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Revise, resubmit and reveal? An autoethnographer's story of facing the challenges of revealing the self through publication

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Abstract

This article presents a story of writing, revising and publishing an autoethnography of sporting injury. Using extracts from peer review comments and personal reflections both on these reviews and on the process more broadly, I show that although autoethnography can be a very challenging, even troubling, experience for the author, it can also be rewarding and empowering when editors and reviewers offer supportive and constructive comments and suggestions. I argue that greater consideration needs to be given to the aftermath of publication of autoethnographic accounts and call for wider debate about the ethics of asking authors to reveal more about their personal lives and weaknesses in the pursuit of academic goals. The article offers would-be autoethnographers one account of the writing, revising and publishing process in order to explore a number of relevant issues that arise when an author chooses an autoethnographic approach for conducting and presenting research.

Keywords

Autoethnography; ethics; narrative; peer review; publication; sport

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In June 2006 I had an accident whilst competing in a show jumping competition which resulted in damage to my teeth, mouth and – more lastingly – my confidence. I wrote about this injury experience and the ways that it affected my sense of myself as a competent horse rider, woman and feminist (see Dashper, 2013). The accident that prompted my original autoethnographic piece was not catastrophic, and did not result in permanent physical or aesthetic damage, yet it affected me deeply in ways that I found surprising and uncomfortable. As an injury to the face it was very visible and prompted me to reflect on how important physical appearance is to me, even though I would like to think I am not so heavily influenced by western norms which place such value on (female) appearance. I felt that this was very much a ‘feminist failure’ (Olive & Thorpe, 2011) and exposed an inconsistency between my feminist ideals and my actions. This discomfort was not something I had anticipated when I started work on the original autoethnographic piece, and has troubled me since. This prompted the current article, which is a story about my experiences of writing and publishing that autoethnography and a reflection on the aftermath of publication.

Autoethnography is an established method for using personal narratives to explore wider social and cultural issues, and numerous sporting autoethnographies have illustrated the value of such an approach for exploring complex emotional and social topics within the field of sport and physical recreation, focusing on embodied experiences and relationships with and through bodies (e.g. Drummond, 2010; Laurendeau, 2013; Douglas, 2014). Although autoethnography as a method of social science research has been subject to numerous critiques relating to questions of validity, representation and relevance, and is open to charges of narcissism and navel gazing (Roth, 2009), many scholars have shown the power of autoethnography to challenge established ways of thinking about and doing research and have illustrated how personal stories can be revealing about wider social issues and power relations (see Young, 2008; Denshire, 2014). My purpose in this paper, therefore, is not to argue for the legitimacy and value of autoethnography as method and approach but rather to consider aspects of the processes of writing, revising and publishing an autoethnography, and some of the implications and experiences that become apparent post-publication.

My purpose in this paper is threefold. First, through presenting extracts from peer review comments, and my reactions and responses to those comments, I hope to show how peer review can be an exciting and empowering experience for the author, depending of course

on the nature and tone of the reviews. Peer review is an important mechanism for ensuring scholarly quality and for advancing a field of knowledge (Peters & Ceci, 1982; Rowland, 2002; Ware, 2008) and I was fortunate to encounter supportive and insightful reviewers and editors who challenged me to push the boundaries of my writing and reflection in ways that greatly improved the paper under question and with implications for the development of my writing and research beyond that autoethnographic piece. My experiences of the peer review process differ markedly from those of Sparkes (2000), Holt (2003) and Wall (2008), as I explain later, and suggest that autoethnography is now a much better understood and valued approach within social science research and publication than was the case a decade ago.

Second, in chronicling my own endeavours to construct a story that was evocative enough to engage the reader and 'connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social and political' (Ellis, 2004: xix) I hope to show that, while this process is challenging and at times personally and emotionally uncomfortable in a way that most other forms of academic writing are not, the process of autoethnographic writing can be hugely rewarding, even transformative.

Third, autoethnography does not stop with publication. Although I experienced some relief on getting a notification of acceptance for my autoethnography, and satisfaction and even some pride on seeing it published and receiving feedback from students, colleagues and peers, I have also experienced some feelings of discomfort related to my account, some personal ambiguities and complexities that I did not think through as I wrote the paper and rewrote it for publication. Once an autoethnography is published in the public domain aspects of the researcher's life and/or character are exposed and readers will interpret these narratives in ways the author may not have expected. While this is not exclusive to autoethnography, personal narratives expose the author directly (see Ellis, 2007). This can be positive, encouraging the author to face behaviour patterns, and possibly to change them (see Chatham-Carpenter, 2010), but can be unsettling as well. Consequently, the aftermath of publication of autoethnography requires some consideration and reflection.

As with all personal narratives, the 'writing story' (Richardson, 1995) told in this paper is my story. Others have experienced the writing, rewriting, publication and post-publication processes of autoethnography differently to that which I present here. However, I hope that

my account can provide would-be autoethnographers with some insight into a process which can be at once terrifying, challenging and liberating.

Autoethnography: Purposes, practices and issues

Autoethnography is 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) (Trahar, 2009). Authors use personal stories to consider wider issues and try and present their own experiences in ways that evoke and provoke emotional responses and identification (or sometimes revulsion) in the reader. There are (at least) two broad types of autoethnography: analytic autoethnography and evocative autoethnography. In analytic autoethnography the researcher is a full member of the group under study and uses reflexivity, along with the words and perspectives of other group members, to consider wider analytical issues (Anderson, 2006). Evocative autoethnography is much more focused on personal narratives and draws on literary techniques to produce an account that

includes researchers' vulnerable selves, emotions, bodies and spirits; produces evocative stories that create the effect of reality; celebrates concrete experience and intimate detail; examines how human experience is endowed with meaning; is concerned with moral, ethical and political consequences; encourages compassion and empathy; helps us know how to live and cope (Ellis, 1999: 669)

Autoethnography remains peripheral within social science and humanities research, but has become increasingly accepted in recent years with journals such as *Qualitative Inquiry* regularly publishing autoethnographic pieces. Writers experiment with different forms and styles, ranging from realist stories (e.g. Tsang, 2000) to poetry (e.g. Pelias, 2003) and pieces combining multiple styles in one publication (e.g. Krane, 2009).

Autoethnography thus presents a challenge to traditional academic formats of conducting and presenting research on 'others' in which the (usually invisible) researcher speaks authoritatively about the lives and experiences of other people. Dauphinee (2010: 806) critiques this academic knowledge gaze that 'pounds others into manageable interview

material' and silences the voices of many, usually relatively powerless, groups and individuals. Autoethnography is a method that may enable researchers to begin to challenge the dominance of traditional academic forms of writing and researching and open up possibilities for including other voices and perspectives, including those of the researcher herself, and thus begin to break down some of the power divide between researched 'others' and all-knowing researcher. However, autoethnography is a challenging method that raises numerous ethical issues, as I discuss throughout this article.

Ethnographic research often raises questions about co-mingled data, and this is exacerbated in autoethnography as a personal story inevitably involves other people and so is also, to some extent, their story (Barton, 2011). For some, attempts to resolve these issues revolve around questions of informed consent – how to ensure it and when to achieve it (Tolich, 2010). For others, there can be no foundational ethical guidelines for autoethnographic research which apply in all situations, as such research is inherently relational and contingent (Adams, 2008; Grant, 2010). As well as responsibilities towards 'others' included in personal narratives, autoethnography raises further questions about the vulnerability of the autoethnographer herself, an issue I had not fully considered before embarking on my own autoethnographic publishing journey. Autoethnography requires the author to open herself up to the reader in order to present an evocative and engaging narrative that relates the personal issues discussed in the piece to wider sociological themes and topics. This has the potential to expose the autoethnographer in ways that may be damaging in terms of career, relationships with others and with the self (Jago, 2002; Bruce, 2010; Tomas, 2009, 2011). To be taken seriously as a method of sociological research autoethnography needs to be open to critique, review and evaluation in ways similar to other forms of research, and a number of writers have suggested criteria on which to judge the academic merit of autoethnographic work (Bochner, 2000; Ellis, 2000; Richardson, 2000b). However the intensely personal nature of autoethnography raises additional questions about the ethics of critiquing the author's presentation of herself, or an aspect of herself, and of asking her to reveal more about personal weaknesses and often trauma (see Snyder-Young, 2011).

Gannon (2006: 477) suggests that autoethnography 'might be considered inherently poststructuralist' through focus on incomplete and often incoherent embodied lived experience. Several autoethnographers skilfully illustrate the complexities of trying to 'write the self' and the multiple selves that emerge, contradict and vie for attention in any account

(see Jago, 2002; Rambo, 2005). Autoethnography has the potential to remove what Humphreys (2005) calls the 'academic mask' of clarity and certainty which can be so intimidating to those new to the academy. As an early career researcher working within poststructural feminist traditions (e.g. Butler, Cixous) I was drawn to autoethnography as a way to try to present my story (or the version of the story I wanted to tell in my article) in such a way that expressed some of the inconsistencies of identity that I experienced throughout the process and to illustrate how my 'self', as written through my autoethnographic article, was but one version of 'me', frozen in time on the page, constructed and presented for academic purposes and audiences yet unfinished, unfixed and often incoherent. This proved very difficult to do and at times the reviewers of my article both helped push my autoethnographic project forwards and hindered my attempts to capture the inconsistencies of my experiences and how they made me feel, in their desire for a well-rounded and meaningful 'story'. In such ways autoethnography is a process fraught with contradictions as, although open to uncertainty and fragmentation, the very act of writing the self suggests that there *is* a coherent self that can speak and narrate her story (Gannon, 2006). The processes of writing, rewriting and publishing my autoethnographic account illustrate some of these complexities and inconsistencies.

Stage One: Writing autoethnography?

Richardson (2000a: 253) argues that 'the ethnographic life is not separate from the self'. Having recently completed an ethnographic PhD, and buoyed up by suggestions from my examiners to be more reflexive and 'write myself into' my research, I began to write an article in which I tried to present myself as an active character in conversation with my research participants, in ways I felt were more representative of the research process as I had experienced it, as a member of the social world I was researching and as a friend of some of my participants (see Ellis, 2007). The topic I selected – injury and risk within a sporting subworld – is one which many other researchers have addressed (e.g. Pringle & Markula, 2005; Malcolm, 2006; McKewan & Young, 2011). My discussion centred on equestrian sport, a sporting world which has received limited academic consideration to date, and by including my own experiences of risk, pain and injury alongside those of my research participants, I hoped to contribute to the wider sociological consideration of risk and injury within sport. As a feminist researcher I was keen to explore the gendered aspects

of sporting injury and was drawn to autoethnography as a method of exposing different personal stories and of beginning to break down some of the hierarchies inherent in research relationships.

The 'narrative turn' in the social sciences has encouraged many researchers to think about *how* they present their research findings in ways that celebrate multiple forms of representation and favour local stories over 'grand narratives' and disembodied accounts (Bochner, 2001). Denzin (2000: 257) argues that 'words have effects on people. Words matter' and I was inspired by the possibilities of narrative and autoethnographic approaches to pull the reader in, to show, rather than tell. However, I have rarely looked deeply inwards and questioned who I am, what I do, why and the implications this has for myself and for others. This writing project thus marked a disjuncture for me, one of the few times in my life when I have made a deliberate and sustained effort to turn the gaze inwards. This made the processes of writing, revising and publishing this autoethnography particularly challenging, sometimes unsettling, and, at times, empowering for me. Inspired by the powerful and evocative accounts of skilled narrative scholars like Ellis (1999, 2004, 2010), Rambo (1995, 2005) and Jago (2002, 2011) I was keen to push my writing skills, to try and produce an account that was well crafted, intriguing, revealing and analytically powerful. A big task, as I was to discover!

My first attempt was weak. Looking back on my earliest submission I can see that I did not commit to a narrative approach. Although I wanted to show, rather than tell, my first submission was realist in approach (see Sparkes, 2002a), overly-analytical and 'I' featured only as a (poorly developed) listener to my research participants and not as a character in my own narrative. As such I was missing the point of narrative approaches and of including myself in the story I was trying to present. There was some sociological merit in my early attempt, but it did not build on the power of narrative approaches to engage the reader in difficult or emotional topics.

Holt (2003) explains how his experiences of trying to publish an autoethnography were centred on his struggle to persuade reviewers of the legitimacy of his approach. Wall (2008) also found that she was put under pressure by reviewers and mentors to 'tone things down a bit' in her autoethnography of adoption, to add more theory and analysis and less personal story. My experience was different. Two of the reviewers largely ignored my attempts to

include my own voice, and confined their comments to questions of theory and analysis, but the third reviewer, backed by the editor, picked up on my weak attempt to be reflexive.

Reviewer: I'm not entirely convinced that the author has achieved her goal of "showing" rather than telling . . . as it stands, the analysis seems to overpower the narratives. These are, in effect, narratives about narratives and I found myself wondering at times about the "auto" in "autoethnography" . . . I think there's room to push this much further in this direction, to really draw your readers into the "scenes," and to accomplish more of the analytical work in these vignettes (as well as, perhaps, making them more evocative).

I received the reviews, and the associated judgement to 'revise and resubmit', as positive (after all, it was not an outright rejection) but somewhat puzzling. How was I to go about the daunting task of bringing the 'auto' into my account? How would I let the narrative do some of the analysis for me?

Stage Two: Coming to writing autoethnography

So I did what I always do when faced with an intellectual stumbling block, what most academics do in this kind of situation, I read. And read. And I could have kept on reading indefinitely, if the clock were not ticking on the six-week turn around granted by the journal. Having read a number of evocative autoethnographies which had drawn me in, shocked me, moved me, I wanted to draw on this evocative tradition to try and offer a personal account of some of the experiences and implications of athletic injury. I had had many injuries over the course of twenty years involvement in horse-riding, but one injury to my mouth and teeth had affected me more than the others, and so I chose this as the focus for my evocative autoethnography. I had no fieldnotes to draw on as 'data' to construct this account, so instead I had to rely on 'headnotes' (Wall, 2008) and the processes of emotional recall and systematic sociological introspection (Ellis, 2004; 2009) to help me. Thus started a process of self-reflection that would cause me to examine my perception of myself in ways I generally manage to avoid doing.

Initially, at least, I was naïve in this regard and did not consider just how far my introspection would need to go if I were to produce a convincing and sociologically useful account. My second attempt certainly addressed the reviewer's concerns about the missing 'auto' in my paper – I focused on a personal narrative that I developed throughout the article. But I still did not fully embrace the evocative autoethnography genre so skilfully exemplified by authors such as Ellis and Rambo, among others. For a combination of reasons including lack of ability at crafting evocative narratives, lack of confidence in fully embracing alternative ways of representing research and awareness of the critiques of scholars such as Delamont (2007) that autoethnography is not 'real' research, I stuck to a traditional article format, except now I also included vignettes from my own injury story. I eagerly awaited the feedback from reviewers. Had I done enough in putting the 'auto' into my autoethnography?

No. Although the reviews were positive, commending me 'for committing more fully to the autoethnographic project', the response was still 'revise and resubmit'. The reviewers wanted more.

Reviewer: Though the author is now present as a character, and is well developed in certain ways, I find this character somewhat "thin" in certain respects. . . In my reading the author has devoted too much time and space to making the case for the importance of autoethnography, as opposed to actually doing it. I would urge the author to "get to it" a bit more and get us to the stories. This will allow for fully developed stories, and perhaps more of them, and this is where the real value of the manuscript lies.

I was encouraged to reveal more, develop myself as a rounded character within the narrative and to invite the reader 'to "know" not just with their heads but with their hearts and (dare I say it) souls'. However although I clearly still had a lot more work – and soul-searching – to do with this article, the reviews were framed in very supportive language, urging me to go further, take more risks with my writing and try and uncover 'the "gem" to be found within this piece'. As an early career researcher this support was important in encouraging me to take up the challenge and push myself further but it also kick-started what was to be an unsettling process of introspection, self-analysis and self-critique.

Stage Three: Becoming introspective

It was at this point that the difficult work started. Some critics of autoethnography suggest that it is 'lazy research' (see Delamont, 2007), but I would strongly refute this, based on my experiences. Although autoethnography does not necessarily involve hours of fieldwork, it does involve considerable reflection and mental work to consider how to connect the 'auto' – the self, or the personal narrative – to the 'ethno' – the wider society or social groupings – through 'graphy' – the form of writing or communication, in this case evocation.

As with any research method, there are a number of texts that provide would-be autoethnographers with guidance on 'how to do' autoethnography. These range from the traditional format of descriptive methods texts (e.g. Chang, 2008; Muncey, 2010) to more methodologically novel and evocative formats exemplified in Ellis' *The ethnographic I* (2004) in which she combines narrative, analysis and fiction to illustrate some of the 'what', 'how' and 'why' of autoethnography as method. These texts are useful, and provide pointers, examples and prompts to the would-be autoethnographer, but as autoethnography is about the personal, the self, the individual, different researchers will approach their writing in different ways to try and achieve their goal of using a personal story to explore wider social and cultural issues.

For me, as I reflected more upon how my injury story had affected me, and what this said about risk, pain and injury within sport, I was forced to face up to some uncomfortable issues. My initial decision to write about this injury came about as a result of the encouragement of the reviewers and my feeling that this was an interesting injury story that I could tell 'from the inside'. I hadn't given it much more thought than that. But as I started to consider the wider implications of this injury experience and what it could tell me about myself, and the culture(s) in which I am embedded, I started to think more deeply about this experience and my own relationship to myself and my appearance. This was difficult, uncomfortable, and unsettling in ways that I had not imagined when I embarked on writing the story. I had to confront my own insecurities and relive the injury, and post-injury trauma, many times. I am not sure that I would have been so willing to write about this injury had I really considered how difficult I would find this process of reflection.

However, I had come this far and, as Chatham-Carpenter (2010) also acknowledges in relation to the ways in which her difficulties with anorexia resurfaced as she tried to write an autoethnography of her experiences, I wanted the publication in order to develop my academic career. So I sat for hours, sometimes writing very little, but thinking about how I could try and express how this injury that seemingly had been 'fixed' continued to haunt me and what this said about the interrelationships between sport, femininity and physical appearance.

By submission number three I had gained the confidence to move away (to some extent) from a traditional article format and instead tried to interweave my personal narrative with broader analytical and theoretical discussions of the issues that my story brought to the fore. Six difficult weeks later I resubmitted my manuscript and awaited feedback.

The feedback I received this time is illustrative of the arbitrariness of the peer review and publishing process. The reviewer comments were extremely positive.

Reviewer: I received the request to review the latest revision of this paper a mere six hours ago. Obviously, I was looking forward to seeing where the author "took" this paper, and with good reason. I am tremendously impressed with this version, and hope to see it published soon.

Great! I thought, success at last! However, over the course of my three submissions the journal had changed editors and the new editor asked for additional changes and deeper theoretical clarity than the reviewers or previous editor had suggested. So my writing story had still not finished, despite positive feedback on my autoethnographic attempts. However, the additional changes now requested were easier for me to address than the request to reveal more about myself, to think more deeply about my story and its links to wider issues. Editorial requests for more theoretical clarity may reflect the ongoing marginality of autoethnography as I was now requested to ensure that the theoretical 'value' of my narrative was made explicit to the reader, rather than assuming that 'a good story is itself theoretical' (Ellis, 2004: 195).

Stage four: Publication and beyond

Two more submissions and several 'minor changes' later, I finally received the long-awaited confirmation that my article had been accepted for publication. At last! I was pleased and relieved that the writing and rewriting process was now finished for this particular article. Time to move on to the next.

However, the process of academic publishing is not so easily compartmentalised. All publications take on a life of their own post-publication. Some researchers comment on how research participants respond to publications (e.g. Ellis, 2007); others note the importance of quality peer-reviewed publications for academic career development and funding applications (e.g. Bence & Oppenheim, 2004); whilst others have identified how contemporary communication platforms, such as Twitter, expose researchers to fast and sometimes critical responses from their peers and wider groups (e.g. Mandavilli, 2011). The publication of my autoethnographic article has had some repercussions for me – personal and professional – which once again I had not really considered when I set about trying to compose a personal narrative. Whilst these repercussions are not as significant as those recounted by Jago (2002) and others they illustrate some of the complexities of autoethnographic research which authors may not fully consider when they embark on such projects.

After receiving confirmation of acceptance of the article I was able to largely forget about it, until it appeared in the journal a few months later. But the processes of reflection and revision had triggered thoughts in my head that I needed to address. My injury was to my mouth and teeth and, after lengthy and painful dental treatment to address the problems, my teeth were 'fixed' about six years ago. I then stopped going to the dentist for check-ups, as I was so horrified by the thought of someone touching my teeth again and, perhaps more importantly, telling me they were going to fall out. I knew it was not a good idea to avoid the dentist, still I did. Writing my injury autoethnography forced me to think seriously about my teeth again and cued much examination of them in the mirror. In the end it also encouraged me to do the unthinkable and go to the dentist. So, on a small, yet personally significant scale, writing that personal narrative impacted on my practice (and my dental health). It also forced me to question how I feel about my appearance, and how I do care about how I look and what other people think about how I look, to a much larger extent than my feminist-self would normally like to admit. The deep reflection that autoethnography entails makes it

very difficult to ignore thoughts and issues that are usually pushed to the back of the mind and dismissed as too uncomfortable for further consideration.

Once the article was published, people read it. I know this is the purpose of writing and publishing, and in many ways I wanted people to read my article of which I was quite proud, but I then started to get feedback from people. One of my students said 'I read the article about your teeth. Very interesting.' 'Great,' I responded, smiling through closed lips and putting my hand in front of my mouth. 'I feel like I know a whole other side to you,' a colleague said, enthusiastically. 'Really? That's great,' I responded inanely, again feeling the urge to hide my teeth from view. When people I interact with regularly on a professional basis brought up this article I found myself changing the subject in a way I don't do for other articles I have published. The personal nature of my narrative paper left me feeling more exposed than my other writing has done, and the weaknesses I explored in that piece, relating to my feelings about my appearance (and particularly my teeth) made me feel vulnerable when people raised them with me face to face. This is something I had not really considered prior to publication – how I would react when people brought up the personal insights I had openly discussed in a public forum of publication. Somehow, when speaking to people outside the confines of the publication I felt these topics should be off-limits again, personal thoughts not open for discussion. The feelings of discomfort I felt when writing the original article about what I saw as my vanity in relation to my physical appearance and how it had been affected by the injury came once again to the fore. My 'feminist failures' (Olive & Thorpe, 2011) were exposed once more, troubling my perceptions of myself as a feminist woman who tries to challenge normative ideals of femininity through her research and actions.

In contrast, I have delivered several student sessions on writing and publishing autoethnography, and these form the basis for this article. These sessions have not left me feeling exposed and uncomfortable in the same way as casual conversations with students and peers have done. Perhaps this is because I am more in control of these formal sessions. I decide what to say about the process, how I felt about it, the repercussions and later implications and I know that these topics are going to come up and be the basis of discussion so I am not caught off-guard, as it were, by casual comments and remarks.

Finally, I have shown the published article to my husband, the only other recognisable human character from my initial narrative. As many researchers have pointed out, autoethnography may be a form of personal narrative but it is never only about the author, others play important roles. This raises ethical issues about informed consent and the 'truth' of representations and narratives as presented by and solely from the perspective of the author. Some think these ethical issues are insurmountable and make autoethnography a morally questionable method of research (Delamont, 2007); other researchers censor what level of detail and information to give to significant others who feature in autoethnographic accounts for the sake of preserving dignity, feelings and relationships (Ellis, 2007); some use composite characters or fictionalise accounts in order to preserve privacy and anonymity (Sparkes, 2002b); some write collaboratively with others, trying to incorporate different perspectives and views into the narrative (Ellis & Rawicki, 2013; Martinez & Merlino, 2014). I went for what could be considered the easy option.

I told my husband I was writing the story of that injury and when it was published handed him a copy and left the room. His response to me later was that my account was well written and interesting, but didn't tell him anything he didn't already know. I looked at him sceptically. 'Really? But I never said I was that worried about it all,' I said, incredulously. 'Yes, but I could tell,' he replied, smiled, and left it at that. This response surprised me a little. On the one hand I perhaps wanted a more lengthy praise of my literary talents to stroke my ego, I maybe also wanted him to tell me that I had handled the whole injury trauma so effortlessly that he thought it had not affected me. But perhaps I was also pleased that he had known how I'd felt about the whole incident. Known, but not pushed me to talk about it. When I was ready I had written about it, and perhaps for me this was a better way to work through the injury, the associated issues it raised for me, and how this relates to my position both within a sporting subworld and as a feminist researcher in the sociology of sport.

Achieving publication is just part of the process of autoethnography and I encourage authors to think about how they will react to other people's reactions to their stories. I found the process of writing and revising my narrative extremely challenging but I enjoyed it and was relatively pleased with the result. I was thus inspired to have another go and see if I could push myself further, be more evocative, more revealing, and so I picked a topic with more emotional significance for me. This piece concentrates on my relationship with my extremely

unsporty mother and her unwavering support of my horse-riding goals and aspirations. I am quite pleased with the result of my second attempt but so far have not sent it off for review. I am not sure if I will, simply because I am not sure if I want to discuss the issues that narrative raises with professional peers and students. Like Wall (2008), I may or may not publish that autoethnography, but I think I have gained personally from writing it, even if no one else ever reads this work.

Decisions about what and how much to reveal in autoethnographic work need careful consideration and ultimately are personal decisions for each author. Denzin (2000: 256) argues that 'writing is not an innocent practice' and autoethnography is a great manifestation of this sentiment. Far from being 'lazy research' (Delamont, 2007), autoethnography requires emotional honesty and robustness, as personal issues, insights and experiences become public ones post-publication. I was naïve to this when striving to get my first autoethnography published, but now am a little more cautious about what I am happy to offer up for public critique and discussion.

Autoethnography within sport, exercise and leisure research

Autoethnography as method has gained in prominence, acceptance and popularity over the last decade or so and it is no longer unusual to see autoethnographic accounts of various different sporting activities and experiences. I think this is to be celebrated, as well-crafted personal stories can often evoke and provoke responses and discussions and generate further reflections and can begin to break down some of the hierarchies inherent in research relationships between researched 'others' and all-knowing, usually invisible, researchers. Sporting practices and subworlds may be particularly well suited to the autoethnographic genre which enables the researcher to express, through personal narrative and reflection, a sense of the embodied, sensuous experiences of sport and the important role sport plays in some people's personal sense of identity (see Douglas, 2009; Drummond, 2010). Recent autoethnographic articles within the field of sport and physical recreation have used narrative techniques to explore a diverse range of issues including power dynamics in the coach-athlete relationship (Purdy et al., 2008), masculinity and same sex attraction for young men in PE (Carless, 2012), experiences of working on a sport for development and peace project in southern Africa (Forde, 2013) and an 'insider' perspective of fandom (Parry,

2012). Even research which is not explicitly framed as autoethnography often uses personal narratives and reflexivity to great effect, such as Fletcher's (2014) insightful consideration of his positionality as a white researcher studying a predominantly Asian cricket club in England.

These examples, and many others, suggest that autoethnography and narrative techniques are thriving within social science sport-related research. This adds to the richness of understanding within the field. Autoethnography is also a useful pedagogical tool with which to engage students and encourage them to think more deeply and critically about their own experiences and how those experiences are linked to wider social and cultural issues. There are certainly many positive points about autoethnography and I would encourage any researcher who thinks they have a relevant story to tell to consider this as a potential approach for developing their ideas and exploring issues.

Yet I would also urge would-be autoethnographers to think carefully before committing their personal stories to the page and sending off for review. Autoethnography has been described as almost therapeutic, even empowering, by some researchers (Lee, 2006; Smith, 2012) but others have described the process as uncomfortable, unsettling and destabilising (Wall, 2008; Chatham-Carpenter, 2010). As I have argued throughout this paper, autoethnography is not an easy option and it requires a commitment to personal openness and honesty that differs from that required when researching and writing about 'others'.

The ethics of autoethnography, in terms of the involvement of others in a so-called 'personal' narrative and in relation to questions of narrative 'truth', have been well-rehearsed and require serious consideration in any autoethnographic project (Medford, 2006; Ellis, 2007). However, as autoethnography grows in prominence and acceptance within academic circles and publications I think there are other ethical issues that also need to be considered and debated more widely. Peer review is the lynchpin of academic publishing and is important in ensuring quality and credibility in published research. Yet although peer review is a mechanism for ensuring quality, and it is the job of reviewers to highlight weaknesses and ask authors for increased clarity, detail and elaboration, additional considerations should guide reviewers of autoethnographic pieces. How far should we ask authors to go in revealing their own personal troubles, insecurities and weaknesses? How

ethical is it to ask authors to 'reveal more, give more' in relation to their personal accounts, as I was asked to do several times as my own autoethnography developed?

Autoethnographic accounts need to be evocative to do their analytic work, and so detail and some emotional insight is necessary (Ellis, 1999). However the decision about how much, what and how to reveal in relation to personal issues, weaknesses and experiences in pursuit of academic goals is one that requires careful consideration and constitutes a very personal decision to be made by the author, regardless of pressure from editors and reviewers to 'reveal more'. Once published, stories cannot be recalled and often take on a life of their own. The very nature of autoethnographic accounts makes them extremely personal, and it is the author who must decide what and how much to reveal (Snyder-Young, 2011). These revelations can only ever be partial, frozen in time at the point of writing and constructed for academic audiences and for purposes of career and disciplinary field progression. Drawing on Cixous, Tomas (2009) argues that writing can be a form of self-discovery, revealing what we cannot know before we have written it, yet some things we still do not know or understand after the writing process. My autoethnographic journey exemplifies this uncertainty, as the process of writing and publishing my personal story continues to challenge and surprise me in different ways, even three years after publication. Autoethnography can have unexpected effects on the author.

That said, I am happy I wrote and published my autoethnography of athletic injury and that the supportive and insightful reviewers and editors I encountered encouraged me to 'reveal more'. I hope that the account I have offered here will help other would-be autoethnographers think carefully about the processes involved in writing a personal narrative, submitting it for peer review and eventually achieving publication. Autoethnography is a powerful method of research in terms of evocation and exploring highly personal and often sensitive issues, yet the repercussions of publishing autoethnography can also be powerful for the author, in personal and/or professional terms. I hope to see many more autoethnographies published within the sociology of sport, and suggest that more debate and careful consideration of the implications for individual authors of 'revealing more' are needed.

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