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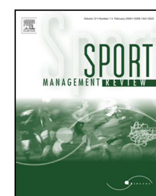

"Looking back (and forth)": Acknowledging the people who make personal narratives plausible

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ABSTRACT

The past decade has seen a noticeable rise in the number of people embracing autoethnography as an "alternate" research methodology. As a result, a plethora of first-person narratives and pieces of creative non-fiction now exist for truth-seeking scholars to access for authentic inspiration. The author's unique contribution to the ongoing conversations was first inspired by the professional confessions of a friend and former colleague. Sociological introspection, packaged as a piece of creative non-fiction, should stimulate sociological imagination, evoking a memorable, equally meaningful reaction. In this paper, the author's goals is to inspire rather than inform, encouraging readers to take time to think about their sport management memories and the meanings attached to their sport management experiences. Readers should question the plausibility of producing professional narratives of self. Readers are encouraged to have a conversation between themselves and the various leaders, legends, and legacy-makers they have followed in order to become who they are. The author encourages readers to reflect on the things they have seen, the places they have been, and the lived experiences they have produced along the way. Readers are prompted to consider the costs and consequences of presenting autoethnography through the guide of creative non-fiction.

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1. Setting the scene: the purpose of the paper

> Back and forth autoethnographers gaze: first they look through an ethnographic wide lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations . . . I wanted to be there . . . I wanted to use a form of representation, which would not violate my desire to be alongside the people . . . I turned to autoethnography, a blend of ethnography and autobiographical writing that incorporates elements of one's own life experience when writing about others, a form of self-narrative that place[s] the self within a social context (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 38, cited in Wright, 2011, p. 311).

Autoethnographers situate themselves within their social and cultural context, transporting both writer and reader to new places in space and time (Bochner & Ellis, 1996; Boyle & Parry, 2007; Chang, 2008; Dashper, 2013; Ellis, 2004; Holt, 2003;

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Humphreys, 2005; Sparkes, 2002a; Tolich, 2010). At the same time, they can evoke emotional reactions from the reader (the consumer). Dashper (2015, p. 3) defined autoethnography as "a form of narrative research which recognises that stories are an important way in which people try to understand and make sense of their world(s). "Like Reed-Danahay (1997), I found autoethnography at a time when my personal memories were overshadowing those being shared by others. Autoethnography certainly helped me make sense of my inability to distance my personal and professional identities. In 2008, I fully embraced the freedom it allowed me to situate my self within my study of sports tourism, choosing to bare all for the future benefit of others. I opted to put my heart and soul into the production of an evocative autobiographical narrative that has truly changed my outlook on life, love, loss, and the leveraging of legacies.

Having survived a decade of soul searching and serious self discovery, moving back and forth between the fields of leisure, tourism, events, sport, and recreation management, I've finally found a place where my multiple identities appear comfortable. I've found a space for me to grow up, settle down, and lay my roots. By encouraging compassion and promoting dialogue between the author and audience, autoethnography has allowed me to target my storytelling at sport management scholars struggling to make sense of their lived experiences. My research philosophy, for what it is worth, is essentially underpinned by ontological relativism, which proposes "reality" as something which is "multiple, created and mind-dependent," and epistemological constructionism, which argues that all "knowledge is constructed and subjective" (Smith, 2013, p. 134). My personal offering to this special edition showcases the views of Laurel Richardson, Andrew Sparkes, and Brett Smith, all three of whom have identified story-writing as a valid form of narrative analysis (Richardson, 2000; Smith, 2013; Sparkes, 2002a). Smith (2013, p. 135) notes how, using Richardson's (2000) creative analytical practices (CAP), "a storyteller aims to produce an analysis in storytelling and show rather then tell theory in and through the story." Autoethnography and ethnographic creative non-fiction are subsequently identified as one of many CAPs available to the academic storyteller (Smith, 2013).

The value and validity of producing autoethnography has been argued on multiple occasions over the past decade, with many authors dedicating significant parts of their personal narratives to providing definitions and detailed explanations of how it differs from other forms of qualitative research (Boyle & Parry, 2007; Dashper, 2015; Holt, 2003; Tolich, 2010; Tomas, 2009; Wall, 2008). Ellis (2004, p. 38) believes that autoethnographies "showcase concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness" and can take the form of "short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, scripts, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose." In 1999, she coined the term "heartful autoethnography," to acknowledge the artistic sharing of evocative, traumatic, emotional, and life-changing/defining stories that not only come straight from the heart of the author, but also targets and talks to the heart of the reader (Ellis, 1999). A couple of years prior to this, Ellis and her partner, Art Bochner (1996 p. 25), revealed that autoethnography can "expose the reader to stories that would other wise be 'shrouded in secrecy'."

While Ellis and Bochner are widely regarded as the forerunners in the advancement of autoethnography, as both a method and methodology, David Hayano is widely credited as the first person to place the auto (one's self) in front of the ethnography (the study of others) (Bochner & Ellis, 1996; Dashper, 2015; Ellis, 2004; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Sparkes 2002b). In 1979, Hayano suggested, "while auto-ethnography is not a specific research technique, method or theory, it colors all three as they are employed in fieldwork" (Hayano, 1979, p. 99). Heartful autoethnographers seek to conjure an immediate emotive response from the reader, using evocative language, imagery, and imagination-capturing plot lines (Ellis, 2004). Anderson, however, offered a much more structured and systematic way of situating one's self within their socio-cultural study of others, calling in "analytic autoethnography" (Anderson, 2006). The following year, Boyle and Parry (2007) advocated the idea of organisational autoethnography, specifically targeting individuals operating within the realms of human resource management and organisational culture. Their rationale was based on the belie that autoethnography "has the ability to connect the everyday, mundane aspects of organizational life with that of broader political and strategic organizational agendas and practices" whilst "autobiographical and retrospective approaches are more likely to unearth and illuminate the tacit and subaltern aspects of organization" (Boyle & Parry, 2007, p. 186).

Although it is missing from the list of options provided by Ellis, creative non-fiction offers autoethnographers a means of presenting truthful personal narratives (Caulley, 2008; Hackley, 2007; Smith, 2013). According to Hackley (2007, p. 101), creative non-fiction is "a personalised but factually-based style of writing that uses the essay form" that "can be transforming for reader and author and contributes to a better understanding of the world and of the person in the world." Caulley (2008, p. 426) acknowledges that an ethnographic creative non-fiction "is deeply committed to the truth," while Smith (2013, p. 135) refers to it as "a story using facts developed from systematic research, but uses many of the techniques of fiction (e.g., contextualized, vernacular language; composite characters; dialogue; metaphor; allusions; flashbacks and flash forwards; tone shifts and so on) to communicate results in compelling and emotionally vibrant ways."

Arguably, the most comprehensive source of information on the production of creative non-fiction is a publication by Gerard. When discussing the renaissance on non-fictional narrative, Gerard (2004, p. 4) reminds his audience that the storyteller "must always rein in that impulse to lie, in all the subtle ways we can shade the truth in something less than – or more than – the truth. The nonfiction writer must be more truthful than we usually require of ourselves or of each other." He concedes that this is not as easy as it sounds, adding:

> We [academics] lie a lot . . . . We embellish. We misremember. We inadvertently change what somebody actually said because we didn't happen to have our tape recorder handy. Or worse, we paraphrase their words, giving them a different emphasis, a sharper tone. We conveniently leave out details that make ourselves look bad and leave out other information because it seems irrelevant and leave out still more details because we plain didn't see or hear them. And what's left out

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