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Select a page...

Contributors
Visual Communication Concept Explorer
Table of Contents
Electronic Journal of Communication
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Self-Reflection and Our Sporting Lives: Communication Research in the Community of Sport

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Abstract: While the field of sport communication continues to grow, the researchers themselves are often left on the sidelines. This piece argues for more self-reflexive forms of scholarship in sport communication research, including field notes, personal narrative, and autoethnography. Doing so problematizes voice, representation, and the author-subject-reader dynamic by presenting multiple perspectives that more fully represent the sport experience. Self-reflexive practices also enhance scholars' ability to capture the somatic qualities of sport participation and sport communication research in the community of sport. By unpacking examples of self-reflexive research in sport communication literature and discussing what each approach can offer researchers, the essay frames such evocative writing as an ideal way to invite readers into the sport experience.

In most organized sports, there is a clear delineation between the playing field, court, or pitch, and non-playing areas. Coaches take in the action from the sidelines. Spectators and other interested parties observe from the stands. However, in the burgeoning area of sport communication research, much can be gained by widening what is considered to be in the field of inquiry. Sport communication research has thus far branched out in studying many issues, including foci on organizational dynamics, gender, race, and media relations (Kassing, et al., 2004), enabling scholars to tease out a variety of factors that influence communication in the community of sport and the ways sport participation provides new insight

into communication processes. For example, as sport is reflective of larger cultural values (Butterworth, 2005; Cherney, 2003), gender, race, class, and ability impacts the way sport participants construct meanings about their own athletic endeavors (Meân, 2001; Pronger, 1990; Trujillo, 1992; Whitson, 2002). Given this intersection of identity and communication in sport, it makes sense that the gender, race, class, and ability of the sport communication researcher herself impacts her construction of meanings about the sport participation she studies; she is necessarily implicated in her study of sport. Such methodological implications further resonate when considering that many sport researchers began their scholarly journey in the area as sport participants themselves, as lifelong fans and athletes (Sparkes, 1999; Trujillo & Krizek, 1994). In this sense, the "sporting lives" that sport communication researchers study are not just those of other people. T hey are, indeed, our own as well.

While many sport communication researchers would readily admit these implications, this self-reflexive knowledge is not often integrated into the study itself, even as what some call the "narrative turn" or the "autoethnographic turn" has permeated other areas of communication research (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Goodall, 2000; Goodall, 2004). Self-reflexivity in sport communication research, however, can offer invaluable insight into the community of sport. In this essay, I argue that sport communication research can benefit from a reflexive stance on the process of inquiry into sport and from the researcher's personal experience with sport and in the community of sport. I also contend that the ways such concerns are integrated into the writing of a study provide a rich understanding of the community of sport. I explicate three primary manifestations of self-reflexivity in qualitative research: self-reflexive field notes, personal narrative, and autoethnography. For each, I detail the ways in which voice engages the author-subject-reader dynamic. I then discuss challenges facing researchers interested in these genres of writing and future directions for such approaches.

Self-Reflexivity in Field Notes: Communicating In Situ Connections Between Self and Other in the Community of Sport

I first began to realize the necessity of self-reflexivity in my own research on communication among wheelchair rugby players. While conducting participant observations — in which I was both an observer of communication and a participant in team communication (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) — I took copious field notes on their interactions, how they talked, what they talked about, and with whom they talked. As Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) explain, field notes are the written records of what the researcher "observes and learns while participating in the daily rounds of life of others" (p. 1). While such a definition may seem relatively straightforward, the authors also remind us that these observations necessarily include the researcher's own experiences in the field. To leave out personal reactions of what others do and say ignor es the socialization process a researcher goes through as she discovers the significant meanings in a culture and adapts to these in order to continue to do her research. Including reflections about these interactions enables readers to witness this socialization and adaptation *in situ*. Below, I provide an illustration of how this process might be included in a self-reflexive field note.

My father was himself a wheelchair athlete — mostly basketball and road racing. Our relationship was mediated both through our enjoyment of sport as spectators and his efforts to push me into sport participation. I was certainly prepared to talk about my family life to my participants, some of whom knew my now-deceased father through the wheelchair sport equipment business he owned. As I conducted my fieldwork, however, I noticed that my relationship with my father began to take a prominent role in some of my field notes. This role is illustrated in the following excerpt:

Sitting down on the old, pull-out wooden bleachers, I see one kid playing in a wheelchair in the empty court, pushing himself around gleefully, and another, older, probably adolescent kid walking around the outer edges of the empty court in a bored, meandering fashion, kicking at the walls. I was both those

kids when I was younger, attending basketball games that my Dad played in or photographed. I loved sports, but I felt left out as I was not in a chair, unable to fully empathize with what was going on, with the fact that these (mostly) men who would never walk again were playing as best they could in front of a crowd of spectators. I was okay at able-bodied sports, not great, even though I was as competitively-minded as my father. I almost wished, fantasized about being in a wheelchair like my Dad so I could feel included in his group. That adolescent was me. That kid in the chair was me, too, mimicking the athletes I saw on the court, on the sidelines wishing I cou ld join (Lindemann, 2004, p. 23-24).

In immersing myself in the culture of wheelchair rugby athletes, their lingo, pre- and post-game rituals, sideline talk, and on-court displays of athleticism, similarities between the behaviors of athletes' family members and my own experiences growing up with a disabled father emerged. I could not ignore the parallels; they were too powerful an influence on my field observations and subsequent interviews. In drawing out my own experiences as a child on the sidelines of wheelchair sporting events, I began to develop insight into such issues as in-group and out-group status ("I loved sports, but I felt left out as I was not in a chair"), the role of athletics in father-child relationships ("I was okay at able-bodied sports, not great…"), and disability as a dynamic and fluid, rather than static, identity marker ("…mimicking the athletes I saw on the court…"). This exercise, in conjunction with other field not es drawing on memories of my mother and father's relationship, not only enabled me to better understand the ways family members might communicate but gave rise to potential interview questions I might pose to the athletes in this particular study. In short, I was better able to recognize and adapt to the relationships and meanings of disability indicative of this culture. Additionally, I was able to communicate with athletes and their family members with heightened empathy, which may have prompted more honesty and openness in participants' responses to my questions.

Self-reflexive field notes embed connections between personal experience and participants' experience into a larger qualitative study, which implicates particular understandings of voice and the author-subject-reader dynamic. While authors may choose to integrate field note excerpts and interpretations, visually mark field notes as separate from interpretation, or perhaps a combination of these approaches (Emerson et al., 1995; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), self-reflexive field notes transform the researcher from a more-or-less disembodied, infallible voice telling what Van Maanen (1988) calls "realist tales" to a narrator who recounts memories and feelings in the course of doing research. In this genre of writing, however, the participants' meanings, words, and experiences, will ultimately take center stage. The memories and feelings offered by the researcher serve to enhance readers' understandings of participants' communication and to clarify interpretations of participant communication, rather than provide an in-depth explication and analysis of the author's experiences. Readers encountering the incorporation and interpretation of field notes will still expect the author to illuminate participants' communication and how that communication creates, shapes, and maintains participation in the community of sport.

By temporarily shifting focus from an "authoritative" rendering of participants' behavior to the researcher's personal experiences and feelings, these field notes offer an ethical way to represent participants' communication and interaction. Especially in the study of marginalized populations in the community of sport, researchers are able to counter the tendency to either gloss over or exoticize differences. Differences in perspective, surprises in research, and gaffes and mistakes made by the researcher can all be written into the study. Readers can then weigh their own assumptions and expectations with those of the researcher, and consider the ways these assumptions and expectations are confirmed and contradicted by participants, in this case, disabled athletes. The following passage illustrates the ethical utility of self-reflexive field notes to an able-bodied researcher investigating meanings of disability and masculinity in wheelchai r rugby. In it, I am "hanging out" with wheelchair rugby players after a game, and,

Steve offers me a piece of Starburst candy. I take it and thank him, unwrapping the piece quickly.

Watching me intently, Steve says, shaking his head, “Look at that. Do you have any idea how hard that it is for me, something as simple as that? You need to do it like we do it.” Steve illustrates the way quads have to unwrap Starburst candy: holding the piece on the flat palm of their hand (as flat as they can make it) and only using their mouth. Pretty soon, the team is racing each other to see how fast they can unwrap pieces of candy with our mouths. Jokes abound about the guys’ oral sex “technique” as evidenced in the unwrapping (Lindemann & Cherney, 2008, p. 119).

This passage is not just an example of reflection on the research process. In it, I dispense with any pretense of control or poise, implicitly acknowledging that I was unconscious of the differences in ability between myself and the athletes, admitting that I unwrapped the candy quickly, without thought. I took for granted my ability to do so. This passage allows the audience to consider the ways they themselves might engage in sport activities (and, of course, everyday activities) with little thought to how those differently abled may participate. How often do most of us thoughtlessly engage in activities like unwrapping candy? How often do most of us give these abilities a second thought? When researching communication in the community of sport, certain levels of ability and skill may be taken for granted and assumed to be the norm; this self-reflexive field note questions that assumption. Both able-bodied and disabled readers of this piece can hopefully empathize wi th me, the researcher; able-bodied persons do not usually consider how easy it is for them to do these things, and disabled persons may have encountered able-bodied persons’ understandable ignorance of the effort a simple task often requires for those who are differently abled.

Additionally, my self-reflexivity tempers the traditional masculine communication behaviors offered by the team, as this field note draws attention to the discussion about oral sex, using quotes around the word “technique” to hint at the suspicion with which I view the team communication. As a researcher critically examining performances of gender in wheelchair rugby, I observed many instances of communication that seemed to reify a narrowly constrained, heteronormative masculinity. The candy unwrapping seemed to be another such occasion in which the male athletes attempted to assert their sexual ability and prowess. However, this piece does not condemn this communication; I more or less go along with the unwrapping “contest.” This excerpt, then, also hints at the role communication plays in the players’ socialization on the team. I was afraid to voice protest for fear of being ostracized from the group and ultimately accepted this as a &l dquo;normal” communication pattern among team members; I illustrate my own socialization to team norms. Even though socialization into traditional gender norms is common on sports teams (Sabo & Panepinto, 1990; Whitson, 1990), the process is rendered new in the context of disability and therefore revelatory from the outsider’s perspective from which this passage is written. As such, this form of writing resists the tendency of an able-bodied researcher to enact a gaze critical of other groups or cultures with no regard for his or her own standpoint.

Writing about my self in this culture aided both my understanding of relationships within the culture and how to better conduct my research. While most scholars would likely agree that ethnographers should remain reflexive in their fieldwork, the difference here is that by writing such reflexivity into one’s field notes and incorporating those field notes into the reporting of one’s understandings of participant communication, the *reader* is also privy to this reflexivity. Utilizing field notes to communicate self-reflexive knowledge illustrates the connections between personal experience and participants’ experience in the community of sport. Kassing et al. (2004) note that sport permeates our lives, whether in participation or exposure to everyday media consumption. As the researcher writes her past and present experiences into the research moment, she encourages readers to reflect on these connections.

As it is primarily reportage, albeit self-reflexive, the field note itself offers little in the way of interpretation. The subsequent “unpacking,” in which I explain what this excerpt illustrates about the team and its members, illuminates how self-reflexive field notes maintain the separation between reflection and interpretation. The scene is still framed as an observed phenomenon on which I am reporting. The reader gets bits and pieces of my background, but not a full story of my personal experiences in the community

of sport. This form of self-reflexivity is useful for sport scholars to draw connections between their own lives and those of sport participants, but its constraints do not allow sport scholars to foreground the emotional connection that often develops between fans and the sport experience. Nor does it do much to explicitly evoke emotion on the part of the readers. To pursue that task, sport scholars would do well to enact another form of se lf-reflexive scholarship: personal narrative. I explore this self-reflexive research practice in more detail below.

Communicating Identity in the Community of Sport: Personal Narratives and Social and Cultural Connections

Often an area of focus of performance studies, scholars examining the aesthetics and function of staged and everyday storytelling (Langellier, 1999; Langellier & Peterson, 2004; Park-Fuller, 2000) define the performance of personal narrative as communication that is aesthetically shaped, framed as separate from ordinary talk, and displayed for an audience (Langellier & Peterson, 2004). Personal narratives, broadly defined here as the stories people tell about themselves and their experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Krizek, 2003), are not created in a vacuum. In fact, these stories illustrate that "participation in a culture includes participation in the narratives of that culture, a general understanding of the stock meanings [of a culture] and their relat ionships to each other" (Richardson, 1990, p. 24). Personal narratives are embedded within larger political, social, and cultural discourses, and these stories implicate and invoke these discourses and, indeed, the audience to whom these stories are told (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Krizek, 2003; Langellier, 1999; Park-Fuller, 2000). Further, these stories are performative (Langellier, 1999), meaning that the telling of a personal narrative creates the teller's identity as it is told, rather than simply reflecting a static identity. The story is not outside of the body, it intimately involves the body, its perceptions and lived experience (Langellier, 1999). As such, the telling of personal narratives is necessarily an embodied experience.

Since our identities are shaped or fashioned within larger discourses, the use of personal narrative can greatly inform the sport experience and experiences in the community of sport. Researchers do not leave their identities on the sidelines when investigating communication in the community of sport. Their identities as people, as fans, as researchers, intersect in varying degrees with those of the sport participants and fans being studied. As such, researchers' personal narratives often can illuminate the connections of the author to the audience and participants (Park-Fuller, 2000) by telling a story in which readers can witness the author's identity formation.

What follows are examples of personal narratives written as part of a study the researchers conducted on the closing of two baseball parks, Old Comiskey Park, former home of the Chicago White Sox, and Arlington Stadium, where the Texas Rangers used to play (Trujillo & Krizek, 1994). At the end of an ethnographic study that employed observations of and informal interviews with attendees at the final games at these stadiums, the authors provided their own confessional tales marked as separate from field note exemplars. The first piece, reflecting on the second author's relationship to his father as mediated through baseball, is titled "Goodbye Old Friend: Krizek's Confessional Tale":

> When Old Comiskey closed that autumn day in 1990, I lost something. I lost a very real connection to the feelings a 6-year-old boy has for his father. As I grew older, those feelings changed from a young boy's naive admiration for his perfect dad to an adult's realization that his father is human, frail, not perfect, and, in the end, mortal. But in Old Comiskey, my father was perfect, he was immortal, and I always wanted to remember him as he existed for that 6-year-old boy inside that park (Trujillo & Krizek, 1994, p. 317).

The second personal narrative, told by the first author, Nick Trujillo, details his experience pitching for a college team, the reasons he quit the team and, for a long time, avoided baseball altogether:

> Although it is too melodramatic to say that I have been "born again" through this study, I do believe that it has helped me — more than any "fantasy camp" or "senior league" could help me — to again enjoy the game that meant so much to me in my youth and, more importantly, to again define myself through baseball, this time as a researcher and a writer (Trujillo & Krizek, 1994, p. 321).

The two personal narratives from which the above passages are taken are not presented as self-reflexive field note excerpts; while they may have been started in the field or written in part while physically conducting the study, they are presented in the piece as stories separate from the comments gathered in informal interviews. However, the narratives are intimately connected to the research and to readers' ability to transfer knowledge from the experience of the research participants – including the researchers – to their own lives. As with self-reflexive field notes, personal narratives told in the context of doing ethnographic research highlight particular understandings of voice and the author-subject-reader dynamic.

In the first piece, Krizek employs a voice brimming with melancholy as he poignantly reflects on the similarities between himself and the fans who spoke of an emotional connection to Comiskey Park. Krizek's realization that his reasons for attending Old Comiskey's closing are more than scholarly is recounted in his remembrance of his relationship with his father, his desire to hold on to the image of a "perfect" father, forever "immortal" in the stands of Old Comiskey. This father-son relationship is not unusual. Parent-child relationships are often mediated in some degree through sport participation and consumption (Kassing et al., 2004; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). Krizek's personal narrative also implicates the values of traditional masculinity upon which such relationships, familial and friendship, are built. Sport offers a covert intimacy in which men can be close without "acting" close in traditional ways; physical contact and conversation are framed in the sport experience (Swain, 2001). By including a confessional tale prompted by his experiences in the field, Krizek communicates to the reader his identification with the sport, the ballpark, and with the participants in the study. In telling this tale, Krizek also illustrates how the sport experience has shaped and continues to shape his identity. In turn, the reader may be prompted by Krizek's reflection to consider how experiences in the community of sport have shaped her own identity and familial relationships. Krizek's personal narrative provides a "sufficient knowledge base" for readers to determine how they might apply, or *transfer*, the researcher's conclusions to their own lives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 359).

The brevity of self-reflexive field notes moves the reader into the author's experience and quickly back to the more scholarly voice of the ethnographic study. Personal narratives like Krizek's, however, allow the reader to enter the author's emotional landscape. Although he is clearly looking back on his life with his father, he simultaneously embraces and resists his father's infallibility by choosing to fix his memory of his father inside Old Comiskey Park. The performative function of personal narratives, the ways our personal stories create our identities, is evident. In Krizek's narrative, the narrator emerges to the reader as a son still in mourning: mourning the death of his father, mourning the end of their relationship as admiring son and "perfect father," and mourning his realization that his father was, as we all are, "frail" and "mortal." This identity is *created* in its telling, and e vokes the way our participation in the community of sport creates who we are and how we think of ourselves.

Trujillo's piece also explores the role sport plays in identity formation through a personal narrative that confesses to the reader a personal benefit of the study as well as his ambivalent attitude toward the subject matter, baseball. Filled with remembered dialogue between him and the coaches who did not often let him pitch and instead gave more opportunities to the struggling scholarship pitchers on the team, Trujillo's tale is one of an outsider. He was a nonscholarship player with talent and potential, yet felt belittled by other players' talk on the team bus regarding "walk-ons." These experiences speak to anyone who did not achieve their expected success in sport, and, indeed, to anyone who might have felt

like an outsider looking in at a party to which they were not invited. Exclusion and self-doubt about one's role on a team are often as much a part of the sport experience as actually playing the game (Pronger, 1990; Whitson, 2002). Unfortunately, ostracism and criticism from one's peers are also usually part of the sport experience, especially among children and young adults attempting to behave according to gendered ideals about how to "be a man" (Pronger, 1990; Whitson, 1990, 2002). Trujillo's piece brings to the forefront these issues and reveals a constellation of implications in sport participation that the study on ballpark closings had previously elided. In each of these narratives, the "sporting life" examined is not just that of a participant attending a baseball game, it is that of the researcher studying those ballpark attendees.

These two pieces enlighten readers about the role of communication in sport and in research about sport. The two passages above engage many aspects of sport participation that Kassing et al. (2004) deem crucial to understanding communication in the community of sport, including its role in family communication, gender identity development, and the ways sport participation influences interpersonal relationships. Just as important for communication scholars, these narratives highlight the role of communication in understanding one's self *through* sport. In the longer narrative from which the above passage is excerpted, Trujillo notes the effect players' talk on the team bus had on his esteem, and the role player-coach communication played in his decision to ultimately quit the team (Trujillo & Krizek, 1994). While a more traditional ethnographic study might focus on just one of the se issues, personal narratives can bring these issues to light in the course of several paragraphs or pages. These personal narratives also implicate the process of inquiry into the community of sport. For example, Krizek comments on the similarities between himself and his interview participants, leading him to better understand others as well as himself (Trujillo & Krizek, 1994). Each piece, then, illustrates the potential of personal narrative to enhance the ways the researcher conducts her study.

Thus far, I have framed self-reflexive field notes and personal narratives as distinct yet overlapping approaches to practicing self reflexivity. Field notes and personal narratives are similar in several ways. Self-reflexive field notes are useful for communicating to readers brief snapshots of the researcher's personal experience in the field and, when unpacked in the context of ethnographic interpretation and analysis, intersections between the author's and participants' personal experiences. Personal narratives are similar in that they recount the researcher's experience. And like field notes, personal narratives may be written in the course of doing ethnographic research, a practice Krizek (2003) labeled the ethnographic excavation of personal narrative. In short, the fieldwork – and participants' narratives collected in that fieldwork – may prompt the researcher to write his or her own personal na rrative because participants' narratives will often intersect with the "primary identities" (Krizek, 2003, p. 147) of the ethnographer (for example, baseball fan, Comiskey Park attendee, or son who experienced the death of his father). This intersection may elicit a narrative on the part of the researcher that contributes additional insight into the event(s) or people being studied.

However, personal narratives are aesthetically shaped in ways different from field notes, sometimes with dialogue, characters, a plot, and a climax, and tell the reader a more-or-less complete story of personal experience, taking care to spell things out clearly for the reader as would any piece of fiction or creative nonfiction. If the reader cannot follow the story, the story may seem like a self-indulgent divergence from the scholarly study of which it is a part. Personal narratives also are different from self-reflexive field notes in that the stories told are vehicles with which to understand the ways identities are shaped. Unlike self-reflexive field notes that maintain the same form as traditional field note excerpts, personal narratives are marked as different from traditional scholarly discourse — sometimes with italics, sometimes with asterisks, or even different headings — and explicitly encourage readers to look beyond traditional scholarly conc eptions of research of the sport experience. The authors' emotions, often considered an "irrational" and therefore superfluous aspect of scholarly research, emerge as an important part of their sport experience.

There may be occasions, however, in which the author is less intent on communicating the whole story intact and instead wishes to convey experiences in the community of sport that are less linear in nature. For example, doing fieldwork or even contemplating a topic may bring back a flood of memories that are not stories, but images, feelings, and other bodily sensations that are best captured in more poetic prose. A researcher may find these experiences parallel or perpendicular to scholarly literature. While personal narrative can certainly be used to interrogate lived experience, I argue that its straightforward storytelling does not fully allow for an interrogation of the gap between lived experience and theory. Researchers may want to paint a picture that is more aesthetically shaped to represent the inner landscape of emotion and memory, even as these strokes come from a scholarly brush. For this task, I argue, the genre of self-reflexive writing called autoethnog raphy is best suited. While its place in ethnographic research has been more or less accepted (Ellingson, 2009), autoethnography's all-encompassing scope makes it difficult to define. Nonetheless, it possesses many characteristics of potential use to the sport communication researcher. I take up the task of defining it and illustrating its utility below, drawing out implications for voice and the author-subject-reader dynamic.

Using Autoethnography to Communicate Embodied Scholarship: Capturing the Somatic Experience of Sport

Autoethnography is defined in numerous ways. It is described as: "research, story, and method" that "displays multiple layers of consciousness" (Ellingson, 2009, p. 63); as "an autobiographical genre of writing and research…that connects the personal to the cultural" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739); and as an experimental type of writing that may seem to some naive and narcissistic, to others liberating, enlightening, and useful for "gaining access to private scenes of social action" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 291). Krizek (2003) takes care to distinguish his approach of using ethnography to excavate personal narrative from what others might term autoethnography or the writing of personal experience without venturing into the field. While I agree that autoethnography connects the perso nal to the cultural, like personal narrative, and may often take the form of a story like personal narrative, I draw out one important characteristic of this self-reflexive genre to differentiate it from personal narrative.

Autoethnography destabilizes relationships: between author and subject, author and audience, and subject and audience. It does this by presenting a less linear, more poetic or lyric narrative, one that uses metaphor and imagery to communicate the lived experience of scholarly inquiry. Sometimes presented in story form, sometimes presented in a "layered" structure in which the author alternates between scholarship and personal experience, autoethnography attempts to "keep both the subject and object (that which is being examined) in simultaneous view" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 16). This approach is different from self-reflexive field notes, whose form keeps them firmly embedded in a more traditional ethnographic voice and ultimately maintains focus on the participants' experiences with a single or circumscribed interpretation of events. Autoethnography is also different from personal narrative. While implicating social, political, and cultural discourses in which it was created, the form of personal narrative maintains the traditional author-reader relationship; the reader is prompted to reflect on her experiences and emotions, but the author's linear story is uninterrupted and maintains the illusion of writing as a stable and untroubled form of representation. Autoethnography attempts a simultaneous focus on both subject and researcher, and as such invites the reader into the co-construction of meanings. This simultaneous focus and active participation on the part of the reader is made possible through the use of metaphor, whereby two dissimilar things are framed as similar, and imagery, which transforms with a lyric or poetic lens ordinary objects and activities. This makes autoethnography particularly useful in capturing experiences not easily observable: bodily sensations, feelings, and emotions. Autoethnography has "the potential to challenge disembodied ways of knowing a nd enhance empathetic forms of understanding by seeing our 'actual worlds' more clearly"; these ways of knowing "are not just about the body; they are told *through* the body" (Sparkes, 2002, p. 100).

As authors attempt to capture their bodily experiences in the community of sport, they illustrate the process of writing by explicitly acknowledging the inability of social science research and writing to fully capture the lived experience. They may do this by interrupting a passage of traditional research writing with a more personal voice, different fonts and line breaks, and metaphors and repetition designed to highlight linguistic (in)capabilities in expressing particular experiences, memories, or feelings. In other words, the narrative or passage (as not all instances of autoethnography are narrative) is presented not only as a finished, polished product (as with the published telling of personal narratives) but as a dynamic and fluid mode of representation. Certainly, autoethnographies should be written well — the skill involved in crafting effective metaphor and imagery requires this — but the simultaneous focus on author and subject in autoethnograp hy requires authors to show the (in)ability of language to capture personal experience and the process of scholarly inquiry. In doing so, autoethnography invites readers to be active participants in the interpretation of the piece. Asserting that autoethnography is an embodied form of writing means more than just using this genre to talk about the body in sport. It also means more than exploring one's emotions during the course of field work. Autoethnography as embodied writing attempts to highlight the gap between scholarship and lived experience.

There are several reasons autoethnography is best suited to capture the experiences of a body in sport and a body in fieldwork. First, an ongoing concern with gender in sport necessitates that we examine the body as site of gender identity formation and of the struggle with gender ideals promulgated through sport. Second, the researcher's gendered identity plays a large part in his or her fieldwork (Ortiz, 2005), and so fieldwork about sport is also a lived experience. Third, attempting to capture the way sport participants embody health and injury is a concern well-suited to the larger agenda of sport communication research. Injuries are not often given more than passing consideration by scholars (Messner, 1992; Sparkes & Smith, 2005), yet sport communication research has a strong relationship to issues of health. While some communication research has focused on sport and u nderstandings of health (Kassing et al., 2004; Sparkes & Smith, 2005), health is still an under-studied intersection to which an autoethnographic approach can lend a critical lens.Health scholars advocate an integration of the body into scholarly considerations of health (Babrow, Kline, & Rawlins, 2005; Harter, Japp, & Beck, 2005). Injuries arising from sport can obviously pose problems for future participation. But for individuals whose self-identities are thoroughly bound up in that participation, injuries that impede or prevent participation can be devastating (Sparkes, 1999; Sparkes & Smith, 2002). Autoethnography, simultaneously foregrounding multiple perspectives through a writing style that is both narrative and poetic, can help scholars understand t he body in pain "as both intimate and alien, and self and other" (Sparkes, 1999, p. 53). The separation of body from self that often occurs when an athlete deals with pain and injury can have serious consequences, as a person may push him or herself to drugs or psychological trauma in order to get the body to perform again (Messner, 1992). Autoethnography, then, can be useful in achieving what Sparkes (2002) terms the "emancipatory moments in which powerful insights into the lived experiences of others are generated" (p. 96).

I present below an autoethnographic account written by an author who studies sport and is himself physically active in exercise and sport. The author writes about recovering from an injury that interfered with his routine of intense physical exercise:

> [I] entered a gym again after a 5-year break following surgery to my lumbar spine in 1988. As I pushed open the door, a wave of apprehension swept over me. I wanted to walk away. I didn't, and went through the ritual of being shown around by the weights and machines. Moving around the gym I began to feel a bit like when you meet an old friend, or an ex-lover, whom you have parted from on bad terms. You acknowledge each other but little more. Memories of good times gone bad can be too hurtful to resurrect. (Sparkes, 1999, p. 56)

The author uses the metaphor of a relationship gone bad to illustrate the bittersweet feelings of returning

to physical activity after an injury. This enables a reader to get a sense of the author's relationship to his injured body by prompting identification with the emotions expressed in the piece: most of us have been through a relationship break-up and subsequent meeting. The metaphor of the relationship highlights multiple layers of the sport experience simultaneously: the body knowledge acquired through exercise (and, by extension one can imagine, sport participation), the connection one develops with his or her body through physical exercise, and the (in)ability to capture this experience through writing. When the author writes "I began to feel a bit like…" the reader can both readily identify with the relationship of the author's body to the weight machines and, at the same time, acknowledge the lack of confidence the author has ("a bit like") in being able to capture his experience in writing. Writing, then, is shown as a *process* of inquiry, a struggle to represent the sport experience even as it does so with a well-crafted metaphor. In this way, his piece also illustrates the gap between scholarship and lived experience, as written scholarship is not fully able to capture his feelings, emotions, and bodily knowledge of his injury.

The next excerpt illustrates how capturing the somatic experience of sport and physical activity highlights the ways that sport mediates communication within the family:

> My father introduced me to the sport that would dominate much of my junior high school and high school career: running. I was a religious runner in high school, competing in cross country and track and field, but I ultimately started running to satisfy his expectations of me. As I think about the brief time we shared together through sport participation, I am struck by the juxtaposition of my able body next to his disabled body. Since we rarely talked about the day he was hurt and barely addressed the difficulties he faced since his accident, these physical activities were some of the few times I felt a connection with him. While our bodies may have been different, it was an activity we performed in similar ways.
>
> The fluorescent street lights hanging over our suburban Detroit neighborhood fizzle on in the autumn dusk. My father rolls down the driveway in his everyday wheelchair. There is nothing aerodynamic or lightweight about his chair, it was not designed to be used in sport activity; it is simply the only wheelchair he owns. This is the beginning of his workout program after years of trying other hobbies. He found that he wasn't good in wheelchair basketball and, since he was never one to "sit" on the bench, he became the team photographer. Perhaps he believes road racing may finally provide him that transformative experience about which many of his disabled friends and physical therapists spoke.
>
> So, he rolls off into the tree-lined dusk of our street. I follow, having been convinced by him to give jogging a try. I focus on his shadow, appearing and disappearing as we pass under each street light. I focus on my breathing: in, step, step, out, in, step, step, out. He compliments me on the way I have aligned my breathing with the rhythm of my strides. I seem to find the rhythm naturally, adjusting my stride to each push of his wheels. I feel that I can go faster, but I don't want to pass him and embarrass him. After all, I am running to be closer to him (Lindemann, 2006, p. 12).

While writing *about* the body, as I do in this piece, does not necessarily make something an embodied piece of writing, I employ literary devices to attempt to capture a fuller scope of the lived experience. In this case, I draw on the imagery of autumn and word repetition to approximate a runner's breathing. The "fizzle" is an onomatopoeia, a word whose sound imitates the object it describes; hearing the street lights "fizzle" on is likely a shared childhood experience of many readers, and using it here enables me to ground the piece in childhood, something necessary to understanding the relationship of father and son. The repetition of "in, step, step, out, in, step, step, out" is particularly important because it serves as the focus of not only a father's compliment to his son (something for which many children may strive, especially when it comes to sport participation) but a son's hesitancy to overtake h is disabled father in the physical activity they are supposed to be sharing. This father-son relationship is complicated, of

course, by the father's injury. The shared activity of running-wheeling also serves a sort of recovery for the father. While I was not privy to many of my father's thoughts and emotions regarding his injury, the autoethnographic excerpt above explores a recovery of a different kind: the recovery, in a sense, of our relationship; physical activities were the only times I felt a connection to him after the motorcycle accident that rendered him paraplegic. The two autoethnographic pieces cited above, employing aesthetic devices like metaphor, imagery, and repetition, attempt to capture the somatic experience of injury, recovery, and, ultimately, the way one relates to others and communicates one's self to others through sport activity.

They also implicate gender. While the first piece could be said to address the ways idealized gender roles might push one to achieve unrealistic notions of what a "fit" body entails, the second piece more explicitly evokes gender in its examination of father-son relationships. The lack of communication about feelings ("we rarely talked about the day he was hurt") and the attempt at intimacy through activities rather than conversation ("these physical activities were some of the few times I felt a connection with him") are both hallmarks of a traditional male-male friendship (Swain, 2001). While more traditional studies of sport can certainly address gender in equally insightful ways, these two excerpts point to the ability of autoethnography to *simultaneously* highlight multiple aspects of the sport experience: health, injury, gender, and sport participation. The narrative form and the aesthetic fashio ning in each help these pieces achieve this. Metaphors, in their comparison of two dissimilar concepts or objects, require the reader to think about each in the course of reading a sentence or phrase (lifting weights and a romantic relationship, or running and father-son relationships). It is easy to imagine how these literary devices also might be employed to capture the somatic experience of, say, being a female football player or a male cheerleader, unique and unusual experiences that would nonetheless be colored by traditional gender notions. Metaphors and imagery will make such experiences more "real" to the reader.

Needless to say, the autoethnographic voice demands certain things from the reader that make the author-subject-reader relationship a unique one. As noted above, autoethnography requires that the reader become an active participant in the construction of knowledge about the phenomenon. Such co-construction is an important characteristic of well-written autoethnography (Denzin, 1997; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Gingrich-Philbrook, 2005), and is encouraged by the literary devices used in the excerpts above. This co-construction of meanings resonates with aspects of the sport experience itself, as participants often come to shared meanings about sport through communication in the consumption of sport (Kassing et al., 2004).

Engaging Self-Reflexive Research in the Community of Sport: Directions for Future Research

Sport is pervasive in our lives, whether or not we participate in it (Kassing et al., 2004). To this end, concerns that self-reflexive studies of sport are impossible if one is not an athlete or regular participant in the community of sport can be put to rest. One's experience as a researcher in the field, as illustrated in some of the above exemplars, is fair "game" for reflexive considerations of sport communication, just as sport participants also might effectively study their own experiences in sport. This approach can enlighten readers on communication issues in three distinct ways. The first is that by examining one's role as a sport participant, a researcher can shed light on the ways communication shapes identity in the sport context (Sparkes, 1999; Trujillo & Krizek, 1994). Second, self-reflexive research can illuminate the ways personal rev elations and experiences influence communication with research participants (Lindemann, 2004; Lindemann & Cherney, 2008). Finally, this approach, especially personal narrative and autoethnography, can communicate to the reader the difficulty of written scholarship to capture the somatic experience of sport. Below, I outline some challenges facing researchers employing self-reflexive research before pointing to future directions for research.

Challenges of Self-Reflexive Research

Sport communication researchers utilizing self-reflexive research methods, especially personal narrative and autoethnography, will likely face several challenges. Employing imagery, metaphor, and a heightened sense of language in one's research is not easy. Honing one's writing skills can be done by reading popular creative nonfiction and sports writing in addition to taking a class in creative nonfiction (Goodall, 2000; Goodall, 2008). Scholars also may worry that personal narratives and autoethnographies present one narrow view of the sport experience. The assumptions undergirding these writing genres, however, acknowledge the inherent partiality of any research endeavor and an inability to tell a complete or "whole" story (Bloor, 2001; Lather, 1993). Indeed, experiences of sport activity are not monolithic or even consistent across the same a ctivities. Gender, ability, ethnicity, and other factors mediate the sport experience for participants (Ashton-Shaeffer, Gibson, Autry, & Hanson, 2001; Kassing et al., 2004). By acknowledging the partiality of experiential "truths," these forms of writing, especially autoethnography, provide room for readers to recognize the multifaceted nature of sport experience.

Future Directions for Self-Reflexive Research in the Community of Sport

As hinted above, self-reflexive research can be helpful in examining difficult-to-access aspects of injury and recovery. Traditional masculine ideologies that pervade sport activity often serve to separate the body from the self. Messner (1992) claims that this separation fosters a utilitarian attitude toward the body and teaches men and women to treat the body simply as a tool to accomplish a goal. This traditionally masculine stance of "toughness," of "no pain, no gain," is dangerous: it can often prompt participants to injure their bodies and be in denial of pain. Further, it teaches men and women not to talk about their bodies in any way that indicates weakness or vulnerability (Bordo, 1999; Messner, 1992; Sparkes, 1999; Whitson, 1990). If sport participants are taught not to share these experiences, especially g iven sport's pervasive masculine ideology that shuts down any talk of vulnerability, how are these experiences to be gathered and analyzed? The telling (orally or written) of personal narratives as therapeutic practice holds much promise in breaking down these walls. Personal narratives are used to not only assess recovery from injury (Sparkes & Smith, 2002) and illness (Park-Fuller, 1995) but also to foster understanding of self and other in the process (Babrow, Kline, & Rawlins, 2005; Langellier & Peterson, 2004; Park-Fuller, 1995, 2000).

Self-reflexive research serves an important ethical function in qualitative inquiry into the community of sport and into the experiences of groups who exist on the borders of this community. Sport participation offers significant health benefits, but marginalized populations who want to take part in sport activities may find themselves unable to fully experience all the positive aspects of sport. Some may experience exclusion or discrimination based on ability (Ashton-Shaeffer, et al., 2001; Cherney, 2003; Lindemann, 2006), gender (Kassing, et al., 2004; Messner, 1992; Whitson, 2002), or sexual orientation (Pronger, 1990). Participation for some can be therapeutic, as with disabled athletes who may gain increased physical mobility and strength, self-confidence, and feel ings of camaraderie and support through sport (Ashton-Shaeffer, et al., 2001; Lindemann, 2006; Lindemann & Cherney, 2008). Such experiences, then, warrant careful attention. For researchers who are not members of these marginalized populations, self-reflexive research practices offer an ethical way to acknowledge one's standpoint and resist any tendencies to exoticize differences, to ignore the role these differences play in the sport experience, or to stereotype participants based on certain characteristics. Importantly, writing such realizations into one's study allows readers to recognize the ways that they themselves might judge, discriminate, or ignore participants not fully part of mainstream sport participation.

Utilizing self-reflexive research methods also may offer insight into sport activities whose participants may be few in numbers or whose meaning-making processes may be too difficult to access — like skydiving,

bungee jumping, and yoga. While one might not classify yoga as a sport, and may refer to skydiving and bungee jumping as “extreme” sports outside the purview of sport communication research, these physical activities are certainly popular enough to warrant scholarly attention (Bruner, 1996; Lindemann, 2003). Physical activities like these, and presumably other “extreme sports,” seem to require a different sort of inquiry into the somatic experience. Whether because they are based in a spiritual practice or come with an intense adrenaline rush, these sports may have personal meanings not easily accessed without at least some degree of self-reflexive writing. Just as a sports writ er might be expected to try surfing when writing an article about it, sport communication can greatly benefit from such first-person accounts of unusual solo activities that are otherwise difficult to observe.

Researchers investigating communication in the community of sport may find it useful to not only practice self-reflexivity in their own study but to encourage this self-reflexivity in their participants. Scholars might, then, instruct participants in this genre of writing. Gathering personal narratives of injured athletes has already yielded interesting results, providing readers with insight into the ways athletes rationalize “playing through the pain” and even the use of performance enhancing drugs to allow them to do so (Messner, 1992). But prompting participants to produce more aesthetically shaped narratives — asking participants to use metaphors or talk about images — can engender a different sort of insight, personal experience written in a way that raises questions and resists closure. Again, this aesthetic shaping highlights the myriad ways the sport experience is gendered and the ways sport is embodied. It is precisely with this issue of representation of communication in sport that communication scholars can embrace a new direction in sport research, adding another dimension to considerations of health and gender.

Self-reflexive field notes, personal narratives, and autoethnography all have the potential to contribute to the already burgeoning area of sport communication research. This potential lies in the ability of each to cover a wide range of experiences in unique and innovative ways. Such work may require scholars and readers to re-envision research writing. However, the rewards sport scholars will derive from such studies promise to widen the playing field of communication and sport research by putting more players into the game.

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