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**The perfect stroke: Moving beyond the performance  
narrative within rowing.**

A thesis  
submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of  
**Master of Sport and Leisure Studies**  
at  
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by  
**Toni-Elizabeth Green**



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# Abstract

This Thesis presents a narrative inquiry into the experiences rowers have within their sport, through exploring the stories they tell. Following Carless and Douglas (2012) my thesis identifies that success is a multi-dimensional concept. In doing so, I challenge the dominant performance narrative within sport that conceptualises success solely as winning.

The performance narrative is often unsustainable and therefore can be damaging to an athlete's well-being, due to such circumstances as injury, de-selection, drop out, aging, and losing. This can lead to narrative wreckage; where the individual no longer knows how to make sense of their life as the dominant story they told no longer aligns with their experiences. Highlighting, exploring and sharing stories that resist or move past the performance narrative can give individuals the ability to view themselves as a multi-faceted identity, allowing them to holistically enjoy sporting participation.

Rowers interviewed in this thesis told stories of winning, but also of friendship, loyalty, and the freedom of movement. Of particular interest were the stories told that shared a sense of embodied convergence; the sensation of merging with the medium (Anderson, 2012). As yet, the convergence narrative is largely underdeveloped in the broader sporting literature; thus the paper drew heavily on the literature surrounding surfing in which the notion of convergence has been developed.

By sharing and spreading of a range of different stories, individuals develop their narrative repertoire. This gives them the resources to be able to move past the performance narrative, and restory themselves if, and when, it no longer aligns with their experiences.

My thesis looks to add to the existing literature resisting the performance narrative, by sharing evocative tales showing the complexities and intricacies of resisting or conforming to the performance narrative, and essentially, the joy that can be found within the sport of rowing.

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Lastly I would like to thank the rowers. Both the ones I interviewed, and the ones I rowed with all those years ago, you all have influenced my life in countless ways. The stories we share ring with loyalty, friendship, and a never ending, passionate desire to feel that glorious perfect stroke once more.

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# Proem

The alarm shrieks, piercing the silence of the early morning. I have to use an abrasive noise as otherwise I tend to incorporate the alarm sound into my dream and carry on sleeping. Oh how I wish I could carry on sleeping! The birds aren't even awake and singing yet, why must I be?! Sometimes (oftentimes) I wonder why I row. Right now, I'd give anything to carry on sleeping.

Sighing and yawning, I fling my arm out and clumsily thump around until I make contact with the alarm, and the shrilling stops. I roll my legs out of bed and curl my body over them, stretching out my back. An injury about a year ago has left it tight, too long in the one position such as while sleeping and it clenches up and spasms when I try to breathe.

Grumbling to myself, I shuffle out of the house. I wore my training clothes to bed in so that I could get an extra couple of minutes sleep. Outside is dark, but I can see clearly. I live in a small town which means there's less light pollution, and the stars and moon are cheerily beaming from the sky lighting my way. In the car I pick up my banana that I stored there the night before, and reverse out of the driveway while I force myself to eat half. I trained without breakfast for years until I started getting dizzy spells, and finally conceded to having a half banana in an effort to better fuel my body. I hate eating in the morning. I hate everything in the morning.

I fiddle with the radio to turn it down- everything is too loud in the pre-dawn quiet, blaring into my sleepy ears. Only two minutes down the road and I see the water. In the dark it is inky black, and I can tell how flat and glassy it is from the now fading stars mirrored perfectly on its surface.

I breathe out my morning anger with a whoosh, and the beginnings of a smile creep around the corners of my mouth. I hate mornings, I hate the cold, I hate the dark, but oh, I do love the water.

The wind has not yet risen to ruffle its smooth surface, and no boat owners have set out yet to disrupt its peaceful slumber with a slew of frothy wake and loud engine noise. As if acknowledging my appreciation

for its elegant sheen, the water dances in front of my eyes, beckoning me to join it. It's funny how water can at once be so still yet also in motion. Maybe it is just my early morning bleary eyes. I rub them, but the water still beckons.

In a blink, I am at the rowing club. The single light bulb inside is flickering itself into existence; the club is old and run down, having only few members leaves little money to upgrade. I rarely notice its dilapidated state; it houses my beautiful, elegant, boat. What does it matter what it looks like?

I can see my teammates sleepy bodies make their way out of their respective cars as I park. Three rowers and a coxswain. My smile widens, it looks as though we are training alone this morning, without a coach.

I like my coach, but I have a painfully annoying habit of needing to know why we do a certain training when we do it and how to best do it to get the best results and why do we want those results and who taught them why they should do that and thankfully, I do not have to have this battle again this morning. An added bonus of rowing sans coach is there will be no noisy motor hovering behind us, as irritating as a giant, obnoxiously loud mosquito that hovers around but never quite comes close enough to swat.

Mumbled greetings ensue; none of us are particularly morning persons. We fall wordlessly into our positions about our boat. There are so few rowers at the club that we almost have sole custody of this boat, and we treat it with due respect. We had to earn it. The phrase "it is a privilege, not a right" echoed in our ears every time we used it for the first six months. Years of lugging our old boat that was essentially an ancient, cumbersome tree trunk without ever scratching or denting it eventuated in this upgraded vessel.

Using eye contact as communication, we lift the boat gently, shuffle it out from its shelf and all together raise it to our shoulders- our preferred position for transporting.

As we exit the club, our feet are greeted with sharp gravel stones. We long ago hardened our feet to their piercing embrace, casting aside the comfort but instability of jandles for our surer footed bare feet. Gently,

we wade into the water. It is summer, but the rivers first embrace is always icy cold. I nod, and we slip one arm each under the boat to lift it above our heads. We make a striking silhouette, with the sun now tracing rays of light at our backs, creeping out from behind Mount Parihaka.

All together, we bend to the right and gently flip the boat right side up, placing it delicately on the water. The noise it makes is so satisfying; I take a breath and smile at the sound. Two of my crew mates run across the stones to fetch our oars, and they skip back, one oar in each hand. We quickly set the oars up in their respective gates, stiff morning fingers fumbling with the twisting motion required to secure them into the gates.

The two members who have the riggers on the shore side of the boat grasp their oars and slip lightly into the boat, wriggling around on the seat in an effort to find the familiar groove their behind will settle into for the entirety of the row. The coxswain then slides into her position at the bow, laying her body down and inside the bow of the boat until just her head is visible. She moves the wires connected to the rudder to ensure it is moving freely.

Finally, Mel and I place our left feet inside the boat, and grasping our oar against the gunnel we push off awkwardly with our right feet until we can no longer feel the bottom, then slide our right legs inside the boat and go about securing our feet into the shoes.

This is my favourite moment. The first ripples appear on the water's surface, slowly rolling away from us and disappearing into the dark water. The light is creeping steadily across the sky, the only sounds to be heard are those of my teammates breathing and the occasional caw of a waking gull. As we begin to row, more music fills my ears. I hear the creak of the boat as we swing and sway, and the clunk of oars all together at the finish. I hear the magical single splash as all four oars enter the water at once; a rare feat. I breathe in deep once more, the smell of salt growing stronger. The further we row the more salty the water and air becomes. Our rowing club is on a river that leads to a harbour, so we make our way towards the ocean rhythmically.

As we move our bodies in unison our minds gradually wake up, no doubt due to our pumping muscles forcing the blood forcing its way

through every muscle. At this point, we start singing. Separately at first, Moby starts us off. He is more cheerful in the morning than the rest of us. My ears pick up the tune he is poorly singing and I don't hesitate to give him a good natured ribbing about the likeness his voice displays to a wailing cat. We all burst into laughter, which then dissolves in to a chorus of our voices, interspersed with grunts and massive gasps of air and laughter. We sing and row faster and louder, our rowing strokes keeping time with our verses. Eventually we are belting tunes at the top of our voices, no one around for miles to hear the ridiculousness of our poor singing voices and hearty laughter. We change words out of popular tunes to make them rowing songs, and we make up entire songs from scratch, repeatedly singing them over and over until they are etched deeply in to my memory.

The sun is rising now but the wind is not, and I am swept along the harbour with not a thought in my mind but for the wonderful sensation of being amongst my best friends and doing an activity that is so relaxing and invigorating at the same time.

The movements are so therapeutic, beginning from the catch- we pause out there, arms wide open, the world at our fingertips. Together, splash. Legs push, shoulders pull, arms bend. Bringing the world into our embrace at our chests. Together, drop the oars out of the water. I hear fizzing, the sound that the boat makes as we go faster. Someone told me once it is bubbles from the boat that makes that noise. One solid clunk fills my ears as our wrists roll the four oars to make the blades flat, to glide and skim across the surface of the river. I can feel our bodies bend, sway, and roll forwards, reaching out all together in perfect unison, to begin at the catch once more. Without perfect unison there would be lag in the boat, but the stroke feels free and easy; the mark of perfect timing. I glance sideways and catch my team mate's wide, goofy grins and flushed faces out of the corner of my eye. The sun finally breaks over the side of Mount Parihaka, sending beams of gold right over our heads and making the water shimmer and gleam, sparkling, a reflection of our jubilant mood. What a great way to wake up, I think to myself.

Why would I ever stop rowing?

# Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that within sport, success is primarily constituted as winning (Carless & Douglas, 2012). This commonly acknowledged storyline has been labelled the performance narrative (see Carless & Douglas, 2012; Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2006; Douglas & Carless, 2009; Koukouris, Panagiotis & Nikos, 2009) and like many dominant narratives (see Frank, 1997), it can be harmful to sportspersons. It can constrict a person's identity (Neimeyer, Herrero & Botella, 2006) due to the oppressive nature of the discourse. Generally alternative stories are dismissed or silenced because they are incomprehensible within the culture of sport (Douglas & Carless, 2009).

When the performance narrative fails to align with a person's experiences, narrative wreckage can occur (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). This misalignment can come about due to injury, de-selection, aging, or just being beaten (Sparkes & Smith, 2002) along with simply a growing sense of discomfort within the confines of the narrative. These factors are linked to youth drop out in sports; reportedly 99% of high school athletes do not make the transition to further their sporting careers after school (Butt & Molnar, 2009).

At the point of transition, athletes are often so accustomed to telling stories that follow the dominant narrative; success is winning, that they lack the resources and language necessary to restory themselves (Sparkes, 2000; Sparkes & Smith, 2002). This can lead to a large number of mental health problems (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000) due to the loss of their identity. Fortunately, other narratives exist in the sporting world. As we can see in the opening story, rowing can be very enjoyable for such simple reasons as being out on the water, the joy of movement, and connecting with friends. In the telling of these stories, we may move beyond the performance narrative, giving ourselves valuable story-telling resources which will allow ourselves to re-story our identity when the performance narrative no longer aligns with our experiences.

These were not always the stories I told about rowing, however. Unfortunately my experience in rowing was fraught with pressure from people all around me glorifying the performance narrative, which I did not feel aligned with my emotions and experiences. This left me feeling that the dominant narrative had failed me, suppressed, silenced and 'othered' my experience. It is only with the benefit of hindsight that I realize I was telling other stories, such as in the proem, and that these stories were meaningful. But, due to the fact that I felt silenced at the time, I retired from sport which cast me into a black hole due to my strong identification to my athletic self. This will be elaborated on with greater detail in the section on narrative wreckage.

Some further stories within sporting culture include but are not limited to relational narratives and movement narratives (Carless & Douglas 2012). They are often silenced by the media, coaches, family members, and sportspeople themselves (McLeod, 1997), but the more we highlight these different ways to feeling successful the less likely it is that the performance narrative constrict the athletic person's identity (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). Simply put, there is more than one way to constitute success and these other forms of success ought to be given a voice.

One such 'different' narrative I have come across in surfing literature was the convergence story (Anderson, 2012). Anderson details how surfers tell stories about feeling one with the medium, and connecting to nature (2012). These stories resonated with me, as I felt I have experienced such a phenomenon whilst rowing; when I had experienced the perfect stroke. I was certain that other rowers must have experienced it also, and this, coupled with my desire to give individuals the space to move beyond the performance narrative, was the motivating factor behind this research.

That is why in this thesis I undertook a narrative inquiry of the experiences of rowers, in an effort to highlight the stories these rowers tell of their experiences and the extent to which they conform to or resist the performance narrative.

The proem was intended to introduce non-rowers to some of the hidden aspects of rowing, to highlight the possibility of storying oneself

without relying on the performance narrative, and finally to set the narrative tone of the paper. I have written myself into the thesis throughout, and towards the end I make use of storytelling (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b) to present my findings.

My intention was for the rowers and I to share stories, collaborate in our meaning making efforts (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995), and create a safe space to explore stories differing from the performance narrative. It is through telling more stories that we can perceive ourselves as a multi-faceted identity, able to both resist the performance narrative and restore oneself if one should need or want to.

The first section offers an extensive outline of my paradigmatic assumptions, justifying my choice of narrative inquiry. This will be followed by a review of the use of narrative within academic literature, with a special focus on narratives within sport. In particular, I offer a detailed analysis of the performance narrative and the tensions that arise from this dominant narrative, alongside opportunities to alleviate these tensions through the sharing of different stories. From there I will outline step by step how one might perceive a place as an assemblage; which is an integral part of understanding convergence. This will lead to exploring how both the surfed wave and the rowed boat can experience convergence.

After the literature review, I will detail the method I used to explore my participants stories, focusing on who the participants are and how I interviewed them. This will include a description of how I identified, analysed and presented my findings. This will be followed by a critical examination of the theory and method I used.

At this point, I will turn from the traditional academic voice and present my findings, through a mixture of evocative stories and poetic writing. This will be followed by my concluding comments. Because I make connections and links between disciplines at times, I will work to signpost very clearly throughout the thesis.

# Methodology

## Paradigm

Following Markula and Silk (2011), I understand a paradigm to be overarching constellation of beliefs values and methods that provide the parameters to how researchers understand reality, truth and knowledge. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest a paradigm encompasses axiology (questions of ethics in the social world), ontology (reality), epistemology and methodology.

Thus, paradigms are important because they describe how a person perceives truth; whether it is 'out there' or subjectively created. The importance of aligning oneself within a paradigm is clear when considering how to go about gathering data; do I believe there is only one truth? Then I will likely run tests and gather quantitative data. Do I believe that reality is subjectively created? Then I will be more likely to perform qualitative, in depth research. Markula and Silk (2011) state that paradigms provide boundaries for the researchers' ethics and values, actions, control of study, voices deployed, and the very basic and fundamental understanding of the world that the researcher is investigating.

It may be of no surprise that I will be approaching my research from an interpretivist paradigm. The strength of the interpretivist approach lies in its ability to address the complexity and subjective meaning in situations (Black, 2006), alongside using this meaning to question existing assumptions (Carless & Douglas, 2013). This has clear links to questioning dominant narratives, and the extent to which they enforce unwritten rules upon our lives. I will discuss this in detail in the literature review on dominant narratives.

Interpretivist theorists have the ontological perspective that there is no one truth, rather they believe that the social world is instead a constructed reality. They believe that reality itself is a product of human actions and meanings attached to individual experiences (Denzin, 1989b). This is justified by the awareness that one individual may experience the same event entirely different to another individual, therefore potentially

attributing different or conflicting meanings to the experience (Wignall, 1998).

A contributing factor to these differing perspectives of reality is that the discourses available in one's culture directly impact the meaning an individual gains from a situation (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Therefore people's variable socio-cultural circumstances will directly influence why and how they make sense of certain experiences.

The perspective that reality is subjective, and there is no one truth, aligns perfectly with my research aim. In order to find out the experiences different rowers have through listening to their stories, I must be aware that each rower will have unique experiences, attribute different meanings, and ultimately believe different 'truths' to one and other, making it necessary that I do not listen to them with the idea of one version of knowledge myself. I wish to explore how they experience their rowing reality, so an interpretivist paradigm will allow me the viewpoint that none of them are wrong and each have something equally valid and interesting to share. I shall briefly foray into my exclusion of alternative paradigms to further explain my selection of the interpretivist point of view.

Positivist researchers distance themselves from the particular phenomena under investigation, searching for a reality that is entirely independent of their opinions of said phenomena (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 30). Hence, because the entire concept of this study was formed by my opinions of the rowing world and I am writing myself directly into the thesis, the positivist paradigm is immediately disqualified as it does not align with my research or world view. Positivism would necessitate me being an objective observer, using mainly quantitative data collection. This does not align with how I wish to conduct my research; interactively, qualitatively, and respecting each individual experience. A common move for researchers struggling with the positivist paradigm is to adopt post-positivism, which I will now detail.

Post-positivists argue for data that is collected in natural settings; to accurately depict 'real' life as opposed to a laboratory. Thus they promote qualitative research because it accommodates the influence of the natural setting, it includes participants' meanings and purposes, and it allows the

researcher to see things more from the participants' perspective rather than pushing theory onto them (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 30).

While in many ways the two paradigms differ, they still share the similarity that they are searching for one ontological 'truth'. Post-positivists use qualitative methods to test positivist theories (Markula & Silk, 2011). They still assume that knowledge that counts must be collected objectively, leading them to try to separate themselves from the research so as to minimise their subjective influence and bias (Markula & Silk, 2011). Once again, the paradigm is inappropriate for my research.

Researchers who identify with the interpretive paradigm see all knowledge as fundamentally subjective (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 32). Therefore research is subjective and interactive; a co-constructed, active, meaning making process between researcher and participant (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). As such, contrary to much qualitative research in the field of sport psychology, the interpretivist paradigm assumes that there is no social reality 'out there'. Rather, it is multiple, created, subjective and socially constructed (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a).

Narrative inquiry as method and methodology align perfectly with the interpretivist paradigm. It is by no means the only method of inquiry I could have undertaken, but the following section will detail an explanation of the theory and justify why it is suitable for this line of research.

## **Narrative Inquiry.**

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out that it is accurate to say both 'inquiry in to narrative', and 'narrative inquiry'; as it is both a method and a phenomenon. What follows is a discussion loosely based on this philosophy; in the literature review, I attempt to tease it apart and discuss the method researchers have used.

Smith and Sparkes (2009b) assert that any attempt to provide one sole definition of narrative is difficult. This is because narrative has a great many ways of analysing and interpreting data (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b). As an umbrella term, narrative analysis refers to a group of methods used for interpreting stories in a range of forms (Reissman, 2008). It points to

the evolving process of meaning making and avoids offering closure on people's lives (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b). Gubrium and Holstein (1998) suggest that narrative analysts focus on two aspects of the story: both what is being told and how it is told. Gibbs (2008) develops this with the assertion that not only do narrative theorists take what is said, but how it is said, why it is said and what the individual felt and experienced.

Smith & Sparkes (2009b) surmise that despite the many nuances of the genre, narrative analysts generally undertake their research under two sub-categories: story analysts and storytellers. For my research I will be undertaking the role of storyteller. In order to understand the role of story teller more coherently, I will describe the differences between the two stand-points and highlight why I have chosen this role.

To begin, story analysts carry out an analysis *of* stories (Polkinghorne, 1995). Rather than letting the story do the work of analysis, the researcher abstractly scrutinises, employs analytical procedures and techniques to develop theoretical abstractions (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b). The findings of the story analyst are often represented in a 'realist tale' (Sparkes, 2002). The process for a story analyst is generally: collect stories for data, extrapolate said data in the form of categorical content for analysis, and finally represent the findings in a realist tale (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b). Essentially, a realist tale catalogues actions and emotions from the participant's point of view but is channelled through the authority of the researcher.

Story tellers, on the other hand, view the story as analysis in itself. Ellis (2004) notes that because the telling of stories creates meaning and helps us understand our lives; this means that stories are already analytical without another layer of analysis on top. Frank (1997) implores researchers to think with stories, rather than about them, because even on their own "stories can and do theorise" (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p.444). Smith & Sparkes (2009b) further develop this with their assertion that as a storyteller there is a shift from merely telling the story to showing the story. They state "showing aspires to create images in an audience's body and imagination..." (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b, p. 282). This supports the suggestion that 'good' stories are evocative and embodied (Ellis, 2004).

The key difference between the two approaches is that story analysts present theory and analytical interpretations, where storytellers invite the reader to take part in the story, to engage in their feelings about a character, and to freely interpret and evaluate the text from their unique subjectivity (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b). Frank (1997) suggests that thinking *about* the story reduces it to analytical content, whereas thinking *with* the story takes said story as already complete.

This style of presentation shows implicit trust from the researcher in both the audience and the participant, by allowing the stories to stand on their own. Smith & Sparkes (2009b) state that this does not mean the researcher can place the entire onus of theory on to the reader or indeed write any story they desire. The story must have a theoretical point which the researcher wants to share with the reader. This aligns with my intention to write stories based on the narrative threads that emerge from the rower's stories, instead of writing definitive commentary on what the narratives mean. Barone (1995) terms this the role of the artfully-persuasive storyteller. The stories I have written toward the end of the thesis align with the story-telling style and attempt to display the complicit trust between researcher and participant, and writer and reader.

Thus theory and analysis will be present in the stories I have constructed, and they will be of evocative and embodied nature, compelling the reader to think with the story rather than about it (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b). I am confident that even with my novice status as a researcher I will have demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the theory behind writing evocative tales, and proficiently present my findings.

It was of some concern to me that my method entailed a thematic analysis *and* storytelling, as I was under the impression that lines must be drawn between right and wrong. As we can see however, the lines of narrative analysis are blurred, and I now acknowledge there is no one right way to undertake narrative research (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, 2009b). Gubrium and Holstein (2000) reiterate that there is inescapable tension within storytelling, which must be accepted but cannot be completely resolved. This tension is reflected in this thesis, where I am forced to

accept that in reality I cannot authoritatively state that one line of analysis is better than another; nor should I hope to cleanly cut between the two styles.

The types of representation of evocative tales are varied, but have been grouped under the umbrella term creative analytical practices (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b). Richardson (2000) suggests a few of these creative research practices; fictional representations, drawings, music, and poetry to name a few. I intend to use evocative tales and poetry as the analytical practices of my research. These practices will be elaborated upon in the method chapter; further into the thesis. In the following section I will examine what makes narrative inquiry my theory of choice within this research.

### **Why Use Narrative Inquiry?**

There are a variety of potential benefits which motivate me to use narrative inquiry. Narratives commitment to the interpretivist paradigm allows research to be subjective, co-constructed and fluid in its' meaning making process. Furthermore narrative creates space for the individual participant to tell their own story, rather than be 'mined' for the 'correct' information (Kvale, 2007). Narrative and the analysis of stories 'breathe' meaning (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b), this allows them to evocatively show the richness of individual, social and cultural experience.

With this capacity to create and highlight meanings, narrative helps me understand and illuminate the participants' experiences of rowing. It provides in-depth, subjective data (Jowett, 2008). This allows for tensions and differences to be told, enabling a deeper look at the performance narrative and its confines, alongside the other narrative threads that arose. On a broader scale narrative allows me to see how involvement in rowing brings a sense of meaning to the participants' lives (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a).

Narrative presents an opportunity to see the socio-cultural life speak through the individual (Riessman, 1993). Thus, even as the participant tells personal stories, how and why they say certain things is

influenced by their social and cultural surroundings and histories. This tells me as much about the rowing culture and society as it does about the individual (Riessman, 2008).

Because of the narratives' commitment to seeing humans as relational beings (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a) I am able to explore the relationships within rowing. These relationships effectively shape, enable and constrain lives (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b). This allows further enlightenment on the differences, disparities and comparisons between rowers in one rowing club. Arguably they may all follow the rowing clubs unwritten rules; the social norms put in place, but narrative allows me a glimpse of the extent to which each individual is influenced, resists or upholds these norms. Not only this but narrative illuminates what social norms there are within the rowing club in the first place.

Narrative allows the development, exploration and construction of identity (Sparkes, 1998). This is of particular relevance to my study as it has been noted that sportspersons can identify particularly strongly with an athletic identity (Smith & Sparks, 2005). This can be a 'Hercules muscle' or 'Achilles heel' (Sparkes, 1998) depending on the extent to which the athlete bases their self-worth and identity solely on winning as success. It can have a detrimental effect on the athlete's self-worth if the athlete suddenly loses that identity as they may hold no storytelling resources to alternatively story themselves and see themselves as successful (Sparkes, 1998). This topic is a crucial factor in my study and will be elaborated in further detail in the sections on dominant narrative, performance narrative, and narrative wreckage.

By conversing with these rowers I explored *with* them different stories that resist the performance narrative, building resources to tell other stories, with the hope that they do actually tell these different stories and share them with the wider rowing community. This opens space for holistic narratives to become more accepted. The more stories a person has access to, the more potential they have to live their life differently (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a).

The final reason why I find narrative inquiry appropriate for this study is that it foregrounds the application of writing (Richardson, 2000). I

will discuss writing as analysis (Richardson & St Pierre 2005) at greater length in the method section, but I bring it up now as it is a great strength of the narrative inquiry. As I mentioned earlier narrative opens up space for different styles of representation; be it confessional tales, ethno dramas, fiction, music or poetry (Sparkes, 2002). These all create space for the researcher to use writing as a method of analysis, and as I discuss further on, I make use of evocative tales and poetry. I use these writing tools to present the themes I find, represent the individual tales collectively, and discover and analyse through writing.

Essentially, my ontological position aligns with Clandinin (2006) who states that “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (p. 51). Given the aim of my research is to highlight different stories that rowers tell in order to move past the performance narrative, it makes sense that I would listen to these rowers stories. The use of narrative as an inquiry method often overlaps the use of narrative as analysis and presentation. In highlighting the philosophical underpinnings of this thesis, I am aware that I have blurred the line between methodology, method, analysis and even the literature review. As I mentioned previously however, I have discovered there are no clean lines; this reflects the messy nature of life and indeed individual experience (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b).

These strengths of the narrative approach to research are why I have aligned my study in this direction. Smith and Sparkes (2009a) reiterate that it is not the only form of qualitative inquiry that counts or works, nor should it be privileged above other forms of research. There are of course a great many sceptics of narrative work, and the questions remain: Can a good story stand-alone (Denison, 1996)? If we become too involved in the experiences of our participants, can we accurately present our participant’s experiences? Does the story need to be truthful (Kiesinger, 1998)? I take my lead once again from the likes of Richardson (2000) who states there is no single way to present text. With these considerations in mind, I feel I have established narrative as an appropriate method of inquiry and presentation to explore my participant’s experiences.

The following section is a detailed and expansive literature review. Because narrative has influenced this thesis so greatly, the first section is a review on the literature of narrative; primarily in a sporting context. It will begin with an overview of how researchers have described what narrative actually is, and then move to the specific applications within sport. I will discuss narrative types, dominant narratives and the potential repercussions of unchallenged dominant narratives within sport. Then I will discuss the different narratives that have been recently explored, and why they are important.

## Literature Review

### Narrative

Narrative is centred on the premise that through telling stories humans make meaning, and making meaning is what it is to be human (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). Thus, narrative has developed as an appropriate space to explore, through storytelling, how individuals create meaning within the context of their life experiences (Douglas & Carless, 2009). Narrative is also a space to draw upon these stories for multiple ways of knowing (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b) and through this, comes the opportunity to examine one's identity (Tsang, 2000). This identity exploration occurs because what a person tells about themselves has direct bearing on what they can claim of their life (Sparkes & Smith, 2002).

Lally (2007) defines identity as “a multidimensional view of oneself that is both enduring and dynamic” (p.86). This is shown by Tsang (2000) as she writes several different stories about herself, displaying the multiple facets of her identity. Though identity may contain numerous dimensions, it is possible for one to become stronger than the others (Lally, 2007). In relation to sport an athlete may identify strongly with the athletic identity, forgoing other aspects of their identity (Sparkes, 1998).

Tsang (2000) acknowledges that identity is constantly in the process of being created and re-created. She demonstrates her own varied relationship to her identity by writing engaging stories, as I mentioned above. The stories she tells encompass race, height, and

gender norms within sporting culture. Because she can tell multiple stories and acknowledges her experiences are “ongoing, multiple, and changing” (Tsang, 2000, p.47), Tsang is able to view her identity as dynamic and able to be created; demonstrating that the stories people tell about their experiences have a direct relationship with the construction of one’s identity.

For narrative theorists, to be human is to actively interpret our experiences in a meaningful manner (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). Brockmeier and Harre (2001) concur that construction of meaning is the very centre of human life. Likewise Crossley (2000) affirms that focusing on meaning is vital in understanding ourselves and others.

Importantly, from a narrative perspective this does not mean finding the truth or solving a problem (Bruner, 2002). It is more about interpreting meanings along the journey (Bruner, 2002) coinciding both with the manner in which I will conduct my interviews and the overarching philosophy of the thesis; the interpretivist paradigm. I am working with the perspective that there is no one truth; it is created subjectively through cultural and social influences (Frank, 1997).

Meaning is not merely sitting inside of our experiences or inner worlds (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a), ready to be pulled out. Nor is one’s identity pre-made. One must construct meaningful narratives through the act of storytelling; the stories one tells has direct impact on what one can claim of their lives (Carless & Douglas, 2012) and therefore their identity. Bruner (1990) reiterates that when we narrate our lives, we engage in the act of meaning making.

Narrative promises insights into what life is like as an embodied human being (Carless & Douglas, 2013). Through, about, in and out of our bodies we tell stories (Smith, 2007). This is a prime motivator for theorists to use narrative. But what exactly are the foundations of narrative?

First, it must be coherent. This is both because it is what humans expect (McAdams, 2006) and because incoherent stories are difficult to hear, if not rejected outright (Frank, 1997). Smith and Sparkes (2009a) provisionally define a coherent narrative as “a complex genre that routinely contains a *point* and *characters* along with a *plot* connecting *events* that

unfold *sequentially over time* and *in space* to provide an overarching *explanation or consequence*" (p. 2, italics in original).

This leads to Sparkes (1999) assertion that sometimes the terms narrative and story ought to be distinguished from one and other; and thus the factors such as plot, characters, events, time, space and explanation are a template through which stories may be told.

The narrative template exists in order for the story to be coherent. The template includes factors such as who, what, when, where, and why. This allows individuals to once again *create*, not *find* meaning through narrative (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). The template must acknowledge the feelings, emotions and mood of the character/s. From this template, individuals and groups may tell stories that allow them to examine their life stories and create their identity, through creating meaning in experiences.

The process of distinguishing between story and narrative can be difficult (Smith & Sparkes, 1999a). Simply put; story is the simpler, less complex term, than narrative. That is to say, narrative imbues stories with richness of meaning and allows exploration of identity (Cross, 2009). That is not to say stories are not meaningful, but again, narrative is the template people rely on to tell these stories (Sparkes, 1999). Thus; story is the actual telling of the story, and narrative is how that story is constructed.

As such, narrative ought to be used when discussing dimension or properties such as tellability, consequences and categorical content (Smith & Sparkes, 1999a). This is why when I refer to the threads that arise within individuals stories such as performance, or friendship, I term it a performance narrative or friendship narrative. This is because the story may be complex and diverse, and to label it a 'friendship story' would be too simplifying. Narrative is a tool to identify which themes are evident in the stories individuals tell.

While narrative is an excellent space to explore individual identity as it allows agency to tell one's own story, storytelling is not and cannot be merely an individual endeavour. We are all connected to those around us and as Mykhalovskiy eloquently states, "to write individual experience is, at the same time, to write social experience" (1996, p. 141). Thus, storytelling is ever an individual and social experience as one can only

draw from one's socially and culturally constructed repertoire (Sparkes, 1999). As Sparkes (2000) reiterates we do not live in a vacuum; meaning social and cultural influences constantly circulate around us.

Our lives are constructed within the social realm, to escape this would mean living as a hermit, yet even then the choice to abstain from human contact is still influenced by other humans. As Bochner and Ellis (1996) queried; if culture circulates through all of us, how can personal stories be disconnected to a world beyond the self? Thus we are both enabled and limited by our individual experience and the cultural storytelling tools we have at our disposal (Carless & Douglas, 2012). Stories are therefore personal, social and cultural all at the same time.

Gergen (1999a) argues that this is what separates narrative from other schools of thought; storytelling relations make the narrative meaningful and not just the individual mind. This assumption of the human as a relational creature is at the heart of the narrative ethos (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). This also means that while I am interviewing the participants, together we will both be constructing the stories they tell. I will elaborate on this fully in the method and interview chapters.

This can be taken a step further; even though individuals can tell stories of agency and position themselves wherever they desire (Davies & Harré, 1990) the stories are still by one person to another, whether the other is present or not (Frank, 1995). Thus the audience will have a direct bearing over how and why they tell the tale in the way that they do. This has relevance in my work even now, as I consider who will be reading my thesis: the non-academic rowers who I desire to converse though the writing will be unlikely to read this long and wordy document. It will be academic examiners reading it, and to them I must direct my language choices in a particular, academic way. Deeper into my thesis I will be writing stories and face the same conundrum; while I want the stories to reach wider audiences I must be aware of who will be reading them. It is possible that because the stories do not take the form of traditional academic writing, nor use the academic voice, they might communicate to non-academics in a way that traditional academic writing might not. This

gives me the potential to reach a wider audience than typically possible from a piece of academic writing.

### **Lifting the veil**

Narrative is not dissimilar to Foucault's notion of discourse. Indeed, it might help to explain the power of narrative by comparing it to the power of discourse. Discourse refers to rules, both written and unwritten, that guide social practices, determining what is heard, perceived and understood (Pringle, 2007). Once in place, these become 'truths' that are very rarely challenged (Denison, 2010).

This makes very clear links to narrative, as Neimeyer, Herrero & Botella (2006) state dominant narratives can 'colonise' ones sense of self, constricting identity and ultimately limiting the narrative resources one has to story themselves. Because one cannot transcend one's narrative resources in storying oneself (Sparkes, 2000) these narratives and unwritten rules can be difficult to challenge. Philosophically we can see the dilemma: how can we know what we do not know? That is to say, oppressive discourse and dominant narratives work in similar ways to blind us to other ways of being, the former by establishing norms that oppress other discourses (Pringle, 2007) and the latter oppressing alternative narratives to limit ones storytelling resources (Sparkes, 1998).

Fortunately narrative has the power to lift the veil of conventionality off those practices we have taken for granted (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a), and is this not so very similar to the power of problematization on discourse to "render alien modes of thought and behaviour we accept as normal and everyday" (Lloyd, 1996, p. 244). Simply put, narrative researchers can help uncover silenced stories simply by allowing space for them to be told and heard.

It is important to acknowledge that while I am exploring the merits of narrative, it is but one framework through which we can explore our inner worlds and create meaning (Bochner & Ellis, 2002). Sparkes (1999) asserts the dangers of exaggerated claims that narrative has 'more understanding' than other theories, which can lead to either a romanticised view of the self or vulgar realism. With these warnings in mind and the

acknowledgement that narrative is but one theory I could have used, not necessarily *the* best but may be best suited to this research, I now turn to examine the concept of narrative type.

It is through the repeated telling of stories that themes can occur. When this happens, one can identify different narrative types (Frank, 2005) or threads (Spence, 1982). From my review of the literature the two terms are synonymous. In the following section I will discuss what they are, and which types or threads we are examining in this thesis.

### **Narrative Types**

Narrative types (Frank, 1995) or threads (Spence, 1982) come about through the analysis of stories (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b). Frank (1995) is one of, if not the most influential scholars of narrative theory. He determined that a narrative type is the most general storyline that can be recognised underlying the plot and tensions of an individual's stories. This is in line with Spence (1982) who reasoned that through telling stories, a narrative thread develops which constitutes our identity and sense of self. This analysis is useful in determining the stories that are 'out there' in society and culture that shape individuals experiences (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b)

As an individual tells stories, themes may be recurrent. These themes, or narrative threads (Spence, 1982), expose themselves over time and contribute to an individual's sense of self and identity (Sparkes, 1999; Carless & Douglas, 2012). Thus, the term narrative thread or type is essentially a tool with which aids narrative theorists in thinking with stories (Frank, 1997). I have used the words type, theme and thread synonymously largely in following the works of Carless and Douglas (2006, 2009, 2012). The narrative types expose themselves by stories being told.

A warning is given by Frank (1997) that the hard work narrative theorists undergo to expose and listen to individual's stories will all be undone if we are too quick to categorise the individual again into a homogenous type of group. People can tell many narrative types in the same story, each more dominant at a different time. Narrative types merely aid the audience in truly listening to the speaker (Frank, 1997).

This links in with the description I offered earlier of how I will use the term narrative within this thesis; i.e. performance narrative. It means that while it was my aim to illuminate and identify the types of narratives the rowers were telling, I must be wary of then seeing the individual as merely another example of that narrative. Each person will have their own life histories, experiences and emotions, and to respect that I must not merely group them together under a label. This would undo the ontological and methodological position of my thesis.

This brings me to arguably the most important problem with narrative types; the occurrence of a dominant narrative and the categorisation of the individual into a homogenous narrative. I will first describe dominant narratives and their effect in general, and then narrow my focus to the dominant sporting narrative and its repercussions.

### **Dominant Narratives**

A dominant narrative is one that oppresses alternative narratives, rendering those narratives and their speakers silent. If one does not have the chance to tell alternative stories, the dominant narrative will then 'colonise' an individual's sense of self (Neimeyer, Herrero & Botella, 2006) so that either they are unaware of other possibilities or do not speak out for fear of negative reaction (McLeod, 1997).

An example of a dominant narrative is to think about the stories you tell or hear to do with illness. The most dominant narrative type in the illness culture is restitution (Frank, 1995). This has the basic story line yesterday I was healthy, today I am sick but tomorrow I will be healthy again. We spread this narrative without even realising it, be it an "I'm fine! I'll walk it off" about a sprained ankle, or a "hope you get better soon" to an unwell friend. In sporting culture, the most dominant narrative is performance. I will discuss this narrative in detail in the following section.

Frank (1997) writes of narratives having strong cultural and personal preferences. Both institutions (i.e. sport) and individual listeners (coach, teammates, parents) steer people toward certain narratives, and other narratives are simply not heard. Now that we have an understanding

of dominant narratives, in the following section I will discuss the possible negative outcomes that can arise from limiting one's self in this way.

## **Narrative Wreckage**

In this section I discuss how dominant narratives can lead to narrative wreckage, through their limiting and constrictive nature.

Mental well-being requires alignment between one's experiences, the stories one tells, and the narrative types available in one's culture (Douglas & Carless, 2009). Thus, when a person's stories no longer fit their experiences, 'narrative wreckage' can occur (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). Narrative wreckage, simply put, sends a person into a void of meaningless existence as they have lost their sense of self (Sparkes, 1998).

While this sounds dramatic, consider: The narrative one lives by has the potential to cease aligning with their experiences. This can happen rapidly, due to illness or injury, or it can come about gradually, as the dominant narrative begins to make less and less sense in one's life. Due to the dominance of the narrative the individual may struggle to find an alternative narrative to replace or supplement it with. Not everyone will restrict their narratives to this extent, but it is more of a risk for athletes (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Koukouris, 1994). Narrative wreckage can leave the athlete feeling adrift and meaningless, as if they were standing atop an endless chasm (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Sparkes, 1998).

As an example Frank (1997) explains the journey from health, to illness, and back to health again. He notes that the restitution narrative is the most widely spread story; 'I just have a cold but I'll be fine again soon'. However if this storyline does not fit with the individual's experience because they found out that their journey into illness was not going to be a short visit, their entire life might be disrupted. For example a person might expect to recover from a cold quickly, but instead discover they now had a chronic disease. Charmaz (2008) details this elegantly; once a person's expectations of health are not met, they struggle to make sense of their

experience, leading to shame and feelings of inadequacy. Thus, the term 'narrative wreckage' sums up the situation perfectly.

Frank (1997) describes this storyline as the restitution narrative. The most extreme and tragic example of how this dominant narrative constricts one's identity is when it fails the terminally ill (Frank, 1997). The terminally ill person is often denied the possibility to die in alignment with the story they were telling and are told; that of falling ill and getting better again. This is heart breaking not only for the individual who may pass on feeling like a failure, ashamed and angry that their story did not go the way it was supposed to, but also it is traumatic for that person's loved ones. It brings up questions of why, in the western culture, dying while ill seems so frowned upon- a classic phrase in the media is people who die and did 'not go down without a fight'. This culturally dominant narrative fails these people and denies them the opportunity to be at peace with the experiences in their lives. Similarly, athletes can be denied the right to retire from sport gracefully and without shame, as sporting culture generally lacks the wide range of narratives necessary to help athletes restore themselves past the dominant performance narrative (Carless & Douglas, 2012).

Neimeyer, Herrero & Botella (2006) reiterate that traumatic events challenge a narrative's adequacy, and furthermore in light of a traumatic event the narrative's core emotional themes and goals may be invalidated. I cannot express enough the feeling and passion these researchers display in their work; the empathy they feel for people whose dominant narratives have been disrupted and who can see no way out.

Now that I have broadly outlined narrative, dominant narrative and narrative wreckage, the following section will take a narrower focus on how athletes may be constricted, constrained and failed by their culture's dominant sporting narrative.

## **The Dominant Performance Narrative**

The predominant narrative thread within sport is that of performance (Carless & Douglas, 2012; Douglas, 2009; Douglas &

Carless, 2006; Douglas & Carless, 2009; Koukouris, Panagiotis & Nikos, 2009). This has come about due to the stories we tell in, about, and around sporting culture, the majority of which have a focal point of achieving success, with success being winning (Carless & Douglas, 2012).

Stories of winning and success are told and retold, contributing to a cultural script that proclaims single minded dedication to victory is the only way to be successful within sport (Douglas & Carless, 2006). This is such a widely entrenched opinion that it has been for the most part internalised and accepted as truth (Douglas, 2009). Indeed Douglas (2009) states that associating winning with glory, pride and worth is not only expected, but promoted as truth within sport.

For many athletes, the demands of achieving success will result in physical and mental isolation (Douglas & Carless, 2006). Rowers often put aside studies, or fail their courses in pursuit of winning (Koukouris, Panagiotis & Nikos, 2009). This culture is so widely entrenched that it silences other narratives. Not dreaming of winning is dismissed because it is incomprehensible within sport (Douglas & Carless, 2009).

Thus, because these stories are told and retold they create a dominant cultural script requiring single-minded dedication in order to achieve success (Douglas & Carless, 2006). Therefore athletes become solely committed to winning in sport, at the expense of other activities (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000) which eventually narrows the identity to align with this singular narrative. This narrowing of identity is high on inescapable when winning and results are such recurrent themes in the athletes life (McAdams, 2006) and relate closely to the story teller's mental well-being, identity and sense of worth (Douglas & Carless, 2009).

Focusing on rowing to the exclusion of all other activities was a philosophy that I lived and breathed. My every spare minute was tied up in training, travelling, eating, anything and everything for rowing. I began to see studies not as learning and improving my mind, but impeding on my training or rest time. This attitude is common amongst rowers (and other sportspersons) as they have stated they would, do, and should put aside studies, work, friends and family time to pursue rowing (Koukouris, Panagiotis & Nikos, 2009). Indeed all of my friends, my only friends, were

'rowers' and we identified very strongly as such. I remember one of us stating one day that "we do not row, we *are* rowers". This experience is mirrored across many sports where it is suggested that one must have a very narrow focus within sport; prioritising sport performance before all else is the only way to be successful (Carless & Douglas, 2012).

Problems arise when, as previously stated, the dominant narrative no longer aligns with one's life experiences. For rowers, this can happen in every race one enters. Eight boats in a race means there are always seven losers, which shows that the performance narrative statistically guarantees failure for majority of sporting participants. The performance narrative also solely accepts rededication to training for future success as the way to cope with this failure, despite the impossibility of this success being achieved by all rowers or athletes.

Douglas and Carless (2006) state that the telling and retelling of these stories creates a cultural script that requires single minded dedication and focus in order to achieve success. The demands of achieving success often result in mental and physical isolation (Douglas & Carless, 2006), leading to the silencing and rejection of different stories due to the athlete's prioritisation of winning as the only way to achieve success (Douglas & Carless, 2009).

As I have discussed earlier, dominant narratives can lead to narrative wreckage. The following is an exploration of how the performance narrative can result in the narrative wreckage of an athlete.

## **Narrative Wreckage within Sport**

Much research has been done on athletes transitioning out of sport. An athlete can retire involuntarily, via de-selection, injury (Sparkes, 1998), and replacement of old athletes with new ones (Koukouris, 1994) amongst other reasons. The negative repercussions of this transition on the athlete have been well documented, showing it can lead to identity confusion, depression, eating disorders, and decreased confidence, occasionally leading to substance abuse and in some cases attempted suicide (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000).

Douglas and Carless (2009) point out that an individual's mental well-being requires narrative alignment their experiences, the stories they tell and the narratives available within their culture. This is why transition out of sport can be so traumatic; the narratives available within sporting culture are restricted to the dominant performance narrative (Douglas & Carless, 2006). This means that the majority of stories an athlete tell are ones prioritising success as winning, which constrict the athlete's identity (Carless & Douglas, 2012). Thus, when they leave sporting culture their life experiences no longer align with the dominant narrative, resulting in the loss of the athletic identity and oftentimes narrative wreckage (Douglas & Carless, 2009).

When the individual desires the lost identity to the extent that they try to recapture the athletic self, it can lead to feelings of invalidism and despondency (Charmaz, 1994). Koukouris (1994) states that retirement is not always involuntary as some athletes retire as they feel they have no other option in an impossible situation. It seems that this also is involuntary however; if there is no other avenue is it really free choice?

I have experienced this first hand. Within my rowing career, the dominant narrative of winning was so overwhelming that I found myself straying from values that I held. This included becoming aggressive, and focusing my entire life on rowing to the point that I had no social life or other hobbies. I would skip school to do more training, and my entire day was ruined if I hadn't performed adequately in a training session. I lived and breathed rowing; when I wasn't in the boat I was discussing training strategies or what would be best to eat or just watching rowing.

I was good at rowing, but when I would beat other crews I couldn't erase a sour taste from my mouth. I felt that these people worked just as hard, if not harder, than me, and they truly valued winning whereas I felt guilty at beating them. After sharing this point of view I quickly learned that it was deemed strange and incomprehensible to my teammates. Their ridicule led me to keep any further deviances from the performance narrative to myself.

When I joined a newer, bigger, more important club I felt more outcast than ever. How could I say I didn't like winning to a group of

people who viciously mocked people who did things for 'fun'? Who prioritised training hard over everything else? Who would carry on rowing even when their hands were ripped and blood was dripping down the oar?

I felt ashamed to be so different. I felt there was no one to confide in. This links to my earlier mention of my friendship group being solely comprised of rowers, and furthermore my mother was a rowing coach. I was surrounded by people who vehemently upheld the performance narrative, and its dominance resulted in my isolation. I was going through the actions and becoming consumed by rowing, but I was deeply uncomfortable and I couldn't explain why, even to myself. This has clear links to the narrative template allowing a tellable and comprehensible story. Because I generally lacked the resources to tell alternate stories, my experience was rendered mute.

Eventually the discomfort and tension was so great that I quit. The sudden loss of such a central, dominant part of my identity was terribly frightening. I did not have the narrative resources to restory myself at that time, and I had no social group or other hobbies to occupy me. I fell into a dark place where I started to question the meaning of my existence, but could not motivate myself to find out more about what I was experiencing. I was an outsider to any sport I tried: no team could bond as tightly as my rowing friends and I. What was the point of sport? Even in 'fun' games I was under pressure to win from teammates and spectators. I couldn't escape the pressure and tension surrounding me, so I dropped all physical activity for roughly three years, unable to align my ideal narrative threads to those of sport. The feelings of hopelessness, uncertainty and being an outcast were a terrible learning curve, one that I hope less sportspeople have to feel alone in experiencing.

Thus, 'voluntary' retirement can lead to the same negative repercussions as involuntary retirement. This demonstrates how questionable it is to distinguish between the two (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). I hope I have given an adequate example of the despair a person can feel even when supposedly freely quitting.

Upon reflection I believe my repeated attempts to try new things led me out of my narrative wreckage. I am not content lying idle and thus

experimented with many different activities. The exposure to different cultural and social narratives allowed me to slowly realise that the performance narrative was not the sole narrative upon this Earth. I now allow myself the space to tell multiple stories that construct my identity, rather than plunging into another dominant narrative and constricting my identity once more.

My athletic identity is now merely a part of my identity as a whole, rather than the strongest and/or only component. I will admit there are dominant narratives circulating within all social and cultural spheres of life, some of which I can identify readily and resist, but others that I fail to recognise immediately. Undoubtedly I will be living in alignment with a dominant narrative that I have not yet recognised at this very moment, and I am unsure that I will ever identify and recognise all of the narratives which may have affected and still affect me. Rather than induce despair at this thought, my academic identity relishes the idea of never-ending learning.

This, coupled with the enlightening Sport and Leisure degree I undertook at university broadened my story telling resources to the extent that I could frame myself as no longer a failure or an outcast.

Another reason why it may be futile to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary retirement is because the dominant sporting narrative creates such a strong sense of athletic identity (Sparkes, 1998; 2002) much as I experienced, so that whether leaving a sport is your own or not, you are affected by its absence. This 'athletic identity' means that the individual's identity has been colonised to identify solely or mostly with an athletic sense of self (Sparkes, 2002). This is problematic because the narrative that you have constructed your identity on no longer suits your life experiences, again, leading to narrative wreckage (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). This aligns with the wreckage I experienced when I retired from rowing.

That I was ridiculed for caring about the other team's losses and how they felt aligns with Douglas's (2009) assertion that stories of caring and nurturing are seen as the antithesis to excellence in sport. After I learnt my lesson, and out of fear of further rejection from my teammates, I

kept silent, in keeping with McLeod's (1997) suggestion that silence is a likely response to fear of negative reactions.

Like Douglas (2009) I do not wish to 'prove' that there are alternative narratives. They are there. I simply wish to add to the expanding literature with both my own experiences and those of my participants in a manner which will hopefully lift the veil of conventionality off even a few rowers' eyes.

It is my opinion that in the same way Frank (1997) sees ill people as both injured *and* healers by means of empathic story-telling and listening, so too are retired sports persons both injured by their wrecked narrative *and* able to heal themselves and others. As Frank states, "as wounded, people may be cared for, but as storytellers, they care for others...their injuries become the source of the potency of their stories" (1997, p. xii). I see those affected by the constraints of an oppressive discourse such as the performance narrative as suffering and also able to heal; themselves and others through the use of exploring alternative stories. Simply put, the more we talk about other ways of being, the more space we create for others to avoid or move beyond narrative wreckage.

While the performance narrative is dominant within sporting culture, it is not the only narrative that exists. The following section will be an overview of the narratives I have come across within sporting literature.

### **More Narrative Types within Sport**

Despite the prevalence of the dominant performance narrative within sport, Carless & Douglas (2012, see also Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2006; Douglas & Carless, 2009) have explored a number of different narrative types such as relational and movement (Carless & Douglas, 2012). These stories are often silenced and trivialised in sporting cultures, much as mine was, but their very presence challenges the notion that there is only one way to be an athlete (Carless & Douglas, 2013).

Even though it has already been ascertained that they exist at an individual level, they are largely oppressed and silenced at a societal and cultural level leaving much scope for a larger, more open conversation in the sporting realm. The more we tell different stories, the more resources

others will have to tell different stories (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). Individuals need these different stories in order to be able to move past the dominant narrative (Douglas, 2009) which is why my research is important.

Thus, even if the athlete does not wish to story their life in alignment with the performance narrative, stories that do not fit dominant cultural narratives are often silenced (Douglas & Carless, 2009). Their stories are deemed incomprehensible and met with disbelief by others; indeed they are often outright rejected because they prioritise other ways of being (Carless & Douglas, 2012). Furthermore the tellers find themselves to be failures when their stories do not align with the performance narrative, and so the tellers see themselves as unworthy and deem their tales un-tellable (Douglas & Carless, 2009).

My experience of retiring from rowing highlights these feelings of unworthiness and failure. As I explained, the feeling of being so different and then being mocked for it led to silence and shame, and I no longer saw myself as capable of expressing my experiences. My stories were outright rejected by my peers, parents and coaches and I quickly learned to only tell performance stories, even though I found them unfulfilling.

In saying this, there are most definitely stories that do not align with the performance narrative 'out there', even if they are met with disbelief and/or shunned as mine were. I have worked hard to avoid the use of the word alternative, as to call the stories alternative renders them less than, or secondary (Frank, 1997). This phrasing expresses that the performance narrative is the dominant, main narrative and anything else is 'other'. The overcoming of the performance narrative will be accomplished when sports people's stories that are different to the performance narrative are no longer as secondary, but have their own primary importance.

The opportunity for more narratives is high on endless, but there are only a couple that have been discussed in the literature; demonstrating the importance of a study such as mine. I will focus first of all on the three presented by Carless & Douglas (2012) as options that diverge from the performance narrative. Through reviewing many writings from Carless and Douglas, it seems that the different narratives were discovered first

through the identification of the performance narrative (Douglas & Carless, 2006). Douglas (2009) went on to discuss her experience within professional golfing, and established that she did not solely follow the performance narrative. This highlighted the existence of other stories in sporting culture. Douglas and Carless (2009) went on to discuss abandoning the performance narrative, and their 2012 article (Carless & Douglas, 2012) appears to have resulted from their analysis of the works they had been undertaking up until that point in time; a summary of their findings thus far.

The effort narrative is described by Carless and Douglas (2012) as being only subtly different to the performance narrative, as there are a great deal of similarities. Both story types include themes of hard work and dedication, the difference being that performance narratives emphasise the necessity of the two in order to succeed whereas effort narratives focus on the process of being effortful as a “defining characteristic of the teller’s sense of self” (Carless & Douglas, 2012, p. 391). Therefore effort narratives are not reliant on the achievement of outcomes to be successful; the application of effort is enough for the teller to have a fulfilling sense of self. This shift in emphasis is seen by Carless and Douglas as a more controllable narrative, where the individual can build a more sustainable life story.

Another narrative discovered by Carless and Douglas (2012) was an ‘experiencing’ narrative. This narrative emphasises the intrinsic pleasure an athlete may feel from embodied movement. For example, the sensation of swimming and being underwater can at times feel like flying, and individuals can gain a great sense of joy merely from moving their body through the motions of swimming. Success is predominantly based upon self-improvement, with little to no comparison to ‘others’ and little emphasis placed on competition. This narrative is sustainable within and outside of sport, making it a desirable long-term narrative as whatever stage of life one is in (elite sport, retirement, injury) the athlete may still view themselves as capable of improving and indeed gain pleasure from small improvements and the experience of moving. Unfortunately athletes may experience tension within the elite sport culture by refusing the

dominant performance narrative (Carless & Douglas, 2012), however, if they are able to bear this tension this is a narrative of great long term benefit.

The third narrative Carless & Douglas (2012) identified was the relationship narrative. This focuses on the athletes desire to make and maintain social connections, prioritising relationships over performance. This narrative helps athletes deal with times of emotional disappointment, such as de-selection and injury. This can be seen in many sporting examples, such as how people joining sports clubs because their friends already participated.

Douglas (2009) tells a beautiful story about winning a golfing tournament and being asked by a journalist how her recently deceased father would feel about their now. Instead of responding the way the journalist expected, she said that her father was proud of her no matter what she did. This demonstrates the power of a relationship narrative to resist the performance narrative, even when the individual is in a position of power within the narrative. Douglas (2009) felt that to respond saying only after winning would her dad be proud, that she would be supporting a culture that glorifies success and only sees worth in winning. She elegantly and gracefully resisted this narrative publicly, demonstrating the strength of the relationship narrative.

***Summary: Why am I exploring different narratives?***

Sport is such a huge part of the western culture, especially in New Zealand. I have a vivid memory of working as a waitress when the Rugby World Cup was on, and on the last night my workmates and I begged the heavens for the All Blacks to win, not because we necessarily wanted the 'success', but because previous losses had led to aggressive patrons. The agitated customers would turn dark, behave abusively to all of the staff and other patrons, and drink heavily. This is just one example of the effect of the performance narrative; and the narrative wreckage I witnessed was not even from the athletes but merely from the spectators. This is why it is so important to spread other stories; it is not mentally healthy for almost an entire nation to go into a depression if their national team loses.

As previously stated, many athletes and coaches believe that the only goal worth striving for is winning (Carless & Douglas, 2012; Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Ingham, Chase & Butt, 2002). The pursuit of success becomes the athletes' sole priority, to the exclusion of other activities (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). I believe that the holistic, life enhancing features of sport can and should be brought to the forefront; the oppressive discourse of the performance narrative can be revealed by identifying alternative stories.

In the telling of multiple types of stories the opportunity opens up for athletes to engage in a more diverse narrative repertoire, giving them the opportunity to live their life more flexibly (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). Indeed by accessing and sharing multiple narratives it may prepare sportspersons minds for something unexpected or anticipated (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b) which would help alleviate narrative wreckage due to the damaging constriction of a person's identity.

Tsang (2000) demonstrates the ability of an athlete to tell multiple stories about their experiences in sport, and in doing so, she acknowledges that her identity and self-worth do not rely on winning alone. It is my hope that eventually this nation can be aware of the performance narrative's constrictions, and be able to tell other stories in the event that the narrative does not align with their expectations. At a more micro level, I wish for rowers to be able to enjoy their sport with a new notion of what success can be, one not necessarily tied winning.

Moving forward with my thesis, one such narrative that has not been discussed within sporting literature as yet is convergence. The concept of convergence as a sporting narrative is the contribution I hope my thesis will make to the literature on sporting narratives.

Tellers of convergence stories would use such phrases as "one with the medium" (Anderson, 2012, p.) to imply that they feel connected to the world around them at that moment and place in time. In much the same way as the body has been theorised to have its own language, I wish to bring the body to the forefront to examine the ironically almost indescribable experiences of being a part of something larger than oneself. The easiest route to understanding convergence is through understanding

assemblage, so what follows, then, will be a discussion of the concept of assemblage. This will lead into a comprehensive discussion and understanding of the convergence narrative.

## **Assemblage**

Assemblage has been increasingly used in geographical scholarship, alongside specialist use within archaeology, ecology, and art history (Anderson & McFarlane, 2011) amongst other social sciences and cultural analyses (see Marcus & Saka, 2006). It is widely agreed upon that assemblage and its fellow discourses (Marcus & Saka 2006, Anderson 2009) are the result of theorist's dissatisfaction with the modernist categorising of the world (Anderson, 2009).

Assemblage is the result of a growing dissatisfaction in the way the world has been viewed. Up until recently modern knowledge prized cognitive processes; the rational mind with intellectual reasoned thought processes was the epitome of knowledge (Anderson, 2009). Meanwhile embodied feelings such as passion and emotion were discarded, "deemed irrational and silenced as 'nonknowledge'" (Anderson, 2009, p. 121). This has very clear ties to dominant narratives oppressing and silencing alternative options, rendering them 'incomprehensible' (Douglas & Carless, 2009).

Deleuze was the inspiration for many schools of thought taking up the notion of assemblage (Marcus & Saka, 2006) although the English term assemblage is actually only a loose translation of his term agencement (Phillips, 2006). Deleuze coined the term 'adsorbion' to describe the coming together relationship; "adsorbion is a gathering of elements in a way that both forms a coalition and yet preserves something of the agential impetus of each element" (Deleuze, as cited in Bennett, 2005, p. 462).

This links to assemblage; which entails things coming together and connecting but retaining their essence (Anderson, 2012).

Assemblage is therefore a resource to analyse the modernist style of thought, leading to a post-natural or amodern style of thinking

(Anderson, 2009) which addresses the connectivity of things whilst still retaining the structural/structured concept enmeshed in the social sciences (Marcus & Saka, 2006).

It has been asserted there is no sole 'correct' way to use the term, nor does one theoretical tradition or style hold an exclusive right to it (Anderson & McFarlane, 2011, p. 124), as such I have orientated my theorising alongside Anderson & McFarlane's (2011) geographical engagements with the concept as they provide a comprehensive overview of the differing uses of the term. The two surmise that the schools of thought share initial orientations that things have to be put together and taken apart in points of time whilst retaining their heterogeneity; "assemblage emphasises spatiality *and* temporality: elements are drawn together at a particular conjuncture only to disperse or realign" (Anderson & McFarlane, 2011, p. 125).

### **Understanding a Place through Assemblage**

A place is a means of understanding the "overlapping realms of individual, cultural, and natural phenomena in human existence" (Andkjaer, 2010, p. 10). The identities of places are built over long periods of time, ensuring they are durable and stable so that we can readily identify and territorialise them (Anderson, 2012). As an example of this; one territorialises their city, suburb, street, home. We identify with these places and keep returning to them each day after work for example. This is because through our repetitive use they have been constructed into a familiar and stable place.

Linking to assemblage, a place is significant and meaningful, constructed socially and culturally (Gruenewald, 2003). For example, the sea is a place of "enormous personal significance and meaning to surfers" (Ford & Brown, 2006, p.7). This shows that the sea is not just a physical space in the world; individual and cultural factors combine for the surfer to see the sea as significant. From this perspective we can see place-responsive theorists (either intentionally or not) subscribe to the assemblage 'ethos' (Adey, 2012).

Assemblage can be used to interpret place as “a moment and a location, concurrently shot through with lines of movement that constantly (re)combine to change its form and substance” (Anderson, 2012, p. 574). This type of theorising is of great importance to geographical and place-responsive scholars as it signifies a change in attitude from structure; “traditional approaches to geography have tended to frame geographical sites as fixed and static” (Anderson, 2012, p. 572) as could be found in place-responsive theories, to unstructured and relational; “place is no longer reliable, consistent, or necessarily coherent; it is wholly provisional and unstable. Place, at any moment, emerges in time and space from the web of flows and connections...” (Anderson, 2012, p. 574). This shift in focus is important and necessary because of the inadequacy of human-centred notions of agency (Bennett, 2005) and the corresponding notion that it is a flawed concept to believe we can discretely categorise the world, as we humans have never been separate from nature (Latour, 1993, as cited in Anderson, 2009).

I believe that the concept of assemblage has strong links to the theory of narrative. Consider, if you will, a setting, some characters, emotions, a plot, a timeline. These combine to make a coherent story (McAdams, 2006), which would be very unlikely to ever be repeated or recaptured. By this I mean it is likely we would be faced with a different story every time we came to write it, even if it is by the same writer. Even if the writer managed to be in the same place, at the same time of day, with the same pen and the same paper, in order to write the same story, it would still be a different day, a different age, with a different mood and experiences. Much like being unable to step in the same river twice due to the rivers flowing nature, I would maintain that it is impossible to write the exact same story twice.

This aligns with the assemblage theory that by combining such things as people, space, time, and emotions, you will be presented with a new ‘place’ each time. Even if it is the same place and the same person, the person will be older, with new experiences; an infinite amount of micro changes will result in a different ‘place’ every time.

Drawing on Anderson's (2012) definition of a relational place, and Smith & Sparkes (2009a) template for a coherent narrative, the following story attempts to capture an essence of assemblage and story-telling; "relational places are made up of material objects, living things, and natural processes, alongside the practices, cognitive responses, and emotions that produce and are produced by this intersection" (Anderson, 2012, p. 574). One could argue this quote is not dissimilar to the template of narrative I mentioned earlier; "a complex genre that routinely contains a *point* and *characters* along with a *plot* connecting *events* that unfold *sequentially over time* and *in space* to provide an overarching *explanation* or *consequence*" (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, p. 2, original italics). Both place and story require elements drawn together to connect in to a whole, as follows;

Lake Karapiro, an artificial lake on the Waikato River lies just outside of Cambridge. It has been an important and meaningful place to me over the years. Having been a rower throughout high school, I made many trips to the lake on weekends for regattas, and at other times for trainings, and again other times just to enjoy the presence of the lake. While I was always visiting the same *location*, each time I went there it was a new *place*. I will explain briefly through one significant memory; the morning and afternoon of the same day.

Early in the morning I went to the lake to set up our boat for the days racing. The regatta was Maadi Cup; the most important competition of the year for high school rowers. My team and I were the first people at the lake as it was 6am, and a low, thick mist clung to the grass around the lake, rolling down the hill and drifting close to the water. Shapes were vague and dark; the outlines of all objects were slightly blurry like they had been painted in haste. I could just make out flocks of swans loitering beside and on the water; they would soon be scared off by the crowds. The entire area was silent; the kind of silence one only gets when by still, calm water. Dew soaked our clothes and the cold made the gravel seem bigger and rougher on our bare, numb feet. We felt sleepy, remnants of dreams lingering in our minds and not yet registering emotions.

Compare this place in time and space to a couple of hours later in the day. Hundreds of rowers, coaches, spectators, and officials flock to the lake and its shores, rendering the noise overwhelming. Chattering, cheering and whooping along with the commentators booming voice permeate the air, all with a tinge of palpable excitement. Anticipation and nervousness can almost be smelt; they are so evident on our faces. The sun is high and hot, the dew long dissipated and the mud on the side of the lake dried into large cracks and fissures. No swans or animals can be seen; apparently they have gone into hiding.

As you can see, change any “human and non-human, organic and inorganic, technical and natural” (Anderson & McFarlane, 2011, p. 124) variable and the place disassembles and reassembles to become another place. The same applied for changing the mood and time of the story, adding characters and changing the weather; it became different. I was still describing the same geographical place, but to me they were different stories of different places.

While this is the emerging attitude, it still does not do away with the assumption that all things are separate; assemblage as the coming together of parts into a whole relies on connectivity, yet the concept still retains the ‘fact’ that all things are heterogeneous (Deleuze, as cited in Bennett 2005, Anderson 2009, Anderson & McFarlane 2011). Relations *between* require separation prior to their contact (Ingold, 2008). The human body is a good example of how this assumption is flawed; while we view ourselves as having borders and being separate from outside, our body is in fact porous and absorbing: it can easily catch and inhale other things. This suggests our borders are not as fixed as we presume (Anderson, 2009).

This is the problem Anderson (2012) has sought to problematize with his theorising on the convergence of a surfed wave.

### ***A Wave as Assemblage***

The first step to viewing the surfed wave as a convergence is to see it as assemblage. Anderson explains how the traditional sedentary view of geography would not allow surf to be seen as a place, due to its fluidity

and temporality (2012). This is evidenced in place-responsive literature by its oppressive discourse; many dialogues have been written on terrestrial places while the ocean traditionally received less attention from scholars (Steinberg, 1999) and the closest research has come to the sea has been its connection to the shore (Cooney, 2003) and not the ocean itself.

However, from a relational perspective a surfed wave can be viewed as a place; through the “*meeting* of surfer, sea, and swell, which itself cannot be separated from the *movement* of its constituent parts” (Anderson, 2012, p. 576, emphasis in original). This demonstrates trajectories crossing and engaging with one another to differing extents over time (Bennett, 2005); resulting in the coming together of diverse parts composing a not necessarily seamless whole (Anderson et al., 2012). Thus the surfed wave may be seen as an assemblage. At that place at that time, a coming together of wave, board, surfer and a multitude of other organic, technical, natural and non-human threads occurred to result in a “complex of interconnected points...interwoven lines...” (Ingold, 2005, p.47 as cited in Anderson, 2012, p. 574), which constitute *place*.

Along the same lines, Thrift (2004) has positioned the relations between bodies and things as assemblages. In particular with surfers, he asserts the surfers body, board, wetsuit, life histories, personal dispositions all function together on the surfed wave (Thrift, 2004).

Now that the foundation has been laid to view the surfed wave as an assemblage, I will now discuss how it can be constituted as convergence.

## **Convergence**

In much the same way as narrative allows us to see meanings as constantly developing and changing, the key to seeing the surfed wave or the rowing stroke as convergence is to approach the world as if it is “a verb rather than a noun” (Doel, 2000, p. 125). Anderson (2012) follows with stating that things are always acting upon and being acted upon by everything else, similar to narrative’s perspective that while an individual has agency over telling a story, they are influenced by their socio-cultural

surroundings. This position reflects Deleuze's stance that we are ever becoming-in-the-world (Deleuze, 1993).

What we are used to calling 'the environment' might be better envisaged as a 'zone of entanglement' (Ingold, 2008, p. 1807). Ingold asserts this tangle is the texture of the world; emphasising "not with relations *between* organisms and their external environments but with the relations *along* their severally enmeshed ways of life" (2008, p. 1807). This perspective was significant in Anderson's (2012) theorising of the move from viewing place as an assemblage to viewing it as a convergence.

It seems the idea of the surfed wave as convergence came about due to the insufficiency of merely calling it an assemblage. Surfers in Anderson (2012) suggested feeling 'at one' with the sea, of 'merging with the medium' and feeling 'intimately connected' to it (see p. 580). These descriptions depict not the relation *between* the surfers and the sea as in assemblage but an entanglement in their enmeshed ways of life (Ingold, 2008). Here assemblage lacks the capacity to understand the surfer's sentiments, their sense of "losing a coherent sense of self in being part of something larger" (Anderson, 2012, p. 580). Surfers often express the sense that they can feel the energy of the wave incorporated within them (Ford & Brown, 2006).

Although the surfer, wave and board may not have physically 'entangled' (Ingold, 2008) the surfer is left with a sense that they had done so (Anderson, 2012). Surfers feel they have been "completely immersed in nature" (Ford and Brown, 2006, p. 17); these affective intensities provide the opportunity for a new framing of place as convergence (Anderson, 2012). This is easier to imagine within the sea than land as it is of radically different materiality to the land (Steinberg, 1999) allowing our literal submersion in it.

It is total engagement in the activity, to the extent of the physical and psychic capacities that facilitates ecstatic union with nature (Stranger, 1999). Similarly Flynn (1987) notes that when riding the wave the surfboard becomes an extension of the surfers' body and mind.

Lewis highlights the importance of touch; engaging with the world tactually can lead to an unmediated relationship with it (2001, as cited in Ford & Brown 2006).

Reading the surfing literature has enhanced and widened my vocabulary surrounding convergence. That being said, it is a difficult thing to write about and Ford and Brown (2006) point out reluctance from surfers in talking about the sensation. I am unsure if this is because they don't want to, or because we as a society have not talked about it enough to develop the story and the language involved. I found while interviewing my participant's that they also were cautious in speaking about the sensation. This is perhaps a gap that needs to be filled moving forwards.

Regardless, I have had a sense of convergence while rowing. The feel of one's hand on the oar, feet in the shoes, wind in the hair, sun on the back, eventually, sometimes, the boundary between boat and rower merges. You no longer notice each of those sensations separately and the distance between you and the sensations dissolve, leaving you with no sense of spatiality but a clear sense of the now. That is when you have a truly great row.

## **Flow**

Importantly, what I am referring to here is not the 'flow' experience often reported by athletes (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991) as flow is still an assemblage of parts coming together to create the experience (Anderson, 2012). Rather "connections are not made but boundaries blended and dissolved" (Anderson, 2012, p. 582). Flow is an 'optimal experience of one's perceived skill versus the perceived challenge (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). This points to the mind's influence at all times; flow may be impeded by a low sense of self-worth or skill level, or a high perceived notion of the challenge they face.

Alternatively, convergence is being so involved within your activity that you feel as though you 'disappear'. This is similar to flow but the primary difference is that convergence does not require skill versus challenge; the mind does not affect the experience in the same way.

Importantly, convergence deals with the place you are in, for example the surfed wave or the rowed boat, and the feeling that you are a part of something bigger than yourself. Convergence implies that you feel you are a part of your rowed boat, not just connected to it; your boundaries dissolve. Flow, on the other hand, can be equated with optimal experience and optimal performance. This not only presumes that you are in complete control, but also that you are concentrating and receiving unambiguous feedback on your performance (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Convergence implies you neither control nor are controlled, you are merely being in a point of space and time.

Because much of my language and knowledge of convergence comes from surfing literature, the next section will outline a brief history of surfing's prestige systems in order to understand why they might have come to be the sphere that seemingly first experienced, or at least spoke of, convergence. Following this, the next section will discuss how the surfed wave can be experienced as convergence, and finally, I will draw comparisons between surfing and rowing that demonstrate the existence of convergence within the rowing sphere.

### **Surfers' prestige systems**

Before I theorise on the surfer's experience of convergence, I find it prudent to first discuss the field of surfing, and potential obstacles in storying said convergence narrative.

There is a tension between the individual experience of the ride and the desire to be seen performing or winning competitions (Ford & Brown, 2006). This can be seen in the different types of surfers, for example the 'soul surfer' and the competitive surfers (Booth, 2004; Ford & Brown, 2006).

Seemingly paradoxically, Ford & Brown suggest that these tensions do not necessarily present a conflict. According to Lowe (1977) beauty and excellence in sport come from intrinsic, subjective self-realisation *and* extrinsic, objective social recognition. I am sceptical of this assertion, as is Booth (2003) who overviews the surfing cultural prestige systems.

'Polynesian rhythm' surfers tended to flow with the water; dancing with the

wave. On the other end of the spectrum, 'Australian shredders' were the first to attack the wave with aggression, attempting to dominate it (p. 323-325). The key difference seems to be that 'soul surfers' surf *with* the water, completely immersing themselves in their surroundings, while competitive shredders see the wave as a back drop, an apparatus on which to do tricks (Booth, 2003).

There were 'bitter debates' between these factions, with professional surfing finally resolving the dispute in favour of Australian shredding (Booth, 2003). Thus many surfers were anti-competition as it went completely against the soul surfing ethic. Booth (2003) had one surfer stated that competitions go against the ethic of surfing, which is to be one with nature instead of a scramble for points. The main reason for the popularity of competing turned out to be the surfer's realisation that they could get paid to keep chasing waves; professionalism was the avenue to eternal hedonism (Booth, 2003).

However once competitive surfing took hold, the performance narrative once again proved its destructiveness in the way of 'surf rage' found predominantly in competitions and surfers who over territorialise their beach, surf rage leads to brawls, aggression, anger and violence (Young, 2000); the exact opposite of the soul surfer philosophy. Similarly, I found that to be successful in rowing races it helped to be angry and aggressive.

Alternatively, as I have pointed out, 'soul surfers' ride waves for the good of one's soul (Booth, 2003). While surfing is a very individual sport, the experience that this type of surfer shares together is the moment of transcendence that occurs when the surfer and the wave become one. Surfers state that this unity with the wave is an orgasmic experience (Booth, 2003). Similarly, in my own experience while rowing there can be moments of this 'oneness' but it very rarely, if ever, occurs whilst competing.

I have included this brief history of the tensions surrounding surfing prestige systems to highlight some surfers' resistance to the performance narrative. While they may compete, many still struggle with the conflicting nature between the performance narrative and the soul surfing narrative.

More research would need to be done to discover the effect of the performance narrative on the surfer's ability to experience convergence, before we can state with all certainty that the distinction has no matter.

## Convergence in surfing

Surfing generally is theorised about quite beautifully. Flynn (1989) elegantly positions the surfer as a dancer with the waves. Flynn (1989) defines this dancing as a unity between man and nature. Likewise, Booth (2003) eloquently describes the ties between surfing and dancing as part of the culture of pleasure. Ford & Brown (2006) assert that this is not a surprising analogy given the twisting, turning and dynamic motions of surfing. Surfers themselves are telling stories where the beauty of the experience shines through, indicating the presence of the convergence narrative thread.

While they say it in different ways, the narrative threads running through the stories are similar; as aforementioned "completely immersed in nature" (Ford & Brown, 2006, p. 17), "being a part of something larger" and feeling "intimately connected" to the sea (Anderson, 2012, p. 580), and having a communion with nature (Booth, 2003) are just some instances evidencing the emergence of the convergence narrative thread. Surveying the literature it appears to be the most general storyline that can be recognised underlying the plot and tensions of the individuals' stories.

Sparkes (2000) assertion that one cannot transcend one's narrative resources in storying oneself suggests that surf culture itself enabled this narrative to blossom, as one can only draw from one's socially and culturally constructed repertoire (Sparkes, 1999). This demonstrates yet another tension; it is both more acceptable within surfing to use terms such as 'merging with the medium' yet at the same time also slightly frowned upon, with surfers feeling that the experience ought to be an unspoken but shared experience between their own (Ford & Brown, 2006).

The term assemblage becomes important here, and the recognition of the story tellers' individual narratives. Each circumstance of

convergence comes about through a collection of discourses, emotions, place, weather and the like, and thus the tales are unlikely to be consistent.

This is relevant because if surfers, who are renowned to be motivated by hedonism and enjoyment of the activity (Booth, 2003) do not feel comfortable sharing their special experiences, then rowers who are under pressure from the dominant performance narrative and its' unspoken rules may feel even less inclined to share or even know alternative stories.

Indeed surfers and rowers seem to be motivated differently. Surfers are primarily motivated intrinsically; open to sensations and experiences (Ford & Brown, 2006). Arguably rowers are the exact opposite; there are no new movements, sensations or experiences to rowing, so where can I draw parallels? This might have seemed a very obvious contrast to you, the reader, but it came as a surprise to me. I have always assumed that people do physical activity because they enjoy the activity itself, which in hindsight was possibly where my problems with the dominant performance narrative began.

Once again, the concept of assemblage and individual stories are where I find the answer. I am not suggesting that this theory is the sole truth, but, arguably an assemblage of a surfer with a board and a wave could be very similar to an assemblage of a rower in a boat, depending on the individual who tells the story and the stories they are culturally and socially influenced by.

In the following section I will draw links and connections between surfers experiencing convergence, and the rowers' potential to do the same. Bear in mind all I have discussed up to this point; dominant narratives, identity construction, assemblage, the surfed wave as assemblage, and the concept of convergence. It is my intention to bring all of the theories together in the next section into an assemblage of its own.

## **Convergence, surfing, and rowing**

Rowing, while very competitive and success focused (Koukouris, Panagiotis & Nikos, 2009) has the perfect medium to experience

convergence. Like surfing, rowing is set on watery terrain which is on the margin to the land (Shields, 1991). This could give it space away from land based theorists to story itself differently, and as Steinberg (1999) points out, ought not the water to be theorised about differently as it is of radically different materiality to the land?

There are currently no studies on the presence of a convergence narrative within rowing. In a search of literature within other domains, I came across only one article that mentioned feelings of connectedness between climber and rock wall (Rossiter, 2007). However, this lack of literature does not deter my enthusiasm as it just means there is space for new and exciting writing. I know that convergence exists within rowing because I have felt it, in the pure, blissful, beauty of a perfect stroke.

In a piece of non-academic writing, Daniels (2011) says “daft as it may sound, (I) was becoming connected to the boat and the water underneath” (p.9). I feel this sentence effectively captures the presence of the convergence narrative alongside the tension that accompanies it; we feel like fools discussing not only an alternative to the performance narrative but a narrative that allows us to vocalise a feeling of connection and submersion into the present moment. This again demonstrates the oppressive nature of the performance narrative.

Surfing has a ritual element to getting in the water which contributes to a heightened sense of involvement and aliveness (Thrift, 2001). The movement of sliding along the wave can become an automatic, almost instinctual action (Ford & Brown, 2006; Thrift, 2001). This is similar to rowing in that the ritual of getting on the water prepares the body to take over (Thrift, 2001). After much experience the rowing stroke becomes instinctual. Once the stroke is instinctual, space opens up for immediate connection to the present moment as in the perfect stroke, which can lead to a re-enchantment with the world (Thrift, 2001).

Thus, the perfect stroke is where I find the parallel. It is but a moment in time, at once fleeting and beautiful. A surfed wave and dancing are ephemeral performances (Ford & Brown, 2006); you cannot hold on to the experience, it can be felt only in its traces (Manning, 1993). Nor will a spectator’s eye or photograph belie the essence of the movement, the

feelings of the mover. The same can be said for the perfect stroke. Ecstasy awaits the beholder of the perfect stroke, the perfect wave, the perfect dance!

The fleetingness of the sensation of convergence is highlighted by Ford & Brown (2006) who state that while paddling, the surfer is aware of the board as an object. But once on the wave, the sense of separation between body and board seems to disappear. Likewise when in the motion of the perfect stroke, all sense of separation disappears and the boat, crew, water, everything blends together. Once the perfect stroke has been completed, the rower once again becomes aware of their spatiality within the boat.

Thus, while the links are tenuous and not everything can carry between the two disciplines, I find it reasonable to make the claim that rowing and surfing are alike if only in the sense that both can bring about feelings of convergence.

This is a poem written by a rower;

Through soft and dew-kissed, misty veil,  
with silent strokes, I swiftly sail.  
A glassy pool reflects my flight,  
the shining stars, and moon, so bright.  
The world is sleeping, but not I;  
One with water, I start to fly.  
None to stop me, I race with time;  
Internal bliss, a state sublime.  
Each moment sacred in my shell.  
The moon shares secrets I'll never tell.  
But Dawn will rise, and I must go.  
She broke the spell, my moonlit row.

(Gregory, 2014).

This very accurately and succinctly describes the sensation of a perfect stroke; with the line “one with water, I start to fly”. The narrative thread (Spence, 1982) of convergence can be seen weaving its way

through the poem, suggesting that the author has lost his sense of self to the feeling of being one with the medium, indicative of feelings of convergence (Anderson, 2012).

Possibly the reason why convergence narratives seem to be acknowledged in surfing as opposed to other sports is the very fact that surfing began as a hedonistic non-sport, thus escaping the dominant performance narrative.

In justification of my search for the convergence narrative thread, I believe that the convergence narrative is of great importance and relevance to rowing because it is another way to story oneself within sport that gives a more holistic and less singular athletic identity (Sparkes, 1998).

This concludes the literature review section of my thesis. I hope to have cohesively discussed problems within sporting culture, involving the dominant performance narrative. Rather than resting on critique, I moved to elaborate different narratives that those such as Carless and Douglas (2012) have exposed. Furthermore, I discussed in detail the concept of convergence through understanding it first as assemblage. In summary, I believe that throughout the literature review I have positioned the experience of convergence as a viable narrative within sporting culture; rowing specifically. Now, I will elaborate on the methods I chose to conduct and present my research. This will involve firstly explaining why I chose to use interviews, then describing the process of the interview, the steps I took following the interviews, an introduction of the participants and how I decided to present the findings.

## **Method**

### **Interviews**

I gathered narratives through the use of semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview is a useful tool for narrative because they are 'personal and intimate' interviews which go in-depth (Whiting, 2008). An example of this is Denison's use of narrative to "present a personal and inside look at athlete's retirement experiences because the previous

research on sports retirement has relied heavily on questionnaires and scales and given little voice to the athletes themselves” (1996, p. 383). Following Denison, my focus was giving athletes a voice and listening to their individual experiences.

The reason I chose to use semi-structured interview as opposed to structured or un-structured interview is because it allows the interviewer access to intimate stories. The rigid format and quantitative data of structured interviews (Whiting, 2008) can serve to constrict dialogue (Carless & Douglas, 2013) and un-structured interviews could potentially lead to endless ramblings. Given that I am a novice researcher in the midst of a three paper thesis; my research was required to have greater focus and less breadth due to the time constraints of my project.

Polit and Beck (2006) define an interview as a method of data collection where one person; the interviewer, asks another person questions. Similarly, DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (among others) state that the interviews are constructed by open, direct questions to elicit detailed narratives and stories (2006). However, this perspective of the interview is perhaps a little simplistic as there is growing concern that interviews or indeed any human interaction is not so ‘cut and dry’ as this. I will elaborate further on this topic in the following section; where I detail the impracticality of trying to assume the researcher as objective outsider stance.

This brings me back to my ontological position; if I believe there is no ‘one truth’ to life, how can I believe that by asking clear cut and well-formed questions I will get the ‘one true’ answer? Thus, I turn my perspective to that of ‘interview as traveller’ (Kvale, 2007) or ‘interview as collaborative storytelling’ (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

## **Interview as collaborative storytelling**

Kvale (2007) positions interviewing using two separate metaphors; interviewer as miner and interviewer as traveller. Interviewing as mining suggests that the interviewer is sifting through the rubble to find the gems; searching for the truth of the story. Therefore this conceptualisation of the

interview would be ill fitting for my paradigm and research design. However, when one positions the interview as travelling, space opens up for the interviewer and the respondent to wander together in conversation. This conversation allows the two parties to view interviewing as a collaborative meaning making process (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

Following from this, the respondent can be seen and see themselves as a story teller. Thus, like with any story, the narrator relates to a specific time and place, with distinctive objectives in mind (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) which is where the interviewer becomes an active, critical audience, perhaps requesting these specific stories about specific aspects of the participant's life.

Participant's and interviewers alike often need (or feel the need) to establish their right to speak on the topics being discussed (Kvale, 2007). This is accomplished by claiming 'category entitlement' (Potter, as cited in Kvale, 2007) to a particular category. For example, when I met each participant I could have simply said "I am a Master's student, let's talk". Instead I chose to share a little more about myself by beginning with saying a version of the following: "I rowed for about 6 years and because of my interest in the sport, I decided to research it during my master's degree. I would love to also hear about your experiences". The difference is, regardless of the claims you do or do not make, both parties will make assumptions about the other and alter what they see as tellable stories. Thus it would make sense to direct their assumptions in a favourable, relatable fashion.

Once again using the example above, a participant who thought I knew nothing of the sport might not go as in depth, or might 'dumb down' their rowing vocabulary. By positioning myself within their sphere, this opened up engaging, insightful conversations where the participants felt comfortable and confident sharing their experiences with me; a 'like-minded' person. Cross (2009) details how stories will flow more freely if you share your own, and this is what I attempted to accomplish.

Thus, the notion that the interview ought to be a neutral exchange of question=answer is not only outdated (Fontana & Frey, 2005) but also undeniably false. The interview can never be a one off, or in a vacuum, as

both interviewers and participants will bring their histories and expectations to the table (Kvale, 2007) and both are historically and contextually located, carrying unavoidable desires, feelings and biases (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

By being an active listener and sharing stories with the participant, an empathetic and trusting relationship will grow (Carless & Douglas, 2013). Frank (1995) asserts that stories as acts of telling *are* relationships, so by sharing with the participant I was further developing our relationship. Within this trusting relationship alternative and silenced stories had the opportunity to both be voiced and taken seriously following Carless & Douglas (2013).

Smith and Sparkes (2009a) reiterate that the use of narrative does not mean that as a researcher I may simply collect stories. Instead, I was ready to potentially share, collaborate, care, feel passionately, and be curious (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). As a result I found myself often side tracked and lost sight of which question I ought to have asked next, but the resulting interviews were still rich and diverse. The following sections will detail specifically how I gathered participants, who the participants are and then how I interviewed them.

## **Procedure**

There are six participants in total in my study. They were located from a single rowing club, and included on the basis of length of their individual rowing experience. In this case I was not overly concerned with age, as my initial criterion was: three rowers with less than five years rowing experience, and three rowers with more than five years' experience.

I found it was necessary for me to alter my requirements as it turned out that there were no rowers with less than five years' experience at the club. Instead, of the participants, three had been rowing for six years at the time of the interview, one had been rowing for eight years, one had been rowing for nine years, and one participant was a coxswain of six years. I included the coxswain because there were limited rowers and some club members declined to participate, so instead of doing five

interviews I decided to see what perspective a coxswain would add to the research.

I chose this particular rowing club because I have a personal history with it. This was a number of years ago and majority of the people I knew are now gone so it did not present a conflict of interest, but that being said, the history presented me with the opportunity to approach the rowers, coaches and club captain with a degree of intimacy that would be lacking elsewhere. This was greatly beneficial in gaining the club members trust, and I was welcomed with open arms.

The participants all rowed at club level; there were no elite rowers among them. That being said I believe it would be highly interesting and informative to perform another study on elite rowers as they would arguably be more deeply entrenched in the performance narrative. For the time being, I am content with the narrative research on elite athletes already standing (See Carless & Douglas 2012; Denison, 1996; Douglas & Carless 2006, 2009; Douglas 2009).

What follows is a summary of how I went about contacting and gaining consent from all parties. To begin with, I completed the required ethics application for the study from the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee. This included information sheets and consent forms, which I have attached as appendices. Once I gained ethical approval for the research, I emailed the club captain with an information sheet and asked him if this were a study he would be interested in for his club. He responded swiftly with an affirmative, and was openly eager about helping me any way possible.

From there I went to the club on a Sunday; the only day you can expect all of the rowers to be at the club. The club captain met me there, introduced me to the club members, and allowed me the chance to have a conversation with the members about what I was doing. At this informal meeting I handed out information sheets and consent forms, and asked them to return with them at their next trainings, where I would collect them.

This stage happened much quicker than I expected, with majority of the participant's grabbing pens and signing the consent forms immediately. I ended up having to urge the participants to take the information sheets

and give them a more comprehensive read, so I could be sure of their understanding of what would be involved.

Over the next couple of days I double checked that each participant who had handed in a consent form was comfortable with the study, and I set up times and places for interviews. I asked each participant to choose a location and time that best suited them, and the results were varied. Most interviews took place either on lunch breaks or just before trainings, and the locations were eclectic.

Two of the interviews took place at the rowing club, one in a café, one at the participant's place of work, one in my vehicle, and one in my home. At each location I made sure to confirm the participant was comfortable in the space, and felt they had privacy.

Each participant was assured of their anonymity to the best of my ability. I made it clear to the participants that each interview would take around an hour, and would be of a semi-structured nature; more of a formal conversation. I informed each participant in writing and in person that the interview would be transcribed verbatim and asked if, after the transcription, I found gaps in the interview I could contact them and ask for permission to do a follow up interview.

I informed the participants that I would send them a copy of the transcription, and from the date that I sent it they would have two weeks to amend or remove any perceived inaccuracies or misrepresentations.

Finally, I made the participants aware that they had every right to decline and/or withdraw from the study at any stage up until they return their interview transcripts to me. All of the above was included in the information sheet and consent form. The participants were comfortable with all of the proceedings, and the interviews went relatively smoothly despite my novice skills. The next section will give a brief outline of who the participants are, without disclosing their identities. All names are pseudonyms.

### **Who are the participants?**

Laura has been rowing for six years. She originally joined the rowing club because her workmate, Sharon, asked her to. She didn't like it

at first, but the friendly club members persuaded her to stay. She is vibrant and energetic, and loves the excuse to stay fit.

Sharon has been rowing for eight years. She started because her husband, Jim, rowed, and so did her son and daughter at the time. She expressed to me; “if you can’t beat them, join them”! Some of her favourite rowing experiences involve seeing her children compete and come away happy.

Jim has been rowing for nine years, and some more when he was younger. He expressed feelings of not particularly loving rowing, but being unable to quit all the same, due to those magical rows that make all the drudgery worthwhile. He got his wife Sharon to join the club, and his two kids also rowed for a while.

Clive has been rowing for six years. He told me many stories of how good it felt to win. He discussed often spending years in a sport, as long as I took to figure out how to be the best at what he was doing, and then he would quit.

Henry has been rowing for six years. He described feeling like there was nothing that compared to being out on the water. He came from a boating background, and originally found the idea of being in an un-motorised, self-powered boat highly unappealing.

Dave has been a coxswain for six years. He expressed not overly enjoying his job, and disliking going straight home with nothing to do most evenings. This was what he enjoyed most about rowing; the promise of something to do and somewhere to be.

### **How I conducted the interview**

As suggested by Wolcott (1995) each interview began with a ‘grand tour’ question, in which I invited the participant to tell me something about themselves. This helps to put the participant at ease and give them the power to decide which stories they wish to tell. In general I began with simply asking about the participant’s work day (as the interviews were often on lunch breaks). I often followed this by asking about their first rowing memory, to give them the opportunity to frame their rowing life however they wished to.

From there, I asked after the participants early rowing careers; how and why they started and what kept them coming back. I progressed from there into more depth of their rowing experiences.

Because the nature of my research is narrative and I have ascertained that narratives are drawn on socially and culturally (Sparkes, 1999), alongside the interview as traveller technique (Kvale, 2007), I took on the role of active listener (Sparkes, 1998). This entails the same theory that I detailed in the previous section. Namely, I took an interactive role to enable the person talking to speak more effectively (Wolcott, 1995). As an active listener I shared stories with the participant at appropriate times. Denzin (1989b) states that to “listen only, without sharing, creates distrust” (p. 43). Seeing as I have rowing experience, it was only fitting that at appropriate times in the interview I shared stories of my own, in order to contribute to the interview as collaborative storytelling that I had intended.

While this was my intent unfortunately this easy flowing collaborative conversation did not occur as smoothly as I had hoped. Upon transcribing my first interview I realised I had been nervous and anxious about wanting to do a good job, and as a result I often missed opportunities to question further or share a story of my own. Fortunately, the rest of the interviews saw this nervousness abate and I settled into a comfortable conversational groove. Upon reflection and hindsight I am able to critique and praise my performance where necessary, for example it took me a while in each interview to be comfortable and at ease, but fortunately it appeared that I was proficient at allowing the participant to feel relaxed and open. Fortunately for me, we shared a common interest in rowing, and, I discovered, discussing what makes the perfect stroke was a guaranteed conversation starter.

The previous sections detailed the method I used to interview the participants and gather data. What follows now, is how I analysed and represented the findings.

# Presentation of Findings

## Evocative stories

Because I have been writing the entire time with the evocative tale in the back of my mind, I have undoubtedly steered the writing on narrative in the literature review and method towards this topic already. As such, this section will serve more as a summing up than an introduction or in depth theorising on evocative writing.

Evocative stories are those that encapsulate sights, sounds, emotions, and feelings. They draw the audience in, and rather than merely explaining what happened and whence, they invite the reader to feel along with the story. As such they are a striking way of seeing past naturalisms (Richardson, 2000). They invite the reader into the messy, complex life of the story being told, with its ups and downs and contradictions.

Evocative tales do not take writing for granted, but offer multiple ways of thinking about a topic and reaching wider audiences (Richardson, 2000). Richardson goes on to state “how we are expected to write affects what we can write about” (Richardson, 2000, p.7). I have mentioned earlier who my audience is; scholarly markers. This places an expectation on how I write, so even though I shall be writing evocative stories I am nevertheless wary about casual language as this thesis will be presented to the academic eye.

Evocative tales encourage the reader to “feel the moral dilemmas, think with the story instead of about it, join actively in the decision points and consider how their own lives can be made a story worth telling” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 735). This quote elegantly surmises the main motivation for a researcher to use an evocative tale. Simply, they wish for the reader to see themselves in the story, to be moved, to feel empathetically. In this way the research is no longer a sterile list of numbers or facts, but an open conversation between researcher and reader about each person’s subjective, individual meaning making.

## Poetic representation

As previously mentioned, poetry is a form of evocative writing (Sparkes, 2002). The aim of poetry is to touch feelings through ornamental elegance or evocative description (Simmons, 1994). For a poet of sensibility, these feelings are an end in themselves (Vasanthi, 2012).

Poetic representation of data enables compression and accessibility of research (McCrary Sullivan, 2004). Furthermore poetry can communicate on both a sensuous and intellectual level (Bradey, 2005). McCrary Sullivan (2004) supports this, stating that poetry is intellect embodied; indeed Richardson (2000) claims poetry engages the body even if the mind resists. This links well to convergence; an embodied sensation that is difficult for the mind to describe. When I think of convergence, my heart jumps a little and eyes go dreamy; my body knows instinctively what my mind must learn through language.

Poetic sensibility can allow the demystification of the 'other'; seeking to creatively see the world and not control it (Rinehart, 2010). Because convergence is an 'other' story silenced by the performance narrative poetry may present an appropriate way to explore the experience without seeking to control or own it. Once again assemblage comes to play; the poem of convergence will be an assemblage of every participant's thoughts, emotions and feelings, combined with my own. This does not make the only way to experience convergence, nor the 'right' way. A different lot of experiences may combine in a different assemblage and present an entirely new way of viewing the experience.

We must also be wary not to over-romanticise poetry. Rinehart (2014) warns that essentially the poem is still empty of substance; a window or peephole to obtain a glimpse of a "myriad of emotions, remembrances, memories" (p. 657). The poetic sensibility, in an attempt to intimately know others will only ever approach, not truly capture the essence (Rinehart, 2014).

Rinehart (2010) discusses how in the sporting world, as social sciences, we often examine and research groups in a marginalising way. That is to say, even as we envision a better world free from

marginalisation, by marking these groups as different we enact and validate the marginalisation ourselves. It is a disappointing realisation to come to, that I have been complicit in spreading the marginalisation of these different stories merely by marking them out as different. However for the purposes of this thesis it was necessary to identify and hopefully support those stories that veered from the performance narrative.

Richardson (2000) describes poetry as the shortest emotional distance between the speaker and the reader. Indeed she claims poetry is closer to a person's speech than prose. This is ideally aligned with the sense of immediacy and presence involved in convergence.

By using poetry I have forayed into poetic devices such as "rhythms, silences, spaces, breath points, alliterations, meter, cadence, assonance, rhyme, and off-rhyme" (Richardson, 2000, p. 12). These devices allow us the power of language (DeShazer, 1986) which in turn demonstrates our "relationship to everything in the universe" (DeShazer, 1986, p. 138). This depiction of poetry aligns serendipitously with the essence of convergence; the dissolving of relations between things into 'ever-becoming's'.

Rinehart (2010) argues for a more evocative, emotional way of understanding. He asks researchers to explore seeking knowledge in ways that do not cut out the messy complexities of life, and that do not marginalise or oppress. I am not speaking on behalf of these rowers so much as I am relaying our conversation. They and I were intertwined in the telling of stories, a chorus of voices speaking together through one character at a time. Because I did the thematic analysis so that I could construct these stories around a narrative thread, the dimensions and characteristics of many participants who spoke of similar experiences will be combined to portray an example, a story, of what a person who feels these feelings might look like. As Rinehart (2014) warns, it will be a mere stand in for the true people behind the stories.

These are the justifications I give for using poetry. Upon reading my participant's interviews, it was apparent that convergence, when felt, was felt in the immediate moment. The speaker became vulnerable, almost whimsical when talking about the point in time. I felt intimately connected to the participant when sharing this sacred experience, and to attempt to

capture these emotions, sensations and feelings within theorised text or even an evocative tale felt a disservice. By using the shortest most immediate form of evocative tale there is, I hope to capture the immediacy of convergence itself.

My final justification for using poetry follows from Richardson (2000) who states that poetry, and setting words together in new configurations, allows us to see, hear and feel the world differently. This is exactly what will be required for a reader who has not personally experienced convergence, to gain a sense of empathy and understanding for something that is so difficult to put into words and explain.

The following section discusses how I might tell if I have 'done a good job'. Because the use of narrative in presenting data is relatively novel, and other representations have such opposing ontologies guiding them, I see it as futile to apply the same standards between methods. I will discuss this below.

### **How am I to tell if it is a 'Good' narrative?**

In other words, what counts as a good/correct/proper story? Is a good story enough? Richardson (2000), a 'heavyweight' in the writing arena, laid out standards she believes Creative Analytical Practice users ought to follow: Substantive contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, impactfulness, and expressing a reality. These criteria outweigh mere novelty; just because evocative writing is still seen as 'different' does not mean we can skirt critique.

Developing these criteria further (see Richardson, 2000) substantive contribution queries whether or not the piece contributes to understanding social life. Aesthetic merit asks whether the piece is artistically shaped, satisfying, and not boring. Reflexivity requires the researcher to be cognizant of all the tensions present between themselves, the research, and the text, foremost of which the extent to which they reflect on their own subjectivities. Impactfulness asks whether it affects the reader/marker emotionally or intellectually. Finally, expressing a reality

questions if the text embodies a sense of lived experience; does it seem true?

Other researchers have also offered contributions to this end; suggesting asking the questions “does this account work for us? Do we find it believable and evocative on the basis of our own experience?” (Garratt & Hodkinson, 1999, p.252).

The reason I ask those questions rather than the scientifically influenced criterion of veritability and reliability are simply because I agree with Sparkes (2000) when he states it makes little sense to impose criteria from one type of paradigmatic inquiry to another type. For example, positivist criteria imposed upon interpretivist research; who am I to say that my participants’ response to my question lacked veritability and reliability? Indeed as Denison (1996) states, to judge a story on validity, reliability and generalizability makes little sense.

Therefore, such things as actual truth and evidence are renounced for relatability, evocativeness, and believability. Ellis (1995) argued that to judge the validity of an evocative tale one ought to discern whether it evokes feelings that the experience written is authentic, believable and possible.

Authenticity can be found when the story invites the reader into a vicarious experience of the life being described (Sparkes, 2000). This would include such elements as “mood, feeling, experience, situational variety, and experience” (Sparkes, 2000, p. 33-34). A narrative is believable when it conveys convincingly that the events happened and were felt in the ways the narrator asserts (Sparkes, 2000).

Importantly, suggesting that singular ‘truth’ and reliability are not necessarily important in narrative does not mean I am trying to shrug off the responsibility of creating good work that fits within a set of criteria. I am merely suggesting, as others have before me, that narratives require a different set of criteria. We have a responsibility to make effort to understand and engage with the ‘Other’ (Bernstein, 1991). Now that I have discussed the method I chose within this research, and how I intend to present my findings, I will discuss and critique my choices thus far.

## Critically Analysing Method

Even though I have located my research within the interpretivist paradigm, and I have constantly reiterated the importance of each individual's experiences, I still find myself thinking about finding 'the' answer. I will explain what brought me to this point in the following paragraphs.

As suggested by Carless & Douglas (2012) among others, following from transcription of the interviews and immersing myself in the data, I underwent a thematic analysis. You will recall from the literature review an integral part to my research is finding narrative threads. These threads are those defining things a person lays claim to about their identity, indeed helping the individual construct their identity. Thus, thematic analysis is of great importance in helping identify these threads.

This is where I come across my conundrum(s). First, to group themes together from each interview is to ignore the individuals' life story that allowed and constructed each theme. Second, it is impossible to sit back and wait for themes to 'jump out' at you, as they are actively searched for (Wegener, 2014). Furthermore in searching for these themes it feels as though I am turning to the researcher as miner metaphor that (Kvale, 2007) detailed, which I have mentioned earlier. Whenever one claims truth, they claim power (Richardson, 2002) and in doing so am I removing the agency of these individuals? This is certainly not my conscious intention. But this is where my worries of searching for the 'one' truth arose.

I wish to remain loyal to what the individuals were trying to express. Therefore, rather than a strict categorical analysis, I will be searching more for what the participant was trying to say as a whole rather than labelling it discretely.

St Pierre (2011) actively encourages her doctoral students not to code because it stifles the creative writing as analysis. Which brings me to my next concern, because I have partaken in thematic coding of my interviews, have I already prohibited any writing as analysis?

I think not. This writing even now, is allowing me to analyse and discover the different tensions within my method. For the purposes of this investigation I see it as fitting to pursue both thematic coding and writing as analysis, even with these tensions present. I believe that by identifying the themes within each interview I can gather rich data and quotations, in order to turn these simple threads in to rich narratives of their own.

By selecting the four major themes; performance, movement, relational and convergence, I give myself parameters within which I can write freely. Contrary as it sounds, it is much like the decision of which criteria ought to be imposed upon narrative writing; just because it is 'other' does not mean we should abandon all attempts at understanding (Sparkes, 2000) and creating boundaries.

As I am writing I am aware I almost begin to talk in circles. I am trying to make neat what is intrinsically messy; Bridges-Rhoades & Van-Cleave (2013) demonstrate this problem very well by writing their conversations into their article. The result is a paragraph of scholarly writing, followed by tangents, thoughts, doubts, links, and ideas. St Pierre (2011) sums this up well; "I imagine a cacophony of ideas swirling as we think about our topics with all we can muster..." (p.622).

It gives me some solace to know that this itself is the act of writing as discovery; much as I positioned the interview as a journey (Kvale, 2007), writing as analysis is similarly seen as a method of discovery (Richardson, 2002). It is only as I converse with myself and the page that these thoughts occur. This sentiment reflects Richardson's (2003) notion that she writes in order to learn something she did not know before she wrote it.

In summary of this critique of my method, because it is pertinent to my research I shall keep the thematic analysis of the interviews. I shall attempt to retain the essence of the individual speaking by constructing narratives that reflect what meanings the participants and I constructed within our interviews. This writing now, and the narrative writing to come, is serving as my writing as analysis. I understand that this may not necessarily be the best and certainly not the only way to proceed, but as

Denzin & Lincoln (2007) suggested there is not one correct way to tell of this event.

### **Summary of method**

Because I am (only) doing a masters' thesis I feel certain that I do not hold the authority to simply allow the narratives to stand on their own, as is trademark of narrative work. Even Sparkes, who is a prominent name within the narrative field 'lacked the courage' to let his narrative pieces stand alone, and instead sought to limit the interpretive options of the reader (Sparkes, 2000).

Alongside this narrative theorising I will be writing four stories through which prominent narrative threads from the interviews will be shown. While each story will be representative of the threads found in the interviews, I shall leave room for interpretation. The narratives will be the tool through which I write about and analyse the data, which in turn the reader is encouraged to engage in re-creation and dismantling the text (Barone, 1990).

Reader engagement is a large motivating factor in why I will use narrative. Evocative writing, in particular, is written with the intention that readers will care and feel (Bochner & Ellis, 1996). Through writing the writer attempts to connect with the reader (Sparkes, 2000) which is exactly what I desire. This is because while the presence of narrative threads alternative to performance has been verified (Carless & Douglas, 2012), these stories are often marginalised and/or silenced both within sporting culture and the public domain (Carless & Douglas, 2012).

This concludes the theory sections of this thesis. The next four chapters will be stories imbued with narrative threads and participant voices. I invite you to engage empathetically and digest critically the messages of each story, which are open for interpretation. Along the way, ask yourself: Does this story work for me? Does it evoke feelings within me? Do I find it believable? I certainly hope the answers are yes.

## It's the thrill of the win

Clive is nauseous. His stomach is twisting and bunching and squirming- like there is an animal inside him. He knows it is from nervousness so he speaks to his body in an attempt to settle it down; "I have done everything I could possibly do to prepare for this race, and at this point there is nothing else I can do anyway". He has heard of visualisation, so he gives it a go now. He closes his eyes and breathes deeply, imagining the sensations of crossing the finish line first. He imagines how elated he will feel, his body weary but light with happiness. He imagines the crowd chanting his town's name; Whan-ga-rei! Whan-ga-rei! He smiles as he imagines waving to the crowd and rowing over to the podium. When he opens his eyes again, his stomach has quietened and he is slightly more relaxed, even though he knows the anxiety will soon return.

He turns, grabbing the sides of the boat to twist his torso and stretch out the tightness in his muscles. He catches Laura's eye and, seeing her tightly bunched face- out of nerves too he imagines- gives his best attempt at a reassuring smile. She smiles faintly in return, and flicks her eyes away, eyeing their competition.

He and Laura are sitting at the start of the rowing race track at Lake Karapiro; the host of New Zealand's largest regattas. They sit in the trusty boat that they have sat in every day for months. This reassures Clive. The thought of all the long, hard hours they have spent training in that very boat, literally every day for months on end now, makes him feel a tiny bit more relaxed. He picks at a scab on his knuckle where he scratched himself in training, trying to convince himself that it's likely that they really did train harder than everyone else here. And, he reasons, if they trained harder and longer and better and just, more, then that logically means they will be better, right? Although... doubt creeps back into his mind. Most of these crews are from around here so they have practice rowing on the fresh water lake, whereas he is used to rowing on buoyant salt water. And they have professional paid coaches, where he has volunteers who don't

have that much more experience than him. And they have better, lighter boats, whereas Whangarei rowing club can't afford the latest designs... He tugs at his shoelaces and checks the tightness of the gate, a short pre-race ritual he uses to distract himself from the pep-talk-self-doubt-cycle that constantly accompanies him at the start of a race.

He and Laura trained twice most days, before and after work. They are Master's rowers, not professionals, so they have to fit rowing in around their day to day life.

Clive frowns, the thought of training bringing memories of the last argument he had with Laura. They have a long standing friendship, but it is not uncommon to fight when you're out on the water. Most crews do it. The last time was because Laura felt that they had trained enough, that they should have some rest before the regatta. This had infuriated Clive, who wanted to train right up till the day, believing this to be the best strategy. The fight was eventually resolved by the coach, who sided with Laura and said they need a couple of day's recovery before the race. Clive had stewed about it for days.

This in turn reminded Clive of the relationship he had with his work colleagues. He would often turn up to work in a foul mood because of his training in the morning. If he felt Laura wasn't concentrating enough, or pulling hard enough, he would snap at her and resent her for the whole row. Every time the oar skimmed on the water on the way up to the catch, he saw it as a sign of how much more they need to train. Laura would often chirp back, saying how much they had improved together already. This only incensed Clive further as he perceived her optimism as a blasé attitude. He would fume about the training all day, and it happened so often that his workmates had picked up on when he wanted to be left alone. He doesn't care much; they don't have a whole lot in common. Slackers, mostly, he reckons. No drive. And they don't know about rowing so there's limited conversation between them anyway.

He has also been reprimanded for showing up to work late, but what did they expect? You can't control the wind and the tide, so obviously some rows went longer than expected. Sometimes he had to leave early

too, to catch the high tide. It showed he was a hard worker, he proudly thought. Dedicated. Committed.

Clive has no qualms about his behaviour. He doesn't see any of it as a sacrifice; it's just the price you pay to row, and to row well, he reckons. So what if some people think he's rude? He's just focused. So what if Laura bears the brunt of his ill temper? He's just striving for perfection, as she should be too.

Brought back to the present moment by the sound of Laura clearing her throat, he swallows loudly in turn, his mouth dry and throat tense as he sits on the calm lake. It's lucid, dreamy depths don't betray the frantic energy humming on its surface.

A loud, erratic beating makes its way into Clive's attention. He realises the thudding is his heart, clamouring to be heard. He breathes deeply, trying to slow the agitated throbbing down. Wait, he reminds himself. He doesn't want to slow it down. He focuses on the sensation, using it much as people use a beating drum to stir their blood and make their emotions dance. He has found out that he rows best when he's angry. That he seems stronger when he aggressively attacks the water, rather than working with it. He focuses on the anger, riding the waves of it in time to his drumming heart. Eventually all other sensations are blocked out by the fire seeping through his veins like a drug. His shoulders are tense and his body trembles slightly all over.

The air itself reflects the state of his body, both thick with tension and fizzing with electricity. It makes Clive feel that surely if he reached back and touched Laura, they would both get a shock. Proving his point, the hairs on his arms stand at attention, stiff and regal despite the breeze. Goosebumps line his skin, puckering and turning it a purply red hue even though it is not cold. He rubs at his arms, trying to make the hairs lay down and the goose bumps go away. As soon as his hand passes they leap back to their position, unperturbed by his efforts. He sighs, the first sound to break the melodic tune of water lapping against the boats hulls. He is surrounded by people, crews in their own boats, yet all of them are deathly silent and still.

Clive repeats their starting sequence in his head. Half, three quarter, three quarter, full. Short strokes at first, to launch the boat out of its stationary position and try gain momentum as quickly as possible. He turns again and asks Laura if she remembers the sequence. Of course she does, she replies; “we’ve done it at least a hundred times”. Their voices sound alien in the silence and it causes other crews to stir, as if they were in a trance. Glances are thrown their way, crews annoyed at being disturbed during whatever pre-race ritual was going on in their heads. Clive smirks, knowing how frustrated a disturbance would make him, and hoping it would even slightly have a negative effect on their mental space in the race. Any little bit helps, he muses.

The starting horn echoes across the water, breaking the calm once and for all. Clive watches the rowers in the race ahead of him surge out of the starting docks, followed closely by the safety boat. The group leave a foamy white broth trailing behind them.

When the pack of boats has pushed, tugged, and pulled themselves ferociously past the ten metre point, followed by the loudly braying safety boat, Clive, Laura and the rest of the competitors in their race head towards the now empty starting docks. The water left behind is agitated, having been whipped into a boil. Slowly, as they gently glide across it, the water simmers down. The lake seems to hold its breath, knowing it has only minutes before it is churned into a frenzy again.

Clive looks at his hands as he slowly rows and notices his white and red knuckles, straining from the intensity of his grip on the oar. He winces. Paradoxically, the best rowing stroke is aggressive but very gentle. A relaxed grip on the oar will allow it to float at the height it is meant to, making the boat balance and causing less rocking about and time wasting. He breathes deeply, trying to melt his arms from his shoulders right to his fingertips. He wiggles his fingers, holding onto the oar with just his thumbs as he stretches and flexes them in an attempt to relax his grip.

Clive and Laura pull into the starting docks. They are in lane five; one of the middle lanes and an ideal position to be in. Clive allows himself to be a little bit cocky; the lane you are put in is decided by the outcomes

of your semi-final races. Being in the middle of the course means that you performed well and are picked as a favourite to win the race, plus it is an advantage as the middle lanes receive less cross wind and wake. Clive looks to his left and right, taking one last look at his rivals. He sits up straighter as he feels their eyes sizing him up one last time in return, adding a sliver of height to his figure in an effort to appear more intimidating.

Clive and Laura roll forwards on their seats, taking up their starting position. Clive's eyes are now focused straight ahead; it helps with balancing the boat and shows the other rowers that he is unperturbed by their appearance, or so he hopes. Inside his mind is a flurry of thoughts however. He physically strains to quiet the constant tirade of self-doubt, and instead focuses on everything about the opponents that makes him angry. It's not hard, as his rage is at a constant simmer. The crew on his left are wearing smug smirks that make his blood boil and he sees it as a condescending assumption from them that they have the race in the bag. The crew to his right has a person that keeps sneezing, this infuriates Clive beyond measure. He has no other reason for his anger than the mere fact that they dare disturb the silence.

A dragonfly skims across the water in front of him. It is the only movement he can perceive; his head and eyes are locked forward. Even if he did turn at this point, he knows that each person is strained and taught just like him. He knows each person will be barely breathing and tensing their bodies into a powerful coil, ready to leap forth into the race.

Clive tries imagery again, but this time the scene is different. He imagines himself as a bay hound preparing for the kill, straining tight against his leash but uttering no sound, sniffing at the scent of blood in the air and waiting desperately to be released, howling, baying, flying, into the hunt.

"Attention". The metallic voice echoes across the loudspeakers. Everyone sits up millimetres straighter, tightening each muscle in their body so it will unleash with the force of a loaded gun. Racers, all, collectively, hold their breath. The horn goes...

...Desperately thrashing limbs, wildly swinging bodies, forceful grunts, accusatory yelling, shrieking, screaming fills the air. The water around the boats is churned into a writhing boil from the forceful pumping of the oars as the rowers swing frantically through it. There is a frenzy of boats, oars and limbs. They strain and heave to pull their way out of the churning froth.

Clive breathes harshly, ignoring the metallic taste in his mouth. His ears buzz, overwhelmed by the cacophony of oars creaking, water splashing, voices coming over the megaphone from the safety boat, yelling from the crews all around him. He peeks his head to the side, desperately trying to get a sense of what place they are coming. "Eyes in the boat"! Laura orders from behind him. Angrily, he yanks his head straight and pushes their pace even faster, they fly in tandem up and down the slide...

...At halfway, Clive and Laura have settled the boat into a rapid rhythm. He knows that even though it feels as though they are merely limbs thrashing about, there is a beat underneath the mayhem, a tempo that they pound the oars to. His heart thumps loud, heavy in his ears. It is so heavy and reverberant that he uses it as the beat for his pace, much as he used it earlier to bolster his anger. Blood sings through his veins, the race has separated into two packs and he is in the leading group, but it is too early to tell who is out in front. "Put the pressure on! Leave nothing on the course!" Laura yells, her voice hoarse in his ears. He forces his legs faster and harder through the burning, faster and harder he goes...

With 250 meters left, Clive's life is a blur of huffing, grunting, searing pain, burning legs, his torso swinging wildly trying to keep up the rapid pace. The steady beat he set for the middle of the course has disintegrated and he is desperately trying to rein his weary body back into a steady swinging rhythm. He thinks they are in second place but it is too hard to tell for sure. As he nears the banks, a dull roar fills his ears. He is conscious that it is the crowd, and undoubtedly people are chanting for him and Laura, but his ears swim and he can't focus on anything but the rowing stroke. Every catch, he pushes down harder on his feet. He strains to pull through his burning muscles. He feels sick, his whole body is on

fire, stretching to its limit, he doesn't know if he will make it much further, his vision swims in and out and black fuzzy edges have crept in and refuse banishment by his rapidly blinking eyes, sunscreen and sweat sting their edges, a concoction of this mixture runs down his face and drips off his chin, he doesn't notice as it splats onto his heaving legs...

...One hundred meters to go is signalled by a tiny white buoy. By the time Clive can see it he knows that he has already passed it. The knowledge that he has less than ten strokes left swells him up. His body, indignant and resentful, obeys his desperate plea to eke out a little bit more, a little bit harder. He picks up the pace by a fraction, trying to also maintain the long strong stroke that they have practiced day in and day out. It can't be much longer, he reprimands his distraught body. He can see the other crews out of the corner of his eye, are they level?

He hears the finishing horn go off, once, twice, three and four times. Where were they? Four horns in a row mean that the race was close. Please, he pleads to the commentator silently, please announce the placing's...

He can't hold himself still, his legs are burning too much to stop moving so he moves erratically up and down the slide. His oar swings with him above the water, creaking with resignation, looking sad and out of place out of the water. He knows that the crowd is yelling, he can see them spread out ahead of him. They wave about, a sea of colour, flags blowing cheerily in the breeze. It is exactly as he imagined it, save for one stark difference. It is not for him. He drops his head, droops his shoulders, blocking the scene from his sight. He knows there is a cacophony of noise going on, but all he can hear is a suffocating silence, only broken by the whining buzz of white noise. He feels Laura's hand on his back, there for only a second but the heat leaves a stamp on his skin, taking far longer to fade.

He raises his head and blinks at the sky, trying to make sense of this sensation; this hollow ache. He turns his head sideways, not allowing himself to make eye contact with Laura. If he does, he knows he will scream at her. He did his very best, he knows it. He is exhausted, there is nothing left inside him. That can mean only one thing, reasons Clive. She

was at fault. It is because of her they missed out on a placing. His fury boils up and he resists the urge to curse and rant at her. Instead, he scathingly bites out the words "Let's go". His eyes, focused on the far horizon are a contradictory mix of fury and emptiness, fire and hollow space. "We should take her straight in, no need for a warm down" Laura says. Clive tilts his chin once downwards sharply in agreement.

Sullenly, silently, he rows to shore. Their stroke is erratic and messy, exhaustion playing havoc with their coordination. The coach is waiting on the dock. Arms crossed, sunglasses covering her eyes. Wordlessly, she pulls them in close to the dock, and holds an oar to keep them in place while they climb out of the boat. She is crouched, face turned away from the two rowers, back rigid.

They tersely unroll the gates, and the oars get picked up and carried away by other club members. Teresa, a novice, stops and brightly says "you guys looked really good out there!" She is met by stony silence. Her eyes drop to the ground, and then Laura, feeling bad for the well-meaning young girl says "thanks". Teresa smiles then skips away, clearly unsure of what she did wrong in the rowers eyes.

Clive and Laura stand at each end of the boat, grabbing it and hoisting it over their heads. What seems like gallons of water rushes out of the feet well, a testament to how much of the lake they splashed inside during the race. They settle the boat on a shoulder each, and Clive stalks his way ahead of Laura to their camp. Not a word is spoken between the coach and the two rowers, although Laura smiles and waves at a family member on her way by.

Back at the camp, Clive sullenly sits under a tree, away from the rest of the club members. His posture is bent over and hunched. He rips grass up from the ground and shreds it angrily, stewing on the race. What went wrong? He wonders. They trained so hard. He is silent, morose for the rest of the day.

The club, much like his workmates, have seen this side to him before. There is a wide berth around him, as no one can be bothered to put up with his snappy retorts to anything and everything they say. They

learnt long ago, silence and solitude are the only companions he will tolerate at times like this.

Clive himself is torn between being angry at himself and angry at Laura. He knows deep down that it cannot be solely her fault, but that means taking responsibility and he cannot accept that just yet.

He growls to himself, thinking of how lightly Laura responded to the novice after the race. She clearly was not as upset as him! Where was she now? Not thinking about what she could do better, he bets to himself. She obviously lacks the steely resolve that is required. He sits there, as slowly the thought creeps across his mind: he could drop her, and pursue gold alone in the single scull. He brews on this thought, weighing up the different sides. Single scull is hard, and only the best rowers go into it. But, he would be free to train whenever he wanted. He rolls the scenario around in his mind, pondering the possible repercussions of making this move.

The memory of crossing the finish line, and hearing three other club names echoing across the speakers. He physically recalls the way his gut clenched, as though someone was ripping it out. He remembers the soul crushing disappointment, the desperate pleading in his mind, the all engulfing rage.

At these memories, a steely determination enters his eyes. He will train harder than ever before. He will go for longer rows. He will add in weights sessions, he will do anything he needs to, even if that includes dropping Laura. She could find someone else to row with. He will do anything to avoid a repeat of this year.

Nothing, no one, will stop him from returning next year to claim what is rightfully his. Eyes dark and body heavy, he finally re-joins the rest of the club as they are packing up to go to the barbeque.

## **It's the people**

A cool breeze lazily drifts around Laura. She shivers slightly and does the zip on her jersey a little higher, wondering how summer came and went so quickly. It is nearing autumn now, and the trees are starting to

shed their leaves, the green a little duller than it was before. A musical hum surrounds her, the noises of her club mates undoing riggers, stacking them in the trailer, loading the boats up and tying them down. She has already de-rigged her boat and stored the riggers away; she likes to do things as quickly as possible so that then she can sit down and rest. She earned it, she reckons. It was a hard race today. Sounds of laughter and chatter fill her ears. People have started their post-regatta banter and everyone is in a much sillier mood now that it is all over. Everybody that is, except for one.

She eyes Clive, who has been sitting under a tree far away from everyone for hours now. He looks as though he is literally sitting under his own rain cloud. He is moodily ripping up pieces of grass, and the air around him looks a couple of shades darker. Or she's just imagining it. She had gone and talked to him once earlier, but he was abrupt and mean and she doesn't usually bother talking to him when he's like that. She sighs. She was in the boat too, she muses. She knows how it feels. To have put your life and soul into something for months on end, and then not even getting a placing. Fourth. That's what they came. It's gut wrenching, sure. All that hard work. She fiddles with the zip, unsure of what to do. She feels the loss heavily, but Clive seems to take it to a whole new level. She feels guilty for not feeling as bad as he does, then feels even guiltier for making it into a competition, who is more upset? But all the same, she knows he probably is thinking the same thing. He takes this stuff so seriously. But that's not to say that she doesn't? She sighs, tired of the whirling thoughts in her head.

"We're having a club barbeque tonight, are you coming Laura"? The voice breaks her reprieve and she looks up gratefully. Tim, who has just spoken, is strolling past flipping a spanner in his hand. "Yeah, I'd love that" she replies with a smile. Her pensive thoughts scattered, she rolls herself onto her hip, pushes her hands into the dried grass, feelings the dirt scratch her blisters. She hoists herself up to a standing position and hovers there for a moment, shifting her weight around, the tiny movements stretching her fatigued muscles. She wriggles her toes in the grass,

revelling in the simple sensation. Once she gains her balance, she hobbles over to Clive.

“Have you heard about the barbeque”? She asks cautiously. She watches the physical shifts ripple through Clive’s body, the tensing shoulders, the quick inhalation, the steeling of his body ready to retort. She holds her gaze steady as he slowly lifts his eyes to meet hers. She is shocked at the anger simmering in their depths. She knew he was upset, but he looks furious. Is that at me? She wonders. Or just at the outcome?

“Yes”. He spat the word at her, and she flinched at the venom it contained. “Ok”, she says shakily, trying for a light tone. “Will you be going”?

“Too tired”. He snaps his head away, an unspoken dismissal. With their eye contact broken Laura visibly wilts from the strain his heated gaze had on her. His three words cut into her again and again, containing much more power than their meanings. They echo in her head, his tone, his stare, the feeling of hatred she got from him burn tracks in her skin. Slowly she turns and steps away. She doesn’t consider herself feeble, by any account. The rowing club is full of boisterous, loud men and she can hold her own easily. Growing up in a large family does that to you. But she is taken aback by how rude Clive is, how purely mean. They have seen each other every day for as long as she can remember but now she feels as if she barely knows him. Or at least, he certainly doesn’t want to know her. She kicks at the ground, frustrated that he can have this effect on her. Self-doubt and insecurity fizz around her mind as she flops down, back to her spot to her spot on the ground. Questions start circling her mind; was the result of the race because of me? Did I train hard enough? Does Clive blame me? She swallows back the lump in her throat, feeling tears swell in her eyes. Angrily she picks up a stick and starts snapping it, berating herself with every crack.

Suddenly, a face appears in front of her. It is Henry, and he is smiling cheerily.

“What’s up, Lozza”? He asks, eyes sparkling. “Nothing” she mutters, blinking rapidly to dispel the giveaway moisture in her eyes. Catching his quizzical gaze, she sighs. “It’s just... I feel like maybe it was my fault that

we lost today". She lowers her eyes to the ground, a flush spreading across her cheeks with embarrassment at the confession. Henry is silent, and after a while Laura peeks up to see why. He is looking at her in bemusement. "Nonsense"! He yells. The sudden volume gives Laura a start and she giggles nervously. "First of all, you didn't lose! You're fourth in the whole of New Zealand! Come on, how many people can say that they're fourth best out of their entire country?" He demands.

"Only in masters" Laura mutters, hunching her shoulders and crossing her arms, pulling her knees in tight to her chest to hide her embarrassment.

"ONLY in Masters"? He repeats her, laughing. "You're being ridiculous, Lozza. Look how far you've come. Need I remind you how terrible you used to be"?

Henry had been at the club for a couple of years before Laura started rowing, and had been there on the day she had rowed for her first time. Looking at his beaming face, she remembers back to when she was a novice and they had first met. She had started rowing at the urging of her workmate, Sharon, who had been very persuasive. Sharon had completely and utterly romanticized rowing, talking with sparkling eyes about joyous friendships, watching sunrises while cruising along the river and she even threw in a dolphin pod sighting- not that Laura had ever seen one. Laura remembered being taken by the allure of Sharon's tales and the passion in her voice when she talked about the club, so she had come along with great optimism and given it a go, and it was terrible.

Terrible! Sitting in one spot for seemingly endless hours, contorting her body and discovering muscles she never knew existed, getting numb fingers and ears and nose. And the blisters! Even now, they never go away. And she was bad at it. Laura winced at this memory, of how truly difficult she had found that first row. She had gotten off the water, drenched, freezing cold, aching sore, and ready to quit. She was planning on telling Sharon the next day that it wasn't for her, but then, the club members started introducing themselves properly.

Henry introduced himself first, beaming into her face and with a chuckle had said "pretty good day for your first row eh? The weather really

turned it on for you. I bet you feel terrible-but at least you didn't fall out!" Laura had laughed, and wrung her dripping socks out some more, emphasising the sopping wet conditions of the day. He had carried on; "everyone is horrible when they start. Believe me. I was the absolute worst, and yes, I did fall out my very first time. But I promise it gets so much better". She had still felt dubious, but when each of the club members came up to her and introduced themselves, and offered their own version of The Terrible First Row, she slowly began to be convinced.

Not only convinced, but also extremely grateful for their kindness; the only words she heard were those of support and joviality. She had felt like a wounded bird who had failed at its first attempt flying, but here were these gracious people telling her how great she had done and bathing her in the golden glow of encouragement. They had been so friendly and truly welcoming; it had felt like slipping into a new family. It was the people that first got her to love rowing, and then with time and practice she fell in love with the sport itself.

Blinking, Laura feels the corners of her mouth twitch, unable to help herself in the face of her memory and Henry's present jubilant optimism. She begins to feel undeniably better. The knot of tension and guilt in her stomach dissipates somewhat as she smiles back at Henry. She shakes her head but in doing so she sees Clive's morose figure out of the corner of her eye, and her gaze darkens once more. Henry follows her glance, turns back to her and says much quieter "don't you worry what he thinks. He never has dealt with anything less than first place well, you know that. Heck, he once won and STILL griped that it wasn't as much of a lead as he wanted. He'd suck the joy right out of the world if he could". Hearing someone else put into words what she was unable to express made Laura feel as though a huge weight was lifted.

She slowly savours the words in her mouth, "I suppose, I did come fourth. That's pretty cool". She smiles, feeling buds of pride blossom within her. Henry jumps up and cries "that's the spirit! Now, are you gunna stop moping around and come to the barbeque"? He holds his hand out, expectantly. She swats it aside and heaves her body up by herself, widely grinning. "Who else is gunna make sure you don't burn everything"? She

teases, turning her back on Clive and beginning to daydream about all the food she would soon devour. She noticed for the first time how starving she was. Satisfied, and smiling, she walked with Henry back to the others, ready to go to the barbeque and actually enjoy herself.

## **It's the feeling**

Out in the harbour sitting on the merrily sparkling waves, Jim smiles to himself. His face is flushed and he has a bead of sweat rolling down his nose, but he is content. He is in a crew of four going for a long, slow, row. On long rows such as this, one has ample opportunity to think and this is exactly what Jim is doing.

He marvels at the delightfully cheerful water beneath him, buoyantly holding up his boat. He revels in the warm sunshine, and thanks the fresh breeze for cooling him ever so slightly. As he swings up and down in the rowing stroke, he tries to focus on each little component that makes it so beautiful.

First, the catch. He dips his oar in the water. Then engage. He feels for the tension; the water pushing against his blade. Sometimes he doesn't dip his oar in far enough, so when he pushes off his blade goes skittering across the water without finding purchase. That's why there's a moment, probably imperceptible from outside the boat, but there's a tiny pause, a breath of air, in the split second where he feels for the water. Feels it swell behind the oar, inviting, encouraging.

Then he pushes. He feels the surge of water moving with the blade. He hangs his arms out straight, as if he is trying to pull his shoulders out of their sockets. It's difficult to try to separate the body when everything is moving, which is why he has such a gruesome visual to keep his arms locked and unmoving. It's all in the legs at this stage. He pushes off the balls of his feet evenly, feeling his quads engage, his calf muscles tightening and then lengthening.

Once he has pushed his legs out straight, and his body is still hanging over on an angle and his arms are still taught, he starts tilting at the hips. Pulling with his back. His shoulders. He keeps his arms straight

still, as he knows bending them prematurely will weaken his stroke. Keeping his back straight, core tucked in tight supporting his spine, he knows there's no pressure anywhere there shouldn't be. When he has rocked back on his sit bones he now, finally, bends his arms to finish off the stroke.

Pulling, bending, bringing the oar right in just around the bottom of his rib cage. Sending the water he had collected by oar away from the boat. He watches the swirling eddy he created, along with his team mates; four miniature whirlpools swirling, gracefully flowing away from the tail end of the boat. He pushes his arms down, releasing the oar from the water. He twists his wrists, in unison together with his crew, and hears the satisfying clunk of four oars rolling against their gates together. This manoeuvre lays the oar parallel to the water, improving balance, reducing wind resistance and lessening the likelihood of the blade catching on the water. He straightens out his arms again. Bending his upper body forwards at the hips, followed by his knees, he rolls up the slide, preparing for the stroke to start again.

All of this takes place in the space of about three seconds. Jim reckons that's probably why there's so much focus and concentration involved in getting it perfect, if that's possible, he chuckles. He guesses that's why rowing isn't as boring as cycling or swimming. Probably because there's always something to focus on, he muses. The stroke is so fleeting, how would he be able to run through that entire script every stroke? He wonders if professional rowers do. He can't, not every stroke, which is why he flits into daydreams after long periods of trying to concentrate. He reckons even if he rowed for decades there would be something still to work on. Some minor technical thing that he hadn't quite got yet, that would make his boat go that little bit faster. He grins, thinking himself lucky for stumbling across this sport, even though it took him a while.

He started out as many kiwi lads do, on the rugby field. He grimaces, the ghosts of long distant tackles still leaving their traces in his memory. He didn't notice the bumping and knocking and bruising back then, it was just part of the game. Once, he bit right through his lip and got

sent to hospital. There is still a faint scar on the right side of his chin, just underneath his lip. That was when he decided he'd had enough of rugby. So he took up running.

He ran for many years, until a niggle in his left knee became too much of a nuisance to run on. He had gotten good by that stage too, running up and down the hills on the back roads every day. He didn't consider giving up sport, as he knew how cranky no activity made him. So he started swimming.

By far the shortest of his jaunts into a new sport, he found swimming unbearably boring. Staring at a black line, doing the same monotonous movements over and over again in a concrete tub made him feel trapped. This, coupled with the silence that comes with being underwater left him feeling miserable, isolated and above all bored. He quickly left the pool, and vowed never to return. At this point he decided to buy a bicycle.

He had been living a couple of kilometres out of town and decided that he may as well use his commute as exercise. The benefits were twofold; get his physical activity for the day and save money on gas. But he very quickly discovered that biking was terribly monotonous also. One day Jim had been cycling past the river at the same time that a crew was rowing a boat past him. He had stopped and watched, admiring the elegance of the boat gliding through the water. He thought about the image the scene had imprinted on his mind for the next couple of days, until his wife, fed up with hearing about it, had urged him to join the club. She had rowed when she was younger, she said, and it was a great amount of fun.

So Jim went down to the rowing club. At the memory of his first season, Jim cringed. He had hated it at first. All the lads were younger, and they swore! Foul language, every time he went down there. He scowls, recalling how he told them "if you don't stop swearing I'm going to quit". He had always been pretty blunt. They did stop. And then they had started again, but by this time Jim had gotten to know them through racing and training together, and he had gotten used to it. Now, he barely hears it.

Jim hears the call to easy-oar, yelled by the coxswain and faint on the wind. The crew ceases motion, but the boat carries on gliding for a short while, the momentum propelling it forward. "Check it bowside" the coxswain calls. Jim and Sam dig their blades into the water, gripping them tightly as the boat's momentum is halted rapidly and swings to the side. This is the most efficient way to turn the boat around, by checking it while it is still in motion. Once the boat is perpendicular to its original course, the two stroke side rowers begin touching the boat around so that it points homeward.

The coxswain calls easy oar when they have done enough, and everyone drops their oars and immediately wriggles around, alleviating any tension, aches and pains. The boat rocks and oars skew up in the air; once the crew don't have to worry about balance they completely disregard keeping the boat level. Jim is a bit puffed, it's always hard work even after all these years. Especially going in to a headwind.

It's November, the promise of warmer weather is on the air but still tantalisingly out of reach. As the sun droops low in the sky, a fresh breeze picks up. Jim is glad he's wearing his thermal as the wind tickles his ears and nose, numbing the very tips. At least it will be a tail wind on the way home, he thinks to himself, combined with an incoming tide that should make for a very speedy trip home.

The four rowers, having stretched and watered themselves, slowly start rowing once more. True to Jim's calculations the boat picks up quickly and sails through the water with ease. The atmosphere in the boat is lighter now that the crew knows they're over halfway and on the way home.

Jim wriggles and stretches his fingers; they can get locked in one position if he forgets to do that in the cold. His knuckles resent the movement, they groan in complaint. Slowly, gradually, he begins to warm up again. He eases into the rowing rhythm. He likens the start of any row to a baby deer skittering around, not knowing how to use its limbs. The thought makes him smile. It doesn't matter how experienced of a rower someone is, there will still always be bad rows. If you're having a bad day, if it's cold, if people are late, if the wind picks up; plenty of things can put you out. This

reassures Jim, who enjoys the knowledge that while the rowing stroke is repetitive, rowing itself is never boring.

Jim's not quite sure why he doesn't find it as boring as the other sports he has tried. He supposes it's because they are so many things to think about, and so many contributing factors to how it will go. He loves being in the elements; when he was cycling he was outside but it's not the same as being at the mercy of the harbour.

The boat is really getting going, and Jim snaps out of his pensive daydream. What does it matter why I like it? He thinks. Just enjoy the row now, he reminds himself. His cold hands have softened around the wooden oar, knuckles no longer protesting the movement. The sea sprays up from the oars of the person in front of him, tickling his face and then getting chilled immediately by the wind. It is refreshing, and his mind feels sharp. He can concentrate more clearly now, the hazy fog of memories has dissipated with the spray and the wind and the crisp movements of the crew all together.

Jim is puffing, and once again thankful now for the chill wind. He is proud to sweat and puff, and forever be searching for unobtainable perfection. He shudders to think of being this age and not doing anything at all, just wasting away.

He gazes at the vista before him, the sun filtering in from the west on its steady downward descent. He breathes in deeply, savouring the salty, clean air, and relishes in the movement of the rowing stroke. As he once again runs through the stroke one component at a time, he smiles wide at how the individual parts come together into a whole, making his old, weary body feel young and graceful one more.

## **Convergence**

I can hear my crew breathing  
As we swing together.  
Rapidly and leisurely

We sway

Long, lean, strong, clean

The stroke dissolves

Under velvet sky

Over silky water

We are flying.

Horizons blend.

I feel the wooden oar

Worn smooth under many hands

merging

Wind tickling my face

Body pressed into boat

Boat gliding,

soaring to watery depths,

Water melting into sky.

We are blending, swirling,

Boundaries blur

Connections fade in to

everything

We are flying

Tingling, sparkling, crackling,

ecstasy flows through

Everything.

If you find the poem describing convergence underwhelming, please know that I do too. It never occurred to me that if convergence was a phenomenon that not many people are talking about, perhaps, it is not because they don't know about it. Perhaps it is because they know it is there, but they don't know how to say it.

I am ashamed to admit that I got sucked into the novice researcher trap of believing I had come across something brand, sparkling, new, and I was going to be the one to pave the way for other researchers to follow. It seems to me that the reason not many people are talking or writing about convergence is because it is so difficult to put into words. The surfers were right; you need to experience to understand it. This has not stopped me from giving it my best attempt, however. It might be flagrant optimism, but I choose to believe that it is only because it is new, and un-researched, and hidden, that we lack the language to talk about. I choose to believe that *trying* to explain it, and not giving up just because it is hard, will one day eventuate in a rich, descriptive, coherent convergence narrative.

For now, it exists in the spaces between. It exists in the eyes of my participants. The moment, the electrifying tingle when we both knew what each other were talking about and a light shone out of their eyes, sparkling and glimmering at the memory.

It exists in the moment after that, when a shadow darkens their gaze, and their breath catches, hanging on the air as they realise they do not know how to say what they want to.

It exists in the clichés, ‘one with the world’, ‘connected to everything’, ‘sublime’ ‘unreal’, ‘phenomenal’ ‘merging with the medium’.

It exists in the passionate fervour with which each and every participant talked about the perfect stroke. They sat up straighter, leaned towards me, and talked with animation. Each and every one of them knew that the perfect stroke was achievable, it was wonderful, it was joyous, but not one of them could pin exactly how it came to be. Not one could remember being in the moment; only the echoes and traces of the experience remain, unable to pass their lips.

It is coming back from a long and difficult row, but when someone asks you how it was, instead of complaining, a dreamy look crosses your face and you reply with a whimsical, “great”.

It is as frustrating as the promise of a tomorrow that never comes, and as aggravating as a name on the tip of your tongue, that never quite materialises.

It is the disappointment of looking back at a photo of a magnificent sunrise, and realising a picture will never allow you to recapture the perfect brilliance.

And then, it is the euphoria that comes when you realise that just by looking at the picture, your emotions have been stirred and whirled and fluttered, even though the object itself is but a trace of the original experience.

These spaces are where convergence exists. Not in my poem, not in the above examples, but in the space of the now. Forever fleeting, irreplaceably lost in time and space but oh so tantalising sweet to remember. I am sorry if it was not what you expected. It is not what I expected. But I know with all the conviction of my body that I have experienced convergence and it is my most ardent desire that one day, I may come to speak about it more eloquently.

## **Concluding Comments**

My interest in the research I undertook in this thesis was undeniably formulated through my personal negative experience within the performance narrative. Upon learning that researchers had studied and put into words the very thoughts that I had previously felt largely unable to express, I could not wait to dive into my own research.

Thus, a thesis with underpinnings of narrative, critique of the sporting culture, and to some extent auto-ethnography was born. The interpretivist paradigm provided the boundaries for my research ethics, values, and actions (Markula & Silk, 2011), and guided my decision making from the start. With the idea that there is no singular truth I was able to critique literature throughout my literature review, and take the stance that my interviews would be collaborative meaning making processes (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Furthermore the interpretive paradigm allowed me the space to write myself into the thesis. This enabled me to turn from the traditional role of researcher as objective, passive, and unbiased and instead write my own subjectivity and experiences in, alongside the voices and experiences of my participants.

My thesis highlighted from both my experience and the literature, that because athletes tend to identify particularly strongly with the athletic identity (Smith & Sparkes, 2005) they are at risk of experiencing narrative wreckage when this identity and the performance narrative that constructs it no longer align with their experiences (Douglas & Carless, 2009). This is because the oppressive nature of the performance narrative often denies individuals of the story telling resources necessary to create new a new identity and story.

Following from Carless and Douglas (2012) my thesis demonstrated that an appropriate way to move past a dominant narrative and allow space for a multidimensional identity is to share more stories. Through the sharing of stories, one's narrative resources and repertoire is expanded and thus one may tell varied stories creating a multi-faceted identity. The form of story-sharing I chose to undertake was that of interviewing six participants at a single rowing club.

By interviewing my participants using the concept of interview as travelling (Kvale, 2007) I was able to share with participants numerous stories and experiences within and outside the performance narrative. Together, we collaborated in our meaning making (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995), which led to many various stories being shared. This demonstrates that rowers have the power and the story telling abilities to supplement and move past the performance narrative, enabling a more holistic enjoyment in the participation of their sport.

One story that lies outside the bounds of the performance narrative was that of convergence. By comprehending convergence through the concept of assemblage, I was able to understand convergence as embodying a sense of merging with the medium (Anderson, 2012). I discussed assemblage's meaning of the coming together of parts which retains their heterogeneity (Anderson, 2009); the connectivity of things whilst still retaining the structural/structured concept (Marcus & Saka, 2006). Essentially convergence was a move beyond this, allowing for the relations between things to dissolve (Anderson, 2012).

While it was difficult to do it justice in writing, I gave it my best effort because it was evident in the interviews that my participants experienced

the sensation of connecting with the world, and I wished to share their stories. The discussion I presented of the convergence narrative is the contribution I hope my thesis makes to the narrative sporting literature. I hope that through the presentation of the findings as evocative stories, I have engaged you, reader, in an empathetic understanding of the diverse ways these participants experienced their sport and storied their lives.

I have deliberately left these stories open to the readers interpretation, a choice informed by the discussion I presented in the methodology and method sections. Following Ellis and Bochner (2000), I am encouraging the reader to take part in decision making, by way of my artfully-persuasive story-telling (Barone, 1995). Like Rinehart (2010), I am aiming for a more evocative, emotional way of understanding. Thus theory and analysis were present in the stories I constructed, and I sincerely hope they were of evocative nature allowing and compelling the reader to think *with* the story rather than about it (Frank, 1997; Smith & Sparkes, 2009b).

As I mentioned at the beginning of the thesis, following Douglas (2009) I did not intend to go out and prove that the narratives existed. I knew that they were there. Rather, I was uncertain what form the stories would take. What I encountered were a range of unique individuals who story their experiences in many different ways. Some, as I expected, aligned their experiences with the performance narrative while others told stories of loving the movement and feeling loyal to their friends. Importantly, the stories shared were complex and subjective, and it would be impossible to peg each individual into a neat box.

I see this as the primary success of my thesis; having had the opportunity to collaborate with five rowers and a coxswain in sharing meaningful, diverse and compelling stories, which often move past the performance narrative. This motivates me to continue my journey as a researcher and I am looking forward to continuing my focus on discovering new and empowering narratives within the sporting culture.

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## **Appendix A: Information form for club captain**

Dear club captain,

My name is Toni-Elizabeth and I am doing a master's degree at the University of Waikato. As a former rower the sport is of interest to me, so, for my thesis I am investigating how rowers experience their sport. This letter provides you with the information you need to make an informed consent to allow me access to your club's rowers.

With your permission and the consent of the relevant rowers, I am hoping to speak with and interview 6 rowers around the topic of their experiences within sport. The duration of the project would hopefully only be a week in April, relying on times that the rowers are available. I intend to interview 6 rowers individually, for the duration of approximately an hour each. These will be audio recorded.

If, after reviewing the interviews I discover gaps in the data I may request a follow up interview from the rower(s) in question. This will take no longer than an hour.

The rowers will be offered the opportunity to view their transcribed interview with the intention for them to correct any inaccuracies of their comments.

In the interests of protecting you and the club from potential harm (not that I foresee any) the club's name will remain anonymous, with a pseudonym in its place. All measures will be taken to ensure anonymity, however it cannot be guaranteed.

Please find attached an information sheet for the rowers, which further elaborates on my project. With your consent I will approach the relevant coaches to outline my project, and from there distribute the information sheets to the rowers themselves.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me. In the event of any concerns I recommend contacting me in the first instance. If we cannot resolve the concerns the matter will be taken to Hamish Crocket, the supervisor for this project. Should this still prove unsuccessful it will be referred to Kirsten Petrie; the Chairperson of the University of Waikato's Sport and Leisure department.

Toni-Elizabeth (Researcher)

Email:

tgreen82@windowslive.com

Hamish Crocket (Supervisor)

Email:

hamishc@waikato.ac.nz

Kirsten Petrie (Chair of department)

Email:

kpetrie@waikato.ac.nz

## **Appendix B: Information form for coaches**

Dear Coach,

My name is Toni-Elizabeth and I am doing a master's degree at the University of Waikato. As a former rower the sport is of interest to me, so, for my thesis I am investigating how rowers experience their sport. This letter provides you with the information you need to make an informed consent to allow me access to your club's rowers.

With your permission and the consent of the relevant rowers, I am hoping to speak with and interview 6 rowers around the topic of their experiences within sport. The duration of the project would hopefully only be a week in April, relying on times that the rowers are available. I intend to interview 6 rowers individually, for the duration of approximately an hour each. These will be audio recorded.

If, after reviewing the interviews I discover gaps in the data I may request a follow up interview from the rower(s) in question. This will take no longer than an hour.

The rowers will be offered the opportunity to view their transcribed interview with the intention for them to correct any inaccuracies of their comments.

In the interests of protecting you and the club from potential harm (not that I foresee any) the club's name will remain anonymous, with a pseudonym in its place. All measures will be taken to ensure anonymity, however it cannot be guaranteed.

Please find attached an information sheet for the rowers, which further elaborates on my project. With your consent I will approach the relevant coaches to outline my project, and from there distribute the information sheets to the rowers themselves.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me. In the event of any concerns I recommend contacting me in the first instance. If we cannot resolve the concerns the matter will be taken to Hamish Crocket, the supervisor for this project. Should this still prove unsuccessful it will be referred to Kirsten Petrie; the Chairperson of the University of Waikato's Sport and Leisure department.

Toni-Elizabeth (Researcher)

Email:

tgreen82@windowslive.com

Hamish Crocket (Supervisor)

Email:

hamishc@waikato.ac.nz

Kirsten Petrie (Chair of department)

Email:

kpetrie@waikato.ac.nz

## **Appendix C: Information form for rowers/participants**

Dear rower,

You have received this letter because you belong to, or row out of Whangarei Rowing Club. My name is Toni-Elizabeth and I am completing my master's degree at the University of Waikato. As a former rower I am interested in the sport and how it is experienced. So, for my thesis I am investigating how rowers experience their sport, through the lens of the rower themselves. This letter provides you with the information you need to make an informed consent on whether you would like to participate or not.

With your permission I; Toni-Elizabeth, would like to interview you. This will probably take between 40-60 minutes and will be conducted either a) at the rowing club; by the river if people are around or b) at a place of your choosing i.e. café, park, or your home, whichever is most convenient and comfortable for you. The interview will be audio recorded.

Once the interviews have been transcribed, you will receive an email with a copy of your interview. This will be an opportunity for you to read over and amend revise or strike any statements you feel did not accurately portray your opinions, or are factually inaccurate. You will have two weeks from the date you receive the transcripts to return the amended version, if, after that time you have not replied I will deem the original version to be true and accurate.

Participation is your choice. You don't have to participate, but it would be great if you would share your experiences. You will not be named in any data or documents if you do not wish to be identified. All measures will be taken to ensure anonymity, however it cannot be guaranteed. You are able to withdraw from the study at any stage, up until the two week date set from the return of the transcripts.

The interview will be conducted more like a guided, formal conversation. Because the study is based on your experiences, the answers you give will be a matter of your own opinion and cannot be judged right or wrong. If I feel further information is required after I have transcribed the interview, you may be contacted for some follow up questions.

If you would like to help please sign the consent form on the following page. If you do not wish to participate no further action is required from you. If more than 6 rowers from the club agree to participate then the participants will be selected at random. If you consent but are not selected it will only be because of the luck of the draw. This project complies with the requirements of the School of Education's Ethics Committee.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me. In the event of any concerns I recommend contacting me in the first instance. If we cannot resolve the concerns the matter will be taken to Hamish Crocket, the supervisor for this project. Should this still prove unsuccessful it will be referred to Kirsten Petrie; the Chairperson of the University of Waikato's Sport and Leisure department.

Toni-Elizabeth (Researcher)      Email: [tgreen82@windowslive.com](mailto:tgreen82@windowslive.com)

Hamish Crocket (Supervisor)      Email: [hamishc@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:hamishc@waikato.ac.nz)

Kirsten Petrie (Chair of department) Email: [kpetrie@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:kpetrie@waikato.ac.nz)

