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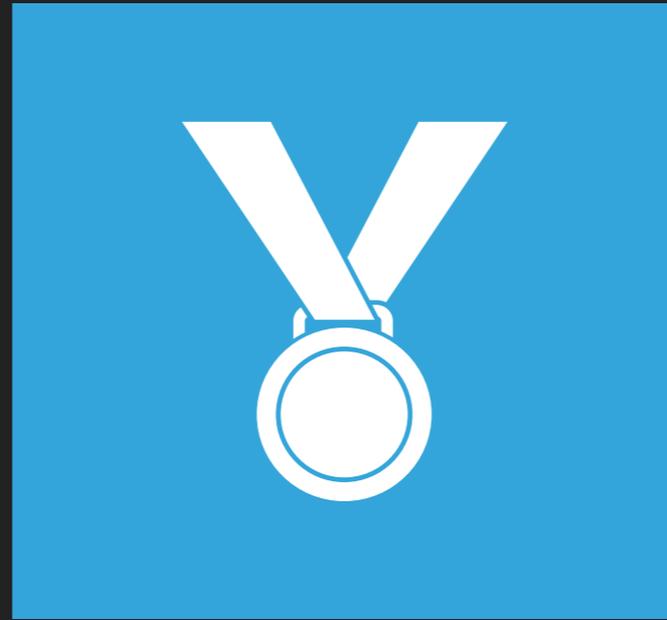
~~FASTER, HIGHER~~ ~~STRONGER SAFETY,~~ WELFARE & PROTECTION

THE ROLE OF THE SPORT
PSYCHOLOGIST IN KEEPING
PEOPLE SAFE IN SPORT.

DR EMMA KAVANAGH
@EMJKAVANAGH



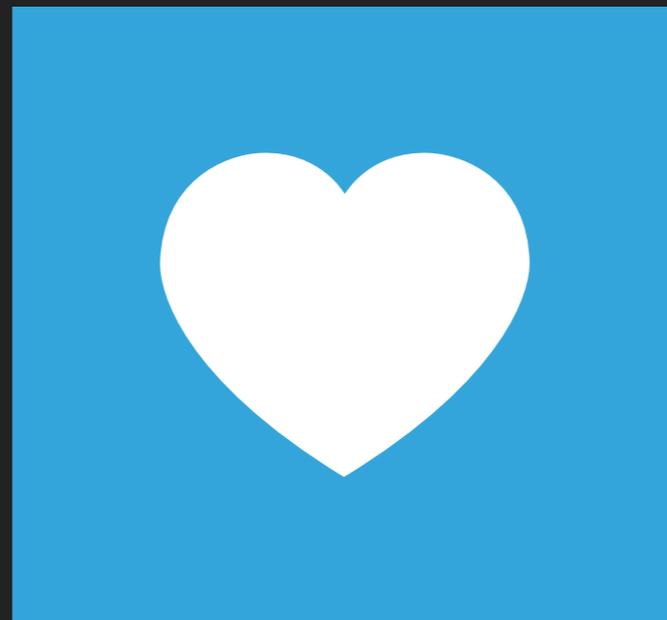
INTRODUCTIONS



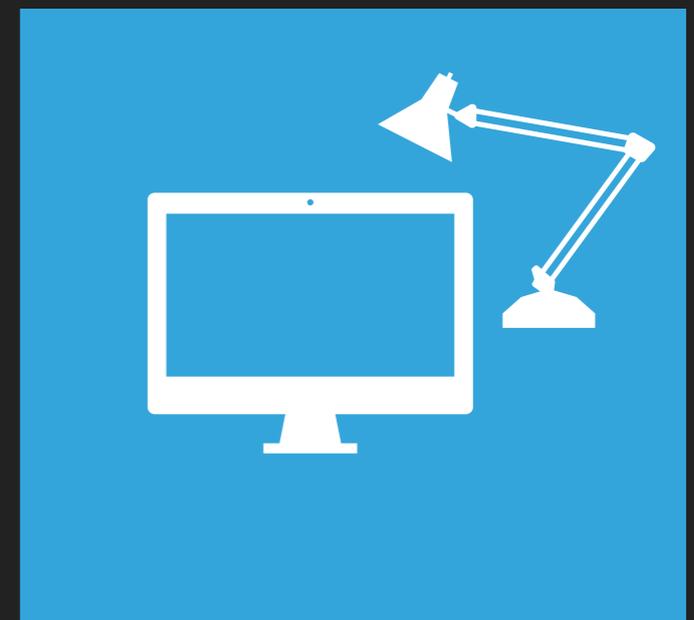
Ex Athlete



Student



Practitioner



Academic

INTENTIONS

- ▶ Welfare concerns in sport
- ▶ My research journey
- ▶ A duty to care?
- ▶ The future and changing the narrative?
- ▶ A call to action: being ambassadors of safer sporting spaces.

There are a wide range of issues that can compromise the physical, emotional, sexual, psychological social, intellectual and spiritual welfare of athletes of all ages and across all levels of sport.

(LANG, 2020).

ATHLETE WELFARE: A MULTILEVEL PERSPECTIVE

- ▶ Taking a multi-level approach to understanding welfare concerns is essential:
 - ▶ **Individual** (e.g., depression, self-harm, substance abuse, and disordered eating)
 - ▶ **Relational** (e.g., sexual, physical, and psychological abuse);
 - ▶ **Organisational** (e.g., an unhealthy organisational culture, systems that promote over training or competing with an injury, institutional doping)

THE FOCUS OF MY RESEARCH

Interpersonal violence more broadly refers to acts of physical, emotional and/or sexual violence, threatened or enacted that can pose a significant threat to the physical and or psychological safety of the recipient.

(MOUNTJOY ET AL., 2015).

INCLUDING SEXUAL ABUSE, PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE, PHYSICAL ABUSE, BULLYING, HARASSMENT, NEGLECT, NEGLIGENCE.

PREVALENCE

- ▶ Alexander et al. (2011) surveyed over 6000 young people in the United Kingdom concerning their experiences of sport:
 - ▶ 75% reported experiencing some form of emotional harm, 29% sexual harassment, 24% physical harm, 10% self-harm and finally 3% sexual harm.
- ▶ Vertommen et al. (2016) interviewed over 4000 Belgian and Dutch athletes regarding their experiences of inter-personal violence before the age of 18:
 - ▶ 44% of participants reported having experienced at least one form of violence in sport (sexual, psychological or physical).
 - ▶ Specifically, the authors reported that 11% of respondents experienced physical violence, 38% experienced psychological violence, and 14% experienced sexual violence.

SOME CASES CAPTURE ATTENTION MORE THAN OTHERS

- ▶ In 2017, Larry Nassar, the Medical Doctor for USA gymnastics, formally pled guilty to 10 counts of first-degree criminal sexual misconduct with minors under the age of 16 years (Fisher and Anders, 2019).
- ▶ The scale of the case against Nassar dwarfed his admissions. In his position as a medical practitioner in various sports (including gymnastics, diving, athletics and swimming), it is estimated that he abused more than 250 victims in a career spanning multiple decades.
- ▶ Nassar was sentenced to between 40 and 175 years imprisonment for his crimes.
- ▶ In 2018, British youth football coach Barry Bennell was convicted of sexually abusing young boys. He was sentenced to 30 years in prison, and the extent of this abuse continues to unfold as part of a broader inquiry concerning historical sexual abuse in youth football in the United Kingdom.
- ▶ In 2019, it was announced that the Nike Oregon project, led by head coach Alberto Salazar, was to be closed following Salazar's four-year doping suspension. In the aftermath, female athletes who trained under coach Salazar and his support team have provided testimony of being subjected to systemic physical and emotional abuse in a toxic high-performance culture (Chavez, 2019).

“If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to abuse one” (Kerr & Stirling, 2019, p.10)

Abuse, or violations of integrity are not just individual acts perpetrated against victims, instead we need to shine a spotlight upon more systemic practices that enable abuse to occur in sporting spaces (Kavanagh et al, 2020).



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The Dark Side of Sport:
Athlete Narratives of Maltreatment in
High Performance Environments
Emma J. Kavanagh
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of Brunel University for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy
August 2014

THE DARK SIDE OF SPORT : ATHLETE NARRATIVES OF MALTREATMENT IN HIGH PERFORMANCE ENVIRONMENTS / EMMA J KAVANAGH

[Kavanagh, Emma](#)



0 review

This study provides a unique insight into the impact and experience of maltreatment in elite adult sport, which to date has had limited consideration within the sporting literature. The evidence suggests that elite adult athletes can experience maltreatment in high performance environments and such treatment has the potential to have long-term negative effects on athlete wellbeing and continued participation in sport. However, to date, much of the guidance on protecting and supporting athletes has been directed toward child athletes or those under the age of 18. There remains much to be understood about the experience of maltreatment into adulthood if adult safeguarding and protection in sport are to be enhanced. The aim of this study is to explore elite adult athletes' experiences of maltreatment in high performance sport.

SUBJECT

DESCRIPTION

Subjects

- [Violence](#) 🔍
- [Athletes](#) 🔍
- [Psychology](#) 🔍
- [Harassment](#) 🔍
- [Academic dissertations](#) 🔍

COPING WITH EMOTIONAL

What can we learn from hearing about how athletes cope?

The implications for sport psychology.

JOURNAL OF APPLIED SPORT PSYCHOLOGY, 0: 1–16, 2017
Copyright © Association for Applied Sport Psychology
ISSN: 1041-3200 print / 1533-1571 online
DOI: 10.1080/10413200.2017.1298165



Elite Athletes' Experience of Coping With Emotional Abuse in the Coach–Athlete Relationship

EMMA KAVANAGH, LORRAINE BROWN, AND IAN JONES

Bournemouth University

In this article, we explore the coping strategies used by elite athletes in response to emotional abuse experienced within the coach–athlete relationship. The athletes in this study adopted emotion- and avoidance-focused coping strategies to manage their feelings in the moment that emotional abuse occurred. Over time, athletes accessed support networks and engaged in sense making to rationalize their experiences. The potential of coping-level intervention to develop individual resources and to break the cycle of emotional abuse in sport is highlighted. We suggest that as primary agents of ensuring athlete's protection, sport psychologists need appropriate safeguarding training.

Cense and Brackenridge (2001) argued that within a sports culture that thrives on authoritarian leadership, the climate is ripe for the abuse of athletes. The subject of abuse has, however, received only sporadic attention within the academic literature, thus limiting understanding of the presence and experience of abuse in sport. Research in sport indicates that athletes have been subject to physical (Kerr, 2010; Pike, 2010; Stafford, Alexander, & Fry, 2013) and sexual (Brackenridge, Bishopp, Moussalli, & Tapp, 2008; Fasting, Chroni, Hervik, & Knorre, 2011; Hartill, 2005, 2009; Parent & Demers, 2011) abuse; emotional abuse (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Stirling, 2013; Stirling & Kerr, 2008, 2009, 2013, 2014); and neglect and bullying (Kavanagh, 2014). These studies suggest that a range of exploitative and abusive practices take place in the context of organized sport (Hartill, 2009) that threatens athletes' physical and emotional well-being (Rhind, McDermott, Lambert, & Koleva, 2014).

Emotional abuse, the focus of this study, is an underrecognized but common form of abuse in the sporting arena, making this a subtle yet pervasive behavior that has been difficult to operationalize and subsequently police (Stirling & Kerr, 2014). A small body of research to date has focused on providing a definition of emotional abuse suitable for the sporting domain (Stirling & Kerr, 2008) and has examined its impact within the coach–athlete relationship (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Stirling & Kerr, 2007, 2013, 2014), as well as the role of bystanders (such as parents) in the emotional abuse cycle (Kerr & Stirling, 2012). Despite this body of work, emotional abuse is still relatively underexplored in the sporting domain, and this study contributes to further understanding its presence and impact upon the athlete.

Investigations of abuse in the coach–athlete relationship suggest that emotional abuse may be the most frequently occurring form of abuse in the sport environment (Stirling & Kerr,

Received 4 April 2016; accepted 19 February 2017.

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PREPARED TO NAVIGATE

When that coach screamed at her for the tiniest of mistakes or lapses in focus, calling her weak, lazy or messed up in the head, with an obscenity for emphasis, Hernandez rationalized that all top coaches pushed their young gymnasts that way. When she stood frozen and bawling at the gym, her heart racing as she struggled to breathe, scared to do anything that would elicit her coach's wrath, Hernandez — an adolescent at the time — assumed she just couldn't handle the pressure.

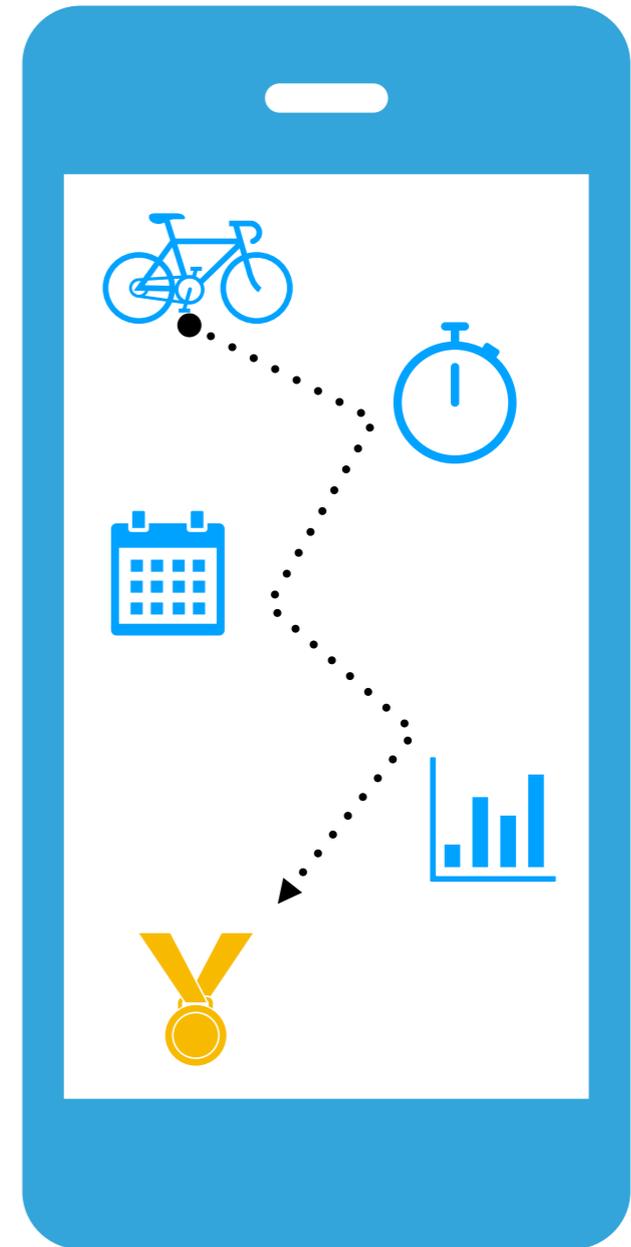
Hernandez said she learned how to block out the abuse.

“As soon as Maggie raised her voice past a certain point, that space in my brain would pull the parachute and I couldn't hear her,” she said. “As soon as practice was over, it was like my brain was a computer and I wiped out everything.”

Macur, (2020), on Olympic champion Laurie Hernandez



VIRTUAL
ENVIRONMENTS
HAVE BEEN A GAME
CHANGER IN THE
WORLD OF SPORT;
WE HAVE
WITNESSED
INCREASING
RELIANCE ON
TECHNOLOGY AND
THE RISE OF THE
@TUIETE



TWEETS

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[Media](#)

"I think at the beginning when I would see mean, hurtful messages, it would really hurt my feelings because I wasn't used to it. I wouldn't remember any of the good comments; I'd just remember that one bad one... I've had people threatening to kill me and kill my family, wishing that I get cancer and die a slow, painful death. Horrible words I couldn't even think up in my head to be that mean." (Heather Watson, cited in Ward 2015).



BEING MINDFUL OF VIRTUAL INTERACTION

- ▶ Cyber-enabled abuse;
- ▶ Cyber-bullying;
- ▶ Online grooming or sexual solicitation;
- ▶ Surveillance; when to switch off;
- ▶ Addiction - to online spaces or offline behaviour magnified by the ease of digital spaces.



ENHANCED RISK IN ONLINE SPACES

- ▶ High levels of Internet use;
- ▶ Lack of regulation in these spaces;
- ▶ The likelihood of interacting with strangers or people whom you have not met in physical space;
- ▶ A space of presumed intimacy heralded as a bastion of freedom of speech;
- ▶ The development of para-social relationships.

SPACES, PLACES AND PERPETRATORS

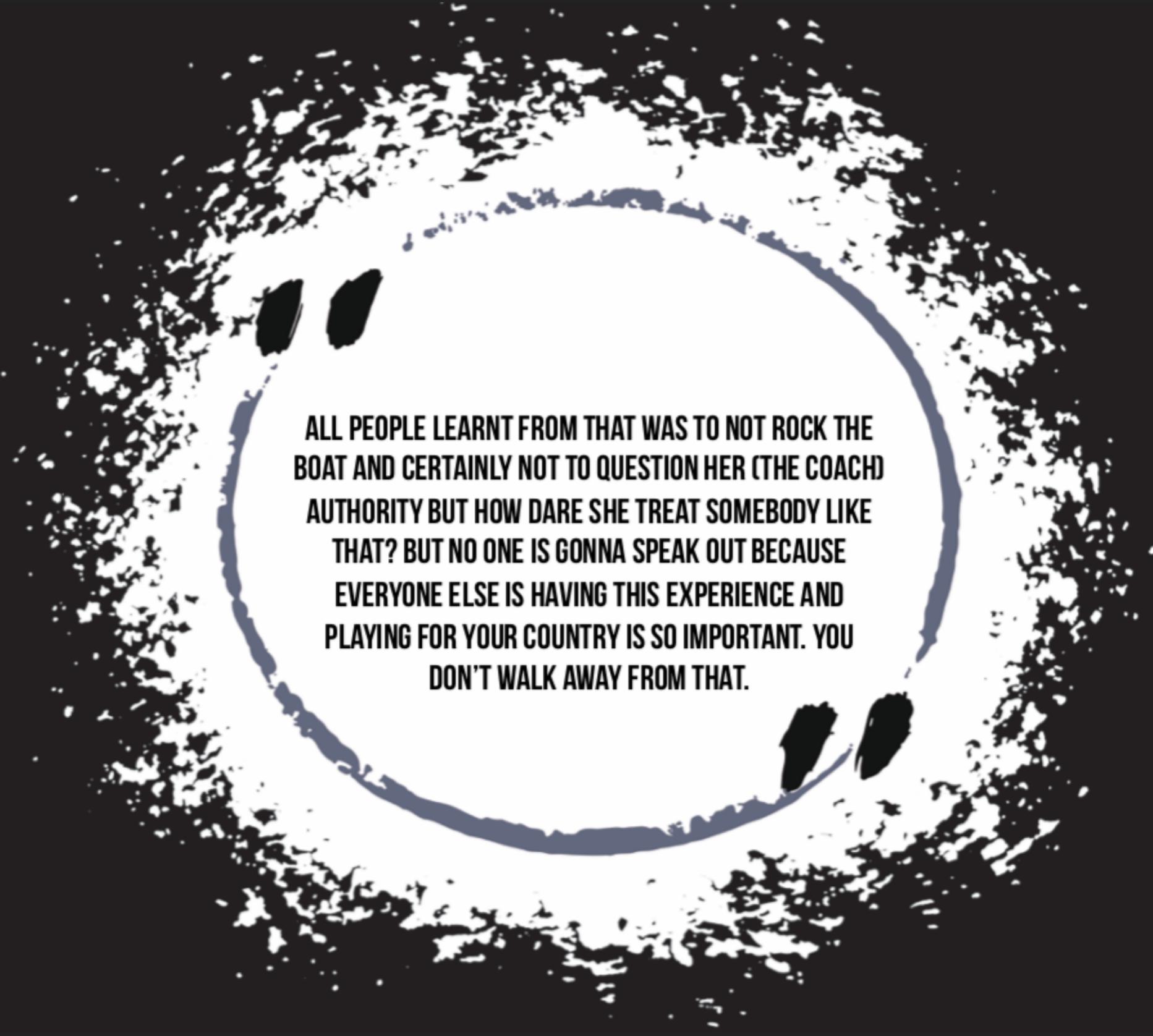
- ▶ We need to take a broader view of where harm can happen in sporting environments and who can be the perpetrators of it;
- ▶ Face-to-face; digital environments; inside and outside of the sporting arena.
- ▶ We all have the potential to be victims, perpetrators and or bystanders to abuse.

THE IMPACT OF ABUSE

- ▶ The impact of abuse in sport can be long-term and extremely damaging (Mountjoy et al., 2016);
- ▶ The experience can have an impact both on the athlete and those closest to them (friends, family, partners, team mates);
- ▶ The impact can persist long after the experience
- ▶ Correlated with a plethora of long-term sequelae, including depression, anxiety, maladaptive eating behaviour, social withdrawal, self-harm, detriments to academic or work performance, long-term PTS symptomatology (Kavanagh, 2014; Mountjoy et al., 2016; Parent & Fortier, 2017; Stirling & Kerr, 2007, 2008, 2014).

THE ROLE OF THE SPORT PSYCHOLOGIST IN KEEPING PEOPLE SAFE IN SPORT

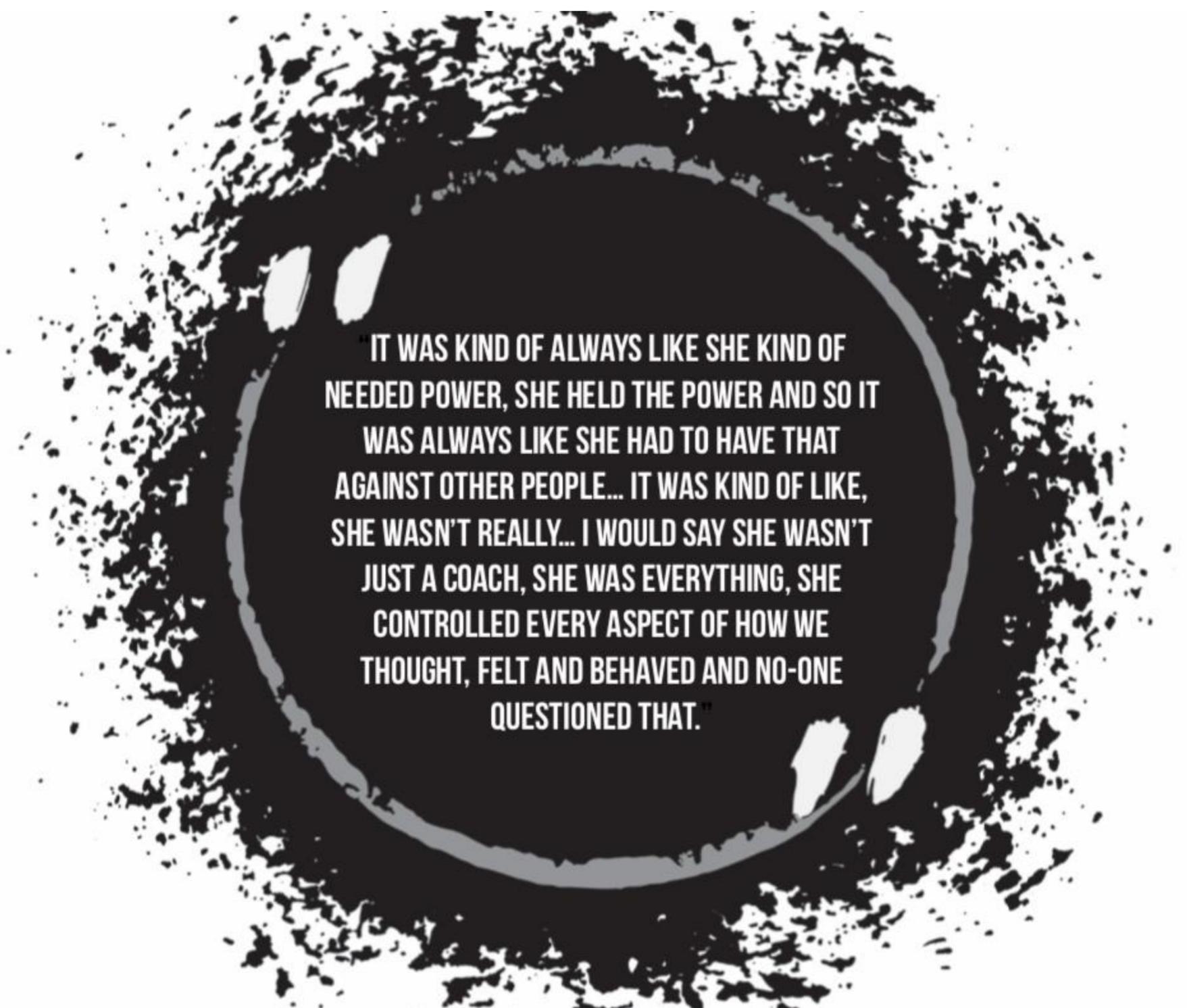




ALL PEOPLE LEARNT FROM THAT WAS TO NOT ROCK THE BOAT AND CERTAINLY NOT TO QUESTION HER (THE COACH) AUTHORITY BUT HOW DARE SHE TREAT SOMEBODY LIKE THAT? BUT NO ONE IS GONNA SPEAK OUT BECAUSE EVERYONE ELSE IS HAVING THIS EXPERIENCE AND PLAYING FOR YOUR COUNTRY IS SO IMPORTANT. YOU DON'T WALK AWAY FROM THAT.

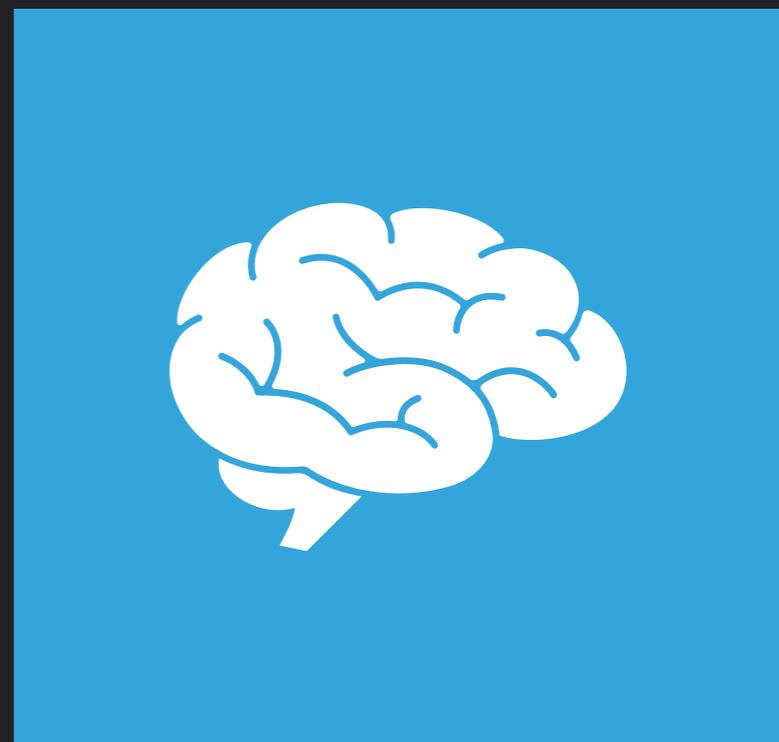
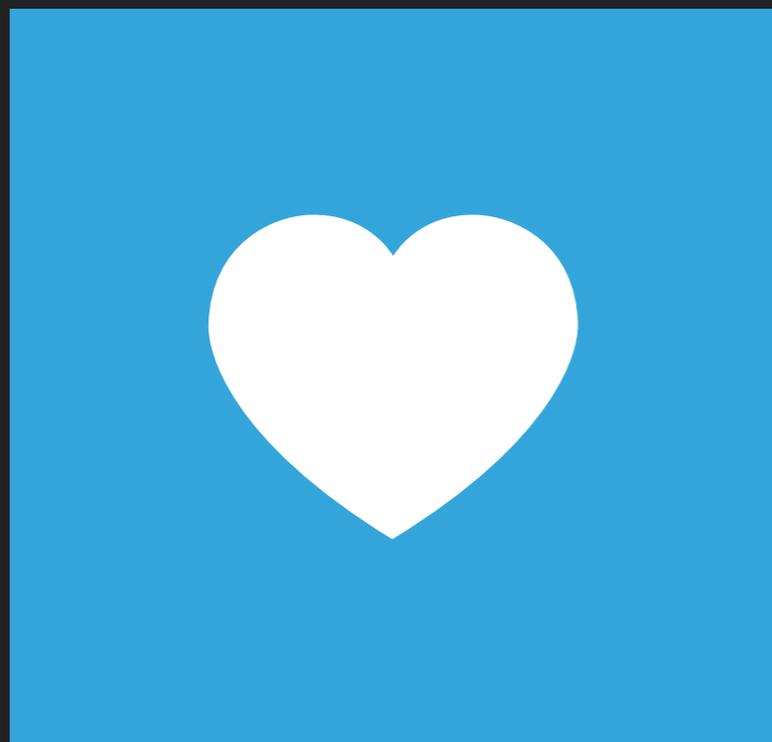


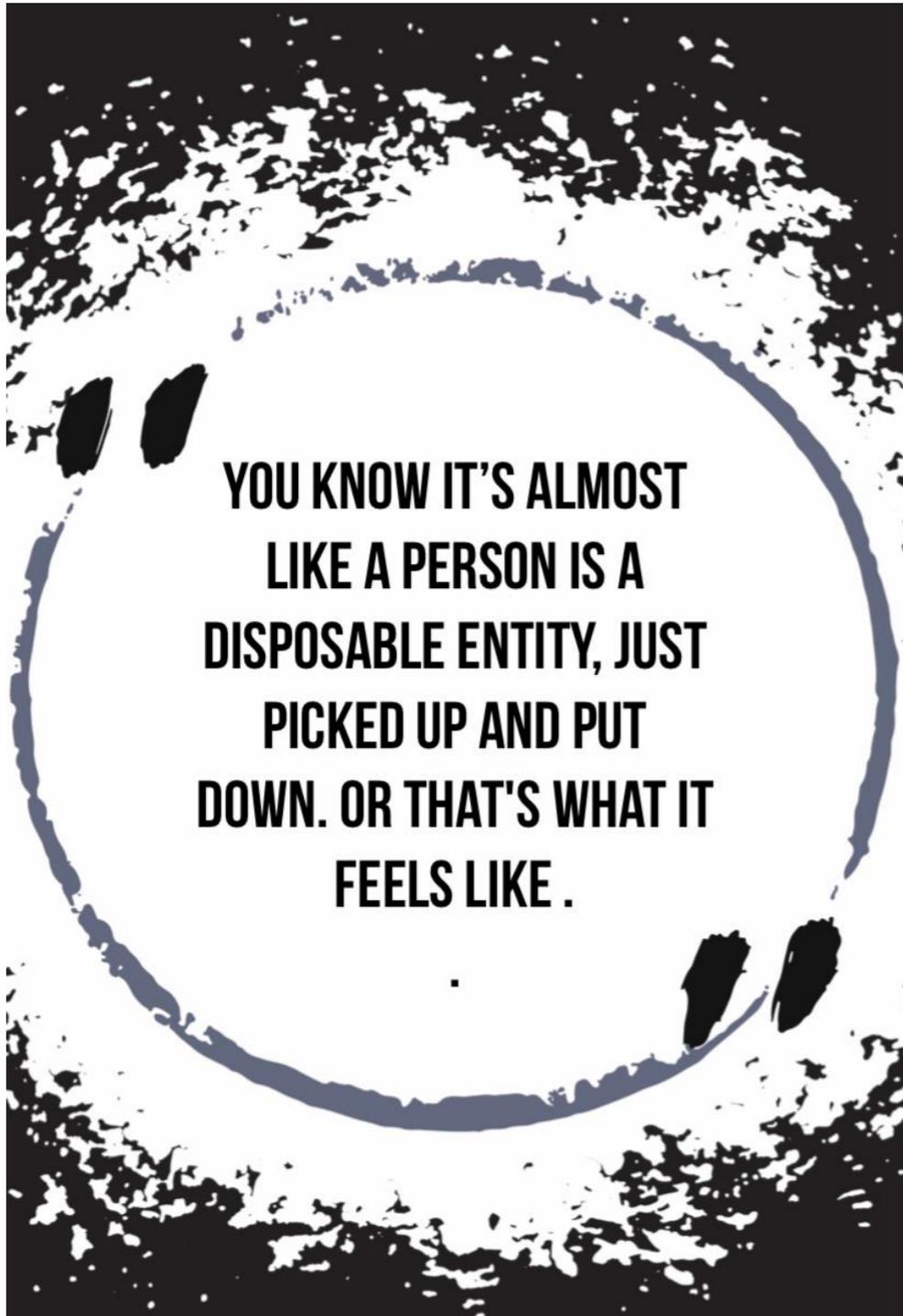
“We were back in for the team chat, and we were in there for an hour and a half just getting a bollocking, it was more, he bollocked us, kicked stuff, shouted and screamed and worked his way around the room tearing people apart and everyone’s scared of him so no one says a thing.”



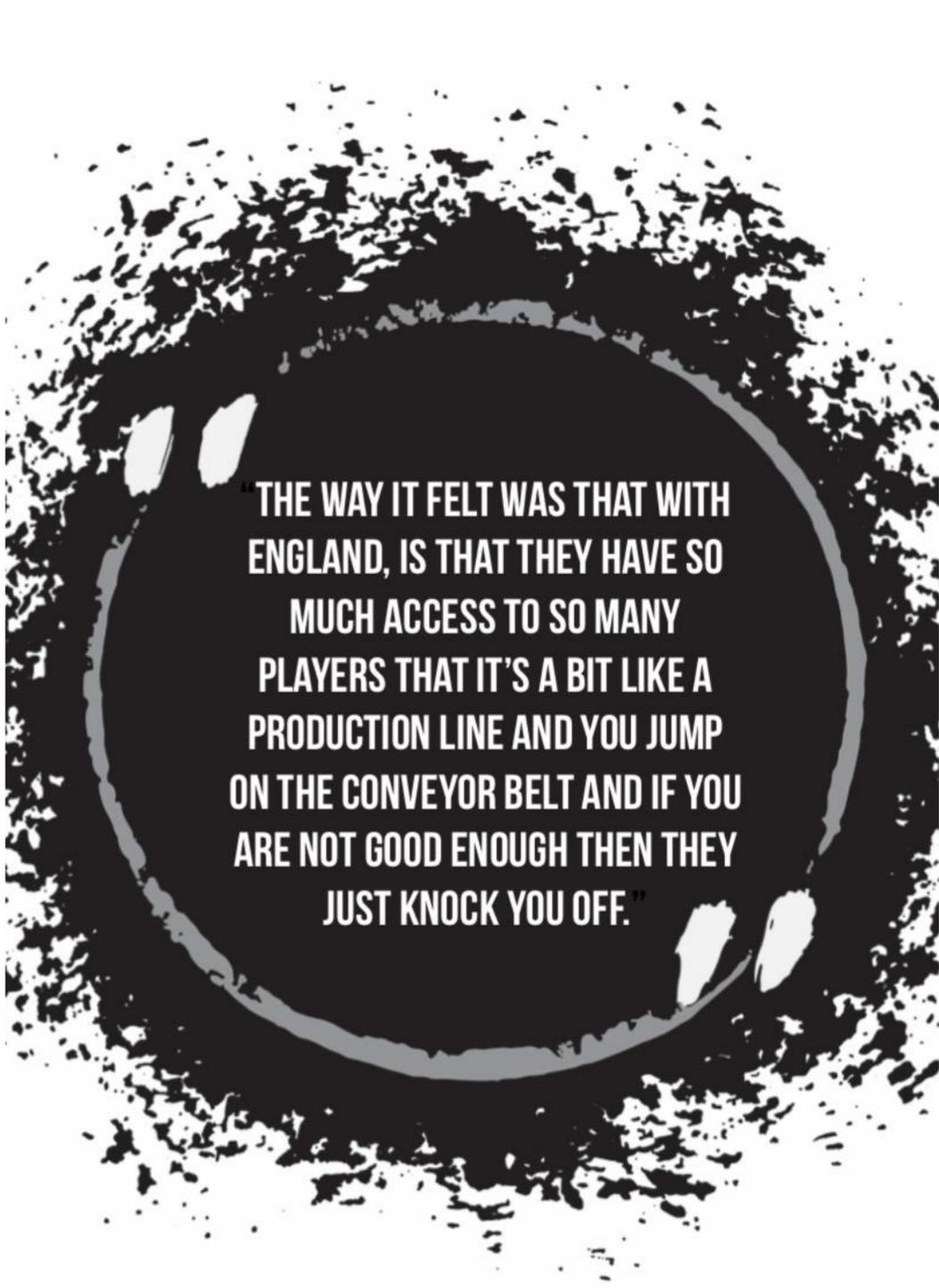
**IT WAS KIND OF ALWAYS LIKE SHE KIND OF
NEEDED POWER, SHE HELD THE POWER AND SO IT
WAS ALWAYS LIKE SHE HAD TO HAVE THAT
AGAINST OTHER PEOPLE... IT WAS KIND OF LIKE,
SHE WASN'T REALLY... I WOULD SAY SHE WASN'T
JUST A COACH, SHE WAS EVERYTHING, SHE
CONTROLLED EVERY ASPECT OF HOW WE
THOUGHT, FELT AND BEHAVED AND NO-ONE
QUESTIONED THAT."**

TAKING THE TIME TO REALLY LISTEN

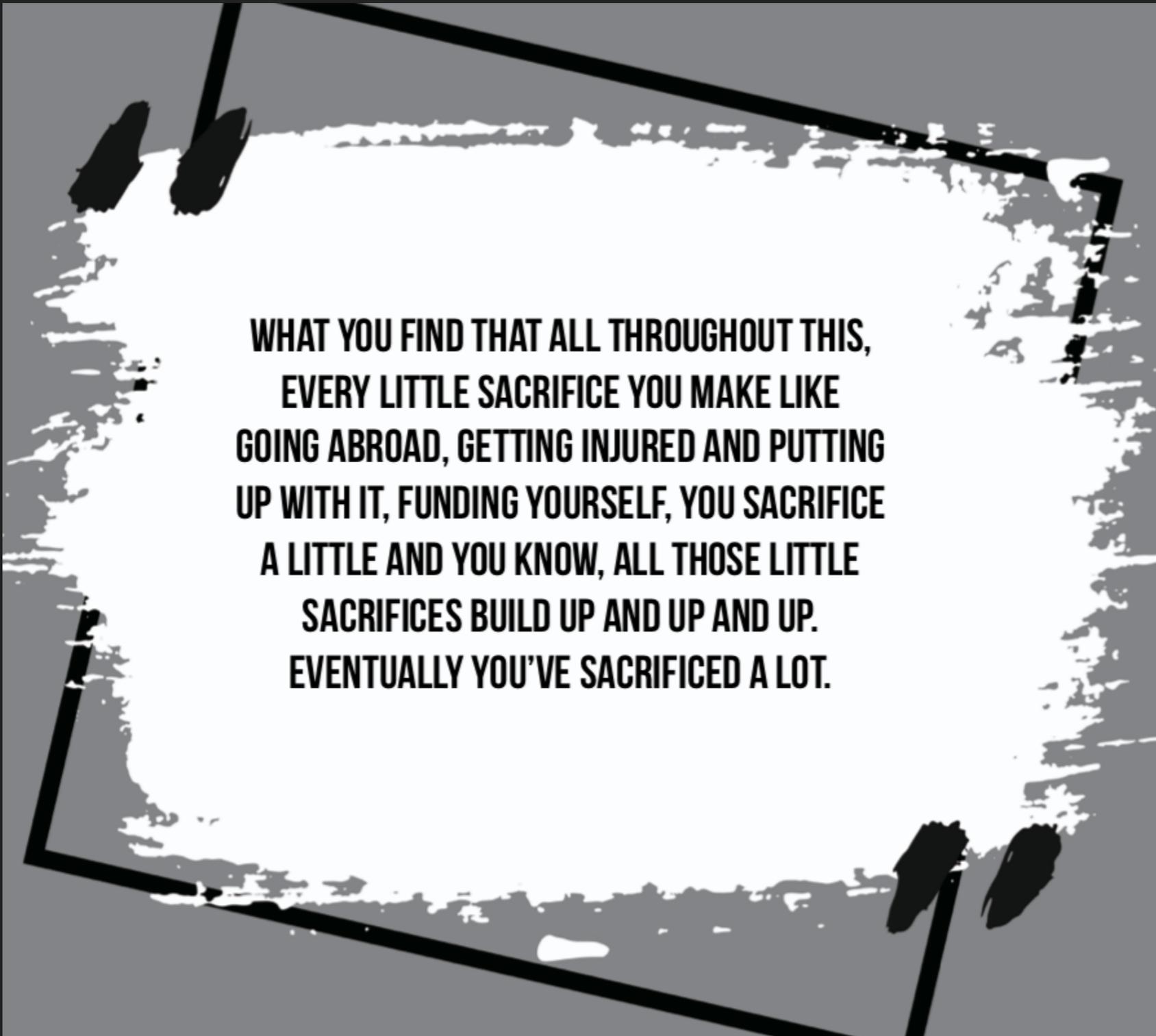




**YOU KNOW IT'S ALMOST
LIKE A PERSON IS A
DISPOSABLE ENTITY, JUST
PICKED UP AND PUT
DOWN. OR THAT'S WHAT IT
FEELS LIKE .**

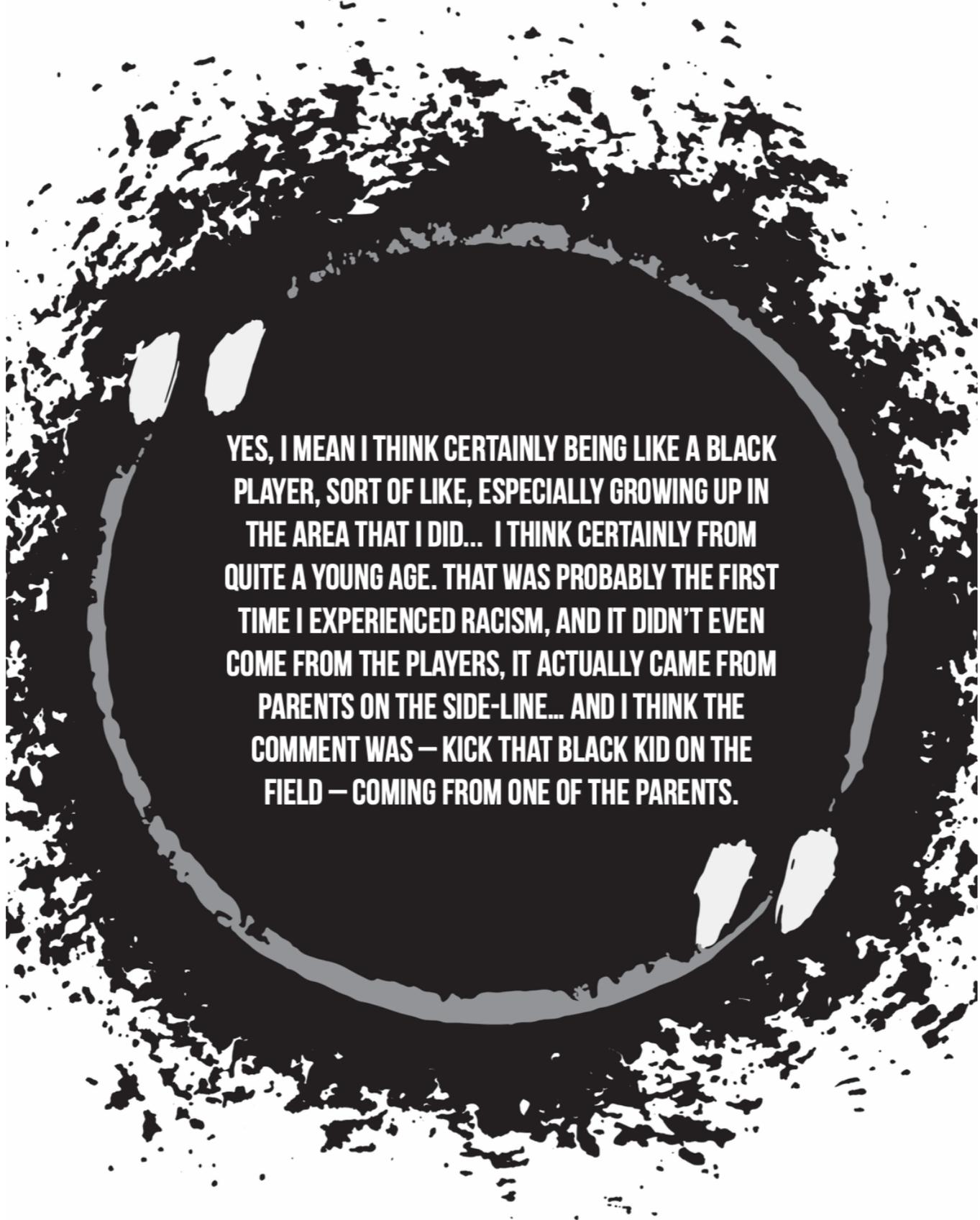


**"THE WAY IT FELT WAS THAT WITH
ENGLAND, IS THAT THEY HAVE SO
MUCH ACCESS TO SO MANY
PLAYERS THAT IT'S A BIT LIKE A
PRODUCTION LINE AND YOU JUMP
ON THE CONVEYOR BELT AND IF YOU
ARE NOT GOOD ENOUGH THEN THEY
JUST KNOCK YOU OFF."**

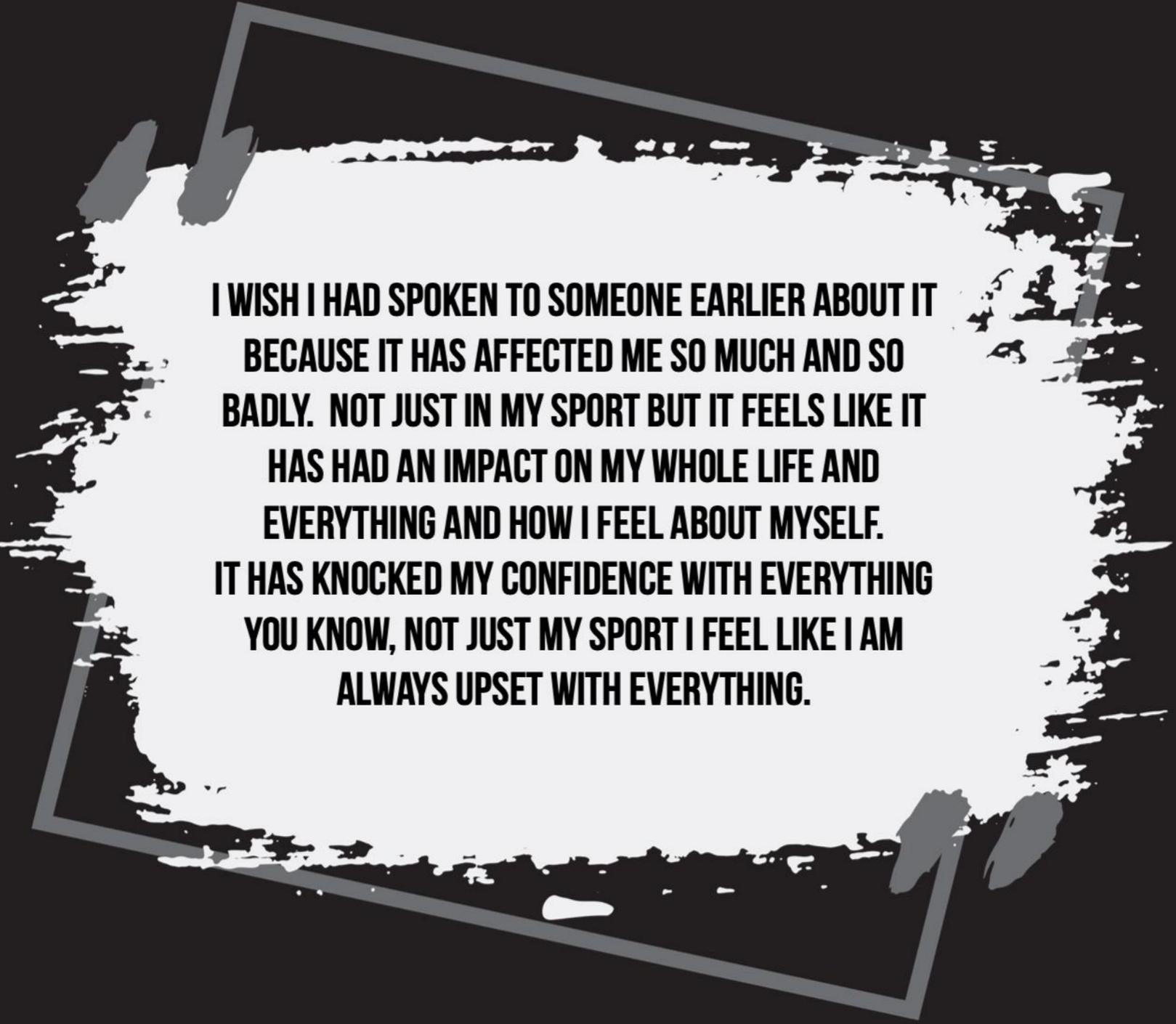


**WHAT YOU FIND THAT ALL THROUGHOUT THIS,
EVERY LITTLE SACRIFICE YOU MAKE LIKE
GOING ABROAD, GETTING INJURED AND PUTTING
UP WITH IT, FUNDING YOURSELF, YOU SACRIFICE
A LITTLE AND YOU KNOW, ALL THOSE LITTLE
SACRIFICES BUILD UP AND UP AND UP.
EVENTUALLY YOU'VE SACRIFICED A LOT.**

“I know players that had to give up sport because they developed serious eating disorders as a result of what he (the coach) said to them, I know I had a weird relationship with food when I was competing, you never wanted to be the one singled out or told you were fat or overweight.”

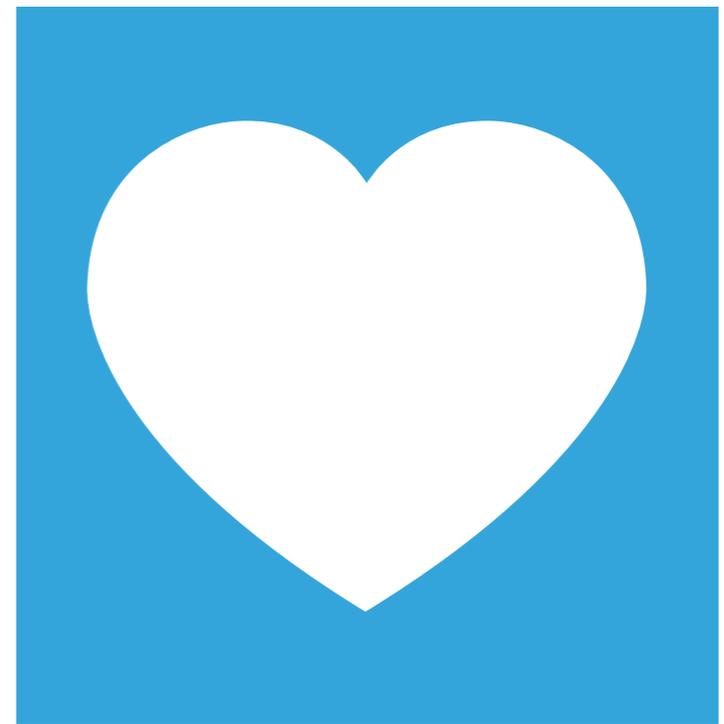


YES, I MEAN I THINK CERTAINLY BEING LIKE A BLACK PLAYER, SORT OF LIKE, ESPECIALLY GROWING UP IN THE AREA THAT I DID... I THINK CERTAINLY FROM QUITE A YOUNG AGE. THAT WAS PROBABLY THE FIRST TIME I EXPERIENCED RACISM, AND IT DIDN'T EVEN COME FROM THE PLAYERS, IT ACTUALLY CAME FROM PARENTS ON THE SIDE-LINE... AND I THINK THE COMMENT WAS — KICK THAT BLACK KID ON THE FIELD — COMING FROM ONE OF THE PARENTS.



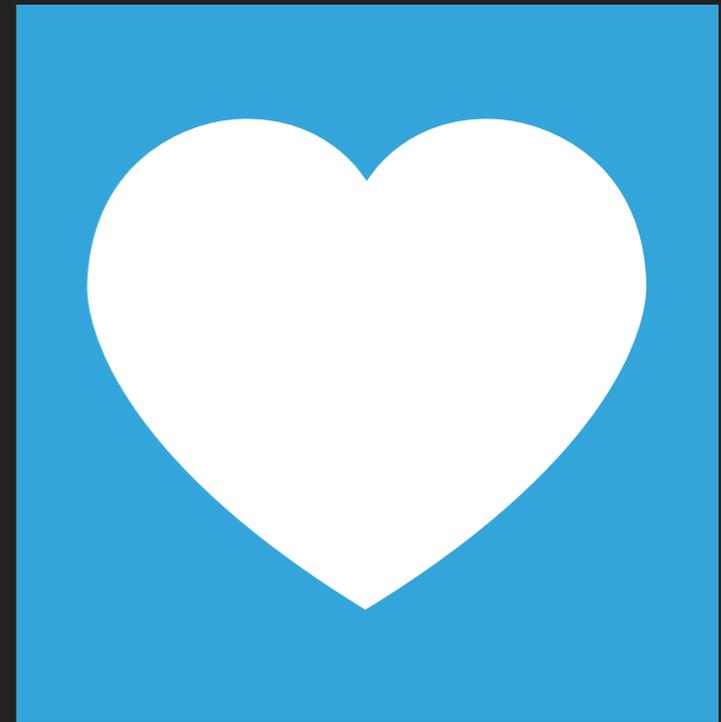
**I WISH I HAD SPOKEN TO SOMEONE EARLIER ABOUT IT
BECAUSE IT HAS AFFECTED ME SO MUCH AND SO
BADLY. NOT JUST IN MY SPORT BUT IT FEELS LIKE IT
HAS HAD AN IMPACT ON MY WHOLE LIFE AND
EVERYTHING AND HOW I FEEL ABOUT MYSELF.
IT HAS KNOCKED MY CONFIDENCE WITH EVERYTHING
YOU KNOW, NOT JUST MY SPORT I FEEL LIKE I AM
ALWAYS UPSET WITH EVERYTHING.**

SPORT
PSYCHOLOGISTS ARE
UNIQUELY
POSITIONED TO BE
AMBASSADORS OF
HEALTHY SPORTING
SPACES.
CARE IS AT THE
HEART OF WHAT WE
DO (STIRLING &
KERR, 2019).



BEING A SPORT PSYCHOLOGIST

- ▶ The discipline of Psychology, both as a science and a profession, exists within the context of human society. Accordingly, a shared collective duty for the welfare of human and non-human beings, both within the societies in which Psychologists live and work, and beyond them, is acknowledged (BPS, 2020).
- ▶ AASP (n.d) states that psychological practice is guided by the values of Excellence, Respect, Integrity, Diversity, Collaboration, and Service; its Ethical Principles and Standards refer to the principles of Competence, Integrity, Professional and Scientific Responsibility, Respect for People's Rights and Dignity, Concern for Others' Welfare, and Social Responsibility.



ISSP-R ETHICAL CODE FOR SPORT PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICE

Principle #1: beneficence and concern for others' well-being

ISSP Registered practitioners' actions are based on the principle of Beneficence and Concern for Others' Well-being. They obligate themselves to act for the benefit of others with whom they work (e.g., individual, teams, organisations, students, trainees, and supervisees). They seek to safeguard the welfare of those with whom they work. They strive to be the best practitioners they are able to be while working with clients as well as in their own personal lives. The welfare of the people with whom they work as well as the standing in the member's profession take precedence over the individual member's self-interest.

Principle #2: respect for peoples' rights and dignity

ISSP Registered practitioners' actions are based on the principle of Respect for People's Right and Dignity. They conduct themselves in a manner that exemplifies respect for the dignity and worth of all people, and an individual's right to privacy, confidentiality, self-determination and justice. In particular, they take special safeguards that may be necessary to protect the rights and welfare of persons or communities they serve whose vulnerabilities could impair autonomous decision-making.

Principle #3: social justice and responsibility

ISSP Registered practitioners' actions are based on the principle of Social Justice and Responsibility. They do not engage in unfair discrimination based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, or any basis proscribed by law, and take precautions to ensure that their potential biases do not lead to or condone unjust practices.

DUTY OF CARE IN SPORT



A duty of care

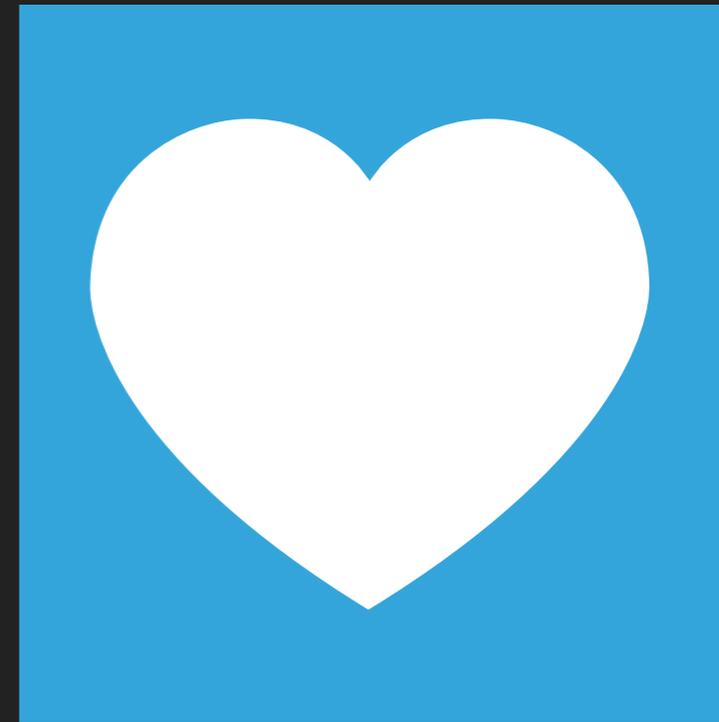
The **legal** obligation to safeguard others from harm while they are in your care, using your services, or exposed to your activities. A legal duty of care amounts to risk and whether reasonable steps to prevent foreseeable risk have been identified and action taken to reduce the risks

The **moral** duty of care is more correctly a responsibility for safety and welfare (Kavanagh, Rhind & Gordon-Thompson, in press). The duty of care assumes a responsibility for the care of another whereby care refers to the relational element of this duty and is linked to the interaction between people and or an organization.

Grey-Thompson (2017) highlighted that it is essential that high-performance cultures put “people – their safety, wellbeing and welfare – at the centre of what sport does” (Grey-Thompson, 2017, p. 4).

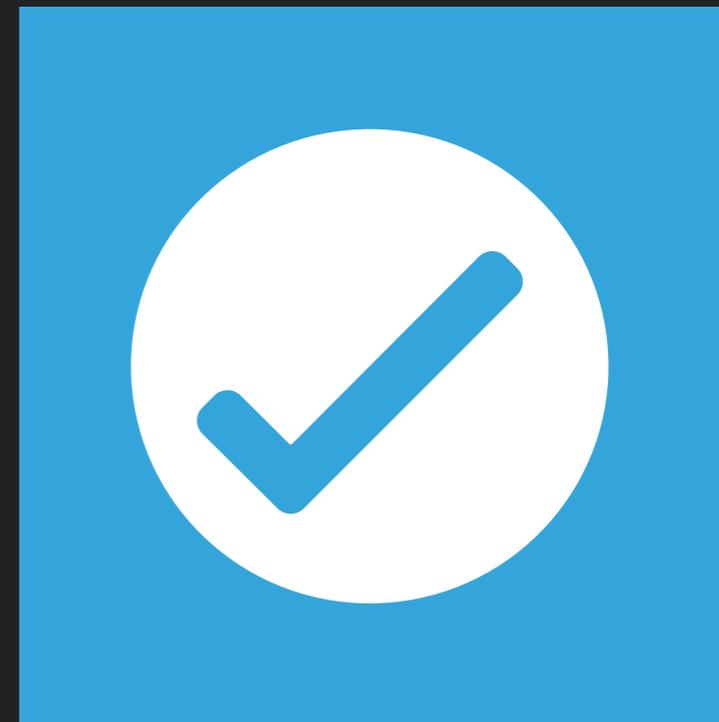
AN ETHICS OF CARE

- ▶ Noddings (2010) notes “Caring, in every approach, involves attention, empathic response, and a commitment to respond to legitimate needs” (p. 28). Whereby care consists of performed acts that have the potential to enhance relationships and promote well-being and flourishing of others (Hamington, 2019).
- ▶ Noddings differentiates between caring for (the practice of caring) and caring about. Caring about welfare is part of the process of achieving change. It drives our practice to be more critical a, promotes concern and is an emotional activity. Yet caring for and enacting care is the sustained process of care, over time, and enacted in different circumstances.
- ▶ Newton et al. (2007) define a caring climate as “the extent to which individuals perceive their particular setting to be interpersonally inviting, safe, supportive, and capable of providing the experience of being valued and respected” (p. 70) .
- ▶ An emphasis on safeguarding is of great importance in articulating the duty of care and enhancing the safety of all participants.



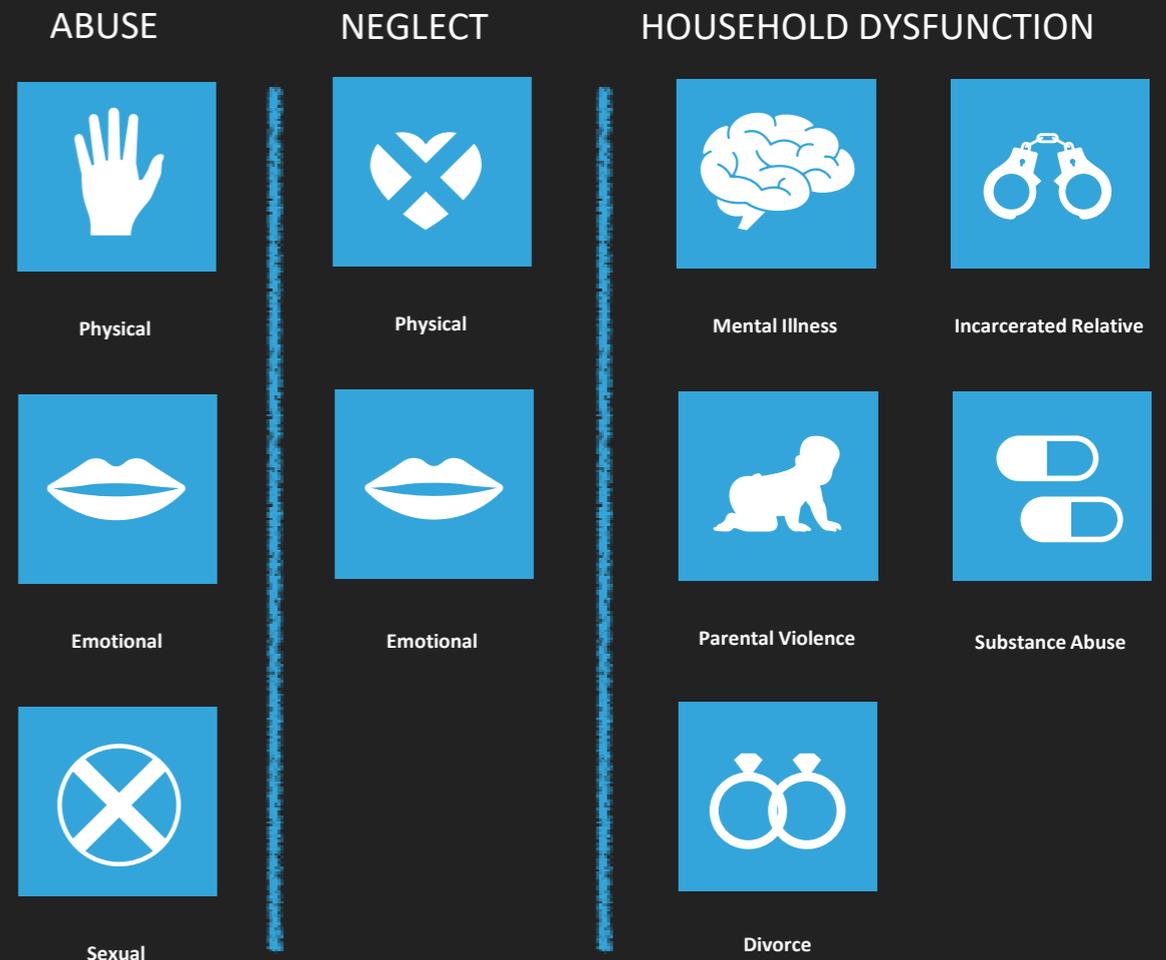
SAFEGUARDING LITERACY

- ▶ Safeguarding serves to promote the welfare and well-being of everyone in sport.
- ▶ It involves taking reasonable action(s) to ensure that everyone involved in sport are safe from harm (Rhind, et al., 2015).
- ▶ Putting in place measures to assure athletes' safety and human rights.
- ▶ Main emphasis on prevention
- ▶ Remember this requires multilevel awareness, it isn't just what happens in sport!



ACE'S

- ▶ Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are experiences that occur before the age of 18 that cause extreme distress and can result in long-term medical, mental health, and behavioural issues (Felitti et al., 1998).



BEING AWARE OF THE RISKS OR PRESSURE POINTS

- ▶ Hierarchical power relations; the omnipresence of power
- ▶ Conformity to “potentially” damaging norms
- ▶ Disruptive narratives surrounding “what it takes” to perform
- ▶ Hyper-masculine culture(s), language linked to these cultures
- ▶ Competitive neoliberal climates
- ▶ Highly accelerated careers
- ▶ Fear surrounding reporting, speaking out.

SIMPLE STEPS TO PROMPT SAFEGUARDING ACTION



BE FAMILIAR WITH YOUR POLICY

You should be familiar with the related policies for the organisations and contexts in which you work. Be mindful that there may be a number of policies at any given time to be familiar with.



MINIMISE RISK

Minimise risk by putting in place safeguards. This should be a part of our practice. Work in a manner which places priority on the safety of the self and others. Be aware of increased vulnerabilities where possible.



KNOW HOW TO RESPOND

Reporting procedures describe the operational processes required to implement organisational policy and provide clear step-by-step guidance on what to do in different circumstances. Get familiar with procedures required to manage any safeguarding concerns.



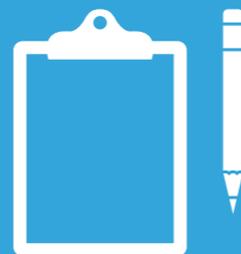
PUT IN PLACE GUIDELINES FOR BEHAVIOUR

Be familiar with relevant codes of conduct and ethical standards as these can guide behaviour. Work with those in your environment to develop benchmarks for optimal climates and to promote psychologically safe environments for all.



ADVICE AND SUPPORT

Identify people and resources who can support you to effectively fulfil the safeguarding aspects of your role (e.g., welfare officer or Safeguarding Manager). The CPSU and Ann Craft Trust provide a range of helpful resources which may be of benefit.



EDUCATE AND EVALUATE

Keep up to date with current safeguarding guidance and continue to re-educate yourself in this area. Use safeguarding as a point of reflection and planning in your own thinking and delivery to optimise your practice.

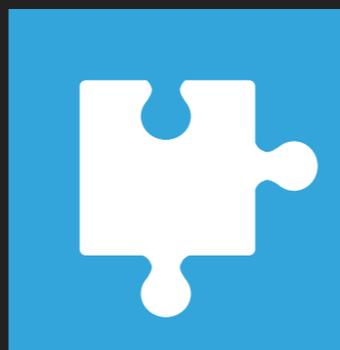
THOUGHTS FROM OTHER PRACTITIONERS



Use safeguarding as a point of planning and reflection



Be diligent in record keeping



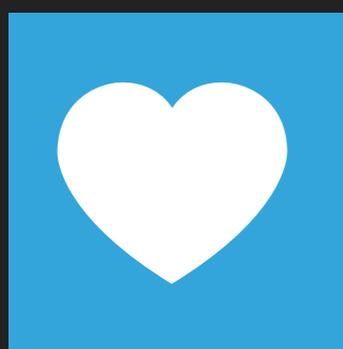
Consider the impact of interventions: is everyone ready?



Education as the key; self and others



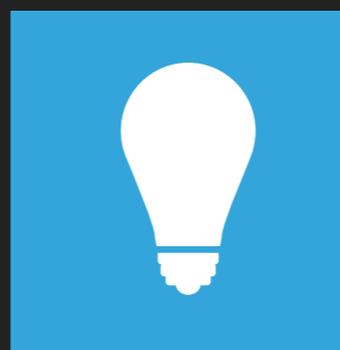
Bring in specialists; Talk to others; have in place referral points



Foster psychologically safe climates; practice self care



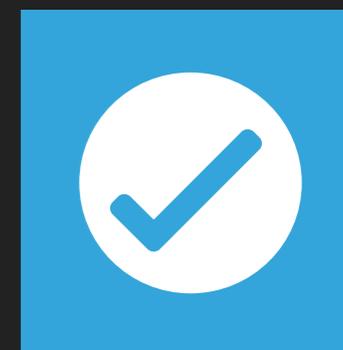
Be aware of pressure points and respond to them



Ask critical questions of the places and spaces in which you work

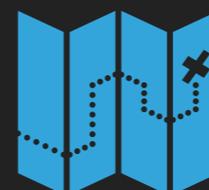


Know yourself, be aware of your privileges or biases



Always work within your boundaries and level of experience

Safeguarding as a journey not a destination



CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

- ▶ Sport often promotes the Olympic motto in which athletes become faster, higher and stronger.
- ▶ We need to facilitate the same motivation for sport to be safer.
- ▶ We are all ambassadors of healthy sporting spaces, advocates, the opportunity for change.
- ▶ Through raising standards and awareness around Duty of Care and striving for the highest performance when it comes to safeguarding people in sport, we can go beyond the minimal legal requirements to create cultures in which people are able to flourish.
- ▶ It is only through providing a genuine duty of care that the optimal performance can be achieved.
- ▶ How to realise this aspiration still requires greater attention in academic literature and practice.



the british
psychological society
promoting excellence in psychology

~~FASTER, HIGHER~~ ~~STRONGER SAFETY,~~ WELFARE & PROTECTION

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SPORT
PSYCHOLOGISTS TO FOSTER SAFER
SPORTING SPACES...

DR EMMA KAVANAGH
@EMJKAVANAGH

