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**Relational possibilities through arts-based methodologies:  
[Re]presenting focus group research with female Olympic athletes**

Kitrina Douglas and David Carless  
Leeds Beckett University

**Abstract**

Feminists have suggested women's ways of talking and sharing do not fit well with traditional scientific, individualistic, detached, depersonalised data collection strategies. However, it is not just during data collection where women's relational sensibilities might be threatened. Traditional ways of analysing and representing interactions can also hide or distort relational aspects. In this paper, we adopt an arts-based methodology to explore the lives of four Olympic athletes shared during focus group research. Through a series of poems and stories, we provide an example of an experimental text that reanimates women's lives, relationships and inter-connections. Such representations are especially vital in sport psychology research, to counter the dominance of the performance narrative.

## Introduction

Research has long shown women's ways of talking and sharing information about their lives can be compromised through individualistic, detached, and depersonalised data collection strategies (Etherington, 2004; Oakley, 1981; Riessman, 1987; Stanley & Wise, 1983). Unsurprisingly, therefore, feminist researchers have been at the forefront of exploring and developing strategies that will put participants at ease during the research process, and that then preserve and enhance intimacy, and 'capture' the ways women talk and interact in day-to-day life more authentically. For example, being an 'insider' who explores areas where the researcher and participant's lives intersect can enhance and develop trust (Madriz, 1998), turning 'a formal interview' into an informal conversation (Ellis & Patti, 2014), collaborating with participants (Etherington, 2004; Ritchie & Barker, 2005; Wilkinson, 1999), and using friendship as method (Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2013; Tillmann-Healy, 2003) have been fruitful alternatives to traditional research. In this regard, focus group interviews offer unique opportunities that move beyond the sediment of individual memories by providing a forum for talk that sustains the richness and complexity of lives through dialogic, collaborative and polyvocal interaction (Madriz, 2000; Oakley, 1981).

Yet, despite the qualities focus groups bring (see Barbour, 2005), the most common approaches to analyse focus group interviews have been content and thematic analysis (Madriz, 2000). Considering these analysis methods have been honed for analysing an individual account, using them with focus group interviews risks obscuring much that is unique about focus groups – relational and jointly constructed. Using thematic or content analysis can chisel a 'neat' monologue from what was a complex, messy, interdependent text. In the process, what may have been a flowing conversation, where sentences have been collaboratively created, and multiple speakers talk together, becomes a linear, singular quote or extract. Most frequently extracts are then presented via a realist tale (Van Maanen, 1988) which reveals few hints on how the extract came to be shared, or what and who supported its creation. Further, the addition of categories or themes to group quotes together brings an additional barrier between participants that had not existed previously, *in action*.

Our concern, therefore, is that much of the relational dynamism that is present in a focus group interviews can be lost through traditional analysis and reporting strategies. Added to these issues, traditional ways of analysing transcripts often neglect the 'unsaid' – that is, mood, timing, rhythm, the back and forth tidal flow of

conversation, the half said, and the humour. For Siegesmund (2013), much of what we experience in our lives and relationships cannot be put into words but is nonetheless ‘fecund with meaning’ (p.143). For social science researchers, and particularly feminists, this causes a problem. By not including those aspects of life that are almost impossible to capture we do a disservice to women’s lives and relationships and simultaneously reduce the potential impact of our research. It is to these ends that arts-based approaches offer a landscape of possibilities in terms of interpretations, emotions, rhythm, speech, interjection, and flow of language (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011). These approaches help us attend to what cannot be said, or put into words, while privileging ‘felt sense’ (somatic, pre-linguistic, sensory experience) over scientific, logical, rational ways of knowing.

Our approach with *Her Telling Her*, the arts-based piece that follows, builds on a storytelling methodology we use (see for example Carless, 2012; Carless & Douglas, 2016; Douglas, 2012; Douglas & Carless, 2008, 2009) to include things that might otherwise go unsaid (such as humour, paradox, relational interaction, unspeakable experiences). From an ethical perspective, this approach also allows the researcher/s to be visible on the page alongside participants in the unfolding action, revealing our vulnerabilities, uncertainties, mistakes and the foundations on which we make our interpretations. By utilising poetic representations, we are able to further distil text without compromising its potency by ‘deftly editing sensory excess through compression of all significance rather than selection and exclusion’ (Dewey, 1989, p. 211). For Neilsen (2008, p. 94), poetry is a form of lyrical writing that embraces “liminality, ineffability, metaphorical thinking, embodied understanding, personal evocations, domestic and local understanding – the desire to honour and experience phenomena through words, ambiguous and inadequate as they might be, and to communicate this experience to others.” We have also found that poetic representations support the communication and exploration of visceral, emotive personal truths that may not be amenable to expression in a coherent, rational narrative form (Carless & Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2015a; Sparkes & Douglas, 2007).

Although we do not restrict ourselves to particular formulae when creating arts-based pieces, we adhered to following guidelines to create the poems featured in *Her Telling Her*:

- The poems were created using the participants’ own words

- We added additional words only if it was essential to the integrity of the poem, the flow of the text
- Participants' words were taken from anywhere in the transcript provided they related in an authentic way to the topic or experience
- Where possible we distilled the text by editing out inessential words and repetition
- We were guided by aesthetics and felt sense
- We privileged what we found emotionally evocative
- We strove to include issues that were important and meaningful to participants
- We aimed to preserve the dynamic flow and rhythm of the focus group interactions

*Her Telling Her* is an example of an arts-based methodology that has the potential to inform sport psychology practice. It was developed from a 20,960 word, 51-page single-spaced transcript of a focus group with four Olympic athletes (see Douglas & Carless, 2006 for a full methodology), alongside our field notes and reflexive diaries. It reimagines an alternative way to understand and represent female athletes experiences through stories and poems based on an unfolding conversation that took place as athletes shared their life stories and Olympic experiences. The piece features Ruby, Onyx, Jade and Sapphire (all pseudonyms), Olympic medallists in the sports of judo, rowing, judo and swimming respectively. Also featured are two researchers, Jessie and Tom (also pseudonyms). The interactions flowed from two main research questions: *What are your early memories of sport?* and *How did you get from there to here?*

## **Her Telling Her**

### **Ruby**

Uncle Sid did it and he said to mum

*The kids will enjoy it!* That's how it began

so my brother he started

with my uncle and cousins

on the way back from ballet

we'd pick up m'brother

then when the ballet school closed

I started too

Not a girlie girl me, so from that first lesson

the rough and the tumble

fighting m'brother, not getting in trouble

going up the levels ... without even noticing

Not driven, just *routine*

come home from school, go to Judo

come home from Uni, go to Judo

never thought about *not* going

so that was my brother, my dad, my uncle and me

dad still comes to all my competitions

and m'brother's still my sparring partner

### **Onyx**

I went to a really big crap school

sports facilities but

nothing to throw, kick, or hit

big swimming pool full of shopping trolleys

But I wanted to do something and there was nothing

So what did I do? What all kids in the country do...

ride horses!

and you have to run a lot with horses

catch them in the morning

I won every competition on two legs

then entered a half marathon

trained in the morning, and again at night

with crappy hard plimsolls, down country roads

music isolating me from the outside world

Amazing – wouldn't do that now!

music and headphones!

dangerous mix down pitch black lanes

*(What were my parents were thinking?)*

Strange, isn't it, looking back  
amazing feat – wouldn't call myself a runner  
no wonder my knees are shagged!

But, I wanted to be good, at something  
So worked at the best stable yard, but still wanted to be  
the one  
to break the mad horse  
stick on it for longer  
but there were never any measures  
never any competitions.

### **Jade**

Dad had done it before, for fitness  
no more behind it than that  
other than I was a bit of a tom boy  
and Dad knew the coach, got me in for free  
So it was Judo

then my sister said *I want to come*

coz dad had done it  
I wanted to prove I could do it too  
then my sister fell into that trap  
trying to prove she could do what I could do  
So we both ended up at the Judo club  
and we've been training partners ever since

### **Sapphire**

Mum was a swimmer  
I was always gonna *do* something  
But nearly drowned, at my gran's,

so my mum, had to teach me to swim  
even when I was being rescued  
I wasn't frightened  
But also there was  
asthma  
and the Doctor said *You should swim*

I love being in water, love it  
don't know what it is  
I'm at my most comfortable when I'm in water.  
If I see a pool, I have to touch it  
If I smell a pool, I have to find it  
I don't know why. I'm sorry. I need help!  
I had a boyfriend once who said  
*If you are stressed out, the only thing I can do  
is throw water at you*  
Calm me down

### **Onyx**

fresher's fair flicking through options, rowing, cool!  
train every day, then some snooty cow said  
*you won't be any good  
you haven't rowed at school.*  
So, that was that.  
No trial  
*Stuff rowing!* I thought  
That's for girls from public schools

Joined rugby  
Friendly and hard  
and I'd never done hard before.  
Trained through the winter  
Felt fit, and enjoyed it, plus we competed  
that was fun and my boyfriend was into rugby



taught me extra skills

Then I went away for a year  
when I got back my rugby mates were rowing!  
So I got a trial though I'd never been in a boat  
won the land-based tests  
so they let me in  
on the proviso  
that I learnt  
how to row

**Jade**

when it comes to Judo  
you need a sparring partner  
somebody *in front*  
they define your training  
how good or how bad  
is up to that person  
makes training easy  
you don't have to battle-yourself  
you don't have to motivate-yourself  
if your partner's there  
and they're reliable  
and you trust them

And preparing for the Olympics  
to have my sister as my training partner  
is huge  
that relationship  
there, on another level.

But equally, as Ruby mentioned,  
my mum and dad have always been *there*

**Onyx**

I've never not won in rowing  
winning is fun – that was it  
No desire to be an international, that stuff  
Getting selected, well, that was accidental

The coach and my mates decided I was going  
loaded my boat on a trailer  
I turned up in the morning confused  
*Where's my boat?*  
*It's in Henley*  
So I went to get it, got a lift  
and because I was there:  
*You might as well join in, now you're here!*  
And that was that  
I won  
was in the team

### **Sapphire**

always wanted to go to the Olympics

*How did you know that? (can we loose this line?)*

doing projects on it at school  
and when I was starting  
mum would take me early  
to meet international swimmers  
autographs  
watch 'em swim  
she knew the ropes  
she knew the swimmers  
she started teaching there, so  
she knew, when we went places  
the guys who were quite well known  
she'd say, watch her, watch him, watch them

## **Onyx**

working'n'wedging til I made myself ill  
get up, train, cycle to work,  
eight a.m. train, wedge an ergo at lunch,  
take calls while I'm pumping, then back to my desk,  
cycle home, train, eat and to bed,

Five hours later begin again

But I broke, oh yes,  
after less than a year  
physically and emotionally  
everything ... complete melt down

### **Jade: Don't ask me**

my world was judo  
then – slap in the face  
a year out injured

And that was hard, really hard.

My club and my family were my support  
... But I was the top person coming through ...

Where did all those officials go?

Not one single phone call, just to ask

*How are you?*

Hang on,  
what is my worth?

no point in being upset  
they're not giving me a second thought.

like Ruby said,  
I'm doing it for me – not for them

## **Selection**

Ruby was talking about negative things that affect her performance. Sat next to Ruby was her mate, Jade, also an Olympian, who seemed to be bent on derailing Ruby's thoughts by teasing and ribbing her friend, or seeing the funny side of things. The discussion was open and free flowing, not quite a galloping horse out of control, because each woman paused to reflect and think, but on some occasions it felt like it might get out of control at any moment. No one seemed afraid to laugh at some of the situations that had brought them grief in the past.

'Sometimes,' Ruby carried on, 'like, at one point when I was going through problems with the judo association...'

Before she could say any more, Jade cut in with a loud 'Yes!' and then with a laugh. 'See! This is what I was waiting for you to do!' Ruby might have known what Jade was expecting, but the rest of the group had no clue. For a moment, this fact seemed to elude the two women as they carried on in their own private bubble.

'No, look,' Ruby protested, turning to face her friend, but Jade carried on: 'I couldn't believe it, I couldn't believe it!'

'No!' Ruby interjected again, in a way the others couldn't tell if she was really annoyed or playing annoyed. 'That was genuine. But that? The other stuff!'

Like spectators in a tennis match Onyx, Sapphire, Tom and Jessie watched the two women bat the conversation back and forth, without really finishing any sentence until, finally, Jessie managed to grab their attention by raising her voice a little: 'What happened?'

Ruby glanced over. 'Well!' she began now looking round at the others too, 'basically, I won every competition. Well, there may have been one odd exception,' she wafted her hand in the air signalling the insignificance of this last bit of evidence, 'and then I wasn't selected for the World's. So I was a bit like *what?*' She raised her voice: 'What do you *mean* I'm not going?'

The entangled exchanges now made complete sense, to the group as well as to Tom, who'd been watching the body language between the two women and how they'd been communicating in a code the rest found hard to follow. Now the cat was out of the bag he began to scribble a few notes that would remind him of these things later when he and Jessie might consider their relevance. He wrote 'digging up dirt' to signal the way Ruby had been reluctant to say what happened, and the way her friend, in contrast, wanted everyone to know. To Tom, at least, it seemed Jade wouldn't

jeopardise the trust Ruby had in her by being the one to say what happened, but she was glad when Ruby finally did.

Meanwhile, Jessie tried to open the discussion out. ‘How did you find out? What’s the selection procedure?’

With an air of sarcasm, mirroring Jessie’s question, Jade dramatically looked around at the others and took over, ‘Yes, what *is* the selection procedure?’ She then continued, mimicking herself: ‘It’s when the letter falls on your door step and it says *Congratulations you’re reserve.*’ She shrugged and pulled a contorted face as her eyes rolled up through her eyelids. Then, as if she was thinking back to her own experiences as opposed to Ruby’s she said, ‘I didn’t even get a letter!’

Ruby ignored the last comment and carried on with her tale. ‘That time I got a phone call, cause I was in Canada, and I was like: *What? Are your kidding? Sorry, there’s a bad connection ... sorry, I just don’t get what you’re telling me!*’

Jessie and Tom were well aware of the theory behind using humour to make it possible to talk about something that’s difficult or impossible to broach. The words used to describe the event portrayed something devastating in Ruby’s life, yet the *way* she acted the story out made everyone laugh, talking into an imaginary telephone, putting on a stupid voice and playing the part of the official. Then, for a moment, she became a little more serious. ‘So yeah, that was one of the most stressful times of my life. And what made it worse was that was my best year for performance!’

‘How did that make you feel?’ Jessie asked

‘Oh! Like absolute shit!’ Ruby came back without pause for thought. ‘It was like being punched in the stomach, seriously, and I was away from home, so my phone bill was through the roof. I’d phone my mum at three in the morning,’ she turned to the others, put her hands together as if to pray, closed her eyes, and then said: ‘God bless my mum!’ Then opening her eyes again, ‘I’d phone her at like three in the morning just crying because I couldn’t, I couldn’t envisage not going to the World’s. It was like, *what?*’

Onyx, and Sapphire had absorbed the show, the dramatics, the acting. They were nodding, laughing and then, by way of support, showed their disbelief: ‘No!’ ‘Typical!’ ‘Bastards!’ they chipped in.

‘Who was responsible for that decision?’ Jessie asked.

Jade blurted out, halfway through a sip of orange juice: ‘Julio from Pooleyo!’

‘Bloody Julio!’ Ruby echoed. This time Ruby filled in the missing information: ‘the performance director.’

‘But you got your own back!’ Jade laughed, again looking towards her friend without letting on *how* Ruby had got her own back, but egging her on.

‘Did you do a move on him?’ Sapphire asked, her arms flying to and fro in a mock judo move.

‘I wish!’ Ruby laughed. ‘He was an Olympic champion!’

‘Ha, not a good idea then!’ Sapphire smiled, folding her flailing arms.

Jessie tried to clarify: ‘So, is he the person who picks the team?’

‘Your know what,’ Ruby said leaning back, ‘I don’t actually know!’

Jade appeared to have the answer: ‘No, it’s a panel.’

‘I didn’t know that at the time,’ Ruby continued, ‘but he was the messenger.’

‘Yeah!’ Jade smiled at Ruby, who then added, ‘And it’s always good to shoot the messenger!’ Everyone laughed again. And then as if to give another punch line Jade turned to the group, raised her eyebrows and in another dramatic delivery announced: ‘And he got shot!’

Although Jessie couldn’t help laughing and being carried along she was also trying to get her job done. ‘So,’ she interjected again, to get everyone’s attention before asking, ‘they don’t have a point system or ...?’

Onyx also wanted answers: ‘Don’t you have a written policy?’

‘Soon will have,’ Jade added, and putting on another farcical voice, looked to the ceiling: ‘A selection policy? Yes! Ooooooh, that’s a good idea!’ She nodded her head slowly.

Ruby continued. ‘If you read it all the way through, it means you can pretty much pick who you want.’

Jade finished Ruby’s sentence, ‘they call it *discretionary*’.

Seamlessly, Ruby continued: ‘Yeah, so I ended up going to the sport dispute panel over it and they told ‘em the selection policy was shit and said change it! Technically that meant I’d won but it wasn’t about getting one over on them, it was about going to the World’s and winning.’

‘And,’ Jessie continued, ‘they stopped you doing that, they stopped you from competing?’

Ruby sat back. ‘Yep!’

‘How did you cope with that?’

‘Well,’ Ruby brought the conversation back to her family again, ‘I was lucky really, cause I’ve got good family, friends and stuff and,’ she put her arm round Jade, gave her a big squeeze, and then patted her on the head, ‘and I’ve got good old Jade here. She was there.’ The two athletes exchanged glances, smiled, and let out a laugh. But Tom noticed the momentary hold of each other’s gaze. He didn’t know what it meant, but there seemed to be an unspoken bond between the two women. He wondered if it had been cemented through hardships, trauma and the other sport-related politics where they had been disempowered. While Tom pondered these issues Ruby finished up. ‘And I’m quite a level headed person, so what I said to myself was, like, well, I can either let it get me down and get depressed and lose my mind, or I can carry on and just do judo, you know. It’s judo that I love.’

### **Jade: Monday morning mail**

I won everything  
or equal results  
now British Champion and out for a meal  
with mum and dad thinking: Right! European’s!  
Monday morning mail  
*Congratulations you’re reserve*  
and you think  
What more could I have done?  
Who have I upset?  
No communication  
and you don’t understand

### **Sapphire: Blub blub blob**

I hadn’t heard – so I hadn’t made it  
morning newspaper  
mum called – I pretended to be sleeping  
didn’t want to come out  
and it was just awful

And they swam so crap!  
I should have been there – on that team  
and sat at home watching, you assume

*I could do better*

don't you?

and it was hard, then, being back on the team,  
everyone talking about the Olympics  
and people forget you weren't there  
and they go: *Do you remember?*  
and you go: *I wasn't there*  
really easy to do, done it myself  
you're an outsider

till the next win and then you're back in  
then a journalist asked, *Being left out*  
*how did you feel, emotionally?*  
and I said, *I do my talking in the water*  
so everyone goes: *What does that sound like?*  
*blub blub blob*

### **Onyx**

look at all the ex-athletes  
bitter and twisted  
bitching and moaning  
and that's me!

But the anti-establishment crowd  
are the ones with the flare  
the ones who know  
how to make a boat move

who know – how to train  
who have – that thing  
that you don't get  
from ticking boxes



so we've got a whole load  
of really talented  
bitter and twisted  
ex-Olympians  
*Jade: Sounds familiar!*

**Sapphire: Best moment of my life**

he wanted young swimmers  
not a veteran like me  
Not athletes with opinions! No thinking!  
you see  
so ... he made my life hell

then the shit hit the fan  
my coach, Jack, poolside  
going: *You don't fucking swim for fatty!*  
*You swim for yourself! You do it for you!*  
me, swimming in tears, going  
*fuck him! fuck him! bastard!*

people started not swimming well  
so fatty said, *OK*  
*it's all up for grabs*  
*we'll go by the heats*

more ultimatums  
rules changing each day  
my coach on the phone, saying  
*If you swim fast enough they can't not put you in*  
*Forget his ultimatums – just swim the race*  
so that's what I did

Then, the bastard said: *that was awesome!*

and I went: *You, fuck off*

*that* was the best moment of my life

Jade: Sad that though. Why does that have to happen?

### **We won't go on about it then**

'Mum in the background fighting your corner...' Tom jotted a few more words. 'Unconditional support?' Then he scribbled a few questions: 'What happens to those athletes who don't have someone to call in the middle of the night?' 'How come the governing bodies don't check up on athletes?' While Tom was getting his notes down, Jessie smiled across the table at Onyx and Sapphire as a way of inviting further discussion on these themes.

'I didn't get any support from my parents, never.' Onyx began. Jessie tried not to look shocked, or alarmed, but she couldn't help realising, *not getting support* went against the whole flow of the conversation up to that point. 'I mean they're very pleased with what I've done, but they've never offered support or said *That's great* or *Not great.*'

Tom looked up from his scribbling. 'So what you've done,' he thought back through Onyx's earlier stories about motivating herself, 'you've achieved on your own? what you said about fitness and cycling and running?' Onyx nodded. The others, this time, had no comments or questions. Did they sense now was not the time for jokes, that something else was in the air? For a moment there was silence.

Eventually Onyx gave them a little more. 'One of my worst experiences was at the Olympics' she said looking towards Jessie, then Sapphire, then Jade and then Ruby. 'And I was interviewed by the TV, and this guy, who was doing regional stuff, wanted a piece to camera and he started going on about my parents and how excited they must be and then he looked round and said: *Where are they?* And I was the only person out of about 20 people to say, *They're not here.* And he went, *So who have you got here?* And he had this silly grin on his face. And I said, *I haven't got anybody here.* But he wouldn't leave it at that. He said, *So are they watching at home?* And I said, *Well, no, I don't think they are.*'

Onyx stopped, looked down at her hands, fingers locked together on the table. 'I don't think they gave a toss, you know,' she added, before, 'but the press, they just wouldn't leave it alone, they didn't pick up on *that's not a good line of questioning*, they just went on and on and on.'

Jade turned towards Onyx. ‘How did that effect you?’ she asked.

But Onyx was momentarily locked in that moment, ‘...on and on and on...’ she said slowly, as the first tear begun to cloud her vision.

‘Does it bother you?’ Sapphire asked gently leaning slightly closer, her brow furrowing into a frown.

Another tear formed, much quicker this time, and its heaviness traced a journey across Onyx’s cheek. She nodded and, wiping the tear away, said ‘Yeah.’

‘It does bother you,’ Jade said sitting back, recognising, because she too had been in that cauldron, *what* was absent, acknowledging something she’d never experienced. Then, in a show of solidarity she softly said: ‘Well, that’s even more credit to you then, for doing it. Cause I know, personally, there’s no way I could have done what I’ve done without my mum and dad and my sister and not just my family but the network around me. So that’s amazing that you’ve done.’

Ruby joined in: ‘Incredible.’

Jessie didn’t know what to do or say next. Four Olympians sat around a table, one crying, openly. ‘Is this something you still find difficult to talk about?’ she asked. All Onyx could say at that moment was ‘Mmm’ through her tears. More silence filled the space. ‘We won’t go on about it then,’ Jessie reassured. After a quick look towards Tom, she changed the topic.

### **Sapphire**

your mind knows, where you want to go  
but your body is the one that lets you  
and at the end of the day  
you can be like, *I want to go on to the next Olympics*  
but physically, it’s not always the way  
because your body  
can only take  
so much punishment

### **Jade**

Judo’s my life  
However, decisions don’t always go my way  
I’ve learnt you can’t always rely on others

you've got to be self sufficient  
a horrendous injury tomorrow  
– which has happened to a few –  
and they have to start again  
I just didn't want that to be me  
I didn't think *Oh god! I'm going to get injured tomorrow!*  
but I knew, I was smart  
*University?*  
no reason why I couldn't go

it's a habit, your life  
but it's not *just* your life  
it's your social network  
it's your family's social network  
it's what you do together

### **Five women**

*Jade:* I've got 5 children

*Ruby:* I've got big cats

*Jessie:* Do you want to have children?

*Onyx:* Oh I've been asked that!

(Every single day for two weeks in my new job)

Not particularly ... but ...

*Sapphire:* Sorted then!

*Jade:* Win – win

*Onyx:* But I don't have a choice – because of sport –  
don't have the income, no pension, can't get benefits yet

*Jade:* Lot of single mothers on my estate would argue you can!

*Onyx:* My sister included!

*Ruby:* Well done Jade...

see if you can put the other foot in there!

*Jessie:* Some women say its babies or sport

*Sapphire:* I put it off because of sport – bit jealous of the guys  
cause they can have it all

*Ruby, Onyx, Jade:* Yeah!

*Sapphire:* I do want to have kids, but as in...

*Jessie:* ...after...

*Jade:* ...after my sport, definitely  
cause there were only a few in Judo who have kids

*Onyx:* You need a partner who can support you

*Sapphire:* Any rich brothers?

*Ruby:* Definitely definitely want children

Definitely definitely no way now

*Sapphire:* I made plans, want 'em, but not as much as I want to swim

But made a deal with a mate, a backup plan

*Ruby:* And he's prepare to shine?

*Jade:* That's cool!

*Sapphire:* My sperm donor!

*Jade:* Artificial or...?

*Sapphire:* You know, he said:

*I'll even shove it in there for you*

*(if you want)*

*Thanks mate,* bit romantic

Then, just when I got a new boyfriend, he phoned:

*What about our deal?*

I go, *Weeeeell, hang in there*

And I checked him out

he's still got all his own hair, gone grey,

good taste in clothes

I know he'll look after me

and ... a better shopper than me

*Jade:* Is he gay?

*Sapphire:* Minor detail, I've got my plans, know I'm OK  
go it alone – if I have to

*Jade:* I got a man in place just need time  
to get him warm to the idea

*Sapphire:* You've got to get yours warmed up?

*Jade:* Yeah!

He's younger than me, not quite at that stage  
so I've got to convince him it's a good idea

### **Where we find ourselves today**

*Sapphire:* I went a little bit further than I thought  
- I'm doing OK -

And I went swimming this morning

*Jessie:* Well, now you've stopped competing  
you're allowed to enjoy swimming!

*Jade:* What! At five o'clock in the morning?

*Jessie:* Yeah, I run at five, its quiet, lovely, go any time you like

*Ruby:* You're a looney!

*Onyx:* I was on the river at five this morning  
in a different boat

*Jade:* I was in my bed!

### **An Ending ... of Sorts**

In a recent documentary about the life and work of influential British artist David Hockney, the artist commented that he had always had a 'problem' with 'perspective' saying he would "do anything I can do to change it" (Wright, 2014). The documentary, which included numerous 'to camera' conversations and interviews with David Hockney talking about his paintings, provided the audience with an understanding about how one comes to see differently, and with an eye of an artist. Likewise, experimental texts like "*Her Telling Her*" can widen the aperture through which we attempt to capture a small portrait of women's lives alongside including our

own research practices. Such a perspective seems critical if we are to challenge the dominant hegemonic masculine stronghold that is evident in professional and Olympic sport. A perspective that, we are led to believe, is the only one in sport, where life revolves around competition, winning and doing whatever it takes to win (Douglas & Carless 2015b).

Our choice to leave this story of these women's lives at this particular juncture is a strategy to remind the reader that lives are in motion, unfixed, fluid and should not be neatly finalised, cemented or summed up (Frank, 2010). In Hockney's terms, there are additional perspectives through which these lives might be known, and the possibilities and potentialities for these women, like the stories about their lives, remain open to multiple interpretations.

We also might say, *for now*, that Sapphire and Onyx are transitioning out of high performance sport, with valued identities intact. Sapphire is enjoying swimming and Onyx being in her boat on the river, both out early in the morning even though the need to train and compete have passed. Ruby and Jade, despite setbacks and hardships, are continuing, in good humour, their sports careers. They all appear to be doing OK: together, in relationship with one another, they have found ways to navigate the cultural pressures of life in elite sport.

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