2

3

4   Vulnerability: Ripples from Reflections on Mental Toughness

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

1   Abstract

2   The aim of this paper is to present a critical reflection on mental toughness using a creative

3   analytic practice. In particular, we move from intra-personal technical reflections to an

4   altogether more inter-personal cultural analysis that (re)considers some of the assumptions

5   that can underpin sport psychology practice. Specifically, in the ripples that extend from

6   these initial technical reflections, we argue that it is important to understand vulnerability,

7   and consider (a) wounded healers, (b) the ideology of individualism, and (c) the survivor bias

8   to help make sense of current thinking and applied practice. Emerging from these ripples are

9   a number of implications (naming elephants, tellability, neoliberalism) from which sport

10   psychologists may reflect upon to enhance their own practice. In making visible the invisible,

11   we conclude that vulnerability can no longer be ignored in sport psychology discourse,

12   research, and practice. Should this story of vulnerability resonate, we encourage you, where

13   appropriate to share this story.

14   Keywords: vulnerability, care, mental toughness, critical reflection, neoliberalism

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

1   Vulnerability: Ripples from Reflections on Mental Toughness

2   I've grown up in my sport with the impression I was meant to be a

3   superhero. You're supposed to be able to handle things. You are in

4   high pressure situations so you are convinced you should be able to

5   handle those situations yourself, so it is hard to get help, it is

6   admitting you have a weakness. (Danvers, n.d)

7   **Introduction**

8   Our education in sport psychology takes its shape not just from what is in textbooks,

9   curriculum, graduate programmes and supervision, but also from what is missing – what we

10   do not see or talk about (cf. Greene, 2006). As Greene remarks, "we learn what topics are to

11   be ignored, treated as secrets, denied, discounted, or examined no longer than you would hold

12   a hot potato…we learn the processes of avoidance, masking, and minimisation, and begin to

13   model them for our colleagues, our clients, our students, and the public." (para 1-2).

14   One concept that if not entirely absent from the applied sport psychology literature,

15   could be described as lurking in the shadows of the discourse surrounding sport psychology,

16   is vulnerability (Uphill, 2014). Despite glimpses of vulnerability in athletes' stories and

17   practitioners' descriptions of, and reflections upon, practice (e.g., Douglas & Carless, 2015;

18   Hemmings, 2015), for the most part vulnerability represents a few lines of a story dominated

19   by the presence of mental toughness (Gucciardi & Gordon, 2011), and resilience (Sarkar &

20   Fletcher, 2014)[1]. Such an observation is supported by a recent bibliometric analysis of

21   literature in sport psychology (Lindahl, Stenling, Lindwall, & Colliander, 2015) and is

22   perhaps indicative of a discipline that fails to invite, or does not easily hear stories of

23   vulnerability (cf. Douglas & Carless, 2015).

1   Critical reflection has been advocated as one strategy that may challenge views that

2 have for some period of time held sway (cf. Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010) and may be helpful

3 in drawing attention to elements of education and practice that have hitherto been

4 marginalised or lack visibility. For Brookfield (1998), critical reflective practice is a process

5 of inquiry in trying to discover, and research, the assumptions that frame how individuals

6 work by seeing practice through four complementary lenses. Brookfield ~~(ibid)~~ contends that

7 these four lenses are (1) their own autobiographies as learners of reflective practice, (2) the

8 lens of learners' eyes, (3) the lens of colleagues' perceptions, and (4) the lens of theoretical,

9 empirical, and philosophical literature.

10   Because there remain relatively few examples of what critical reflection might look

11 like in sport psychology (Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010), this paper attempts to redress this

12 imbalance by specifically drawing together three of Brookfield's four lenses: reflective

13 vignettes (encompassing elements of our own autobiographies) woven together with

14 theoretical and empirical literature to make more visible and explicit, assumptions that

15 hitherto have remained relatively implicit in guiding practice in sport psychology. In not

16 merely constructing, but presenting this tale to colleagues, we are exposing these reflections

17 to the lens of colleagues' perceptions. A little like the participants in Moll, Eakin, Franche

18 and Strike's (2013) study, we have to some extent tested the waters with colleagues, gauging

19 receptivity. Now by further inviting colleagues into this journey, we are helping to unravel

20 the "shroud of silence in which our practice is wrapped" (Brookfield, 1998, p.200).

21 **The Development of "Ripples"**

22   This project started with a mutual desire to extend a reflection on vulnerability

23 (Uphill, 2014). A discussion about the direction the manuscript might take was had, some

24 examples of where vulnerability had arisen in our experiences were identified and so the seed

25 for this paper was sown. Rather than embark on an empirical study, it seemed appropriate [to

1   us], to draw collectively on our practical experiences, written reflections, and extant literature

2   to construct what Strathern (1987) ; cited in Sparkes, 1995) described as a persuasive fiction.

3   More specifically, our [beginning] motivation was to develop a clearer picture about the

4   construct of vulnerability, and create a stimulus for research and debate on this topic. As the

5   seed began to germinate, and intuitive perceptions embraced others' work on vulnerability, so

6   a more critical agenda began to emerge. That is, intra-personal technical reflections upon

7   elements of practice transitioned toward a messier, contextualised account, imbued with a

8   sense of justice and emancipation (cf., Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010; Knowles, Katz, and

9   Gilbourne, 2012). The staging of the vignettes against the developing (written) understanding

10   of the literature around vulnerability, generated conversations between us that illuminated

11   issues of care, humanity and compassion (Mosewich, Crocker, Kowalski, & DeLongis, 2013;

12   Knowles et al., 2012). These shared understandings have in turn, been considered alongside

13   relevant literature, and woven into the written text. As Richardson (2000) notes, writing is a

14   way of knowing, and as drafts have developed [this is the fifth iteration], we have engaged in

15   what could be described as a creative analytic practice (Richardson, 2000); that is the process

16   of [our] knowing and analysis is deeply intertwined with the product of presentation. In

17   presenting this story, we first begin by presenting two vignettes of individual reflections on

18   practice, illustrative of vulnerability. To begin to make sense of those initial reflections we

19   then use literature to locate these reflections in a more nuanced, critical manner. Emerging

20   from these critical reflections are some tentative suggestions about how practitioners might

21   draw upon an understanding of vulnerability in their own practice. Finally, the "ideology of

22   individualism" embedded in a neoliberal discourse is highlighted as one (implicit)

23   assumption that may be guiding and informing much of current practice.

24   **Bulletproof: Reflective Vignette 1**

1   We had probably spent around 20 minutes in the spectator area; the glass providing a

2 view to the swimming pool behind it; bodies gliding smoothly through the water in a

3 rhythmic manner; bodies categorised by lanes according to the speed at which they were

4 swimming. My attention had long been drawn away from the water, fixed now on the words

5 of the head swimming coach. I'd listened attentively as the coach had outlined his

6 philosophy, nodded and smiled my appreciation as the coach remarked how strongly he felt

7 that the mental game was instrumental to successful performance, and then began to explain

8 what he felt would benefit Jeremy [a pseudonym].

9   This meeting was part of a needs assessment for Jeremy, a national age-group

10 swimmer. I'd met Jeremy, his parents, and was now meeting his coach (with the athlete's

11 consent) to understand a little more about the swimming environment, to further develop an

12 understanding of what the characteristics of the psychological work might take with Jeremy.

13 The coach remarked, "My vision would be for Jeremy to have a bulletproof approach to

14 competition. A bomb could go off, and he could still go out and perform." This sense of

15 toughness resonated a little with what Jeremy had mentioned in our earlier meeting; of being

16 'gritty' and maintaining form in the last 10m of a race when his body was screaming at him

17 to stop.

18   Writing some reflective notes on this meeting, I think I was getting what the coach

19 meant in a metaphorical rather than a literal sense, but nevertheless the coach's words

20 repeated themselves in my mind. In interpreting and synthesising this conversation alongside

21 earlier conversations with the athlete, I found myself playing with this idea of a bulletproof

22 athlete. 'What might it mean to be bulletproof? What might some "psychological armour"

23 look like?' And my fictional parrot on the other shoulder chirped back at me, 'What if the

24 ammunition being fired wasn't bullets?' Drawing a late night to a close, my thought process

25 ended with two questions, Sooner or later, do we have to stop building a "mental armour" and

1 simply acknowledge that there will be surprising, unplanned for events that leave ourselves

2 vulnerable? And paradoxically, drawing on literature on prospective coping (Greengrass,

3 2002), if we are able to acknowledge and understand what it is that we are vulnerable to,

4 might we be in a better position to deal effectively with those circumstances?

5 **"Beneath Your Beautiful": Reflective Vignette 2**

6 You've carried on so long,

7 You couldn't stop if you tried it.

8 You've built your wall so high

9 That no one could climb it,

10 But I'm gonna try

11

12 Would you let me see beneath your beautiful?

13 Would you let me see beneath your perfect?

14   The lyrics from Labrinth's (2012) song "beneath your beautiful" resonated poignantly

15 around the car…I banged the wheel in frustration. The music echoing around the car was

16 interspersed with the voice of the athlete with whom, I had just met. I had asked Heather, a

17 17-year-old runner, [pseudonym] to consider some of her strengths. It was the third in a series

18 of conversations that we'd had in helping her to manage her emotional reaction to a recurrent

19 injury, one in which her desire to return to "normal" training and competition was set against

20 the danger of pushing her body too hard and exacerbating the injury, a scenario that had

21 unfolded approximately 18 months earlier. Paraphrasing her, I commented, "What I'm

22 hearing here is an athlete who is conscientious, focussed, determined…As my sentence drew

23 to a close, I noticed her tone of voice had changed in her response, a slight quaking, even

24 sadness had emerged, "That's my problem, I don't know when to stop."

1   This felt like the latch of Johari's window (Luft & Ingham, 1955; cited in Dennison,

2   2009) was being released. Is she going to open up and let me see a piece of her that hitherto

3   had remained hidden? Was the passion for running that had dominated the client's script,

4   bordering on problematic? In the silence that followed, my thoughts turned from attending to

5   the present to thoughts of what might unfold. This felt uncomfortable; it ~~moved~~ scared me.

6   From a narrative that was initially grounded in resilience and toughness emerged an

7   interaction that was imbued with vulnerability, both the client's and my own.

8   **Developing an Understanding of Vulnerability: An Antonym of Resilience?**

9   An initial approach to understanding vulnerability was to consult definitions. The

10   Latin root of vulnerability is `vuln', which means `wound', or `vulnare' meaning `to wound'

11   (Spiers, 2000), and "vulnerable" is used as both ~~as~~ an adjective and noun. As Spiers (2000)

12   describes, the adjective vulnerable is defined as `to be able to be physically or emotionally

13   hurt' and `liable to damage or harm, especially from aggression or attack' (Rogers, 1997, p.

14   65), while the noun vulnerability is defined as the `state or quality of being vulnerable'

15   (Brown, 1993, p. 3605).

16   There are, as Spiers (2000) notes, subtle differences in the use of these two words.

17   The noun suggests a susceptibility to, and possibility of harm, a characteristic associated with

18   epidemiological (Schwarz, Bellinger, & Glass, 2011), and environmental research (Barnett,

19   Lambert, & Fry, 2008) in which individuals or populations may be vulnerable or at risk

20   compared to an average or normal population. The adjective on the other hand, suggests that

21   vulnerability can be considered an experiential state, a feeling of vulnerability that has been

22   highlighted in ethnographic research (Skidmore, 2003) and popularised in Brené Brown's

23   (2012) book "Daring Greatly".

24   These two contrasting notions of vulnerability have been described by Spiers (2000)

25   as emic (experiential state) or etic (externally evaluated risk) perspectives. Each perspective

1   brings with it a certain set of assumptions, and it is worth elaborating on these briefly. An etic

2   perspective defines vulnerability on the basis of genetic, demographic or environmental

3   characteristics that assign individuals or groups a higher risk of being damaged or harmed;

4   the assessment of vulnerability is typically objective, and there exists a tendency to 'blame

5   the victim' rather than the environmental or social structures creating or maintaining the

6   situations in which persons are vulnerable (cf. Demi & Warren, 1995; Spiers, 2000; Stevens,

7   Hall, & Meleis, 1992). An emic perspective in contrast, avoids regarding vulnerability as a

8   consequence of a person's gender, socioeconomic status or genetics for example, but rather

9   sees vulnerability as a facet of lived experience. Indeed, from an emic perspective,

10 vulnerability is universal, that is the potential for harm, and to be vulnerable, is an aspect of

11 the human condition (see Spiers, 2000 for an overview). For us, the value in an emic

12 perspective is an ethical one. That is, we are all human and capable of being vulnerable, and

13 that it is important to be compassionate to ourselves and others who may be experiencing

14 vulnerability, rather than perceive it as a flaw or something about which we should be blamed

15 for.

16   On the one hand, there is a common perception that vulnerability is the antonym of

17 resilience (Folke et al., 2002), that is vulnerability and resilience reside at opposite ends of a

18 bipolar continuum. From this perspective, strategies that have been developed to enhance

19 player resilience could lessen the likelihood of players experiencing vulnerability. Yet, as

20 Andersen (2011) cautioned, a "we all need to be mentally tough" atmosphere may help

21 silence athletes who are struggling (p.82). This latter perspective suggests that interventions

22 designed to enhance resilience may have unintended consequences for athletes who may be

23 experiencing vulnerability. ~~As Priestly (2011) suggests,~~ "When you are told you need to be

24 tough, why show that you are vulnerable?" (~~cited in~~ Gilbourne & Priestly, 2011, p.223).

1   On the other hand, there is a growing acknowledgement that resilience and

2 vulnerability can be considered independent, perhaps complementary constructs (Miller,

3 Osbarh, Boyd, Thomalla, et al., 2010; Newman, Howells, & Fletcher, 2016). From this

4 perspective it's feasible that resilience and vulnerability are co-existing elements of our

5 psychological profile. To illustrate, an athlete who may display all the hallmarks of resilience,

6 may nevertheless experience vulnerability (e.g., associated with addictive behaviours, or

7 career transition). In sum then, although there could well be advantages associated with

8 interventions designed to enhance resilience, there might also be some unintended

9 consequences; one of which could be to help silence athletes who are struggling. Moreover,

10 the extant literature might be considered one-sided in the reporting of interventions. That is,

11 although there is an increasing presence of studies designed to enhance resilience, studies that

12 report interventions designed to help athletes express and manage their vulnerability, are to

13 the authors' best knowledge, absent.

14 **The Ripples from Initial Reflections**

15   **The wounded healer: inter-professional vulnerability.**

16   If from an emic perspective we are all capable of vulnerability, then just as there may

17 be a stigma associated with disclosing vulnerabilities as an athlete, so too are there challenges

18 for psychologists articulating our own concerns. The concept of a wounded healer is not new

19 (cf. Kirmayer, 2003) and describes the ability of a practitioner to draw upon their own

20 wounds and vulnerabilities to facilitate empathic connection with clients in bringing about

21 change. It is likely that many sport psychologists will have experienced some emotional pain

22 or suffering, and therefore have some degree of woundedness. Yet as Zerubavel and

23 O'Dougherty Wright (2012) contend, woundedness lies on a continuum and may have been

24 experienced in the past, or be unfolding in the present (such as with a family member's

1   illness). With an ethical responsibility to notice and address impairment in colleagues, an

2   open dialogue about how our own, a colleague's or supervisee's wounds positively influence

3   or interfere with their work can be threatening. Indeed, there has been a relative silence

4   around the topic of wounded healers in psychology generally (Zerubavel, & O'Dougherty

5   Wright, 2012), and in sport psychology specifically.

6   As Zerubavel and O'Dougherty Wright (2012)ibid) observe, it is likely that more

7   established practitioners can more readily risk being open about their wounds. A rare

8   example in sport psychology is Hemmings' (2015) disclosure of experiencing an episode of

9   depression. If our profession has developed an atmosphere in which it is stigmatizing to

10 acknowledge vulnerability or woundedness (Zerubavel, & O'Dougherty Wright, 2012), then

11 there is a concomitant risk to both ourselves and our clients.

12   It is plausible that supervision sessions provide a safe and secure place in which

13 practitioners can acknowledge, reflect upon and begin to address vulnerability, a scenario that

14 is in accord with both authors' perceptions. Yet such perceptions need to be tempered with

15 evidence that 97% of supervisees in training, intentionally withhold information from their

16 supervisors (Ladany, Hill, Corbutt, & Nutt, 1996) and cite the most common reasons for

17 nondisclosures as negative reactions toward their supervisor (e.g., critical about supervisor's

18 approach), clinical errors and personal issues that the supervisee may or may not consider

19 relevant to supervision (Ladany, et al., 1996). Accordingly, attention to the circumstances

20 that may be associated with the disclosure and management of vulnerability among

21 supervisees and supervisors could perhaps be made more explicit in both academic discourse,

22 and in training and development of applied sport psychology practitioners more specifically.

23 Managing supervisees' anxiety and providing a safe place to engage in role play was

24 associated with the development of supervisees' service-delivery competence (Tod,

25 Marchant, & Andersen, 2007), and the use of supervision or personal therapy for sport

1   psychologists could provide an appropriate context in which to process and reflect on

2   vulnerability (McEwan & Tod, 2015).

3   **Contrasting consequences associated with vulnerability.**

4   Anecdotal evidence, coupled together with a deepening foray into the academic

5   discourse suggests that vulnerability is associated with both adaptive and maladaptive

6   consequences. On the one hand, the experience of vulnerability could sometimes be

7   beneficial. A successful golfer on the European Tour, Eddie Pepperell (2015) describes some

8   value to vulnerability, remarking "You have to always feel vulnerable, have people around

9   you reminding you of your frailties, your insecurities and your weaknesses." In circumstances

10   where athletes may be cosseted or indulged, a sense of vulnerability may bring a healthy dose

11   of perspective. Recognising our vulnerabilities, owning them, perhaps giving them a label

12   (e.g., complacency), may help to understand, and perhaps live with or help manage them

13   more effectively. According to Brown (2012), vulnerability is not weakness; rather being

14   vulnerable requires courage and might be considered a catalyst of innovation, creativity and

15   change.

16   On the other hand, just as there may be difficulties associated with a doctrine of

17   mental toughness, so too are there challenges associated with a culture of vulnerability (see

18   Furedi, 2004). Indeed, Brown (2012) recognises that we need to exercise some caution in

19   what to share and with whom. Perhaps more contentiously, by attending to and highlighting

20   vulnerability we could be implicitly and inadvertently contributing to a therapy culture in

21   which ordinary problems are pathologised (cf. Furedi, 2004).

22   Carse (2006) appears to embrace these contrasting positions, and the etic and emic

23   perspectives of vulnerability more broadly in suggesting that,

24   While our flourishing can be imperilled by our vulnerability, it also

25   requires us to be vulnerable- that is, our flourishing is in crucial ways

1   constituted by vulnerability…flourishing entails the capacity to let

2   down our guard, relax a rigid agenda-driven orientation, take off our

3   armour, and allow ourselves to be 'raw' – exposed in our

4   needfulness, dependency, attachment, and passions. (para 3)

5   Carse (2006) highlights how dominant perspectives on human agency typically

6   emphasise self-sufficiency, control, independence and self-determination. Although there are

7   considerable advantages to this "ideology of individualism" (Kemmelmeier et al., 2003;

8   Nightingale & Cromby, 2001), the myth of an in-control agent "is morally costly, for there is

9   much about the human condition that it obscures, distorts, and effectively denigrates in virtue

10 of its silence about our vulnerabilities" (Carse, 2006, para 7)

11   **Affliction and the in-control agent.**

12   In an environment such as sport that typically celebrates, perhaps accentuates the

13 myth of the in-control agent, admitting to shortcomings, feeling deeply out-of-control or

14 uncertain about the future, may be perceived as costly to individuals (cf. Shore, 2008). At

15 times we too have probably been guilty of joining in the public celebration of healthful

16 vigour, drive, and ebullience and perhaps inadvertently enhancing the isolating impact of

17 suffering (cf., Carse, 2006). If we have found ourselves implicitly colluding with an ideology

18 of individualism (cf. Nightingale, & Cromby, 2001) we are reminded that there is a wider

19 social and political climate that shapes both what is said and unsaid and to whom (Sparkes,

20 2013). Short-lived or acute suffering is less likely to challenge our sense of competency and

21 independence. It may be inconvenient to ask others to drive, or travel by public transport

22 when one breaks a metatarsal for example, but our sense of self-sufficiency and independence

23 are not really threatened in the long-term; there is little need to reach out and risk being

24 exposed and raw.

1   In contrast, sustained disability or weakness, bereavement, or continued thwarting of

2   needs represent circumstances that precipitate isolation from others, and leave us vulnerable

3   and less able to cope alone (cf. Carse, 2006; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). In circumstances

4   where individuals' social networks are fragmented, individuals' lives have acquired an

5   atomised character (cf. Furedi, 2004), and individuals are exposed to a culture that

6   perpetuates the myth of the in-control agent, it is perhaps unsurprising if a sense of

7   vulnerability or affliction is "silently or secretly endured, hidden from view, moved into

8   privatised, sequestered arenas of the home, the clinic, or lonely awareness" (Carse, 2006, para

9   13).

10   The ability to perceive the many things that we share, is compromised by the

11   experience of isolation, and by reinforcing this ideology of individualism we are (a) de-

12   emphasising (at best), and ignoring (at worst) the social and cultural impacts that precipitate

13   and maintain our psychological states, and (b) limiting ourselves to a blinkered and myopic

14   approach to interventions that are typically directed towards individuals (cf. Prillitensky &

15   Prillitensky, 2003). As Ingham, Blissmer, and Wells Davidson (1999) have observed, "far

16   from being politically neutral, the work of many applied sport psychologists unwittingly

17   sustains the system of oppression and exploitation, and focuses on normalizing the

18   individual's responses to such systems as if adjustment and accommodation are the only

19   solutions to distress". (pp. 240-241)

20   **The survivor bias: and why the dog doesn't bark.**

21   Smith (2014) describes the "survivor bias" – as the tendency to focus on the

22   characteristics of 'survivors' or in sport the 'successful' and attribute the characteristics

23   displayed, as reasons for their survivorship or success. Smith draws upon an example of

24   World War 2 planes returning from combat. The planes that returned from combat often had

25   bullet or shrapnel holes in the wings and rear of the plane and the military initially intended

1   to reinforce these areas. By turning attention to those planes that did not make it home (i.e.,

2   those that were hit on the cockpit, engines or fuel tank), these areas were reinforced, a

3   decision which saved many lives. Similarly turning our attention to those athletes who

4   perhaps do not make the pinnacle of their sport and where they are vulnerable to being "hit"

5   may provide the practitioner with enhanced understanding of how to mitigate against such

6   risks.

7   A tendency to see what is compared to what is not available is illustrated in Sir Conan

8   Doyle's book Silver Blaze. Sherlock Holmes, in solving the mystery of the kidnapped race

9   horse focusses on the absence of information (i.e., the absence of a dog barking) rather than

10   the presence of information to conclude that the perpetrator was known to the dog.

11   Collectively, these examples illustrate that (a) we can be guilty of using a distorted or

12   incomplete data set to draw inappropriate conclusions, and (b) focussing on what is not

13   evident (i.e., vulnerability) may help solve puzzles with which we are faced.

14   **Implications**

15   If, as an emic perspective contends we are all vulnerable at times, the ripples that have

16   extended from these initial reflections suggest several themes that practitioner and

17   researchers in sport psychology may wish to consider.

18   **Naming elephants: fear, shame, loss and embarrassment**

19   Whether it is athletes or practitioners, central to the experience of vulnerability seems

20   to be the real or perceived sense of fear, uncertainty, loss, shame or embarrassment that might

21   ensue from speaking out. Gareth Thomas the Welsh international rugby player describes his

22   early hazing experiences as follows, "I didn't sign up to the banter, the casual brutality dealt

23   out to the new boys. The initiation rituals were savage, and refusal to participate was not an

24   option…Madness, but it was my duty to take it, without a murmur. Alcoholic oblivion eased

1 the pain, but the fear remained. It was a tough school, barbaric but somehow acceptable,

2 because it was standard practice" (Thomas & Calvin, 2014, pp. 37). Similarly, the England

3 Rugby Union player, Alex Corbisiero (2016) in an interview with the Guardian newspaper

4 recognised his complicity in a culture of silence

5   "Massively. I should have said: 'I need to rest this injury before it goes too

6   far.' But I pushed myself and kept quiet. There's so much at stake and players

7   soldier on or strap up. But we've reached a point where we need to respect

8   guys who don't play when they're hurt. It takes courage to say you are not

9   right. But the repercussions can be serious. You might play one 'vital' match

10   and end up missing six months. Rugby players are conditioned to exude strength.

11   It is not easy for them to admit frailty in a ferocious professional sport. Even now

12   people will frown if you say you need a rest or can't train in the week. There's still a

13   stigma about it."

14   As sport psychologists we too can be vulnerable to those feelings of fear, shame, or

15 embarrassment. As O'Connor (2001) notes, if we are honest with ourselves, then we will admit

16 that we sometimes are not at our best with clients for reasons of stress or distress; we are,

17 after all, human. O'Connor elaborates that public discussion of personal mistakes we

18 commonly make in our craft is rare…And this is the model we commonly provide our

19 trainees, thereby ensuring an ongoing silence. A supportive, appropriately self-disclosing

20 supervisor can do much for these students, with a model that moves beyond therapeutic

21 technique and focuses on the person of the therapist as the instrument of treatment. A sense

22 of knowing our own pain, fears, and perceived losses can help practitioners empathise with

23 others' vulnerability (cf., Goubert, Craig, Vervoort, Moorley et al., 2005). Managing these

24 vulnerabilities, will we hope, facilitate practitioners' development, and contribute to building

1   relationships with clients that are characterised by trust, honesty and being open about our

2   own uncertainties where appropriate (see Sharp, Hodge, & Danish, 2015).

3   **Tellability and critically reflective spaces**

4   As we begin to consider ourselves how we might make more visible vulnerability in

5   our own and supervisees' practice and ask how we might transform vulnerability to become a

6   catalyst for change as Brown (2012) encourages us, there are no easy answers.

7   If we accept that there are degrees of vulnerability, and varying risks associated with

8   exposure (e.g., directly challenging an employer about practices you perceive as problematic

9   if your income is solely reliant on that performance), then there are perhaps alternative ways

10   in which we might tell those stories. Norrick (2005) describes the notion of "tellability":

11   "some events bear too little significance (for this teller, this setting, these listeners) to reach

12   the lower-bounding threshold of tellability, while others are so intimate (so frightening) that

13   they lie outside the range of the tellable in the current context" (p.327).

14   Toward the lower end of the tellability scale may be the common perception of

15   attempting to preserve a public "face" by pretending everything is fine. Encouraging

16   reflective questions, such as "When have you used 'I'm fine' to preserve a public face, when

17   in fact you were not; What was it about that situation that contributed to your perception that

18   you were unable to share your actual feelings; How might you have gone about sharing what

19   it was that you were feeling in hindsight?" may provide a safe way to tell tales about

20   vulnerability, that are not too threatening.

21   Toward the upper-end of the tellability scale may be some events that are somewhat

22   traumatic and require some deeper considerations about what to share and with whom.

23   Fictive tales such as that by Douglas and Carless (2009), may also provide a way of

24   addressing issues of vulnerability in a way that manages risks associated with disclosure.

1   Similarly, but with less protection, auto-ethnographies (e.g., Triggs & Gilbourne, 2014) may

2   provide a vehicle for articulating the raw, embodied, visceral experience that may often

3   accompany a sense of vulnerability. If we are honest with ourselves, we didn't set out to

4   write this manuscript with a particular 'product' in mind and there remains considerable

5   scope for alternative literary and perhaps performative strategies that may shape our further

6   understanding of vulnerability in sport. Each strategy may help make more visible the

7   vulnerability associated with competing and practicing in sport, and perhaps to reduce the

8   sense of isolation, that might arise from a culture emphasising individualism.

9   **Putting the Critical into the Reflection**

10   The ideology of individualism is perhaps indicative of a broader neoliberal socio-

11   political climate in which individuals are conceived as a set of assets to be managed and

12   maintained and the language of performativity (skills, goals, productivity, effectiveness)

13   infuses dialogue (cf. Sugarman, 2015). Although space precludes a full consideration,

14   according to Sugarman (2015) neoliberalism has managed to make itself invisible by

15   becoming "common sense". Such language and ideology is perhaps imperceptibly embedded

16   in our practices that makes it difficult to be aware of and to critique. From this perspective;

17   we may to some extent unknowingly be colluding with an ideological climate, and to admit

18   our complicity would arguably undermine a credibility forged on value neutrality (Sugarman,

19   2015). Assumptions are made that individuals will achieve success with adequate dedication

20   and resilience whilst ignoring broader social structures such as physical materiality (e.g.,

21   illness and injury), gender, and ethnicity that may affect attainment. Indeed, neoliberalism

22   may enhance the likelihood of performers (perhaps practitioners) being vulnerable to the

23   knowledge and disciplines of others, eroding freedom and choice, and what counts as

24   legitimate practice (see Sugarman, 2015 for a review). To act ethically then, we become

1   "compelled not only to admit that psychology is ideologically laden, but

2   also to ask ourselves whether we are acting ethically in preserving the

3   neoliberal status quo. This entails interrogating neoliberalism, our

4   relationship to it, how it affects what persons are and might become,

5   and whether it is good for human well-being" (Sugarman, 2015, p.115).

6 **Conclusion**

7   Understanding why the dog didn't bark in Silver Blaze, or why athletes or

8 practitioners may be reluctant to talk is not a trivial matter. It is an intellectual short-cut, too

9 easy to attribute this non-disclosure to the stigma an individual may perceive. In a BBC

10 Radio 4 programme, Oldroyd (2010) talked about the anniversary of Robert Enke, the

11 German National footballer's, death. Having lost his 2-year-old daughter to an incurable heart

12 problem some years earlier, the correspondent describes the experience of Robert Enke

13 preceding his suicide – the fear of failure, the fear of making a mistake, his depression, and

14 his fear that, having adopted a little girl, the authorities would take her away if they knew

15 about his condition.

16   Rather than look to direct interventions towards individuals, can we redress this

17 "ideology of individualism" by re-modelling a sports culture in which the acknowledgement

18 of, and permission to express vulnerability is seen as an opportunity to grow and flourish and

19 in so doing minimise the isolated suffering that some athletes [and perhaps practitioners]

20 experience?

21   Citing Fook (2002), Morley (2007) argues, "This capacity for unsettling or

22 destabilizing commonly held or accepted beliefs is potentially one of the most powerful sets

23 of strategies that arise from...critical understanding" (p. 90). Roy (2003), suggests 'that once

24 you see it, you can't unsee it. And once you've seen it, keeping quiet, saying nothing

1 becomes as political an act as speaking out. There's no innocence. Either way, you're

2 accountable' (p. 7). In redressing this absence of vulnerability from the extant literature,

3 "Knowing is not enough…we must do." (cf., McClement & Degner, 2005).

4   Creative analytic practices, can do things to, on, and for people (cf. Smith & Sparkes,

5 2011). In presenting this text to others we hope the article can provide a stimulus that opens

6 dialogue between practitioners, between supervisees and supervisors; that questions about

7 vulnerability and the culture in which vulnerability is embedded are one that are asked.

8 Drawing upon Brown (2012), why is it that "I want to experience your vulnerability but I

9 don't want to be vulnerable?" (p.41). Often others displaying raw truth and openness is

10 incredibly moving and can inspire action, but we're afraid of letting them see it in us (Brown,

11 2012)ibid).

12   Like Fook and Askelund (2007) we hope that this critical reflection can spark a

13 dialogue amongst colleagues that might challenge cultures of silence and individualism. It is

14 our hope that the ripples of this paper extend further. Indicative of our desire to "do", and

15 drawing upon Sparkes (2007), should this "story" resonate with readers, then we hope you

16 will look after it, and when and if needed, share it with others.

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

References

Andersen, M. B. (2011). Who's mental, who's tough and who's both? Mutton constructs
   dressed up as lamb. In D. F. Gucciardi & S. Gordon (Eds.), Mental toughness in
   sport: Developments in theory and research. (pp. 69 - 88). London, England:
   Routledge.

Barnett, J., Lambert, S., & Fry, I. (2008). The hazards of indicators: Insights from the
   Environmental Vulnerability Index. Annals of the Association of American
   Geographers, 98, 102-119.

Brookfield, S. (1998). Critically reflective practice. The Journal of Continuing Education in
   the Health Professions, 18, 197-205.

Brown, B. (2013). Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way
   We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead. London: Penguin.

Brown, L. (1993). The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles (Vol.
   1 and 2). Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Carse, A. L. (2006). Vulnerability, agency, and human flourishing. In, C. Taylor, & R.
   Dell'Oro (Eds), Health and human flourishing: religion, medicine, and moral
   anthropology. [Kindle Version]. Retrieved from: http://www.amazon.co.uk/

Corbisiero, D. (2016). https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2016/may/05/alex-corbisiero-
   rugby-union-england-lions Retrieved, 2nd June 2016.

Conan Doyle, A. (1992). The adventures and memoirs of Sherlock Holmes. Hertfordshire:
   Wordsworth Editions.

Cutter, S. L., Boruff, B. J., & Shirley, W. L. (2003). Social vulnerability to environmental
   hazards. Social Science Quarterly, 84, 242–261.

Danvers, N. (n.d). Performance matters: mental health in elite sport. Retrieved from:
   http://www.mind.org.uk/media/1085139/Mental-Health-and-Elite-Sport.pdf

1   Demi, A. S., & Warren, N. A. (1995) Issues in conducting research with vulnerable families.

2   Western Journal of Nursing Research, 17, 188-202.

3   Dennison, P. (2012). Reflective practice: The enduring influence of Kolb's Experiential

4   Learning Theory. Compass: Journal of Learning and Teaching, 1. Retrieved

5   04/01/2016 from: https://journals.gre.ac.uk/index.php/compass/article/view/12/28

6   Douglas, K., & Carless, D. (2009). Exploring taboo issues in professional sport through a

7   fictional approach. Reflective Practice, 10, 311–323.

8   Douglas K., & Carless, D. (2015). Life story research in sport: Understanding the

9   experiences of elite and professional athletes through narrative. London, England:

10   Routledge.

11   Folke, C. S., Carpenter, S., Elmqvist, L., Gunderson, C., et al. (2002). Resilience and

12   sustainable development: building adaptive capacity in a world of transformation.

13   Scientific Background Paper on Resilience for the process of the World Summit on

14   Sustainable Development. Environmental Advisory Council to the Swedish

15   Government, Stockholm, Sweden. http://era-mx.org/biblio/resilience-sd.pdf

16   Retrieved 28th June, 2016

17   Fook, J., & Askeland, G. A. (2007). Challenges of critical reflection: nothing ventured,

18   nothing gained. Social Work Education, 26, 520-533.

19   Gilbourne, D., & Priestley, D. (2011). Epiphanies and learning: A rejection of performance-

20   based myopia. In D. Gilbourne & M. B. Andersen (Eds.), Critical essays in applied

21   sport psychology (pp. 217-230). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics

22   Goubert, L., Craig, K. D., Vervoort, T., Moorley, S, et al. (2005). Facing others in pain: the

23   effects of empathy. Pain, 118, 285-288.

24   Greene, B. (2006). *What therapists don't talk about and why: Under*standing taboos that hurt

25   us and our clients. Washington, DC: APA. [Kindle Version].

Greenglass, E. (2002). Proactive coping. In E. Frydenberg (Ed.), Beyond coping: Meeting
goals, vision, and challenge (pp. 37-62). London: Oxford University Press.

Gucciardi, D.F., & Gordon, S. (Eds.) (2011). Mental toughness in sport: Developments in
research and theory. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Hemmings, B. (2015). A week in the life of an applied sport psychologist. Sport and Exercise
Psychology Review, 11, 82-88.

Ingham, A. G., Blissmer, B. J., & Wells Davidson, K. (1999). The expendable prolympic
self: Going beyond the boundaries of sociology and psychology of sport. Sociology
of Sport Journal, 16, 236-285.

Kemmelmeier, M. et al. (2003). Individualism, collectivism, and authoritarianism in seven
societies. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 34, 304-322.

Kirmayer, L. (2003). Asklepian dreams: The ethos of the wounded-healer in the clinical
encounter. Transcultural Psychiatry, 40, 248–277.

Knowles, Z., & Gilbourne, D. (2010). Aspiration, inspiration and illustration: Initiating
debate on reflective practice writing. The Sport Psychologist, 24, 504-520.

Knowles, Z., Katz, J., & Gilbourne, D. (2012). Reflective practice within elite consultancy:
Diary extracts and further discussion on a personal and elusive process. The Sport
Psychologist, 26, 454-469.

Labrinth, (2012). Beneath your beautiful (Feat. Emile Sandé). On Our version of events [CD.]
London, UK: Virgin Records.

Ladany, N., Hill, C. E., Corbett, M. M., & Nutt, E. A. (1996). Nature, extent, and importance
of what psychotherapy trainees do not disclose to their supervisors. Journal of
Counseling Psychology, 43, 10–24.

1 Lindahl, J., Stenling, A., Lindwall, M., & Colliander, C. (2015). Trends and knowledge base

2   in sport and exercise psychology research: a bibliometric review study.

3   International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 8, 71-94.

4 McClement, S., & Degner, L. (2005). Knowing is not enough. We must do. [Guest Editorial].

5   Canadian Journal of Nursing Research, 37, 9-12.

6 Mcewan, H. E., & Tod, D. (2015). Learning experiences contributing to service delivery

7   competency in applied psychologists: Lessons for sport psychologists. Journal of

8   Applied Sport Psychology, 27, 79-93.

9 Miller, F., Osbarh, H., Boyd, E., Thomalla, F. et al. (2010). Resilience and vulnerability:

10   complementary or conflicting concepts. Ecology and Society, 3 11 [online]

11   Retrieved, 1st July, 2016: http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol15/iss3/art11/

12 Moll, S., Eakin, J. M., Franche, R-L., & Strike, C. (2013). When health care workers

13   experience mental ill-health: Institutional practices of silence. Qualitative Health

14   Research, 23, 167-179.

15 Morley, C. (2007). Engaging practitioners with critical reflection: Issues and Dilemmas.

16   Reflective Practice, 8, 61-74.

17 Mosewich, A. D., Crocker, P. R. E., Kowalski, K. C., & DeLongsi, A. (2013). Applying self-

18   compassion in sport: An intervention with women athletes. Journal of Sport and

19   Exercise Psychology, 35, 514-524.

20 Newman, H. J. H., Howells, K. L., & Fletcher, D. (2016). The dark side of top level sport: An

21   autobiographic study of depressive experiences in elite sport performers. Frontiers

22   in Psychology, 7, 868.

23 Nightingale, D. J., & Cromby, J. (2001). Critical psychology and the ideology of

24   individualism. Journal of Critical Psychology, Counselling and Psychotherapy, 1,

25   117-128.

Norrick, N. (2005). The dark side of tellability. Narrative Inquiry, 15, 323-343.

O'Connor, M. F. (2001). On the etiology and effective management of professional distress and impairment among psychologists. Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 32, 345-350.

Oldroyd, E. (2010). The pressure to hide depression. Retrieved on 09/12/2015 from http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00vv0dx (Dec, 2015)

Pepperell, E. (2015). Open 2015: Eddie Pepperell - the loneliness & tedium of a pro golfer. Retrieved on 28/09/2015 from: http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/golf/33391487

Prilleltensky, I., & Prilleltensky, O. (2003). Towards a critical health psychology practice. Journal of Health Psychology, 8, 197-210.

Richardson, L. (2000). New writing practices in qualitative research. Sociology of Sport Journal, 17, 5-20.

Rogers A. C. (1997). Vulnerability, health and health care. Journal of Advanced Nursing, 26, 65-72.

Roy, A. (2003). War talk. Cambridge: South End Press.

Sarkar, M., & Fletcher, D. (2014). Psychological resilience in sport performers: a review of stressors and protective factors. Journal of Sports Sciences, 32, 1419-1434.

Schwartz, J., Bellinger, D., & Glass, T. (2011). Expanding the scope of risk assessment: Methods of studying differential vulnerability and susceptibility. American Journal of Public Health, 101, S102-109.

Sharp, L. A., Hodge, K., & Danish, S. (2015). Ultimately it comes down to the relationship. The Sport Psychologist, 29, 358-370.

Shore, C. (2008). Audit culture and illiberal governance: universities and the politics of accountability. Anthropological Theory, 8, 278–298.

1   Skidmore, M. (2003). Darker than midnight: Fear, vulnerability, and terror making in urban

2   Burma (Myanmar). American Ethnologist, 30, 5-21.

3   Smith, B., & Sparkes, A. C. (2011). Exploring multiple responses to a chaos narrative.

4   Health, 15, 38-53.

5   Smith, G. (2014). Standard deviations. London: Duckworth.

6   Sparkes, A. C. (1995). Writing people: Reflections on the dual crises of representation and

7   legitimation in qualitative inquiry. Quest, 47, 158-195.

8   Sparkes, A. C. (2007). Embodiment, academics, and the audit culture: a story seeking

9   consideration. Qualitative Research, 7, 521-550.

10 Sparkes, A. C. (2013). Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health in the era of

11   neoliberalism, audit and New Public Management: understanding the conditions

12   for the (im)possibilities of a new paradigm dialogue. Qualitative Research in Sport,

13   Exercise and Health. DOI:10.1080/2159676X.2013.796493.

14 Spiers, J. (2000). New perspectives on vulnerability using emic and etic approaches. Journal

15   of Advanced Nursing, 31, 715-721.

16 Stevens, P.E., Hall, J.M., & Meleis, A.I. (1992). Examining vulnerability of women clerical

17   workers from five ethnic/ racial groups. Western Journal of Nursing Research, 14,

18   754-774.

19 Strathern, M. (1987). Out of context: The persuasive fictions of anthropology. Current

20   Anthropology, 28, 251-281.

21 Sugarman, J. (2015). Neoliberalism and psychological ethics. Journal of Theoretical and

22   Philosophical Psychology, 35, 103-116.

23 Thomas, G., and Calvin, M. (2014). Proud. London: Ebury Press

1   Tibbert, S. J., Andersen, M. B., & Morris, T. (2015). What a difference a "Mentally

2   Toughening" year makes: The acculturation of a rookie. Psychology of Sport &

3   Exercise, 17, 68-78.

4   Tod, D., Marchant, D., & Andersen, M. (2007). Learning experiences contributing to service

5   delivery competence. The Sport Psychologist, 21, 317-334.

6   Triggs, C., & Gilbourne, D. (2014) 'They never bought me flowers'. Storytelling as a means

7   of critical reflection on applied practice. In Z. Knowles, D. Gilbourne, B. Cropley,

8   & L. Dugdill, (Eds.), Reflective Practice in the Sport and Exercise Sciences:

9   Contemporary Issues (pp. 115-123). London: Routledge

10   Uphill, M. (2014). Reflection on the DSEP Conference 2013: The paradoxical effects of

11   vulnerability. Sport and Exercise Psychology Review, 10, 42-44.

12   Vansteenkiste, M., & Ryan, R. M. (2013). On Psychological Growth and Vulnerability: Basic

13   Psychological Need Satisfaction and Need Frustration as a Unifying Principle.

14   Journal of Psychotherapy Integration, 23, 263-280.

15   Zerubavel, N., & O'Dougherty Wright, M. (2012). The dilemma of the wounded healer.

16   Psychotherapy. 49, 482-491.

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

1

2

3

4   Footnotes

5   1 Both mental toughness and resilience have been the subject of considerable scrutiny in

6   sport. Space precludes a thorough consideration, and thus for reasons of brevity and the

7   purposes of this manuscript, we use the term resilience as a linguistic device that is intended

8   to embrace many of the strengths and limitations characterised by commonly held definitions

9   of resilience and mental toughness.

10