Autoethnography as a critical approach in sport management: Current applications and directions for future research

Joseph N. Cooper [a,*], Robin S. Grenier [b], Charles Macaulay [c]

[a] Department of Educational Leadership, University of Connecticut, 249 Glenbrook Road Unit 3093, Gentry Building 217B, Storrs, CT 06269-3093, United States
[b] Department of Educational Leadership, University of Connecticut, 249 Glenbrook Road Unit 3093, Gentry 240B, Storrs, CT 06269-3093, United States
[c] Department of Educational Leadership, University of Connecticut, 249 Glenbrook Road Unit 3093, Gentry 215 Unit 3093, Storrs, CT 06269-3093, United States

A B S T R A C T

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the value of autoethnography as a qualitative methodology, document the current literature using autoethnographic approaches, and explore the possibilities for future research in the field of sport management. Using a critical lens to counter dominant ideologies that marginalize certain groups of people through the sustainment of existing power structures and inequities, we sought to address the following inquiries: What is autoethnography and how can it be applied to the critical study of sport management? In doing so, we will explore the benefits of the methodology to the field of sport management as well as the challenges and opportunities created in this form of reflexive study. We also offer suggestions for how to apply autoethnography to a variety of research purposes germane to the field of sport management.

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1. Introduction

Autoethnography is an analytic approach, research genre, and form of writing that explicitly connects a researcher's lived experiences and perspectives to the social and cultural world in which they exist (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005). Extending beyond more common autobiographies and memoirs, autoethnographies fall within reflexive ethnography with rich narratives that evoke emotion from the reader, while also requiring the researcher to critically examine the recursive relationship between themselves and historical events, social structures, and cultural practices (Denzin, 1997; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Richardson, 2000). More specifically, autoethnographies involve a level of critical self-reflexivity that heightens one's awareness or consciousness of broader social inequities in society, which can ultimately lead to positive reform efforts to increase equity for all (Sparkes, 2002b). Moreover, this methodology inherently challenges the "normally held divisions of self/other, inner/outer, public/private, individual/society, and immediacy/memory" (Sparkes, 2002a, p. 216), and thus enables the researcher to articulate the complexities of a lived experience in a way that only a true emic perspective can offer. In other words, autoethnographies possess the potential to fulfill the promise of sociological inquiry as

* Corresponding author. Fax: +1 860 486 0210.
  E-mail addresses: joseph.cooper@uconn.edu (J.N. Cooper), robin.grenier@uconn.edu (R.S. Grenier), charles.macaulay@uconn.edu (C. Macaulay).

purported by C. Wright Mills (1959) whereby the connection between personal troubles and public issues can be explored and better understood.

Both evocative autoethnographies, that focus more on presenting alternative narratives and stimulating emotion (Denzin, 1997; Ellis, 1999; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Richardson, 2000), and analytic autoethnographies, that aim to build on theoretical understandings of a phenomena (Anderson, 2006), are useful methodologies for enhancing more generally our collective understanding of the social worlds around us as well as specifically informing our shared experiences of and meaning making from involvement with sport. Related to evocative autoethnographies, Ellis (1999) described the ethnographic setting and how she engaged in this type of research:

> Well, I start with my personal life. I pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions. I use what I call systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall to try to understand an experience I've lived through. Then I write my experience as a story. By exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life,.... (p. 691)

With evocative autoethnographies, the autoethnographer's life and critical reflexivity of these lived experiences serves as context for exploration – particularly the affective aspects. These evocative ethnographies can be written as "short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layer writing, and social science prose" (Ellis & Bochner (in press) as cited in Ellis, 1999, p. 673). In terms of analytic autoethnographies, Anderson (2006) outlined five key components: "(1) complete member researcher (CMR) status, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility of the researcher's self, (4) dialog with informants beyond the self, and (5) commitment to theoretical analysis" (p. 378). In analytic autoethnographies, researchers occupy both first- and second-order narratives when describing settings where the researcher is physically located and/or abstractly connected (i.e., identifying with individuals who experience a similar condition or emotion, but not located in the same physical space). According to Anderson (2006), analytic autoethnographies present detailed narratives of lived experiences and connect them with social science theories with the aim of providing "a more accurate and meaningful framework for understanding" phenomena (p. 379). Anderson (2006) also surmised that analytic autoethnographies are consistent with "traditional symbolic interactionist autoethnography" whereas evocative autoethnographies are often described as "a radically non-traditional, poststructuralist form of research" based on its data collection methods and modes of representation (p. 391). Both evocative and analytic autoethnographies link the personal with the social. However, evocative autoethnographers do not necessarily possess clear analytic goals prior to engaging in research inquiry (i.e., retrospective reflection on one's lived experiences with emotional appeal) whereas analytic autoethnographers begin their research with clear analytic goals and focus on expanding existing theoretical understandings (i.e., research initiated to better understanding social phenomena) (Anderson, 2006; Ellis, 1999).

In addition to understanding the dynamic relationship between self and culture, these autoethnographic approaches also provide a means to deconstruct hegemonic ideologies and structures (McDonald & Birrell, 1999). Each society possesses dominant ideologies that have been shaped over time and influence structural arrangements, social norms, and individual experiences. Within the United States (U.S.), the dominant ideologies are patriarchy/sexism/hegemonic masculinity (gender), White supremacy/racism (race), classism (socioeconomic status), ableism (ability), ageism (age), and heterosexism and homophobia (sexuality) (Coakley, 2015; Cunningham & Singer, 2012; Earp, 2010); all of which are embedded in social institutions including sport.

Despite the positive emotions and outcomes associated with sport (e.g., collective hubris, communalism, health benefits, economic gains for individuals, communities, and nations, etc.), it has often been referred to as a microcosm of society meaning that it can serve as a site for the reinforcement and reproduction of dominant ideologies (Coakley, 2015). For example, renowned sport sociologist Michael Messner (1992, 2007) has problematized the nature of how sport structures and practices are designed to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity and heterosexist norms. According to Messner (2007), gender norms are socially constructed and reproduced on three levels: (1) meaning (culture), (2) performance (interaction), and (3) organization (structure). Using autoethnographic methods, Messner (2007) illustrated how the complex nature of power is exerted and reproduced in society to privilege certain groups (i.e., heterosexual males) and to disadvantage others deemed outside the "norm" (i.e., homosexual males). Even though there is potential for autoethnography to illuminate and challenge the culture of sport and deconstruct hegemonic forces and other invisible norms, it is still underutilized and often questioned as a form of inquiry that lacks rigor, validity, and "objectivity" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Richardson, 2000; Sparkes, 2002a, 2002b).

As such, some scholars may struggle with the lack of researcher detachment from the participants or experience seeing it as somehow violating the integrity of the study, and question the ability of autoethnographers to write in ways that are both public and ethical (Delamont, 2007). Others criticize the methodology for not being "real" research, but just stories that lack rigor, theory, and analytical methods (Ellis, 1999). As a step in addressing this problem we sought to explore how scholars and practitioners can engage in autoethnographic processes. More specifically, our aim is to present how, given the popular appeal and visibility of sport, autoethnographic approaches in sport management research can lead to social breakthroughs in terms of awareness/consciousness raising, empathy, reconciliation, acceptance, and equity for all (Coakley, 2015; Cunningham & Singer, 2012; Schinke & Hanrahan, 2012).

1.1. Process and approach to autoethnography

Like other qualitative methodologies such as phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory, autoethnography is guided by a specific intention and methods of data collection, analysis, and representation. Specifically, autoethnographies

acknowledge that an individual embodies a number of cultural ideologies (Fleming & Fullagar, 2011) and these ideologies can serve as a foundation for examining how one interacts with place or others (Anderson, 2006). For example, Drummond (2010) shared the way in which his body became the focus of his existence within sport and how this impacted his masculine identity. Through a complex, immersive, theoretically informed first-person approach, autoethnography seeks to connect the common experiences of a researcher to broader cultural, political, and social implications, as well as make explicit knowledge and memory that is not easily accessed through other more traditional methodologies (Grenier, 2015). Moreover, this methodology is anchored in social justice foundations (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011) with researchers seeking to exercise and expand their privilege and power through a deeper understanding of the social, cultural, and political structures that oppress certain groups of people (often referred to as minorities or the 'other,' which are coded language to imply inferior status). Forde's (2013) autoethnography highlighted his time working for a year in southern Africa on a sport for development and peace (SDPP) project. His research, though deeply personal, allowed for critical reflexivity on the ways in which his day-to-day practices reflected and perpetuated aspects of Whiteness and masculinity.

By virtue of its design, a traditional autoethnography centers on a single researcher/participant (hence the use of the root *auto-*), and as such limits the number of perspectives incorporated in the writing/description of events and provides what Anderson (2006) describes as only a "partial vantage point for observation of the social world under study" (p. 381). Although, this intimate perspective is a strength of autoethnographic research (Holt, 2003), it also presents challenges in terms of representation and verification methods such as member checks, data and methodological triangulation, and peer debriefing groups (Tracy, 2010). Some scholars are attending to these issues by making structural adaptations to the methodology that, while still reflecting the intention of exploring a lived experience within a socio-cultural context, is open to the inclusion of multiple participant voices and perspectives.

The methodological adaptations expand upon the seminal work of Haug (1987) whereby "collective emancipation" transpires when the memories and perspectives of multiple individuals not only merge theory with experiences, but also history with biography (p. 15). Haug (1987) articulated the significance of capturing and presenting collective voices within their Marxist-feminist memory work:

> In rewriting stories of the body, and subjecting them to critical analysis, the authors attempt to construct a new discursive framework, a *usable* theoretical language for their readers and themselves. Theory, they insist, enters into and meshes everyday narrative, defining the context within which our 'selves' – physical and psychological – become meaningful. (p. 16)

Examples of such collective work are found in collaborative autoethnographies (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2012; Kerwin & Hoeber, 2015). Using terms such as co-ethnography (Lassiter, 2005), collaborative self-ethnography (Kerwin & Hoeber, 2015), and co-constructed autoethnography (Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2012; Grenier & Burke, 2008), these researchers still center on self-interrogation, but within a pair or team of researchers. This means that in a collaborative approach to autoethnography researchers can increase the amount and sources of data by "work together, building on each other's stories, gaining insight from group sharing, and providing levels of support as they interrogate topics of interest for a common purpose" (Chang et al., 2012, p. 23). Potential benefits of collaborative autoethnographic approaches when compared to single autoethnographies are heightened self-reflexivity, overlapping/intersecting identity recognition, constant comparative experiences (including shared and contrasting), and enhanced trustworthiness and credibility (Kerwin & Hoeber, 2015). Others (see Grenier & Collins, 2016) are finding ways to support the development and writing of autoethnographies from individuals outside academia. The authors describe the methodology as a scholar acting as a facilitator along with a lead who is the source of the experience. The facilitator supports the lead through a process of first establishing a routine for eliciting and capturing the lead's experiences and learning. Next the two capture and document the stories in accordance with an established routine. Then the process calls for the lead to reflect on the stories in order to reveal underlying assumptions, beliefs, or realizations that were shared with the facilitator. Finally, the facilitator works with the lead to establish the findings from an analysis within a meaningful cultural framework.

Regardless of the form, the foundation of autoethnography is in its combination of ethnography and autobiography and its methodological and theoretical rigor that illuminates aspects of a cultural experience and make both (culture and experiences) familiar to others (Ellis et al., 2011). It is ethnographic in its reliance on observation in the experience and autobiographical in its written representation. Thus, the researcher/participant is central to the text (Anderson, 2006; Malkki, 2007), serves as the primary data source, and leads the reader through a provocative description of the experience (Denzin, 2006; Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Jones, 2005; Spry, 2001).

To engage in autoethnography, researchers first need to begin with a purpose or specific area of inquiry involving a level of critical reflexivity. Autoethnographers must also know themselves and critically reflect on the roles they occupy, the socio-historical information shaping identity development, and how they construct reality while navigating the world (Anderson, 2006; Malkki, 2007; Spry, 2001); thus, leading them through several layers of consciousness (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). If as Ellis and Bochner (1996) postulate, "culture circulates through all of us" (p. 24), then autoethnography embraces a connection and facilitates investigation between the world and self, which also involves the reflection of body knowledge (Carless, 2012). Cultural signifiers such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status are inscribed onto the self, and one's intangible identity (Denzin, 2006) and consciously and unconsciously inform feelings, emotions, and actions (Holt, 2003). As such, autoethnographers attend to the multiple aspects of self and culture through theoretically-informed and intentional inquiry.

Second, given that the researcher is a participant, they must provide a highly personalized account or narrative of the experience in order to expand sociological understanding and critique "the situatedness of self with others in social contexts" (Spry, 2001, p. 710). Using the self or body as a site of autoethnographic investigation (Carless, 2012), autoethnography relies on the researcher's reflective journaling, photography, blogging, drawings, letters, conversations, documents, inventories (of people, artifacts, and activities), and interviews with others as a way of reliving and describing experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ellis & Berger, 2003). It is also important to note that this often requires a high level of emotional and psychological involvement. Many autoethnographers utilize stressful and emotionally-exhaustive moments to inform some of the most compelling aspects of their research (i.e., evocative texts) (Anderson, 2006; Denzin, 1997; Ellis, 1999; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Richardson, 2000). As such, the vulnerability and transparency inherent with autoethnographies is not a simple task, but rather a recursive and reflexive process requiring commitment and resolve on behalf of the researcher throughout the research process.

Third, the autoethnographer must examine their own feelings, emotions, and personal state of being in relation to the experience (Holt, 2003; Malkki, 2007). This often includes verifying data through triangulation, applying theory and epistemology as it relates to the broader cultural, political, and social contexts, and analyzing and interpreting to understand the meaning of their experiences. Through analysis of the data the researcher becomes immersed in the related events and emotions and create opportunities to relive details leading to a recursive process of meaning-making, which is represented in the researcher's writing (Ellis et al., 2011). Fourth, the autoethnographers represent the data through writing that incorporates a blend of real descriptions, impressionist images, analytical perspectives, and confessional narratives (Chang, 2008). This is often accomplished through layered accounts that focus on the author's experiences alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature (Ellis et al., 2011). By using a reciprocating process, the researcher engages with existing concepts and theories and utilizes them as analytic tools to make meaning of one's lived experiences and observations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Jones, 2005; Malkki, 2007; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In other words, autoethnographers incorporate multiple 'voices' including theory, subjective experience, and even fantasy to increase the evocativeness, esthetic, and authentic quality of the writing and presentation (Rambo, 2005).

Finally, we must acknowledge that the highly personal, creative, and often unruly nature of autoethnography can be unnerving for some scholars and can raise questions about its legitimacy (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Some have sought to apply traditional standards in alternative forms to assess the quality of autoethnographic research including the use of concepts such as validity, reliability, and transferability (Ellis et al., 2011). Validity for autoethnography is based on the work seeking "...verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible, a feeling that what has been represented could be true. The story is coherent. It connects readers to writers and provides continuity in their lives" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 282). Reliability in autoethnography results from the reader's assessment of the researcher as a primary and reliable source who demonstrates continuity and a factual experience. With respect to transferability, the accessible nature of the material to its readers is an important component of autoethnographies. When transferability is attained, a reader compares the researcher/participant's experience with their own and considers similarities and differences, thus transforming the 'I' to 'we' (Spry, 2001). On the contrary, some scholars posit that since the quality of autoethnographies is difficult to assess using traditional social science research methods, terms such as reliability, validity, and objectivity are not directly applicable (Anderson, 2005; Sparkes & Smith, 2009). To redress the challenges from positivists, scholars have suggested abandoning traditional criteriology and pursue what Sparkes and Smith (2009) describe as relativism in action. They propose researchers, reviewers, and readers approach autoethnographic research with an open mind and evaluate this type of research in an ethical and fair manner without specific and often stagnating criteria (Sparkes & Smith, 2009).

2. Current application of autoethnography to sport management

Much of the autoethnographic research in sport management has focused on the intersection of sport, masculinity/femininity, athletic identity, conceptions of the body, and sexual identity (Anderson, 2005; Drummond, 2010; Fleming & Fullagar, 2011; Sparkes, 1998, 2002b, 2003; Sparkes, Partington, & Brown, 2007; Spencer, 2010). For example, Andrew Sparkes, one of the most widely recognized autoethnographers in the field of sport management, has employed autoethnographic techniques to explore the intersection of gender, sport, identity development, and culture. Sparkes' (1998, 2002b, 2003) research documents in detail his process of identity transformation as a result of an illness and injury that ended his athletic career. His narratives reveal how sport served as a site for his identity construction and affirmation particularly with regards to his gender (i.e., masculinity). Along the same lines, Drummond (2010) used autoethnography to examine his experiences as a former elite triathlon athlete and its effect on his self-conceptions of masculinity over his lifespan. Reflexively, as an outcome of the autoethnographic process, Drummond (2010) realized how sport and physical activity gradually became his source of masculine affirmation even to the detriment of his health and overall well-being. Along the same lines, Spencer (2010) incorporated sociological imagination (Mills, 1959) as a theoretical lens with her autoethnographic account of her experiences as a former elite tennis player and subsequent analysis of mass media coverage of Serena and Venus Williams to "examine how white racism works historically and in contemporary circumstances through the operation of sincere fictions" (p. 36). All of the aforementioned literature provides unique insights into how autoethnographies can assist in the critical analysis of the ways in which sport reproduces dominant ideologies and social inequalities.

Similar to the examples from Sparkes (1998, 2002b, 2003), Drummond (2010), and Spencer (2010) much of the extant autoethnographic research in the sport management literature has focused on researchers' lived experiences as current or former athletes. Beyond athletes, the field of sport management encompasses a range of positions including coaches, administrators, support staff, volunteers, and spectators (Pedersen & Thibault, 2014), yet there are far fewer studies that utilize autoethnographic approaches from these positions. With that said, there is an emerging body of autoethnographic research reflecting the method's application beyond the athlete experience. For example, Fleming and Fullagar (2011) critically interrogated how gender was performed and how inequitable gender relations were normalized through the first author's lived experiences as a former player, coach, and sport administrator. The authors documented, through vivid narratives, how dominant masculine norms were ubiquitous in various cricket spaces, as well as explored how low participation rates of women at an indoor sports center were viewed as a personal issue among women by the male-dominated administrative staff. In an effort to challenge these norms, the first author presented cogent arguments for why these participation outcomes were not reflective of the women, but rather byproducts of the structures, policies, and practices at the sport center that privileged males. The first-person data source and narratives from multiple roles within the organization in conjunction with knowledge of hegemonic masculine theories and research enabled the authors to illuminate previously invisible taken-for-granted norms at the sport center that contributed to inequitable gender outcomes (Fleming & Fullagar, 2011).

In another study, Kodama, Doherty, and Popovic (2013) incorporated an autoethnographic approach to offer unique perspectives on sport event volunteerism. The study highlighted the first author's lived experiences as a volunteer for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver, Canada. The study provided a detailed and evocative description of the first author's pre-volunteer, volunteer, and post-volunteer experiences. Similar to fellow autoethnographers (Hoeber & Kerwin, 2013; Kerwin & Hoeber, 2015), Kodama et al. (2013) emphasized how the first author's identity as a former elite figure skater and related nostalgia for elite sport environments influenced both her decision to serve as volunteer and her researcher/autoethnographic lens. Consistent with analytical autoethnographic approaches (Anderson, 2006), Kodama et al. (2013) connected the first author's narratives and experiences with a relevant theoretical approach (i.e., identity theory (Erickson, 1980)) and previous literature on sport event volunteerism in an effort to gain deeper understanding of sport event volunteers' motives for initial and continued volunteerism. The findings from this study offered insightful recommendations for major sport event managers supervising volunteers (e.g., create detailed trainings that are responsive to volunteers' initial anxieties, cultivate a "shared culture" focused on enhancing social enrichment, and promote positive off-task/leisure opportunities and experiences during events) (Kodama et al., 2013, p. 86).

Another area of sport management research where autoethnographic approaches have been incorporated is in the examination of sport fandom. One such example is when Sturm (2015) engaged in an autoethnography to explore her experiences with fandom as a performative expression of self. More specifically, Sturm (2015) presented a set of vignettes to highlight how fandom is a recursive experience rather than a unidimensional process. The author explained the value added from utilizing an autoethnographic approach to examine this phenomenon:

> Ideally, this performative autoethnography contributed to such resonance; provoking an evocative response(s) while illuminating fragments of a fan's life as blurred subject, the fan in flux, the "messy" text via eliciting affective traces (Sturm, 2015, p. 221).

In another study of sport fandom, Hoeber and Kerwin (2013) employed a collaborative self-ethnographic approach to investigate the influence of hegemonic masculinity within professional sporting environments in North America (U.S. and Canada) from the perspective of female sport fans. Findings from their study revealed that at times, the co-authors' reinforced hegemonic masculinity in sport fan spaces by seeking to gain male approval (e.g., citing statistics, offering commentary on a player or team, etc.) rather than questioning pervasive cultural norms, internalizing the "outsiders looking in" mentality even when they were treated as authentic sport fans, and possessing stereotypical assumptions about the authenticity of other female sport fans with limited observational information (Hoeber & Kerwin, 2013, p. 333). Hoeber and Kerwin's (2013) study reiterated the value of autoethnographic approaches because it problematized taken-for-granted beliefs of sport fandom, which are rooted in hegemonic masculinity. In addition, through the use of autoethnographic narratives, their study conveyed the complexity of identity negotiation in specific milieu; in their case, the complex, and at times contradictory, nature of how female sport fans negotiate their various identities (Hoeber & Kerwin, 2013).

More recently, Kerwin and Hoeber (2015) expounded upon the applicability and malleability of collaborative self-ethnography in sport management research. In particular, the authors surmised that their sport fan and sport management researcher identities were integrally connected rather than mutually exclusive and acknowledging this reality was a strength of autoethnographic research in general and more specifically in sport management where researchers connections to sport (e.g., fan, volunteer, coach, etc.) are intertwined with their identities and research interests. Each of the aforementioned studies (Fleming & Fullagar, 2011; Hoeber & Kerwin, 2013; Kerwin & Hoeber, 2015; Sturm, 2015) offered unique and nuanced applications of autoethnographies within the field of sport management beyond the traditional reflexive athlete perspective. These lenses provided in-depth emic perspectives into the ways in which sport as a social institution shapes individuals' lives and sociocultural norms within various contexts. In order to better understand and more fully capture the influence of sport on society, it is imperative to expand the usage of autoethnographic approaches into all areas of sport management.

3. Opportunities and challenges for autoethnography in sport management

Given the important role sport plays in the lives of individuals and societies around the world, it is important for sport management scholars to seek to present and apply diverse perspectives and experiences in their research and teaching. The use of autoethnography in sport management has created some opportunities for critically examining sport-related experiences of individuals including the exploration of individuals' roles in sport, a chance to present counter narratives, and the use of autoethnography as a pedagogical tool, but as we will show, there remain significant challenges to using this methodology in a meaningful and effective way.

3.1. Exploring roles in sport

First, although sport management can point to autoethnography in the exploration of athletes and coaches/staff, there is a dearth of literature that has examined the experiences of spectators or bystanders (Hoeber & Kerwin, 2013; Kerwin & Hoeber, 2015; Kodama et al., 2013; Sturm, 2015), or frame the work beyond the stadium and field of play into the local communities, regions, nations, and global context. Previous research (Hoeber & Kerwin, 2013; Kerwin & Hoeber, 2015; Kodama et al., 2013; Sturm, 2015) serves as an example of the vast potential of the research environment for sport autoethnographers. Along with broadening the context for autoethnographies in sport management, there is also the opportunity to address experiences in the areas of leisure/recreational settings including physical fitness activities and sport consumption in the form of tourism (Cunningham & Singer, 2012).

Additional contexts for consideration of autoethnographic research in sport includes examining individuals' experiences in peripheral sporting spaces such as positions within sport marketing agencies, sport tourism, sport communications, sport finance and economics, sport management in academia (faculty and students), sport facility and event management, sport event volunteerism, and legal departments/offices (Pedersen & Thibault, 2014). Similar to athletes, each of these key roles is an integral component in the production, sustainability, and popularity of sports and thus the same type of critical reflexivity exhibited by current and former athletes turn autoethnographers is needed among these subgroups in order to provide a more comprehensive perspective on the role of sport in society. There is also a need for critical autoethnographic research across various sport types including international sport, professional sport, intercollegiate sport, youth sport, and recreational sport (youth and adult) as well across various positions associated with sport (e.g., from current and previous administrators, coaches, staff, volunteers, and fans/spectators).

Another opportunity where autoethnography can serve as a bridge between sport management research and practice is within the field of statistics and sport analytics. Historically, sports have been dominated by statistical metrics, but in recent years the proliferation and influence of sport analytics and sabermetrics in professional sports (to a lesser extent in intercollegiate, interscholastic, and youth sports) reflects a revolutionary shift in how athletes, teams, and winning outcomes are assessed (Baumer & Zimbalist, 2013; Davenport, 2014; Severini, 2014). Sport statistics, analytics, and sabermetrics is an area where autoethnographic approaches could offer important and unique insights into the connections between cultural understandings of what constitutes knowledge as it relates to competitive advantages and how individuals in these fields (sport statistics and analytics) make meaning of their work. The popularity of sport analytics was typified in the box office movie "Moneyball" starring Brad Pitt, which depicted the emergence and success of Billy Beane (former Major League Baseball (MLB) General Manager of the Oakland Athletics) and his reliance on sport analytics to resurge the Oakland A's baseball franchise in the early 2000s. Although, neither the movie or the book which the movie was based upon ("Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game" by Michael Lewis) were autoethnographies in terms of methodological procedures, the resonance of the narratives of Beane's lived experiences with applying sport analytics and sabermetrics underscores the potential for groundbreaking autoethnographic approaches in this sub-field of sport management.

With that said, it is important to state that autoethnography is not a license for a "confessional tale of self-renewal" (Spry, 2001, p. 718), and as such it must be conducted by someone prepared to engage in a scholarly process that weaves together provocative experiences and self-reflection/interrogation in relation to and with theory, literature, and culture. Finding ways for non-academics (who have important experiences to share with the academic field of sport management) is an issue that requires more attention. Individuals with the interest, training, and time who are from diverse personal (e.g., racial, class, etc.) and professional (e.g., administrative, coaching, staff, etc.) backgrounds must be identified and encouraged to participate in collaborative autoethnographies. For example, given proper support through a facilitated process (Grenier & Collins, 2016) the experiences of pioneers in the sport industry can serve as a rich source of co-autoethnography. For example, Becky Hammon, former standout North Dakota State basketball player, Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) All-Star, and Olympic athlete, who recently made headlines as the first woman assistant coach in National Basketball Association (NBA) history or Sarah Bailey Thomas, the first official in the National Football League (NFL), could offer invaluable autoethnographic or co-autoethnographic perspectives on their sporting experiences across their lifespan. Along the same lines, engaging in co-autoethnographic inquiries with leaders in the sport statistics, analytics, and sabermetrics sub-field such as Billy Beane (former MLB General Manager of the Oakland Athletics) and Daryl Morey (National Basketball Association (NBA) General Manager of the Houston Rockets) among others would serve as a vital conduit for strengthening the relationship between sport management research and practice as well as offer an opportunity for deeper understandings of the phenomena under study (i.e., the emergence and value of sport analytics across the field/industry).

3.2. Offering counter narratives

Autoethnographies in sport management also provide an opportunity to present counter narratives to disrupt the dominant, largely White, male, and heterosexual privileged discourse from those in leadership positions in the sport industry (Coakley, 2015; Cunningham & Singer, 2012; Lapchick, Burnett, et al., 2015; Lapchick, Hoff, & Kaiser, 2015), which is consistent with third wave postmodern feminism that stresses the acknowledgment and examination of the ways in which identities including, but not exclusive to, gender influence the lived experiences of individuals in sport and society (Hattery, 2010). The landscape of organized sport in the U.S. has changed significantly since the passage of *Title IX* in 1972, and although participation numbers for female athletes have increased exponentially across all levels of sport (youth, interscholastic, intercollegiate, and professional), the number of female coaches of women's sport/athletic teams has declined overall (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005). Among National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) member institutions, the number of women's coaches for women's teams has decreased from 90% in 1972 to 40% in 2015 (Benbow, 2015). Situations such as this present a challenge for sport management researchers. Autoethnographic techniques could be used to explore the experiences of female coaches across different levels and positions in order to provide meaningful insight into the ways in which systemic practices in sport and society contribute to such outcomes while linking it to works like Messner's (2007) gender model.

Likewise, autoethnographies create new outlets for studies by people of color within leadership positions. The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) publishes an annual report highlighting the hiring practices among U.S. professional sports and intercollegiate athletic programs. A recent report provided to the Associated Press Sports Editors (APSE) found people of color (operationally defined as African Americans, Latina/os, and Asian/Pacific Islanders) only accounted for 16.7% of all sport copy editors, 15.0% of all reporters, and 16.5% of all columnists (Lapchick, Burnett, et al., 2015). Given the fact that people of color constitute nearly half of the U.S. population, their underrepresentation in sports media reflects the lack of racial diversity in one of the most important aspects of the multi-billion dollar sport industry (Coakley, 2015). Another report from TIDES indicated the gross underrepresentation of people of color in leadership positions such as athletic directors, head coaches, and assistant coaches in college sport. For example, people of color in leadership positions at the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) level (the NCAA's most visible, profitable, and competitive level of football) constituted 0% of conference commissioners, 15.1% of all athletic directors, 11.1% of all head football coaches, 18.1% of managing directors at the NCAA headquarters, and 20.2% at the professional administrative level at the NCAA headquarters. These statistics are particularly troubling given that college athletes of color constitute a large percentage of the participants and in some cases a majority of the participants in sports like football and men's basketball at the Division I FBS level (Lapchick, Hoff, et al., 2015). Similar statistics can be observed across various sporting contexts and levels including international sport, professional sport, interscholastic sport, and youth and community sport (Coakley, 2015; Cunningham & Singer, 2012). Evidence such as the aforementioned statistics underscores the need for autoethnographers who could provide an insider perspective on the barriers and facilitators for successful career growth in these positions within the sport industry. Additionally, there is a gap in the literature of narratives from individuals with unique abilities that challenge the dominant ideology of ableism perpetuated through the use of deficit laden labels such as disabilities. Previous research has documented how youth with unique abilities have fewer participation opportunities, lower levels of fitness, and increased obesity rates compared to their peers who are identified as "able bodied" (Murphy & Carbone, 2008). Therefore, using autoethnographic approaches in the exploration of the experiences of individuals with unique abilities in sport across all levels (e.g., participant, coaching, administrator, staff, volunteer, and/or spectator) would be beneficial in gaining and disseminating knowledge about how the structure of sport enhances, limits, or exacerbates specified experiences and outcomes.

Narratives that draw attention to experiences shaped by sexual identity and sport (Anderson, 2005; Messner, 2007) are also an opportunity for expanding the use of autoethnography in sport management. The dominant ideologies of heterosexism and homophobia in the broader U.S. are pervasive in sport whereby traditional notions of masculinity and femininity create unique challenges for individuals who do not fit this rigid binary structure. The mass media coverage and related scrutiny experienced by various former and current athletes such as Billie Jean King, Caitlyn Jenner (formerly Bruce Jenner), Brittney Griner, and Michael Sam draw attention to the continued stigmatization of individuals who do not fit within the heterosexist binary gender classifications. These challenges are evident both within athletic contexts such as courts, fields, tracks, pools, ice rinks, and locker rooms as well as in administrative offices and media press rooms. For example, Sartore and Cunningham (2009) incorporated a compulsory heterosexuality framework to examine the extent to which gender and sexual prejudice influenced decision making processes among former and current athletes. The authors found that prejudicial attitudes were predictors for an individual's unwillingness to participate in a sport when a coach identified as gay or lesbian. In addition, this same prediction pattern was salient among participants who identified as parents whereby their prejudicial attitudes toward gays and lesbians corresponded with their unwillingness to allow an individual who is homosexual to coach their children. These findings underscore the pervasiveness of homophobia and prejudicial attitudes toward individuals who challenge heterosexual norms (Sartore & Cunningham, 2009). Thus, the application of autoethnographic approaches of individuals across sexual identities who are involved in sport on various levels (e.g., athlete, coach, administrator, spectator, parent, etc.) would expand our understandings of how sport reinforces, resists, and reflects dominant ideologies.

Furthermore, there has been some success in presenting counter narratives from autoethnographic research that critically examines the impact of dominant gender ideologies (e.g., patriarchy, heterosexism, and homophobia) on the lived

sporting experiences of current and former athletes (Anderson, 2005; Carless, 2012; Drummond, 2010; Sparkes, 1998, 2002b, 2003; Spencer, 2010). Despite this research, there is a conspicuous gap in the literature on how autoethnographic research can expand collective knowledge about the ways in which intersecting identities (e.g., race, class, gender, ability, sexual identity, age, etc.) influence, and are influenced by, sporting structures and practices as well as societal arrangements and norms (McDonald & Birrell, 1999). As such, there is an opportunity for conducting autoethnographies in sport management that produce a more expansive interrogation of how power operates across a range of structures and identities (McDonald & Birrell, 1999), moving beyond the current focus of the intersection of gender, sport, and sexual identity (Anderson, 2005; Carless, 2012; Drummond, 2010; Fleming & Fullagar, 2011; Sparkes, 1998, 2002b, 2003). As such, autoethnographic approaches are valuable research and pedagogical tools that challenged dominant taken-for-granted norms and offer insightful counter-narratives. We agree with McDonald and Birrell (1999) who stated:

> . . .we criticized the tendency of mainstream media and scholars alike to frame narratives in terms that privilege one power relationship (i.e., gender, race, sexuality, or class) while ignoring others or overlooking the intersection of several axes of power. . .that treat ageism, sexism, racism, classism, and heterosexism as independent forces aligned against one another rather than potent interacting forces in our culture. (p. 284)

To address such criticism, sport management autoethnographers can examine the role of race, class, sociocultural histories, religious backgrounds, and political influences along with various identity categories to provide a more nuanced understanding of the fluidity of identities and influence of power in sporting spaces. It should be acknowledged that this is not a simple task. Autoethnography's confessional approach exposes the researcher to scrutiny and can make them vulnerable to criticism, shame, or skepticism (Behar, 1996). However, those brave enough to take on the call are crucial to sport management given that when any field focuses "on only one line of power" it results in an incomplete analysis that does "not adequately capture the complexity of relations of domination and subordination within culture" (McDonald & Birrell, 1999, p. 286).

Aside from the sport arena, another area of sport management where autoethnographic approaches would be useful is within academia. For example, Humberstone (2009) engaged in a reflexive autoethnography to challenge neoliberal trends in higher education in the United Kingdom (U.K.); in particular, the author examined how these trends impacted her teaching within the sport management and outdoor studies program at her university. Within her study, Humberstone (2009) highlighted how the market-induced shift from a broad-based leisure studies degree (including sport, recreation, and tourism) to a more specialized sport management degree (business management focus) greatly influenced the gender composition within the program. Given the fact "male hegemony in sport" is the status quo, the emphasis on traditional management in sport was more appealing to male students whereas the previous leisure management focus was perceived as more opportunistic for female students (p. 257). The neoliberal shift, emphasizing specialization and efficiency, was also accompanied by the merging of the sport management and leisure program with the business school, which was emblematic of systemic changes within the U.K. higher education system.

Humberstone (2009) transitioned between "the use of 'I' and the more neutral discursive dialogue" to emphasize is her discontent with this shift (p. 257). Prior to this programmatic shift, her students were more receptive to dialog about broader sociocultural and environmental implications of sport, recreation, and leisure as opposed to an overemphasis on male-dominated and popular sporting practices related to football and rugby. In addition, during the program merge, her innovative gender, difference, and leisure (GDL) course was replaced by a contemporary issues in sport and leisure course with less emphasis on critical and feminist theories and a disaggregated discussion on gender, race, class, and ability over the course of the semester as opposed to the previous course that included a more integrated investigation of these intersecting identities/constructs. Humberstone (2009) summarized the aim of her study when she said:

> Likewise at a personal/political level the use of auto/ethnography provides sport management staff and students with a potent source of feminist knowledge through which to reflect upon diverse cultural contexts including those of various work places to effect change, maybe providing the crucial 'critical space', to enable us to do sport management differently (p. 261).

Humberstone (2009) is not alone in her critique of pervasive hegemonic norms in the teaching of sport management. Similar to hegemony, positivistic norms in sport also serve as means by which power hierarchies and marginalized positions are maintained. Pavlidis and Fullagar (2014) explained the epistemological and paradigmatic challenges inherent with employing complex autoethnographic approaches within the field of sport management:

> In terms of sport and sport management, there is a clash and a battle for claims to the 'truth' – for what and who is best positioned to dictate the direction, the 'rules', the 'truth'. Sport 'matters' to our social lives; the enmeshment of sporting and management knowledge in the battles for domination matters beyond the confines of the sport field and the fields of sport. (pp. 27–28)

Although, some researchers who employ autoethnographies may seek to discover "notions of stability, coherence, unity, likeness, inclusiveness, and commonality" the complexity and multiplicities often involved in this methodological approach may not render clear, comfortable, and traditional interpretations of these concepts. For example, Pavlidis and Fullagar (2015) found in their study of women who participated in roller derby that these participants complicated gender norms, created alternate subjectivities, blurred the limits or distinctions between self and others, and simultaneously rejected and

reinforced exclusionary practices. In other words, honoring the participants' subjectivities and challenging dominant ideologies may not be mutually exclusive nor are they inherently one in the same and thus researchers must be cognizant about ethical issues surrounding representation, privilege, and authenticity (Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2014, 2015).

As such, it is imperative for autoethnographers to maintain ethical standards in terms of transparency in methodological, theoretical, analytical, and writing approaches to acknowledge areas of divergence, contradictions, confusion, discomfort, and alternative subjectivities that challenge dominant discourses as well as areas of convergence/consensus, consistency, uniformity, comfort, and subjectivities and narratives that reinforce dominant discourses (Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2014, 2015). Another risk associated with the complexity of conducting autoethnographies is the shifting of power, which does not negate positive or negative influences of power discourses and structures on different groups (i.e., marginalized groups in context specific milieu) (Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2014). Along the same lines, another risk (albeit a strength as well) of autoethnographic approaches involves the reliance and emphasis emotion (Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2014). Once an autoethnographer becomes immersed into a culture, the emotional involvement can be exhausting and greatly influence one's critical reflexivity of one's self within the culture as well as of the culture itself. Nonetheless, activating and illustrating these relational discourses constitutes an ethical challenge as well as a deeper understanding of various phenomena.

3.3. Teaching with autoethnography

A third opportunity for future applications is to formalize the consumption and creation of autoethnography in sport management undergraduate and graduate programs (Fleming & Fullagar, 2011). For example, one of the supplemental assignments included in Coakley's (2015) *Sport in Society* textbook involves having students write a sportography paper. Within this assignment, students are asked to document their lived experiences in sport and connect these experiences with broader social patterns. In particular, students must engage in critical reflexivity regarding how power and privilege influence access to and the quality of their sporting experiences. With that said, there are two things that should be noted. First, even accomplished scholars struggle with creating autoethnographies (Wall, 2008), so instructors need to provide proper support and scaffolding, and consider using a collaborative form of autoethnography or an approach such as Facilitated Autoethnography (Grenier & Collins, 2016) to ensure student success and help lessen student anxiety. Second, there is potential for instructors to label a reflective writing or personal narrative as autoethnography and forgetting that it is a form of research. Assigning the writing of an autoethnography to students requires them to demonstrate a well-thought out and balanced approach whereby reflections on personal experiences are blended with analyses of social and cultural occurrences/patterns, as well as building on existing theoretical understandings of phenomena (Anderson, 2006). At the same time instructors need to address concerns about representation, legitimation, and praxis (Holman Jones, 2005; Holt, 2003). Without this attention instructors risk perpetuating in future sport management scholars the idea that autoethnographies as merely self-indulgent efforts and not meaningful research endeavors (Anderson, 2006; Holt, 2003; Sparkes, 2002a).

Even if instructors do not require students to create autoethnographies, there remains the opportunity to include autoethnographic readings and analytic development into their curricula (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Holman Jones, 2005; Messner, 2007; Sparkes, 2002b). In doing so, instructors are encouraging students to embrace embodied knowledge, make emotional connections to the work, encourage personal action, and value alternative perspectives (Carless, 2012). Moreover, given the increased emphasis on enhancing ethics in sport (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2003), the inclusion of autoethnographic writing and readings can help transform the ways in which sport management professionals are being prepared to enter the field by enhancing students' consciousness of social inequalities and inequities in sport and society and how individuals contribute to the perpetuation of these realities; thus, heightening overall empathy and ultimately encouraging behaviors and ways of thinking that promote and create positive and equitable experiences for all individuals connected to sport.

4. Conclusions

The first goal for this paper was to examine autoethnography as a viable methodology for sport management research. There are several variations of the approach including the use of multiple participant/researcher voices, but the underlying intention of creating "research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political" remains consistent (Ellis, 2004, p. xix). Existing sport management autoethnographies offer a good start for seeing the value of the approach, but the challenge remains for autoethnographies to be developed and researched by those who experience the phenomenon firsthand. How can autoethnographies move beyond the former athlete-turned-academic and include stories from a wider range of individuals who shape and have been shaped by sport? Scholars can encourage a facilitated approach (Grenier & Collins, 2016) to those who are unfamiliar with the process of examining the self in relation to experience and theory and/or draw from collaborative methods. In addition, academics can integrate autoethnographies into the curriculum. Through regular exposure to a methodology that values counter narratives and amplifies the voices at the margins emerging scholars and practitioners can gain new perspectives to inform their roles in the field.

We also sought to highlight the value of this methodology as a critical approach to presenting the narratives of marginalized voices within a field where hegemonic and discriminatory practices are prevalent. Many sport

organizations perpetuate inequalities and inequities that are present in the broader society (Coakley, 2015; Cunningham & Singer, 2012; Schinke & Hanrahan, 2012), thus there is a need for a critical analysis of these normalized structures and practices. Without the application of critical methodologies, like autoethnography, these structures and subsequent outcomes will persist (McDonald & Birrell, 1999). What both the opportunities and challenges of this qualitative approach demonstrate is that in terms of praxis, autoethnographers must grapple with how personal stories are intertwined with political, social, and cultural structures and norms (Holman Jones, 2005). Much like Holman Jones (2005), who states that without specific stories attached to the harmful effects of hegemony, it is difficult to generate reactions necessary to create sustainable change in society, we see the need for first-person narratives in sport management for challenging the status quo and existing power structures that shape practice, research, and pedagogy in sporting cultures.

Moreover, sport is considered one of the major sites in society for the reproduction of power and privilege – especially as it relates to gender and hegemonic masculinity (Coakley, 2015; Cunningham & Singer, 2012; Earp, 2010; McDonald & Birrell, 1999). Those individuals who do not appear to fit or engage in performative behaviors consistent with traditional notions of gender within a particular sport can incur the risk of being ostracized, bullied, and excluded (Anderson, 2005; Messner, 2007; Spencer, 2010). McDonald and Birrell (1999) argued that critical analyses of sport "traverse the boundaries of lived experiences, knowledge production, and political practices" (p. 284). Through autoethnographic storytelling, sport management scholars and practitioners can generate awareness of the ways in which individuals are involved in sociocultural processes and norms and thus stimulate counter-actions. It can also facilitate a reduction in the gaps between "in groups" and "out groups," and serve as an outlet where embodied experience is privileged (Carless, 2012). Placing the spotlight on autoethnographers like Messner (1992, 2007) and Anderson (2005) who use the methodology to draw attention to the inequitable gender practices in sport exemplifies how this research approach enhances the researcher's ability to engage in constructive reflexivity (Richardson & St Pierre, 2008), while adding unique voices about the differential treatment, opportunities, and language in sporting spaces that contribute to negative psychological, social, and physical outcomes for those outside the norm.

In addition, the opportunities and challenges presented in this paper also illustrate how autoethnographies provide a reflexive methodology that calls on sport management scholars to acknowledge and understand the power of evoking emotional connections and responses to the institution of sport. Emotion is a primary reason why sport is a global phenomenon. The popularity of the Olympic Games, Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), U.S. professional and collegiate sports, and the proliferation of youth sport and sport for development programs (SDP) around the world serve to support the notion that sport has sociocultural influence and an emotional value within cultures and identities (Coakley, 2015; Cunningham & Singer, 2012; Schinke & Hanrahan, 2012). Autoethnography is emotionally evocative for both the author and the consumer of the research. For the author, autoethnographies privilege the subjective self and view embodied experience as a strength. The result is research that has the power to give voice to members of marginalized groups, like those we have highlighted in this paper, and provide a means of challenging taken-for-granted norms that disadvantage certain groups and individuals (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Richardson, 2000; Sparkes, 1997). These "counter narratives," "counter knowledges," and "counter truths" (McDonald & Birrell, 1999, p. 296) draw on analytic practices that are "performative, pedagogical, and political" and enacted as "a way of seeing and being [that] challenges, contests, or endorses the official, hegemonic ways of seeing and representing the other" (Denzin, 2006, p. 422). The result is a more personal and likely emotional experience that can only come from the emic perspective of the autoethnographer. Autoethnographers are also explicit in their concern for the reader. As Ellis and her colleagues (2011) note, "the questions most important to autoethnographers are: who reads our work, how are they affected by it, and how does it keep a conversation going?" (p. 284). Attending to these questions means that from the reader's perspective, an autoethnographer's use of evocative description can elicit an internalized, deep empathy that can lead to transformative behaviors and counter-actions (Anderson, 2005; Carless, 2012). All of these desired outcomes would greatly benefit the field of sport management in its efforts to promote more equitable structures, practices, and experiences for individuals across all backgrounds connected to sport.

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