (due to events from years back) live a form of trauma in their daily lives ... then the profession begins to grow up and writing like this is one way to allow that maturity to come about.

Closing Thoughts

Our aim with this story has been to illuminate taboo issues and to provide some insights into how sexual abuse might take place in sport. Through a multi-layered reconstruction, the story reveals the complex but significant relationships that exist between identity, cultural narratives, and embodied experiences. In doing so, it gives voice to several silenced issues. Others' responses suggest that stories like *That Night* have an important role to play in stimulating reflective practice in educational settings.

As a first step, *That Night* challenges the 'default setting' (Van Raalt & Anderson, 2007) of those practitioners who cling to an overly positive conception of sport. We believe this is a necessary and important step given the contemporary culture of elite sport (and, arguably, sport in general) where the criteria by which 'success' is judged focus on performance outcomes (see Douglas & Carless, 2006, 2008a). In previous work (Carless & Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, in press) we have documented the damage this culture can do to individual athletes in terms of mental and emotional distress, identity foreclosure, and personal stagnation. For us, the task of building and sustaining a successful culture in sport requires moving beyond performance concerns to include serious consideration of the holistic well-being and development of the individual athlete. This will necessitate a *radical* cultural shift. We suggest stories like *That Night* can play a vital part in influencing this shift by encouraging practitioners in sport to reflect on their own position in this debate: is it ethically defensible to ignore the kinds of experience and trauma portrayed in this story in the belief that they are 'irrelevant to success'?

Others' responses to the story highlight some benefits of exploring and reflecting on silenced stories which include an opportunity for solidarity with those who have experienced abuse, a way to challenge accepted cultural practices, and a way to protect the abused while bearing witness to their stories. In the context of a group-based educational environment, students were able to react to and engage in what Schon (1987) terms 'reflective

conversations' because the story provided a catalyst through which to consider ethical dilemmas that many of us face. Commenting on coach education, Jones (2006) suggests the standard model of coach education does not permit this type of learning to take place and we wonder where are the educational opportunities in other sport domains that engage sport science students and sport psychologists with this type of learning?

There are dangers involved in reading or hearing stories about highly volatile scenarios such as sexual abuse or rape. In immersing oneself in these kinds of stories, it is likely that the writer too will find the creative process painful and dangerous. Etherington (2000) has suggested that researchers who hear stories of trauma and abuse are themselves vulnerable to vicariously experiencing trauma. As an experienced counselor, Etherington emphasizes the need to, "talk about my feelings, understand counter-transference responses and receive support" (p. 380). But, as Etherington notes, contemporary research culture often fails to provide this type of support and this is particularly true in sport contexts (Brackenridge, 1999).

One hindrance to the use of stories like *That Night* is the fear that the story is too dangerous to use with students. While we acknowledge the dangers of sharing such stories we suggest that it is far *more* dangerous to individuals, communities, culture and society if we *fail* to consider and reflect upon taboo issues such as sexual abuse, coercion, stigma, and sexuality. For the reasons discussed above, we believe that the story form has much to offer as a way to raise and explore such issues in a sensitive, empathetic, and ethically responsible manner. Through our work we have seen how stories – both fictions and non-fictions – can be a valuable pedagogical tool to facilitate and support critically engaged reflective practice and genuine change at the individual and group level.

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