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Citation:

Carless, D and Douglas, K (2015) Narrating embodied experience: Sharing stories of trauma and recovery. *Sport, Education and Society*, 21 (1). 47 - 61. ISSN 1470-1243 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2015.1066769>

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Document Version:

Article (Accepted Version)

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Date of Acceptance: 23 Jun 2015

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Running head: SHARING STORIES OF TRAUMA AND RECOVERY

Narrating Embodied Experience: Sharing Stories of Trauma and Recovery

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Forthcoming in *Sport, Education & Society*

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**Abstract**

In this paper we explore our use of a dialogical storytelling approach to alleviate some of the tensions involved in researching another person's embodied experience. These tensions concern the problems of (a) how to *access* another's embodied experience, and (b) how to *represent* that experience. We consider these issues through sharing creative nonfiction stories, alongside theoretical reflections, drawn from our research into the meaning and value of an adapted sport and inclusive adventurous training course for military personnel who have experienced serious injury and/or trauma. In terms of accessing another's embodied experience, we observe how co-experienced physical movement seemed to allow taboo tales to be shared. In moments like these there is a sense of 'doing together' that supports story sharing – embodied interaction is the medium that allows it to happen. We suggest that evocative stories of personal embodied experience are unlikely to be shared or witnessed *without* an immersive embodied interaction. In terms of representation, we propose that faithful portrayals of embodied experience are most likely to be achieved through particular writing strategies. Because another's embodied experience can only be glimpsed tangentially, through a physical-emotional sensibility, it needs to be evoked, implied or rendered through aesthetic forms. We have found storytelling to be one way of writing that allows us to express and communicate complex and sometimes ambiguous forms of embodied knowledge, understanding and wisdom that we may not yet have fully grasped ourselves.

**Keywords:** adapted sport, adventurous training, creative non-fiction, fieldwork, military, narrative, representation, story, trauma

## Introduction

In this paper we explore our use of a dialogical storytelling approach (see Frank, 2010) to alleviate some of the tensions involved in researching another person's embodied experience. These tensions, in part, concern the problems of (a) how to *access* another's embodied experience, and (b) how to *represent* or *portray* that experience. Crossley (2007) crystallises the problem we face and serves as a starting point for our exploration, suggesting, "Embodied knowledge is not discursive knowledge and cannot be put into discourse without distorting it" (p. 87). Like many scholars in sport, education and health (e.g., Dowling, Fitzgerald, & Flintoff, 2012; Dowling, Garrett, lisahunter & Wrench, 2013; Evans, 2009; Evans & Davies, 2005, 2011; Gard, 2011; Pink, 2011; Shilling, 2005; Smith, 2008; Sparkes, 1999; Sparkes & Smith, 2011), we recognise the central importance of embodied experience in understanding human life. In our own research we invariably wish to access and represent aspects of embodied experience. And as narrative scholars<sup>1</sup>, working within the critical arts-based research genre (see Bagley & Castro-Salazar, 2012), we have faith in the ability of stories – in various forms – to serve as a means to both access another's experience *and* to portray aspects of that experience to others. Yet, at the same time, we are aware of the fundamental difference between embodied experience itself and *any* representation of it we may create. The question, for us then, is what kinds of methodologies allow us to produce representations that are most faithful to another's embodied experience? How might we minimise the 'distortions' to embodied knowledge that Crossley (2007) identifies? We are therefore interested in considering how (a) different ways of communicating with participants during the research process, and (b) different ways of representing participant experiences, can support more potent insights into embodied experience.

## **Researching ‘Battle Back Lillehsall’**

We consider these issues through sharing examples of creative nonfiction stories and fieldnotes, alongside theoretical reflections, drawn from our ongoing study of the meaning and value of an adapted sport and inclusive adventurous training course for military personnel who have experienced serious injury and/or trauma. Since 2011, we have been working as members of a team researching the effects of an adapted sport and inclusive adventurous training course for British military personnel. The 5-day residential courses take place at the Battle Back Centre Lillehsall and cater for personnel who have experienced physical injury, psychological trauma and/or other illness through their duties. The courses are delivered by teams of civilian coaches and include a range of sport (e.g., wheelchair basketball, archery), adventurous training (e.g., climbing, caving), psychological (e.g., relaxation, goal setting) and social/leisure activities. Throughout, we have used both in-depth narrative one-to-one interviews (see Carless, Peacock, McKenna & Cooke, 2013; Douglas & Carless, 2015a) and participant-observation through fieldwork (see Carless, 2014; Carless, Sparkes, Douglas & Cooke, 2014) to generate meaningful insights into the embodied experiences of military personnel taking part in the courses. It is moments from this fieldwork that we draw upon and consider in detail below.

### **‘Welcome Session’**

Lively music plays in the background. Eighteen occupied chairs are arranged in a large circle. An 8-metre length of rope bisects the circle. A single red hoop is marked towards one end of the rope and four red hoops are marked near the other end. Billy steps into the centre of the circle, turns the music down and gestures towards the rope.

“Through this week I want everyone to feel comfortable to express their doubts, fear, worry, over any activity. Now, I know, we’re military guys, we don’t normally *do* that, do we? When I ask if you are OK with something, you shrug and go: ‘Yeah, yeah, its fine man.’ Even if – perhaps – it *isn’t* fine.” Billy pauses. “We do, don’t we?” He looks around the group. “So, this rope is a kind of gauge for those moments. If you feel totally cool about doing an activity, you stand at the end with one red hoop. If you’re uncomfortable, scared or worried, stand at the end with four hoops. If you’re kind of OK but kind of concerned, then stand somewhere in the middle. Get the idea?” He looks round the group again. There are nods of assent.

“OK. Let’s try it. Suppose I said that this evening – we’re *not* going to ask you to do this by the way – you had to stand up and talk to the group for five minutes about yourself, how would you feel?” All members of the group walk to the end of the rope with one hoop. “That’s great,” Billy says. “You’re all feeling confident. Great stuff!”

“The second challenge,” he says, “which we’re *all* involved with is this: Throughout the week I’d like us to eliminate negative talk. So rather than saying, on the climbing wall, ‘Don’t let go!’ it’d be better to say, ‘Keep a good grip on the handhold to your right.’ See the difference? Now I’m still working on this myself,” he says, “I still say a *don’t* when I should say a *do*.” I need you to help me with this, please. So, anytime one of us uses a negative phrase – I’d like someone to call us on it. Anyone! Anywhere! The climbing wall, the dining room, wherever!” Around the group there are nods and murmurs of agreement.

The final task is a word-card activity and Billy invites us all to pick three cards which best describe how we are now and one that describes how we’d like to be in the future. There are a hundred or more choices – words like ‘adventurous’, ‘optimistic’, ‘powerful’, ‘caring’, and ‘trustworthy’ are among the possibilities. Everyone circles the tables, looking at the options, selecting their cards. Just before we share our choices with the group, Billy reveals

the first two cards he's chosen that describe him. "And the third," he says, "is *sensitive*. Maybe I don't really want to say it in public, but in truth, *sensitive* does describe me."

### **'Stories from a Spinning Wheelchair'**

The first time I see Josh, one member of this week's group, I feel intimidated. Although he looks young, something about his body (lean, hard and wiry), or his look (shaved black hair, an intense stare in his eyes), or perhaps his demeanour, makes me want to keep my distance. At the same time, as an inquiring fieldworker with a job to do, I need to try to understand him.

In a break during the second activity of the day, Josh wanders away from the group to sit in one of eight sleek black wheelchairs, specially customized for basketball, that are parked at the side of the hall. I follow, keeping a little distance, before sitting in another of the chairs. These are no standard wheelchairs, but instead have the feel of a high-performance racing bike. They are light, responsive, fast and infinitely manoeuvrable. I'd defy anybody to sit in one without wanting to take it for a spin! And this is exactly what Josh begins to do. Wheeling, pivoting, reversing, accelerating, before suddenly making abrupt halts. I start doing the same. Quietly, without being noticed by the rest of the group, we engage in some kind of tentative seated dance in our wheeled contraptions. Josh smiles once or twice. I find myself smiling too. We make eye contact occasionally. We keep our peace.

Josh is first to speak. "These things are cool," he says, sending himself into a rapid 360. "I'd never of known!"

"Me neither," I reply, "they just make you want to move don't they?"

“Aye. I haven’t moved much this past year. I’ve done fuck all since I been back really. For a year there I was just nowhere. Drinking, like all through the day. It started off as a celebration – it was a big party. You know, I was glad to be alive. But I just couldn’t stop.”

“Were you back from...”

“Afghan, yeah.” Josh pauses, and his manoeuvres slow. We make eye contact. “You can’t prepare for it, for what you see. No-one should see that stuff.” Josh looks away and starts spinning again. “Back home, I was drinking and taking stuff all the time to try to get it out of my head. I saw a doctor and he just gave me loads of tablets – antidepressants, sleeping pills – and I was just, like, I’m gonna use all these and kill myself. And it seemed like they didn’t care if I did. After the third time I tried to take my life, that’s when I got to see a decent doctor who said, you know, why haven’t you been treated for PTSD?”

### **‘Daily Debrief’**

Billy puts his iPod into the dock and selects a loud, energetic track as the group enters the room after the last activity of day four. It’s one of very few songs I’ve heard on the radio lately that I like. I find the opening chords and building rhythm infectious, despite feeling exhausted after days of intense activity. It helps me muster my last reserves of energy. Billy places some sheets of flip chart paper and some pens around the room as the lyrics “*Are we human? Or are we dancer?*” waft over the driving bass and percussion. The sound fills the room, which up until then had felt more like the waiting room in a doctor’s surgery, but now feels almost like somebody’s home.

As the last members of the group arrive, Billy steps into the middle of the room and, with a big grin on his face asks: “Anyone want to dance? Maybe we all need to move a bit?” A couple of people stand up, smiling too. “I’ll teach you the squaddie two-step – it’s the only



dance I know!” Billy says with a chuckle, stepping side to side and clicking his fingers roughly in time with the beat. The others who stood up join in, laughing. Those watching from the side chuckle too. “Oh, yeah man!” Billy enthuses, “I don’t need to teach you! You’re past-masters I can see from here!”

Once everyone has arrived, Billy turns down the music and addresses the whole group: “I’d like to ask each of you – if you’re happy to do so – to make a drawing which represents either today or the whole week so far.” There are a few gasps of disbelief, a few questions, and a few shrugs of shoulders. One person says, “I can’t draw!”

“What have we said this week, mate, about negative self-talk?” Billy replies, eyebrows raised.

All but one of the group pick up pens and begin work. After a few minutes, Billy asks each person if they’d be willing to tell the group about their drawings. Two people have drawn large smiling faces, one with a slightly crazy-looking tongue-hanging-out expression.

“That’s the shit and that’s the good,” Josh says, pointing at his drawing of a skull and crossbones and a bar of chocolate. “And this,” he says with a laugh, “is a funky monkey ‘cause I like drawing funky monkeys!”

The next person says he hasn’t drawn anything, but would like to say a few words anyway. “That’s great, please, go ahead,” Billy offers.

“Back in 2008 I went to Loch Lomond with a mate. We had cold tea, crap sandwiches and the weather was shit. We couldn’t see a thing all day. But while we were on the peak, the sun came out. Just for a moment. And, at that moment, I was happy – for the first time in more than a year. My mate took me there to try to help me. He probably remembers it as a shitty day, or maybe he doesn’t even remember it at all. But I do. For me, you see, it was a highlight. And today has been like that for me. I haven’t felt this good since 2008. I started

today with a walk at 6.30. We've had shooting and we've done archery. I feel happy. It's been a good day."

The group applauds.

### **'Closing Session'**

With the group sat in a large circle, Billy invites the group members to share any comments they have about their experience of the week. Several take the opportunity to speak.

"First off, I was scared of even coming back to the UK. It's the first time I've been back for two years. Getting on an aeroplane even was a big step. I was absolutely petrified. As you probably all know by now, I have my problems – things I struggle to deal with. Some things I can't deal with. And humour is my mechanism, my way of trying to deal with them. I know I've taken the piss a lot, made a lot of wisecracks, but that's what I've needed to do to get through it, to keep myself going. So I'd like to thank everyone – on the course and the staff – for allowing me to go with that. Thank you all for being so supportive."

A second man, sat on the opposite side of the circle, speaks next. "The best thing about this course is that the militarised factor is gone. You don't feel like you're in the military. And that's just fantastic. Plus, of course, the instructors and the staff are fantastic too. The older people, like Jack, who've been through the military, been injured or disabled or unwell like we have, are just so inspiring. And the younger ones have taught me so much too. It's down to everybody. Thank you all for putting in the effort."

Josh speaks next. "I came here this week a hard-drinking-adrenaline-junkie basically. After this week I'm wondering if there's a way of rather than just doing outdoor stuff for me – for the adrenalin – if there's a way I can go out and do it in a way that helps other people, that benefits people with different abilities, the way you've all helped me this week. My

cousin has Down's Syndrome and I'm thinking maybe I could help people like that, by becoming an outdoor activity instructor, and teaching them the kinds of things I can do."

A fourth man waits until last to speak. "I've achieved more in these five days than I have in over two years. Lately, I don't go shopping. I don't do the school run because I just want to stay in the house. And since May this year, things have got worse. I don't leave the house nowadays. But last night I went to Sainsbury's – just the little local one. Which may not seem a big thing to everyone else but to me it is huge. And this week I'm going to go to Tesco's – and I'm going to hold my head up high and I'm going to go round with my trolley. And rather than holding my daughter and pretending not to see anyone to avoid having to talk to them, I'm going to look people in the eye and talk to them. That'll be a big change for me lately, and it's down to what's happened here this week."

### **Supporting Personal Stories**

Trauma, in its many forms, often remains an untold or silent story, particularly among men (see Etherington, 2000, 2003). As critical aspects of embodied experience in our military research, stories of trauma – including accounts of mental distress, impairment, vulnerability – might be considered 'taboo' stories because they transgress dominant narratives within military culture. Not only within military culture, but also within sport culture and under the terms of hegemonic masculinity, stories of being mentally tough, competitive and physically impenetrable are typically *preferred* – they are the stories most frequently told and heard. For Seagrave (1997), "the language of football is the language of war" and across sports, there is "little or no effort to hide the frequent allusions to violence, aggression and confrontation" (p. 214). In contrast, stories about the trauma, the horrors of war, mental illness and vulnerable

soldiers often remain silent (Douglas & Carless, 2009, 2012, 2015a, 2015b; Jenkins, 2013; Madill & Hopper, 2007; Seagrave, 1997).

In *Welcome Session*, we see Billy (the group leader) embodying and enacting behaviours that explicitly challenge these norms. First, he opens up the possibility that we are perhaps not so tough as we may think we are by making a physical device available that allows us to admit – without needing to say anything at all – our vulnerabilities or worries. Second, Billy includes *himself* as still working towards a goal (eliminating negative self-talk), implicitly revealing himself not as ‘perfect’ – with everything sorted and together – but as someone who wants, needs even, us to help *him* as well as help each other. He presents himself as a leader who is fallible and needs help. Third, Billy reveals himself – as an active, male leader – to be *sensitive* rather than *impenetrable* and *tough*. Further, he is willing to allow that he feels embarrassed to admit it in front of a group of military and outdoor people. In the first session of the course, Billy offered three golden, welcoming moments. He effectively challenges the dominant (military, sport, masculine) culture of toughness by providing a counter story (Nelson, 2001) that scripts another way of being. Additionally, he offers and models practical strategies to allow others to explore and perhaps embrace this alternative.

In addition to being a valuable start to the course, Billy’s actions and words also serve to authorise group members to share (and/or enact) stories that transgress military culture. It is alright, Billy’s words and actions suggest, to share vulnerabilities; there is no need to keep up a façade of invincibility. This is important from a research perspective too because, Plummer (1995) suggests, “Stories can be told when they can be heard. There is usually no point in telling a tale without a receptive and appreciative listener, and one who is usually part of a wider community of support” (p. 120). *Welcome Session* provides a glimpse of the way Billy and the other coaches – throughout the week – work to embody and enact the role

of *receptive and appreciative listener*. By doing so, the coaches allow and even encourage individuals in the group to broach moments of their lives that they might otherwise keep silent. This creates a culture of story sharing, increasing the *tellability* (Smith & Sparkes, 2008) of what might otherwise be considered taboo, transgressive, unwelcome or difficult to share accounts. This was important for us as narrative researchers conducting fieldwork: *we* were included as part of this receptive and appreciative culture, and therefore more likely to be entrusted with personal stories. Without this culture, the kind of interactions we experienced would have been unlikely.

Evident in these interactions – as *Stories from a Spinning Wheelchair* shows – is a high degree of physical movement or embodied action. The kinds of interactions portrayed in the stories (which occurred regularly throughout our fieldwork) were not pre-planned, stationary conversations in a quiet, private room, but impromptu exchanges that took place during the routine activities of the course. While the heightened physicality that accompanied these exchanges is partly a result of the course being sport and adventurous training based, it is also because the coaches deliberately incorporated additional opportunities for non-verbal interactions as a way to open up communication. For example: the rope allowed a physical demonstration of one's emotions in *Welcome Session*; group members were invited to make a drawing about their day in *Daily Debrief*; music was routinely used as an invitation to move in order to lighten or energise an intense session. All these approaches invited the physical expression of aspects of one's life without asking for anything to be put into words, with little in the way of direct questioning. Sometimes these actively embodied tasks led participants to share further personal stories in words.

### **Body-to-Body Stories**

The importance of embodiment to subjective experience is now widely recognised across the social sciences. The need to take embodiment seriously has generated a variety of approaches towards incorporating body knowledge (Evans & Davies, 2005), particularly in sport, education and health research. One example can be found in the work of Evans, Davies and Rich (2009) who describe how the use of *the corporeal device* permits a “focus on the body as not just a discursive representation and relay of messages and power relations external ‘to itself’ but as a voice ‘of itself’” (p. 393). Importantly, as Pink (2011) observes, this “shift towards embodiment allowed the recognition that knowledge was not simply something of the mind, but that ‘knowing’ is embedded in embodied practices, and cannot necessarily be expressed in spoken words” (p. 345).

Concerns have, however, been expressed concerning *how* bodies are incorporated within social science scholarship. As Sparkes (1999), for instance, observes: “When bodies have been focused upon they have been heavily theorized bodies, detached, distant, and for the most part lacking intimate connection to the lived experiences of the corporeal beings who are the objects of analytical scrutiny” (p. 18). How, though, might we write bodies and into our studies in ways that preserve the visceral, connected, proximal and immediate nature of embodied experience? Storytelling, in various forms, offers a set of approaches that we have for some time been exploring in our research (e.g., Carless, 2012; Carless & Douglas, 2010; Douglas & Carless, 2008, 2009, 2015b). We propose this dialogical storytelling approach as an alternative way of researching other’s embodied experiences which begins with the recognition that, “Locomotion not cognition must be the starting point for the study of perceptual activity” (Ingold, 2000, cf. Pink, 2011, p. 346).

In *Stories from a Spinning Wheelchair* physical activity is both a trigger and facilitator of telling stories of embodied experience. Immersion in a shared embodied experience (in this case spinning in wheelchairs) seems to allow a taboo tale to be told, in its

own time. Embodied action is the medium that allows Josh to tell his trauma stories. In moments like these, for us, there is a sense of ‘doing together’ that supports story sharing. It’s as if we (as researchers) can’t go straight to whatever it is we want to know, and they (as participants) can’t either. In Frank’s (1995) terms, there is a sense of the researcher working with a philosophy of, “Let me be with you” over “what do you have to tell me?” (p. 144). Perhaps this allows us (participant and researcher) to find common ground through co-experienced physical movement. While spinning together in wheelchairs, Josh has time to ‘test’ whether David is *with him* – to decide if he considers the relationship sufficiently safe to share his stories.

For Bakhtin (1984) stories are not told to thin air, but always *addressed*. In Frank’s (2010) terms, researchers need to understand themselves “not as collecting data but as being the addressee whose presence enables people to tell their stories” (p. 128). Importantly for us, it follows then that stories are addressed *to a body*. In the story above, Josh addresses his stories (from his body, spinning in a wheelchair) *to* David’s body (in shared action, also spinning in a wheelchair). It is from within this embodied relation that David witnesses the accounts Josh chooses to share. This, according to Crossley (2007), is significant because

Our embodiment is our point of view on the world ... It locates us in the world, putting us in a spatio-temporal relation with other beings and giving us a standpoint, literally, from which to perceive them ... Traditional conceptions of ‘the body’ focus upon its perceptible aspects and thus assume the perspective of an outside observer; an outside-in perspective. Phenomenology alerts us to the body’s own, inside out perspective, and thus to the body of the observer. Human bodies, for the phenomenologist, are both perceptible and perceiving, sensible and sentient. (p. 82)

Although Crossley refers to phenomenology, his points are also relevant to narrative research, not least because they highlight the role of the observer/researcher’s embodied

positioning in affecting *what* stories are shared and *how* those stories are heard. We suspect that evocative stories of personal embodied experience are unlikely to be witnessed *without* an immersive embodied interaction. This quality of interaction, as the stories portray, is critical if we are to generate knowledge that is faithful to participants' own embodied experiences.

Crossley (2007) calls these kinds of approaches to research *body techniques*, and suggests they mark an important departure from other (e.g., interview) methods. In his words:

The meaning generated by body techniques and the knowledge and understanding they embody is best grasped by way of observation ... The devil is in the detail and the detail may not always be reflexively available to the lay agent in an interview situation. It must be observed in practice. (p. 91)

We are aware of how interacting with participants like Josh through fieldwork – in our participant-observer roles – shaped our understandings in important ways. Although we did conduct formal one-to-one interviews during our fieldwork, the kinds of interactions portrayed in the stories above (which revealed the ‘detail’ in Crossley’s terms) had a different quality. Given their impromptu and participant-led nature, we felt it was neither appropriate (in terms of context and our ethical relationships with participants) nor necessary (in terms of generating ‘good data’) to activate an audio-recorder once these interactions were underway. Audio-recorders are clearly ill-equipped to capture the embodied nature of these interactions. Instead, we opted to make detailed fieldnotes soon after the interaction, and it is from these fieldnotes that we developed the creative nonfiction stories above. Throughout, we strove to recreate the embodied qualities of the interactions, drawing on memories of our own physical experiences/senses/emotions, our observations of participants’ physical actions/expressions, and our recollections of the words/stories that were voiced.



## Understanding and Representing Embodied Experience

With reference to experiences of trauma and suffering, Bakhtin (1990) observes that, “The other’s suffering as co-experienced by me is in principle different ... from the other’s suffering as he [sic] experiences it” (p. 102). This distinction has been considered by narrative scholars in recent years as it relates closely to the problems we face in trying to understand another’s embodied experience. Yet without understanding another’s experience, how can we hope to portray their experience more widely? *Narrative imagination* has been proposed as one way of developing understanding of the Other:

Our narrative imagination is our most valuable tool in our exploration of others’ worlds, for it assists us in seeing beyond the immediately visible. It is our ability to imagine other ‘possible lives’ – our own and others – that creates our bond with ‘diverse social and historical worlds’ ... Without this imagination, we are forever restricted to the world as we know it, which is a very limited place to be (Andrews, 2007, p. 510)

Yet, for Smith (2008), this approach is limited because,

... no matter how far the imagination reaches, my fleshy physicality, as a source of, location for and means through which imagination and pain partly operate, limits what and how I can imagine. I cannot, in other words, transcend my flesh and bones to *entirely* imaginatively put myself in another’s embodied place and experience their pain. Thus our capacities for imaginative projection depend in very concrete ways on features of our specific embodiment. These may constrain our abilities to imagine other persons, whether, for instance, in the mode of imagining oneself ‘in the other’s shoes’ or imagining being another. (p.146, emphasis added)

Our fieldwork experiences (illustrated in the stories above) shed some further light on the possibilities and tensions inherent in narrative imagination. For David to understand Josh's traumatic experience – to be able to distil and amplify it so others may also understand – we believe David used his own embodiment as a kind of prism or crystal through which to witness Josh's stories in a more involved way. To listen as a distanced, neutral, disembodied Other would have provided a very different, more one-dimensional, simplistic, superficial understanding. It might even have discouraged Josh from sharing his vulnerable stories at all. Instead, we believe David witnessed Josh's trauma stories through the prism of his own embodied experiences of distress. It is not that David's experiences mirrored Josh's. Their lives did not, in some neat and serendipitous way, merge into one. They had not lived through the same nightmares – they are separate people with different sets of life experiences. We do not wish to compare our own experiences of distress with those Josh, or any of the other men who recount their experiences as young men at war in Afghanistan. The actualities of our life experiences are fundamentally different. In this sense, Smith (2008) is correct that we cannot *entirely* put ourselves in another's embodied place through our imagination.

Lieblich (2014) suggests that while we should resist the temptation to 'put ourselves in another's shoes,' we should think of ourselves as a "container for the Other's story" (p. 443). For us, there is an important distinction here. It is not that we put ourselves (researchers) in their (participants) place, but that we take their story into our selves. This is not merely semantic, but instead a serious engagement with *what we would become* through witnessing the happenings of the Other's story. It is a consideration of the question, *how am I changed through this story?*

There is a delicate balance to be achieved here, then, between remaining fundamentally alien to and ignorant of the Other's embodied experience through a lack of imagination, and becoming falsely familiar with the Other by imposing upon them one's own

embodied experience. Frank (2004) proposes a process of *identification* as a possible solution, which, he suggests, “begins with recognizing that your landscape is not the other person’s” (p. 98). Critically, Frank also observes, “Identification with others requires giving up monologue” (p. 101). While appreciation of difference needs to be sustained, identification is possible *provided the researcher’s voice does not become the only voice*. It is at this point then that representation becomes crucial.

The monological voice – through which a researcher claims to know and express another’s experience – is commonplace in the human and social sciences, where scientific and realist representations dominate the landscape (see Sparkes, 2002). In Frank’s (2004) terms, this voice commits symbolic violence by finalizing participants’ lives and experience. Because human experience is complex, fluid and sometimes ambiguous, these kinds of representations risk simply getting it wrong. To realise *dialogical* representations (Frank, 2010), which allow space for other voices alongside our own, we must relinquish the authority of claiming to know and understand the Other. In Andrews (2007) terms, “We must be comfortable knowing that we do not, and can never, know all about another; equally, we must resist the temptation to overinterpret those empty spaces that lie within our conversations” (p. 509). Likewise, for Neilsen (2008), “we need to recognize that imagination allows us to enter the experience of another without appropriation, ownership, or reductiveness” (p. 95).

For us, portrayals that illuminate participants’ embodiment in a way that is faithful to their experience are most likely to be achieved through alternative writing/representational strategies. As the preceding stories portray, another’s embodied experience can perhaps only be glimpsed tangentially, through a kind of physical-emotional sensibility. Like the sun, perhaps it is the case that the Other’s experience cannot be seen by looking directly at it. Instead, it can only be ‘seen’ out of the ‘corner of the eye,’ through a sideways glance. It is,

in itself, not amenable to being labelled, stated, categorized or finalized through a scientific or realist tale. Instead, it needs to be evoked, implied or rendered aesthetically – perhaps through a more indirect or oblique use of language, such as metaphor, poetic, lyrical or evocative forms. We have found dialogical storytelling – such as the creative nonfictions above and below – to be one way of working that allows us to express and communicate complex, paradoxical or ambiguous forms of knowledge, understanding or wisdom that we have perhaps not yet fully grasped ourselves. In contrast to scientific and realist forms, where authors seem to be expected to have mastered the knowledge therein, storytelling helps us to *hold off*, to resist the illusion of *knowing it all* and leave space for “participants’ words to carry their own message” (Frank, 2010, p. 128).

We conclude with a dialogical telling of *Josh’s Story*. This account was created through creatively re-writing the kinds of exchanges and events portrayed in the stories above. Through an iterative process across the course, David developed a draft story, in the first-person voice, of Josh’s experiences. We agree with Atkinson’s (2007) statement that, “A fundamental interpretive guideline is that the storyteller should be considered both the expert and the authority on his or her life, thus having the final say in what gets told” (p. 239). Therefore, David invited Josh to collaborate on the revision and refinement of ‘his’ story, to ensure that he felt it was a faithful representation of his experiences and a portrayal that he was happy for others to hear. It is in this sense that we describe the story as *dialogical*, in that it includes and allows for multiple voices and perspectives in the telling.

### **Josh’s Story: A Dialogical Telling**

Since I got back from Afghan I feel like I’ve been through the mill. I mean, now it’s been diagnosed as PTSD and I’ve actually joined a Personnel Recovery Unit. But for a year I was

just nowhere. Came back, moved in with my Mum, destroyed the family really. Drinking, all the time, like from 5am, all through the day. Alcoholism. That's what it is. It started off as a celebration – it was a big party. You know, I was glad to be alive. But I just didn't stop, I couldn't stop, I was an alcoholic.

I returned to my unit for a few weeks right after I got back, but I couldn't work, I was getting drunk all the time. Then my Mum got ill so I kind of used that as an excuse to move back in with her. But I've given her a hell of a time. I just couldn't get these images out of my head: bodies, wounds, hearing gunfire, smelling burning flesh, caudate. Where I was, every day was guaranteed contact, see. It was trigger time, every day, loads of trigger time. No matter what you do, you can't prepare for that, for what you see. It's just, like, no-one should see that stuff. So, back home, I was drinking and taking stuff all the time to try to get it all out of my head.

I saw a doctor and he just gave me loads of tablets – antidepressants, sleeping pills – and I was just, like, I'm gonna use all these and kill myself. And it seemed like they didn't care if I did. After the third time I tried to take my life, that's when I got to see a decent doctor who said, you know, why haven't you been treated for PTSD? You need therapy so you can start to deal with what's in your head. And that's when I got sent to de-tox – three weeks straight. That was the best thing that happened to me.

Now I still get panic attacks sometimes. One time I went for a medical appointment that was near the range. I heard the shots, and they couldn't get me past the gate. I was rigid, like – lying on the floor, throwing up. Then the clay pigeon shooting this morning, I did think it might be a bit of a problem. But I never would have thought it was gonna be that severe. As soon as I heard the shots it started, and I went right into a panic attack. I put my earphones in, played some music really loud to try to cover it up. But there was no way I could've stayed. One of the guys took me out right away, I couldn't have done anything on my own. He

helped me out to the vehicle and drove me away. He took me for a coffee and we chatted for an hour or so. I was fine again by the time we left.

This week at Battle Back has been good because it's got me out of the house and away from the neighbourhood. 'Cause I don't really do anything when I'm there – I'll end up playing X-Box and going to the pub with mates all the time. Maybe it doesn't sound like much, but after more than a year hanging around the same place not working, a week somewhere else – doing different things with different people – makes a big difference you know.

I came here this week a hard-drinking-adrenaline-junkie basically. But being here has got me thinking that I can actually do something else, it's got me wondering what I can do next. I couldn't stand an office job – being indoors in the same place every day would do me in. And I don't want to get a trade. I'm looking for something a bit different, something that I can be outdoors. Not in the military mind, I don't want to have anything to do with the military anymore. I've cleaned the house out of everything that reminds me of that. My Mum still keeps, like, a little shrine, but I don't ever see it. After this week I'm wondering if there's a way of rather than just doing outdoor stuff for me – for the adrenalin – if there's a way I can go out and do it in a way that helps other people, that benefits people with different abilities, the way you've all helped me this week. My cousin has Down Syndrome and I'm thinking maybe I could help people like that, by becoming an outdoor activity instructor, and teaching them the kinds of things I can do.

I'm 23 years old and there's still things I want to do with my life. It's just finding a way to make them happen. And I feel like now I need the incentive of doing outdoor stuff, not just by myself, but taking other people out, showing them, helping them, as a way of earning a living.

## **Acknowledgments**

The research on which this article is based was funded by The Royal British Legion as part of their commitment to helping the recovery of wounded, injured and sick Service men and women. We thank Josh, and the other participants in our research, for sharing their stories with us. We also thank the coaching team, military and all other staff at the Battle Back Centre Lilleshall for their support. Finally, we thank the anonymous reviewers for their supportive and constructive responses.

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<sup>1</sup> It is widely recognised that narrative research comprises an array of philosophies, theories and methodologies, and that a single definition is not possible or desirable. Briefly, our own position broadly aligns with Crossley (2000) who sees narrative research as “an attempt to study the language, stories and narratives which constitute selves and the implications and permutations of those narratives for individuals and societies” (p. 21).