

1 A Creative Writing Case Study of Gender-Based Violence in Coach Education: Stacey's Story

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**Abstract**

Creative nonfiction writing is the literary technique employed in this article to explore insights and assist our understanding of an “alleged” sexual assault in a sport coach education environment. Creative nonfiction employs various narrative tools: characters, setting, figurative language, sequences of events, plot, sub-plot, and dialogue, designed to render the sensitive and controversial elements of sexual assault significant. Readers are, therefore, invited to engage with *Stacey’s Story* and reflect on the actions of both the perpetrator(s) and the victim. While there are risks associated with the sharing of stories, especially those which are considered dangerous, it is envisaged that *Stacey’s Story* will be viewed as an opportunity to develop more critical responses and advance our understanding of gender-based violence in sport.

*Keywords:* sexual assault, abuse, controversial and sensitive issues, sport, coach education, narrative

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The terminology used by scholars when referring to various forms of sexual harassment, violence and assault in both the European Member States, and the United States of America (USA), in and beyond sport contexts, varies considerably (Mergaert, Arnaut, Vertommen, & Lang, 2016). In terms of consistency therefore, we accept the European Commission's Proposal for Strategic Actions on Gender Equality in Sport's position, by adopting "gender-based violence" as a proposition to capture any unwanted "sexual act" committed by a perpetrator. According to Mergaert et al. (2016) gender-based violence is defined in these terms:

Violence directed against a person because of that person's gender (including gender identity/expression) *or* as violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionality...sexual violence (including rape, sexual assault, abuse and harassment) are considered a form of gender-based violence. (p. 2)

It is widely considered that gender-based violence occurs across all sports and at all levels, but deliberate and targeted behavior is especially prevalent at the elite/professional ranks (Brackenridge & Fasting, 2008; Caudwell, 2017, Fisher & Anders, 2019). In the USA for example, the sexual abuse<sup>1</sup> of (mostly) female athletes, eventually lead to the prosecution and criminal conviction of medical professional Larry Nassar, at the time, the team doctor for USA gymnastics. The case of Larry Nassar acts as a stark illustration of both the physical and psychological suffering which can occur at the hands of a sexual predator (Fisher & Anders, 2019). It also reminds us that there is no "typical" profile of a sexual abuser, and sexual offenses

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<sup>1</sup> To trick, force or coerce a person into any sexual activity the person does not want, or is not sufficiently mature to consent to.

49 vitiated by force, or the fear of force, can be perpetrated by individuals who typically rely on  
50 upholding the highest levels of morality, trust and care (e.g., medical professionals). Similar to  
51 the medical profession, sporting environments are also distinctive, in the sense that legitimate  
52 physical touching can take place between the coach and the athlete, and there is no doubt, that  
53 the spaces in which sport coaches inhabit are nested by complex social, political, historical,  
54 cultural and gendered discourses (Fisher & Anders, 2019). Sporting environments, therefore,  
55 provide a unique sociocultural context that offers the potential for gender-based violence to take  
56 place (Douglas & Carless, 2009).

57       Theorization beyond sport reveals instances of gender-based violence occurring in both  
58 university education settings and the workplace (Everbach, 2018; Phipps & Young, 2015). For  
59 instance, gender-based violence is reported to permeate through universities' sport and "lad"  
60 drinking cultures (Phipps & Young, 2015). Heavy drinking is considered an integral element of  
61 university life and concerns have been raised about the potential violence, threats, and associated  
62 risks that women face when entering historically hegemonic "masculine" domains (Rogan,  
63 Piacentini, & Szmigin, 2016). Online forums such as Uni Lad and the Lad Bible are reported to  
64 contribute to these sexual discourses and "raunch culture" (Rogan et al., 2016), with online  
65 content, such as the example below serving as a disturbing illustration:

66       If the girl you've taken for a drink ... won't 'spread for your head', think about this  
67       mathematical statistic: 85 per cent of rape cases go unreported. That seems to be fairly  
68       good odds. Uni Lad does not condone rape without saying 'surprise' (Cited in Phipps &  
69       Young 2015; and in Caudwell, 2017, p. 69).

70       With this in mind, it is perhaps no surprise that the #MeToo movement, which helps to  
71 support those who have suffered gender-based violence has been formed (MeToo, 2018).

(Brackenridge & Fasting, 2005; Owton, 2016). Nonetheless, achieving diversity in male-dominated industries remains an enduring challenge. It is well established that due to the ideological and cultural centrality of sport, not to mention the dominant masculine discourses and power relations which permeate their way across regulatory sporting bodies, any substantive shift in attitudes and inequalities towards women remains elusive (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2016). Within the United Kingdom (UK) formal coach education is framed as a predominantly male-dominated preserve, where women continue to present and negotiate their gendered identities along a path of both acceptance and resistance (Norman, Rankin-Wright & Allison, 2018). More recently, coach education has been described as a harsh and uncaring environment for women (Lewis, Roberts & Andrews, 2017; 2018). However, it is not generally regarded as fertile terrain for gender-based violence to take place. Saying that, existing research does not portray the coaching profession (in the UK at least) as a particularly positive environment for underrepresented groups (i.e., women) with reported evidence of bullying, harassment and intimidation (Norman et al., 2018).

In the following pages of this article, we therefore draw on events that allegedly took place during a formal coach education course in the UK. In doing so, we offer a creative nonfiction short story, which aims to give voice to the voiceless and the underrepresented. As such, we are treating the process of research as an act of critical construction rather than discovery. Ontologically then, our reality is positioned within a political, cultural, historical and economic context (Mertens, 2008). Critical researchers have an agenda of change, and attempt to improve the lives and situations of the underrepresented or those of whose affairs are oppressed (Freire, 1996). To help inform this work we are drawn to the theoretical concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987). Hegemonic masculinity is a concept widely used to identify the

attitudes and practices among men who seek to propagate gender inequality, mostly involving the use of power as a way to dominate women (Jewkes, Flood & Lang, 2015). Hegemonic masculinity is thus described as:

A set of values, established by men in power that functions to include or exclude, and to organize society in gender unequal ways. It combines several features: a hierarchy of masculinities, differential access among men to power (over women), and the interplay between men's identity, men's ideals, interactions, power, and patriarchy (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012, p. 40).

It is outside the scope of this article to provide a detailed theoretical overview of hegemonic masculinity, for a review see Jewkes et al. (2015). However, in terms of positioning hegemonic masculinity in historical sporting terms, its application has been employed in representations of soccer "hooliganism" and assaultive violence in the USA (Newburn & Stanko, 1994). It has also been deployed to assist our understanding of the symbolic violence attributed to contact sports (Messner & Sabo, 1990) and risk-taking sexual behavior (Sabo & Gordon, 1995). So, while some have argued hegemonic masculinity is associated with negative characteristics of criminology (i.e., Collier, 1998), which has led to the continuation of men engaging in toxic practices and physical violence in particular settings, others have suggested that more than one hegemonic masculinity within a society exists (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Thus, while we accept the masculine concept as a framework to understand gender-related norms, we reject the use of hegemonic masculinity as a fixed character type, or a collection of toxic traits. Instead we are framing masculinities as multiple, fluid and lithe and seen as positions held situationally, whereby practices and values espoused in one context may be different from those of another (Jewkes et al., 2015).

Our aim here is increased gender equity and violence prevention, by “breaking the link” between masculinity and violence, by challenging how social norms of masculinity can be understood and changed. It also contributes towards practice by providing scholars, policy-makers, coaches, and coach educators with a grounded, user-friendly account, designed to assist our understanding of hegemonic masculinity that might inform future coach education workshops.

### **Method**

This research was granted full university ethical approval and formed part of a larger body of work, regarding how hegemonic masculinity was translated into practical gender equality in sport coach education contexts, some of which is published and archived elsewhere (i.e., blinded for anonymity purposes). The creative nonfiction story was developed using selected secondary sources (not revealed to protect individual identities) and a secondary synthesis of qualitative data captured during the project. These included: newspaper articles, written correspondences between an alleged victim of gender-based violence and a national sporting body, informal conversations with coaches regarding the case, conversations with women who were the alleged victims of sexual assault, and a copy of a written complaint alleging gender-based violence that was forwarded to a national sporting organization.

Like others, we had a moral and ethical duty to ensure the best possible use of the data and given the experiences recounted in the story, we offer a “cloak of anonymity” in order to protect both the worthy and the unworthy (Douglas & Carless, 2009). The writing process followed a multi-staged, iterative course of drafting, re-drafting, editing and story engineering (Vickers, 2014). Partial happenings, fragmented memories, and echoes of conversations were layered against conventional, creative literary writing techniques (Sparkes, 2007). For instance,

141 we make no assertions that scenes as described actually took place, or that the characters  
142 portrayed actually said what they are reported to have said. All events as described (i.e., physical  
143 spaces, plot, conflict and the composite characters) were captured in our data, however, we have  
144 simplified certain elements into a story telling narrative, designed to portray an alternative  
145 picture of hegemonic masculinity in coach education. Thus while certain encounters and  
146 character development in this story have been imagined, that events in this story occurred as  
147 described is not in doubt, the information presented is based on our own existing research (Finley  
148 & Finley, 1999). Significantly, we have deliberately chosen to adopt some creative license by  
149 mixing up the language features, metaphors, and embellishing or exaggerating the thread of our  
150 narrative (Bachelard, 1964; Vickers, 2014). Our aim here, was to not to retell “life as lived”  
151 (Finley & Finley, 1999, p. 318), but to create a story that was useful in raising important  
152 questions, and by weaving the empirical, historical, imaginative and reflective, create a text that  
153 allows us to know more about those who we choose to write about (Finley & Finley, 1999). In  
154 this sense, the use of narrative in scholarly work is not new. Academics have made important  
155 contributions to often complex and controversial topics by synthesizing existing works of fiction,  
156 by shaping their own, or by adopting the tradecraft of fictional writing to allow nonfiction to  
157 breath (e.g., Beames & Pike, 2008; Brackenbridge & Fasting, 2005; Douglas & Carless, 2009;  
158 Dzikus, 2012; Pelias, 2004). Researchers adopting this genre create vicarious versions of reality  
159 inviting the reader to inhabit the experiences of both the individual and the unique (Vickers,  
160 2014). Creative nonfiction captures what Gilbourne and Richardson (2006) refer to as moments,  
161 offering instants obtained from countless techniques of fiction (e.g., contextualized vernacular  
162 language, composite characters, dialogue, metaphor, allusions, flashbacks and flash forwards,



tone shifts and so on) to communicate considerations, results and key findings in compelling and emotionally vibrant ways (Smith, 2013).

Ultimately, the implementation of creative nonfiction in academic terms is only warranted “when employed in the service of a legitimate research purpose. That purpose is the generation of a conversation about important educational questions” (Barone, 1997, p. 223), or, in our case, the pursuit of emotional truth or descriptions of unwanted sexual attention. More recently, Carless, Sparkes, Douglas and Cooke (2014) have offered the following criteria for judging the quality of creative literary fiction: is the topic under scrutiny timely, significant and interesting? Does it contribute practically and methodologically to our understanding of social life? Does the study achieve its primary goals? Does the work embody a sense of lived experience? Does the work generate new questions? Do the stories hang together? Do they invite an interpretive response from the reader? Are they credible and do they work? Does the work resonate at an intellectual and emotional level? With these thoughts in mind the primary goals of this article were to (a) show the emotional truth and effects of gender-based violence within a coach education setting, and (b) illustrate the potential for creative nonfiction as a literary tool to enable readers to understand an incident of gender-based violence from the perspective of the victim. What follows is Stacey’s story, however, we warn readers that the story does contain some explicit sexual language and a bar scene that some readers may find distressing.

### **The Location**

The Academy for Coaching Leadership and Excellence (ACLE)

### **The Time**

Several years ago

**185 The Characters<sup>2</sup>**

186 Stacey—Female coach.

187 Tony—Ex-professional male athlete and coach.

188 Steve—Male coach and ex-police officer.

189 Gavin—Male coach education tutor.

**190 Stacey's Story**

191 I didn't open the letter, not straight away. Instead I placed it on the kitchen table and  
192 stared at the crisp, white looking envelope. I knew straight away who it was from. The  
193 distinctive logo, courtesy of the organization's franking machine was immediately recognisable.  
194 The cause of my hesitancy lies with the decision, hitherto unknown, buried deep inside the  
195 envelope. The unknown question: will I be good enough? The longer I stare, the more  
196 uncomfortable I feel. My stomach tightens, my heart is doing somersaults. It was as though the  
197 envelope was goading me, whispering to me:

198 *Go on, open me...if you dare.*

199 You see, I have been here before. My previous applications—all rejected—not good  
200 enough. In my own mind I had convinced myself that this would be the final time. Never again! I  
201 could do no more. I had put in all the necessary hard work: the endless hours of planning,  
202 coaching in the wind and the rain, the submission of the never-ending paperwork, attendance at  
203 preparation courses, the accumulation of evidence, the completion of formative assessments, and  
204 summative assessments. The tutor feedback though was always the same: *Not enough...not*  
205 *working at a high enough level...perhaps in a two or three years.*

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<sup>2</sup> All the characters names described below are pseudonyms.

If I'm honest, I think it had something to do with me being a woman. I know what you're thinking. I didn't want to use the gender card, you must believe me when I say that, but some of my male colleagues were accepted first-time, no questions asked, but then again, they were former professional athletes. A glance up at the clock that hangs above the kitchen door. I need to open this thing, otherwise I will be late for work. With my eyes closed and with a deep intake of breath, I tear open the envelope. I remember my hands were shaking. I don't recall my reasons for this, but I started reading the letter from the bottom of the page. Beginning with the name of the signatory, I scanned through the document for information, clues, anything for some indication. It didn't take long before the text started to filter its way through my senses sending messages to my brain:

*Congratulations...*

*Confirm your attendance...*

*We look forward to seeing you...*

At long last, I had done it. My hard work and efforts had been rewarded.

I had been accepted.

The journey to the ACLE was largely uneventful and the traffic on the road was kind for a change. It was the height of mid-summer and the sun was making an impromptu, but welcome appearance to what had been hitherto a very wet August. On arrival, I was in complete awe of the surroundings. The grounds were manicured with immaculate lawns as far as the eye could see; herbaceous borders were ablaze with an abundance of colour; further back, evergreens competed for space with the sycamores and the cherry blossoms; together their expansive canopies cascaded an intricate matrix of temporal patterns onto the lush green turf. The spectrum of organic colour was in contrast to the white facade belonging to the Georgian mansion style

229 hotel, which loomed impressively at the end of the expansive driveway. It was eerily quiet, the  
230 only sound being the crunch of the gravel resonating against the tires of my car. I complied with  
231 the speed limit and followed the signs to: guest parking.

232         After checking in, unpacking and a quick change of clothes, it was time for the first  
233 meeting: welcome and general introduction. I found the meeting room with ease, and as I stood  
234 in the doorway my initial impression was one of fear and trepidation. Professional athletes both  
235 past and present were helping themselves to the complimentary coffee or mingling with  
236 members of the tutor team. I seem to remember there was a lot of handshaking, back-slapping,  
237 good humour and laughter. From a distance it appeared as though everyone knew one another;  
238 familiar, comfortable, and at ease in one another's company. In contrast, I felt like an imposter; it  
239 looked as though a squad mentality was already forming. I felt like an outsider: *I looked like an*  
240 *outsider.*

241         The room reeked of professionalism and superiority. On the walls large plasma screens  
242 were projecting images of community coaches working with younger athletes followed by  
243 professional coaches working with the National team. Classical music accompanied the video  
244 montages creating a relaxed, sedate background atmosphere. Name badges, complimentary  
245 training uniforms and resource materials were stacked neatly on a large wooden table. No  
246 expense had been spared. I recognised some of the other coaches in the room. They looked lean  
247 and athletic. Wearing training uniforms with their organizational logo or expensive designer  
248 clothing, they appeared somewhat incongruous when compared to the other coaches or the  
249 course tutors who cut a much fuller figure around the mid-riff. Thinking back, there were  
250 probably more tutors on the course than actual coaches. Over the week, I think we had probably

251 15 or 20 tutors, all male. They clearly didn't expect any women to apply, as all the pre-course  
252 literature adopted the pronoun: *he*.

253         The course itself was both physically and mentally challenging. Early starts, coupled with  
254 late finishes; in the classroom one minute, quickly followed by practical coaching sessions and  
255 then back in the classroom for reflection and analysis. The itinerary was very full on; some days  
256 we were in the classroom until late in the evening. I thought I coped pretty well with the  
257 coaching side of things, but I was a little disappointed to be constantly referred to as a *fella* or a  
258 *lad* and when it was my turn to coach the course tutors did nothing to stop *some* of the other  
259 coaches fooling around. I was made to look foolish on a number of occasions, and whilst I  
260 respected their status as former professional athletes, I did wonder whether they could show me a  
261 little more respect, especially Tony, who seemed to take great pleasure and satisfaction when he  
262 messed up parts of my coaching session. On one occasion during a technical practice I overheard  
263 him say: *I'd love to give her one*, and when I turned around he was mimicking a humping action  
264 with his hips. It was both juvenile and humiliating. This was in full view of Gavin the lead tutor  
265 but he just smiled and said nothing. There were other occasions where I could sense Tony had  
266 'crossed the line' with the other coaches; pulling down other people's shorts or crouching down  
267 behind someone in order for someone else to push them over. It started off quite jovial and  
268 playful but after a while, when some others were fatigued how it had the potential to develop into  
269 more destructive violence.

270         To say a drinking culture existed on the course is somewhat of an understatement. After  
271 the first few days it was apparent who the drinkers were. The absence of certain individuals at  
272 breakfast was the first clue. The red eyes, croaky voices, vacating the pitch to throw up or even  
273 in some cases, throwing up at the side of the pitch, was the other. It did leave me wondering how

274 they coped, especially when we entered the part of the course where we were required to conduct  
275 small episodic coaching sessions. Gavin however employed some creative license to the delivery  
276 timetable, especially when some of the group were so hungover they didn't even show up. This  
277 did lead to some tension and frustration amongst the group. Thinking back, I guess I was lucky;  
278 as it didn't affect me, but I did feel sorry for some of the guys who were required to deliver on  
279 the spot sessions with inadequate numbers, or attempt to motivate the make-believe athletes who  
280 were so ill, they could hardly move.

281         Tony was usually the orchestrator of a night out in town, or a late night drinking session  
282 in the hotel bar. To be fair, Gavin did or said nothing to discourage the drinking, and remained  
283 aloof from some of the antics and shenanigans which were going on. You know, the usual stuff:  
284 putting all the drinks on someone else's room tab, playing drinking games, the odd forfeit here  
285 and there. In the evening it was round after round, and for those guys who didn't drink or who  
286 were on a tight budget, it was a bit awkward. Plus, when they had consumed a few drinks the  
287 language tended to be of a sexual nature, and if I was in the vicinity I noticed how some of the  
288 group looked a little embarrassed, and so I would call it a night. In all honesty, I didn't object to  
289 the early nights as there was enough work for me to get on with; preparation tasks for the  
290 following day, background reading that sort of thing.

291         For the final evening we were booked into the gourmet restaurant, for what was  
292 advertised as a gala dinner but in reality, it wasn't. The pre-course material made reference to the  
293 event and reminded us to pack appropriate smart casual clothing including amongst other things:  
294 *a shirt and tie*. As a rule, I don't normally wear business style clothes, being more content in a  
295 training uniform or a casual pair of jeans, but on this occasion, I was pleased to make an  
296 exception. I had packed my navy blue suit, normally reserved for weddings, interviews or a visit

297 to the bank manager! I had taken care with my hair and make-up, nothing over the top, but I was  
298 pleased with my appearance. A crisp white blouse and a pair of heeled shoes completed my attire  
299 for the evening. Following the meal, we all decamped into the various bars and lounge areas.  
300 Tony was really going for it, ordering bottles of wine and beer on his American Express card. He  
301 had quite an audience and was seemingly enjoying the attention. He was reliving some anecdotes  
302 from his time as a former professional athlete. It was noticeable how his speech was beginning to  
303 slur and his eyes were becoming glazed. As the time approached eleven, we were asked by the  
304 hotel staff to move into another lounge. It was smaller and contained a number of regal looking  
305 leather chairs and sofas, together with the wooden panelling it looked more like a private  
306 gentleman's club than a hotel lounge. Tony was now ordering another bottle of red wine, some  
307 of the group were calling it a night. He offered me a drink. I told him I would have one glass for  
308 the road. Steve and Gary were sitting opposite. I had enjoyed Steve's company during the course,  
309 but Gary was a bit on the strange side. He was from London and he kept using cockney rhyming  
310 slang, which at first was funny, but after a while it started to sound immature and annoying. He  
311 was a bit awkward on the social side. He was a bit too sure of himself and was only happy when  
312 putting others down, making inappropriate lewd comments, or fooling around during my  
313 coaching sessions. When Tony reappeared he was carrying a tray of Jäger bombs, which he  
314 placed on the table before sitting next to me on the sofa. He offered one to me—I refused. He  
315 placed his arm on the back of the sofa, and not for the first time during the course I felt uneasy in  
316 his company. The topic of the conversation was beginning to become a little uncomfortable.  
317 References and innuendos of an explicit sexual nature were becoming more frequent. Tony  
318 laughed as he cracked another derogatory remark about one of his previous conquests, while  
319 staring at my breasts for longer than was necessary. He attempted to top up my drink, however,

320 this time I reached forward and placed my hand over my glass. He looked angry and offended. I  
321 could tell by the expression etched across his face that he was not used to a woman turning him  
322 down. I remember removing my glass from the table and placing it down by my feet to prevent  
323 him trying again and caught him leaning forward leering at my legs. Steve and Gary who were  
324 sat opposite were trying to send messages on their phones, but with little success. Gary kept  
325 throwing his head back and would fall asleep for short periods, before sitting bolt upright as  
326 though he had experienced an electric shock. Steve then stood up and excused himself, he made  
327 some reference to a python! Which I didn't understand. Gary now asleep was snoring softly. It  
328 was well after midnight and the lounge bar which was now closed was otherwise empty. I had  
329 finished my drink and was reaching for my jacket, which I had draped over the side-arm of the  
330 sofa, when suddenly I felt a hand squeeze my breast. At first I wasn't sure what was happening  
331 but then I felt another hand, this time on the underside of my thigh. I was being pulled, forced  
332 violently onto my back. It was Tony. He was pushing hard against me. My neck was jammed  
333 between the intersections of the sofa, and he was trying to force himself on top of me. I could  
334 feel his stubble rubbing against the nape of my neck, it was rough and coarse like sandpaper.  
335 Even though I turned my face in the opposite direction, I could smell his alcohol fuelled breath.  
336 He was trying to kiss me. He pulled my face towards him. His hand was pressing hard against  
337 the inside of my thigh, lifting up my skirt. With his other hand he was trying to pull my legs  
338 apart. My response was ineffective; I just wasn't strong enough. His hand pushed further up my  
339 thigh reaching for my underwear. I struggled. I really did. I tried punching his back, but it was  
340 pointless, he was just too strong. He groped up my skirt and pulled at my underwear, he was  
341 panting heavily, feral—out of control. His watch caught my pubic hair. He placed his fingers



342 inside me, he was beginning to hurt me...I asked him to stop. I wanted him to stop. Terrified, I  
343 begged for him to stop.

344 He refused. In the end I had no choice, and I give in to the inevitable.

345 The next thing I remember was shouting—lots of shouting. I glanced up and saw Steve  
346 dragging Tony across the room by the scruff of his neck. He threw him hard against the bar and  
347 started grabbing him by the throat. I didn't know at the time, but Steve was an ex-policeman.  
348 Gary now awake, had a look of confusion ingrained across his drunken face as he stared at my  
349 exposed thighs and torn underwear. I pulled my skirt down trying hard to ignore the red  
350 handprints branded onto my skin. I reached for my jacket and raced out of the bar. I rushed back  
351 to my room in a state of shock, confused, and unsure about what to do next. I slammed the door  
352 shut and collapsed to the floor, my body was shaking and I wanted to vomit. I sat with my back  
353 pressed up against the bed with my legs tucked tight into my chin and sobbed and sobbed. Tears  
354 rolled down my face in torrents. I was inconsolable, drowning in a sea of desperation, guilt and  
355 shame. *I was a victim*. That's what they would call me. They would say I brought this on myself,  
356 that I encouraged him. For me though, this was not a scar showing competition. *I was a victim*.  
357 Everyone's a victim these days. It's the only way to get your voice heard; use your gender card  
358 that's what they would say, but I didn't want that level of protection—I'm better than that. I want  
359 to feel protected. They would say, you can't say anything to her because she is a victim.

360 A knock at the door.

361 I could hear my name being called, repeated over and over again. It took some time  
362 before I recognised Gavin's voice. He asked if he could speak to me, I agreed. Steve had woken  
363 Gavin and told him what he had witnessed in the bar. Gavin was visibly shocked. I could tell by  
364 the manner in which his voice trembled and the confused expression on his face that he was out

365 of his depth. He was really apologetic; but he could barely look me in the eye. Steve then  
366 knocked on the door, and asked if I was okay. He said he wanted to stay and offer his support,  
367 but Gavin told him it was not necessary. Steve however was insistent, he got his way in the end,  
368 especially when he mentioned that he was a policeman in a former life. Steve was brilliant; calm,  
369 reassuring, but also pragmatic. He asked me if I wanted to press charges and picked up a  
370 notepad. Gavin's face was a picture when he heard this, he was shitting himself! I told Steve I  
371 wasn't sure, that I needed time to think. Then Gavin reminded both of us that Tony was married,  
372 with three young children. He looked straight at me when he reminded me that Tony was a well-  
373 known former professional athlete and that the press would have a field day if this ever leaked  
374 out. I became upset and angry, especially when Gavin concluded that: I leave the course and go  
375 home, for my own good. I started to cry again, I couldn't understand why I was the one being  
376 asked to leave. By this time Steve was sitting next to me on the bed convincing me that I had  
377 done nothing wrong. He offered me an endless supply of tissues, from a box he had rescued from  
378 the bathroom. He challenged Gavin, again and again, asking him why it was not Tony being the  
379 one asked to go home. I recall he gave some pathetic excuse about him not being in a fit state to  
380 drive. I knew this was bullshit and so did Gavin.

381       The following morning, I woke early. I say woke. The truth is that I didn't actually sleep.  
382 My body ached and my mind was racing. I was still reliving the events of the night before. I  
383 spent most of the night crying, staring at the ceiling, thinking about the consequences for both  
384 me and Tony. I blamed myself and I was angry for not putting up a stronger fight. I was angry  
385 because I should have done more. I am not the type of person to run away from things but I  
386 couldn't face going to the restaurant for breakfast. I wasn't hungry, plus I was worried, you  
387 know, just in case I bumped into Tony. The first person I spoke to that morning was Steve.

388 Thoughtfully he had brought me some pastries from the dining room and checked in to see if I  
389 was okay, but I had no appetite for food. It was his idea that I attend the last classroom session; a  
390 wrap-up before the final departure.

391 The classroom that morning was eerily quiet, the air full of tension. It was such a contrast  
392 to the welcome event only days earlier which was full of laughter and bonhomie. I don't think it  
393 was paranoia on my part, but I got the feeling that word had leaked out, though I couldn't  
394 determine whether the other coaches were supportive of me or not, not that it mattered. Steve  
395 was sitting alongside me; he was the only person who spoke to me that morning. The atmosphere  
396 in the room was awful, it was like a funeral. I was treated like a leper. Then, to my surprise,  
397 Tony suddenly got up out of his seat and casually strolled to the front of the classroom where he  
398 spoke briefly to Gavin who was busy sorting out the course evaluation forms. Deep in  
399 conversation, I remember Gavin turning his back on the group; presumably to mask his facial  
400 expression, but it was obvious from his incessant nodding that whatever was being discussed had  
401 his agreement. After a short discussion Gavin placed the evaluation forms back down on the  
402 table and turned off both his computer and projection screen, and cleared his throat.

403 "Listen everyone, can I please have your attention for a second. Last night there was bit  
404 of an incident in the bar, and Tony here would just like to say a few words," he said.

405 I remember sitting with my head in my hands, in a state of disbelief and embarrassment.  
406 The discomfort was causing my skin to burn up. Heat was radiating from my cheeks, the trickle  
407 of cool, wet tears ineffective. Silently, I was thinking, oh no. Please, no. Not here. Not here, not  
408 in full view of everyone. I wanted to shout out: just leave it, its fine, but the words did not come,  
409 and anyway, it was too late: Tony was already speaking:

410 “Listen *fellas*, last night after most of you had gone to bed, there was a little  
411 misunderstanding in the bar involving myself and Stacey. I’ll be honest, I don’t remember much  
412 as I was pretty wasted, but it turns out I made a bit of a *dick* of myself. I’m not proud of what  
413 happened. I let myself down, and my family down, but above all, I let down the people sitting  
414 here in this room. The people who I have enjoyed working with over the past week. I acted like a  
415 right idiot and I hope you will accept my apology. I really didn’t mean to cause any offence or  
416 upset anyone.”

417 To my complete astonishment, the room then exploded into a round of spontaneous  
418 applause. To add to my sense of incredulity someone even managed a wolf-whistle. At first,  
419 Tony looked embarrassed and uneasy with the adulation, but then he started to receive the  
420 applause with acclaim, even managing a modest wave to his adoring audience, it was as though  
421 he had just been presented with an award. He even managed a nod and a subtle wink in my  
422 direction. I was flabbergasted, speechless, hurt and angry. He was being treated like a hero. He  
423 didn't even admit to what he had done. Nobody apart from Steve spoke to me as we departed the  
424 room, not even Gavin. I felt like a pariah. I just wanted to get out. I wanted to shout it from the  
425 rooftops: I hate it here. But what was the point?

426           After all: I was the victim.

427 **Discussion**

428 Researchers working with alternative literary formats have argued that creative nonfiction  
429 such as the story presented here, can stand alone and requires no further forensic interrogation  
430 (Smith, 2013). This is an important consideration especially if stories and storytelling are to be  
431 used as a catalyst for dialogue and social change. Like others (i.e., Smith, 2013), we also share  
432 the value of allowing a story to speak for itself, empowering the reader to build connections in

the development and construction of knowledge. On this occasion however, we resist this temptation, and instead provide a theoretical discussion which we hope illustrates how creative nonfiction can contribute to furthering our understanding of hegemonic masculinity in sport. As the problem of gender-based violence in educational and workplace settings continues to increase (Hill & Silva, 2005), it is surprising to read that such topics remain on the periphery of the research community; presumably because researchers continue to grapple with the ethical and disseminator dilemmas associated with this form of discourse (Fasting & Sand, 2015). Research surrounding sexual assault as defined by Fontes, (2004) is a sensitive topic, as those women who are victims may be reluctant to engage in the research process. As mentioned earlier, gender-based violence is a behavior where coercive power is used as a means of obtaining a desired outcome in return for a sexual favour, or a series of sex-related actions which lead to the victim feeling uncomfortable and the creation of a hostile environment (Fasting, Brackenridge & Borgen-Sundgot, 2003; Fasting & Sand, 2015; Hunt, Davidson, Fielden & Hoel, 2010). As Fasting and Sand (2015) remind us, pivotal to our understanding of gender-based violence is that the behavior experienced is not desired and instead is perceived as threatening, degrading, insulting and offensive. Thus gender-based violence is not only a violation of a person's body, but of their mind as well, and can lead to a number of debilitating health outcomes. For instance, previous research has suggested that 31% of sexual assault victims will display posttraumatic symptoms (Kilpatrick, Edmunds, & Seymour, 1992). Whereas others have reported that victims of sexual assault develop depressive symptoms (Kucharska, 2017). More worryingly, being a victim of gender-based violence is reported to be a strong predictor of future sexual assaults (Gidyez, Coble, Latham & Layman, 1993).

Stacey's story reads similarly to findings in Fasting, Brackenridge and Walseth (2007) as it shows us how Stacey was subjected to a range of humiliating and degrading forms of behavior: sexual innuendo, jokes of a sexual nature, leering, and unwanted physical sexual attention that eventually leads to a penetrative sexual assault. Similarly, these actions help to illustrate how men are able to conform to hegemonic views of masculinity. Of interest here is that these behaviors occurred during times which could be defined as both formal and social situations. We know that gender-based violence can be prevalent in a range of settings and is not unique to sport (for example Rogan et al. (2016) observations about marketing drinking venues in the UK). By removing herself from the situation or laughing off the jokes rather than confronting or reporting the behavior, Stacey exhibits a common reaction to such a situation. As the scene in the bar escalates, Stacey is heard "asking...wanting...[and] begging for him to stop." The story demonstrates how Tony appears to normalize his behavior and avoids taking responsibility for his own violence. He doesn't go as far as blame the victim, but the lack of support provided by Gavin rationalizes a hegemonic masculine view that the event does not need to be taken seriously. Unfortunately, the gender-based violence entwined within the story is not unique to a sporting setting but is all too familiar within the wider contemporary society (Scott, Crompton & Lyonette, 2010).

Collinson and Collinson (1989) stated that "men's sexuality and organizational power are inextricably linked" (p. 107), and unwanted conduct of a sexual nature often reflects an abuse of power and is primarily about men exercising their power over women (Wilson & Thompson, 2001). In Stacey's story we show how Tony's playful behavior during the practical coaching sessions (i.e., short pulling) has the potential to become violent. Here the story illustrates how men who do not use "serious violence" can be responsible for condoning less severe forms of

478 violence in order to avoid group exclusion without losing face. Men often provoke notions of  
479 hegemonic forms of masculinity by presenting notions of an entitlement to women's bodies. For  
480 instance, when Tony was caught "leering at Stacey's legs" and when he attempted to "grab her  
481 breasts."

482       Also captured in the story are references to those individuals in a position of  
483 organizational authority (i.e., Gavin) who did not respond appropriately to the situation or the  
484 seriousness of what took place and acted as a bystander (Fisher & Anders, 2019). This is  
485 juxtaposed against the uncertainty demonstrated by Stacey as to whether to press charges against  
486 Tony or not. The decision of whether to report a sexual assault is a complex one (Hunt et al.,  
487 2010). For instance, it is well established that not all organizations have a transparent policy or  
488 procedure for dealing with potential sexual assault complaints (Hunt et al., 2010). The situation  
489 for Stacey was intensified by the sporting organization's apparent concern that the alleged  
490 assault may get out and that as the alleged perpetrator was a former professional athlete that the  
491 "press would have a field day." Readers are, we hope, intrigued by how Stacey was also made to  
492 become part of a conspiracy to protect the honour of the offender should the incident become  
493 publicly known (for an example of ideas of good character that arise in sexual assault cases see  
494 Inglis & MacKeogh, 2012). The position adopted by Gavin to offer immediate protection to  
495 Tony is a worryingly common occurrence in sexual assault cases and one which serves as an  
496 illustration of how sporting organizations may need to change and greatly consider training their  
497 workforce on gender-based violence.

498       Interestingly, Steve, who was an ex-policeman, was the only person who seemed to be  
499 aware of the serious nature of what had taken place and by shaping the story in this way may  
500 help to bridge the research-practice divide. Whether gender-based violence training is considered

important enough by organizations to include on coach education programs is debatable (Fasting & Brackenridge, 2009). What is clear, is that in the UK at least, a recent number of high-profile sports have seen accusations of alleged gender-based violence appearing in the media (e.g., England women's football, bobsleigh, cycling and canoeing teams) and with the evidence cited previously from the case of Larry Nassar in the USA, then perhaps further training is needed. Despite the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Equality Act (2010) in the UK, there are still examples of inequality in which women still have to prove their worth compared to men (Lewis et al., 2017; 2018). Young (2010) also argued that the "aspects of a woman's body most gazed at and discussed, and in terms of which she herself all too often measures her own worth, are those which least suggest action – breasts, buttocks, etc." (p. 14). She goes on to comment that "contemporary film, advertising, popular literature and periodicals, and countless other media objectify the female body as sexy, passive flesh...making them desirable." A point echoed by Rogan et al. (2016) in relation to marketing in the night time economy. Sport has often been seen as a functional and positive environment, and the darker side of sport (i.e., sexual exploitation), is often under researched (Owton, 2016), apart from a few exceptions (e.g., Fasting et al., 2007; Fisher & Anders, 2019; Owton, 2016). According to Brackenridge, Bishopp, Moussalli and Tapp (2008), although the exact prevalence of sexual abuse in society is difficult to determine, "it is clear that it occurs across all classes of society and in any context where there is the opportunity for" (p. 387).

Stacey documents how she was "hurt" and felt "upset," "angry" and as though she "was the victim." Further on, she tells the reader that she felt like a "pariah" and "wanted to get out." What is also important to note is that, our short story aside, is that although there are investigations into alleged gender-based violence, by those who may be described as well-known



or in positions of power, little is known about other cases in sport that get pursued which fall outside the radar of the media because they are not well-known. There appears to be a number of reasons for this, comprising of people feeling unable to share their stories through being suppressed or silenced and resistance to acknowledge that sport itself does in fact possess a dark side (Cense & Brackenridge, 2001).

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Within this article, we attempt to provide an alternative picture of hegemonic masculinity in coach education, whilst also demonstrating how story-telling can be an effective pedagogical approach in providing a voice to the voiceless (Beames & Pike, 2008). A case is put forward that coach education and coaching is a unique sociocultural context that offers the potential for gender-based violence take place (Owton, 2016). The story presented was designed to signify the sensitive and controversial elements of gender-based violence and assist our understanding of hegemonic masculinity in a coach education domain.

Stacey's story, we hope, offers a powerful learning vehicle into how she was subjected to unwanted sexual attention that eventually lead to a sexual assault, before being cajoled to withhold her story. Stacey's story is, therefore, an example of an attempt to cover up gender-based violence in addition to exposing a highly heteronormative and aggressively masculine environment. Due to recent sexual abuse scandals in the USA, we are even more aware of the potential impact of gender-based violence in sporting contexts (e.g., the Larry Nassar scandal).

In the context of advancing this debate, we recommend that there is a need to offer participants who are attending coach education the opportunity to learn more about the potential for gender-based violence to take place, in order to help keep both athletes and fellow coaches safe (see Fasting et al., 2007). We believe some exciting, creative opportunities to move this

work forward exist. First, gender transformative programs such as those described in The Macho Factory in Sweden offer exciting possibilities (Jewkes et al., 2015). It is outside the scope of this article to describe The Macho Factory in depth, but in short this educational program uses ethnomethodological material and two short films to illustrate men's violence against women. Here the aims are to scrutinize accepted accounts of violence towards women and understand new ways to think and act. We endorse the idea of "forum theatre" as a potential vehicle to make this happen and will explore possibilities of shaping this work into what Denzin (2017) referred to as a "performance-centered pedagogy." We are then, in the words of Denzin (2017, p. 14) pushing back against "racial, sexual, and class boundaries..." and by talking about these "...painful experiences..." we are framing them as a performance-centered pedagogy as a mode of developing our understanding of provocative and sensitive topics. From a Freirean perspective as pedagogues we are trained to respect the architecture and performance in the classroom, and actively work on opportunities for incorporating different forms of knowledge. What we are asking is whether this performance event can contribute to broader societal change in hegemonic masculine domains such as coach education? At the very least, at a discursive level, it offers a pragmatic, preliminary first step about how to raise issues surrounding gender equity and gender-based violence. As others have stated elsewhere (i.e., Jewkes et al., 2015), such changes will not happen in a vacuum or in isolation, and so we call on sporting organizations and governing bodies of sport to take a more comprehensive, longer term view by considering suitable interventions that lead to the eradication of gender-based violence in sport.

#### **Declaration of Interests Statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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