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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

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

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

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

41 It is widely considered that gender-based violence occurs across all sports and at all
42 levels, but deliberate and targeted behavior is especially prevalent at the elite/professional ranks
43 (Brackenridge & Fasting, 2008; Caudwell, 2017, Fisher & Anders, 2019). In the USA for
44 example, the sexual abuse¹ of (mostly) female athletes, eventually lead to the prosecution and
45 criminal conviction of medical professional Larry Nassar, at the time, the team doctor for USA
46 gymnastics. The case of Larry Nassar acts as a stark illustration of both the physical and
47 psychological suffering which can occur at the hands of a sexual predator (Fisher & Anders,
48 2019). It also reminds us that there is no "typical" profile of a sexual abuser, and sexual offenses

¹ 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).

72 (Brackenridge & Fasting, 2005; Owton, 2016). Nonetheless, achieving diversity in male-
73 dominated industries remains an enduring challenge. It is well established that due to the
74 ideological and cultural centrality of sport, not to mention the dominant masculine discourses
75 and power relations which permeate their way across regulatory sporting bodies, any substantive
76 shift in attitudes and inequalities towards women remains elusive (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân,
77 2016). Within the United Kingdom (UK) formal coach education is framed as a predominantly
78 male-dominated preserve, where women continue to present and negotiate their gendered
79 identities along a path of both acceptance and resistance (Norman, Rankin-Wright & Allison,
80 2018). More recently, coach education has been described as a harsh and uncaring environment
81 for women (Lewis, Roberts & Andrews, 2017; 2018). However, it is not generally regarded as
82 fertile terrain for gender-based violence to take place. Saying that, existing research does not
83 portray the coaching profession (in the UK at least) as a particularly positive environment for
84 underrepresented groups (i.e., women) with reported evidence of bullying, harassment and
85 intimidation (Norman et al., 2018).

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

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

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

103 It is outside the scope of this article to provide a detailed theoretical overview of
104 hegemonic masculinity, for a review see Jewkes et al. (2015). However, in terms of positioning
105 hegemonic masculinity in historical sporting terms, its application has been employed in
106 representations of soccer "hooliganism" and assaultive violence in the USA (Newburn & Stanko,
107 1994). It has also been deployed to assist our understanding of the symbolic violence attributed
108 to contact sports (Messner & Sabo, 1990) and risk-taking sexual behavior (Sabo & Gordon,
109 1995). So, while some have argued hegemonic masculinity is associated with negative
110 characteristics of criminology (i.e., Collier, 1998), which has led to the continuation of men
111 engaging in toxic practices and physical violence in particular settings, others have suggested
112 that more than one hegemonic masculinity within a society exists (Connell & Messerschmidt,
113 2005). Thus, while we accept the masculine concept as a framework to understand gender-
114 related norms, we reject the use of hegemonic masculinity as a fixed character type, or a
115 collection of toxic traits. Instead we are framing masculinities as multiple, fluid and lithe and
116 seen as positions held situationally, whereby practices and values espoused in one context may
117 be different from those of another (Jewkes et al., 2015).

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

124 **Method**

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

135 Like others, we had a moral and ethical duty to ensure the best possible use of the data
136 and given the experiences recounted in the story, we offer a “cloak of anonymity” in order to
137 protect both the worthy and the unworthy (Douglas & Carless, 2009). The writing process
138 followed a multi-staged, iterative course of drafting, re-drafting, editing and story engineering
139 (Vickers, 2014). Partial happenings, fragmented memories, and echoes of conversations were
140 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,

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

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

181 **The Location**

182 The Academy for Coaching Leadership and Excellence (ACLE)

183 **The Time**

184 Several years ago

185 **The Characters²**

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.*

² All the characters names described below are pseudonyms.

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

216 *Congratulations...*

217 *Confirm your attendance...*

218 *We look forward to seeing you...*

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

220 I had been accepted.

221 The journey to the ACLE was largely uneventful and the traffic on the road was kind for
222 a change. It was the height of mid-summer and the sun was making an impromptu, but welcome
223 appearance to what had been hitherto a very wet August. On arrival, I was in complete awe of
224 the surroundings. The grounds were manicured with immaculate lawns as far as the eye could
225 see; herbaceous borders were ablaze with an abundance of colour; further back, evergreens
226 competed for space with the sycamores and the cherry blossoms; together their expansive
227 canopies cascaded an intricate matrix of temporal patterns onto the lush green turf. The spectrum
228 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

433 the development and construction of knowledge. On this occasion however, we resist this
434 temptation, and instead provide a theoretical discussion which we hope illustrates how creative
435 nonfiction can contribute to furthering our understanding of hegemonic masculinity in sport. As
436 the problem of gender-based violence in educational and workplace settings continues to
437 increase (Hill & Silva, 2005), it is surprising to read that such topics remain on the periphery of
438 the research community; presumably because researchers continue to grapple with the ethical
439 and disseminator dilemmas associated with this form of discourse (Fasting & Sand, 2015).
440 Research surrounding sexual assault as defined by Fontes, (2004) is a sensitive topic, as those
441 women who are victims may be reluctant to engage in the research process. As mentioned
442 earlier, gender-based violence is a behavior where coercive power is used as a means of
443 obtaining a desired outcome in return for a sexual favour, or a series of sex-related actions which
444 lead to the victim feeling uncomfortable and the creation of a hostile environment (Fasting,
445 Brackenridge & Borgen-Sundgot, 2003; Fasting & Sand, 2015; Hunt, Davidson, Fielden & Hoel,
446 2010). As Fasting and Sand (2015) remind us, pivotal to our understanding of gender-based
447 violence is that the behavior experienced is not desired and instead is perceived as threatening,
448 degrading, insulting and offensive. Thus gender-based violence is not only a violation of a
449 person's body, but of their mind as well, and can lead to a number of debilitating health
450 outcomes. For instance, previous research has suggested that 31% of sexual assault victims will
451 display posttraumatic symptoms (Kilpatrick, Edmunds, & Seymour, 1992). Whereas others have
452 reported that victims of sexual assault develop depressive symptoms (Kucharska, 2017). More
453 worryingly, being a victim of gender-based violence is reported to be a strong predictor of future
454 sexual assaults (Gidyez, Coble, Latham & Layman, 1993).

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

472 Collinson and Collinson (1989) stated that “men’s sexuality and organizational power are
473 inextricably linked” (p. 107), and unwanted conduct of a sexual nature often reflects an abuse of
474 power and is primarily about men exercising their power over women (Wilson & Thompson,
475 2001). In Stacey’s story we show how Tony’s playful behavior during the practical coaching
476 sessions (i.e., short pulling) has the potential to become violent. Here the story illustrates how
477 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

501 important enough by organizations to include on coach education programs is debatable (Fasting
502 & Brackenridge, 2009). What is clear, is that in the UK at least, a recent number of high-profile
503 sports have seen accusations of alleged gender-based violence appearing in the media (e.g.,
504 England women’s football, bobsleigh, cycling and canoeing teams) and with the evidence cited
505 previously from the case of Larry Nassar in the USA, then perhaps further training is needed.
506 Despite the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Equality Act (2010) in the UK, there are still
507 examples of inequality in which women still have to prove their worth compared to men (Lewis
508 et al., 2017; 2018). Young (2010) also argued that the “aspects of a woman’s body most gazed at
509 and discussed, and in terms of which she herself all too often measures her own worth, are those
510 which least suggest action – breasts, buttocks, etc.” (p. 14). She goes on to comment that
511 “contemporary film, advertising, popular literature and periodicals, and countless other media
512 objectify the female body as sexy, passive flesh...making them desirable.” A point echoed by
513 Rogan et al. (2016) in relation to marketing in the night time economy. Sport has often been seen
514 as a functional and positive environment, and the darker side of sport (i.e., sexual exploitation),
515 is often under researched (Owton, 2016), apart from a few exceptions (e.g., Fasting et al., 2007;
516 Fisher & Anders, 2019; Owton, 2016). According to Brackenridge, Bishopp, Moussalli and Tapp
517 (2008), although the exact prevalence of sexual abuse in society is difficult to determine, “it is
518 clear that it occurs across all classes of society and in any context where there is the opportunity
519 for” (p. 387).

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

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

529 **Concluding Thoughts**

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

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

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

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

567 **Declaration of Interests Statement**

568 No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

569

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