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**Playing Nostalgic Language Games in Sport Research: Conceptual Considerations and
Methodological Musings**

Abstract

As researchers interested in social aspects of sport, we enmesh ourselves in the work of memory, (re)membering and forms of 'capturing' sport and sport experiences. While nostalgia is at play in these social constructions of sport, for researchers we contend that the concept of nostalgia can prove devious. In this paper, we illustrate the social significance afforded to nostalgic experiences or events, and consider their representation in social sciences sport research. We develop and apply arguments concerning the senses, nostalgia, and language in line with the 'abilities' view of concepts. The consequences of nostalgia can, we contend, be underplayed, taken for granted and/or ignored by sport researchers in ways that curtail more critical readings of sport phenomena. Our purpose is to interrogate the construction and a/effects of nostalgia as hidden/implicit/latent and heuristic. We advocate methodological critique that addresses the elusive, apparent, 'capturable' and confusing nature of nostalgia within sport research.

Key words

Nostalgia, qualitative research, sport, memory, methodology

Introduction

Instances from sport and sport research have prompted us to consider the explicit and implicit ways in which memory, nostalgia, reminiscence and reflection coalesce within language games to bring about particular narratives that shape our understanding of sport as a physical, embodied and emotive practice. Take the following as examples: the strategic use of traditional emblems, symbols, narratives, anecdotes and jingoistic imagery associated with the national competition at Olympic and Commonwealth Games events; assumptions and rhetoric made about a country's past performances and 'proud sporting tradition' in mainstream media; the passing on of particular traditions and cultural practices within national sport teams; generic beliefs about collective sport spectatorship, community and identity; the historical revisionism that occurs when there is reflection by individuals, commentators and/or the media on aspects of the sporting past; or, the reconstruction and mythologising of historical sporting failure(s) (Donoghue & Tranter, 2018; Eitzen, 2016; Fairley, Gibson, & Lamont, 2017; Kohe, 2010; Nathan, 2003). Such examples, which may be evident in many countries and sport spaces, are part of largely accepted practices of how people come to know, engage with, experience and understand sport as a social and linguistic practice. These ways of knowing and meaning making in and about sport may be relatively benign. However, there are different ways memory and nostalgia contour appreciation of sport and, invariably, this crafting of sporting memory may also have concomitant effects within sport research contexts. We respect that in some areas of sport research (for example, sport history, sport tourism, and museum/heritage studies) an attentiveness toward nostalgia and memory informs disciplinary thought and work (Booth, 2005; Hill, Moore & Wood, 2012; Hughson, 2016; Jarrett & Gammon, 2016; Kohe, 2010; Osmond & Phillips, 2015; Ramshaw & Gammon, 2017; Snyder, 2001). In contrast, the purpose of this paper is to interrogate the construction, use, meaning and

a/effects of the concept of nostalgia as hidden/implicit/latent and heuristic. In doing so, we aim to raise some broader philosophical questions about the working of nostalgia within research in sport and some associated problems for empirical research.

The examples above offer a starting point for our discussion in which we draw attention to the assumed messiness and fallibility of the concepts of memory and nostalgia whilst offering some logical remedies to help researchers work with such concepts. We suggest some ways of thinking through nostalgia and its influences on research. While the interest in this paper is primarily on the mechanics of nostalgia and memory, the intention is to acknowledge the implicit, and general, ways in which concepts may work to guide modes of enquiry. In the articulation and investigations of sport experience this concern, we argue, is particularly important; especially for how people's narratives might be critically and subjectively deployed and interpreted. Subsequently, we explore logical links between the concepts of nostalgia, the senses and memory within sport and its numerous language games that operate as research. Our interest in language games derives initially from the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953), who we consider later in this paper. We conclude by highlighting some methodological issues that may stem from more careful conceptual considerations within sport research.

Nostalgia of and Beyond Sport

One way to understand the pervasive influence of nostalgia within sport is to appreciate the ways in which the concept has been part of the ideological underpinnings of the sport industry, which, by its very nature, rests on not only human experience but the emotive nature of, and constant reflection on, performance. Sport organisations, for example, are continually engaged in nostalgia and memory acts. Sport organisations have at their disposal a substantive bank of

memories. However, organisations may often take most interest in those memories that speak to advance organisational agendas, political intentions, or perpetuate their public profile. These processes of nostalgia enable sport organisations to position themselves as architects of dominant narratives by drawing on and sustaining investments into certain memories and mythscapes (Bale, 2012; Bell, 2003; Kohe, 2013). By recalling selective aspects of an irretrievable past, for example, the organisation makes explicit and implicit decisions of what and whose memories matter. In so doing, the sport organisation acts as author to its own history and produces a narrative of what it assumes its past to be about.

We acknowledge here in sport, as in other facets of daily life, nostalgia is bound to notions of tradition. With its inherent social components, connectivity to time and place, regularities of practice, affiliations to player/club/sport/national genealogies and legacies, and the affective dimensions manifest in collective and individual experiences, sports are sites in which tradition(s) matters. The socio-cultural, (geo-)political notions and spatial aspects of tradition, and the related extent to which nostalgia contributes to associated practices of memory making and forgetting, has been well recognised by sport scholars (e.g., Blackburn, 2016; Huggins, 2001; Krüger, 2014; Vertinsky, 2015). While perspectives vary, work here has pointed to the advantageous qualities of tradition (e.g., engendering and fortifying collective spirit, preservation of cultural and social practices, providing means for political mobility and advocacy, establishing sustainable infrastructures and practices, legitimising economic investment, and providing foundations for capacity building and future security) (Bairner, 2003; Creak, 2015; Kay, 2013; Krüger, 2014). In contrast, scholarship has also highlighted the contentious nature of tradition in the politicisation of sport and discourses that perpetuate inequality, disenfranchisement, disempowerment, marginalisation and discrimination (O'Bonsawin, 2017; Parratt, 2016). A notable concern, critics

remark, is the profound, yet often subtle, ways in which nostalgia and tradition are operationalised as political devices to venerate dominant narratives while subsequently sanitising or suppressing alternate renderings. Importantly, research continues to explore how the deleterious and amorphous effects of tradition in sport are played out (useful work in this regard has been examinations of decolonisation (Bang & Amara, 2014; Borell & Kahi, 2017; Hokowhitu, 2009); political protest (Maclean, 2010; 2014); and critical heritage/museology (Phillips, Osmond & Morgan, 2013; Ramshaw & Gammon, 2017)). A recognition of tradition is of value in this paper in appreciating how nostalgia is nuanced and enacted in specific sport contexts. Beyond this, there is also merit in respecting the roles tradition contributes to prevailing hegemonies and assumptions with regards to how sport is framed in historical terms, how sport experiences are viewed (within and beyond research) as ‘recoverable’ pasts, the veracity and power of memory, and the subsequent analytical weight and value placed on the authenticity of those experiences in the present.

Here, to understand some of the complexities of sport organisations’ affectations for memory, it is useful to draw upon wider historiographical, philosophical, and political memory discourse. For example, while sport organisations might seek to represent a collective belief about the past and base interpretations and the privileging of specific memories on established ‘truths’ and assumptions celebrated within the sport, processes of narrative craftsmanship are subjective (Booth, 2005, 2009; Munslow, 1997, 2007; White, 1973). Moreover, the reliance on (collective) memory within narrative making is problematic due to the fallibility of memory and its potential to be corrupted by the forces of nostalgia, romanticism, and decontextualization. In the case of the contemporary professional sport industry, such forces call into question collective memory and nostalgia as a robust enterprise upon which to build sport organisational foundations, agendas, and practices. Rehearsing some of the points established within nostalgic critique elsewhere (e.g.,

Batcho, 1998; 2013; Glover & Bates 2006; Nikelly, 2004; Sedikides et al., 2015; Tannock, 1999), Andrews (1999) contends forces of late-capitalism have coalesced to create a ubiquitous ‘structure of [sporting] feeling’ (p.75); essentially, an amalgam of hyper-commercialism, predictable production mechanisms, and hagiographic banality that transcends geopolitical and spatial boundaries and sutures together notions of the past, present, and future into easily digestible spectacles and experiences. Across a variety of landscapes (e.g., NFL, NASCAR’s Pepsi 400, FIFA World Cups), Andrews notes, it is possible to witness nostalgia at play in the return of ‘historical’ sporting outfits, the resurrection of long dead sporting icons for commercialisation experiences, the (re)construction of ‘retro’ stadia and sports park, and nostalgic marketing in which contemporary sports stars are (re)framed within legacy and tradition narrations (e.g., Reebok’s use of footballer Ryan Giggs during the 1990s, or Steinlager’s reimagining of dead All Black rugby players).

In essence, the constant bombardment of historical reference points in sport (which extends to processes of nostalgia) has become increasingly peripatetic, random, and unpredictable. Moreover, the development of sport has led to a point of constant flux in which constructions of legacy, heritage, and tradition have become blurred and fictions and realities dissolved/dissolvable. As Andrews contends, “the present thus becomes a random moment which may, or may not, bear any relationship to the past, or indeed to the future” (pp.77-78). For sports fans/consumers, the practices Andrews identifies here are not, inherently, problematic. Indeed, rehearsing earlier points, nostalgia and tradition may contribute to sports’ enjoyable affective qualities. In terms of research implications, however, the sport industry’s nostalgic indulgences become an issue when they contribute to how sport might be known, whose narratives are privileged, and what logic and sense can be subsequently derived.

Yet, there is further complexity to nostalgia. In many cases nostalgia has enabled sport organisations to celebrate, utilise, and further narrate their own pasts for varied purposes. For some sport scholars, such investments into nostalgia may present challenges that adversely affect the research process and researchers' subjectivities (or affects) toward their subject matter. One area of sport research in which the area of nostalgia has explicitly appeared and been acknowledged is sport and tourism (Dann, 1994; Healy, 1991; Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). Early use of the term was a way to conceptualize sports-related travel to sport halls of fames, museums, visits to historical artefacts, seeking 'authentic' sporting experiences (e.g. Gilley, 2014; Snyder, 1991) or as a diasporic resource which enables migrants to connect to their nation, religion, cultural heritage and/or dispersed peers (Joseph, 2011). Slowikowski's (1991) interrogation of the sport-festival flame ceremony suggests such events offer a nostalgia for "solidarity, the sense of connectedness with strangers among whom we live" (Murray, 1990, p. 213). The concept has also interested scholars who have highlighted the role of nostalgic recollections of volunteering at previous sport events, as well as nostalgic recollections of the history and tradition of the Olympic Games as motives for volunteerism (Fairley, Kellet, & Green, 2007), or in organising neighbourhood sporting activities (Glover & Bates, 2006). Finally, Connell's (2017) work on groundhopping (i.e., people who travel to watch matches which are below the senior echelons of league competitions at a variety of grounds) compiles themes relating to authenticity, emotion, community, and identity. In relation to sport policy, Petracovchi and Terret (2013) considered Romania's nostalgia for the successes experienced prior to 1989 which paradoxically revived the temptation to adopt a model of state-financed sport. While this body of work has been significant in advancing understanding about the conceptual influence of nostalgia in particular contexts, our paper takes

its interest in the ways in which nostalgia works and is implied in more subtle and less easy to discern ways in sport research.

At its point of origin, nostalgia is a psychological and linguistic concept that is memory oriented, historied and occasionally evoked for strategic purposes at the individual collective and organisational level (Davis, 1979; Lears, 1998; Hamilton et al., 2014). It is therefore a normative concept and with this comes various complexities and rules. Understood etymologically, nostalgia is formed by *nóstos*, thus meaning some form of ‘homecoming’ or ‘returning to’. This, coupled with *álgos*, suggests a pain, grief or distress. In terms of its literary use, the concept of nostalgia famously appears in D. H. Lawrence’s *The Lost Girl* as a wistful yearning for a past or earlier time. In their theoretical unpacking of the concept and its connection with the human senses, Vannini, Waskul, and Gottschalk (2012) attribute the first use of the word nostalgia to the late seventeenth century Swiss physician Johannes Hofer. This bittersweet emotion or “longing for a sense of both a time and a place anchored in the biographical past” (Vannini, Waskul, & Gottschalk, 2012, p. 95), was in Hofer’s time a diagnosable disease.

With concept interrogation, it is worth considering how nostalgia or such longing, yearning or thirst for past times involves the attempted evocation of things what were. A logical point is necessary here. We use the words ‘attempted’ and ‘evocation’ to illustrate how nostalgia or more precisely, ‘feelings of nostalgia’ are always in some form partial, idealistic, or fanciful. The concept operates as a very selective form of psychological and linguistic recalling, recounting, re-living. This selectivity could raise some issues for researchers working within qualitative paradigms where and when the individual and collective subjectivity of meaning and memory making are concerned. The aforementioned literature interprets nostalgia as “a preference (general liking, positive attitude or favourable affect) towards objects (people, places, experiences or

things) from when one was younger or from times about which one has learned vicariously, perhaps through socialization or the media” (Fairley, 2003, p. 288). As such, one does not have to possess or experience something to feel nostalgic about it.

In addition, concepts, such as nostalgia, are not just words. Rather, words are used to express and also possess concepts. Such concepts have a certain logic and do not operate in isolation. Instead, concepts operate within a conceptual scheme. Concepts are the focus when qualitative researchers interview people. Researchers ask people about their health, their experiences and their recollections of events, and so on. Bennett and Hacker (2008, p. 127) provide some clarity in terms of the operation of concepts. They identify that -

1. Concepts are not entities.
2. Concepts can be applied or misapplied.
3. Concepts can be introduced by a definition or an explanation (this is the classical view or theory of concepts).
4. Concepts can be substantiated for another concept.
5. Concepts can be extended in various ways.
6. Concepts can be grasped, understood or misunderstood.
7. Concepts can be shared with others.
8. Concepts can be mastered or possessed.

These ideas form what may be called the ‘abilities’ view of concepts, the possession of concepts, and the articulation of concepts. Such a view is predicated on the idea that we are the arbiters of concepts in adherence with logic, logical grammar, and sense. The concept of nostalgia, for example, is one that we possess and use; it can be enabled (e.g., to be nostalgic) and this concept is used within our broader conceptual scheme (e.g., constructing nostalgic experiences) that

includes, and is closely connected with, concepts of truth, authenticity, knowledge, memory, thought, and also imagination.

Senses of Nostalgia

The concept of nostalgia operates at both an individual and collective level. The discussion advanced in this paper is to illustrate a concept that is somewhat akin to memory and we encourage researchers' appreciativeness that just as memories are made in real life, they are recalled, evoked, known, and used not solely in the brain, but instead in our interpersonal sensuous and linguistic interactions (Batcho, 1998; 2013; Davis, 1979; Lears; 1998). Somewhat differently to ways in which nostalgia has been presented thus far, Vannini et al. (2012) approach the concept of nostalgia with an appreciation of its self maintaining, performative, and sensuous qualities. Vannini et al. (2012) note how nostalgic "recalling is a form of somatic work: a sensual practice we actively deploy to maintain self continuity over time" (p. 97). Such active deployment can be laden with political and strategic attempts to manage and alter individual and collective identities over time. By working in and with the human senses, they draw upon the work of Dewey (1967) to illustrate through the notion of 'somatic work' how experiences of nostalgia emerge almost as a by-product in their inquiries into the sociality of the physical senses of vision, smell, touch, and more. The senses (that are 'operating' in the present via social interactions) it would seem, can act as memory inducing portals to certain pasts, the sense of smell in particular 'appears' to have real evocative and transformative potentials to bring forth experiences, feelings, and emotions that are sensuously historied (Classen, 1990; Howes, 1991; 2003; Nikelly, 2004; Roadway, 1994; Simmel, 1997; Tannock, 1995). Caution is warranted. We use the word 'appears' carefully above to show how smells in the present can correlate with a similar smell from the past. The sensuousness of nostalgia

seems to operate whereby significant events, people or things, say for example a previous lover, a game or hockey stick are associated, marked, or historied with a particular scent that is some time later encountered in the present. The smell in the present cannot bring forth the smell of the past. The previous smell is not dialled up via synapses from the recesses of our brain. Instead, the current scent instigates a memory of a past that is marked by a similar smell. We cannot smell, or sense for that matter, the past.

The senses also appear to be useful triggers that may be fired by researchers and research participants where and when an evocation of past or recent present experiences is desired. Such an 'excitation' as Dewey (1967, p. 44) has it, or 'transubstantiation' (Howes, 1987, p. 399), via the senses appears to be a useful epistemological device to tap into memories. Such tapping into is a linguistic endeavour. For qualitative researchers, interpretations rest upon language and the linguistic recounting from participants. Meaningful divulsion, reception, critique, and interpretation is dependent on language because it is only through language, and more specifically, a commonly used and shareable language, that anything of any sense can be communicated in qualitative research. Vannini et al. (2012) depart from their symbolic interactionist predecessors and instead claim that "language plays a limited role because recalling is an act that is overwhelmingly sensory and loaded with potent emotional capital" (p. 97). We acknowledge that Vannini's position is not intended to be oppositional to the utility of language, rather that there is recognition of the futilities of language in conceptual articulation and consolidation.

The degree to which language's role is limited therefore becomes a critical question as it would appear *prima facie* that our senses and sensations are indeed concepts that are language dependent. This is a logical issue. By way of example, one cannot smell the aroma of a musty pine forest without the necessary conceptual understanding of smell, must and forests. Similarly, one

must possess the linguistic concepts of pain, anxiety, love, and so further in order to experience the things which may logically follow from such emotions. Language works only when our experiencing of such emotions is communicated following rules that are broadly accepted as being sensible, legitimate, and not contradictory. If one has persistent erratic feelings of hate towards someone that one supposedly loves, the concept of love has clearly not been understood properly (as in the way we usually use the word and concept) and it would be plausible to conclude that said person is therefore not in love. In such examples it is evident that any such experiences or sensations associated with love are preceded by the linguistic concept of love. To reiterate, our underlying point at this juncture is that the ability to articulate experiences *as* experiences of *something* is dependent upon language. While we respect the existence of visceral sensations, here our concern is with the subsequent inferences made by individuals when they endeavour to evoke these sensations as memories (or in this context of this paper, as nostalgia) using a repertoire of language that is conceptually and logically fallible.

Hopefully such an argument goes some way to augment and add clarity to Vannini et al.'s (2012) assertion regarding the relationships between language and recollection. To say that the recalling of experiences and memories, or the nostalgia from these times is overwhelmingly sensory seems to put the cart before the horse. Indeed, one must first linguistically possess the concept of nostalgia to sensibly claim that one is nostalgic, or that there are nostalgic sentiments implicitly at work within one's ontological position that informs subsequent research practices. The recourse to a consideration about the senses may seem abstract. However, for the purposes of analysing how nostalgia informs researchers and research practice in sport, a segue to the senses is of value. The aforementioned discussion helps us think about how we can 'know' senses; shapes our acknowledgement that senses are private things; and, that with this privacy comes an innate

confidence and certainty that grounds and consolidate understanding (often in permanent and fixed ways). This entrenched belief in what we feel we know, what we know, and what we think we know is an inescapable part of undertaking research (within and beyond sport). Yet, as we explore in the next section, navigating a pathway as a researcher through this ontological terrain is further compounded by the slipperiness of language and the collective practices within qualitative sport research that have become par for the course.

Language Games and Concepts

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953) deploys the idea of language games in his *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein provides a radical rethink and clarification of the way that our everyday concepts are used in everyday language, and the idea that our concepts within language are worked during ‘games’ that are ‘rule bound’ with ‘logical grammar’ dependent upon our ‘form of life’. His ideas have formed the basis of much philosophy of language in the 20th century. We adopt some of these ideas to help think about qualitative research, nostalgia, and memory and the associated common parlance used to articulate such.

For example, imagine a (qualitative) researcher being interested in sports coaches and the work that they do with elite athletes. The coach and researcher share some resemblance with each other in the way that they are both involved within a particular form of life (they are both reasonably familiar with, and appreciative of, the notion of competitive sport and the associated concepts). Their being in this ‘form of life’ allows them to sensibly converse (most of the time) about it; for example, they can speak about winning and losing, players and more and thus they generally understand what each other says. For Wittgenstein, they could both engage in a ‘language game’ that could be called (these are not exhaustive and could be phrased differently)

the reporting of an event game. During this language game the researcher asks the coach questions about an event (a particular event or time in their career when...) and so long as both parties share some conceptual resonance, the coach recalls and reports things to the researcher. This appears rather straightforward and distinctly characteristic of the form and premises of much psychological and qualitative research.

The above example works in most cases if both the coach and the researcher possess and share similar concepts (it may be tempting to think that they need to share only vocabulary or terminology however this is mistaken as will be shown). The above 'game' would not work if the researcher asks questions about a certain event and the coach speaks about particular 'tensions' during the season. Imagine the researcher for some reason assumes these to be physical tensions or cramps of the body when what was meant was interpersonal 'tensions' or perhaps the sort of 'tensions' usually associated with descriptions of 'poor relations' within the team. The word 'tension' has not been verbally miscommunicated here, rather the concept 'tension' has been misapplied in this language game. We can see the dissonance here and we also recognise that this is not usually how conversations go. Pushing the point further and more realistically however, if the coach reports of such 'tensions' during that season and describes 'that it felt like...' or 'that he had to decide whether...' or 'that he thought about...' etc. and the propositional form of the statements, rather than the concepts, are misunderstood for some reason, then this is a major problem for the qualitative researcher. Suppose, for instance, that the coach is playing a language game more akin to the very similar, but slippery, *nostalgic reporting of an event* game when instead the researcher thinks that the game is just a basic *reporting of an event* game. Here the tensions, emotions, feelings, and so further could be understood perfectly well yet the implicit concept of nostalgia could be tainting the qualitative analysis. It would therefore make little sense to speak

with any degree of certainty (which surely should be a marker for all empirical research) of the coach actually ‘feeling...’ or ‘thinking...’ in that event or the researcher analysing such a reporting as being authentically representative of the coaches’ experiences.

Our discussion has illustrated how concepts (even sensory and psychological concepts) are linguistic in form and operate according to certain rules. Such rules are not restrictive, but they are fundamentally necessary for our speaking sense. The concept of nostalgia comes with a certain logical baggage or ‘grammar’, namely, a yearning and an allure for something that may not necessarily have been experienced. This raises some problems for empirical research and qualitative researchers of various methodological persuasions whether they are interested in social agents or broader organisations.

Our contention here is that qualitative researchers need to be clear about the ‘language games’ that they instigate and the extent to which their inquiry deals with propositions. Qualitative researchers are in some way thought collectors and memory instigators, however sentences rather than propositions seem to be the evidence of choice within their inquiries. It becomes evident that qualitative researchers do not just play language games, their whole enterprise actually *is* a language game in itself. For the purposes of exploring these games, we provide a generic sport exemplar to work from (from which, we hope, readers may relate to their own respective research subjects and contexts). Consider a research project to examine the welfare of former elite athletes in a particular sport and geographical setting. The researcher may assume that via inquiry they are able to uncover and understand the concept of welfare through interrogating athletes’ experiences during their elite careers. While the researcher may acknowledge, in various ways, the subjectivity of their own position, they essentially still work from an assumption/set of assumptions that: (a) the notion of ‘welfare’ may be captured; (b) that both researcher and participant have the same

spatial and temporal conceptualisation of the term; and (c) incongruence between participants' reflection on welfare and the in situ data acquisition can be easily bridged through the researcher's theoretically-driven making meaning via their academic analysis and narration. Subsequently, within corresponding discussion and conclusions the researcher may extract certain illustrations that facilitate an interpretation of legitimate social reality that might be of 'value' to furthering our understanding.

To consolidate our argument, and explore the potential ramification for the above example, we consider three approaches to the language and conceptual sense games that may be operationalised within researchers' work across the ontological/paradigmatic spectrum. These are as follows:

1. There is a retrievable 'truth' (subjective though it may be in qualitative research) that is out there independent of the mind to be recovered; and, that by arresting this truth via academic enquiry it may be considered authentic and, thus, understandable/knowable/meaningful. In adopting this realist position, the researcher is, therefore, obliged to provide evidence to support this claim. Yet, if we accept that nostalgia is at play (which we operate from a position in this paper that it is), then such assumptions become problematic in that they cannot accept that nostalgia, by its very nature, is a corrosive concept that has the capacity to erode notions of truth, authenticity, and empirical legitimacy. The danger in doing so is that the researcher creates an issue in opening up their research to an explicit fallibility that works against the version of record and phenomena that they are endeavouring so ardently to construct. If a piece of qualitative research was to claim something like 'these participants experienced X' then there needs to be sufficient evidence provided to ascertain whether X is X (rather than nostalgia), or a nostalgic X was experienced. If there is the

necessary evidence provided then the work can be judged accordingly and sensibly considered.

2. Researchers who adopt opposite assumptions tend to accept that reality and experiences are mind dependent and not necessary out there to be truthfully retrieved. Notions of authenticity and truthfulness are evidenced alongside very different criteria and there are very different expectations and warrants upon such researchers. For researchers operating under these alternative relativist philosophical assumptions, the concept of nostalgia appears less problematic on first inspection, however the concept (as understood within this paper) casts a shadow of doubt upon the claims made during such an inquiry. Like the first example, if a piece of qualitative research was to claim something like ‘these participants experienced X’ then there also needs to be sufficient evidence provided to ascertain whether X is X (rather than nostalgia), or a nostalgic X was experienced. It just so happens that the criteriological threshold and degree of expectation is contrary to that in the first example. The concept is no more or less problematic here, it is however more implicitly accepted given these philosophical auspices.
3. Researchers who accept nostalgia may be essentially stuck with respect to how to deal with it and its consequences within the research. There may, for example, be acknowledgement that experience X is shaped by nostalgia, or X is entirely nostalgic. However, it is ontologically and practically difficult for the researcher to establish a set of criteria and values upon which the characteristics and consequences of nostalgia on X can be ascertained. Ergo, it is therefore intellectually and methodologically easier for researchers either to superficially account for nostalgia as part of the normal caveat of qualitative subjectivity, dismiss nostalgia affects as congruent within interpretivist tradition, and/or to

avoid engagement with nostalgia entirely as it creates unnecessary and unhelpful ‘mess’ in interpreting and narrating X.

In outlining these positions and assumptions, our intention here is not to present a superficial dichotomy. Rather, regardless of positionality on the spectrum, we are interested in encouraging researchers to consider positionality irrespective of the nature of the work they may be undertaking. While researchers may not operate from a position of outwardly acknowledging philosophical assumptions in qualitative research (for example, all qualitative research employs assumptions as a *modus operandi*); such assumptions invariably craft the ontological and epistemological positions and practices. Because qualitative research is heavily premised on the recovery and articulation of thoughts, beliefs, ideas, and experiences - concepts such as nostalgia may be implicitly at work.

As discussed at the outset of this paper, nostalgia works effectively and constructively within sport to shape discourse, meaning, experience, and memory. In some cases, nostalgia may be entrenched within the retrieval and creation of knowledge (think here about popular expression of sport fandom or public sport heritage celebration, or phenomenological accounts of individuals’ past sporting/physical activity experiences). In academia, nostalgia may be readily accepted by some qualitative researchers as a part of the cultural practice and dimension of sport being examined. Yet, we accept that it may be of peripheral or perhaps no concern to some researchers. We argue here, that within empirical sport research, nostalgic thinking can creep in and implicitly contour the notions of empirical ‘faith’ and ‘truth’ that are entrenched within the research process. For example, what researchers believe that they are able to uncover about a phenomenon (e.g., experiences of sport fandom, gender-inequality, micro-political interactions, abuse, or deviance). In the following section, we outline some dominant ways in which qualitative researchers uncover,

capture and construct data and findings from empirical projects about associated sports-based concepts.

Methodological considerations

The previous argument concerning the philosophy of language and nostalgia raises challenges for qualitative research as it disrupts the logical, ontological, epistemological, and methodological grounds on which it tends to be designed. The discussion specifically draws attention to the need for researchers to recognise how language creation (in particular inherent propositions therein) effect discourse creation, meaning making, and established 'truths' in research contexts. Philosophical critique of the research exercise works in so much as it enables critique to be made about the a priori and entrenched assumptions that inform the nature of our scholarly inquiries. Of primary concern here is in advocating that care needs to be taken with regards to the relationship between language and the assumptions and meanings that are drawn from the language that qualify as established, verified, and legitimate research 'truths'. Although within qualitative research scholars may make the necessary caveats and concessions about the providence of the data, in the end there is a general acceptance of the 'account'/'event'/'moment'/'data' as 'workable truth'; that is, a version of record that - with all its limitations - may still reveal something authentic about the (sport) world. In terms of language, there is an apparent established faith in our linguistic creations and a tendency to glaze over the presumptions that information language (mis)use, the limitations of language to effectively convey meaning (e.g., in some cases there are simply no words to capture what it is that we want to capture), and, that narrative construction in research often requires leaps of logic between realities and experiences and empirical data that is essentially comprised of reflection, and in the case of this paper, nostalgia. Taken in totality, the intricacies and fallibilities

of language and the messy nature of language games pose issues for the authenticity of our research. In what follows, we consider some of the practical methodological implications and questions that arise when we place language central to our research process.

We have touched upon the logic and limits of language generally and the associated difficulties of researching peoples' memories through language. If we bring back the example of the coach and the experienced 'tensions', perhaps sometimes metaphor or idiom find their way into articulation. 'It's as vivid as the day it happened', 'it's coming back to me now', 'I felt under the microscope', 'we were on top of the world' etc., we are questioning the extent to which researchers interrogate such idiom or metaphor to ward off any possibility of nostalgic embellishment or underplay. Idiom and metaphor are useful in our everyday parlance and we all know that there are no microscopes or tops of the world to be on. Similar issues are at work when the coach in our example notes 'it felt like...' What is really being said here is *that* 'it felt like...'. The first one would be part of a sentence whereas the second is part of a proposition and qualitative researchers need to know the difference and be suitably aware of the implications.

With respect to particular research methods and the processes of data generation, there are also further considerations to be made. In terms of the construction of interview and/or questionnaire items, there is scope here for researchers to consider more carefully how the language games they utilise may come to bear on the participant data acquisition. Such a rethink may start with the researcher reflecting upon what the overarching and/or underpinning philosophical/ontological questions are that lay at the heart of the work (e.g., what is there to know about sport experience or phenomena X; in what ways might X be evidenced via sport; and/or how does participant A recall experiencing X). Specific acknowledgement could also be explicitly afforded here to nostalgia as a mechanism by which experience X may be 'recovered' in the

interview process. For example, expressed as the researcher suggesting that ‘experience X was in the past, however, how did you believe you felt then and in what ways has this changed now?’.

Other tangible changes and encouragement may be to consider the philosophical decisions that are made during the analytical research phase. We are not, per se, suggesting here that there need be a nostalgic dimension to the analysis (if that is not the researcher’s focus). Rather, we contend that there is a further layer of critique that might be incorporated in the process of connecting the meaning ascertained between the analysis, interpretation and articulation. This may comprise, for example, of the researcher asking, and moving to the foreground, questions pertaining to the claims that are construed from the data as a representation (albeit admittedly accepted as subjective) of phenomena X. For example, in questioning what ways might there be a disjuncture between participants’ claims of X in situ, X as was experienced in situ at a particular time and place, and X as recalled in the present? Or, further, considering what ways has the participant’s narration of X and my role as co-constructor of knowledge about X been limited by language (though this might apply to all sorts of different ideas and constructs, in our case our foci has been notions and understanding of nostalgia).

Beyond language and conceptual considerations, we advocate for deeper acknowledgement and engagement with the research context. We are not, necessarily, suggesting researchers embrace ethnographic methodologies, but rather that there are efforts to have a more sustained academic involvement. For example, in aspects of our own research, we believe our abilities to articulate nuanced narratives has been added by a critical sensibility and sensitivity to participant experiences and contexts and a knowledge borne out of longer term connectivities and networks that we endeavour to work with in our thought and word. Our position, and our intentions to speak for and to particular communities, for example, we feel have been shaped by nostalgia (in

addition to other assumptions about meaning and authenticities associated of being and becoming). This nostalgia need not be considered detrimental, but rather works to add another layer of nuance, value, and critique to how we might view participants' experiences as a phenomenological reality.

As gatekeepers, we also encourage more reviewers to also engage in this process of interrogating the philosophical premises upon which data is obtained, analysed, and crafted within qualitative research. We appreciate that many reviewers may already operate in this way. However, there remains scope to use the review process to engage in constructive and productive intellectual discussions about the use, and belief, in particular philosophical constructs that are employed in phenomena interpretation. Moreover, in a practical sense, while academic publishing conventions seem to encourage more abbreviated methodological accounts, we believe there may also be a need to return to more extensive sections that better articulate some of the assumptions that operate within and through the research process. Part of these changes could be undertaken in the review process. As gatekeepers, reviewers may wish to raise points of inquiry as to the implicit and explicit assumptions authors may have made obtaining, interrogating, and reconstituting participants' accounts as authentic representations. Here, in basic parlance, we suggest more discussions around the premises such as, 'the participant said it was so, so it must be so, and I as a researcher accept it as so' are warranted more. Herein may lie also a consideration of the fallibility of authenticity of qualitative research that transcends conventional accounts of research and researcher subjectivity. We accept that this may be a somewhat dangerous suggestion or conversation to be had as part of the review process; namely in that it opens up academia to instability that may crumble our collective enterprise. Yet, we are optimistic in that while such rigor may potentially cause initial intellectual ruin, from this rubble new ontological enterprise that fortifies our work and disciplines might emerge.

Conclusions

Qualitative research is about interpretation. Interpretation is a craft that rests not only on language, but the assumptions of language to convey conceptual complexities and a faith in the universality of language to effectively narrate forms of knowledge that reveal to us ‘something’ about the worlds in which we inhabit. This process is also predicated on an innate faith that we have in research authorship and an authenticity we are assumed to share as an academic community with the research and knowledge construction process (Booth, 2005; Callinicos, 1995; McCullagh, 2004). The purpose of this paper was to interrogate the construction and a/effects of nostalgia as hidden/implicit/latent and heuristic. In doing so, our aim was to raise some broader philosophical questions about nostalgia within research in sport (at the methodological level). Using nostalgia as a heuristic device to question ways of doing within our discipline, in this paper, we have sought to fuel further discussion about the nature and assumption of qualitative research and the ways sport researchers consider their work within this realm. While here we attend to nostalgia, we acknowledge that other concepts may also warrant semantic and philosophical deconstruction (e.g., memory, identity, experience, being, knowledge, communication, language). Regardless of concept foci, and while in this paper we have advanced a conceptual and theoretical argument, we respect that there is a need to think about the practical ramifications for research practice.

What we propose is further reflexivity and critique of the implicit assumptions, truths, and ideals that may be about of each researcher’s disciplinary epistemes. For us, in sport, we have taken nostalgia as a key conceptual focus that is discernible, yet not always recognised as overtly, influencing how researchers think, work, and create knowledge. In other disciplines and sub-disciplines there may be equivalent concepts that are at play that have effects on the nature of knowledge construction and meaning making. In qualitative sport research we might begin with

questions that critique how researchers might better acknowledge the influence of nostalgia within their work; ways researchers can, more broadly, respect and account for the complexities and nuances of concepts and language games in the research process. What we advocate is to start using language carefully and in ways that do not infer or take for granted the subtleties of language, or place too much weight on the universality of concepts. As part of the necessity of constantly checking our bias, checking our privilege, checking our positionality and that of our participants, we should also be as careful of the products (e.g., language and narratives) that are produced through the research process.

We have shown the ways in which the concept of nostalgia is operated, possessed, used, and potentially misused. Our arguments have centered on the logic that concepts are language dependent and are manifest in our social practices. In possessing the concept of nostalgia, humans do not have something or some experience in them, instead, they can say words that mean things. What becomes evident is that qualitative research (whether it now warrants the title ‘research’ is deeply questionable) appears to be more of a conceptual and philosophical rather than empirical and scientific activity. Qualitative research may be better served by more concerted time spent thinking about the ways in which people possess and use concepts ‘occasion sensitively’ (Travis, 2006) (here, the concept of nostalgia).

Research traditions and disciplinary conventions have been built upon a series of assumptions over time that have serviced to consolidate our faith in research as a *bona fide* knowledge production industry. It is this near unwavering belief in the sanctity and infallibility of our academic systems and its underlying ethical basis that provides us with assurance that what we do in our work matters, is meaningful, is constitutive of meaning making, and is of ‘value’ in revealing ‘something’ about ‘something’. However, when we start to unravel some of the

assumptions upon which our intellectual institutions are based then the credibility of our practices may be revealed and unsettled. Yet, such unsettling, we hope, may create possibilities that transcend current practice.

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