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Opening Doors:

Poetic Representation of the Sport Experiences of Men with Severe Mental Health Difficulties

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Abstract

We present here a series of poetic representations which stem from our research into the sport and exercise experiences of men with severe mental health difficulties. Relying exclusively on scientific or realist tales risks omitting or misrepresenting participants' sometimes "messy" stories. By allowing space for these stories – which may not be considered "good stories" in terms of traditional narrative criteria of content, form, coherence, or plot – poetic approaches can contribute to a richer and more complex understanding of others' lives. The first poem was written in response to our experiences of doing qualitative research in the context of a rehabilitation day centre for people with severe mental health difficulties. We created the subsequent poems, using only the participants' own words, as a way to further explore and represent their experiences of, and responses to, a golf activity group which was offered within the context the day centre.

Keywords: mental health, narrative, poetry, recovery, representation, sport

The Pepper Pot

The pepper pot sat on the table
Minding it's business and still
Standing upright in the centre
Of the café for those who are ill

Does he mind if I use a recorder?
Does he mind if I listen and care?
I just wanted to ask a few questions
Just wanted to see and be there

The pepper pot sprang into action
Two taps to the left then the right
A quick pirouette and then shaken
Depositing dust in the air

The pepper told the story
But no words were spoken that day
Held tight in a fist by one in a mist
Like pepper, lost in the air

you feel free

That's all

No disrespect to the people

I wouldn't say it to their faces

But I just like to feel normal

like having the door opened

instead of always shut.

Peter's Stuff

I was interested 'cause I'd played before

(a long time ago)

It was only just a one-off

I went mad, just went out

spent some money on clubs

got into it I suppose

I thought I'd give it a go

got me interested again

If I can use those clubs, my gloves, my hat

'Cause it's my own personal equipment, say

I feel it's important I should use it

and get fulfillment out of it.

O – K

I'll tell you what I think of the golf

I can say it in one word:

O – K

alright, act – u – all – y

and I haven't insulted staff

we haven't been insulting

and that is pro – gress

you should be pleased with that

I like it light hearted

can't stand in – ten – sit – y

can't handle people mocking

mock – ing – me

I'm not happy about my appearance

worry about it

But like to think at sport

I've got ab – il – it – y

Getting It Back Together Again

Awhile back

attempted suicide

physical injuries

I was heavily medicated

lot of hassle going outdoors

I was paralyzed

had to wear a corset

I was feeling OK in May

feeling ill in March

Oh, hassles (situations)

feel panicky (get a panic attack)

I need a break from indoors

get out, do something

an activity, not watching TV

I'm surprised I enjoyed it this much

Not getting as many

side-effects

symptoms

whatever.

It's enjoyable.

Gets rid of some stress.

I can cope with situations.

Part of the package.

Know what I mean?

That went up nicely,

not all that far but really straight.

Direction just right.

Yeah, good result

wind up

follow-through

A proper swing, the last two shots

followed through

improved (the swing),

the proper thing

I did a proper swing

It's a bit of a relief

to know

I'm getting it back together again.

Join the Club

No, no, I don't think so,
I think I'd need more practice
on an ordinary course
like the pitch and putt
get familiar, there's a step

No, no, I'd feel out of place
don't know anybody there
the operation of the club
I don't know how it works

No, no, I don't know
if they let people play up there
they only allow certain people
to go up there to play

That's what I want to do

actually

if I can

I'd love to do that.

Biographies

David Carless, Ph.D., is currently a Senior Research Fellow at Leeds Metropolitan University, UK. His research focuses on using a variety of narrative and arts-based approaches to explore identity, mental health and psychological well-being in and through physical activity and sport.

Kitrina Douglas, Ph.D., played golf on the Ladies European Tour for twelve years and has worked in broadcasting and the media. Since 1996 she has been conducting narrative and arts-based research in the areas of sport, exercise, and health and is currently an Honorary Visiting Fellow at the University of Bristol, UK.