

1 A Creative Writing Case Study of Gender-Based Violence in Coach Education: Stacey's Story

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4 **Abstract**

5 Creative nonfiction writing is the literary technique employed in this article to explore insights  
6 and assist our understanding of an “alleged” sexual assault in a sport coach education  
7 environment. Creative nonfiction employs various narrative tools: characters, setting, figurative  
8 language, sequences of events, plot, sub-plot, and dialogue, designed to render the sensitive and  
9 controversial elements of sexual assault significant. Readers are, therefore, invited to engage  
10 with *Stacey’s Story* and reflect on the actions of both the perpetrator(s) and the victim. While  
11 there are risks associated with the sharing of stories, especially those which are considered  
12 dangerous, it is envisaged that *Stacey’s Story* will be viewed as an opportunity to develop more  
13 critical responses and advance our understanding of gender-based violence in sport.

14 *Keywords:* sexual assault, abuse, controversial and sensitive issues, sport, coach  
15 education, narrative

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17 Story

18 The terminology used by scholars when referring to various forms of sexual harassment,  
19 violence and assault in both the European Member States, and the United States of America  
20 (USA), in and beyond sport contexts, varies considerably (Mergaert, Arnaut, Vertommen, &  
21 Lang, 2016). In terms of consistency therefore, we accept the European Commission’s Proposal  
22 for Strategic Actions on Gender Equality in Sport’s position, by adopting “gender-based  
23 violence” as a proposition to capture any unwanted “sexual act” committed by a perpetrator.  
24 According to Mergaert et al. (2016) gender-based violence is defined in these terms:

25 Violence directed against a person because of that person’s gender (including gender  
26 identity/expression) *or* as violence that affects persons of a particular gender

27           disproportionality...sexual violence (including rape, sexual assault, abuse and  
28           harassment) are considered a form of gender-based violence. (p. 2)

29           It is widely considered that gender-based violence occurs across all sports and at all  
30 levels, but deliberate and targeted behavior is especially prevalent at the elite/professional ranks  
31 (Brackenridge & Fasting, 2008; Caudwell, 2017, Fisher & Anders, 2019). In the USA for  
32 example, the sexual abuse<sup>1</sup> of (mostly) female athletes, eventually lead to the prosecution and  
33 criminal conviction of medical professional Larry Nassar, at the time, the team doctor for USA  
34 gymnastics. The case of Larry Nassar acts as a stark illustration of both the physical and  
35 psychological suffering which can occur at the hands of a sexual predator (Fisher & Anders,  
36 2019). It also reminds us that there is no “typical” profile of a sexual abuser, and sexual offenses  
37 vitiated by force, or the fear of force, can be perpetrated by individuals who typically rely on  
38 upholding the highest levels of morality, trust and care (e.g., medical professionals). Similar to  
39 the medical profession, sporting environments are also distinctive, in the sense that legitimate  
40 physical touching can take place between the coach and the athlete, and there is no doubt, that  
41 the spaces in which sport coaches inhabit are nested by complex social, political, historical,  
42 cultural and gendered discourses (Fisher & Anders, 2019). Sporting environments, therefore,  
43 provide a unique sociocultural context that offers the potential for gender-based violence to take  
44 place (Douglas & Carless, 2009).

45           Theorization beyond sport reveals instances of gender-based violence occurring in both  
46 university education settings and the workplace (Everbach, 2018; Phipps & Young, 2015). For  
47 instance, gender-based violence is reported to permeate through universities’ sport and “lad”

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<sup>1</sup> To trick, force or coerce a person into any sexual activity the person does not want, or is not sufficiently mature to consent to.

48 drinking cultures (Phipps & Young, 2015). Heavy drinking is considered an integral element of  
49 university life and concerns have been raised about the potential violence, threats, and associated  
50 risks that women face when entering historically hegemonic “masculine” domains (Rogan,  
51 Piacentini, & Szmigin, 2016). Online forums such as Uni Lad and the Lad Bible are reported to  
52 contribute to these sexual discourses and “raunch culture” (Rogan et al., 2016), with online  
53 content, such as the example below serving as a disturbing illustration:

54         If the girl you’ve taken for a drink ... won’t ‘spread for your head’, think about this  
55         mathematical statistic: 85 per cent of rape cases go unreported. That seems to be fairly  
56         good odds. Uni Lad does not condone rape without saying ‘surprise’ (Cited in Phipps &  
57         Young 2015; and in Caudwell, 2017, p. 69).

58         With this in mind, it is perhaps no surprise that the #MeToo movement, which helps to  
59         support those who have suffered gender-based violence has been formed (MeToo, 2018).  
60         (Brackenridge & Fasting, 2005; Owton, 2016). Nonetheless, achieving diversity in male-  
61         dominated industries remains an enduring challenge. It is well established that due to the  
62         ideological and cultural centrality of sport, not to mention the dominant masculine discourses  
63         and power relations which permeate their way across regulatory sporting bodies, any substantive  
64         shift in attitudes and inequalities towards women remains elusive (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân,  
65         2016). Within the United Kingdom (UK) formal coach education is framed as a predominantly  
66         male-dominated preserve, where women continue to present and negotiate their gendered  
67         identities along a path of both acceptance and resistance (Norman, Rankin-Wright & Allison,  
68         2018). More recently, coach education has been described as a harsh and uncaring environment  
69         for women (Lewis, Roberts & Andrews, 2017; 2018). However, it is not generally regarded as  
70         fertile terrain for gender-based violence to take place. Saying that, existing research does not

71 portray the coaching profession (in the UK at least) as a particularly positive environment for  
72 underrepresented groups (i.e., women) with reported evidence of bullying, harassment and  
73 intimidation (Norman et al., 2018).

74 In the following pages of this article, we therefore draw on events that allegedly took  
75 place during a formal coach education course in the UK. In doing so, we offer a creative  
76 nonfiction short story, which aims to give voice to the voiceless and the underrepresented. As  
77 such, we are treating the process of research as an act of critical construction rather than  
78 discovery. Ontologically then, our reality is positioned within a political, cultural, historical and  
79 economic context (Mertens, 2008). Critical researchers have an agenda of change, and attempt to  
80 improve the lives and situations of the underrepresented or those of whose affairs are oppressed  
81 (Freire, 1996). To help inform this work we are drawn to the theoretical concept of hegemonic  
82 masculinity (Connell, 1987). Hegemonic masculinity is a concept widely used to identify the  
83 attitudes and practices among men who seek to propagate gender inequality, mostly involving  
84 the use of power as a way to dominate women (Jewkes, Flood & Lang, 2015). Hegemonic  
85 masculinity is thus described as:

86 A set of values, established by men in power that functions to include or exclude, and to  
87 organize society in gender unequal ways. It combines several features: a hierarchy of  
88 masculinities, differential access among men to power (over women), and the interplay  
89 between men's identity, men's ideals, interactions, power, and patriarchy (Jewkes &  
90 Morrell, 2012, p. 40).

91 It is outside the scope of this article to provide a detailed theoretical overview of  
92 hegemonic masculinity, for a review see Jewkes et al. (2015). However, in terms of positioning  
93 hegemonic masculinity in historical sporting terms, its application has been employed in



117 selected secondary sources (not revealed to protect individual identities) and a secondary  
118 synthesis of qualitative data captured during the project. These included: newspaper articles,  
119 written correspondences between an alleged victim of gender-based violence and a national  
120 sporting body, informal conversations with coaches regarding the case, conversations with  
121 women who were the alleged victims of sexual assault, and a copy of a written complaint  
122 alleging gender-based violence that was forwarded to a national sporting organization.

123         Like others, we had a moral and ethical duty to ensure the best possible use of the data  
124 and given the experiences recounted in the story, we offer a “cloak of anonymity” in order to  
125 protect both the worthy and the unworthy (Douglas & Carless, 2009). The writing process  
126 followed a multi-staged, iterative course of drafting, re-drafting, editing and story engineering  
127 (Vickers, 2014). Partial happenings, fragmented memories, and echoes of conversations were  
128 layered against conventional, creative literary writing techniques (Sparkes, 2007). For instance,  
129 we make no assertions that scenes as described actually took place, or that the characters  
130 portrayed actually said what they are reported to have said. All events as described (i.e., physical  
131 spaces, plot, conflict and the composite characters) were captured in our data, however, we have  
132 simplified certain elements into a story telling narrative, designed to portray an alternative  
133 picture of hegemonic masculinity in coach education. Thus while certain encounters and  
134 character development in this story have been imagined, that events in this story occurred as  
135 described is not in doubt, the information presented is based on our own existing research (Finley  
136 & Finley, 1999). Significantly, we have deliberately chosen to adopt some creative license by  
137 mixing up the language features, metaphors, and embellishing or exaggerating the thread of our  
138 narrative (Bachelard, 1964; Vickers, 2014). Our aim here, was to not to retell “life as lived”  
139 (Finley & Finley, 1999, p. 318), but to create a story that was useful in raising important

140 questions, and by weaving the empirical, historical, imaginative and reflective, create a text that  
141 allows us to know more about those who we choose to write about (Finley & Finley, 1999). In  
142 this sense, the use of narrative in scholarly work is not new. Academics have made important  
143 contributions to often complex and controversial topics by synthesizing existing works of fiction,  
144 by shaping their own, or by adopting the tradecraft of fictional writing to allow nonfiction to  
145 breath (e.g., Beames & Pike, 2008; Brackenbridge & Fasting, 2005; Douglas & Carless, 2009;  
146 Dzikus, 2012; Pelias, 2004). Researchers adopting this genre create vicarious versions of reality  
147 inviting the reader to inhabit the experiences of both the individual and the unique (Vickers,  
148 2014). Creative nonfiction captures what Gilbourne and Richardson (2006) refer to as moments,  
149 offering instants obtained from countless techniques of fiction (e.g., contextualized vernacular  
150 language, composite characters, dialogue, metaphor, allusions, flashbacks and flash forwards,  
151 tone shifts and so on) to communicate considerations, results and key findings in compelling and  
152 emotionally vibrant ways (Smith, 2013).

153         Ultimately, the implementation of creative nonfiction in academic terms is only  
154 warranted “when employed in the service of a legitimate research purpose. That purpose is the  
155 generation of a conversation about important educational questions” (Barone, 1997, p. 223), or,  
156 in our case, the pursuit of emotional truth or descriptions of unwanted sexual attention. More  
157 recently, Carless, Sparkes, Douglas and Cooke (2014) have offered the following criteria for  
158 judging the quality of creative literary fiction: is the topic under scrutiny timely, significant and  
159 interesting? Does it contribute practically and methodologically to our understanding of social  
160 life? Does the study achieve its primary goals? Does the work embody a sense of lived  
161 experience? Does the work generate new questions? Do the stories hang together? Do they invite  
162 an interpretive response from the reader? Are they credible and do they work? Does the work

163 resonate at an intellectual and emotional level? With these thoughts in mind the primary goals of  
164 this article were to (a) show the emotional truth and effects of gender-based violence within a  
165 coach education setting, and (b) illustrate the potential for creative nonfiction as a literary tool to  
166 enable readers to understand an incident of gender-based violence from the perspective of the  
167 victim. What follows is Stacey's story, however, we warn readers that the story does contain  
168 some explicit sexual language and a bar scene that some readers may find distressing.

### 169 **The Location**

170           The Academy for Coaching Leadership and Excellence (ACLE)

### 171 **The Time**

172           Several years ago

### 173 **The Characters<sup>2</sup>**

174           Stacey—Female coach.

175           Tony—Ex-professional male athlete and coach.

176           Steve—Male coach and ex-police officer.

177           Gavin—Male coach education tutor.

### 178 **Stacey's Story**

179           I didn't open the letter, not straight away. Instead I placed it on the kitchen table and  
180 stared at the crisp, white looking envelope. I knew straight away who it was from. The  
181 distinctive logo, courtesy of the organization's franking machine was immediately recognisable.  
182 The cause of my hesitancy lies with the decision, hitherto unknown, buried deep inside the  
183 envelope. The unknown question: will I be good enough? The longer I stare, the more

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<sup>2</sup> All the characters names described below are pseudonyms.

184 uncomfortable I feel. My stomach tightens, my heart is doing somersaults. It was as though the  
185 envelope was goading me, whispering to me:

186         *Go on, open me...if you dare.*

187         You see, I have been here before. My previous applications—all rejected—not good  
188 enough. In my own mind I had convinced myself that this would be the final time. Never again! I  
189 could do no more. I had put in all the necessary hard work: the endless hours of planning,  
190 coaching in the wind and the rain, the submission of the never-ending paperwork, attendance at  
191 preparation courses, the accumulation of evidence, the completion of formative assessments, and  
192 summative assessments. The tutor feedback though was always the same: *Not enough...not*  
193 *working at a high enough level...perhaps in a two or three years.*

194         If I'm honest, I think it had something to do with me being a woman. I know what you're  
195 thinking. I didn't want to use the gender card, you must believe me when I say that, but some of  
196 my male colleagues were accepted first-time, no questions asked, but then again, they were  
197 former professional athletes. A glance up at the clock that hangs above the kitchen door. I need  
198 to open this thing, otherwise I will be late for work. With my eyes closed and with a deep intake  
199 of breath, I tear open the envelope. I remember my hands were shaking. I don't recall my reasons  
200 for this, but I started reading the letter from the bottom of the page. Beginning with the name of  
201 the signatory, I scanned through the document for information, clues, anything for some  
202 indication. It didn't take long before the text started to filter its way through my senses sending  
203 messages to my brain:

204         *Congratulations...*

205         *Confirm your attendance...*

206         *We look forward to seeing you...*

207           At long last, I had done it. My hard work and efforts had been rewarded.

208           I had been accepted.

209           The journey to the ACLE was largely uneventful and the traffic on the road was kind for  
210 a change. It was the height of mid-summer and the sun was making an impromptu, but welcome  
211 appearance to what had been hitherto a very wet August. On arrival, I was in complete awe of  
212 the surroundings. The grounds were manicured with immaculate lawns as far as the eye could  
213 see; herbaceous borders were ablaze with an abundance of colour; further back, evergreens  
214 competed for space with the sycamores and the cherry blossoms; together their expansive  
215 canopies cascaded an intricate matrix of temporal patterns onto the lush green turf. The spectrum  
216 of organic colour was in contrast to the white facade belonging to the Georgian mansion style  
217 hotel, which loomed impressively at the end of the expansive driveway. It was eerily quiet, the  
218 only sound being the crunch of the gravel resonating against the tires of my car. I complied with  
219 the speed limit and followed the signs to: guest parking.

220           After checking in, unpacking and a quick change of clothes, it was time for the first  
221 meeting: welcome and general introduction. I found the meeting room with ease, and as I stood  
222 in the doorway my initial impression was one of fear and trepidation. Professional athletes both  
223 past and present were helping themselves to the complimentary coffee or mingling with  
224 members of the tutor team. I seem to remember there was a lot of handshaking, back-slapping,  
225 good humour and laughter. From a distance it appeared as though everyone knew one another;  
226 familiar, comfortable, and at ease in one another's company. In contrast, I felt like an imposter; it  
227 looked as though a squad mentality was already forming. I felt like an outsider: *I looked like an*  
228 *outsider.*

229           The room reeked of professionalism and superiority. On the walls large plasma screens  
230 were projecting images of community coaches working with younger athletes followed by  
231 professional coaches working with the National team. Classical music accompanied the video  
232 montages creating a relaxed, sedate background atmosphere. Name badges, complimentary  
233 training uniforms and resource materials were stacked neatly on a large wooden table. No  
234 expense had been spared. I recognised some of the other coaches in the room. They looked lean  
235 and athletic. Wearing training uniforms with their organizational logo or expensive designer  
236 clothing, they appeared somewhat incongruous when compared to the other coaches or the  
237 course tutors who cut a much fuller figure around the mid-riff. Thinking back, there were  
238 probably more tutors on the course than actual coaches. Over the week, I think we had probably  
239 15 or 20 tutors, all male. They clearly didn't expect any women to apply, as all the pre-course  
240 literature adopted the pronoun: *he*.

241           The course itself was both physically and mentally challenging. Early starts, coupled with  
242 late finishes; in the classroom one minute, quickly followed by practical coaching sessions and  
243 then back in the classroom for reflection and analysis. The itinerary was very full on; some days  
244 we were in the classroom until late in the evening. I thought I coped pretty well with the  
245 coaching side of things, but I was a little disappointed to be constantly referred to as a *fella* or a  
246 *lad* and when it was my turn to coach the course tutors did nothing to stop *some* of the other  
247 coaches fooling around. I was made to look foolish on a number of occasions, and whilst I  
248 respected their status as former professional athletes, I did wonder whether they could show me a  
249 little more respect, especially Tony, who seemed to take great pleasure and satisfaction when he  
250 messed up parts of my coaching session. On one occasion during a technical practice I overheard  
251 him say: *I'd love to give her one*, and when I turned around he was mimicking a humping action

252 with his hips. It was both juvenile and humiliating. This was in full view of Gavin the lead tutor  
253 but he just smiled and said nothing. There were other occasions where I could sense Tony had  
254 ‘crossed the line’ with the other coaches; pulling down other people’s shorts or crouching down  
255 behind someone in order for someone else to push them over. It started off quite jovial and  
256 playful but after a while, when some others were fatigued how it had the potential to develop into  
257 more destructive violence.

258         To say a drinking culture existed on the course is somewhat of an understatement. After  
259 the first few days it was apparent who the drinkers were. The absence of certain individuals at  
260 breakfast was the first clue. The red eyes, croaky voices, vacating the pitch to throw up or even  
261 in some cases, throwing up at the side of the pitch, was the other. It did leave me wondering how  
262 they coped, especially when we entered the part of the course where we were required to conduct  
263 small episodic coaching sessions. Gavin however employed some creative license to the delivery  
264 timetable, especially when some of the group were so hungover they didn’t even show up. This  
265 did lead to some tension and frustration amongst the group. Thinking back, I guess I was lucky;  
266 as it didn’t affect me, but I did feel sorry for some of the guys who were required to deliver on  
267 the spot sessions with inadequate numbers, or attempt to motivate the make-believe athletes who  
268 were so ill, they could hardly move.

269         Tony was usually the orchestrator of a night out in town, or a late night drinking session  
270 in the hotel bar. To be fair, Gavin did or said nothing to discourage the drinking, and remained  
271 aloof from some of the antics and shenanigans which were going on. You know, the usual stuff:  
272 putting all the drinks on someone else’s room tab, playing drinking games, the odd forfeit here  
273 and there. In the evening it was round after round, and for those guys who didn’t drink or who  
274 were on a tight budget, it was a bit awkward. Plus, when they had consumed a few drinks the

275 language tended to be of a sexual nature, and if I was in the vicinity I noticed how some of the  
276 group looked a little embarrassed, and so I would call it a night. In all honesty, I didn't object to  
277 the early nights as there was enough work for me to get on with; preparation tasks for the  
278 following day, background reading that sort of thing.

279         For the final evening we were booked into the gourmet restaurant, for what was  
280 advertised as a gala dinner but in reality, it wasn't. The pre-course material made reference to the  
281 event and reminded us to pack appropriate smart casual clothing including amongst other things:  
282 *a shirt and tie*. As a rule, I don't normally wear business style clothes, being more content in a  
283 training uniform or a casual pair of jeans, but on this occasion, I was pleased to make an  
284 exception. I had packed my navy blue suit, normally reserved for weddings, interviews or a visit  
285 to the bank manager! I had taken care with my hair and make-up, nothing over the top, but I was  
286 pleased with my appearance. A crisp white blouse and a pair of heeled shoes completed my attire  
287 for the evening. Following the meal, we all decamped into the various bars and lounge areas.  
288 Tony was really going for it, ordering bottles of wine and beer on his American Express card. He  
289 had quite an audience and was seemingly enjoying the attention. He was reliving some anecdotes  
290 from his time as a former professional athlete. It was noticeable how his speech was beginning to  
291 slur and his eyes were becoming glazed. As the time approached eleven, we were asked by the  
292 hotel staff to move into another lounge. It was smaller and contained a number of regal looking  
293 leather chairs and sofas, together with the wooden panelling it looked more like a private  
294 gentleman's club than a hotel lounge. Tony was now ordering another bottle of red wine, some  
295 of the group were calling it a night. He offered me a drink. I told him I would have one glass for  
296 the road. Steve and Gary were sitting opposite. I had enjoyed Steve's company during the course,  
297 but Gary was a bit on the strange side. He was from London and he kept using cockney rhyming

298 slang, which at first was funny, but after a while it started to sound immature and annoying. He  
299 was a bit awkward on the social side. He was a bit too sure of himself and was only happy when  
300 putting others down, making inappropriate lewd comments, or fooling around during my  
301 coaching sessions. When Tony reappeared he was carrying a tray of Jäger bombs, which he  
302 placed on the table before sitting next to me on the sofa. He offered one to me—I refused. He  
303 placed his arm on the back of the sofa, and not for the first time during the course I felt uneasy in  
304 his company. The topic of the conversation was beginning to become a little uncomfortable.  
305 References and innuendos of an explicit sexual nature were becoming more frequent. Tony  
306 laughed as he cracked another derogatory remark about one of his previous conquests, while  
307 staring at my breasts for longer than was necessary. He attempted to top up my drink, however,  
308 this time I reached forward and placed my hand over my glass. He looked angry and offended. I  
309 could tell by the expression etched across his face that he was not used to a woman turning him  
310 down. I remember removing my glass from the table and placing it down by my feet to prevent  
311 him trying again and caught him leaning forward leering at my legs. Steve and Gary who were  
312 sat opposite were trying to send messages on their phones, but with little success. Gary kept  
313 throwing his head back and would fall asleep for short periods, before sitting bolt upright as  
314 though he had experienced an electric shock. Steve then stood up and excused himself, he made  
315 some reference to a python! Which I didn't understand. Gary now asleep was snoring softly. It  
316 was well after midnight and the lounge bar which was now closed was otherwise empty. I had  
317 finished my drink and was reaching for my jacket, which I had draped over the side-arm of the  
318 sofa, when suddenly I felt a hand squeeze my breast. At first I wasn't sure what was happening  
319 but then I felt another hand, this time on the underside of my thigh. I was being pulled, forced  
320 violently onto my back. It was Tony. He was pushing hard against me. My neck was jammed

321 between the intersections of the sofa, and he was trying to force himself on top of me. I could  
322 feel his stubble rubbing against the nape of my neck, it was rough and coarse like sandpaper.  
323 Even though I turned my face in the opposite direction, I could smell his alcohol fuelled breath.  
324 He was trying to kiss me. He pulled my face towards him. His hand was pressing hard against  
325 the inside of my thigh, lifting up my skirt. With his other hand he was trying to pull my legs  
326 apart. My response was ineffective; I just wasn't strong enough. His hand pushed further up my  
327 thigh reaching for my underwear. I struggled. I really did. I tried punching his back, but it was  
328 pointless, he was just too strong. He groped up my skirt and pulled at my underwear, he was  
329 panting heavily, feral—out of control. His watch caught my pubic hair. He placed his fingers  
330 inside me, he was beginning to hurt me...I asked him to stop. I wanted him to stop. Terrified, I  
331 begged for him to stop.

332           He refused. In the end I had no choice, and I give in to the inevitable.

333           The next thing I remember was shouting—lots of shouting. I glanced up and saw Steve  
334 dragging Tony across the room by the scruff of his neck. He threw him hard against the bar and  
335 started grabbing him by the throat. I didn't know at the time, but Steve was an ex-policeman.  
336 Gary now awake, had a look of confusion ingrained across his drunken face as he stared at my  
337 exposed thighs and torn underwear. I pulled my skirt down trying hard to ignore the red  
338 handprints branded onto my skin. I reached for my jacket and raced out of the bar. I rushed back  
339 to my room in a state of shock, confused, and unsure about what to do next. I slammed the door  
340 shut and collapsed to the floor, my body was shaking and I wanted to vomit. I sat with my back  
341 pressed up against the bed with my legs tucked tight into my chin and sobbed and sobbed. Tears  
342 rolled down my face in torrents. I was inconsolable, drowning in a sea of desperation, guilt and  
343 shame. *I was a victim.* That's what they would call me. They would say I brought this on myself,

344 that I encouraged him. For me though, this was not a scar showing competition. *I was a victim.*  
345 Everyone's a victim these days. It's the only way to get your voice heard; use your gender card  
346 that's what they would say, but I didn't want that level of protection—I'm better than that. I want  
347 to feel protected. They would say, you can't say anything to her because she is a victim.

348           A knock at the door.

349           I could hear my name being called, repeated over and over again. It took some time  
350 before I recognised Gavin's voice. He asked if he could speak to me, I agreed. Steve had woken  
351 Gavin and told him what he had witnessed in the bar. Gavin was visibly shocked. I could tell by  
352 the manner in which his voice trembled and the confused expression on his face that he was out  
353 of his depth. He was really apologetic; but he could barely look me in the eye. Steve then  
354 knocked on the door, and asked if I was okay. He said he wanted to stay and offer his support,  
355 but Gavin told him it was not necessary. Steve however was insistent, he got his way in the end,  
356 especially when he mentioned that he was a policeman in a former life. Steve was brilliant; calm,  
357 reassuring, but also pragmatic. He asked me if I wanted to press charges and picked up a  
358 notepad. Gavin's face was a picture when he heard this, he was shitting himself! I told Steve I  
359 wasn't sure, that I needed time to think. Then Gavin reminded both of us that Tony was married,  
360 with three young children. He looked straight at me when he reminded me that Tony was a well-  
361 known former professional athlete and that the press would have a field day if this ever leaked  
362 out. I became upset and angry, especially when Gavin concluded that: I leave the course and go  
363 home, for my own good. I started to cry again, I couldn't understand why I was the one being  
364 asked to leave. By this time Steve was sitting next to me on the bed convincing me that I had  
365 done nothing wrong. He offered me an endless supply of tissues, from a box he had rescued from  
366 the bathroom. He challenged Gavin, again and again, asking him why it was not Tony being the

367 one asked to go home. I recall he gave some pathetic excuse about him not being in a fit state to  
368 drive. I knew this was bullshit and so did Gavin.

369         The following morning, I woke early. I say woke. The truth is that I didn't actually sleep.  
370 My body ached and my mind was racing. I was still reliving the events of the night before. I  
371 spent most of the night crying, staring at the ceiling, thinking about the consequences for both  
372 me and Tony. I blamed myself and I was angry for not putting up a stronger fight. I was angry  
373 because I should have done more. I am not the type of person to run away from things but I  
374 couldn't face going to the restaurant for breakfast. I wasn't hungry, plus I was worried, you  
375 know, just in case I bumped into Tony. The first person I spoke to that morning was Steve.  
376 Thoughtfully he had brought me some pastries from the dining room and checked in to see if I  
377 was okay, but I had no appetite for food. It was his idea that I attend the last classroom session; a  
378 wrap-up before the final departure.

379         The classroom that morning was eerily quiet, the air full of tension. It was such a contrast  
380 to the welcome event only days earlier which was full of laughter and bonhomie. I don't think it  
381 was paranoia on my part, but I got the feeling that word had leaked out, though I couldn't  
382 determine whether the other coaches were supportive of me or not, not that it mattered. Steve  
383 was sitting alongside me; he was the only person who spoke to me that morning. The atmosphere  
384 in the room was awful, it was like a funeral. I was treated like a leper. Then, to my surprise,  
385 Tony suddenly got up out of his seat and casually strolled to the front of the classroom where he  
386 spoke briefly to Gavin who was busy sorting out the course evaluation forms. Deep in  
387 conversation, I remember Gavin turning his back on the group; presumably to mask his facial  
388 expression, but it was obvious from his incessant nodding that whatever was being discussed had

389 his agreement. After a short discussion Gavin placed the evaluation forms back down on the  
390 table and turned off both his computer and projection screen, and cleared his throat.

391 “Listen everyone, can I please have your attention for a second. Last night there was bit  
392 of an incident in the bar, and Tony here would just like to say a few words,” he said.

393 I remember sitting with my head in my hands, in a state of disbelief and embarrassment.  
394 The discomfort was causing my skin to burn up. Heat was radiating from my cheeks, the trickle  
395 of cool, wet tears ineffective. Silently, I was thinking, oh no. Please, no. Not here. Not here, not  
396 in full view of everyone. I wanted to shout out: just leave it, its fine, but the words did not come,  
397 and anyway, it was too late: Tony was already speaking:

398 “Listen *fellas*, last night after most of you had gone to bed, there was a little  
399 misunderstanding in the bar involving myself and Stacey. I’ll be honest, I don’t remember much  
400 as I was pretty wasted, but it turns out I made a bit of a *dick* of myself. I’m not proud of what  
401 happened. I let myself down, and my family down, but above all, I let down the people sitting  
402 here in this room. The people who I have enjoyed working with over the past week. I acted like a  
403 right idiot and I hope you will accept my apology. I really didn’t mean to cause any offence or  
404 upset anyone.”

405 To my complete astonishment, the room then exploded into a round of spontaneous  
406 applause. To add to my sense of incredulity someone even managed a wolf-whistle. At first,  
407 Tony looked embarrassed and uneasy with the adulation, but then he started to receive the  
408 applause with acclaim, even managing a modest wave to his adoring audience, it was as though  
409 he had just been presented with an award. He even managed a nod and a subtle wink in my  
410 direction. I was flabbergasted, speechless, hurt and angry. He was being treated like a hero. He  
411 didn’t even admit to what he had done. Nobody apart from Steve spoke to me as we departed the



435 violence is that the behavior experienced is not desired and instead is perceived as threatening,  
436 degrading, insulting and offensive. Thus gender-based violence is not only a violation of a  
437 person's body, but of their mind as well, and can lead to a number of debilitating health  
438 outcomes. For instance, previous research has suggested that 31% of sexual assault victims will  
439 display posttraumatic symptoms (Kilpatrick, Edmunds, & Seymour, 1992). Whereas others have  
440 reported that victims of sexual assault develop depressive symptoms (Kucharska, 2017). More  
441 worryingly, being a victim of gender-based violence is reported to be a strong predictor of future  
442 sexual assaults (Gidyez, Coble, Latham & Layman, 1993).

443         Stacey's story reads similarly to findings in Fasting, Brackenridge and Walseth (2007) as  
444 it shows us how Stacey was subjected to a range of humiliating and degrading forms of behavior:  
445 sexual innuendo, jokes of a sexual nature, leering, and unwanted physical sexual attention that  
446 eventually leads to a penetrative sexual assault. Similarly, these actions help to illustrate how  
447 men are able to conform to hegemonic views of masculinity. Of interest here is that these  
448 behaviors occurred during times which could be defined as both formal and social situations. We  
449 know that gender-based violence can be prevalent in a range of settings and is not unique to sport  
450 (for example Rogan et al. (2016) observations about marketing drinking venues in the UK). By  
451 removing herself from the situation or laughing off the jokes rather than confronting or reporting  
452 the behavior, Stacey exhibits a common reaction to such a situation. As the scene in the bar  
453 escalates, Stacey is heard "asking...wanting...[and] begging for him to stop." The story  
454 demonstrates how Tony appears to normalize his behavior and avoids taking responsibility for  
455 his own violence. He doesn't go as far as blame the victim, but the lack of support provided by  
456 Gavin rationalizes a hegemonic masculine view that the event does not need to be taken  
457 seriously. Unfortunately, the gender-based violence entwined within the story is not unique to a

458 sporting setting but is all too familiar within the wider contemporary society (Scott, Crompton &  
459 Lyonette, 2010).

460 Collinson and Collinson (1989) stated that “men’s sexuality and organizational power are  
461 inextricably linked” (p. 107), and unwanted conduct of a sexual nature often reflects an abuse of  
462 power and is primarily about men exercising their power over women (Wilson & Thompson,  
463 2001). In Stacey’s story we show how Tony’s playful behavior during the practical coaching  
464 sessions (i.e., short pulling) has the potential to become violent. Here the story illustrates how  
465 men who do not use “serious violence” can be responsible for condoning less severe forms of  
466 violence in order to avoid group exclusion without losing face. Men often provoke notions of  
467 hegemonic forms of masculinity by presenting notions of an entitlement to women’s bodies. For  
468 instance, when Tony was caught “leering at Stacey’s legs” and when he attempted to “grab her  
469 breasts.”

470 Also captured in the story are references to those individuals in a position of  
471 organizational authority (i.e., Gavin) who did not respond appropriately to the situation or the  
472 seriousness of what took place and acted as a bystander (Fisher & Anders, 2019). This is  
473 juxtaposed against the uncertainty demonstrated by Stacey as to whether to press charges against  
474 Tony or not. The decision of whether to report a sexual assault is a complex one (Hunt et al.,  
475 2010). For instance, it is well established that not all organizations have a transparent policy or  
476 procedure for dealing with potential sexual assault complaints (Hunt et al., 2010). The situation  
477 for Stacey was intensified by the sporting organization’s apparent concern that the alleged  
478 assault may get out and that as the alleged perpetrator was a former professional athlete that the  
479 “press would have a field day.” Readers are, we hope, intrigued by how Stacey was also made to  
480 become part of a conspiracy to protect the honour of the offender should the incident become

481 publicly known (for an example of ideas of good character that arise in sexual assault cases see  
482 Inglis & MacKeogh, 2012). The position adopted by Gavin to offer immediate protection to  
483 Tony is a worryingly common occurrence in sexual assault cases and one which serves as an  
484 illustration of how sporting organizations may need to change and greatly consider training their  
485 workforce on gender-based violence.

486         Interestingly, Steve, who was an ex-policeman, was the only person who seemed to be  
487 aware of the serious nature of what had taken place and by shaping the story in this way may  
488 help to bridge the research-practice divide. Whether gender-based violence training is considered  
489 important enough by organizations to include on coach education programs is debatable (Fasting  
490 & Brackenridge, 2009). What is clear, is that in the UK at least, a recent number of high-profile  
491 sports have seen accusations of alleged gender-based violence appearing in the media (e.g.,  
492 England women’s football, bobsleigh, cycling and canoeing teams) and with the evidence cited  
493 previously from the case of Larry Nassar in the USA, then perhaps further training is needed.  
494 Despite the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Equality Act (2010) in the UK, there are still  
495 examples of inequality in which women still have to prove their worth compared to men (Lewis  
496 et al., 2017; 2018). Young (2010) also argued that the “aspects of a woman’s body most gazed at  
497 and discussed, and in terms of which she herself all too often measures her own worth, are those  
498 which least suggest action – breasts, buttocks, etc.” (p. 14). She goes on to comment that  
499 “contemporary film, advertising, popular literature and periodicals, and countless other media  
500 objectify the female body as sexy, passive flesh...making them desirable.” A point echoed by  
501 Rogan et al. (2016) in relation to marketing in the night time economy. Sport has often been seen  
502 as a functional and positive environment, and the darker side of sport (i.e., sexual exploitation),  
503 is often under researched (Owton, 2016), apart from a few exceptions (e.g., Fasting et al., 2007;

504 Fisher & Anders, 2019; Owton, 2016). According to Brackenridge, Bishopp, Moussalli and Tapp  
505 (2008), although the exact prevalence of sexual abuse in society is difficult to determine, “it is  
506 clear that it occurs across all classes of society and in any context where there is the opportunity  
507 for” (p. 387).

508 Stacey documents how she was “hurt” and felt “upset,” “angry” and as though she “was  
509 the victim.” Further on, she tells the reader that she felt like a “pariah” and “wanted to get out.”  
510 What is also important to note is that, our short story aside, is that although there are  
511 investigations into alleged gender-based violence, by those who may be described as well-known  
512 or in positions of power, little is known about other cases in sport that get pursued which fall  
513 outside the radar of the media because they are not well-known. There appears to be a number of  
514 reasons for this, comprising of people feeling unable to share their stories through being  
515 suppressed or silenced and resistance to acknowledge that sport itself does in fact possess a dark  
516 side (Cense & Brackenridge, 2001).

### 517 **Concluding Thoughts**

518 Within this article, we attempt to provide an alternative picture of hegemonic masculinity  
519 in coach education, whilst also demonstrating how story-telling can be an effective pedagogical  
520 approach in providing a voice to the voiceless (Beames & Pike, 2008). A case is put forward that  
521 coach education and coaching is a unique sociocultural context that offers the potential for  
522 gender-based violence take place (Owton, 2016). The story presented was designed to signify the  
523 sensitive and controversial elements of gender-based violence and assist our understanding of  
524 hegemonic masculinity in a coach education domain.

525 Stacey’s story, we hope, offers a powerful learning vehicle into how she was subjected to  
526 unwanted sexual attention that eventually lead to a sexual assault, before being cajoled to

527 withhold her story. Stacey's story is, therefore, an example of an attempt to cover up gender-  
528 based violence in addition to exposing a highly heteronormative and aggressively masculine  
529 environment. Due to recent sexual abuse scandals in the USA, we are even more aware of the  
530 potential impact of gender-based violence in sporting contexts (e.g., the Larry Nassar scandal).

531         In the context of advancing this debate, we recommend that there is a need to offer  
532 participants who are attending coach education the opportunity to learn more about the potential  
533 for gender-based violence to take place, in order to help keep both athletes and fellow coaches  
534 safe (see Fasting et al., 2007). We believe some exciting, creative opportunities to move this  
535 work forward exist. First, gender transformative programs such as those described in *The Macho*  
536 *Factory* in Sweden offer exciting possibilities (Jewkes et al., 2015). It is outside the scope of this  
537 article to describe *The Macho Factory* in depth, but in short this educational program uses  
538 ethnomethodological material and two short films to illustrate men's violence against women.  
539 Here the aims are to scrutinize accepted accounts of violence towards women and understand  
540 new ways to think and act. We endorse the idea of "forum theatre" as a potential vehicle to make  
541 this happen and will explore possibilities of shaping this work into what Denzin (2017) referred  
542 to as a "performance-centered pedagogy." We are then, in the words of Denzin (2017, p. 14)  
543 pushing back against "racial, sexual, and class boundaries..." and by talking about these  
544 "...painful experiences..." we are framing them as a performance-centered pedagogy as a mode  
545 of developing our understanding of provocative and sensitive topics. From a Freirean perspective  
546 as pedagogues we are trained to respect the architecture and performance in the classroom, and  
547 actively work on opportunities for incorporating different forms of knowledge. What we are  
548 asking is whether this performance event can contribute to broader societal change in hegemonic  
549 masculine domains such as coach education? At the very least, at a discursive level, it offers a

550 pragmatic, preliminary first step about how to raise issues surrounding gender equity and gender-  
551 based violence. As others have stated elsewhere (i.e., Jewkes et al., 2015), such changes will not  
552 happen in a vacuum or in isolation, and so we call on sporting organizations and governing  
553 bodies of sport to take a more comprehensive, longer term view by considering suitable  
554 interventions that lead to the eradication of gender-based violence in sport.

555 **Declaration of Interests Statement**

556 No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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