ACADEMIC PAPER

Retelling tales: The (missed?) representation of working class women's stories of leisure

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Abstract

Reflecting on an undergraduate dissertation, Rhiannon Lord became increasingly dissatisfied with the limitations on understanding and communication imposed by the conventional form of presentation usually expected of undergraduate students. Here we seek to transgress the boundaries of the author-evacuated realist tale form and offer a re-presentation of original data in the form of creative fiction, drawing extensively upon the work of Sparkes (2002). Renewed insights are generated into the lives of young women via two short stories, presented in an effort to further communicate their leisure experiences. Consideration is given to new ways of constructing and presenting understanding at the undergraduate dissertation level and the research process in general.

Keywords: creative fiction; realist tales; re-presentation; dissertation

Introduction

Following a recent conference, *Narrative research in sport and exercise: Exploring the themes of story analysis and story telling*, which explored varied and new forms of narrative research in sport and exercise, Rhiannon Lord (RL) came to realise the source of her disappointment surrounding a successful undergraduate dissertation in the previous year. The dissertation, entitled *Leisure trends of working class women in relation to Gramsci's cultural hegemony theory*, was based on a series of interviews. Looking back, uneasy questions remained concerning the (missed?) representation of participants and presentation of data in what felt like a constrained and reductive final product. In essence, despite the process of indwelling in the lives of these women, their stories had been missed and lost in the clinical process of writing up. This un-reflexive process echoes the early thoughts of Sparkes (2002) on his time as a research student, which consequently formed the starting point of his career as a self-confessed self-taught qualitative researcher:

> At no point in the process was I asked to reflect on writing as a way of knowing or to reflect on the representational and ethical dilemmas inherent in the act of writing about other people and their lives from my own position and as a situated author. No one else raised questions, and I didn't either. I didn't need to. As I understood things

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> back then, you did your ethnography, case study, interview project, or what have you; read around the area; analyzed the data; and then retired to your room to engage in the mysterious process of "writing up". (Sparkes, 2002, p. 1)

Similarly, RL was not aware that she had written any kind of tale at all, or that she had any choice of genre in which to do so. Like so many undergraduate students, she followed a prescribed structure offered by generically useful research methods manuals (e.g., Gratton and Jones, 2004). This is not an uncommon assumption among many undergraduate degree candidates (Sparkes, 2002), particularly in the area of sports studies where the dominant tale has for a long time been a scientific one. Indeed, furthering this, Jacobs (2008) argued that such expectations go beyond undergraduate work to the overwhelming majority of doctoral programmes.

Recently however, in response to a paradigmatic shift that has argued for the legitimisation of qualitative research, questions concerning writing "the other", often situated within "the crisis of representation", have been raised (Sparkes, 1995, 2002; Lincoln & Denzin, 2000). That is to say, there is increasing concern about how authors write themselves and others in and out of their texts, and the problems associated with traditional criteria used to evaluate this:

> The crisis of representation remains in the form of a continued questioning of the assumption that qualitative researchers can directly capture lived experience. Such lived experience is now taken to be *created* in the social text by the researcher, which means the link between text and experience is increasingly problematic. (Sparkes, 1995, p. 159)

Such questioning has brought about the emergence of more diverse perspectives that seek to honour the centrality of the researcher's voice, experience, creativity and authority (Jacobs, 2008), and in doing so "loosen the grip of specific styles of writing within the social science community" (Sparkes, 2002, p. 9). Although still relatively new, there has been an increasing interest in the use of narrative as a form of analysis (process) and presentation (product) in sport, physical activity and leisure research. In particular, a strong theoretical framework and rationale for the use of the story form in physical activity contexts has been established (Sparkes, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; Sparkes & Silvennoinen, 1999). In his book, *Telling Tales in Sport and Physical Activity*, Sparkes (2002) reminded us that the present and future moments of "experimenting and theorizing about authorial voice, considering the role of the "other," and reflecting on narrative form and authority" (p. 6) are upon us. As such, researchers have begun to explore alternative ways of presenting their data through new forms of writing in a variety of disciplines (e.g., sociology, cultural studies, psychology). These different and new forms of narrative presentation include auto ethnographies, poetic representations, ethnodrama and fictional stories (see Sparkes, 1995, 2002).

For instance, Carless and Sparkes (2008) presented three short creative non-fiction stories to communicate the personal and subjective physical activity experiences of three men with serious mental illness (SMI). Creative non-fiction uses fictional techniques to draw upon real people and real events where the characters and setting must be actual, not virtual (Barone, 2000). The stories by Carless and Sparkes (2008) were written as first-person narratives to foreground participants' voices and allow the reader to empathise with the experiences of living with SMI in an engaging and evocative manner.

In another example, Sparkes (2007) presented a fictional tale, narrated in the third-person, about some embodied academic struggles in a sports department at a university. In it there is less concern (or more ambiguity) over the accuracy of factual content presented in a fictional form; instead he tells of a "composite and mythical (perhaps?) academic at an imaginary (perhaps?) university in England that is permeated by an audit culture" (p. 2).

Using the creative fiction form, Jacobs (2008) similarly constructed an entire book dedicated to the alternative dissertation movement presented in the form of an imaginary conference on alternative ways of knowing, research and representation. It comprises stories from a mixture of real-life scholars and two fictional characters used for the dialogue, intended to stimulate meaningful thought for the readers around various topics. In all of these examples, and in contrast to creative non-fiction, creative fiction stories need not be based on real events or real people other than through suggesting that these things may have occurred.

It is within this shifting landscape of qualitative research that Richardson (2000) suggested we are provided with an opportunity to review, critique and re-vision writing. Similarly, Sparkes (2002) was drawn toward the creative potential of this opportunity "to contribute to the re-visioning and generative expansion of qualitative inquiry in sport and physical activity" (p. 25). This paper exercises one such opportunity to do so. In moving away from "an over-emphasis on academic writing if it tends to stifle creativity or one's true voice" (Jacobs, 2008, p. 2), in this article we seek to illustrate a process of research, dissatisfaction, subsequent reflection and research once again through creative writing of the same data. Firstly, we present original data from the undergraduate dissertation project of working class women and their experiences of leisure, as presented through a traditional, more-rigid academic structure of author-evacuated realist tales. Secondly, following Wolcott's (1994) assertion that qualitative researchers need to be storytellers, and to answer the primary researcher's own "methodology of the heart" (Pelias, 2004; Sparkes, 2007), addressing feelings of guilt and disappointment felt in relation to the original dissertation, the data are re-visited and re-presented in the form of two short creative fiction tales.

A methodological journey: From realist tales to fictional tales

Revisiting data

Revisiting the data requires engaging, to an extent, in a new research project. In going back to the original data and looking at new ways of presenting them, the researcher becomes a co-participant in the creation of meaning once again (Brochner, 1994). Importantly, therefore, we must not underestimate our own shifting subjectivities and the situatedness that will directly influence constructions of perception and interpretation the second time round. The researcher begins to re-perceive, re-experience and re-understand what they previously neglected and, inevitably, things that were omitted, for example a deeper reflection on the researcher's and the participants' emotions, are then considered.

Presentation is as much a part of research as exploring data (Jacobs, 2008). By writing in different ways, we inevitably discover new aspects of the topic and our relationship to them (Richardson, 2000). Thus, form and content cannot be separated (Richardson, 2000; Sparkes, 2005). As Sparkes (2002) pointed out, "quite simply, writing and representation cannot be divorced from analysis, and each should be thought of as analytic in its own right" (p. 15).

The fictional stories created contain an additional and revised process of data analysis, and explore new relationships with the data. Undeniably, the relationship between author, text and reader is revised and renegotiated. Before presenting the forms and tales, a brief background to contextualise the original project is useful.

Background to the project

The interview-based undergraduate dissertation explored the early leisure lifestyles of five working class women aged between 17 and 28 years of age. In-depth interviews were conducted in an environment comfortable to the participants (Gratton & Jones, 2004). The interview schedule was structured around five topics: family; education; current employment; previous history of sport, exercise, and physical activity; and current attitudes to sport, exercise and physical activity. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and thematic data analysis was performed (Neuman, 2006). To summarise, findings indicated that work, family

commitments and choice of leisure activities did not provide ideal conditions for participation in regular non-deviant forms of sport, exercise and physical activity. Further, the leisure trends of this group of young women primarily included deviant activities (e.g., clubbing), termed as such due to their strong association with alcohol, illegal drug abuse and casual sex (and were partially responsible for some having become parents at a young age). These findings are consistent with similar studies about leisure participation (Coles, 2004; Kay, 2004; McRobbie, 1991). The data were originally presented in the form of author-evacuated realist tales.

Scientific tales

Despite the original data being part of a qualitative piece of research, underpinned by different philosophical assumptions than those that inform a quantitative piece of research (Guba, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Sparkes, 1992, 1994a), certain features of it still adhered to conventions within the dominant scientific paradigm in sport and physical activity. Firstly, the writing style generally mimicked the style of the physical sciences, where the exercise is one of presenting not writing (Plummer, 2001), and the form, to an extent, reflected a traditional scientific report: statement of problem through to discussion (Sparkes, 2002). As such, ideas were presented in an orderly manner, with clear logical progression to make the task of reading, and indeed marking, an agreeable one. For example, the specific undergraduate marking criteria included "shows a clear train of thought and logical progression", and presenting coherent methods and results sections ensures in part that the student addresses these criteria. This form has been learned over the duration of many undergraduate sport and leisure students' academic careers, one learned by RL in her final year research project. Accordingly, this form feels comfortable in its construction as a way of knowing, to undergraduate students and (most) academic staff alike. However, the results or findings section in this project format is presented differently to that within the dominant scientific tale.

Realist tales

There is little uniformity in the way that qualitative researchers present their work, but another kind of presentation has come to dominate qualitative research in sport and physical activity: the realist tale (Van Maanen, 1988; Sparkes, 1995, 2002). In the social sciences, a realist ontology concerns central issues of what is real about society and relationships or, as suggested, that there is some objective knowledge of reality. That is, there is an empirical material base for individual experience and stories reflect that reality. From this position, Sparkes (2002) reminded us that realist tales are strikingly similar to scientific tales because they present some sense of authority and objectivity illustrated in their construction.

Firstly, realist tales are typically characterised by the absence of the author from most segments of the finished text. That is to say, only the words and actions of the studied participants are visible in the text. Ironically, this works to enhance the author's authority and reduce the audience's concerns over the subjectiveness of what is being reported (Van Maanen, 1988). In RL's original dissertation, the author or the "I" is only present in two pages, under the title heading "Biographical motivation for the research: A rationale". This section informed the reader of the researcher's situatedness in relation to the group of people under study and, in our opinion, was the most engaging two pages of the dissertation.

Secondly, realist tales include closely edited quotations which convey the words of the participant as spoken directly from their mouths and not the researcher's views (Van Maanen, 1988).

Thirdly, these cultural descriptions are tied to a theoretical problem of interest to the researcher, in this case Gramsci's cultural theory of hegemony. Elements of theory are carefully illustrated by empirical data and Van Maanen (1988) suggested that in doing so only one persuasive reading is offered. Therefore, the original dissertation adheres closely to the central conventions of realist tales. Selections from this original piece of work have been selected to offer the reader a brief insight into the original presentation mode, and into the lives of the young women in the study.

Selections from the original data

On work

Since leaving education, the majority of respondents have had relatively short-term, casual and unskilled employment, such as bar work, working in cafes or fish and chip shops. Furthermore the majority of respondents have remained in employment since they were 16 years of age or younger, seeking work as a necessary part of life. The main reason for bouts of unemployment appeared to be due to pregnancy. Comments from some of the respondents during the interviews highlight their attitude to work:

> I've worked from the age of 15. Umm the only time I had off was when I was on maternity, which was 6 months. As soon as 6 months was up I went back. (Lauren)

Lauren's statement is supported by Kelly:

> I've always worked, before I was 16 . . . yeah. Since 14 I've always worked . . . it's just the way you get your money isn't it. You gotta do it. If you want money you've gotta work, simple as.

On leisure time

The interviewees all suggested that they had very little time for leisure due to work and family commitments. However their main source of leisure activity seemed to be clubbing or going out with friends. This is unsurprising as the leisure activities, such as consumption of alcohol, illegal drugs, tobacco, and participation in unprotected sex, have all been associated with the club scene in Britain (Measham, 2004; Storry & Childs, 2002) .

A number of respondents expressed positive feelings towards engagement in physical activity when they were younger. Lauren in particular expressed her liking for athletics: "discus, javelin, shot and 100m sprint . . . I loved it. I did love athletics".

Despite the women's split views, the majority of them no longer took part in any regular exercise. The reasoning behind this was put down to their work and family commitments. Comments from Laura highlight this particularly well:

> I don't go to the gym. I find looking after a 2 year old is quite energetic (laughs) . . . up at half 6 in the morning and it's non-stop. Coming into work at 6 o'clock at night, that's basically my exercise.

Fictional representation

Having given a flavour of the lives of the women under study through realist tale presentation of the original data, we have selected fictional representation from a range of genres available to us to re-present some of these themes.

Sparkes (2002) described creative fiction as characterized by "the willingness . . . to include things that never happened" (p. 157). As such, narrative imagination has free rein to invent characters, events and places with a view to crafting these into an engaging story. Typically, these inventions may include real situations but there is no (obliged) claim as to how much or how little these events form the basis of the stories invented. As a part of this process, several actors are often combined into one or one is split into several, allowing individual identities to be disguised further. Ethical concerns with personal narrative in research and disclosure have been discussed (Mellick & Fleming, 2010) with regards to the impracticality of seeking informed consent, the disclosure of identities and mistaken identities, and the risk of harm and violation of privacy. These concerns, especially with vulnerable groups, form a strong part of the rationale for choosing a fictional genre as it can go some way toward addressing these problems by creating composite characters (Angrosino, 1998; Sparkes, 2002). In addition to these ethical concerns, and of concerns over missed stories within the original research, Frank (cited in Sparkes, 2002, p.151) stated: "There is a possibility of portraying a complexity of lived experience in fiction that might not always come across in a

theoretical explication". This format allows the voice, emotional texture and multilayered experiences of participants to be fore-grounded. It allows the reader to experience participants living their lives, and to engage readers at an immediate emotional level (Frank, 2000).

The stories presented below are based on all five participants interviewed and their interview data. Facts, events, characters and identities are rearranged to represent an amalgamation of emotions, feelings and memories, to portray and evoke a deeper understanding of the women's lives than told in the realist tales. Further, in this paper we draw attention to the stories as unavoidably based on the embodied self of the researcher-as-author, and the complexities in managing and considering her own autobiographical positioning. There is a need to signal RL's position in terms of the social categories to which she formerly and currently belongs as a white heterosexual female university student in her 20s. For example, RL's ability to write about and for these women may be informed by some privileges associated with her membership, as a student, of an intellectual community. Equally, RL's shared experience, as a young white female who went to school with some of these young women, enabled her to share stories, build rapport and balance that power. In a re-creation of original data, RL's memories of "being there" during the original interviews, and her imagination, as informed by her own partial memories of events that happened in her life or as told by others, are used as a tool to increase sensitivity as they are reworked into a story to convey the lives of others. In this sense the text should be read as poly-vocal.

In contrast to realist tales, the finished text does not imply author-evacuation, nor does it contain direct quotes from the participants' mouths, nor does it seek to explicitly apply a theoretical framework to the data presented. Two short stories, selected from several written, are presented in the section that follows.

Success at the competition

Louise strutted toward the mini bus.

"You're late Lou!" shouted Miss Trude, "Run!"

"It wasn't my fault Miss, Mr Coleman kept me back for fifteen minutes", Louise explained.

"Not again Lou, just get in the bus, we're already late" said Miss Trude sympathetically.

The minibus screeched to a halt in the athletics stadium car park.

"Steady on Miss, I want to get there alive" giggled Louise.

Miss Trude replied with a strained smile, biting her tongue. "Right everyone out of the bus quickly, Jayne, Sam, the 400m sprint is in fifteen minutes so you had better go and get ready and warmed up."

Jayne rolled her eyes and Sam frowned aggressively in Louise's direction as she wandered off, leaving the rest of the team to carry the kit. Realising their frustration at their team mate Miss Trude called, "Louise, can you carry some of the kit please?"

"I need the loo Miss. Jay', can you bring my kit with you to the changing rooms? I'll see you in there in a minute".

Without waiting for a reply Louise continued to strut into the building, leaving her team behind. If Jayne had been a cartoon character she would have had steam blowing out of her ears having heard Louise's reply.

"Miss is she having a laugh or what? We are late because of her, my race is in less than fifteen minutes and now she wants me to carry everyone's kit as well. She's taking the piss!"

"I know Jayne, you know what she's like, I'll help you carry it now . . . I'll just lock the minibus first."

"Louise . . . Lou . . .Louise Henry!" shrieked Miss Trude, causing other students to turn and stare, "take those bloody headphones out for five minutes, your race is in ten minutes and you haven't even started to warm up, you had better get a move on".

"Nah, it'll be alright Miss, I don't need to warm up, I'm saving my energy".

Louise continued to shove her headphones back into her ears. Jayne looked at both Miss Trude and Louise in disgust as she continued to clutch on to the cold compress attached to her hamstring. Jayne had disappointingly only completed the first hundred and forty metres of her race before she'd collapsed on the floor, rolling in agony with a pulled hamstring. Her county coach, who was at the stadium scouting for promising athletes, had attended to her as Miss Trude had been attending to Louise's orders in the changing rooms.

"Lou...Lou!" barked a rather angry Miss Trude.

Louise pulled her headphones out for a second time with a tut, her eyes rolling.

"What Miss? God, I'm mentally preparing over here and you're interrupting me."

Miss Trude took a deep breath. "Go and register Louise, here is your registration card...now!"

"Oh alright" Louise replied, stuffing her belongings into her bag.

Louise lined up at the starting line. There was a slight breeze. "On your marks" came the order to get into the blocks. Louise settled quickly into her start position, taking controlled breaths, completely relaxed. "Set". Louise prepared looking ahead. The explosion of the gun erupted, almost deafening her, but spurring her body into action. She felt as though her mind was detached from her body, her arms and legs moving in swift, easy motions, propelling her towards her goal. The line was approaching, with no one in sight but the officials and students jumping, waving, cheering, encouraging in silent chants. She leaned forward as she reached the line, regained her balance and slowed. Her hearing came to life again, hugs from her team mates, screaming, shouting. She'd won. Her timekeeper came to congratulate her.

Jayne scowled. There stood Louise on the top of the podium, a medallion of gold clinging to her chest. She wasn't sure if it was the pulled hamstring giving her pain, or thought that she may be out of the county squad for the coming season. It was then, after Louise dismounted the podium and the presentation stage, that she saw her County coach. He approached Louise with a smile and a handshake. It became evident that he'd asked her to come along to County training, from Louise's smiles and nods. Jayne felt a wave of depression and resentment. Louise was a good sprinter, but she didn't want to be an athlete, not the way Jayne wanted it. She had trained for years, committed to hours and hours of agonising gym sessions, begged her parents to help her go to competitions that had cost hundreds of pounds.

Jayne's suspicion had been confirmed on their return trip to the school, where Louise had told everyone on the minibus how Mr Alan Jones, the head of the

County Athletics squad had begged her to join the team. Jayne, along with several other members of the team, knew Louise's ranting was exaggerated, they still angered her. However Miss Trude could fully understand Louise's boasting. It was the first time she'd been praised or recognised within the school. So despite her exaggerations Miss Trude smiled happily and engaged in congratulating her success.

Another day off

"I'm bored" Tiffany moaned.

"Well want do you want to do then?" replied Louise.

"Let's go up the shopping centre and meet up with Ben and all that lot" replied Tiffany, smiling and winking at Louise.

Louise laughed. "Yeah, alright then".

"Girls, you know I can't go up there, Mr Fletcher and Mrs Morris are doing a walk through in the shopping centre now at the end of lunch and I don't want to get caught ditching again!" moaned Jessica.

"Don't be such a baby, just hide or something if you see them" suggested Tiffany.

"It's alright for you two, you've been suspended again, you've got an excuse!" came Jessica's final retort as they left Louise's house.

The girls filed out of the post office with bags and pockets stuffed with sweets, having explained to the man behind the counter that they weren't bunking off, they had been suspended. The young shop assistant let them out of the shop, googly eyed as Louise had been flirting with him since they had walked in. This was a common occurrence in the shop. The youngest member of staff, usually male, would allow no more than ten school children into the shop at any one time, and then watched for those who tried stealing chocolate or sweets. However he usually got distracted by the older girls who came in with their short skirts and high heels. Nevertheless Louise continued to flirt with him, as though this was a unique occurrence.

Louise, Tiffany and Sabrina walked along the shopping centre. It was dark and dingy, with a black, worn floor and grey, graffitied walls. Despite many community projects to help improve its appearance, the building had remained the same for the last ten years. Louise swayed and strutted in the middle of her two friends, arms linked as though they were in a Spice Girls video. They approached the group of four boys who were sat on the arms of the benches in the middle of the centre, surrounded by plumes of grey smoke, which blended into the painted brick walls. Wolf whistles screeched towards them. The girls replied their gratitude in fits of giggles.

"Alright sexy?" Ben asked Louise, as she sat on his lap, kissing him on the cheek.

"Fine thanks babe" replied Louise as she pulled out a cigarette for him to light, "So what have you got me for my birthday then?"

Ben smiled, winking to the other boys, "I reckon I could give you something Lou, you just won't let me. Playing hard to get are we?" The group erupted with laughter. "Anyway Lou, it's my birthday today, what are you going to give me?"

Louise smiled and flirted. She kissed Ben fully on the lips; sparking some of the boys to wolf whistle loudly.

Whilst the group engaged in conversation about Ben's birthday plans for the evening, older members of the community passed by, cringing at the conversations that they over heard and the behaviour that continued on the benches. Yet they passed quickly, scared of confrontation.

That evening Louise, Tiffany, Jessica and Sarah met at Sabrina's house, where they straightened their hair and smeared lip gloss across their lips. The girls donned their finest clothes; short skirts, low cut tops and high heels. Sabrina clattered down the stairs to get the drinks as they gossiped in the bedroom. Shrieks filled the air.

"You're not going out like that!" screamed Sabrina's dad. The girls upstairs burst into laughter as cross words were exchanged, "you're only fourteen and you look like you are going clubbing, not to the park!"

The girls left the house, with Sabrina's father having been silenced by her mother. The light was dimming as they walked along the streets to the children's playgroup that was on the outskirts of the council estate. The boys were already there, visible by the smoke signals. As they approached they could hear music and laughing. A few of the older girls from school had also turned up for the birthday celebrations. Louise scowled. Although she and Ben were not officially in a relationship she saw him as her property, not to be touched be anyone else. Her anguish increased as she arrived in the playground finding Ben deep in conversation and laughter with a girl. It took several minutes before Ben had realised Louise's presence. It took him even longer to stop his flirting with the girl and skulk over to Louise. He did this in an ape like fashion which was a common way to walk on the estate. He placed his arm around Louise's shoulders. Louise's heart skipped.

"Alright Lou, fancy a walk over the by the woods?" He asked with a cheeky smile.

"Let's go" Louise smiled back.

The party continued. The music grew louder and louder. Empty larger cans scattered the floor. Cigarettes and marijuana joints were passed from person to person created a billowing cloud over the play area. Tiffany glanced at her mobile phone in a daze. It was 11pm. She started to get worried about Louise; she'd disappeared with Ben some time ago. Ben's friend, Matt, soon took her mind off her worries though as he brought her a new can of larger and began talking to her. Matt was older than Ben. He'd left school the year before, but Tiffany remembered him distinctly. Tiffany had been talking to him for some time when she noticed Ben and Louise's arrival back at the party. She explained to Matt that she would be back shortly and hurried over to Louise. She looked very different to when she left. Her make-up had run down her face. The previously perfectly applied lip gloss had been smeared across her face and her hair and clothes were in disarray.

"You alright Lou?" asked Tiffany concerned.

"Of course I am" Louise replied, trying to straighten her skirt.

She took out a mirror and re-did her make-up quickly. Ben and the group of boys he'd been talking to erupted into tears of laughter, which Tiffany assumed were directed at Louise and whatever had happened in the woods. A burp, followed by a splatter, followed by another wail of laughter distracted Tiffany from the conversation with Louise. It was the sound of Jessica and Sabrina vomiting simultaneously.

"We had better go Lou, look at the state of them."

Reflections: A better representation?

> Story is integral to human life. It is one of the paramount ways in which humans make sense of lived experience. There exists a creative symbiosis between human life and story. That is, a living together where story and people are companions nurturing and benefiting each other. (Lewis, 2006, p. 832)

Originally the project was not specifically about stories or taking a narrative approach, but it became about stories. As Sarup (1996) suggested, when you ask someone about their life and identity within it "a story soon appears" (p. 15). Talking to these women about their lives in relation to leisure experiences called forth stories that spoke to the researcher more than those that could be told within a conventional dissertation framework. It was felt that the style of representation and interpretation did not speak directly, specifically, and wholly to these embodied experiences (Denison & Markula, 2003). As such, the overwhelming presence of these stories resonated with the ethical consciousness of the researcher and remained there, long after she had cropped them to the shape of realist tales. She felt the complexities of the lived experience were lost, and other researchers have expressed similar concerns as a rationale for using this form of presentation (e.g., Diversi, 1998; Frank, 2000).

Allowing readers to "meet" the participants ensures that voice and multilayered immediacy of participants' own experiences are not lost (Frank, 2000; Krizek, 1998). Creative fiction was used here to "show not tell" stories (Denzin, 1997, p. 40), and we hope that the second mode of presentation illustrated a different kind of relationship between author, text and the reader. As readers of the stories, we were aware of the shift from passive receiver of knowledge to co-participant in the creation of meaning (Carless and Sparkes, 2008) as we moved from realist tales to creative fiction. Firstly, the stories sparked reflection and posed many more questions about the meaning of those stories and suggested future research. Secondly, and perhaps most profoundly, the women's stories have been brought to life (Lewis, 2006); contextualised within, and stimulating reflection on, our own lives.

This said, even though fictional representations do more to answer concerns of ethical reporting in disguising identities, the tales in this example answered much more to the ethics of representing the participants in a way that feels more true to life, recognisable to the researcher and the participants. Participants were shown the original text and the creative fictions. They expressed more familiarity, interest and emotional connection with the latter. Likewise, as researchers we were more confident in the latter to capture and illuminate some form of reality (Sparkes, 2002). There is a further methodological point to be made here about making the research data we produce, for participants to "member check", in an accessible and readable style rather than using a vocabulary of academic jargon. Importantly, Sparkes (2002) argued that in order for research to impact on the majority, it must be as accessible to as many people as possible, and the potential of fictional tales to do this is an exciting prospect.

Further, the sharing of stories encourages reflexive inquiries in ethical self-consciousness and enlarges paradigms of the normative as a step towards liberation and acceptance of diversity (Jacobs, 2008). Echoing this, Duncan (1998) suggested that "stories enable us to re-envision ourselves as the marginalized Other, and thereby offer us the possibility of moral behaviour" (p. 97). In other words: Are we able to shift our focus to see through the writer's eyes? And if so, will that shift have a lasting effect? (Denison & Markula, 2003) Are we now able to see things otherwise invisible to us? And use this awareness to challenge oppression? (Sparkes, 1994b). Evocative representational styles, through well crafted stories, offer readers a greater empathetic and embodied learning opportunity in relation to these women's experiences, as opposed to a more detached and potentially judgemental reading of their behaviour.

This paper has answered researchers' calls to be adventurous with alternative ways of knowing (Jacobs, 2008; Sparkes, 1995, 2002). It has also adhered to a more common

qualitative research goal that encourages us to be reflective, reflexive and questioning in the actual process:

> There is no burden of proof. There is only the world to experience and understand. Shed the burden of proof to lighten the load for the journey of experience . . . when in doubt, observe and answer questions. When certain, observe and ask many more questions. (Patton, 1990, p. 143)

This work provides an example of how any piece of research should be an ongoing process of reflexivity and self-awareness by the researcher, as both producer and product of text (Richardson, 2000). We may and should revisit our findings to explore new relationships to data and provide alternative modes of presentation for readers, to enable them to form their own understandings. Interpretations, like stories, are never finished or complete. In agreement with Jacobs (2008), there may be a need to introduce opportunities for innovative ideas, and to set some groundwork for understanding at undergraduate level, before students revert to the "just get it done" traditional dissertation formats. Instead, he suggested we should be opening windows into alternate spaces, disrupting conceptions of form, and seeking to bring lived experiences alive.

So is creative fiction a better form of representation in this case then? Methodological impulse may initially call us to provide an extensive analysis of the stories in relation to the original piece of work, but our aim here has not been to re-present data and re-apply analytical and theoretical frameworks: that would contradict the assumptions and the point of creative fiction. Instead, like Sparkes (2007), these creative fiction stories are presented here for consideration as a different way of understanding and generating insights into these women's lives. This is not to say there is nothing to learn from the original realist tales. We are confident that the original research goals were met and that leisure trends were appropriately reported in relation to those goals. However, it did not fulfil a research goal concerning empathy, increased understanding and emotional connection, which emerged as having been there all along only once the task of write-up was complete. In this sense we feel we have answered applicable and alternative criteria needed to judge this new piece of research. We draw upon Richardson's (2000) criteria of aesthetic merit (in seeking to open up the text, invite interpretive response and produce a satisfying text), reflexivity (in positioning the author), expression of a reality (in seeking a fleshed out, embodied sense of lived experience) and impact (in seeking to affect the reader). We would ask the reader to consider these when evaluating this piece of work. For example, included in the feedback to RL upon first reading the creative fictions, Carly Stewart expressed delight at the ability of the work to answer to Richardson's (2000) criteria of impact: Does this affect me? Emotionally? Intellectually? Does it generate new questions? Move me to write? Move me to try new research practices? Move me to action? (Richardson, 2000, p. 937). The production of this paper speaks testimony to this.

Some will continue to be critical of this form of narrative methodology and representation (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997), and the problem of representation will continue to be discussed. However, as Rorty (1982, as cited in Bouchner, 2001) suggested, the use of narrative methods is just as valuable as other research, it is just different. We hope to have provided a step in the direction towards embracing alternative ways of knowing and exploring different ways presenting research, as suggested by Jacobs (2008) and Sparkes (2002). Here, we have provided an illustrative example of one way in which this might be achieved, and thus a resource for teachers and supervisors of undergraduate students to draw on.

With this is mind, we signal some of the more practical challenges teachers and students may face if engaging with alternative research processes. Despite it prevailing in the form of this paper, we reflect on the use of alternative criteria for judging qualitative work and whether they could be incorporated into an undergraduate dissertation marking framework in the near future. We see no reason why it ought not be but recognise some challenges of doing so. Firstly, where terms such as validity and reliability have become well established, distinct and recognisable terms on which to draw judgement over quantitative (and some

qualitative) work, response to finding alternative criteria for qualitative work has not been addressed in terms of an array of different focal points and terms for these (see Leiblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Richardson, 2000). Whilst this may feel refreshing and reflect the multiple realities that qualitative research boasts, we would suggest it makes application to student marking guidelines more difficult, especially in the current research climate where some academics, and thus journal reviewers, find this area difficult as part of a review process. Secondly, given that we are "not yet there" in terms of some key criteria and terms that might be written into marking frameworks, students who choose to engage with alternative ways of presenting qualitative research are left with the difficult task of playing with a limited word count, particularly in the methods and methodology chapter. That is, if taking an alternative route they would be sensible to ask the marker to reject traditional criteria with full justification for this, and select new criteria from a range with full justification for its substitution. This, of course, then ought to link back to a section where students have justified their opting to take a qualitative approach in a rationalised rejection of quantitative research as related to their research question, another additional section not necessary in most quantitative research projects. We recognise that there is work to be done here.

Although radical structural changes to dissertation guidelines might not be achievable in the near future, small changes in the research articles used to support and illustrate module content in sport and leisure studies might be used more readily by teachers, both in terms of broadening the range of research methods taught and, ideally, complimenting a broadening of the content of modules more generally to make students more receptive to these types of ideas. Further, it may be that those teachers currently unfamiliar or unsure of such research practices could be made more aware of their value in education, as supported by their alignment with the value of reflexive practice and learning theory in higher education and sporting and leisure contexts (e.g., Knowles, Borrie, & Telfer, 2005; Knowles, Gilbourne, Borrie, & Nevill, 2001). As such, we recommend the works of Sparkes (2002) and Denison and Markula (2003) as a reference point for locating alternative sport and leisure research texts, and encourage these forms to be used as part of a repertoire of research methodologies. If implemented early enough in the undergraduate dissertation research process, students will benefit from an increased repertoire of research practice available to them to draw on. We encourage students and teachers alike to consider the range of modes available to them when conducting research and presenting data.

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