

# **Making Sense of Sports Injury: A Psycho-Social-Cultural Exploration**

Thesis submitted by:

Ciara Everard

For the award of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Sport, Allied Health, and Performance Science,  
St. Mary's University, London

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents.

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## Abstract

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the diverse psycho-social-cultural meanings that athletes construct from their sports injury experiences. Specifically, the aims were fourfold: First, to provide a broader, more nuanced, and more holistic understanding of sports injury by exploring the meanings that athletes derive from their injury experiences. Second, this thesis aimed to broaden injured athletes' perspectives and possibilities from injury by identifying and foregrounding multiple meanings from sports injury and by cultivating a more inclusive understanding of the diverse ways in which injured athletes may make sense of their experiences. Third, this thesis aimed to extend theoretical understanding of injury from a psycho-social-cultural perspective by extending the analytical gaze beyond the injured athlete and exploring how the broader socio-cultural contexts and influences can shape and frame athletes' psychological experiences of injury. Finally, this thesis aimed to bridge the ongoing knowledge-practice gap by disseminating this PhD research findings in accessible formats and exploring the applied value of the research findings to athletes, coaches, and service-providers.

The thesis consists of five empirical chapters. The first study in this thesis (chapter 3) appraises, synthesises, and integrates the literature on one potential meaning from injury: Sport-Injury Related Growth (SIRG). Study two (chapter 4) builds and expands upon the scope of study one by exploring the multiple meanings elite track athletes experience from injury across the lifespan by adopting a narrative inquiry approach. Study two identified six narrative typologies of sports injury that formed the conceptual basis of this thesis: *Resilience*, *Merry-Go-Round*, *Longevity*, *Pendulum*, *Snowball*, and *More-To-Me*. Study 3 (chapter 5) extends understandings of these six sports injury narrative typologies by further theorising how elite track athletes engaged with them. Study 4 (chapter 6) enhances the accessibility and availability of these narrative findings by foregrounding the use of an *arts-based knowledge translation* (ABKT) tool (i.e., videos) to translate and disseminate the six sports injury typologies into user friendly formats for dissemination beyond academic audiences. Finally, study five (chapter 7) evaluates the applied value of these video narratives for athletes, coaches, and practitioners.

This thesis extends the sport injury psychology literature across empirical, methodological, theoretical, and practical domains. First, by providing novel insights into a collective understanding of SIRG. Second, by identifying and foregrounding the multiple meanings elite track athletes derive from their injury experiences across the lifespan using a narrative inquiry approach. Third, by enriching theoretical understanding of how to cultivate a more inclusive and diverse sport injury narrative landscape. Fourth, by foregrounding the use of an innovative and timely ABKT tool to enhance the impact and uptake of sport injury psychology research. Finally, by generating empirical insights into the applied value of sports injury narratives in working *on*, *for*, and *with* athletes, coaches, and practitioners.

## **List of Abbreviations**

ABKT	Arts-Based Knowledge Translation
DNA	Dialogical Narrative Analysis
DLP	Digital Learning Practitioner
MMSI	Multi-level Model of Sport Injury
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SIRG	Sport-Injury Related Growth
SCI	Spinal Cord Injury
T-SIRG	Theory of Sport Injury Related Growth

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## Research Outputs

### Journal Publications

Everard, C., Wadey, R., & Howells, K. (2021). Storying sports injury experiences of elite track athletes: A narrative analysis. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 56.  
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Everard, C., Wadey, R., & Howells, K. (2022). Sharing and discussing sports injury narratives with elite athletes: Reflecting on member reflections. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise, and Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2022.2152083>

Everard, C., Wadey, R., Howells, K., & Day, M. (2022). Construction and communication of evidence-based video narratives in elite sport: Knowledge translation of sports injury experiences. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*.  
<http://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2022.2140225>

### Book Chapters

Howells, K. & Everard, C. (2020). “What doesn’t kill us, makes us stronger”: Do Injured athletes really experience growth? In R. Wadey (Ed.), *Sport injury psychology: Cultural, relational, methodological, and applied considerations* (pp.85-96). Routledge, London

Wadey, R., & Everard, C. (2020). Sport Injury-Related Growth (SIRG): A conceptual foundation. In R. Wadey, M. Day, & K. Howells (Eds.), *Growth following adversity in sport: A Mechanism to Positive Change* (pp.189-203). Routledge, London.

Gylmn, S., Wadey, R., Day, M. & Everard, C. (2023). Cultural, institutional, and relational understanding of sport injury. In M. Arvinen-Barrow & N. Walker (Eds.), *The psychology of sport injury and rehabilitation* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). Routledge, London.

### **Conference Presentations**

Everard, C., Wadey, R., Howells, K., & Day, M. (2021). Oral presentation “Storying sports injury experiences of elite track athletes: A narrative analysis”. *SHAS Research Event*, St Mary’s University, Twickenham, UK.

Everard, C., Wadey, R., Howells, K., & Day, M. (2022). Oral presentation “Video narratives as a knowledge translation tool within sport injury psychology”. *SHAS Research Event*, St Mary’s University, Twickenham, UK.

Pang, B., Cavallerio, F. Day, M., & Everard, C. (2022). Symposium “Using creative and arts-based methods with diverse communities in sport and health” at International Conference for Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise. Durham, UK



## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

## **1.0 Introduction**

It is well-documented that sports injuries can have devastating consequences for athletes. An injury can impact an athlete's mental health and psychological well-being, compromise their performance potential, and in some instances, induce an involuntary retirement from sport (Gouttebarga et al., 2016, 2019; Putukian, 2016; Ristolainen et al., 2012). In elite sport, where athletes' livelihoods are often dependent upon sports participation, these psychosocial ramifications can become amplified (Rice et al., 2016). For example, sports-related injuries have been identified as one of the main triggers for elite athletes to experience mental illness (Souter et al., 2018), which can include depression, generalized anxiety, eating disorders, substance use and abuse, and suicide ideation (e.g., Didymus & Backhouse, 2020; Foskett & Longstaff, 2018; Gervis et al., 2019; Gulliver et al., 2015; Putukian, 2016; Souter et al., 2018). However, despite these heightened concerns, the socio-cultural milieu surrounding high-performance athletes can often negate and normalise their injury experiences by viewing them as 'part and parcel' of the fabric of elite sport (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2019). Moreover, while storylines of triumph and positivity are often welcomed and reinforced within elite sport cultures, storylines associated with injury and laden with negative emotional connotations (e.g., anger, blame, depression, frustration, hopelessness), are often marginalised and described as creating tensions for athletes as they represent 'weakness' (Wadey et al., 2019). Collectively these psycho-social-cultural influences can both heighten elite athletes' risk of injury and implicate athletes' psychological well-being by limiting the opportunities available to them, to frame, interpret, and express their injury experiences to others (Gulliver et al., 2015; Salim & Wadey, 2018; Trainor, 2020). For example, Natasha Denvers, an elite track

and field athlete, openly discussed the challenges she faced in seeking psychological support for her ongoing injury struggles (*Mind*, n.d.):

I've grown up in my sport with the impression I was meant to be a superhero. You're supposed to be able to handle things. You are in high-pressure situations all the time so you are convinced you should be able to handle those situations yourself, so it is hard to get help, it is admitting you have a weakness.

Acknowledging and addressing these psychosocial challenges, sport injury psychology is a field of research that emerged almost five decades ago with a remit of supporting the safety, well-being, and welfare of athletes (Wadey, 2020). Aligned with this remit, researchers within sport injury psychology have aimed to both reduce the risk of injury occurrence and provide adaptive psychological strategies to assist rehabilitation and recovery following injury (Brewer, 2020). The overall maturity of the field and increased research attention afforded to sport injury psychology can be evidenced in the number of articles, journals, and books now dedicated exclusively to the topic. For instance, in recent years there have been several new books that challenge the status quo of the literature (Gledhill & Forsdyke, 2021; McKay, 2021; Wadey, 2020), articles published that open new lines of research (e.g., Evans & Brewer, 2022; McGannon et al., 2021; Tamminen & Watson, 2022), and a special edition focused on sport injury psychology published in the *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* (Day & Wadey, 2022; Wadey & Day, 2022), that builds upon and extends the previous edition (Brewer, 1998).

Nevertheless, despite the ever-expanding, rich, and varied scholarship this field of research has produced, there are still several areas within sport injury psychology that warrant further exploration and enrichment. To expand, firstly, the sport injury psychology literature has been criticized for creating a fragmented and

reductionist understanding of the experience of sports injury (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017; Walker et al., 2007). This restricted understanding has led to calls for greater insight into the meaning of injury for athletes and how it may impact their personal ‘lifeworld’ (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017). Second, the models and literature within sport injury psychology have predominately maintained a focus on the injured athlete and how they can alter *their* thoughts, feelings, and behaviours around injury (Wadey & Day, 2022). Recently researchers have challenged this status quo by highlighting how in leaving the socio-cultural context, “under-theorized and underchallenged”, it can promote and reinforce a neoliberal health agenda whereby athletes are viewed as being solely responsible for their injury experiences (Wadey & Day, 2022, p. 1031). Finally, despite the advances made within sport injury psychology, to date, the sport injury psychology evidence-base has had limited uptake into practice, and limited transferability to those who could potentially derive benefits from its use, including athletes, coaches, and practitioners (Evans & Brewer, 2022).

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this thesis was to explore the diverse ways that athletes may make sense of their injury experiences from a psycho-social-cultural perspective. Understanding how athletes’ psychological experiences of injury are socially and culturally constructed, can help raise the social consciousness of injury, and promote a broader, nuanced, and more critical understanding of athletes’ injury experiences (Wadey et al., 2018). Meanwhile, foregrounding multiple meanings of injury could help ensure that the many ways athletes experience injury is recognised, validated, and understood, including those that may have been previously silenced or suppressed by dominant cultural norms (e.g., injury as part and parcel of sport; Barker-Ruchti et al., 2019; Williams, 2020). As the meanings individuals attach to their experiences can also expand or limit their possible responses and actions,

spotlighting multiple and diverse meanings of injury could offer athletes more potential opportunities for re-framing their injury experiences if necessary (Polkinghorne, 2004; Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, 2009b). Building upon this conceptual foundation, the second half of this thesis was concerned with addressing the ongoing knowledge-transfer gap, whereby research is being created but is not reaching key stakeholders (i.e., athletes, coaches, practitioners) or being implemented by them (Leggat, 2020, Leggat et al., 2021). To address this concern, this thesis aimed to render the findings more accessible to diverse audiences by communicating them in user-friendly formats (i.e., videos). Furthermore, this thesis also aimed to explore the applied implications of the findings for athletes, coaches, and practitioners.

To further contextualise this thesis, there are a few additional points that require attention. First, at the outset of this PhD, I was originally concerned with exploring one potential meaning from injury: SIRC (Roy-Davis et al., 2017). The SIRC literature aims to broaden athletes' perspectives and possibilities following injury by highlighting how the injury experience can act as a catalyst for positive change, thereby providing a counterbalancing perspective to the predominant negative conceptualisation of injury (Salim & Wadey 2018; Wadey et al., 2011). Notwithstanding the merits of offering athletes alternative and more constructive conceptualisations of injury, following several ongoing reflections, and developments within the SIRC literature, I noted the tensions of exclusively promoting the development of this injury meaning (see chapter three). Accordingly, I expanded the scope of this thesis to explore multiple injury meanings to help cultivate a more inclusive understanding of the diverse ways that athletes may experience injury. Second, the conceptual foundation of this PhD is situated in the experiences of elite track athletes. Elite track athletes were chosen because of the normalisation of injury

embedded within the culture of this sport (Howe, 2004). There is also a limited understanding of the experiences, meanings, and consequences of injury for elite track athletes, despite the high rate of sports injury occurrence within this population (Lundberg et al., 2020). On a further note, I also competed as an elite track athlete and continued to do so during the initial phases of this PhD. To this end, I would be classified according to Berger (2015) as a cultural insider to this population, which both constrained and enabled my understandings, rapport, and interpretations, of the participants' injury experiences (see chapters four, five, six, seven eight).

Finally, this PhD is concerned with stories. That is, the stories athletes tell about their injury experiences, how socio-cultural narratives frame these injury stories, and how athletes get 'caught up' in injury stories, shaping how they think, feel, and behave around injury (Frank, 2010). This thesis also invites readers to critically consider how the social and cultural worlds of injured athletes condition the telling of certain storylines whilst negating others and what this limited repertoire of storylines might mean for injured athletes. Finally, by expanding the types of injury stories available within an injured athlete's social and cultural worlds, this thesis offers a consideration of how we can create new and alternative ways for supporting injured athletes by extending the opportunities available for them and others to make sense of their injury experiences.

### **1:1 Background**

The genesis of this thesis was in some ways serendipitous. It originated from an amalgamation of both my own injury experiences, and a contemporary topic that was beginning to gain increased traction within sport injury psychology, that is SIRG, which refers to how injury can act as a catalyst for positive change (Roy-Davis et al., 2017). In the early meetings with one of my PhD supervisors, Ross Wadey, we

discussed and debated a range of possible PhD topics, however, when he alluded to this emerging phenomenon, I instinctively gravitated towards it, thinking ‘yes, that’s it, that’s the one’. To contextualize my response, I need to rewind. I had just recently re-located to the UK from Ireland, the primary purpose of which was to join an elite athletics training group at St. Mary’s University. It was 2018, a full year and a half after my first and only Olympic experience, where a stress fracture in May hampered my capacity to perform. I ‘bombed out’ in the heats and continued to suffer several other fractures and repercussions from that experience that rippled right throughout the remainder of my athletics career. Nonetheless, I viewed the UK as a fresh start, a chance to begin again, without any of the shame and pain I felt from that experience. Moreover, I had ‘bounced back’ from numerous injuries and performance failures in the past and felt confident that having gone ‘all-in’ in my investment to recovery, by leaving behind friends and family at home, I was on the road to redemption. So, when my supervisor, Ross presented the notion that athletes could use the injury experience to return to sport above and beyond their previous level of functioning, I thought, ‘yes, that’s it, that’s the one’.

My own personal agenda, however, was not the sole and only motive for choosing this research topic. It also stemmed from the ongoing conversations with my supervisory team, reading around this research topic and how it helps broaden athletes’ perspectives of injury, alongside the many encounters I had with injured athletes both in my sporting, and my professional career as a physiotherapist. The shift away from focusing exclusively on studying SIRG to more inclusive and multiple meanings from injury was also triggered by both personal and professional events. The first event was sparked by a book chapter I wrote with one of my supervisors, Karen Howells, and was titled “What doesn’t kill us makes us stronger, do injured athletes really

experience growth?” (Howells & Everard, 2020). In this chapter, building upon Karen’s work (e.g., Howells & Fletcher, 2016), we explored the concept of illusory growth, whereby athletes feel pressure to conform to SIRG as a cultural script, which can, in some instances, prevent athletes from authentically developing from the experience of injury (Howells & Fletcher, 2016; Howells et al., 2017; Howells & Everard, 2020). This chapter was my first entry point into critical thinking. Indeed, given my positivistic upbringings and my background in both physiotherapy and sport medicine, challenging the construction of knowledge was not at the forefront of my educational repertoire. Therefore, in writing this chapter, it was the first time I began to critically consider SIRG (Roy-Davis et al., 2017) as something as delicate and malleable as a cultural script that I and others had come to embody. Moreover, against the backdrop of illusory growth (Zoellner & Maercker, 2006), I further reflected upon the dangers of exclusively studying and promoting the development of this injury meaning. These reflections were brought into further focus by my reading of a contemporary article written by a British track athlete who spoke candidly of the pressures she felt from the bombarding cultural messages to ‘never give up’ and ‘keep working harder’ when it came to injury, which stigmatized her and made her feel like a failure, for wanting to do the worst thing of all, and give up (The Mixed Zone, 2017). This story resonated with my own experiences and the ongoing tensions I was beginning to feel between the ‘come back’ messages consistently promulgated in the media, and my own stark reality. Following these reflections and several ongoing weekly discussions with my supervisor Ross Wadey, we decided to change the course of this thesis from exploring SIRG to multiple injury meanings.

Given the aforementioned context, whereby my reading of an athlete’s story made me question what cultural scripts we promote, and the tensions this may cause



for athletes, my supervisors suggested adopting a narrative inquiry approach to analyse and conduct my research with injured athletes. Narrative inquiry is a psychosocial approach concerned with the interpretation of stories (Smith et al., 2015). It is premised on the assumption that as humans we are storytellers, and therefore to make sense of our experiences and communicate our experiences to others we formulate and share stories, shaped from the narrative scripts available within our social and cultural worlds (Carless & Douglas, 2013). In this sense, the socio-cultural narratives that are ‘out there’ will influence how we construct and give meaning to our experiences (Williams, 2020).

To begin my foray into the world of narrative inquiry, my supervisor emailed me a reading list containing the works of several narrative scholars (e.g., Caddick et al., 2015; Douglas & Carless, 2006, 2009; Papathomas et al., 2015a; Smith & Sparkes, 2005, 2009a, 2009b); Smith (2013a), and Sparkes & Smith, 2002, 2005). One afternoon, sitting in the PhD office, I began to sift through the reading list, opening up the papers by Smith and Sparkes, (2005), Smith (2013a), and Sparkes and Smith (2005). These papers storied the experiences of men with a SCI and explored how their experiences of a SCI was shaped and framed by illness narratives of restitution, chaos, and quest (Frank, 2013, see chapter four). I moved with the free-flowing pace of the writing, as I traversed their stories of becoming disabled through sport, living with a SCI, navigating living with a SCI in an ableist society, and the meaning of hope in their lives. As I neared the end of my reading, I was left feeling a little perplexed, contemplative, and tearful. I carried the stories of Doug, David, Jamie, Craig, and Jon amongst others with me on my walk home. I carried them with me as I reflected upon broader, and quite frankly uncomfortable issues, such as my own ableist views and that of society. I carried them with me as I reflected upon the more mundane and

innocuous issues, such as the ‘dog shit’ on the side of the pavement and how that affects a wheelchair user. I still carry those stories with me today. Back then, I had none of the theoretical understanding to intellectualise what had happened, and for that I am grateful. In hindsight, perhaps most simply put, by reading the stories proposed by Smith and Sparkes (2005), Sparkes and Smith (2005), and Smith (2013a), I was invited into the worlds of these men, and afterwards, life in my world was different (Frank, 2000). Having experienced the impact that narratives can have, I was keen to see what narrative inquiry could offer to our understanding of sports injury experiences.

### **1:2 Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis has eight chapters. Chapter two begins with a review of the literature pertaining to this research context. This review begins with an exploration of the sport injury psychology literature and the models and frameworks informing this literature to date. Following an overview of the models and a synthesis of the current sport injury psychology evidence-base, the review then shifts towards the current knowledge-gaps within sport injury psychology. To address these gaps, I suggest exploring the meanings that athletes derive from their injury experiences. To contextualise this research project, the review discusses both the psychological and sociological literature within track and field. Finally, the review sets out the intention to explore both psychological and sociological elements of athletes’ injury experiences by adopting a narrative inquiry focus (Frank, 2010). Overall, this chapter provides a rationale for this programme of research and ends with an outline of its aims and scope.

Chapter three explores one potential meaning athletes may experience from injury, named SIRG. To provide a more cohesive and comprehensive understanding of this timely phenomenon, I appraised and synthesised the current literature using a

meta-study methodology (Paterson et al., 2001). Following a systematic search, 10 articles were retained for the synthesis. The meta-study then involved conducting an analysis of the methods, data, and theory of the primary research, before integrating this literature into a synthesis that offers novel interpretations of this collective body of research (Paterson et al., 2001). The final meta-synthesis extended current understanding of SIRT by providing a more cohesive understanding of SIRT and its dimensions (i.e., corporeal, athletic, personal, social). It also offers novel insights into the origins of SIRT, the temporal nature of SIRT, and how it can be developed across personal, social, and cultural levels.

Chapter four provides the conceptual basis for the remainder of this thesis and builds and expands upon the scope of the previous chapter by exploring the multiple meanings athletes experience from injury across the lifespan, adopting a narrative inquiry approach (Frank, 2010). Aligned with narrative inquiry, life history interviews and timelines were conducted with 15 elite track athletes over 18 months. A DNA (Frank, 2010) was then used to identify the narrative typologies, that is the “most general storyline” underlying athletes' injury stories (p.75). Athletes' stories of injury mapped six narrative typologies (i.e., resilience, merry-go-round, longevity, pendulum, snowball, more-to-me). Each narrative typology is discussed in turn by focusing on the underlying plot, the implications of these plotlines on athletes' well-being and sporting careers, and how athletes' psychological experiences of injury were created and managed within their socio-cultural narrative context. By identifying and foregrounding multiple meanings from injury, this study aimed to expand the opportunities available to athletes to make sense of their injury experiences in diverse and meaningful ways.

Chapter five builds upon the previous chapter's findings by exploring the challenges and tensions incurred when storying and sharing these six narrative typologies with participants. By critically reflecting (i.e., introspective, intersubjective; Finlay, 2002) upon the collaborative process of member reflections (i.e., sharing research findings *with* participants; Smith & McGannon, 2018), this study aimed to understand how elite track athletes engaged with these diverse injury narratives. Using narrative theory and the narrative typologies as a lens to problematise and interpret the findings (Frank 2010), data was analysed using an RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Five reflexive themes were identified: (a) confronting the dominant narrative, (b) embracing new materialism, (c) extending boundaries of tellability, (d) linear and polyphonic narratives, and (e) symbolic violence.

The second half of this thesis aimed to address the ongoing knowledge-transfer gap within sport injury psychology, by drawing upon a form of ABKT to translate and disseminate the six injury narrative typologies constructed in chapter four. Working collaboratively with a DLP, videographer, user-group (i.e., elite athletes), and research team, this chapter first provides a detailed account of the co-construction of the video narratives. Second, 11 focus group interviews with 69 participants were conducted to explore end-users' perspectives of the video narratives in communicating sport injury psychology research. Overall, this study helped facilitate the impact and uptake of this PhD's research findings, by rendering them more accessible and available to diverse audiences.

Chapter seven further aimed to bridge the knowledge-practice gap (Evans & Brewer, 2022; Leggat, 2020; Leggat et al., 2021), by exploring the applied value of the video narratives. Aligned with narrative pedagogy (Goodson & Gill, 2011), this study first aimed to explore how video narratives when shared and discussed within

pedagogical encounters may work *on*, *for*, and *with* stakeholders. Second, this study aimed to work *with* stakeholders (i.e., athletes, coaches, practitioners) to explore their views on how the video narratives could work for injured athletes in the future and/or inform professional practice. A reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020) revealed that the video narratives when dispersed and discussed within pedagogical settings had several applied implications in supporting injured athletes across personal, social, and cultural levels.

Chapter eight brings this thesis to a close by drawing conclusions across the entire body of research and summarising its contribution to both our understanding of sports injury and practice. It begins with the empirical, conceptual, theoretical, and practical contributions of this thesis to the sport injury psychology evidence-base. The implications of these contributions in enhancing and enriching our understanding of sports injury are further discussed across four domains (i.e., *enhanced social consciousness, nuanced and idiosyncratic understandings, multiple meanings, and broadening the narrative landscape*). Adopting the MMSI (Wadey et al., 2018), this chapter also provides recommendations for how this research can be implemented into practice across multiple levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, and policy. A discussion then follows regarding the limitations and areas left unexplored by this research, together with some suggestions as to how these may be addressed in the future. This thesis ends with a conclusion that draws together the central aspects of this research and its contribution to knowledge and practice.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature review**

## **2.0 Overview**

This chapter provides a critical narrative review of the literature pertaining to topics underpinning this PhD. The review begins with an exploration of the sport injury psychology literature and provides an outline of some of the frameworks that have guided the literature to date. Following an overview of the models, a synthesis of the research exploring the psychological response to, rehabilitation from, and management of sports injury is provided. A critique of the current knowledge-gaps in our understanding of sports injury is then discussed. The review then shifts to how we may address some of these knowledge-gaps by focusing on the meanings athletes construct from their injury experiences. To contextualise this research project, the second section of this review outlines the literature concerning track and field, from both a psychological and sociological perspective. The final section of this review outlines a rationale for integrating both perspectives of injury by adopting a narrative inquiry approach (Frank, 2010). The basic assumptions of narrative inquiry, alongside an outline of how narrative inquiry could enhance our understanding of sports injury is discussed, and previous narrative inquiry literature is reviewed. Overall, this chapter aims to provide a rationale for this programme of research and ends with an outline of its aims and scope.

### **2.1 Sport Injury Psychology Literature**

Emerging almost five decades ago with the remit of supporting the safety and well-being of athletes, researchers within the field of sport injury psychology have aimed to both predict and prevent sports injuries and provide adaptive psychological strategies to assist rehabilitation and recovery following injury (Evans & Brewer, 2022). Given the impact of sports injury on athletes' well-being, sporting performances, and long-term athletic career potential (Rice et al., 2016), it is

unsurprising that this field of research over time has amassed—and continues to amass—a critical evidence-base to both advance theory and support professional practice. This critical evidence base, exemplified by the numerous books, journals, and articles now dedicated exclusively to the topic, has enabled the discipline to transform from one of limited and fragmented understanding (Brewer, 2020; Hess et al., 2019) to that which now has substantive and sophisticated conceptual, empirical, and applied underpinnings (Hess et al., 2019). From “humble beginnings” to a “thriving academic discipline”, the increasing production of “rich, varied, and ever-expanding scholarship” continues to make a significant contribution towards our understanding of sports injury (Evans & Brewer, 2022, p. 1011). Nevertheless, the quest for continued knowledge in both reducing the risk of injury occurrence and in supporting injured athletes’ psychological well-being and welfare, remains a work in progress.

## **2.2 Models of Sports Injury**

As the field of sport injury psychology has matured, researchers have endeavoured to provide explanations of both the prediction of, and response to, sports injury through the development and application of various models. These models have helped to focus research efforts, facilitate interpretation of findings, and guide intervention strategies (Brewer, 2020). To provide a broad and critical understanding of the sport injury psychology landscape, the following section will now outline the models and research that describe both the prediction and prevention of, and response to and rehabilitation from, sports injuries. However, to help contextualise this literature review and to establish the remit of this thesis, it is important to note that the types of injuries to which this body of research pertains are sports-related acute and overuse injuries. Acute injuries can be defined as injuries that occur suddenly with a specifically defined cause or onset (Bahr, 2009). Meanwhile,



overuse injuries are considered the consequence of “repetitive submaximal loading of the musculoskeletal system when rest is not adequate to allow for structural adaptation to take place” (DiFiori et al., 2014, p. 3). This PhD did not focus on severe injuries which can be defined as an unintentional injury leading to long-term disability (see Kampman et al., 2015).

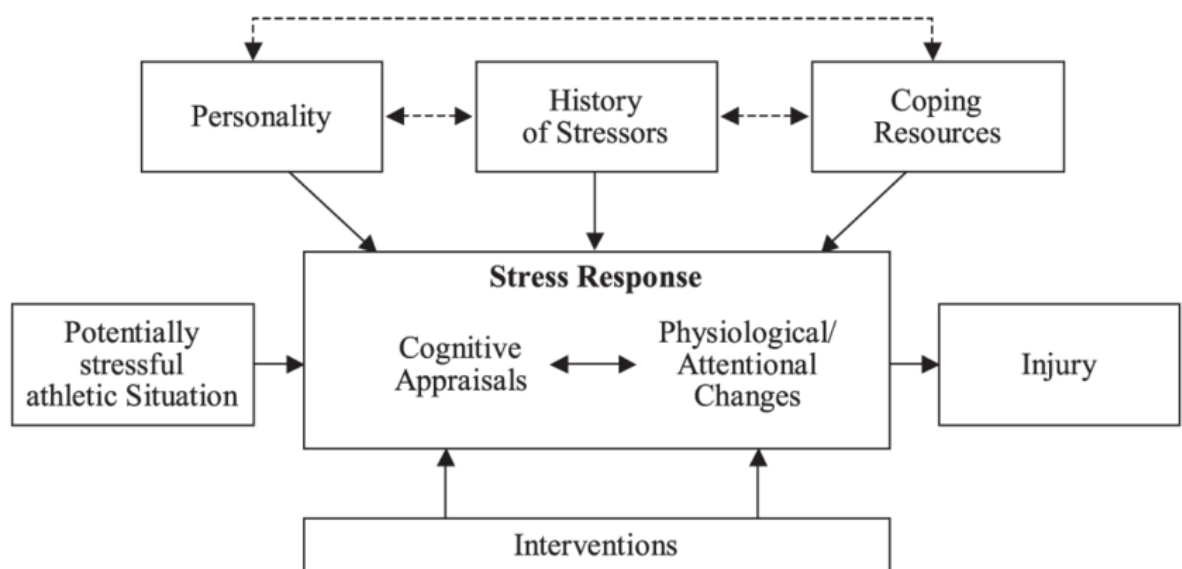
### **2.2.1 Prediction and Prevention of Sports Injury**

Addressing the narrow scope and atheoretical nature of early research into the psychosocial risk factors of injury occurrence (i.e., Bramwell et al., 1975; Coddington & Troxell, 1980; Cryan & Alles, 1983), Williams and Andersen developed the model of stress and athletic injury (1988), later revised in 1998, which remains one of the most comprehensive and influential models in this area of research to date (Figure 1; Ivarsson et al., 2017). According to this model, the risk of injury is determined by an athlete’s stress response (Williams & Andersen, 1998). Three psychosocial constructs are postulated to influence this response by either working in isolation or in combination with each other including, history of stressors (e.g., life event stress, daily hassles, past injury history), personality traits (e.g., hardiness, locus of control, competitive trait anxiety), and coping resources (e.g., social support, stress management skills). Accordingly, the model implies that an individual with a stressful personal history, personality characteristics that tend to exacerbate the stress response and a lack of adequate coping resources, will more likely appraise a demanding sporting situation as stressful, showing higher levels of physiological arousal and attentional disruptions (e.g., increased muscle tension, narrowing of the visual field), thereby, increasing the risk of injury compared to an individual with the opposite psychosocial profile (Williams & Andersen, 1998). Consistent with these assumptions, the model highlights how psychological-based interventions aimed at

either changing an athlete's cognitive appraisal or reducing the magnitude of the stress response will help decrease the risk of injury from psychosocial mechanisms (Williams & Andersen, 1998).

**Figure 1.**

*Psychosocial Antecedents of Sport Injury: Review and Critique of the Stress and Injury model (Williams, & Andersen, 1998)*



This model is the most cited and used framework for research exploring the psychological risk and prevention of sports injury (Ivarsson et al., 2013; Ivarsson et al., 2017). In terms of empirical support, all three psychological constructs (i.e., history of stressors, personality, coping resources) have been shown to effect acute injury rates both in isolation and in combination with each other through the examination of psychosocial risk profiles (Clement et al., 2022; Johnson & Ivarsson, 2017). Intervention strategies aimed at decreasing the stress response through employing cognitive-behavioural means (e.g., psychological skills training, mindfulness, relaxation), have further corresponded with a decreased risk of injury (Ivarsson et al., 2017). Nevertheless, despite the merits of this model, there are several limitations.

Most notably, the model has been criticised for a reductionist focus on the cognitive stress response, ignoring other potential risk factors to injury including behavioural, physiological (i.e., beyond the stress response), emotional, and environmental factors (Appaneal & Perna, 2014; Johnson & Ivarsson, 2017). This limited scope of the model has led to calls for more inter-disciplinary research which encompasses physiological, social, psychological, and cultural elements (Ivarsson et al., 2017). Furthermore, a systematic review called for greater insight into how an athlete's cultural climate may predate their injury risk via both the stress response and maladaptive behavioural responses including playing through pain or taking inadequate recovery from injury (Ivarsson et al. 2017; Johnson & Ivarsson, 2017). Despite the above recommendations, research to date in these areas has been scarce (Ivarsson et al., 2017). This may, in part, be linked to how researchers continue to either test or apply the model of stress and athletic injury (Williams & Andersen, 1998), instead of theorising over new ways of conducting research that encompass these multi-faceted aspects.

Given that the model of stress and athletic injury (Williams & Andersen, 1998) pertains to acute injuries only, Tranaeus et al. (2014) set out to explain the psychological risk factors for overuse injuries. In their working model, they proposed that a history of stressors (e.g., previous injuries, stress in life, stress in sport), personal factors (e.g., athletic identity, carelessness with body, excessive training, motivation, passion), psycho-physiological factors (e.g., lack of recovery, pain, staleness), psychosocial factors (e.g., culture, lack of communication), and ineffective coping (e.g., fear of re-injury, lack of social support), influence injury risk over time. However, despite accounting for how diverse psychosocial factors (e.g., culture, communication), may influence injury risk, the model assumes that by acting on athletes' coping strategies alone, their risk of developing an overuse injury will be

prevented. This assumption is negated by the recent and growing body of evidence which underscores the significance of cultural norms, values, and intersubjective factors including the relationship between the athlete and the coach, in the development of overuse injuries (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2019; Cavallerio et al., 2016; Wiese-Bjornstal, 2010, 2019). Against this backdrop, recently researchers have advocated for a shift away from interventions that solely focus on the stress response and have called for a more collaborative approach that accounts for the diverse nature of injury occurrence (Ivarsson et al., 2017; Johnson & Ivarsson, 2017; Van Iperen et al., 2022)

### **2.2.2 Response to and Rehabilitation from Sports Injury**

The occurrence of a sports injury is purported to induce a series of psychological responses in athletes which may vary throughout the rehabilitation process (Brewer, 2020). The psychological response to sports injury was first conceptually understood by using stage models, most notably Kübler-Ross's five-stage theory of loss and grief (Kübler-Ross, 1969). By viewing injury through this lens, researchers postulate that by suffering an injury, athletes incur losses and thus will experience a sequence of psychological responses (i.e., shock and denial, anger, depression, bargaining, acceptance). However, one of the major drawbacks of stage models is their inability to account for individual differences in responses to sports injury (Brewer & Redmond, 2017). Cognitive appraisal models, on the other hand, were specifically developed for this purpose (Walker et al., 2007). The integrated model of response to sport injury (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998), is one such cognitive appraisal model and is of particular importance as it remains the most empirically dominant model in explaining both the response to and rehabilitation from

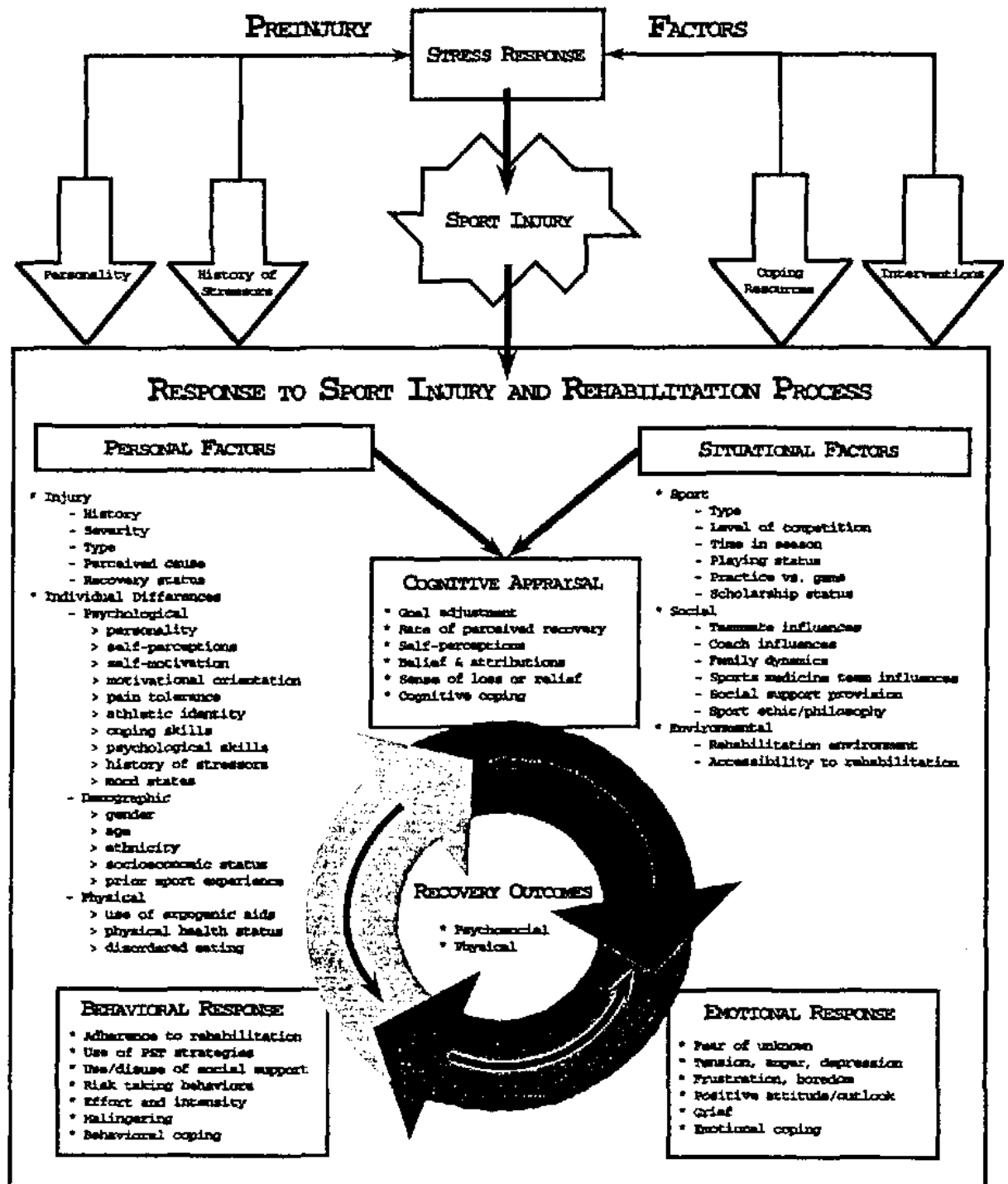
sports injury, within the sport injury psychology literature (Brewer & Redmond 2017; Gledhill & Forsdyke, 2021).

### **2.2.3 Integrated Model of Response to Sport Injury**

The integrated model of response to sport injury refers to injury as a stressor (i.e., environmental demands encountered by an individual; Fletcher et al., 2006), whereby an individual determines the extent of the stress through a process of cognitive appraisal (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998; Figure 2). This appraisal is moderated by pre-injury factors (e.g., history of stressors, interventions, personality, coping resources) and post-injury personal (e.g., injury severity and type) and situational (e.g., social support) factors. The model hypothesises that these cognitive appraisals in addition to the contexts in which they occur will influence an individual's psychological response to injury which is comprised of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural elements. This trio of responses serve as the core of the model and are subject to change over time dynamically and iteratively as they operate in an environment of changing moderators (i.e., personal, situational factors) and reflect the changes in psychological responses to injury over time. This dynamic core determines the outcome(s) of the injury moving upwards in a positive direction towards full recovery or downwards away from full recovery if the recovery outcomes are negative. The model hypothesizes that athletes may experience various trajectories from injury. For example, some athletes can experience re-injury which is purported to add to the loss experienced from the initial injury leading to a new set of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses. Conversely, some athletes are reported to return from injury above and beyond their previous levels of functioning (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1995). However, the model does not explain how such trajectories from injury occur.

Figure 2.

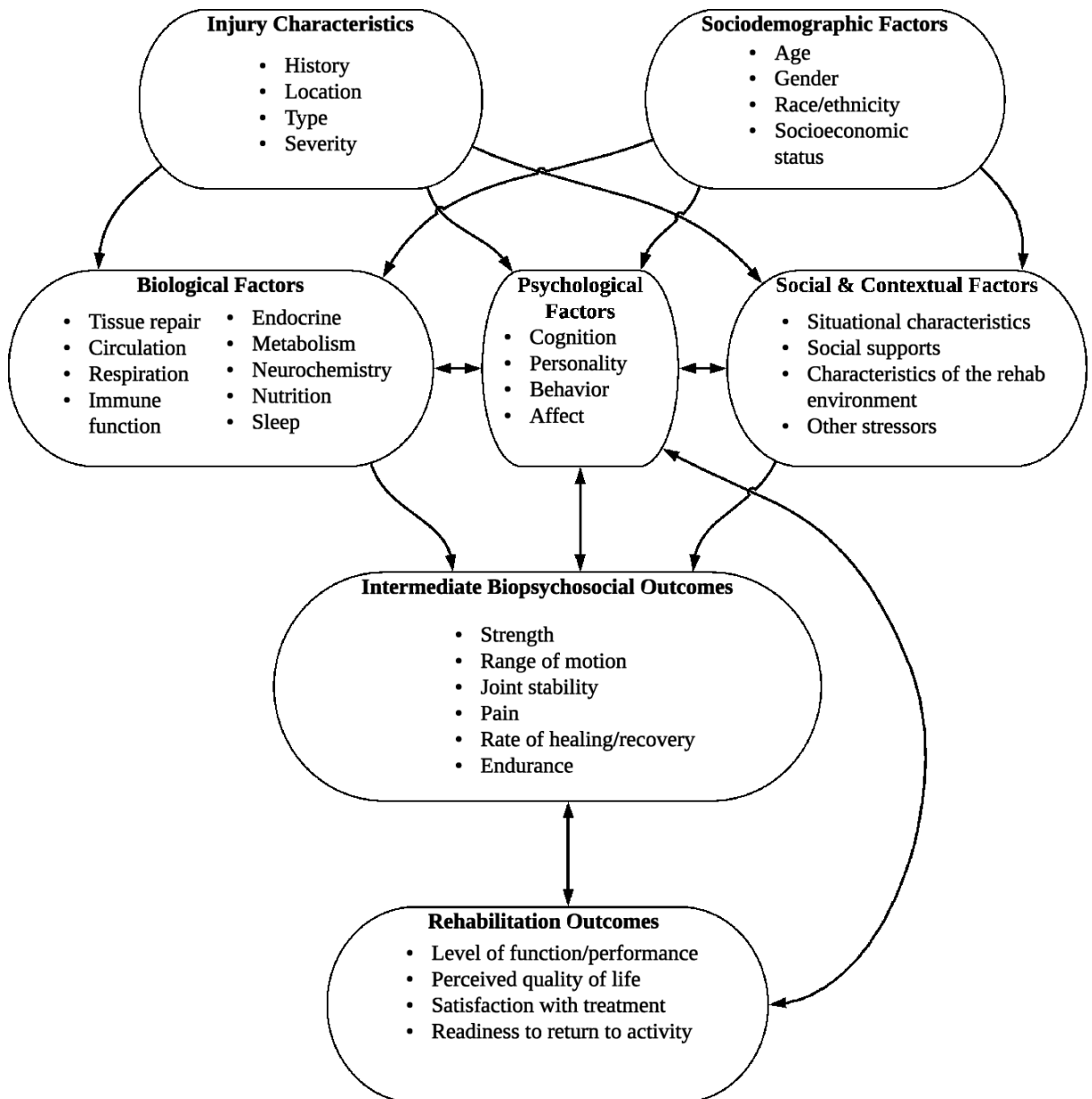
*The Integrated Model of Response to Sport Injury (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998)*



The biopsychosocial model (Brewer et al., 2002; see Figure 3) builds upon the integrated model of response to sport injury (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998) through the inclusion of the influence of physiological factors on sports injury rehabilitation. The biopsychosocial model is comprised of seven dimensions: Injury characteristics, sociodemographic factors, biological factors, social and contextual factors, intermediate biopsychological outcomes, and sport injury rehabilitation outcomes (Brewer et al., 2002). In this model, injury characteristics refer to the nature of the injury (e.g., type, location, severity, history), which together with the individual's sociodemographic factors (e.g., age, gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) will influence the biological (e.g., immune functioning), psychological (e.g., personality), and social/contextual (e.g., life stress) factors. These three factors will subsequently affect the intermediate biopsychological outcomes, which *inter alia* include range of motion, strength, pain, and joint elasticity. Finally, these intermediate outcomes will either facilitate or debilitate rehabilitation outcomes, including functional performance, quality of life, treatment satisfaction, and readiness to return to sport. Within this model, psychological factors play a unique central role, having a direct bidirectional relationship with biological and socio-contextual factors, and the resulting intermediate and final recovery outcomes. While this model provides a holistic framework that helps to explain the process of sport injury rehabilitation, it does not explain the relationships between the specific psychological variables.

**Figure 3**

*Biopsychosocial Model (Brewer et al., 2002)*



### 2.3 Sports Injury Response, Rehabilitation, and Management

The literature exploring the psychological response to, rehabilitation from, and management of sports injury has largely been framed and guided by the integrated model of response to sport injury (Brewer & Redmond, 2017; Wadey & Day, 2022).



That said, due to the consistencies between both the biopsychosocial model (Brewer et al., 2002) and the integrated model of response to sport injury (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998), much of the research that supports one paradigm mutually supports the other (Hess et al., 2019). Although the integrated model of response to sport injury (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998) has yet to be examined in its entirety, researchers have supported some of its underlying assumptions, including how injury serves as a stressor for athletes. For example, Gould et al. (1997) highlighted how athletes may experience up to 182 stressors from injury across psychological (e.g., social comparison), social (e.g., isolation), physical (e.g., pain), medical/rehabilitation (e.g., slow progress), and financial (e.g., difficulties with sponsors) dimensions. Scholars have further supported the influence of certain personal (e.g., timing, prior experience, level of competition, athletic identity; Bianco et al., 1999; Brewer et al., 1993; Leddy et al., 1994; Moore et al., 2021) and situational (e.g., social support, Bianco, 2001; Mitchell, 2011) factors in moderating the response to injury as indicated by the model (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998).

The onset and recovery from sports injury have also been suggested to induce a range of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses (Quinn & Fallon, 1999; Tracey, 2003). Researchers typically depict the recovery from injury as occurring across three distinct phases, initial reaction, rehabilitation, and return to sport, with each phase hosting its own set of cognitions, affects, and behaviours (Clement et al., 2015; Ruddock-Hudson et al., 2014). Findings suggest that the initial reaction to injury induces negative cognitions and is characterised by a preponderance of negative emotions including anger, frustration, helplessness, and depression (Clement et al., 2015; Tracey, 2003). Athletes' cognitions are reported to change following a diagnosis of injury (Clement et al., 2015; Udry et al., 1997), as the rehabilitative phase becomes

typified by mixed cognitive appraisals, with an overall trend towards more positive emotions as the recovery progresses (Leddy et al., 1994). Upon returning to sport, researchers suggest that athletes experience a mix of both positive and negative emotions including impatience, re-injury anxiety, excitement, gratitude, and fluctuating levels of confidence (Ardern et al., 2013; Podlog & Eklund, 2006, 2007; Salim & Wadey, 2018). During this phase, athletes are also indicated to reflect upon the lessons learned and may begin to view injury and rehabilitation as a process that facilitated greater learning (Wadey et al., 2019), understanding (Clement et al., 2015; Salim & Wadey, 2018) and appreciation (e.g., not taking health for granted; Udry et al., 1997).

Throughout these various stages (i.e., injury onset, rehabilitation, return to sport), athletes are reported to engage in certain behaviours to assist them in managing their injury experiences (Bianco et al., 1999; Johnston & Carroll, 1998; Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 2020). Coping strategies and adherence to rehabilitation have emerged as the two most widely studied behavioural responses to injury (Brewer & Cornelius, 2003; Marshall et al., 2012). Athletes are reported to engage most often in active coping, whereby they increase their efforts to deal with the injury, in addition to instrumental social support, which involves seeking out information or support to help manage their injury experience(s) (Brewer & Cornelius, 2003). Adherence to rehabilitation is reported to be influenced by certain personal (e.g., self-motivation, attribution of recovery to controllable and stable factors, importance, or value of rehabilitation to the athlete) and situational (e.g., belief in the efficacy of the treatment, convenience and comfort of the clinical environment, social support during rehabilitation) factors (Brewer & Cornelius, 2003). However, a recent systematic review concluded that there remains a limited and fragmented understanding of *how*

these factors influence rehabilitation adherence, thus limiting the uptake of this research into practice (Goddard et al., 2021).

To facilitate athletes' recovery from injury and underpinned by the integrated model of response to sport injury (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998), researchers have further focused on identifying the type of cognitions, emotions, and behaviours that promote 'positive' recovery outcomes. For example, recent research indicated that injury-related cognitions including restoring the self (i.e., self-esteem, self-confidence, self-identity), perceptions of basic psychological needs fulfilment (i.e., competency, autonomy, relatedness), and perceptions of growth and development are associated with successful rehabilitation outcomes (Forsdyke et al., 2016). Moreover, athletes who manage fear and anxiety, display signs of mental toughness and resilience, can emotionally disclose, employ problem-solving coping, adhere to rehabilitation, and utilise social support, were also indicated as being more likely to recover from injury and return to previous athletic levels than those who did not engage in such behaviours (Levy et al., 2006; Salim & Wadey, 2018; Tamminen et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2007; Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1995, 2020). Aligning with the cognitive appraisal process inherent within the integrated model of response to sport injury (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998), interventions to support 'successful rehabilitation outcomes' have primarily been concerned with managing the stress response of injury by employing various cognitive-behavioural means. Such interventions include the use of goal setting, stress management, self-talk, relaxation and guided imagery, mindfulness, emotional disclosure, counselling skills, and acceptance-commitment therapy (Ledingham et al., 2020). These interventions have received some empirical support in terms of having desirable impacts on athletes' thoughts (e.g., boost confidence), feelings (e.g., reduce 'negative' mood), and behaviours (e.g., adherence) (Genneralli et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, these interventions have been criticised for maintaining a predominant focus on the necessity to ‘upskill’ the injured athlete, thereby negating wider social responsibility, including, for example, the role of coaches, service-providers, and sporting cultures on athletes’ rehabilitation outcomes (Wadey & Day, 2022).

## **2.4 Critique of the Sport Injury Psychology Literature**

The models and literature detailing the risk, response, and management of sports injury have significantly enhanced sports injury understandings. For example, they have helped foreground the factors that may lead to injury, the typical responses to injury, the myriad of factors that influence these responses, and the various trajectories that can occur from injury. However, while the field is greatly indebted to these models and the systematic lines of enquiry they have informed, there are several knowledge-gaps in this body of research. First, the models that help to frame, interpret, and guide the sport injury psychology literature (i.e., model of stress and athletic injury and the integrated model of response to sport injury; Williams & Andersen, 1998; Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998) are descriptive and atheoretical. In this sense, they were never intended to provide nuanced or theoretical insights into *how* various concepts interact to shape an athlete’s injury experience (Wadey & Day, 2022). Consequently, this atheoretical underpinning of the literature has generated a scholarship that is largely concerned with identifying and understanding the individual factors that influence rehabilitation outcomes (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017). In doing so, it has limited understanding as to how these various factors interact to influence how an athlete appraises or derives meaning from their injury experiences. Moreover, how this appraisal or potential meaning(s) from injury then influences athletes’ responses and trajectories from injury, is also relatively unknown. It is important to understand how athletes come to experience injury so that we can better support them in such

experiences. To this end, a theoretical understanding through either applying, testing, or building theory is warranted within the sport injury psychology literature (Brewer, 2020; Wadey & Day, 2022).

Second, research exploring the psychological prediction, response, and rehabilitation from sports injury has been largely individualistic, in that it fails to consider how the broader social and cultural contexts may have shaped an athlete's injury experiences (Wadey & Day, 2022). This individualistic perspective stems from the cognitive underpinnings of both the model of stress and athletic injury (Williams & Andersen, 1998) and the integrated model of response to sport injury (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998). For example, both models are premised on the assumption that an athlete's appraisal of injury will be determined through a process of individual meaning-making about the significance of the event concerning their goals, values, and beliefs (Tamminen & Bennett, 2017). Although within the integrated model of response to sport injury (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998) the social context is acknowledged, primacy is given to the way an athlete thinks about and interprets the situations they find themselves in (Wadey & Day, 2022). Recently, researchers have challenged the cognitive appraisal process inherent within these sport injury models, by providing illustrative examples of how these appraisals occur within intersubjective encounters and are situated in socio-cultural contexts (Cavallerio et al., 2016; Tamminen & Bennett, 2017). For example, the cognitive appraisal process implies that an individual's appraisal of an event is determined by the extent to which it threatens their goals, values, and beliefs. Yet, researchers contesting for this socio-cultural view, have highlighted how these same goals, values, and beliefs are negotiated within interpersonal encounters and through social and cultural traditions (Tamminen & Bennett, 2017). In line with these assumptions, a more social and

relational discourse of sport injury psychology is warranted, to generate more critical, holistic, and nuanced understandings (Wadey et al., 2018; Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 2018, Wiese-Bjornstal, 2019). Researchers have further suggested that by creating an understanding of how injured athletes' experiences are impacted by their social networks and cultural milieu, it may help shift the perception of injury away from being viewed as a purely psychological phenomenon located 'within' individuals and promote greater social responsibility (Wadey et al., 2018). Nevertheless, despite increasing calls for a psycho-social-cultural understanding of sports injury, the socio-cultural context remains "undertheorized and underchallenged" within the sport injury psychology literature (Wadey & Day, 2022, p. 1030).

Third, research guiding our understanding of sport injury psychology has been largely positivistic in nature, dominated by quantitative methodologies (Bekker et al., 2020). While this research has provided useful insights into the specific injury responses that occur, and factors influencing such responses, these methods are too restrictive to explore the nature of the injury experience for the athlete (Anderson et al., 2004; Bekker et al., 2020). Several scholars have critiqued this fragmented and reductionistic exploration of the injury experience, suggesting that a broader and more subjective viewpoint is required (Grindstaff et al., 2010; Mainwaring, 1999; Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017; Walker et al., 2007). An alternative and complementary approach to this fragmented understanding can be found in sport injury psychology researchers shift towards more interpretative ways of knowing (Hall et al., 2022; McGannon et al., 2021; Tamminen & Watson, 2022). Indeed, qualitative research has been advocated as a methodology useful in conveying a more holistic and contextualised understanding of lived experiences while also embracing the complexity and nuance of people's lives (Grindstaff et al., 2010; Mainwaring, 1999;

Walker et al., 2007). Taken together, such insights may help provide a counterbalancing perspective to the neat, objective, and often binary categorisations of injury espoused by the quantitative literature. To illustrate, within this literature, athletes' injury experiences are often reduced to being conveyed as one that shifts from being negative to positive or contains 'good' or 'bad' recovery outcomes. This narrow perception precludes the subtleties, complexities, and idiosyncrasies of an athlete's injury journey. However, it is these very insights, the kind typical within qualitative research, that can better inform practice by furnishing a deeper, more nuanced, and more relatable understanding of injured athletes' experiences.

Finally, by cultivating such nuanced and accessible insights into how injury can impact on an athlete's 'lifeworld', it could answer calls for more "relevant, meaningful, and application-ready findings", to help bridge the ongoing know-do gap, within sport injury psychology (Evans & Brewer, 2022, p 1012). The know-do gap refers to the gap between theory and practice, whereby research is being created but is having limited uptake to practice and policy (Leggat et al., 2021). This gap is now a timely and pressing concern, as if the sport injury psychology evidence-base, which is designed to support injured athletes' well-being and welfare, is not reaching athletes, coaches, and practitioners, or being implemented by them, then the duty of care to injured athletes may be compromised (Baroness Grey-Thompson, 2015). To address this concern, researchers have suggested a shift from nomothetic research designs, which focus on abstract concepts, ideas, and laws, towards a more ideographic focus (Leggat et al., 2021), where insights are co-constructed with participants "to better understand how events, actions, and meanings are shaped by the unique circumstances in which they occur" (Sparkes & Smith 2014, p. 16). By generating more contextualized and naturalistic insights into athletes' lived experiences, researchers

posit that it may enhance the transferability of research to practice, by creating a more accessible and relevant understanding of how and why athletes think, feel, and behave in a certain way (Bekker et al., 2020; Bolling et al., 2018; Verhagen & Bolling, 2018). Moreover, given that qualitative research can be represented in rich and diverse ways, the findings could be translated and disseminated into engaging and digestible formats and can be readily available for implementation into practice (Bekker et al., 2017).

## **2.5 Meanings of Sports Injury**

Rather than continuing to explore the cause and solution to athletes' injury experiences, perhaps a broader, more subjective, and complex understanding can be garnered by exploring the meanings athletes derive from their injury experiences. Although understanding the meanings of an individual's experiences is often understated in most psychological traditions (Polkinghorne, 1988; Smith & Sparkes, 2009a), meaning-making is a fundamental premise to being human. As humans we strive to make sense of our experiences, we ascribe meaning to our experiences, and our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours towards an experience are informed by and generated from the extent of that meaningfulness (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). Meanings also teach us about the significance of the events in our lives, as they help connect discrete experiences into a cohesive whole and enable us to view their contribution towards some specified outcome or goal (Polkinghorne, 1988). Thus, by shedding light on athletes' subjective meanings of injury and detailing how athletes' responses to and trajectory from injury originate from such meanings, it could help provide a more integrated and more applicable understanding of athletes lived experiences of injury.

Considering the importance of meaning-making, a body of research has already explored some of the meanings athletes may experience from injury by



drawing upon qualitative methodologies of IPA, grounded theory, existential-narrative theory, and narrative inquiry (Granito, 2001; Grindstaff et al., 2010; Mainwaring, 1999; McGannon et al., 2021; Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017). These methodologies have generated rich, in-depth, and more idiosyncratic understandings of the injury experience. For example, Grindstaff et al. (2010) conducted an IPA study on five elite athletes who had sustained severe injuries involving surgery. Their findings indicated that athletes' meanings of injury were individualised and subject to change over time but were influenced and shaped by their perspectives, emotions, relationships, and coping strategies. Mainwaring (1999) conducted a grounded theory based on a prospective longitudinal examination of ten athletes who had sustained an ACL rupture. Her findings reported how athletes' main meaning of injury was concerned with restoring the self and overcoming the injury to return to their pre-injury functioning. This meaning was influenced and determined by factors such as rehabilitation gains, affective states, coping strategies, perceived social support, expectations about the role of physiotherapy and the physician, attitudes towards disability, and information regarding the injury and the recovery process (Mainwaring, 1999).

More recently, Ronkainen and Ryba (2017) drew upon an existential-narrative theory framework to explore how injured hockey players made sense of career-threatening injuries. Within this study, the authors described career-threatening injuries as a boundary situation, whereby athletes become aware of their fundamental limitations and life projects leading them to re-consider broader life meanings. Moreover, the authors drew upon Frank's narratives of illness (Frank, 2013; see chapter four), to conceptualise how athletes may impose meanings on this boundary situation. Consistent with this existential-narrative theory framework, the authors

documented how injury meanings were marked by profound loss and isolation, as injury posed a relational rupture between athletes and their support networks. This relational rupture prompted athletes to reconsider new meanings and a purpose in life. These new broader life meanings were characterised by a dis-identification with sport, an increased awareness of the “more important things in life”, alongside a development of instrumental attitudes towards sport (e.g., “hockey is just hockey”) (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017, p.926).

Building upon narrative understandings of meanings from injury, McGannon et al., (2021), analysed digital news stories of a high-profile NFL player (i.e., Andrew Luck) within a narrative theory framework (Frank, 2013). The authors explored how the media circulates stories within narratives that shaped meanings of Andrew Luck’s injury and retirement. For example, they identified how Luck’s meanings of injury were shaped and framed by dominant cultural norms within the NFL and elite sport including the ‘tough committed athlete’ (Turner, 2018), ‘playing through pain’, and masculinity. However, the authors highlighted how the media defended Luck’s retirement due to injury by exposing meanings of injury that showcased the toll of football and cyclical injury on athletes’ physical and mental health. Overall, the authors demonstrated how the media is a cultural site that shapes and frames meanings of injury in ways that influence public understandings of injury.

Finally, an emerging body of research has also explored one alternative meaning that may frame athletes’ injury experiences, named SIRC (Roy-Davis et al., 2017). SIRC refers to perceived changes that propel an athlete to a higher level of functioning than that which existed prior to their injury (Roy-Davis et al., 2017). This meaning offers a counterbalancing perspective to the sport injury psychology literature which predominately depicts injury as a negative event with debilitating consequences

(Putukian et al., 2016; Salim & Wadey, 2018). Recently, Roy-Davis et al. (2017), proposed a theory to explain the underpinnings of SIRG named the T-SIRG. The T-SIRG suggests that several internal (i.e., personality, coping styles, knowledge and prior experience, and perceived social support) and external factors (i.e., cultural scripts, physical resources, time, and received social support) enable injured athletes to transform their injury experience from a threatening experience into an opportunity for growth (Roy-Davis et al., 2017). The mechanisms through which this process occurs are meta-cognitions, positive reappraisal, positive emotions, and facilitative responses. Recent qualitative research has since either supported and/or challenged the theoretical underpinnings of the T-SIRG (Salim & Wadey, 2019; Trainor et al., 2020; Wadey et al., 2019). This research has also provided greater insights into the mechanisms to develop SIRG, the experience of SIRG, in addition to how to foster SIRG at both an intrapersonal and interpersonal level. Nonetheless, this literature remains somewhat fragmented and a systematic and integrated understanding of this emerging phenomenon is needed (Wadey & Everard, 2020).

Research exploring athletes' meanings of injury has provided some rich, idiosyncratic, and compelling insights into how athletes make sense of their injury experiences. Building upon this research, this thesis aimed to enrich current understandings by exploring multiple injury meanings across the life-course. Studies to date have typically focused on exploring one injury experience, however, athletes may experience multiple injuries throughout their career, the implications of which are often "wide-ranging and far-reaching" (Wiese-Bjornstal, 2009, p. 69). Thus, it is likely that the meanings athletes derive from injury will be influenced by previous or concurrent injury experiences, as has been long suggested (e.g., injury history; Williams & Anderson, 1998), but has been scarcely researched, thus warranting

further exploration. Expanding the scope of study to include multiple injury experiences across the life-course can also allow for greater insight into the longer-term and cumulative impact of athletes' injury experiences, which has received limited attention to date (Hind et al., 2020; Turner et al., 2000; Wiese-Bjornstal, 2009). Moreover, as opposed to focusing on one potential meaning from injury (i.e., SIRG, overcoming injury, injury as a boundary situation), exploring diverse meanings of injury could also broaden our understanding of the many ways in which athletes may make sense of their injury experiences, whilst also expanding athletes' awareness of the range of possibilities and perspectives of injury.

Finally, this thesis aims to extend understandings of the meanings from injury by providing contextualised and population-specific insights into how elite track athletes make sense of their injury experiences. Researchers exploring how athletes develop meanings from their injury experiences have predominately included multiple sports and level of competition (i.e., elite, sub-elite, provisional, club) within their population sample (Granito, 2001; Grindstaff et al., 2010; Mainwaring, 1999; Roy-Davis et al., 2017). However, recently researchers have shifted towards providing more contextualised insights by focusing on specific sports (e.g., hockey, NFL; McGannon et al., 2021; Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017). This shift in perspective can provide more nuanced insights into athletes' injury meanings, as each sport and each level of competition will possess a unique set of socio-cultural norms, values, and beliefs likely to shape how individuals within that group construct and give meaning to their injury experiences (Howe, 2004; Mankad et al., 2009). Moreover, as Roderick et al. (2000) depict, meanings associated with pain and injury can only be fully understood by locating these understandings within the network of social relations characterised by an athlete's sporting culture. In line with these assumptions, this PhD

thesis was concerned with exploring injury meanings of elite track athletes. To provide a contextual backdrop to this body of research, the following sections will now outline both the psychological and sociological research conducted within track and field to date.

## **2.6 Track and Field**

Track and field is globally one of the most popular individual sports and is the largest sport at the Olympic Games (Lundberg et al., 2020). The track events comprise running races that occur over short (100, 200, 400), middle (800 and 1500), and long (5,000, 10,000, marathon) distances as well as races over hurdles (100m/110m hurdles, 400m hurdles, and steeplechase). The field events consist of throwing events (shot put, discus throw, javelin throw, and hammer throw), horizontal jumps (long jump and triple jump), and vertical jumps (high jump and pole vault) (Zemper, 2005). Although recreational running is associated with health-promoting benefits, competitive running is more often affiliated with health-related consequences, including injuries, eating disorders, drug misuse, and mental health issues (McKay et al., 2008). The prevalence of injury occurrence within track and field is high. Epidemiology studies following athletes over an entire athletics season reveal that at least two out of three athletes sustain at least one injury per year (Edouard, 2022; Jacobsson et al., 2013) the majority (96%) of which are due to overuse, with a time loss of greater than three months (Lambert et al., 2022). The consequences of these injury rates on athletes' performance potential have also been documented. For example, a five-year prospective study reported that athletes who missed greater than 20% (5.2 weeks) of training volume and intensity per year were seven times less likely to achieve their sporting goal. The authors concluded by highlighting how for every modified training week the chance of achieving success was significantly reduced

(Ray-Smith & Drew, 2016). The influence of injuries on track and field athletes' psychosocial well-being is less established, with one study dating from 1988 stating that running loss for consistent runners accumulate in depression, anxiety, confusion, and higher mood scores (Chann & Grossman, 1988). Given this dearth of research, the impact of injuries experienced by track and field athletes must be explored, to help provide recommendations to support their well-being, welfare, and career longevity.

### **2.6.1 Psychological Literature within Track and Field**

The sport injury psychology literature within track and field is sparse. Of the literature that does exist, it is primarily concerned with decreasing this high injury rate by uncovering the psychological factors that may increase an athlete's vulnerability to injury, specifically concerning overuse injuries (Jacobsson et al., 2013). From a physical perspective, history of previous injury, male sex, increased age, and excess training load have been reported as predominant factors culminating in overuse injuries (Edouard, 2022). Meanwhile, from a psychological perspective, researchers have focused on how certain psychological factors including personality (Timpka et al., 2015), passion for running (Stephan et al., 2009), psychological resilience (León-Guereño et al., 2020), and behavioural responses (Jelvegård et al., 2016) increase susceptibility to injury. Of the earlier studies on the topic, athletes who were reported to be less "forthright and tough-minded" (Valliant, 1981, p. 251), were deemed to be more prone to injury, as well as those with higher levels of neuroticism (Stephan et al., 2009) or previous experiences of injury (Stephan et al., 2009).

Building upon these earlier studies, current research (Bargoria et al., 2020; Edouard, 2022; Jelvegård et al., 2016; Ruffault et al., 2022; Timpka et al., 2015) in track and field has continued along a similar line of enquiry, in uncovering how

psychological factors may predispose athletes to injury. However, recent research has more acutely focused on how athletes' perceptions and behavioural responses to injury onset may increase their susceptibility to future injuries (Bargoria et al., 2020; Jelvegård et al., 2016; Timpka et al., 2015). This research was inspired by findings from previous track and field research, which stated that it was not necessarily the training load that resulted in overload, but rather the application of load when athletes' bodies needed rest and recovery (Timpka et al., 2015). These findings led researchers to become intrigued with how athletes interpret and respond to injury signs and symptoms, as the behavioural response of neglecting early warning signs and prioritising short-term performance gains, was indicated as one of the biggest predictors for the development of overuse injuries. Offering more insight into these behavioural responses, Jelvegård et al. (2016), examined middle- and long-distance athletes' appraisal of illness and injury symptoms. Their findings revealed that when the injury had a sudden onset and was acute, the behavioural response was uniform in that the athlete immediately amended their training schedule and rested. However, when the injury had a more insidious onset, there was a delayed response characterised by neglect, magical thinking that the pain would disappear, or rationalization that rest was not compatible with recovery. Athletes with gradual onset injuries persisted to run until they were forced to stop either from the pain becoming too severe or by recommendation from a medical professional. The difference in behavioural responses to acute versus overuse injuries was explained by using affective models (Wilson & Gilbert, 2008), which are premised on the assumption that affective responses will be weakened after repeated exposure. Adding to the developing interest in this area, Bargoria et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative exploration of high-achieving Kenyan track athletes' management of injury and illness symptoms. Their findings concluded

that attending to injury risks and altering or modifying training accordingly (i.e., dynamic load regulation) was instrumental to the success of these athletes. The study further reported how athletes learned and developed from their injury experiences and did not let environmental or economic strain interfere with their judgement concerning dynamic load management (Bargoria et al., 2020).

Although these studies provide some useful insights into the key problematic areas of sport injury psychology within track and field, this literature review revealed some limitations. For example, sports injury psychology researchers within track and field have persistently focused on the occurrence and prevention of injuries, yet the meanings, experiences, responses, and consequences of injury to track and field athletes are still to be uncovered. As discussed in the previous section, understanding the meanings and consequences of injury is imperative in nurturing both athletes' well-being from injury and in reducing susceptibility to future injuries. Furthermore, track and field research exploring the psychological predictors of injury has adopted a siloed perspective, viewing injury issues through a psychological lens with a predominant focus on the injured athlete and little to no consideration attributed to the broader socio-cultural contexts and influences (Edouard, 2022). This perspective is limited, as the behavioural responses of ignoring pain and prioritising short-term performance gains over longer-term implications of injury have long been documented in the sport sociology literature as behaviours deeply embedded within the culture of risk (Nixon, 1992). Indeed, central to any sport sociology understanding is this 'culture of risk', whereby athletes are socialized into accepting pain and injury in the pursuit of athletic success (Nixon, 1992). The culture of risk echoes the ethical values of sport first identified by Hughes and Coakley (1991) (i.e., sacrificing oneself, striving for greatness, accepting risks, refusing limits, playing despite pain; Hughes & Coakley,



1991). Nixon (1992) indicates that an athlete's support network can operate collusively to promote risk-taking behaviours and may block alternative ways of dealing with pain and injury. In doing so, accepting risk and playing through pain, becomes the only frame of reference that an athlete has access to within which to guide their decision making around pain and injury (Nixon, 1992). Recent scholarship supporting these claims depicts how amplified risk-taking can also relationally validate one's status as an achieved athlete and serve as an important social indicator for their commitment to sport (Atkinson, 2020; McGannon & McMahon, 2020). Furthermore, McGannon and McMahon (2020) and McGannon et al. (2021) depicted the pervasive nature of these sporting cultural norms and ideals as the media can normalise and promulgate meanings and values of what an athlete is (i.e., tough committed athlete; Turner, 2018) and what it means to be injured (e.g., broken, weak, less of an athlete). Therefore, exploring the risks and behavioural responses to injury, without consideration of the influence of these long-documented socio-cultural factors, provides an incomplete and narrow picture of the problem.

### **2.6.2 Sociology Literature: Track and Field**

The sociology literature within track and field can offer some insights into the influence of these socio-cultural constructs on athletes' perceptions and responses to injury. Howe (2004) conducted an ethnography of middle to long-distance track athletes' pain and injury experiences and provided similar conclusions to the psychology literature, in stating the importance of athletes 'listening' to their bodies and responding appropriately to those early warning signals to prevent more serious longer-term injuries from occurring. Operating from a sociological viewpoint, Howe (2004) depicts the "culture of risk" (p. 72) as a dome that entraps the health and positive physical performance of the body of elite sporting performers. He highlights

how reactions and responses to injury are dominated by this risk culture, as athletes within athletics were socialised into believing that they ought to accept pain and injury as part of the sport. Enduring pain and suffering identified them as part of this athlete subculture and so expressing concern regarding injury runs the risk of being marginalised and ostracised from this community, thus accumulating in athletes' long-term acceptance of pain and injury (Howe, 2004). Distinguishing between 'good' and 'bad' pain was another topical issue explored within Howe's thesis. Indeed, part of any athlete's ability to regulate their training volume and interpret bodily sensations is deciphering what pain is part of the training course (i.e., good pain) and what pain is problematic (i.e., sports injury) (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2017; Bluhm & Ravn, 2022). Howe (2004) provides compelling insights into athletes grappling with this decision-making process, as it is a fine line that becomes even more blurred when we consider the culture of risk that these athletes are enmeshed in (Nixon, 1992).

Other sociological studies of injury within elite athletics have further articulated this decision-making process around injury by situating the debate within the risk-pain-injury paradox (Nixon, 1996). This paradox refers to the problem that athletes are faced with, whereby they are expected to accept risk, but at the same time, not take excessive risks as their bodies are the instruments they use to perform (Mayer & Thiel, 2018). Furthermore, a recent study within elite athletics highlighted how deeply embedded these sporting cultural norms and values (i.e., playing through pain) can become, as they form part of a conversion and socialisation process (Forte, 2020). This conversion process is referred to as a form of symbolic imprisonment and is characterised by an athlete becoming gradually inculcated into a world apart (i.e., elite), that involves the construction of the performing sporting body and subsequent tolerance of pain and injury to support the notion of sport as a vocation (i.e., moral

obligation to fulfil their gift or being predestined to inhabit an enchanted universe) (Forte, 2020).

Against this backdrop, and accounting for the influence of these socio-cultural norms, beliefs, and behaviours (i.e., culture of risk and acceptance of pain and injury), it is evident that athletes' risk-taking and responses to injury are far more nuanced and complex than their mere affective response to sensations diminishing over time (Wilson & Gilbert, 2008). By blending this sociological understanding with a psychological viewpoint, it could provide psychologists with a contextualised understanding of the influence of these socio-cultural factors on athletes' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours towards injury. This perhaps explains why recent sport injury psychology researchers have recommended the uptake of more interdisciplinary perspectives, that promote collaboration and reciprocity with other disciplines (e.g., sport sociology, social psychology) (Wadey, 2020; Wiese-Bjornstal, 2019) to provide a more critical and nuanced accounts of sports injury.

## **2.7 Narrative Inquiry**

In attempting to bridge the gulf between sociological and psychological viewpoints, this thesis aims to draw upon a form of inquiry that explains how the broader socio-cultural landscape might shape an individual's psychological experiences (Williams, 2020), named *narrative inquiry*. Narrative inquiry is a psychosocial approach concerned with the examination of stories (Smith et al., 2015). Narrative inquiry is premised on the assumption that as humans we live storied lives and so to make sense of our experiences and communicate our experiences to others we formulate and share stories (Douglas & Carless, 2006). Through a narrative lens, it is understood that although we might tell unique stories of our experiences, they are derived from the narrative scripts available within our culture as they help to structure,

locate, and underpin our storytelling (Frank, 2010). In this sense, narrative inquiry has the capacity to explore the reciprocal and co-constitutive relationship between an individual's experiences and the construction of those experiences, by a given social structure (Carless & Douglas, 2013).

Narrative inquiry had several purposes for the examination of injury within this PhD thesis. However, before exploring the role of narrative inquiry in shaping interpretations of injury, first, it is important to expand upon what narratives are, as well as the basic assumptions of narrative inquiry. Although a narrative is difficult to define, broadly speaking a narrative can be thought of as a socio-cultural plotline or template that individuals rely on to construct their personal stories, as narratives help connect events by providing an overarching explanation or consequence. To elaborate, Smith and Sparkes (2009a) described 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. It is a constructed form or template which people rely on to tell stories (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, p. 2).

A story, on the other hand, relates to a specific tale that a group or individual tells, constructed from the narratives that social relations, culture, and society make available (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a; Williams, 2020). The distinction between a narrative and a story can be difficult to sustain as “narratives only exist in particular stories, and all stories are narratives” (Frank, 2013, p.224). Yet, this distinction is useful to “recognise the uniqueness of each individual story, while at the same time understanding how individuals do not make up stories by themselves” (Frank, 2010, p. 119).

To further contextualise narrative inquiry, Smith and Sparkes (2008a) illustrate how self-identity conceptualisation within narrative inquiry is influenced by the researchers' ontology (i.e., reality) and epistemology (i.e., ways of knowing). They illustrated five different ways of framing identity that coexist within narrative: psychosocial, inter-subjective, storied resource, dialogical, and performative. Within this spectrum, identity conception "shifts from selves and identities being viewed as individualistic, real, and interior-based, to them being constructions derived from narratives and performed in relationships" (Smith & Sparkes, 2008a, p. 5). Within this body of research, a storied perspective of narrative inquiry was adapted. Aligned with this view, identities and selves are viewed as being both social and personal, as individuals are believed to have agency in drawing upon a cultural repertoire of narratives and using them to fabricate their stories in ways that are personalised to them (Smith & Sparkes, 2008a). Some of the basic assumptions of this perspective and narrative inquiry will be attended to below.

### **2.7.1 Basic Assumptions of Narrative Inquiry**

Implicit within narrative inquiry is an assumption that meaning is essential to being human, and meanings are created and constituted through narrative, as it is a storied effort and achievement (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). To expand, Polkinghorne (1988), describes how narratives are a scheme by which human beings give meaning to their experiences, as by providing an overarching plot, narratives help cohere human action into a whole and make individual actions or events comprehensible by identifying their significance, connection, or contribution towards the whole (e.g., event A leads to event B and culminates in event C; Day et al., 2020; Polkinghorne, 1988). In this sense, storytelling can be understood as a meaning-making activity, whereby humans can generate and communicate meanings of their experiences by

drawing upon culturally ubiquitous narratives as a thematic structure or template to map their personal story into a structured and coherent format (Polkinghorne, 1988).

Given that narratives are socio-cultural templates that shape and structure personal stories, narratives are conceptualised as being both personal and social, as socio-cultural life is thought to ‘speak itself’ through an individual story (Riessman, 2008). For example, although individuals may tell tales of their experiences that are personal to them, the stories people tell about their experiences are also socially and culturally constructed, as Sparkes and Smith (2002, p. 262), state:

In telling a personal story about myself, I try to make explicit the meanings that are implicit in the life I lead as I make sense of the situation. Yet, how I make sense of myself is shaped by the kinds of stories that have been made available to me in the various subcultures and cultures that I inhabit. That is, I cannot transcend my narrative resources in telling a story about myself or in restorying myself if I desired to do so.

As alluded to by Sparkes and Smith (2002), while individuals have agency in constructing their personal stories, they are not free to construct any story they wish about themselves or the situations they find themselves in. Instead, the narratives that are widely told and re-told within society (i.e., dominant narratives) and those made available to them within their social and cultural worlds will act as powerful resources for them to frame, interpret, and express their experiences (Williams, 2020). However, narratives are not only passive insights into the social and cultural influences in people’s lives but are active agents in the construction of those lives as through the ordering of events, they shape and create experiences (Frank, 2010). Put another way, narratives are actors that can do things, *on*, *for*, *in*, and *with* people (Frank, 2010). For

example, Frank (2010, 2016) highlights how narratives can work *for* us by providing us with a map or a destination to follow and *on* us by motivating our actions and shaping our responses to the events occurring in our lives (Frank, 2010). As Frank (2010, p. 48) depicts:

People do not simply listen to stories. They become caught up, a phrase that can only be explained by another metaphor: stories get under people's skin. Once stories are under people's skin, they affect the terms in which people think, know, and perceive.

Finally, narratives are embodied as we tell stories in, through, and out of our bodies (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). Narrative methodologies, therefore, help reveal the reciprocal relationship between bodies and stories as they impact, shape, and constitute one another (Carless & Douglas, 2017).

### **2.7.2 A Narrative Approach to Sport Injury Psychology**

Narrative inquiry is particularly suited to exploring embodied experiences such as injury. First, with its capacity to create and illuminate meanings, it can offer a portal into uncovering the meanings athletes attribute to their injuries, how these meanings are contextualised and created over time, and how they shape and guide their behaviours (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). Furthermore, rather than exploring one discrete meaning from injury (e.g., overcoming injury; SIRG), narrative inquiry holds the potential to explore multiple injury meanings, by allowing athletes the opportunity to tell their own story in their own words (Riessman, 2008). Indeed, instead of employing semi-structured interviews which can limit data generation by imposing a structure on the interview influenced by the researcher's views (Culver et al., 2012), the open-ended nature of narrative inquiry may allow for new meanings of injury to reveal themselves.

Second, narratives can generate rich insights into athletes' lived experiences of injury, as rather than focusing on abstract constructs, opinions, or individual and specific factors, narrative methods prioritise "an individual's experience of concrete events" (Carless & Douglas, 2017, p. 1). Moreover, within the remit of narrative inquiry, the messiness and complexity of human experiences can be "described and shown rather than washed out" helping us to better understand an individual's subjective responses to an event (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, p. 6). Third, the embodied nature of narratives also renders them a seemingly appropriate tool to explore injury experiences, by encouraging researchers to bring the body back to the forefront of injury research which has remained largely mono-cognitive to date (Allen-Collinson, 2017; Hall et al., 2022; Kampmann et al., 2015; Sparkes, 1996; Sparkes & Smith, 2002). Attending to the embodied characteristics of injury may offer a counterbalance to some of the reductionist and mechanistic portrayals of sports injuries, by providing more holistic and emotionally rich perspectives.

Fourth, by situating an athlete's experiences of injury in relation to their career history, narrative methods have the capacity to capture the diachronicity of injury experiences by unveiling their historical and developmental dimensions (Goodson & Gill, 2011). This capacity of narratives permits consideration of how athletes' past injury experiences may impact their current and future experiences of injuries. In this sense, a historical depth is added to the analysis by revealing the consequences of events that may otherwise have gone unnoticed (Goodson & Gill, 2011). Moreover, such exploration allows for a consideration of the cumulative and longer-term impact of athletes' injury experiences, which has remained relatively unexplored to date (Hind et al., 2020; Turner et al., 2000; Wiese-Bjornstal, 2009).

Fifth, as narratives attend to both the personal and the social, they can provide



a unique window into the psycho-socio-cultural nature of sports injury by recasting and expanding our understanding of how athletes' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours towards injury are influenced by their socio-cultural contexts. This is because narrative inquiry attends to not only *what* people say, but also *how* people say it, that is how the story has been socially and culturally constructed, allowing for a broader commentary to emerge (Riessman, 2008). As athletes inhabit a culture awash with stories of injuries and adversities, by illuminating and foregrounding this social dimension, narrative inquiry encourages us to take seriously the impact of these broader storylines in shaping, facilitating, and constraining athletes' experiences of injury (Carless & Douglas, 2013; Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, 2009b). Moreover, as it is "socially difficult and even rude to directly challenge or undermine a personal life story" (Gergen & Gergen, 2006, p. 116) storying and sharing collective storylines that articulate the diverse ways in which athletes may experience injury could act to expand the socio-cultural conditions available for athletes to express and make sense of their injury experiences.

Finally, narratives can function to communicate complex knowledge in ways that are highly accessible to different audiences, not just academics (Scott et al., 2012). By using personal stories, and providing a credible plot and characters, narratives are said to engage diverse audiences by using a format of communication that is authentic, engaging, and familiar (Smith et al., 2015). To this end, using narratives to communicate sport injury research can help bridge the knowledge-transfer gap by dispersing research findings in more user-friendly formats, and in ways that sporting communities can access and engage with.

### **2.7.3 Previous Narrative Research in Sport Injury Psychology**

Within the context of sport injury psychology, Brock and Kleiber (1994), were the first to advocate for a narrative approach to sports injury, by highlighting how narratives can complement the dominant biomedical view of injury and bring the suffering individual “fully into clinical focus” (p. 427). Adopting a narrative analytic method, they demonstrated how the stories of elite athletes who had experienced a career-ending injury, followed a certain pattern (i.e., participation in sport and injury episode, rehabilitation and attempts to return to sport, recognition of career-ending injury, feeling of loss, retrospective influence of injury on life). Brock and Kleiber (1994) reported, how creating an awareness of this narrative structure, and locating where an athlete was positioned in it, could assist service providers in identifying both “avenues to and roadblocks to healing injured athletes” (p. 429). Building upon this idea of identifying a patterned response to sports injury, Russell and Wiese-Bjornstal (2015), examined long-distance runners’ narratives of overuse injuries using a similar narrative analytical method. Through this analysis, they highlighted how participants’ injury narratives occurred over three chronological phases (pre-injury, onset, outcome) and linked psychosocial responses to each of these time-points. These studies generate important insights into the temporal responses to injury. However, they perhaps reflect a more “thick individual and thin social relational” conceptualisation of narratives (Smith & Sparkes, 2008a, p. 7), whereby the narratives identified are viewed as originating from the individual and thus provide a ‘window’ into athletes’ inner worlds of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours around injury.

Aligning with this notion of exploring temporal responses to injury, although operating from a more “thin individual and thick social relational perspective” (Smith & Sparkes, 2008a, p.7), Allen-Collinson and Hockey (2001), adopted an

autoethnographic narrative approach to explore their lived-body injury experiences. To this end, they highlighted the intersubjective and phenomenological nature of their injury experiences in addition to how broader socio-cultural narrative resources (i.e., narratives of suffering, sacrifice, pilgrimage, blame, empowerment, compensation, endurance, and perseverance), shaped and framed their injury journey from injury onset to returning to previous running standards. In a similar vein, Sparkes (1996) conducted a narrative of the self, and provided a rich, embodied, and emotionally charged account of how narratives can be used to reflexively explore the relationship “between the body and self over time in ways that fuse the personal and societal” (p.463). Drawing upon the works of Corbin and Strauss (1987), Giddens (1991), Frank (1991, 1995), and Shilling (1993) amongst others, Sparkes (1996) highlights how injury can be a moment of biographical disruption interrupting the body-self relationship and prompting individuals to engage in reflexive projects to narratively re-construct oneself. In the face of a disrupted body-self, Sparkes (1996) highlights how the socio-cultural narratives at our disposal are pertinent resources to help construct or reconstruct a body-self relationship and expand possibilities of who we are and who we might become in the future. By writing about his injury experiences as a feeling and emotional insider, Sparkes (1996) offers an intimate, sensuous, and evocative portrayal of his bodily injury experiences in ways that invite readers to connect and resonate with his own injury story. Moreover, Sparkes’ (1996) narrative account resists finalization and thus showcases the complex, fragmented, and ambiguous nature of lived-body injury experiences.

Consistent with generating rich, embodied, and nuanced socio-cultural understandings of lived-body injury experiences, Spencer (2012) explored the pain and injury experiences of MMA fighters. Through ethnographic work, Spencer (2012)

illustrates how dominant scripts of masculinity shaped how fighters interpreted their bodily-injury experiences. Narratives of despair and loss are offered which reflect fighters' stories of how injury compromised their capacity to perform and maintain hierarchy within their sporting worlds in line with dominant masculine ideals. The narratives offered by Sparkes (1996), Spencer (2012), amongst a chorus of others (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2019; McGannon et al., 2021, Tamminen et al., 2022; Williams, 2020), point to the notion that athletes have access to limited narrative resources to frame and interpret their bodily-injury experiences. Moreover, narrative scholars highlight the necessity of storying and sharing injury narratives that showcase the vulnerability and fragility of injury experiences (Sparkes, 1996), and athletes' management of such experiences in ways that counter dominant cultural ideals of having the "right attitude" towards injury (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017, p.927), or maintaining a "code of silence" in relation to injury concerns (McGannon et al., 2021, p. 951).

Against this backdrop and moving more towards this performative capacity of narratives, McGannon et al. (2021), highlighted the potential of narratives as social actors to "do things" and shape meanings of injury in ways that counter dominant cultural norms. By analysing news stories of Andrew Luck's injury and retirement, the authors illustrated how stories circulated within narratives from the media constructed meanings of injury that resisted the toxic cultural norms within the NFL by exposing the toll of football on athletes' physical and mental health. In this sense, they referred to Luck's injury story as a 'change agent' as it helped to deconstruct the NFL's cultural narrow masculinity, by praising Luck's vulnerability as courageous for raising awareness about mental health issues for athletes. Moreover, they illustrated the relational element of narratives, as Luck's injury story sparked other NFL players

to speak out about the lifestyle of injury and rehabilitation, binding these athletes together within “pain and injury communities” (Atkinson, 2020, p. 68; McGannon et al., 2021).

Overall, this diverse narrative scholarship underscores the pertinence of narratives as valuable entry points into understanding how athletes make sense of their lived-body injury experiences by mediating through their inner worlds of thoughts and feelings, and their outer social and cultural worlds. Moreover, these studies demonstrate how narratives can humanise athletes' injury experiences, by exposing their feeling, embodied, and emotive characteristics, offering the potential to connect others to their experiences by thinking *with* their injury stories (Sparkes, 1996; Frank, 2013). Finally, these studies highlight how athletes' experiences of injury are influenced and shaped by the dominant narrative resources available to them, and further point to the performative capacity of narratives to ‘do things’ for injured athletes, potentially expanding the conditions for them to think, feel, and behave (McGannon et al., 2021).

Against this backdrop, this thesis aims to further enrich and expand upon narrative understandings of injury. Drawing upon the pioneering work of Frank (2004, 2010, 2013), Smith and Sparkes, (e.g., 2002, 2004, 2005, 2008b, 2011), Sparkes and Smith, (e.g., 2002, 2003, 2005, 2008), Carless and Douglas (e.g., 2012, 2013, 2016), Douglas and Carless (e.g., 2006, 2009), and previous sport injury narrative researchers (e.g., Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2001; Brock & Kleiber, 1994; McGannon et al., 2021; Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017; Russel & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2015; Sparkes, 1996; Spencer, 2012), this thesis aims to make a novel contribution to the sport injury psychology literature, by exploring the diverse ways in which elite track athletes make sense of their injury experiences throughout the life-course (see chapter four).

Answering calls to expand the narrative resources available to injured athletes (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2019; McGannon et al., 2021; Tamminen et al., 2022; Williams, 2020), this thesis aims to identify and foreground the types of narratives that underpin athletes' injury stories. Moreover, this thesis aims to translate these injury narratives into more accessible and evocative formats (i.e., videos) to disseminate the findings more broadly. Finally, this thesis aims to extend the literature by advancing empirical understandings of the applied value of narratives for athletes, coaches, and practitioners (see chapters six and seven).

## **2.8 PhD Aims and Rationale**

Drawing upon the literature reviewed in this chapter, this PhD had four aims. The first aim of this PhD is to provide a broader, more nuanced, and more holistic understanding of sports injury by exploring the meanings that athletes derive from their injury experiences. To begin, chapter three will explore one potential meaning from injury, named SIRC, by collating insights from the SIRC literature into a synthesis to provide a more cohesive and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Recognising the tensions in exploring one injury meaning (see chapter one, three) and expanding upon the scope of chapter three, chapter four will explore the multiple meanings that elite track athletes may construct from their injury experiences using narrative inquiry (Frank, 2010).

By identifying and foregrounding the multiple meanings that athletes may develop from their injury experiences, the second aim of this thesis is to broaden athletes' perspectives and possibilities from injury. Firstly, by outlining how athletes may potentially derive benefits from their injury experiences (see chapter three), offering a counteracting perspective to the preponderance of sport injury literature which conceptualises injury as a negative event with debilitating consequences.

Secondly, by using the injury narratives identified in chapter four to help cultivate a more inclusive understanding of the diverse ways in which injured athletes may make sense of their experiences (see chapters four, five, six, and seven).

The third aim of this PhD is to extend theoretical understanding of injury from a psych-social-cultural perspective. Heeding calls from both Wadey and Day (2022) and Brewer (2020), who purported that there is “much room for theoretical growth within the sport injury psychology literature” (p.234), this thesis aims to build, apply, and extend theoretical understanding of sports injury. To expand, chapter three aims to build theory by creating a framework which offers novel interpretations of SIRG and how it may be developed. Meanwhile, chapter four aims to apply a narrative inquiry (Frank, 2010) and life history approach to conceptualise how elite track athletes’ injury experiences are not only personally, but also socially and culturally constructed. Adopting a life-history approach, will also cater for a wider exploration of multiple injury types and experiences, across their full chronological spectrum from risk, response, recovery, and beyond (Wiese-Bjornstal, 2009). Building upon this conceptual foundation, chapter five intends to enrich theoretical understanding of how athletes respond to and engage with diverse injury narratives by exploring the challenges and tensions incurred when storying and sharing the identified narrative typologies *with* participants. To further enhance the communal responsibility of injury by theorising beyond an intrapersonal perspective; chapters six and seven aim to draw upon narrative inquiry (Frank, 2010), and narrative pedagogy (Goodson & Gill, 2011), to provide rich theoretical and empirical understandings of how the injury narratives identified (chapter four, six) may support injured athletes across personal, social, and cultural levels.

The final aim of this body of research was to bridge the gap between theory and practice by increasing the accessibility and applicability of the research findings. Chapter six will address this aim by co-constructing and communicating the research findings (chapter four) in engaging, and non-academic formats (i.e., video narratives) to end-users (i.e., athletes, coaches, service-providers, sporting institutions). Chapter seven then aims to examine the applied value of these video narratives by sharing and discussing these narratives within pedagogical encounters with athletes, coaches, and practitioners. In doing so, this study aims to enhance understanding of narratives in action and how they can work *on*, *for*, and *with* multiple stakeholders (i.e., athletes, coaches, practitioners). Moreover, this study aims to work *with* stakeholders to explore their perceptions of the applied value of narratives in informing professional practice.

## **2.9 Summary**

In this chapter, I have reviewed the literature pertaining to key underpinning empirical and conceptual ideas related to this present programme of research. I have outlined the models and evaluated the research relating to the prediction and prevention of, and response to, and rehabilitation from, sports injuries. The present thesis aims to move our understanding of sport injury psychology forward by adopting a broader, more critical, and more nuanced understanding of the many ways athletes may derive meaning from their injury experiences throughout the life course. By identifying and foregrounding these diverse injury meanings, this PhD thesis aims to broaden the opportunities and possibilities for athletes to make sense of their injury experiences. By embracing a narrative inquiry (Frank, 2010) approach, this PhD thesis intends to capture the construction of athletes' meaning of injury from a psycho-social-cultural perspective. Expanding the analytical gaze beyond the injured athletes, this body of research intends to extend current understandings of sports injury beyond



being viewed as a solely psychological phenomenon housed ‘within’ the injured athlete, to one that is influenced by multiple levels of analysis (Wadey et al., 2018; Wadey & Day 2022). Finally, in translating this PhD’s findings into accessible formats (i.e., videos) and examining their applicability in impacting injured athletes across personal, social, and cultural levels, this thesis hopes to contribute towards bridging the knowledge-practice gap. Overall, this PhD aims to offer novel insights that can enrich and extend the current sport injury psychology literature in supporting injured athletes’ well-being and welfare.

**Chapter 3**  
**A Meta-Study of Sport-Injury Related Growth**

### **3.0 Abstract**

This study aimed to synthesise the SIRC literature to extend current understandings of the phenomenon and inform future research. Following a systematic search, 10 articles were retained for the synthesis. Analysis of methods, data, and theory of the primary research was conducted, followed by a final meta-synthesis. Meta-method analysis involved an appraisal of the included papers and revealed that half the studies were methodologically coherent (Mayan, 2009). Meta-theory analysis revealed that primary research reports were underpinned by one model (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998) and one theory (Roy-Davis et al., 2017). Meta-findings analysis revealed eight themes, comprising the processes of SIRC (i.e., pre-injury factors, initial meaning of injury, meaning making), the dimensions of SIRC (i.e., corporeal growth, athletic growth, personal growth, social growth), and no growth. The final meta-synthesis extended our current understanding of SIRC by accounting for the origins of SIRC, its temporal nature, and how it can be developed across personal, social, and cultural levels. Recommendations for more longitudinal and interdisciplinary research, and more methodological and theoretical diversification, are outlined.

### 3.1 Overview

Athletic injury has long been recognised as a negative experience with debilitating consequences (Gledhill, 2021). Challenging this dominant perspective and broadening the possibilities following injury, a concept which is gaining increased research attention is the notion of an injury experience acting as a catalyst for positive change (Salim & Wadey, 2018, 2019). Conceptualised as a context-specific form of growth following adversity, SIRG, refers to perceived changes that propel an athlete to a higher level of functioning than that which existed prior to their injury (Roy-Davis et al., 2017). For example, SIRG has been observed to improve well-being (Trainor et al., 2020), build stronger resources (e.g., strengthened relationships; Salim & Wadey, 2019), decrease risk of future injury occurrence (Roy-Davis et al., 2017), and improve sporting performances (Salim et al., 2016). The concept of SIRG, therefore, is timely, especially given the increased attention on athletes' physical and mental welfare (Schinke et al., 2018).

The potential of SIRG was first alluded to by Wiese-Bjornstal et al. (1995) who proposed that positive by-products were a potential recovery outcome in their model of psychological response to athletic injury and rehabilitation. Building upon this speculation, Udry et al. (1997) were the first researchers to empirically examine whether athletes experience positive by-products from injury. From analysing interviews of 21 athletes from the United States Olympic Skiing Team who experienced season-ending injuries, three dimensions of self-development were found: (a) personal growth (i.e., gained perspective, personality development, development aspects of non-skiing life and better time management), (b) psychological-based performance enhancement (i.e., increased efficiency, enhanced motivation, and realistic expectations), and (c) physical-technical development.

Following this study and heeding recommendations from Udry et al. (1997), researchers began to investigate the antecedents (e.g., the personality trait of hardiness) and mechanisms (e.g., positive re-appraisal and social support) underlying these positive by-products (Salim et al., 2016; Wadey et al., 2011).

Despite the merits of these preliminary studies, they are atheoretical and conceptually ambiguous. For example, terms are used interchangeably within and between studies to describe the same underlying concept of growth following adversity (e.g., perceived benefits, stress-related growth). The terms used have not always been clearly defined and conceptualised and there is often limited justification as to why certain terms are used and not others. Providing a conceptual and theoretical foundation, Roy-Davis et al. (2017) proposed and conceptualised the term SIRC and constructed a context-specific theory: T-SIRC (Roy-Davis et al., 2017). The T-SIRC proposes that internal (i.e., personality, coping styles, knowledge and prior experience, and perceived social support) and external factors (i.e., cultural scripts, physical resources, time, and received social support) enable injured athletes to transform their injury experience from a threatening experience into an opportunity for growth. The proposed mechanisms through which this process occurs are meta-cognitions, positive reappraisal, positive emotions, and facilitative responses. To expand, athletes were indicated to reflect upon what they were thinking and why they were thinking a certain way (i.e., meta-cognitions), which enabled them to normalise their thoughts and emotions bringing them under their perceived control. Following this process, athletes were indicated to re-interpret injury from being a threat to a challenge to overcome (i.e., positive reappraisal), as they began to identify possible benefits or opportunities that could arise from the experience of injury. This reappraisal led to athletes experiencing positive affective states, which in turn led to a number of facilitative

responses (e.g., seeking knowledge regarding their injury or exploring or acting upon the opportunities available to them as a result of their injury). Engagement with each of these processes led to athletes experiencing SIRC, which meant different things for different people and spanned personal, social, and physical domains. Recent research has since supported and extended the theoretical underpinning of the T-SIRC (Salim & Wadey, 2019; Trainor et al., 2020; Wadey et al., 2019). This research has also provided greater insights into the mechanisms underpinning SIRC. For example, Wadey et al. (2019) challenged and expanded the T-SIRC by demonstrating how athletes accept rather than control their thinking and use core values alongside positive emotions to facilitate SIRC. Moreover, these studies have offered greater insight into the experience of SIRC, in addition to how to foster SIRC at both an intrapersonal and interpersonal level (e.g., using gratitude with athletes' support networks to promote SIRC; Salim & Wadey, 2019).

Given the increased research attention this phenomenon has received, as with all maturing areas of research, I would argue that it is now time to take stock of the literature to establish what we know now and where we go next. Although the growth following adversity literature has been reviewed (see Howells et al., 2017), no study to date has reviewed the SIRC literature. Therefore, this study is original and aimed to conduct a meta-study to integrate, appraise, and synthesise the qualitative SIRC literature (Paterson et al., 2001). My rationale was threefold. First, researchers to date have used various terms, labels, and definitions to describe both the concept and dimensions of SIRC (Rubio et al., 2020; Salim & Wadey, 2018; Udry et al., 1997; Wadey et al., 2011, 2013). While the definition proposed by Roy-Davis et al. (2017) has helped reduce some of this conceptual ambiguity, providing an integrative understanding of the dimensions of SIRC can help researchers make more informed

decisions in their use of terminology moving forward. Second, by appraising the current evidence-base and examining its underpinnings it can illuminate the strengths and shortcomings of this current body of research. This critical appraisal can ensure that strengths are harnessed, and limitations addressed in future research. Finally, by synthesizing the current SIRG literature, it can help extend what is currently known about SIRG by providing novel interpretations of this collective body of research. New and integrative insights into SIRG can help create a platform for future researchers to continue to advance our understanding of this concept from a methodological, theoretical, and applied perspective.

### **3.2 Methodology**

A meta-study involves the analysis of methods, data, and theory of primary research reports to uncover the processes associated with knowledge production (Paterson et al., 2001). Once uncovered, a meta-study aims to collate these insights into a synthesis to offer original interpretations of the findings that are more than the sum-of-their-parts. The primary goal of a meta-study is to develop a model from synthesising a body of qualitative research (Paterson et al., 2001).

#### **3.2.1. Philosophical Underpinnings**

This meta-study is positioned within an interpretivist paradigm, rooted in the tenets of a constructionist epistemology (i.e., knowledge is constructed and subjective) and a relativist ontology (i.e., reality is multiple, created, and mind-dependent) (Smith & Deemer, 2000). Adopting an interpretivist perspective for the meta-study involves authentic understanding (Denzin, 1989), which implies that the meta-synthesist will analyse data that align with or contradict their own informed assumptions about the phenomenon under investigation. This analysis is said to extend the interpretation of the cognitive aspects of the data into an examination of the emotional implications

(i.e., meaning) of the research allowing for a reflexive and explorative approach that is needed to discern and reframe knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation (Paterson et al., 2001).

Given this research philosophy and meta-study recommendations (Paterson et al., 2001), I aimed to account for the role of researchers in analysing the findings and creating the report produced. As the primary researcher involved in the analysis and construction of this report, my specialism was in qualitative research synthesis, lived experiences of sports injuries and SIRT as an elite athlete, and critical reviews on SIRT (Howells & Everard, 2020; Wadey & Everard, 2020). My supervisory team included Karen Howells, Ross Wadey, and Melissa Day. Karen is a subject specialist in both the conceptualisation and role of growth following various adversities in elite sport (e.g., Howells et al., 2017; Howells et al., 2020). Melissa is a subject specialist in both sport injury (Day & Wadey, 2022) and growth following adversity (Day et al., 2020) and trauma (Day & Wadey, 2016). Meanwhile, Ross is a subject specialist in both growth following adversity (Wadey et al., 2020), and sport injury psychology (Wadey, 2020), with a particular interest in the psycho-social-cultural construction of sports injury. Between us, we were equipped with a variety of theoretical, methodological, and context-specific knowledge to conduct this meta-study (Paterson et al., 2001).

### **3.2.2 Procedure**

A search strategy was conducted to retrieve articles from pertinent journals: *International Journal of Applied Sport Science* (2000-2022), *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* (1970-2022); *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* (1989-2022); *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* (1988-2022); *Journal of Sport Behaviour* (1978-2022); *Journal of Sport Sciences* (1983-2022); *Psychology of*



*Sport and Exercise (2000-2022); Research Quarterly in Sport and Exercise(2000-2022); Sport Exercise and Performance Psychology (2012-2022); The Sport Psychologist (1984-2022); Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health (2011-2022); Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise(2009-2022)* and online databases (Applied Social Science Index and Abstracts, Physical Education Index, PSYCH Articles, PSYCHInfo, SPORTdiscus, and Cinahl). Keywords included terms such as ‘*sport-injury-related growth*’, ‘*stress-related growth*’, ‘*benefits of sports injury*’, ‘*meaning-making*’, ‘*qualitative*’. The search was limited to articles published in English with no restriction in terms of the date range. The grey (unpublished) material was searched for using ProQuest dissertations and theses which were limited to full-text articles published between 2014 and 2022. To ensure an exhaustive search of the literature was conducted, a Librarian with more than 10 years of experience in search databases was consulted to assist with searching for and retrieving qualitative studies (see Barroso et al., 2003). The initial search yielded 11,551 articles which were examined based on keywords in the title and abstract. After an examination of keywords, 42 articles were retained, and a further seven articles were excluded as they included only quantitative data. Altogether, 35 articles were retained for further analysis (see Figure 4).

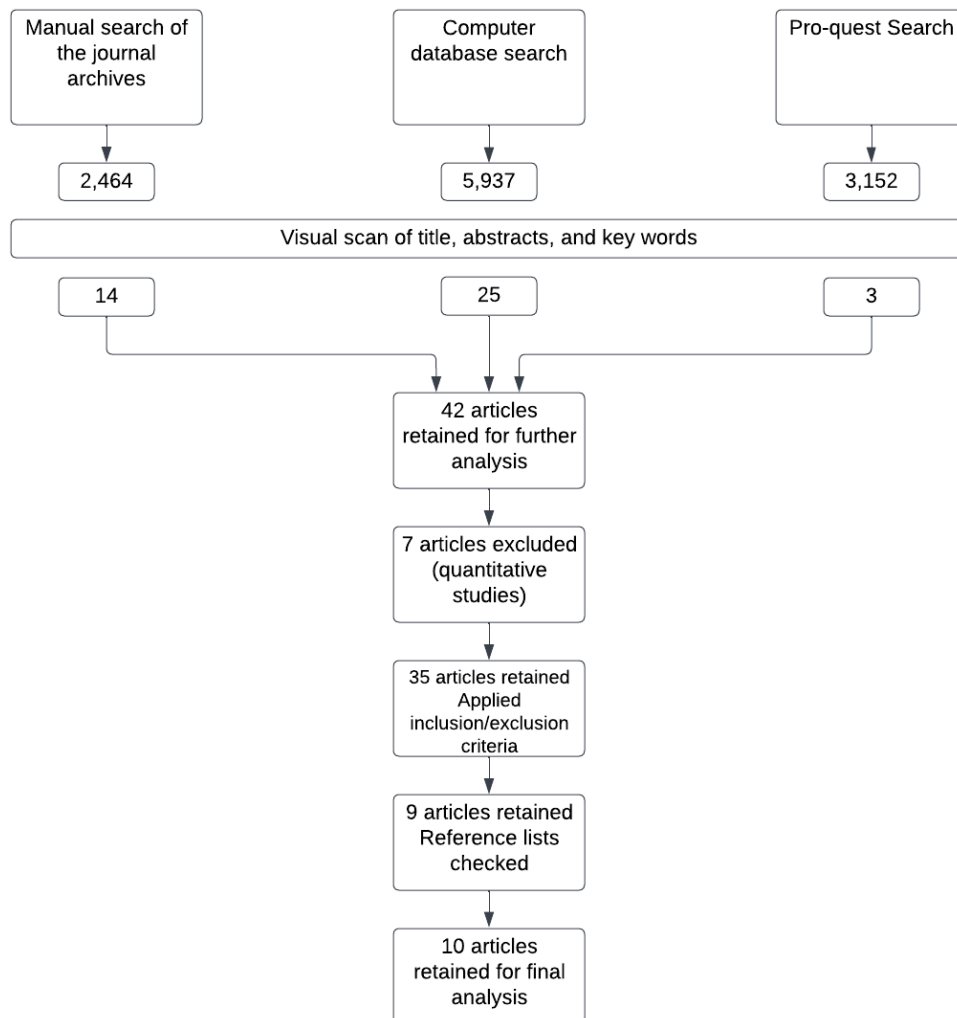
### **3.2.3 Criteria for Inclusion / Exclusion**

Following the guidelines from Paterson et al. (2001), inclusion/exclusion criteria were refined, and the 35 selected articles were screened using the following criteria: (a) qualitative research methods of data collection were used, studies that combined qualitative and quantitative data were included if the findings based on qualitative data could be demarcated and examined independently from the quantitative data (Paterson et al., 2001); (b) participants had sustained a sports-related

injury. A sports injury was defined as a bodily tissue or function impairment that had occurred as a consequence of sport-related activities such as training, competition, and recreational engagement (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 2018). Studies were excluded if they focused on severe injuries which were defined as an unintentional injury leading to long-term disability (Kampman et al., 2015). These included severe multiple fractures, acquired brain injury, paraplegia, quadriplegia, burns to more than 50% of the body, and traumatic amputation of a limb (Kampman et al., 2015); and (c) the aim and the scope of the paper was on growth following sport injury. Growth was defined as changes or benefits athletes derived from being injured which propelled them to a higher level of functioning than that which existed prior to their injury (Roy-Davis et al., 2017). Based on these criteria, nine articles were retained. Reference lists of these nine articles were reviewed, resulting in one other article (Tracey, 2011), meeting the full inclusion criteria being identified. Ten articles were retained for the final analysis (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4**

*Diagram of Search and Retrieval Strategies*



### 3.2.4 Quality Appraisal

Due to the lack of consensus regarding the appropriate approach to judging the quality of qualitative research (Majid & Vanstone, 2018), a qualitative appraisal tool was not employed for this study. Instead, the quality of these research papers was judged on issues of methodological coherence which has been highlighted as being inextricably linked to quality in qualitative research (Poucher et al., 2020).

Methodological coherence refers to the “congruence between your epistemological and ontological viewpoint, your theoretical position/perspective, the methods you choose, and so on” (Mayan, 2009, p. 13).

### 3.2.5 Data Management

Key features from the articles retained were extracted and placed in Tables (see Tables 1,2,3). Tables were created by reading primary research reports to identify the methods, findings, and theory, that would contribute towards the analytic stages of the meta-study: meta-method, meta-data, and meta-theory.

**Table 1**

*Methodological and Theoretical Characteristics of Primary Research*

Author (s) Year	Theory	Specified ontology and epistemology	Sampling method	Sample characteristic	Data collection	Data analysis	Methodological rigour
Roy-Davis et al., (2017)	None	Critical realism and modified dualism	Criterion sampling initially; Theoretical sampling to reach saturation	37 participants: 23 men, and 14 women. Mean age 27.3 (SD=5.4) Variety of sports (team and individual), recreational to elite	Semi-structured Interviews	Grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss 2008)	Analytic memos; Critical friends; Diagrams, and visual representation to establish links; Delayed full literature review; Quality criteria- fit, relevance, workability, modifiability.
Salim et al., (2016)	None	Critical realism and modified dualism	Purposive sampling	20 participants: Seven females, 13 males. Mean age = 23.7 years (SD=6.4) Individual and team sports from recreational to national level	Semi-structured Interviews	Composite sequence analysis (Miles & Huberman 1994)	Peer debriefing; Member checking

Salim & Wadey (2018)	T-SIRG : Roy-Davis et al. (2017)	Critical realism and modified dualism	Criterion , theoretic al and maximum variation sampling	45 participants: 17 females, 28 males. Individual and team sports, recreational to elite	Semi-structured Interviews	Qualitative data used thematic analysis.	Critical friends; Member reflections
Salim & Wadey (2019)	T-SIRG : Roy-Davis et al. (2017)	Critical realism and modified dualism	Criterion and maximum variation sampling	30 former injured athletes Mean age=21.8 years.	Semi-structured Interviews	Thematic Analysis	Critical friends; Member reflections
Tracey (2011)	None	None specified.	Purposive sampling	Two participants Two females; Aged 20 & 22; Participant one: ACL tear. Participant two: Left foot sigmoid bone fracture	Exploratory case studies grounded in phenomenology. Interviews	Grounded theory & Interpretational analysis	None
Trainor et al., 2020	T-SIRG. Roy-Davis et al. (2017)	Interpretivist: Ontological relativism and epistemological constructionism	Criterion-based sampling	12 seriously currently injured female varsity athletes. Aged between 18 and 23, variety of sports.	Semi-structured Interviews	Reflexive thematic analysis	Worthiness of topic; Sensitivity to context; Commitment and rigour; Transparency, and coherence
Udry et al., (1997)	None	None Specified	Purposive sampling	21 participants: (11 males, 10 females). Mean age = 23.9. Elite US ski team members who sustained a season-ending injury	Semi-structured Interviews	Inductive content analysis	Triangular Consensus
Wadey et al., (2011)	Integrated model of response to sport injury; Wiese-Bjornstal	None specified	Purposive sampling	10 participants: 10 males. Mean age =21.7 years (SD=1.8). Three team sports; Rugby	Semi-structured Interviews	Content analysed and displayed using causal networks	Investigator triangulation; Member checks

	et al. (1998)			union, soccer, and basketball. Lower limb injuries.		(Miles & Huberman 1994)	
Wadey et al., (2013)	Integrated model of response to sport injury: Wiese- Bjornstal et al. (1998)	Critical realism and modified dualism	Purposiv e and snowball sampling	Eight participants; Eight male coaches Mean age=45.8 years (SD=11.8). Coaches from club to international level in multiple sports.	Semi- structured Interviews	Deductive and inductive content analysis	Peer debriefing; Member checking
Wadey et al., (2019)	T-SIRG Roy- Davis et al. 2017	Interpretivist: Ontological relativism and epistemologic al constructionis m	Criterion -based & snowball purposeful sampling	10 participants: Four females, Six males. Mean age, 41 years, (SD=4 years).	Semi- structured Interviews	Thematic analysis- horizontal and vertical themes	Critical friends; External reflections

**Table 2***Main Features of Primary Research*

<b>Author (s) (Year)</b>	<b>Research aims/objectives</b>	<b>Main Findings</b>
Roy-Davis et al., (2017)	To develop a context-specific grounded theory explaining the relationship between sport injury and SIRG	A number of internal (personality, coping styles, knowledge, and prior experience) and external (cultural scripts, physical resources, time, and received social support) factors help to transform an injury from a potentially debilitating experience into an opportunity for growth and development. Mechanisms through which SIRG is achieved are metacognitions, positive reappraisal, positive emotions, and facilitative responses
Salim et al., (2016)	To examine how athletes high in hardiness can experience growth whereas those low in hardiness are less likely to derive such benefits	Findings revealed that athletes high in hardiness experienced stress-related growth from having an emotional outlet and utilising their social network. In contrast, athletes low in hardiness had no emotional outlet which led to poor performance, returning too soon, and re-injury.
Salim & Wadey (2018)	Examining the efficacy of a 4-week written and verbal disclosure intervention (i.e., 4 sessions, one session per week) to promote SIRG in injured athletes low in hardiness on their return to sport	The verbal group reported the most growth. Athletes who disclose their emotions are more likely to achieve SIRG. Written disclosure was not found to promote SIRG
Tracey (2011)	To explore: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Is there potential for meaning and self-cultivation to be gained through the experience of recovering from injury?</li> <li>2) Is it possible for injured athletes to positively reappraise the experience of being injured and turn it into an opportunity for personal growth?</li> </ol>	Interviews revealed themes centred on loss of control, the importance of social support, and recognition of the athlete's capacity and ability to be resilient, motivated, and maintain a positive attitude.
Trainor et al., (2020)	To explore how seriously injured women athletes perceive and experience global and sport psychological well-being (PWB) during sport injury recovery.	Four overarching themes were developed: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) My life is chaos and out of control,</li> <li>(2) Pressures shaping responses to sport injury,</li> <li>(3) Maybe I can: adaptation from the disruption of sport injury, and</li> <li>(4) Sport Injury Growth (SIG).</li> </ol> Participants experienced an initial disruption of sport PWB and global PWB, however, once they were able

		to adapt, they could rebalance their PWB's. Once rebalanced, participants reappraised the injury experience as an opportunity for psychological growth and development, leading to the possibility of SIG.
Udry et al., (1997)	To examine: 1) The psychological responses of injured athletes to season-ending injuries 2) Potential benefits from injury.	<p>Injury responses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Injury-relevant information processing/ awareness</li> <li>• Emotional upheaval/reactive behaviour</li> <li>• Positive outlook/coping attempts</li> </ul> <p>Injury benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal growth</li> <li>• Psychologically based enhancements</li> <li>• Physical-technical development</li> </ul>
Wadey et al., (2011)	To explore the perceived benefits of injury and their underlying antecedents and mechanisms	<p>There were several perceived benefits of injury that occurred across 3 temporal phases.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Injury onset (emotional response)</li> <li>• Rehabilitation (free time)</li> <li>• Return to competitive sport (reflective practice)</li> </ul>
Wadey et al., (2013)	Examine coaches' perspectives of athletes' SIRG from injury. The secondary aim was to identify perceived behavioural indicators of SRG	<p>Four dimensions of growth observed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal growth</li> <li>• Psychological growth</li> <li>• Social growth</li> <li>• Physical growth</li> </ul> <p>Behavioural indicators of growth furthermore identified</p>
Wadey et al., (2019)	To examine sports psychologists (SPC) perspectives on the process of facilitating SIRG with injured athletes.	<p>Five themes were identified: Hear the Story, Contextualize the Story, Reconstruct the Story, Live the Story, and Share the Story.</p>



**Table 3***Themes and Representative Quotes*

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>FACTORS</b>	<b>STUDIES</b>	<b>REPRESENTATIVE QUOTE</b>
<b>INITIAL RESPONSE TO INJURY</b>	Negative Emotions	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Tracey (2011), Trainor et al., (2020) Udry et al., (1997), Wadey et al., (2011, 2013, 2019)	The women discussed depression, anxiety, denial, grief, frustration, shock, doubt, envy, guilt, self-pity, isolation, and increased time for self-care. Specifically, emotions were misery, anger, frustration, and disappointment.
	Positive Emotions	Trainor et al., (2020)	It sounds terrible, but it was actually kind of a relief, it was nice to actually take a few months off and let the rest of my body heal, all those nagging injuries, I can have a break, I can focus on school and working and other things, and it's almost better in a sense.
	Ambivalent reactions	Udry et al., (1997)	I knew it would be touch and go but I heal well.
	Cognitive-Processing	Salim et al., (2016), Udry et al., (1997), Wadey et al., (2011)	Intrusive rumination was about the event that led to the injury, concerns about how they would cope and blaming oneself and others "I just kept thinking about how it happened over and over again, and I couldn't understand it."
	Feelings of loss (Loss of fitness, purpose, money, opportunity motivation, ability, independence)	Salim et al., (2016), Tracey et al., (2011), Trainor et al., (2020), Udry et al., (1997)	Running makes me feel like I have a purpose without it I am lost.
	Injury as a stressful experience -threatening short and long-term goals, beliefs, attitudes, values, and storylines.	Roy Davis et al., (2017), Trainor et al., (2020), Udry et al., (1997). Wadey et al., (2019).	Injury was a stressful experience in that it threatened, reminded, and encouraged them to reflect on their short and long-term goals, beliefs, and attitudes.
	Micro: Injury- related information	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Udry et al., (1997).	Responses were more prolonged and intense for more severe, reoccurring, lower extremity injuries as well as those happening at a critical point in the competitive season.
	Meso: Social Support	Roy-Davis et al., (2017)	Responses included feelings of shock, frustration, anger, guilt, and helplessness which manifested in themselves as well as

<b>PRE-INJURY FACTORS</b>			from their interactions with others (e.g., coach, teammates).
	Macro: Sports Culture	Trainor et al., (2020), Udry et al., (1997), Wadey et al., (2019).	Sport culture: Emotions in the early aftermath of injury were unwelcomed and uncomfortable experiences for athletes as they represented weakness.
	Personality	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Tracey, (2011).	Participants' personal qualities of confidence, creativity, resilience, social intelligence, openness to experience, extraversion, optimism, reflexivity, and emotional intelligence – enabled them to understand and express their emotions, be creative in how best to maximise their free time, be open to and act upon the opportunities in their environment, remain resilient and confident that they could overcome adversity.
	Values, Beliefs & Attitudes	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Tracey (2011), Trainor et al., (2020), Udry et al., (1997), Wadey et al., (2011, 2013).	The athlete's pre-injury attitudes, values, priorities, and outlook were also perceived by coaches to be transformed post-injury.
	Short and long-term goals	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Trainor et al., (2020), Udry et al., (1997), Wadey et al., (2011, 2019)	All participants reported that sustaining a sport injury was a stressful experience in that it threatened, reminded, and encouraged them to reflect on their short and long-term goals.
	Prior experience with adversity	Roy Davis et al., (2017), Tracey (2011), Wadey et al., (2019)	Her previous experience of injury gave her the confidence that she could overcome her current injury.
	Athletic & Personal Identity	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Trainor et al., (2020), Wadey et al., (2019)	Participants also spoke of a deeper experience of an athletic identity crisis, specifically the impact of injury on their athletic identity.
	Coping styles	Roy Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Tracey (2011)	Coping styles reflected the participant's typical thoughts and behaviours in response to stressful demands.
<b>MEANING-MAKING</b>	Perceived social support	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Tracey, (2011)	The participants had learned from their previous experiences who in their support network could and would help if necessary.
	Making sense of the injury experience	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Trainor et al., (2020), Wadey et al., (2011, 2019)	Participants reflected on what they were thinking and why they were thinking and feeling the way they were.

Acknowledging the impact/accepting the injury	Tracey, (2011), Trainor et al., (2020), Wadey et al., (2019)	While participants identified they could not change their injury they eventually started to acknowledge and accept the self for the way it was, accepting the injured self. Participants emphasized the need to reach a level of acceptance to continue healing.
Positive reappraisal	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Trainor et al., (2020), Wadey et al., (2019)	Athletes started to reframe their perception of injury, viewing it in a less stressful way and as a challenge to overcome.
Identifying opportunities	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Trainor et al., (2020), Wadey et al., (2019)	With the help of their internal and external resources rather than interpreting their injury as a threat and obstacle, they were able to identify possible opportunities and benefits that could be derived from being injured.
Positive emotions	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Salim & Wadey, (2018, 2019), Tracey, (2011), Trainor et al., (2020), Wadey et al., (2019)	Participants reported experiencing positive affect states “I become more positive thinking about what can I learn from this injury”.
Facilitative responses	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Salim & Wadey (2018), Trainor et al., (2020), Wadey et al., (2019)	Positive feelings led them to identify and invest time and effort in their physical and social resources.
Meaningful action	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Trainor et al., (2020), Wadey et al., (2019)	The SPCs felt the most effective approach was to be led by the injured athletes’ core values (e.g., sport, friends, family, gratitude, compassion, creativity, curiosity, kindness, compassion) and what made them feel good (e.g., inspired, interested, hopeful, optimistic, uplifted). For example, if an athlete’s core values are sport and their body, possible actions include investing time working on other aspects of their game or event, spending time observing training and competition, learning and refining psychological skills, helping other sport science staff (e.g., notational analysis), and spending time working on their strength and conditioning. If core values involve friends and family, then possible actions include spending

		quality time with them and engaging in mutual hobbies and interests.
<b>Micro-Level Factors</b>		
Self-reflection	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Wadey et al., (2011, 2019)	I get them to critical reflect on themselves about who they are and what they value
Self-disclosure	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Salim & Wadey (2018), Wadey et al., (2011, 2019)	Athletes high in hardiness recalled disclosing their thoughts and feeling to members of their support network, whereas those low in hardiness reported having no emotional outlet.
Contextual knowledge and understanding	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Trainor et al., (2020), Wadey et al., (2011, 2019)	Athletes were motivated to seek answers regarding their injury from knowledgeable others, textbooks, journals or reputable internet sites...collectively these sources enabled athletes to understand their injury and journey to rehabilitation better
Values, beliefs and attitudes	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Salim & Wadey (2018), Trainor et al., (2020), Wadey et al., (2013)	Athletes high in hardiness believed that disclosure was beneficial, and athletes low in hardiness believed that talking to others about their emotions would result in them being negatively evaluated.
Time	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Trainor et al., (2020), Wadey et al., (2011, 2019)	All participants reported an increase in free time available to them from not training or competing. which helped mobilise the factors and mechanisms associated with SIRG.
<b>Meso: Social support</b>		
Facilitative	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Tracey, (2011), Trainor et al., (2020), Wadey et al., (2011)	Social support met their needs – the types of support provided included listening support, emotional support and emotional challenge. Athletes who had a supportive environment that aligned with their personal beliefs and psychological needs reported that their support exchanges led to positive reframing, heightened positive effect, and invested increased time and effort in resources.
Debilitative	Salim et al., (2016), Trainor et al., (2020)	The quality of social support was contingent on understanding and ability to relate, resulting in participants rejecting social support from those who did not understand. “Nobody said anything supportive, they just made things worse because they have no understanding of what sport means to

<b>CORPOREAL GROWTH</b>	<b>Macro-Level Factors</b>		
	Physical Resources	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016).	me. How could they understand they don't even play sport."
	Cultural Norms	Salim et al., (2016), Trainor et al., (2020), Wadey et al., (2019)	Physical resources refer to a variety of environmentally based resources including transport, internet, TV, medical care and the availability and accessibility to a gymnasium and specific rehabilitation – these resources helped rationalise strain responses, instil and heighten positive emotions, and promote facilitative responses.
	Cultural scripts	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Udry et al., (1997), Wadey et al., (2019)	Through dominant sports messages and experiences, athletes learned that they were expected by teammates, coaches and supporters to push through pain and injury and win at all costs, which is consistent with the high-performance narrative. Participants not only viewed injury as an inherent part of sport, they also viewed injury as a weakness
	Role models	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Wadey et al., (2019)	Cultural scripts refer to the narratives embedded in the athlete's sports culture that reflect triumph over adversity – the participants knowingly embodied these stories and drew upon them to identity and act upon the opportunities as well as induce effect and facilitate adaptative responses.
	Greater body awareness/body self-relationship	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Salim and Wadey (2018), Udry et al., (1997)	It is using other people's stories to normalize their experience and realise it's not the end of the world.
	Greater understanding of injury and health-related information	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Salim & Wadey, (2018), Trainor et al., (2020), Udry et al., (1997), Wadey et al., (2011, 2013),	They learn about what the body can do and what the body can't do.
	Greater body self-relationship	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim & Wadey (2018)	They have a greater knowledge of their body and how to stop injuries from happening.
	No longer taking physical health for granted	Salim & Wadey (2018), Trainor et al., (2020), Wadey et al., (2013)	Improved body self-relationship (i.e., listening, understanding and being more compassionate towards one's body).
			I think the injury was a wake-up call for them. They are more aware that injuries can happen. They've learnt that they are not indestructible.

## ATHLETIC GROWTH

Engagement in health-related behaviours	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Salim & Wadey, (2018), Wadey et al., (2011, 2013, 2019)	Devoting more time to injury prevention strategies and engaging less in risk-taking behaviour.
Improved strength and conditioning and flexibility	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Wadey et al., (2011, 2013)	I definitely became physically stronger and have had less niggles since coming back.
Improved fitness	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Wadey et al., (2011)	The obvious benefit is that they come back fitter and generally stronger, they were able to do a lot more fitness when injured so they come back physically fitter.
More or less physical strength	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Udry et al., (1997), Wadey et al., (2011, 2019)	Returning stronger than ever before.
New or renewed appreciation of sport	Salim et al., (2016), Trainor et al., (2020), Udry et al., (1997), Wadey et al., (2013, 2019)	I never understood how important skiing was to me until it was completely taken away from me.
Greater sport intelligence	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Udry et al., (1997) Wadey et al., (2011, 2013)	Coaches reported that athletes have a clearer understanding of sport-related demands and an appreciation of one's role within the team and/or that of their teammates (i.e., sporting intelligence).
Improved technical and tactical ability	Salim & Wadey, (2018), Udry et al., (1997), Wadey et al., (2011, 2013, 2019)	Skied technically better because of being more aware.
Becoming more multidimensional as a player	Wadey et al., (2011, 2013)	You've got to concentrate on other aspects when you're injured, so for instance shooting with a weaker hand, dribbling with a weaker hand, and the more you are able to dribble and shoot with both hands the more weapons you have as player.
Greater motivation and commitment to sport	Udry et al., (1997), Wadey et al., (2013)	Her motivation and drive are far better now than what I saw before the injury.
Improved mental toughness	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Trainor et al., (2020), Udry et al., (1997), Wadey et al., (2013),	Approximately 62% of skiers mentioned that being injured increased their mental toughness.

## PERSONAL GROWTH

Greater self-efficacy and self-confidence	Salim et al., (2016), Udry et al., (1997), Wadey et al., (2011, 2013)	The coaches also reported that the athletes had greater confidence in their sporting abilities from working on the other aspects of their physical and mental game during recovery, “when they come back they have greater belief in themselves and what they are capable of.
Optimising sport parameters	Udry et al., (1997), Wadey et al., (2013, 2019), Salim & Wadey (2018)	Greater pain threshold – some of them are so much stronger when they return...they dig deeper through the pain barrier during the tougher training sessions.
Improved sport performance	Salim et al., (2016), Wadey et al., (2013)	Improved sporting performance was reported to emanate from an improvement in their sporting qualities.
Strengthening of past self <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognizing one’s resilience.</li> <li>How one manages adversity</li> <li>Strengthening of current beliefs</li> </ul>	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim & Wadey (2018) Wadey et al., (2011, 2013, 2019)	In terms of beliefs, the coaches reported that the athletes developed and /or refined certain general beliefs following their recovery from injury. “I never thought it (injury) would change me, but I have learned so much about myself. I wouldn’t have called myself a resilient or strong person. I always thought I was weak. But . . . I overcame my injury. So, I must be stronger than I thought.
New self <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved ability to manage stress</li> <li>Better able to manage emotions</li> <li>Gain perspective</li> <li>New appreciation or outlook on life</li> <li>New direction/sense of purpose</li> </ul>	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Trainor et al., (2020) Udry et al., (1997), Wadey et al., (2011, 2013, 2019)	They are now able to put things in perspective they have been to hell and back what’s the worst thing that can happen now?
Personal qualities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased resilience</li> <li>More authentic</li> <li>Greater patience</li> <li>More or less independent</li> <li>More or less selfish</li> <li>More mature</li> </ul>	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim & Wadey (2018), Trainor et al., (2020), Tracey, (2011), Udry et al., (1997), Wadey et al., (2011, 2019)	Some athletes mentioned that they felt their injury contributed in a positive way to their personality development – I became more mature and learned patience.

<b>SOCIAL GROWTH</b>	Greater awareness of social network	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim & Wadey, (2018, 2019), Tracey, (2011), Wadey et al., (2011),	Participants reported a raised awareness of their social circle. “It’s during the hard times that you see people’s true colours.” It was not just about who showed up when the chips were down, but also who didn’t.
	Greater appreciation of social network	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Salim & Wadey, (2018, 2019), Tracey, (2011)	Before my injury I had an awful relationship with my mum, my mum helped me with so much when I was injured, and I realised how good she was to me during my worst time, I appreciate her far more now and it has brought us so much closer together.
	Strengthening of social network	Roy-Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016) Salim & Wadey, (2019), Wadey et al., (2011, 2013)	I think one of the main benefits is a strengthening of their social links, if there’s a strong social network then that tends to get stronger.
	Detaching from negative relationships	Roy-Davis et al., (2017)	Participants also reported detachment or a weakening of negative relationships.
	Understanding reciprocal relationships	Roy-Davis et al., (2017) Salim & Wadey (2018, 2019)	Realizing how much they did for me. I felt I wanted to do something in return.
	Changing relationship	Salim & Wadey (2019), Wadey et al., (2011, 2013)	When you go through a traumatic experience, relationships can form and strengthen so to speak, the longer you spend with anybody the more you learn about them, and you become more of a personal friend than a coach.
	Greater empathy for injured athletes	Salim et al., (2016), Salim & Wadey (2019), Trainor et al., (2020), Wadey et al., (2011, 2013, 2019)	It really opened my eyes a lot. After I was hurt, I tried to be sure to write those girls (injured teammates) letters and faxes and whatever to be sure that they know I am thinking about them and can’t wait for them to get better and come back.
	Pro-social urges, helping others in need	Roy Davis et al., (2017), Salim et al., (2016), Salim & Wadey (2019), Wadey et al., (2011)	These acts lead to the participants feeling good about their relationships which created further prosocial urges and uplifting experiences during their rehabilitation (e.g., giving and receiving positive comments).

### 3.2.6 Meta-Method Analysis

The meta-method analysis involved a critical appraisal of the research design, methods, and methodologies of primary research reports and a reflection on how they



have shaped research findings and ultimately our understanding of SIRC. The first phase of the meta-method analysis involved an appraisal of the included papers which was guided by a subset of questions concerning methodological coherence, the role of the researcher, and ethical considerations. These questions were formulated based on meta-study methodology (Paterson et al., 2001) and recent debates in the literature concerning the rigour and quality of qualitative data (Majid & Vanstone, 2018; Poucher et al., 2020). The second phase of the meta-method section involved establishing the methodological characteristics of each of the primary research reports. These details were then documented (see Table 1) allowing for the identification of the similarities and differences in characteristics across studies, potential gaps in methodological designs, and avenues for future research.

### **3.2.7 Meta-Data Analysis**

Meta data-analysis concerns the examination of findings from primary research reports to identify common themes within the literature (Paterson et al., 2001). The “findings” or “text” analysed in this meta-study refers to my interpretations of the data in addition to the participants quotations. Adopting a meta-study methodology allowed for a re-interpretation of the primary report data to create novel understandings of SIRC and how it is constructed. To conduct the meta-data analysis, a reflexive thematic synthesis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019), was used. This process involved initially immersing myself in the data by reading the findings from each manuscript several times. Initial codes were then created and then combined to form overarching themes. An effort to maintain “meaning-in context” (Paterson et al., 2001, p. 120) and remain transparent (Braun & Clarke, 2019) was preserved by documenting the long-list of themes in a table with accompanying quotations (see Table 3) to capture the data-driven descriptive themes before re-classifying them into

higher-level themes. Themes were then collapsed, refined, and named to create the final themes which aimed to provide interpretative stories about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Throughout these ‘steps’ of analysis, my supervisors acted as critical friends to enhance the methodological rigour of the data analysis process (Smith & McGannon, 2018). This involved presenting my interpretations of the data to them regularly, as well as written summaries of the findings for evaluation. My supervisors helped shape the themes by providing alternative interpretations and explanations of the data in and of themselves as well as in relation to the broader growth and sport injury literature available. The production of the final report involved ensuring the themes presented captured the most meaningful aspects of the data and provided an overall rich, nuanced, and compelling representation of SIRG.

### **3.2.8 Meta-Theory Analysis**

A meta-theory analysis refers to a critical exploration of the theoretical underpinnings or structures upon which research in a field of study is founded (Paterson et al., 2001). The purpose of the meta-theory section is to analyse the contribution theory has made to a body of research. This analysis enables existing theory to be critically interpreted, and assessed, allowing for new theoretical understandings to emerge as was established in the current meta-synthesis (Paterson et al., 2001). The initial stages of the meta-theory analysis involved reading the primary research reports several times to identify overt conceptual and theoretical underpinnings which were then documented (see Table 1). This process revealed that studies were either atheoretical or informed by the integrated model of response to sport injury (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998), with more recent studies being underpinned by the T-SIRG (Roy-Davis et al., 2017). The primary focus of the meta-theory section,

therefore, was in assessing the strengths and limitations of these frameworks in examining SIRG whilst, furthermore, determining how insights generated from these theories could be integrated to provide a more unified theoretical understanding of the phenomenon.

### **3.2.9 Meta-Synthesis**

The final stage of the meta-study involved the meta-synthesis which aimed to integrate the ideas that have been deconstructed in the three analytic processes to create a new interpretation of the phenomenon that accounts for the methods, data, and theory of the primary research reports (Paterson et al., 2001). The purpose of this meta-synthesis was to produce a model that aimed to provide a holistic representation of a collective body of research in addition to offering a platform to extend what is currently known about SIRG. To move beyond the “long-list” of themes created (see Table 3) and given the psycho-social-cultural nature of the findings identified, the findings were mapped onto a social-ecological model (Wadey et al., 2018), which formed a representative framework that helped organise the findings into a meaningful synthesis. The steps of a meta-synthesis involved a “dynamic and iterative process of thinking, interpreting, creating, theorising and reflecting” (Paterson et al., 2001, p. 112). The steps of the meta-synthesis were conducted by me in regular discussions with my supervisory team.

## **3.3 Results**

### **3.3.1 Meta-Method**

#### ***3.3.1.1 Methodological Coherence***

In assessing for methodological coherence of the 10 included studies, five studies were deemed to be methodically coherent (Roy-Davis et al., 2017; Salim et al., 2016; Trainor et al., 2020; Wadey et al., 2013, 2019). Each of the five studies

contained information about the researchers' philosophical positioning from the outset of the study and was transparent as to how their adopted paradigm influenced the nature of their study from its conception (e.g., research question) to outcome (e.g., knowledge produced by the research designs and decisions made). Sufficient detail and justification were provided regarding the research processes used (i.e., sampling procedure, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness techniques), all of which were congruent with the authors' underlying philosophical position. The research design was appropriate for exploring the purpose of the study (e.g., interviews to explore subjects in greater depth). The procedures used were also consistent with the methods or methodology employed (e.g., semi-structured interviews included details of interview guides and probes).

Two studies (Salim & Wadey, 2018, 2019) aligned the purpose of their study with their methodological design and provided sufficient detail and justification for the research processes used (i.e., data collection, sampling, analysis, trustworthiness techniques). However, they did not state their underlying paradigmatic position. From the meta-method analysis, I identified these studies as operating from a critical realism/modified dualism perspective due to the methodology (i.e., mixed methods) and methods employed (i.e., interview questions informed by quantitative findings). Once the paradigmatic position was identified, it was evident that these studies were consistent in aligning their research procedures with their underlying philosophical beliefs. However, consistent with other researchers in the field (Weed, 2006), I recommend that researchers are explicit regarding their paradigmatic position from the outset of their study to allow their work to be judged accordingly. Stating this position from the outset is fundamental in enabling the reader to understand the nature of how the knowledge was created.

Two further studies (Udry et al., 1997; Wadey et al., 2011), left their paradigmatic position unarticulated. Although there was adequate information regarding the research processes (i.e., data collection, sampling, analysis, trustworthiness techniques), there was limited justification as to why certain methods were chosen or how certain research decisions (e.g., trustworthiness techniques used) shaped the knowledge production process. In one study (Tracey, 2011) there was insufficient detail provided to evaluate the study. No information regarding philosophical positioning was provided, minimal attention was attributed to the research processes used (i.e., data collection, sampling, analysis, trustworthiness techniques), and no techniques were employed to enhance the rigour of the research. Although central tenets from grounded theory were reported as part of the analytical procedure, it was unclear how grounded theory was used to frame and inform the study. Furthermore, according to Weed (2009), grounded theory is not a “pick and mix” approach (p. 417); it is a research methodology.

### ***3.3.1.2 Role of the Researcher & Relational Ethics***

The role of the researcher and the relationship between the researcher and the participants received minimal, if any, attention across nine studies included in this review (for a notable exception see Trainor et al., 2020). Although word limitations can often force researchers to privilege findings over methodological issues (Culver et al., 2012), the personal subjectivity and experience of the researcher have implications for the research process and ultimately influences the findings produced (Culver et al., 2012; Williams et al., 2014). Being cognizant of the role of the researcher also enables readers to determine the relationship between the researcher and the participant, which raises important considerations in terms of relational ethics and power dynamics (Culver et al., 2012).

### **3.3.1.3 Sample Method and Characteristics**

All studies used purposeful sampling to recruit their participants, which is advocated in qualitative research to ensure that information-rich participants are selected (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Three studies focused on a homogenous group of athletes (Trainor et al., 2020; Udry et al., 1997; Wadey et al., 2011), whilst the remaining seven studies had heterogeneous samples with sports ranging from individual to team, recreational to elite levels of competition and varying degrees of severity of injury. Not all studies included athletes in their sample. Wadey et al. (2013, 2019) examined coaches and sport psychologists respectively, whilst Salim and Wadey (2019) examined both athletes and their significant others (e.g., siblings, parents, physiotherapists, partners). Eight studies included a sample from the United Kingdom, whilst two studies recruited their participants from Canada. Athletes' injury experiences ranged from acute (less than 4 weeks), moderate, to season-ending (Udry et al. 1997), and severely injured athletes (Trainor et al., 2020)

### **3.3.1.4 Data Collection & Analysis**

All 10 studies used semi-structured interviews as their sole method of qualitative data collection. Two studies (Roy-Davis et al., 2017; Tracey, 2011) used multiple interviews, whilst other studies adopted a one-off interview approach. In terms of analysis, the studies employed various methods including content analysis (Udry et al., 1997; Wadey et al., 2011, 2013), thematic analysis (Salim & Wadey, 2018, 2019; Trainor et al., 2020; Wadey et al., 2019), and composite sequence analysis (Salim et al., 2016).

### **3.3.2 Meta-Data Analysis**

Seven themes were identified. The first three themes relate to the processes of SIRG (i.e., *pre-injury factors*, *initial meaning of injury*, *process of SIRG*). The

final four themes relate to the dimensions of SIRG (i.e., *corporeal growth, athletic growth, personal growth, social growth*).

### **3.3.2.1 Process Themes**

#### **3.3.2.1.1 Pre-Injury Factors.**

Pre-injury factors to injury included personality, prior experience with adversity, perceived social support, coping styles, athletic identity, beliefs, values, and attitudes as well as athletes' short and long-term sporting goals. These pre-injury factors were reported to influence both an athlete's initial meaning of injury, pathways to and the process of SIRG. For example, certain personality traits (e.g., hardiness, confidence, resilience, creativity, extraversion, openness to experience) were reported to influence an athlete's ability to engage with the processes of SIRG (Roy-Davis et al., 2017; Salim et al., 2016). Athletes with prior experience with adversity were also reported to be better equipped to regulate the stressful nature of injury (Roy-Davis et al., 2017; Tracey, 2011). This enhanced capacity was described to be due to athletes developing and refining their coping style from previous adversities (Tracey, 2011) and possessing an in-house knowledge that they had the resources and capabilities to deal with their current situation (Roy-Davis et al., 2017). For example, one athlete reported, "I decided I wasn't going to let the injury get me down . . . I've come through some of the hardest things you can deal with, so an injury it's nothing really . . . I knew I would be able to cope with it" (Roy-Davis et al., 2017, p. 44).

#### **3.3.2.1.2 Initial Meaning of Injury.**

Athletes' initial meaning of injury was predominately described as a constraining experience that negatively impacted themselves and those around them (Roy-Davis et al., 2017; Trainor et al., 2020; Udry et al., 1997; Wadey et al., 2019). This initial meaning of injury was personally, socially, and culturally constructed,

influenced by pre-injury and post-injury factors operating at a micro (e.g., timing, severity, nature of the injury), meso (e.g., conversations with the medical team, coach, teammates) and macro (e.g., physical environment, cultural narratives, sports culture) levels (Roy-Davis et al., 2017; Salim et al., 2016; Trainor et al., 2020; Wadey et al., 2011, 2019). At an intrapersonal level, injury was reported to threaten an athlete's short and long-term goals, values, beliefs, and attitudes, resulting in negative cognitions, rumination, and predominately negative emotional responses (Roy-Davis et al., 2017; Salim et al., 2016; Trainor et al., 2020; Udry et al., 1997). These intrapersonal responses, however, were shaped and framed by interpersonal and cultural factors, including an athlete's internalisation of dominant cultural norms, such as injury being viewed as a sign of weakness (Salim et al., 2016; Trainor et al., 2020; Wadey et al., 2019). For example, one study (Trainor et al., 2020) highlighted how teammates and coaches encouraged athletes to 'play through pain' and 'win at all costs', espousing values that are consistent with the dominant performance narrative within elite sport (Douglas and Carless, 2006, 2009; Trainor et al., 2020). Therefore, when injury compromised an athlete's capacity to conform to this cultural script, it led to athletes perceiving their injury experiences as one that rendered them "emotional and broken. . .worthless, weak, and useless" (Trainor et al., 2020, p. 4). Moreover, Wadey et al., (2019) highlighted how negative experiences of injury were unwelcome within athlete's socio-cultural climate, creating limited dialogical opportunities for athletes to share their injury stories with others. As a result of this hostile socio-cultural climate, athletes were indicated to either suppress their emotional experiences, creating internal tensions as they engaged in display tactics (e.g., presenting an image of positive coping), and/or feelings of isolation as they began to disengage from their peer group (Salim et al., 2016; Trainor et al., 2020; Wadey et al., 2019). Alternatively,



one study highlighted how athletes described experiencing positive emotions (e.g., relief) in the early aftermath of injury, as injury provided them with an opportunity to break free from dominant cultural messages of ‘playing through pain’ and allowed them to prioritise their mental and physical well-being (Trainor et al., 2020).

Finally, athletes initial meaning of injury was characterised by periods of chaos, confusion, feelings of loss and isolation. For example, athletes across studies reported experiencing a loss of purpose, identity, sense of self, opportunity, and money. These feelings of loss were also illustrated to be shaped by dominant socio-cultural scripts. For example, athletes were indicated to construct their sense of self and identity exclusively around their sport, which is reflective of the dominant performance narrative which promotes the idea that ‘sport is life and life is sport’ (Douglas & Carless, 2006; Trainor et al., 2020). Consistent with this single-minded dedication, injury was indicated to evoke an athletic identity crisis for athletes, as they were no longer able to conform to this singular way of being, exemplified in the following athlete’s remark (Trainor et al., 2020, p.4):

I felt like I had no purpose when I was injured, I just was like well I’m not playing so I shouldn’t be here, I don’t really want to see my friends cause that’s all we’re going to talk about, and I just don’t even know where to go from here. Cause if I’m not playing, what am I doing, as much as it’s great to have that purpose it’s like I almost put too much of my whole self-purpose on that, so it was like when I was injured, it was like wow I actually don’t have any purpose.

Athletes’ feelings of loss, chaos, and confusion were further illustrated to be shaped and framed by the dominant investment logic within sport, which indicates that athletes will receive a return on their investment in training and hard work (Trainor et al., 2020). However, as athletes’ injury experiences failed to align with this investment

logic, it created tensions, resulting in feelings of anger, frustration, and confusion, as athletes reflected and ruminated upon the time lost and missed opportunities created by their injury experiences. For example, one athlete reported, “this is it, I will never swim again; everything I have ever worked for has come to an end. Life is so unfair; I don’t deserve this. What am I meant to do now?” (Salim et al., 2016, p. 160).

Overall, athletes' initial meaning of injury was laden with negative connotations. Nevertheless, the resultant ongoing strain of injury was reported to act as the catalyst for their growth-related experiences (Roy-Davis et al., 2017). For example, the ongoing strain throughout rehabilitation acted as a prompt for athletes and others in their social environment to mobilise and re-mobilise their resources to engage with the processes related to SIRG (Roy-Davis et al., 2017). While the negative connotations associated with injury appeared to be a pre-requisite for athletes to engage in further meaning-making processes related to SIRG, negative experiences of injury do not, in and of themselves, promote a SIRG trajectory (e.g., Udry et al., 1997; Salim et al., 2016).

#### **3.3.2.1.3 Meaning-Making Process of SIRG.**

A meaning-making process of SIRG was identified, which comprised four phases (i.e., making sense of the injury experience, reframing the injury experience, identifying possible benefits, engaging in meaningful action). This meaning-making process involved athletes navigating through their inner world of thoughts and feelings and their outer social and cultural worlds, and was shaped and framed by micro (i.e., self-reflection, self-disclosure, time, contextual knowledge and understanding, beliefs, values, and attitudes), meso (i.e., social support), and macro (i.e., physical resources, cultural narratives, cultural norms, role models) level factors.

To begin, athletes tried to make sense of their injury experiences by understanding what they were thinking and why they were thinking and feeling a certain way (Roy-Davis et al., 2017). This process was largely influenced by the opportunities available to athletes to share their injury story with others. Across studies, it was indicated that athletes needed an emotional outlet to disclose their thoughts and feelings around injury (Salim et al., 2016; Salim & Wadey, 2018; Trainor et al., 2020; Wadey et al., 2011, 2019). The type of support offered to athletes was also a pertinent consideration, as athletes reported wanting both tangible and emotional support (Salim et al., 2016), as well as support from others who they felt, could understand, and relate to their situation (Trainor et al., 2020). Athletes also described needing to be situated within a safe and supportive environment (Salim et al., 2016; Wadey et al., 2019), in order to disclose their injury experiences to others. For example, Salim et al. (2016) described how an athlete's cultural climate reinforced their personal beliefs regarding disclosure and subsequent support exchanges by either promoting the idea that "it's good to talk" or creating the conditions whereby disclosing injury concerns would be viewed as a burden to others (p.161). To this end, the sport psychologists in the study by Wadey et al. (2019) noted, how athletes often needed to be permitted to both share their injury experiences and express a sense of vulnerability within interpersonal encounters (Wadey et al., 2019). For example, the following sport psychologist reported, "Give them permission to say, yeah, this is affecting me, I feel dreadful. I've been crying by myself. It's giving them permission to show vulnerability. For the first time, you're asking them to acknowledge that vulnerability to others" (p.14).

Having the opportunity to share and discuss their injury experiences with others was indicated to enable athletes to regulate their negative emotions and

rationalise their thinking around injury. Athletes support network were further reported to facilitate this process by normalising athletes' injury experiences by either reminding them of how the situation could be worse (Salim et al., 2016), or sharing stories of other injured athletes including the 'the good, the bad, and the ugly' of sport injury (Wadey et al., 2019). Once athletes began to accept their injury experiences, it was indicated that they could begin to move forward (Trainor et al., 2020; Wadey et al., 2019). As part of the meaning-making process, athletes began to reframe their injury meaning, shifting from viewing injury as a constraining experience to a challenge to overcome (Roy-Davis et al., 2017). This reframing process was further facilitated by athletes' support network who posed challenging questions to them (e.g., what are you going to do with your time now?) or disclosed their own personal injury experiences to them (e.g., when I was in this situation, it helped to do this) (Roy-Davis et al., 2017; Salim et al., 2016). Moreover, athletes were indicated to draw upon cultural scripts, that is narratives embedded within their culture, that reflected triumph over adversity (Roy-Davis et al., 2017). These narratives stemmed from television programmes, sporting autobiographies, or stories shared within their sporting culture of former athletes' successful recovery outcomes. Roy-Davis et al., (2017, p. 21) described the plotline of these stories as being "success-against-all-the-odds and tales of struggle and ultimate glory". These cultural scripts were reported to enable athletes to reframe their injury experience, identify possible opportunities from injury, and promote positive affect (Roy-Davis et al., 2017).

In line with identifying possible opportunities from injury, athletes were further reported to begin to resist dominant cultural norms and expand their sense of self by focusing on areas outside of sport (Roy-Davis et al., 2017; Trainor et al., 2020; Wadey et al., 2019). This process was facilitated by others (e.g., Wadey et al., 2019)

or stemmed from the athlete's heightened self-awareness of how they had tied their happiness and sense of self to sport (Trainor et al., 2020), and/or a realisation that there are more important things in life than sport (Roy-Davis et al., 2017). Once athletes identified possible opportunities, they began to invest their free time in activities that were meaningful to them and promoted positive emotions (Trainor et al., 2020; Wadey et al., 2019). For example, sport psychologists in the study by Wadey et al. (2019), felt that the most effective approach to engaging athletes in meaningful action was to be led by the injured athletes' core values (e.g., sport, friends, family, gratitude, compassion, creativity, curiosity, kindness, compassion) and what made them feel good (e.g., inspired, interested, hopeful, optimistic, uplifted). For example, if an athlete's core values are sport and their body, possible actions included investing time working on other aspects of their game or event, their rehabilitation programme, or strength and conditioning. Alternatively, if an athlete's core values were friends and family, possible actions involved spending more time with them. Meaningful action was facilitated by engaging in self-reflection and drawing on the social and physical resources (e.g., gym equipment) in their environment (Salim et al., 2016; Wadey et al., 2019). Overall, by engaging in these meaning-making processes (i.e., making sense of injury experience, reframing injury experience, identifying possible benefits, engaging in meaningful action), it was indicated that athletes may experience SIRG across one or four possible dimensions (e.g., corporeal, personal, athletic, social).

Against the possibility of athletes experiencing SIRG, it is important to note that not all athletes were privy to a social-cultural environment that nurtured the underlying cognitive processes of SIRG. For example, it was described that some athletes felt disclosing to their support network would result in them being negatively evaluated (Salim et al., 2016; Trainor et al., 2020), which was influenced by the

circulating cultural norm (macro-level) that emotions equate to ‘weakness’ (Salim et al., 2016; Salim & Wadey, 2018; Trainor et al., 2020; Wadey et al., 2019). These athletes were described to internalise these macro-level cultural norms which at a micro-level resulted in them suppressing their emotions to “keep up with appearances” (Wadey et al., 2019, p. 12). Consequently, in the absence of a nurturing social-cultural environment, these athletes were unable to engage in the processes necessary to achieve SIRT. One athlete reported:

When you are playing sport you never want to show that you are weak. You learn that part of being a good sportsman is having mental toughness. If I start talking about my emotions and showing signs of weakness, then people will probably tackle me harder. Talking is just not something I do. You aren’t going to sit around with your friends and start talking about how you are feeling. You just have to get on with things. In all of the time I’ve been at the club, nobody has ever come up to me to talk about their emotions (Salim et al., 2016, p. 161).

### ***3.3.2.2 Dimensions of SIRT***

#### **3.3.2.2.1 Corporeal Growth.**

This dimension is characterized by developing a greater or new awareness, understanding, and relationship with one’s corporeal self (e.g., being more compassionate with one’s body), as well as behavior changes that reflect and prioritize physical health (e.g., injury prevention). To expand, it was identified that injured athletes became increasingly aware of how they took their physical health for granted prior to their injury and how their injury experience provided them with an opportunity to learn about “what the body can do and what the body can’t do” (Wadey et al., 2013, p. 132) as well as deepening or eliciting new sources of knowledge about the body (i.e., anatomy, physiology, physical injury risk factors, specific types of physical

injuries, physical rehabilitation, nutrition). This awareness and understanding enabled some injured athletes to cultivate a stronger or new connection with their physical self, which included listening and interpreting messages from one's body such as understanding how it responds to training. For example, one athlete reported, "I listen to my body now. I know how much pain is too much and when to stop so I don't get injured" (Roy-Davis et al., 2017, p. 47).

These inner changes (i.e., awareness, increased knowledge) occasionally led to behavioural changes that prioritized physical health. Examples include eating healthier, changing training regimes to incorporate injury prevention (e.g., warming up and cooling down properly, adding in or prioritizing physical recovery, training smarter rather than harder), and the cessation of risk-taking behaviours. Further, athletes reported investing an increased amount of time into their strength and conditioning resulting in them altering their fitness, flexibility, range of motion, muscular/body control, speed, and physical strength (increase or decrease) to resist future (re)injury (Roy-Davis et al., 2017; Wadey et al., 2011, 2013, 2019). One athlete reported, "I definitely became physically stronger because of my injury, and I have had less niggles since returning back" (Salim et al., 2016, p. 124).

#### **3.3.2.2.2 Athletic Growth.**

This dimension is sport-specific and performance-oriented. It encompasses a renewed or new appreciation and outlook on sport, expanding one's sporting intelligence, refining or developing new athletic abilities and qualities (i.e., tactical, technical, psychological), and, for some, ultimately improving sport performance outcomes. Regarding athletes' relationships with their sport, it was identified that they had returned to sport with a deeper or new sense of purpose and meaning for their sport and a greater appreciation of prior sporting accomplishments (Udry et al., 1997;

Wadey et al., 2013). For example, one athlete reported, “People have always said to me that ‘you never know what you have until you lose it.’ But I never understood how important skiing was to me until it was completely taken away from me” (Udry et al., 1997, p. 240). As well as a change in one’s relationship with sport, evidence also supported injured athletes returning with a heightened sporting intelligence. To expand, athletes reported refining or developing a new-found knowledge of their sport from observing teammates or other performers playing (e.g., improved game awareness, increased knowledge of positional play, and role clarity). One coach reported, “I’ve always tried to encourage players to come back to training if they’re not partaking themselves . . . to keep them involved in the game. And when they come back when they are fit, they find they are technically more aware and they see the game from a different perspective” (Wadey et al., 2013, p. 131).

Regarding improved athletic abilities, it was identified that athletes became more well-rounded, learned new athletic skills, and improved their technique (e.g., Udry et al., 1997; Wadey et al., 2011, 2013, 2019), which, for some, led to them exceeding preinjury sporting performance outcomes (Salim et al., 2016). One basketball player reported:

If I did score during a game [before the injury], it was through lay-ups and getting under the basket, and being aggressive. I couldn’t practice that when I was injured, and I soon came to the realization that my game was unidimensional. So, I started practicing my shooting, which opened up a new part of my game (Wadey et al., 2011, p.151).

As well as physical abilities, sport-specific psychological qualities (e.g., more focused in training and competition, enhanced sport motivation, increased sport efficacy/confidence) and skills (e.g., setting and working towards more realistic goals)



were strengthened. For example, one athlete reported, “the fire inside of me was burning hotter than ever because something was taken away from me that has never been taken away before” (Udry et al., 1997, p. 243). These enhanced psychological qualities for some athletes were also associated with optimizing training parameters (e.g., greater commitment to training and training intensity, heightened pain tolerance; Udry et al., 1997; Wadey et al., 2013).

### **3.3.2.2.3 Personal Growth.**

This dimension is characterized by a strengthened past self and/or a shift to a new current self. Indeed, the injury experience was reported to make athletes realise their own capabilities and strengthen pre-existing qualities. For example, one athlete reported a greater awareness of his resilience, “I never thought it (injury) would change me, but I have learned so much about myself. I wouldn’t have called myself a resilient or strong person. I always thought I was weak. But . . . I overcame my injury. So, I must be stronger than I thought” (Salim & Wadey, 2018, p. 13). Other examples include realising one’s selfish nature (Salim & Wadey, 2017), that actions have consequences (Salim & Wadey, 2018), and how one manages adversity (Salim & Wadey, 2018), as well as strengthening certain beliefs such as ‘hard work pays off’ (Wadey et al., 2013). Regarding a new current self, examples clustered around three subthemes: (a) one’s developed or newfound ability to manage stress (e.g., improved ability to cope, coped better with future adverse events, able to put things into perspective, learned to manage and express one’s emotions, (Roy-Davis et al., 2017; Trainor et al., 2020; Wadey et al., 2019); (b) a new appreciation, outlook, and/or direction in life (e.g., developing oneself outside of sport; value being in the here and now, stronger sense of purpose, appreciate the little things, (Trainor et al., 2020; Udry et al., 1997; Wadey et al., 2013). For example, one athlete reported, “I appreciate from

my injury and operations that my life doesn't need to be dominated by sport and the need to play sport. There are other more important things in life" (Roy-Davis et al., 2017, p. 46-47); and (c) personal qualities (e.g., increased resilience, more open, more caring, more mature, less selfish, less critical, greater patience, acceptance of vulnerabilities, more or less independent, more or less optimistic, more or less pessimistic, and more authentic; Roy-Davis et al., 2017; Salim & Wadey, 2018; Udry et al., 1997; Wadey et al., 2013).

#### **3.3.2.2.4 Social Growth.**

This theme is characterized by a greater awareness, appreciation, and strengthening of one's social support network in and outside of sport, as well as a deepened or new understanding of the importance of reciprocal relationships and associated behavioural outcomes (e.g., helping others in need, returning the favour, actively seeking out distressed teammates to offer support, better relating to others with injury, spending more time with friends and family; (Salim & Wadey, 2019; Trainor et al., 2020; Wadey et al., 2013). By awareness and appreciation, I mean heightened perceived social support. That is, athletes across various studies (Roy-Davis et al., 2017; Salim & Wadey, 2019; Tracey, 2011) reported how the injury gave them a greater awareness of and insight into their social network. For example, one athlete reported, "People always say you know who your real friends are when you are at your worst. And I think I was at my worse when I was injured; I was a nightmare to be around. But it was good to recall who stuck by me and who didn't" (Roy-Davis et al., 2017, p. 12). This greater awareness, together with other injury-related experiences, for some athletes, was perceived to result in them strengthening their social circle by forming closer relationships within their pre-existing network (Salim & Wadey, 2019), weakening (or detaching) from others (Roy-Davis et al., 2017), and

developing new relationships and expanding their social circle (e.g., physiotherapists, doctors, other injured athlete; Wadey et al., 2013). For example, a coach reported:

When you go through a traumatic experience, relationships can form and strengthen. . . Their relationship with me got closer because we weren't just dealing with swimming anymore; we were dealing with the injury. And the longer you spend with anybody the more you learn about them, and you become more of a friend than a coach (Wadey et al., 2013, p. 131).

### **3.3.2.3 No Growth**

Not all athletes experienced growth from injury (Udry et al., 1997; Salim et al., 2016). Udry et al., (1997) reported how “one skier was unable to identify any benefits associated with being injured” (p. 244). Salim et al. (2016) supported these findings, highlighting how athletes low in the personality trait of hardiness, who did not emotionally disclose, and felt inadequately supported by their social network, experienced no-growth-related outcomes from injury. Conversely, these athletes returned to sport too soon, re-injured themselves, or underperformed.

### **3.3.3 Meta-Theory**

An examination of the theoretical underpinnings revealed that prior to the introduction of the T-SIRG, studies were either atheoretical (Salim et al., 2016; Tracey, 2011; Udry et al., 1997) or used the integrated model of response to sport injury (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998; Wadey et al., 2011, 2013) to inform and/or interpret their findings. The integrated model of response to sport injury (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998) is one of the most comprehensive models of sports injury and provides detailed insights into how the myriad of pre-injury, personal, and situational factors will influence an athlete's appraisal of injury which in turn influences their emotional and behavioural response to injury. However, the applicability of the

integrated model is limited in that it is not a theory and does not explain *how* an athlete comes to experience SIRT (or not). Furthermore, the integrated model of response to sport injury (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998), is a model underpinned by cognitivism and proposes that the appraisal process determines injured athlete's thoughts, feelings and ultimately their recovery outcomes. However, researchers have recently started to question the underpinnings of appraisal-based models by reporting, for example, how the emotions arising from the appraisal process could also be both intersubjective and social (Tamminen & Bennett, 2017). Findings from the data analysis support these intersubjective views as they highlight how the initial meaning of injury and the meaning-making process is psycho-social-cultural, influenced by pre-injury factors, post-injury support exchanges, and the broader environment in which the athlete is situated.

The latter four studies in this review (Salim & Wadey 2018, 2019; Trainor et al., 2020; Wadey et al., 2019), are informed by the T-SIRT (Roy-Davis et al., 2017), which offers a theoretical explanation of the mechanisms and factors underlying SIRT, grounded in the experiences of injured athletes. These four studies have provided insights into the applicability of the T-SIRT by either supporting (Salim & Wadey, 2018, 2019), challenging, or extending (Wadey et al., 2019), its underlying assumptions. Salim and Wadey (2018, 2019) evidenced the T-SIRT by supporting the internal resource of personality and the proposed mechanisms of positive emotions and facilitative responses respectively. Trainor et al. (2020) aligned with the internal mechanisms leading to SIRT, however, their findings challenged the T-SIRT by stating how facilitative responses promoted positive emotions instead of positive emotions promoting facilitative responses. Wadey et al. (2019), also challenged and extended the T-SIRT by highlighting how athletes accept rather than control their

thinking (i.e., meta-cognitions), use their core values in addition to positive emotions to facilitate meaningful action, and that the strain of injury co-occurs even after SIRG is experienced.

While the T-SIRG (Roy-Davis et al., 2017) has made important contributions to our understanding of SIRG, this review identified some limitations. First, although the T-SIRG accounts for some pre-injury factors (personality, coping style, prior adversity, social support), these are listed as being either internal or external to the process of SIRG, omitting the temporal influence of these factors. By omitting this temporal dimension, it limits our perception of growth as it focuses exclusively on the processes by which athletes may experience growth but ignores what each athlete may *'bring with them'* to injury to enable them to construct SIRG (see Wadey, Evans et al., 2019). Second, the visual representation of the theory suggests that “injury” leads to athletes engaging with the process of SIRG. However, findings from the meta data-analysis revealed that it is not the injury per se, but rather the meaning of the injury to the athlete, that creates the conditions for them to experience SIRG (e.g., by prompting them to further reflect and engage in meaning-making). Ignoring the initial meaning that athletes ascribe to their injury experiences, also creates an incomplete understanding of the process of SIRG. For example, if we are unaware of how the athlete initially made sense of their injury experiences, and the psycho-social-cultural factors influencing that injury meaning, it occludes our capacity to fully understand how the conditions and circumstances may have changed for them to reframe their injury meaning around SIRG.

Third, the T-SIRG does not explain why some athletes do not experience growth from injury; this is a pertinent consideration as growth should not be considered an inevitable outcome of injury (Udry et al., 1997). Finally, although the

T-SIRG is progressive in detailing the myriad of specific factors an athlete can draw on to nurture growth, it ignores the relational nature of these factors and how they operate at various levels (micro, meso, macro). The findings identified from this review detail how the process of SIRG is psycho-social-cultural (e.g., it was influenced by athletes' support network and broader socio-cultural scripts). Accounting for this psycho-social-cultural construction of SIRG is important in enabling us to understand how the process of SIRG is not wholly determined by the athlete but also by the web of relationships and social milieu which surrounds them (Wadey, 2020).

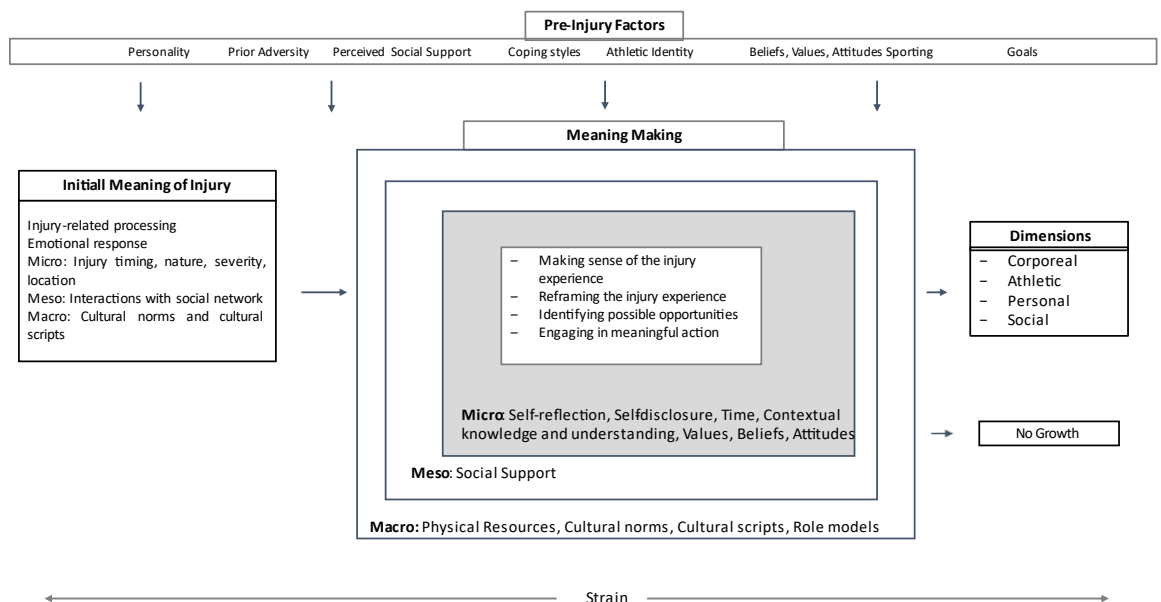
### **3.3.4 Meta-Synthesis**

Given the psycho-social-cultural nature of athletes SIRG experiences, as identified within this review, the meta-synthesis (Figure 5: Integrated Model of SIRG) was created by drawing upon the socio-ecological model (Wadey et al., 2018) to form an organising heuristic for the findings from the meta-data-analysis. The model is not stage-based; rather, given the findings that have been identified from this review, SIRG is a complex and dynamic process that can occur over an extended timeframe and can be influenced by various factors and mechanisms at different times throughout the injury and rehabilitation process. The model proposes that pre-injury factors, as well as post-injury psycho-social-cultural factors, that have been identified in this study, will influence athletes' initial meaning of injury, the ongoing strain, and the meaning-making processes. This model is concerned with the meaning an athlete attributes to an injury and the alteration of that meaning over time which is determined through a psycho-social-cultural process. To elaborate, athletes' initial meaning of injury and the meaning-making process are influenced not only by their cognitions but also by their intersubjective and social experiences, and the cultural contexts in which they arise. These personal, social, and cultural factors operate across multiple levels

(micro, meso, macro). This meaning-making process can culminate in athletes experiencing SIRG across some or all four dimensions (corporeal, athletic, personal, social growth) or not at all (no growth). Strain is ongoing throughout the entire process from initial meaning to meaning making and even after SIRG is experienced. The framework proposed offers a holistic overview of the SIRG experience and can be used by researchers and practitioners to better understand the temporality of growth and how it is influenced by factors operating at multiple levels (micro, meso, macro).

**Figure 5**

*Integrated Model of SIRG*



### 3.4 Discussion

This study aimed to conduct a meta-study of the SIRG literature. Integrating methods, findings, and theory from primary research reports into a synthesis allowed for the development of the Integrated Model of SIRG (Figure 5), whilst simultaneously critically appraising the theoretical underpinnings and methodological

designs of primary research. The meta-synthesis presented (Figure 5) extends the current literature on SIRT in several ways. First, it aims to provide a more holistic and temporal overview of the SIRT experience. It does this by accounting for the pre-injury factors that athletes bring with them, as well as the meanings that are construed in the early aftermath of injury (i.e., initial meaning), and the process of SIRT. Capturing this broader and temporal view of SIRT may have been occluded due to the cross-sectional exploration (see Meta-Method) of SIRT to date. However, by integrating these various sequential dimensions of SIRT (pre-injury, initial-meaning, meaning-making, dimensions) it captures its dynamic nature. Illustrating the dynamic nature of SIRT helps establish SIRT as a process, developed and subject to various influences over time, rather than an event (Day et al., 2020). This diachronic and comprehensive overview can serve as a framework for future researchers to explore elements of SIRT that remain unknown, including when it may occur, how it may evolve over time, or the maintenance or longevity of athletes' SIRT experiences (see Day et al., 2020).

Second, by drawing our attention to the temporal influence of pre-injury factors on SIRT, it helps extend the literature by providing greater direction as to how best to nurture SIRT. This is because certain predisposing factors may predate an athlete's ability to employ the mechanisms to stimulate SIRT. For example, the pre-injury factor of prior adversity has been observed to influence an athlete's ability to experience SIRT, as a recent prospective study highlighted how only those athletes experiencing moderate adversity (versus high or low adversity) prior to injury could experience SIRT (Wadey, Evans et al., 2019). Due to the absence of prospective and concurrent research designs included in this review, it was postulated by drawing from findings underpinned by the integrated model of response to sport injury (Wiese-



Bjornstal et al., 1998) that pre-injury factors would influence athletes' initial meaning and ongoing trajectories to SIRG. Future researchers should look towards more longitudinal designs with multiple data collection points both pre and post-injury over an extensive timeframe to explore this integrated and temporal perspective as proposed by the model further (for example, see Wadey, Evans et al., 2019).

The third novel contribution of the meta-synthesis to the SIRG literature is in providing insights into the origins of SIRG by establishing an athlete's initial meaning of injury. Indeed, findings from the meta-data analysis revealed how it is not the injury itself that stimulates the pathways to SIRG, but rather the meaning of the injury to the athlete. Establishing this initial meaning has important implications for future theoretical and empirical explorations of SIRG, as it helps provide a more complete understanding of the processes of SIRG. For example, across studies, it was indicated that injury was originally perceived as a negative and constraining experience, a meaning that was shaped and framed by personal (e.g., timing and severity of injury), social (e.g., support exchanges), and cultural (e.g., dominant cultural norms of injury being viewed as a sign of weakness) factors. By accounting for this initial meaning and its psycho-social-cultural construction, it allows us to more carefully and critically consider how the conditions and circumstances may have changed for athletes to be able to reframe their injury experiences in a more constructive light. Understanding the original meaning athletes attribute to their injury experience further extends the literature by helping to distinguish SIRG from other possible injury trajectories (e.g., no growth, resilience). For example, athletes may have initially perceived their injury as a challenge to overcome and the demands associated with it within their perceived control. Accordingly, these athletes are more likely to experience a resilience trajectory from injury (Brown et al., 2020). Understanding the initial meaning athletes

ascribe to injury is, therefore, a pertinent consideration to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the process of growth and to distinguish SIRG from other possible meanings of injury.

The fourth contribution arising from the meta-synthesis is in providing a more cohesive understanding of the experience of SIRG by outlining its four dimensions, named corporeal, athletic, personal, and social. The dimensions outlined in this study are reflective of those proposed by a recent study (Rubio et al., 2020) which highlighted personal strength, improved social life, health benefits, sports benefits, and social support and recognition as the domains of SIRG. These dimensions (corporeal, athletic, personal, and social) of SIRG coincide with the wider growth following adversity literature in highlighting that growth is a multi-dimensional rather than unidimensional experience (e.g., Wadey et al., 2020). Heeding recommendations from this literature, rather than assuming that the pathway to each of these dimensions is the same, developing substantive theories for each dimension may be a fruitful avenue for future research (Wadey & Everard, 2020).

Finally, the analysis revealed how the initial meaning of injury and the process of SIRG is psycho-social-cultural. Framing the factors that influence SIRG within a social-ecological model helps provide a more coherent, nuanced, and holistic understanding of how SIRG is developed and influenced across multiple levels (micro, meso, macro). This multi-level approach can be used by researchers to formulate research questions of SIRG across one or multiple layers (micro, meso, macro) and can accommodate diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives (Wadey et al., 2018). By operating within this socio-ecological model, I hope it will encourage a shift in the SIRG literature from intra to interdisciplinary research across academic disciplines (e.g., sport psychology, social psychology, physiology). An

interdisciplinary approach to SIRT could allow for an integration of knowledge and a more holistic way of viewing the phenomenon (Wadey et al., 2020). Indeed, by diversifying and drawing on the theories, concepts, and methods from different disciplines, future research could begin to understand SIRT as being more than a psychological phenomenon but a biological, relational, and cultural one too.

Towards an interdisciplinary agenda, there are multiple pathways through which future researchers could diversify their methodological designs to target the various levels of SIRT (micro, meso, macro). At a micro level, for example, researchers may look to expand our perception of SIRT beyond being mono-cognitive, by embracing more phenomenological processes that encompass embodiment within the entire research process (Hefferon & Kampman, 2020). At a meso level, extending the scope of study beyond the injured athlete and examining both athletes and their social network (i.e., physiotherapist, coaches, partners, siblings, parents), such as that demonstrated by Salim and Wadey (2019), could provide greater insights into how athletes' social networks can influence and be influenced by their injury experiences. Finally, from a macro-level perspective, to date all samples have been based in the UK with two studies (Tracey, 2011; Trainor et al., 2020) being undertaken in Canada. Given that the notion that growth following adversity has been conceptualised as a largely Westernised idea (see Kashyap & Hussain, 2017), exploring growth cross-culturally could provide novel insights into how culture impacts and is impacted by athletes experiencing growth. The use of methodologies such as narrative inquiry (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, 2009b) and ethnography (Krane & Baird, 2005), would also enable us to explore more of the cultural aspects of SIRT by providing insight into the context and environment in which the injury is experienced, and the socio-cultural conditions that can facilitate or impede athletes from experiencing SIRT. Certainly,

the interdisciplinary landscape available within which to explore this phenomenon is diverse and rich with multiple possibilities and opportunities for future researchers.

In sum, the findings presented contribute to an increased understanding of SIRG. The integrated model of SIRG (Figure 5) offers a more holistic and comprehensive overview of SIRG and extends our understanding of the phenomenon by capturing its temporality and multi-level influence. I have also critically assessed the contribution that methods and theory have made to our current understanding of SIRG and have provided a platform for future researchers to advance this scholarship through longitudinal research and more diverse and interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological designs. I hope that future researchers will continue to build upon the findings presented here, so that the adverse experience of injury can continue to be nurtured psychologically, socially, and culturally as an experience not only laden with limiting connotations but one which offers the potential for more constructive ways of being.

Against this backdrop, and in light of recent debates within the SIRG literature (Howells & Everard, 2020; Wadey et al., 2019), the inherent tensions of promoting this injury meaning requires some critical consideration. To expand, while SIRG is often promoted as a ‘positive’ meaning from injury, researchers have highlighted how this injury meaning can also constrain athletes by acting as a protective coping strategy that may prevent athletes from authentically developing from the experience of injury (see Howells & Fletcher, 2016; Howells & Everard, 2020). Moreover, it has been indicated that SIRG is now a pervasive cultural narrative creating undue pressure and tensions for athletes to conform to a cultural ideal that they must return from injury stronger. For example, a sport psychologist in the study conducted by Wadey et al. (2019, p.19) described:

We need to be careful of pushing this whole growth idea. It's something that we are seeing in the media now, in terms of you must overcome adversity. It can place real pressure on injured athletes. Not only do they have to deal with all the turmoil of being injured, but now they must come back stronger. And from my experience, that pressure really doesn't help. That pressure just adds to everything else that an injured athlete is going through.

The above findings highlight how promoting this injury meaning exclusively may be harmful to athletes by feeding into the cultural ideal that they 'must return from injury stronger'. This cultural ideal may create conflicts for athletes, as they feel the need to display signs of positive coping. Moreover, this pervasive notion that athletes can 'triumph in adversity', may preclude athletes from seeking help or expressing concerns about their injury experiences and can also stigmatise and marginalise athletes whose embodied experiences of injury fail to align with this cultural script. Consistent with these arguments, and for this PhD, I recognised that it is important to remain inclusive of the diverse ways of experiencing injury. In doing so, it could help expand the socio-cultural conditions for athletes to frame, interpret, and express their injury experiences to others. Moreover, it can help offer athletes greater capacity to make sense of their injury experiences by allowing them the freedom and opportunity to choose their own injury meaning in their own time. To this end, this PhD will now focus on the multiple meanings that athletes may derive from their injury experiences. Given the impact that cultural scripts and socio-cultural conditions can have on athletes' injury experiences, the remainder of this thesis will also more critically consider these socio-cultural contexts and influences.

**Chapter 4**  
**Storying Sports Injury Experiences of Elite Track Athletes: A Narrative Analysis**

#### 4.0 Abstract

Building upon the previous chapter, this chapter aims to explore the multiple meanings athletes may derive from their injury experiences by adopting a narrative inquiry approach. Aligned with narrative inquiry, this chapter aims to extend the literature by taking a psycho-social-cultural perspective and storying the injury experiences of elite track athletes to identify the socio-cultural narratives that structured their tales. Fifteen elite track athletes participated. Data collection spanned 18 months and involved two methods of collection: life-story interviews and timelining. A total of 42 interviews were collected. Interviews were analysed using a DNA (Frank, 2010), to explore not only *what* the athletes said (i.e., content) but *how* they said it (i.e., form), and the narrative and cultural resources they drew upon to construct their experiences. Six narrative typologies were identified: *Resilience*, *Merry-Go-Round*, *Longevity*, *Pendulum*, *Snowball*, and *More-to-Me*. Overall, this study extends the sport injury psychology evidence-base by highlighting how socio-cultural practices and processes influenced the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of athletes throughout the full spectrum of injury. Creating and sharing multiple narratives of injury can also act to expand the opportunities available to athletes to make sense of their injury experiences in diverse and meaningful ways.

## **4.1 Introduction**

Sports injuries have been identified as a regular occurrence in elite track and field athletes, with two out of three athletes sustaining at least one injury each year (Jacobsson et al., 2013). While research into the psychological experiences of injury for elite track athletes is limited, previous research within elite sport has highlighted how sports injuries can present significant psychosocial challenges for athletes (Gouttebarga et al., 2016, 2019; Rice et al., 2016; Roderick et al., 2000). For example, sports injuries have been indicated as one of the main triggers for athletes to develop a mental illness (Souter et al., 2018), they can compromise athletes' career and earning potential, and, in some instances, impose an involuntary retirement from sport (Rice et al., 2016; Ristolainen et al., 2012). Given these psychosocial challenges, researchers in the field of sport injury psychology have aimed to support the safety and welfare of athletes by studying the psychological factors and processes that describe and explain the occurrences and experiences of sports injuries (for a recent review, see Brewer, 2020). This voluminous body of research has led to a rigorous evidence base that has informed interventions to help prevent and support injured athletes' rehabilitation from injury (Brewer, 2020). While this evidence-base has made a major contribution to our understanding of sports injuries, a shortcoming of this field is that it remains an individual-focused and single, scientific discipline (Wadey, 2020). Despite repeated calls for sport injury psychology to evolve into an interdisciplinary discourse that forges links and reciprocity with other disciplines (e.g., sport sociology, sport medicine, sport communication, sport physiology, e.g., Brewer, 2020), this landscape remains uncharted.

Towards an interdisciplinary agenda, several researchers have recommended that sport injury psychology should strive for a more cultural and relational discourse



to provide more critical and nuanced accounts of sports injuries (e.g., Brock & Kleiber, 1994; Wadey, 2020; Wiese-Bjornstal, 2019). Researchers' interest in cultural and relational thought and practice up until now has been marginal, if not completely eschewed, in sport injury psychology. This shortcoming is surprising, especially given that it is recognised that, "Most aspects of sport, and therefore, sport injuries, are fundamentally as much social and cultural in nature as they are personal" (Wiese-Bjornstal, 2019, p. 18). One form of inquiry that has been recommended to enhance our understanding of how the broader socio-cultural landscape might shape injured athletes' psychological experiences of injury (Williams, 2020), and that has been used extensively in the wider sport psychology literature (Smith & Sparkes, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2008b, 2011; Sparkes & Smith, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2008), is *narrative inquiry* (Frank, 2010). Narrative inquiry posits that as humans we live storied lives and thus, to make sense of our experiences, we formulate and share stories (Douglas & Carless, 2006; Frank, 2010). Through a narrative lens, it is understood that although we might tell unique stories of our experiences, we are provided with insights into the socio-cultural contexts and influences, as we draw upon the narrative scripts available within our cultures to shape our storytelling (Frank, 2013, see chapter two). Thus, the stories that are 'out there' and embedded in the social and cultural worlds of athletes will act as narrative resources for them to shape their interpretation of an event (Williams, 2020). However, narratives not only reflect cultural and social influences, but they also generate insights into behaviours (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). Put another way, narratives are actors that can do things, on, for, in, and with people (Frank, 2010). They work *for* us by providing us with a map or a destination to follow and *on* us by teaching us what to pay attention to and how to respond to certain actions (Frank, 2010). Thus, accessing, knowing, and sharing narratives of injury within elite sport,

would be a fruitful tool in recasting and expanding our understanding of what frames and guides athletes' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours towards injury from a psycho-social-cultural perspective.

Drawing from the broader sociology and narrative inquiry literature, the work of Frank (2010, 2013) has been influential in theorising how individuals handle the unexpected event of illness, which has transferability with how athletes make sense of their injury experiences (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017; Williams, 2020). Frank (1995, 2013) identified three broad narrative typologies that underpin stories of illness, named restitution, chaos, and quest. Frank proposed that patients commonly follow the Western metanarrative of restitution which follows the plotline of "yesterday I was healthy, today I am ill and tomorrow I will be healthy again" (Frank, 2013, p. 77). This plotline promotes concrete hope of patients finding a cure for their illness and returning to their former healthy selves (Sparkes & Smith, 2005). However, not all illnesses are curable and if an individual faces a terminal illness, the concrete hope available within the restitution narrative is to no avail. Where misalignment occurs between an individual's life narrative and real-life experiences, narrative wreckage may ensue (Frank, 2013). The chaos narrative, in contrast, is where the storyteller envisages life never getting better. It is an anxiety-provoking anti-narrative that cannot be told, only lived. Finally, the quest narrative is where an individual accepts illness and seeks to gain something positive from the experience (Frank, 2013). Within a quest narrative, the individual comes to view illness as a journey or a challenge through which meaning will emerge (Frank, 2013). Within the context of sport psychology, these typologies informed Sparkes and Smith's (2003, 2005), and Smith and Sparkes, (2004, 2005) interpretations of the experiences of men who had suffered a SCI through sport. Sparkes and Smith (2003, 2005) and Smith and Sparkes (2004,

2005) provided rich, nuanced, and compelling insights into how the experience and meanings of living with an SCI were framed by these narrative typologies. Furthermore, they demonstrated how these typologies acted as “dynamios” in either enabling or constraining the type of life the participants could lead following an SCI (Sparkes & Smith, 2005, p. 87). However, these narratives were restricted to SCIs and hence their applicability to other sports injuries may be limited.

This study is original in that it aims to identify narrative typologies of sports injuries within elite track athletes. Adopting narrative inquiry will help to extend the sport injury psychology literature and build upon previous narrative research within elite sport (i.e., Brock & Kleiber, 1994; McGannon et al., 2021; Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017; Spencer, 2012), by providing contextualised insights into the broader socio-cultural injury narratives that circulate in elite sport cultures and explain how they shape and give meaning to injured athletes’ experiences. Furthermore, as recommended by Wiese-Bjornstal (2009), this study aims to explore athletes’ experiences of injury throughout their careers. In doing so, the aim is to shift the focus of sports injury beyond being viewed as an isolated incident occurring within a finite timeframe and account for the continuous nature of injuries and their cumulative impact on athletes’ well-being and sporting careers. By exploring experiences of injury in relation to athletes’ career history, narrative inquiry holds the potential to capture the diachronicity of injury experiences by unveiling their historical and developmental dimensions (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, 2009b).

Finally, this study aligns with recent calls for the need to story injury experiences within elite sport, to create and offer alternative and multiple narratives to injured athletes (Barker- Ruchti et al., 2019; Williams, 2020). Indeed, several narrative scholars have indicated that elite athletes have access to a limited pool of narrative

resources with which to make sense of their injury experiences (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2019; McGannon et al., 2021; Spencer, 2012; Tamminen et al., 2022). Echoing the work of Hydén (1997), Barker-Ruchti et al. (2019) illustrated how because injury has not been storied, it often gets swept up as being part of the broader ‘performance narrative’ (Douglas & Carless, 2006). The performance narrative is the dominant storyline within elite sport and represents a totalitarian view of ‘life is sport and sport is life’, whereby performance outcomes are prioritised, and pain, dedication, and sacrifice are accepted in the quest for success (Douglas & Carless, 2006). The integration of the injury experience into the performance narrative is dangerous, as it negates the experience of injury for the athlete by incorporating injury as an expected outcome for participation in elite sport (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2019). However, narrating the experience of injury within elite sport can help counter this normalization by ‘breathing meaning’ into the diverse ways of experiencing injury that may have been previously silenced or suppressed within elite sport settings.

## **4.2 Methods**

### **4.2.1 Philosophical Beliefs & Participant Selection**

This study and the remaining studies in this PhD thesis are underpinned by a relativist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology. That is, reality is believed to be multiple, socially constructed, and mind-dependent; the construction of knowledge is believed to be subjective and value-laden (Smith & Deemer, 2000). Informed by this philosophy, I acknowledge that my positioning as a white, middle-class, heterosexual, cisgender female, current elite athlete, and physiotherapist, with previous experiences of injury will have influenced how the data was co-constructed between myself and the participants, as well as the interpretations offered within this PhD thesis. Specifically, this chapter and PhD thesis is informed by the storied resource

perspective of narrative inquiry proposed by Smith and Sparkes (2008a), whereby selves and identities are viewed as being relational and derived from narratives that are both personal and social. In this sense, individuals are seen to have a degree of agency in constructing their personal stories but are constrained by the cultural repertoire of narratives available to them in a given socio-cultural context.

Following university ethical board approval, a criterion-based purposive sampling strategy was chosen (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The selection criteria were twofold: athletes had to be over 18 years of age and had to have competed at an elite level in the sport of athletics (i.e., World or Olympic Level; Swann et al., 2015). Elite athletes were chosen due to the specific recent call to study narratives of injury within elite sport (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2019). Elite track athletes were chosen because of the normalisation of injury embedded within the culture of this sport (Howe, 2004), alongside the limited insight into the experiences and meanings of injury for this cohort (see chapter two).

Fifteen elite track athletes were contacted via email and were presented with an outline of the research project. The sample comprised of nine female and six male athletes from different countries (i.e., United States, Australia, Netherlands, Ireland, United Kingdom) aged between 22-37 years ( $M = 28.3$ ,  $SD = 3.62$ ). To expand on previous narrative studies that focused on a homogenous sample of either career-ending (Brock & Kleiber, 1994), career-threatening (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017) or overuse injuries (Russell & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2015), this study aimed to examine athletes who had endured a wide range of sports injuries (e.g., acute, over-use, chronic, chronic recurring, career-ending) throughout their athletics career to enhance the scope of this study. Instead of providing a snapshot view of an injury episode (e.g., acute injuries versus overuse injuries), I wanted to provide a more representative

illustration of the wide range of injuries athletes may experience throughout their careers, which may explain how they relate to and impact one another over time. Thirteen out of 15 athletes were still competing in elite athletics at the onset of this study, while two athletes had retired from the sport. Three athletes retired from elite athletics throughout the course of this study. Each participant gave informed consent prior to participation. To protect participant confidentiality and anonymity, identifiable information was removed, and pseudonyms were used.

#### **4.2.2 Data Collection**

Data collection spanned 18 months and involved two methods of collection: interviews and timelining. First and in line with narrative inquiry, interviews were deemed to be the most appropriate method to story the participants' experiences of injury (Cavallerio et al., 2017). All participants were interviewed on at least two occasions, with 13 out of 15 participants interviewed for a third time. Two athletes did not complete the final interview due to their own time limitations. Initial interviews were predominately conducted face to face (13/15), with subsequent follow-up interviews being conducted in person or via mobile, telephone, or online interviewing, subject to COVID-19 restrictions.

The initial interview involved a short-life history interview (Plummer, 2001) where participants were invited to describe their athletics career and detail any sports injuries, they had experienced. This interview was unstructured and involved "giving up control and following participants down their trails" (Riessman, 2008, p. 24), allowing them to tell their own story in their own words. To promote storied data, certain probes were used (e.g., "Can you tell me a story about that?" "Can you describe how that happened?").

For the second interview, retrospective timelining (Kolar et al., 2015), was chosen to create a more structured approach and to facilitate conversation around key moments during the athletes' careers (e.g., career progression, key performances, injuries, adversities, turning points). Timelining has been demonstrated as a useful tool in capturing the temporal nature of participants' experiences and in further facilitating storied data (Smith & Sparkes, 2012). Here, having listened, transcribed, and reflected on the initial life story interviews, I plotted a rough chronological timeline that documented each athlete's key moments. This timeline was then discussed with participants and further co-constructed as participants added to or expanded on key events in the timeline. For in-person interviews, the timeline was visually present. For online and telephone interviews, the timeline was described and discussed aurally.

The final interview built upon the previous interviews and involved discussing my interpretations with the participants to facilitate further reflection and dialogue, to add to the richness of the overall dataset (Smith & McGannon, 2018). This final interview created another opportunity for a reflexive elaboration of the previous two interviews and an exploration of potential storylines, enabling me to further discuss, refine and re-define the preliminary findings (Smith & McGannon, 2018). For example, within these interviews, more contextual information was added to the resilience narrative, while the more-to-me narrative was further developed and expanded upon. Altogether I conducted a total of 42 interviews, with interviews lasting between 50 and 255 minutes.

As recommended in the literature, the use of multiple interviews over an extended timeframe enabled me to build a rapport with the participants evidenced by openness, emotion, and familiarity (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). This relationship was further strengthened by drawing on my own experiences of elite athletics and prior

injuries. While an ‘insider’ status is proposed to help to facilitate an open and trusting relationship with participants, having ‘shared experiences’ also creates its own unique challenges (Berger, 2015). These include the potential of imposing one’s own values, beliefs, or perceptions on the participants, or occluding certain information by taking similarities for granted (Berger, 2015). Having an ‘insider’ status can also affect the power dynamics between the participant and the researcher (Berger, 2015). Issues of power dynamics were illustrated within interviews, as in some cases, the participant’s knowledge of my own injury experiences created a dynamic of comparison (i.e., both upwards and downwards; see chapter five). In other cases, this knowledge was used by participants to deflect from their own injury experiences or to reinforce their own beliefs concerning injury and elite sport (e.g., “You know what it’s like”, “We’ve all run through pain, you’ve done the same”). Noting, reflecting, and discussing these challenges with my supervisory team after initial interviews, was pertinent in finding ways for me to overcome such challenges in follow-up interviews and in accounting for how my positioning assisted and hindered the co-construction of meanings (Finlay, 2002).

#### **4.2.3 Data Analysis**

The participants’ stories were analysed through the lens of a DNA. As Frank (2010) contends, DNA examines the type of story told, what is told in the story, how it is told, and what are the consequences of telling that story. The process of conducting a DNA does not involve following a prescriptive set of steps, instead, Frank (2010), describes DNA as a “movement of thought”, a heuristic guide and method of questioning to spur imagination (Frank, 2010, p72-73). This open-ended and flexible approach to analysis was adopted within this study, to help breathe new life into the experiences of injury within elite sport (Smith, 2016). Making sense of the data



through DNA was an iterative and cyclical process that began alongside data collection and continued throughout the writing-up stage. The analysis was conducted over two years and was shaped by regular discussions with my supervisors, who continued to act as critical friends in debating, challenging, and exploring alternative insights and interpretations arising from the data (Smith & McGannon, 2018). The first step involved transcribing the interviews verbatim, followed by a period of ‘indwelling’ which involved immersing myself in the data by reading and re-reading the qualitative dataset. The transcripts, timelines, and field notes were further marked up with conceptual comments, which involved first identifying stories. To identify the types of stories being told and narrative themes, it was important not to over code but rather “keep the story intact in order to preserve and examine the wealth of storied detail contained in it” (Smith, 2016, p.210). Stories were identified by exploring how “one thing happens in consequence of another” (Frank, 2010, p.25). For example, athletes embodying the snowball narrative told stories of how ignoring pain and injury in the short-term resulted in further pain and injury in the longer-term. Once the what’s of the story were identified, the analytical focus turned to *how* the story was constructed and what were the effects of telling the story. Understanding the *how*’s and *effects* of participant stories was considered in light of a set of dialogical questions (Frank, 2010). This process involved identifying resource questions (i.e., what narrative structures do participants draw on to shape their subjectivity), connection questions (i.e., whom does the story connect the storyteller to), identity questions (i.e., how does the story give participants a sense of who they are), function questions (i.e., how do the participants stories shape their actions), with a final consideration attributed to how participants were “holding their own” in the story (Frank, 2010, p. 77). Working with these questions involved moving back and forth between the

participants' stories and interpretations made in a cyclical and iterative manner and using these questions to orient and ground the analysis. Multiple draft writing was used as a form of analysis (Richardson, 2000). Once the analysis was concluded I structured the results around typologies of stories, defined as, “the most general storyline that can be recognized underlying the plot and tensions of particular stories” (Frank, 2013, p. 75). Building typologies enabled the identification of the types of narratives surrounding injury in elite athletics and the consequences of these narratives on athletes and their athletic careers. It is important to note however, that these final accounts offered do not ‘finalise’ the participants’ lives by offering the last word on who or what they may become (Frank, 2012). As Sparkes and Smith (2014) contend, “this means respecting in analysis that stories always, like human lives that are spun through them, have the capacity to change and that as long as they are alive, bodies telling stories have not yet spoken their last word” (p.132).

#### **4.2.4 Methodological Rigour**

Guided by a relativist position for judging the rigour of qualitative research (Sparkes & Smith, 2009), I invite readers to consider several quality indicators: credibility, sincerity, rigour, and generalizability. To enhance the credibility of the study, as Tracey (2010) recommends, I sought to use thick descriptions including detailed participants quotations, to provide enough concrete detail for readers to form their conclusions about the narratives formed. Credibility was further enhanced by engaging in member reflections, where I provided the participants with an overview of the preliminary narrative typologies identified. These typologies were then discussed, and any potential gaps or contradictions in the findings or complementary insights were explored and further debated (Smith & McGannon, 2018). In line with my overarching philosophy, any reflections the participants offered were not taken as

directly validating or refuting the findings of the study but rather served as an additional source of data and an opportunity for further collaboration and reflexive elaboration (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Overall, feedback from the participants helped refine the narratives presented by providing more nuanced and contextual insights, while participants reported resonating with the findings and found them to be reflective of athletes' injury experiences.

In order to achieve the goodness criteria of sincerity, as proposed by Tracey (2010), I engaged in self-reflexivity, where I used a reflexive journal to account for my positioning within the research and how it may have influenced the data collection and analysis. Interpretations of the data were also presented to my supervisors regularly who acted as critical friends in debating, challenging, and offering alternative perspectives (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). These strategies attended to the sincerity of the research by identifying and explicating the potential or actual effects of personal, contextual, and circumstantial aspects on the process and findings of the study (Finlay, 2002). The rigour of the study was attended to by using "sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex theoretical constructs" (Smith et al., 2014, p. 196), by engaging in prolonged data collection (i.e., multiple interviewing over 18 months), by selecting information-rich participants, and by providing a thorough description of the data collection and analysis process that is contextual to the current study (Tracey, 2010). Finally, this study sought to achieve the goodness criteria of generalizability, specifically naturalistic generalizability and transferability of the data by writing "accessibly and invitationally" through storytelling (Tracey, 2010, p.845) and by providing detailed descriptions of the participants accounts to allow readers to decipher what is similar and different to their own situations (Smith, 2018).

### 4.3 Results and Discussion

Following a DNA, six narrative typologies were identified: *Resilience Narrative*, *Merry-go-Round Narrative*, *Longevity Narrative*, *Pendulum Narrative*, *Snowball Narrative*, and *More-to-Me Narrative*.

#### 4.3.1 Resilience Narrative

The resilience narrative describes a maintenance in well-being and athletic trajectory despite injury setbacks. Athletes embodying the resilience narrative viewed injury as a physical problem to be “fixed” before returning to their pre-injury state of physical health and athletic performance. Aligned with this view athlete’s embodiment of the resilience narrative was consistent with a disciplined or restorable body, one that seeks to compensate for its contingencies by restoring predictability (Frank, 2013). The resilience narrative is also characteristic of the restitution narrative of health (Frank, 2013), and the exercise as restitution narrative (Papathomas et al., 2015a), both of which project concrete hope for recovery following illness or injury. While in the restitution, and the exercise as restitution, narrative individuals focus on finding a cure for their illness or injury either through medical science or exercise, respectively, in the resilience narrative, athletes focus on a context-specific form of “working hard” to return to their pre-injury state. This context-specific form of “working hard” involved the athletes seeking out appointments (e.g., scans), engaging in effortful rehabilitation to ‘fix’ the injury, as well as cross-training to account for any deficits in fitness. The resilience narrative of injury, therefore, reads as, “yesterday I was healthy, today I am injured, but through working hard, I will be healthy and perform again”.

Athletes whose stories resonated with the resilience narrative depicted injury as being “no big deal” or “part of the sport” (Hughes & Coakley 1991). Athletes’ well-

being and commitment to their sport were maintained by the internalisation of a predominant message involving “control the controllables”. Athletes saw no benefit in revisiting the mistakes of the past or worrying about the future, instead their main concern involved focusing on what it was they could do in the present moment to best direct their future. John reports:

It’s about making a plan and committing yourself to it. If you’re focused on that, then I don’t see what there is to be negative about. Even the injury I got before the (championships), I never thought badly. I was like hopefully it will be fine, if not, then it’s done and there’s nothing I can do. I can’t turn back the time to that training session (injury onset) and worrying about it won’t help, so why do that?

Athletes also articulated the idea that success in sport is measured by effort. This idea has been conceptualised as “effort stories” (Carless & Douglas, 2012, p. 391), which are reminiscent of the performance narrative (Douglas & Carless, 2006). However, in the effort stories, process is prioritised over outcome, which lends itself to a more controllable and sustainable narrative, as once athletes are ‘trying their best’, their sense of self is maintained. Amanda reports, “I try my best to make it better and if I think I’ve worked my hardest, then not many people would think I haven’t, so it’s not that I wouldn’t care, I just wouldn’t be down on myself”.

The final message athletes promoted was the idea that they could work harder whilst injured. This idea maintained their motivation and commitment, as athletes rationalised that their absence from training and any potential deficits in performance could be mitigated by accumulating gains in other ways (e.g., getting aerobically stronger through increased cross-training, getting physically stronger through investing more time into their athletic development). Getting fitter and stronger in

other ways, empowered athletes into believing that, when they returned to competition, they would maintain their performance trajectory. Furthermore, working hard is a valued commodity within elite athletics (Dohlsten et al., 2020), and hence it enabled the athletes to accrue social capital maintaining their sense of value, worth, and connectedness within this community.

Within the elite athletics culture, the resilience narrative appeared to be the ‘gold standard’ response to injury and athletes reported being indoctrinated into this narrative by either a coach, parents, and/or an institutional setting during the formative stages of their career. This indoctrination reflects the “social constitutive process of narrative interpellation” whereby individuals are “hailed” or “called upon” to acknowledge or act on a particular identity (Smith, 2013b, p.112). Amanda describes this type of interpellation within the following conversation:

Amanda: So, it started about 15, it was a lot of educational stuff, but I do remember it was like, if you are injured, you can train even harder because Maria had a lot of injuries and that’s a large part of it.

Interviewer: Okay, and was that Maria’s message that she passed onto you when you were injured?

Amanda: Yeah, yeah, that you could train harder . . . and I think I then developed a pride in working hard. Other athletes would come aqua jogging with me and would be like ‘oh my god you look like you’re going to die’ because they would be going for a little paddle and I would be doing, what I thought was normal, what Maria (former elite athlete) told us about how hard you had to aqua jog. I remember hearing about (other elite athletes) cross-training and being like, ‘yeah that sounds about right, that adds up to what I saw with Maria’, but then, a lot of my peers I didn’t really get why they would

be defeatist about injury . . . I guess it was probably a very formative influence with Maria because she was injured a lot, but she did tell us you will always have injuries, but you can work twice as hard when injured.

The example above highlights how the stories that interpellate an individual (“She told us you will always have injuries, but you can work twice as hard”) become that individual’s narrative habitus. A narrative habitus (Frank, 2010) refers to a disposition to recognise something as familiar (“I thought that adds up to what I’ve seen”) and simultaneously to find something else strange or obscure (“I didn’t really get why they would be defeatist about it”). As the resilience narrative was the story athletes were called upon to tell, by internalising this narrative while also rejecting any narrative involving “victimising” or “wallowing” about injury, they were offered a gateway into the elite athletics community, reaffirmed their sense of self when injured and maintained their sense of connection and acceptance within this ecosystem.

Although the resilience narrative of injury is often the accepted storyline and the one promulgated within elite cultures, the findings from this analysis highlighted how in certain circumstances, it may not always take care of athletes. For example, some athletes reported experiencing burnout because of excessive cross-training or reported how their “tunnel-vision focus” on “fixing” the injury and returning to sport prevented them from taking a broader perspective and addressing some of the wider issues relating to their injury (e.g., nutrition, fatigue). Indeed, the overt focus on restoration in this narrative is a dangerous story to live by as it precludes itself to only one foreseeable outcome (i.e., to return one’s body to its pre-injury state through working hard). Therefore, if athletes are unable to find a solution to fix the problem or if working hard no longer provides a narrative blueprint back to their pre-injury state, well-being, and the motivation to sustain this narrative are threatened. Jack reports:

With bone, it's easy, six weeks to heal. If you tear a muscle, you have three phases of recovery. But neural stuff, explain to me how this wasn't a thing and now it is a thing? It was all so overwhelming. I was looking for that magic bullet answer and that's what the surgery was. I was trying to control the controllable, fix this one thing and then we will be 'back on the horse'. But when that didn't work, I just couldn't see a way out and my willpower left to do it how I had done it before had gone. . . the fire just went out.

The precarious nature of this accepted storyline accentuates the need for a multiplicity of stories in relation to injury. Creating more narratives offers athletes the flexibility and opportunity to re-frame their experiences, especially when the dominant narrative no longer fits their experience, does not take care of them, or is problematic to live by (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b).

#### **4.3.2 Merry-Go-Round Narrative**

The merry-go-round narrative reflects a cyclical plot of highs and lows where chronic and recurring sports injuries continually affected athletes' well-being and ultimately their sporting careers. Against the backdrop of this undulating cycle, athletes' body-self relationships, motivation, and commitment to the sport gradually deteriorated over time. This narrative encompassed a dynamic and temporal plotline as athletes' stories started with "what could be" shifted to "what should be" and ended reflecting on "what could have been". Trapped in a purposeless cycle of injury and rehabilitation, the merry-go-round narrative reflects the relegation of athletes to the confinement of the rehabilitative netherworld and the tumultuous journey it incurs. Gemma reports:

It was just that constant cycle, get injured, do your rehab, work back to the track and it could be a few weeks, or a few months and you would be right



back at the beginning again. Every time, I had to pick myself back up and go back through that cycle again and every time it was just chipping away at my motivation and love for the sport.

During the initial phases of this merry-go-round, any temporary upsets (e.g., injury setbacks/missing competition) from injury or re-injury were offset by temporary uplifts (e.g., returning to competition/seeing progress in rehab) and “what could be”. One athlete reported how the temporary uplifts provided her with “flashes of hope” that she was still “on track” to achieve her penultimate goal of competing at the Olympic Games. This “false hope” or “naïve optimism” reported by athletes, negated any injury impact, as they believed they could still achieve their future goals, despite injury setbacks. Liam reports:

Well at that stage I almost had a mindset of protecting myself, like I’m only 22, I’m only 23, so that would be the mindset I would get into like next year, I’ll be good, next year it was always next year, next year, next year.

However, as athletes continued to ride this ‘merry-go-round’ the impact of these injury and re-injury cycles on their well-being and progression within the sport began to reveal itself. Locked into this revolving door of rehabilitation, with no relevant performance indicators; athletes began to draw upward comparisons with other athletes. These comparisons created tension between their current reality and where they felt they “should be”. Sarah reports, “Our training was the same up until then (injury onset), but her trajectory kept rising while mine was crumbling. Every time I would see a result from her, it was like, that’s where I should be”. Attempting to prove where they “should be”, some athletes reported becoming consumed by performance objectives (Douglas & Carless, 2006), resulting in cheating, and rushing rehabilitation to pursue a sporting goal. This mentality was influenced and reinforced

by athletes' coaches (e.g., "When are you going to stop pussyfooting around on the grass and get back to the track?") and their national governing bodies who promoted risk-taking behaviours (Nixon, 1992), further perpetuating these injury cycles. Ana reports:

They are just a business, and they just want you running. If they think if there is any chance that you might be able to get one performance in, then they are always going to look for some quick-fix solution to get you back on your feet as soon as possible. That's why they let me rush into the championships.

These injury cycles were further compounded by a decline in athletes' body self-relationship, resonating with what Sparkes (1998) depicted as the "demise of the disciplined body-self" (p. 654). The disciplined body was characteristic of the body portrayed in high-performance sport and is one that "defines itself in actions of self-regimentation" with its', "gravest crisis" being "loss of control" (Frank, 2013, p. 41). Over time, this crisis was experienced by participants who reported a growing trepidation over never being able to predict or control what their body was going to do. Whereas once the body was forgotten in its state of seamless functioning, once injured it became an oppositional force (Sparkes, 1998), leaving athletes feeling trapped in a body they no longer recognised. Kayleigh reports, "I never had to think about my body before, but then it was, am I going to get through this training session, or will I be going home with ice? I no longer controlled my body, it controlled me".

Consequently, some athletes distanced themselves from their injuries (Leder, 1990), employing mechanical terms to label their body (e.g., it, broken, fixed), which only sought to further increase the disconnect between them and their physical self. Other athletes began to identify as 'the injured athlete' acquiescing to a body where injuries were the "norm" and "something they had come to expect". Confined

by a “body that has let them down”, it created a self-fulfilling prophecy where athletes felt powerless to effect change. Gradually, they withdrew their engagement in rehabilitation and other health-related behaviours, further perpetuating the cycle. Sarah reports, “It seemed no matter what I did I was still in pain, so eventually I just began to run through it (injury)”.

Over time, the cumulative impact of these repetitive cycles began to take its toll. Athletes reported how like a “war of attrition”, their motivation and commitment to the sport was gradually worn down. The latter stages of this merry-go-round were characterised by a jaded exasperation (e.g., “here we go again”), and a sense of fatigue in handling future adversities (e.g., “I couldn’t be bothered to go through the whole ups and downs again”). Furthermore, athletes reported a lack of understanding and empathy from peers, institutions, and coaches (e.g., “He (coach) would almost roll his eyes, like what’s wrong with you now?”), as well as questions over the credibility of their injury experiences (e.g., “I would get messages basically asking was I making it up . . . you start to feel like ‘the boy who cried wolf’”) which increased feelings of low self-worth and isolation. Kayleigh reports, “I just avoided being around the track and that question, are you still injured then? People only care when you are relevant but when you’re no longer relevant you’re just cast aside”. As the highs became few and far between and the lows more significant and pronounced, athletes were left questioning their sense of purpose within the sport. Liam reports:

I remember being on a training session and I was like what am I doing with my life? What is the point of this? I’m losing money, I’ve had my funding cut, I’ve had my contract cut, two years in a row. All these negative thoughts and I just stopped and burst into tears in the middle of the session. It was a mental breakdown; I’m telling you because I couldn’t control it. I knew my mind had

gone. I was exhausted physically, I was malnourished, mentally I was ill. I was just done.

Unable to see a viable future in the sport, athletes became nostalgic about their past and “what could have been”, which was laden with feelings of “unfulfilled potential” and being “robbed” or “cheated” of an athletic career. Although a termination from elite sport might temporarily liberate the athlete, the regressive nature of this storyline confines them to the actions of their past, and so they remain, perpetually entrapped by the prospect of “what could have been”. Gemma highlights, “It will always be that thing of what could have been. If it weren’t for those injuries, where would I be now, and I’ll always think that even when I’m 50”.

#### **4.3.3 Longevity Narrative**

The longevity narrative is progressive (i.e., bad to good; Gergen & Gergen 1986), the storyline shifts from a decrease to an increase in wellbeing and athletic trajectory over time, following multiple sports injuries. It bears resemblance to the progressive redemptive narrative, whereby one “progressively overcomes challenges to arrive at some better place further down the line” (Papathomas et al., 2015a, p. 7). The redemptive element of this narrative highlights how the “bad is redeemed, salvaged or mitigated or made better in light of the ensuing good” (McAdams et al., 2001, p. 474). In the case of the longevity narrative, *time*, a precious commodity within elite sport (Dohlsten et al., 2020) is integral to this notion of progressive redemption, as it follows the plotline of “Time lost from injury is time gained in the longer term”. Indeed, athletes embodying the longevity narrative viewed their multiple injuries and their associated absence from sport not as time lost, but as an opportunity to “press the reset button” and make necessary changes to help prolong their athletics career. Lucy reports:

Ultimately the injuries were a blessing in disguise as it means that I have much more longevity as a senior athlete. They gave me respite in the middle of a ten-year career and that break I got has fuelled and equipped me for longer. Without that break, and what I learned from it, I wouldn't be the athlete I am now.

Athletes embodying the longevity narrative reported experiencing a cycle of injuries from between one-to-five years. These injuries were reported to have occurred because of downgrading injury, running in and through pain, and/or rushing to get back to achieve a performance objective. These behaviours reflect an internalisation of the performance narrative (Douglas & Carless, 2006) and the culture of risk (Nixon, 1992). However, over time, athletes reported shifting away from short-term performance objectives towards a more long-term and balanced view of their health, well-being, and performance. For some athletes, this shift in perspective occurred after having endured years of injury, whilst for others, it was related to a change in their environment or coaching set-up. Lucy reports:

It was years of running in constant pain, but with (previous coach), it was all about performance, instant gratification, and just patching things up to get me to the next championship. His ethos was high performance and solely that, and not necessarily with an ethos of longevity. Whereas with (current coach), it has been about building an athlete for the future. He has taught me that it's not always about the next championship, with him it's like we need to be strong and healthy and ready to run for years, not just one summer at a time.

This change in perspective was reflective of an embodiment of the longevity narrative which promotes the idea of enduring short-term losses from injury for longer-term gains in performance and health. The longevity narrative encompasses a

broader cultural training philosophy of ‘train smart not hard’ (Stulberg & Magness, 2017), where athletes aim to prioritise consistency over intensity in training. This ‘training smart’ perspective appears to be gathering momentum within elite sport settings (Bargoria et al., 2020) and presents a countervailing storyline to elements of the sport ethic (i.e., pushing the limits and striving for distinction; Hughes & Coakley, 1991) that have dominated elite sport training practices and the literature surrounding it for decades. The following statement reflects the emergence of this cultural shift and underscores the personal and social capacity for evolution and change within elite sport cultures. Tom reports:

There is always that group of athletes that were running in the 80s or 90s that say, ‘all you athletes now are weak, and you don’t train as hard as we did’. But we are trying to ‘train smart not hard’, that’s the mentality and it’s a difference in mentality. So, it might look like we are weak in that respect, but I think it is the layer that we have built on top of training hard. Training hard is also ‘one flavour’, whereas training smart has ‘multiple flavours’ and different things work for different people, so we are still figuring it out.

By internalising the longevity narrative which embodies this ‘training smart’ philosophy, athletes were empowered to disengage from viewing their body in mechanistic (i.e., the body as a machine) terms and create a more compassionate body-self relationship. Tom reports:

You have to accept you’re not superman. Everyone wants to think that they are the one athlete who can train hard and get away with it, but then you get injured, miss a week or two, and you realise that consistency is much more important. You’re not invincible. I know you see those stupid memes online about pushing yourself but it’s bullshit! The body can’t do that all year round.

By accepting that they are not “superman” or “invincible”, athletes embodying the longevity narrative accepted their fragility and sought to use it, reflecting a communicative body (Frank 2013). Understanding that “the body can’t do that all year round”, they aimed to work within the remit of what the body could do and engaged in behaviours that sought to promote and endure their physical health. For example, athletes reported confronting injury issues and not letting them fester, incorporating injury prevention strategies into their training, taking days off when necessary to allow their body time to recover from training, and when faced with an injury, allowing it to heal fully, before returning to sport. These behaviours were promoted and reinforced by athletes’ coaches and peers and enabled them to cultivate a symbiotic relationship with their bodies, meaning that time *lost* was in fact time *gained*. By learning to “respect their body and give it what it needs” they were reimbursed by having less time off due to injury or re-injury leading to longer healthier careers and greater long-term performance potential. This coincides with recent research highlighting how attending to health risks is one of the key success factors for high-achieving track athletes (Bargoria et al., 2020).

Adopting a more long-term and balanced view of their health and performance also enabled athletes’ embodying the longevity narrative to re-story their previous injuries as a “blessing in disguise” or an “opportunity”. While some athletes indicated how their previous injuries enhanced their sustainability within the sport by enabling them to develop a more holistic perspective (Dohlsten et al., 2020), others were more sport specific. Adam reports:

Those injuries will give me longevity because I was able to work out by the age of 25 how to rehab almost every injury. An athlete who’s been through injuries, knows how to come back from it, whereas some athletes didn’t

develop those good practices, and if it happens later in their career, it derails them, and they end up just retiring.

As Adam indicates, the longevity narrative not only helps athletes make sense of their previous or current injury experiences but guides their future actions too. Athletes embodying this longevity narrative have a *guiding story to live by* (Papathomas et al., 2015a), which enables them to progressively overcome future adversities and hence extend their life cycle as elite athletes. Extending this life cycle, not only redeems any previous time lost through injury but simultaneously affords athletes more time to reap the benefits of the progressive gains in their personal and sporting development. An elite athlete's career is often reported to be relatively short-lived and filled with fragility and uncertainty (Barker et al., 2014). Therefore, a narrative that aims to extend one's career and allow for the harvest of accumulative gains in personal and sporting development, could certainly serve as a useful storyline both in overcoming injury and enhancing sustainability within the precarious world of elite athletics.

#### **4.3.4 Pendulum Narrative**

The pendulum narrative describes athletes' stories of injuries that alternated between longevity and performance narratives. This alternation in storylines created perturbations in their well-being and was subject to external (environment) and internal (body self-relationship) influences. The pendulum narrative is littered with stories of contradictions and ambiguity, placing this narrative typology within a liminal space, where individuals "are neither one thing or another or maybe both" (Turner, 1967 p. 96). According to Frank (2013), narratives should not be thought to be mutually exclusive, instead, their ability to coexist depends on the narrative's degree of stability. The lower the stability, the higher the possibility the storyteller switches from one story to another (Papathomas & Lavalley, 2012), while figuring out



their own self-story as was exemplified by the participants embodying the pendulum narrative.

For athletes whose stories of injury hung on this pendulum narrative, they highlighted how their personal story historically had a strong alignment with the performance narrative (Douglas & Carless, 2006). Athletes reported how their previous embodiment of the performance narrative helped frame their formative years of elite athletics, developed their sense of self, and provided them with a pathway towards a viable future. Over time, however, the occurrence of injuries, underperformance, or other sporting adversities, led them to question their embodiment of this performance narrative, as Samantha reports:

After the injury, I went away and trained with different groups, just to get some reflection on myself. Some feedback I got was ‘you want it too much’. That was a good one, but a hard one too, because you get told, work hard, that’s how you get success. But, putting too much work in, giving it 100%, that’s not right either. So that was a bit of an oxymoron to me, a bit contradictory.

Although Samantha begins to question her attachment to some of the beliefs (e.g., “putting too much work in” “giving it 100%”) that underpin the performance narrative, she remains sceptical of an alternative approach. Despite changing her training environment where athletes focus on training ‘smart’ and not ‘hard’ and prioritise their long-term health and performance potential (i.e., longevity narrative), she is still reluctant to depart completely from what she once knew (i.e., performance narrative). As she is faced with a counter-narrative she reports being “torn between the two” and worrying that she is “gone too far the other way”. These sentiments were reinforced by Tom who reports, “I certainly believe in training smart, but I don’t want to turn training smart into training soft”. This dichotomous thinking (training hard

versus smart) regarding training is further reflected in the athlete's approach to injury (performance versus health), and the inner conflicts become more amplified when a goal is at stake. Samantha reports:

Every time, after I've been injured, I would have been like 'oh I don't want to do that again'. But then you're in the mix of it again and there's this goal that you want to achieve and you're just toying with yourself. Sometimes you're just so close and you think you can manage a pain; you think your body can override it, but then it just can't . . . The sports hard, so when you get this little bit of something you can cling onto (sporting goal), that you think you can achieve, it can take over . . . and it's just trying to remind yourself of what's important, being smarter I guess, but it's hard.

These internal battles that Samantha experiences are reminiscent of what Shohet (2007), referred to as an authentic narrative as opposed to a coherent narrative practice. When exploring the narratives of eating disorders, Shohet depicts how those fully recovered reflect a coherent narrative where the plotline follows an orderly and temporal progression, gained through internalising popular master narratives. However, those struggling to recover reflect an authentic narrative, where the plotline is indeterminate, as the individual is more questioning of any explanatory model and affords authenticity at the expense of self-continuity, as they ponder the nature of their experiences. It is this authentic narrative construction that creates these inner conflicts for Samantha, placing her in a tortuously confused state as she debates both narratives, neither of which can provide her with an understanding she is happy with (Papathomas & Lavalley, 2012).

In a bid to 'strike a balance' between these opposing narratives, athletes embodying the pendulum narrative reported drawing on their body awareness as well

as those around them to help guide their decision-making around injuries and training. Jessica highlighted how, “no one can feel what you feel and it's knowing that as an athlete and reminding yourself of that” while Tom reported drawing on his coach to hold himself “accountable at both ends”. As illustrated elsewhere (Hall et al., 2022), social support and embodiment are critical components in enabling athletes to navigate and manage experiences of ambiguity and liminality associated with pain and injury. Over time, by drawing upon these components, athletes described becoming more comfortable and confident with decision-making, finding their own middle ground, as Samantha reports:

I was proud of myself because with this injury every day involved those decisions, am I going to push through today or am I going to back off? When you've had a lot of injuries you start to doubt your judgement because it hasn't quite worked out. But I do have good judgement, it just needed some tweaks and the right people to make it work.

For athletes whose stories reflect the pendulum narrative, they remain in this space between narratives of longevity and performance, sometimes overlapping at either end, sometimes remaining in between. Although the uncertainty of lived experience is often difficult to describe in a story, the pendulum narrative aims to encompass this ‘unsayable’ aspect (McAdams et al., 2013), by capturing this experience of liminality. Optimizing sporting performance while maximising long-term health and performance potential is a contradictory term in elite sport (Baker et al., 2014). For athletes embodying the pendulum narrative, it was grappling with this circulating contradiction, or their previous internalisation of a narrative (i.e., performance) which ultimately failed them which resulted in their hesitation towards adopting a new narrative (i.e., longevity). Although adopting a longevity narrative

may have created a more coherent and stable personal story, the infidelity of this narrative to the athletes' past experiences could also heighten their sense of discomfort in departing completely from the narrative (i.e., performance narrative) that once anchored them. While counter-narratives such as longevity can be useful in initiating reflection (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, 2009b), these findings highlight how athletes also need more opportunities for narrative construction and reconstruction. Providing narrative opportunities can help make the 'unsayable' heard (McAdams et al., 2013) empowering athletes to create their own narrative path in their own time (Papathomas & Lavalley, 2012).

#### **4.3.5 Snowball Narrative**

The snowball narrative depicts a downward trajectory of physical and psychological decline following a series of sports injuries. Athletes embodying the snowball narrative reported how their injuries initially had only minor or inconsequential effects on their well-being. Yet, over time, repeated injuries, or a progressive decline in the nature of their injuries led to greater implications to their well-being. The snowball narrative bears resemblance to the narrative of decline (Gullette, 2004), the prevailing master narrative in relation to ageing, which depicts ageing as an inevitable downward trajectory of accumulating deficits and diminishing reserves, "representing nothing more than denouncement" (Randall & McKim, 2008, p.4).

For the snowball narrative, I example a group of athletes whose downward spiral of physical and psychological decline stemmed from being socialised into a culture whereby, accepting risks and playing through pain was normalised and deemed necessary to achieve one's potential (Howe, 2004). Jack acknowledges this indoctrination as he reports:

In that culture and that set-up, injuries were seen as absolutely normal and going to happen, and if you wanted to be an elite athlete then you had to accept that that could happen . . . They were almost seen as a badge of honour in some cases because they just meant you were working hard. If you want to be any good at something then you have to take risks with your body, if you can't, you're not going to be an elite athlete, it's kind of a catch-22, you got to be able to push the limits.

Athletes' reification of these cultural norms caused them to become embroiled in a 'fog' leading to their long-term acceptance of pain and injury (Howe, 2004). As overriding pain served as a social indicator of their athletic commitment and ensured that they were on course to achieve their potential within the sport (Atkinson, 2020), athletes embodying the snowball narrative regularly engaged in risk-taking behaviour such as over-training and competing whilst injured. Over time, as their injuries progressively deteriorated, they aspired to maintain their ability to override or push through pain, by engaging in behaviours that served to distance themselves from their body. Ben reports, "with pain you try and control it, pain never bothered me, I ran my whole career in pain, with pain you can tap out, you can zone out, you can do your massage and mobility afterwards". However, this reinforcement of mind-body dualism triggered a decline in their body self-relationship, ultimately propelling athletes' bodies into a state of physical demise that they could no longer ignore, in Ben's case, a loss of power down his legs. Although Ben reports the incident occurring over-night, the following excerpt highlights how despite disconnecting from his pain, this 'snowball effect' of injury may have continued to gather momentum in the background,

Interviewer: You said that you were used to pain?

Ben: Always. At that time of my career, I was wearing two boots at night for my Achilles, it took me 30 minutes to get down the stairs in the morning, an hour and a half to warm up for my morning run, but I could manage it with massage, mobility, core, but when the power stopped, I couldn't manage that.

Interviewer: You say it happened overnight; can you just talk around that?

Ben: Literally overnight, the next day I tried to do a stride and I couldn't, just overnight.

Interviewer: Okay and when you were sleeping in boots and it was taking ages to warm up, how long was your body in that condition before this happened?

Ben: Three years (finishes abruptly).

Unfortunately, as Leder (1990) highlights, it is the body's own tendency towards concealment that allows for the possibility of its neglect or depreciation. Although athletes' earlier acceptance of pain and injury may have had a minimal impact or even maintained their well-being within the sport. Over time, the physical deterioration that inevitably occurred because of their risk-taking behaviours coincided with a deterioration in their mental well-being. For Jack, despite fighting against his injuries for years, he eventually acquiesces to a narrative of decline, depicting a storyline of accumulating deficits and diminishing reserves as he reports:

You just go from, I never would have doubted myself, but then you start to doubt yourself, you start to doubt your team and you start to just get in on yourself. You're just carrying a weight on your shoulder and even the running isn't a release anymore because your hip is this and your ankle is that and everything you do is just work, work, work. So yeah, I guess the writing was on the wall.

Jack's statement "the writing was on the wall" perhaps reflects his experience of what Freeman (2000), terms narrative foreclosure, which relates to a premature conviction that one's life story is effectively over. On the one hand, the lack of narrative resources available within these athlete's subcultures may have constricted their possibility for self-renewal (Griffin & Phoenix, 2014), within the sport, thereby reinforcing the need for a multiplicity of stories to help reframe and re-create one's experiences (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, 2009b). However, as powerful as counter stories are, they can also trick us into believing that resisting the dominant narratives and their prevailing fatalistic endings is easy, when in fact one's body may place its own limitations on what can be resisted and how (Frank, 2010; Phoenix & Smith, 2011). Unfortunately, for athletes embodying the snowball narrative, they may in fact be too far gone, and self-renewal within elite sport no longer possible. By making stories that reflect the snowball narrative available to service providers, they could warn against the inherent and often invisible dangers that a storyline like this might incur, thus preventing future athletes from snowballing beyond the point of no return, as Ben forewarns:

Listen to your body and get a good team of people around you. Weigh up each decision well at the start, because one bad decision early on can snowball into more bad decisions that are harder to get back from, so measure twice and cut once even on the little things and then you won't have to deal with it afterwards.

#### **4.3.6 More to Me Narrative**

The more to me narrative represents athletes who viewed athletics and injury within the broader context of their life and drew on their multiple roles and identities as a means of buffering the negative implications that an injury might present. The

more to me narrative embodies the plotline of “my injuries and sport do not define me as there is more to me”. It has close ties with the discovery and relational narratives, where a multidimensional life is promoted and sense of self, identity, and mental well-being are not solely contingent on athletic performance (Douglas & Carless, 2006). Possessing a life where sport has a role but is not the sole focus of one’s existence is often trivialised and silenced within elite sport in the pursuit of a more performance-orientated narrative (Carless & Douglas, 2013). However, the ability for athletes embodying the more to me narrative to draw on other aspects of their lives, enabled them to maintain a coherent sense of self and psychological well-being that remained undisrupted by even major or career-ending injuries, as Sarah reports:

I just don’t think my life would have been any different had I been injured or not been injured, made the Olympics or not. It was important to me and it was devastating at the time, but I would much rather have health and family and friends, so in the grand scheme of things, it’s not that big of a deal. I think that’s why I feel quite positive about it all.

Athletes drew upon this more to me narrative in diverse ways, as this storyline meant different things for different people. For some athletes, it signified gaining short-term perspective on their injury experiences by viewing them as opportunities to focus on life outside of athletics. For other athletes, who experienced longer-term injuries, their internalisation of this storyline enabled them to maintain a coherent and consistent sense of self despite injury, as their other roles were still maintained or even enhanced. Finally, for athletes who experienced narrative wreckage (Frank, 2013), where severe or career-ending injuries dislocated them from their previous embodiment of the performance narrative (Douglas & Carless, 2006), the more to me storyline facilitated them in re-constructing and re-framing their experiences of injury.



By embodying the more to me plotline, they came to view their injuries as creating opportunities for them to expand themselves beyond the athlete role. Overall, the more to me storyline provided athletes with a sustainable narrative thread enabling them to maintain or regain a coherent sense of well-being and identity irrespective of their injury experiences. Sarah reports:

I just think apart from my pride it doesn't matter; I'm not going to be on my deathbed thinking I can't get over this (injury). Running is an extra, and if it doesn't work out then it was just a bonus anyway. As long as I can still have friends, family, and a career, I will always see my life as being a success.

Some athletes described being socialised into this narrative from an early age by either a parent or family member, as Jane reports, "My parents believed that you might always be injured and so you might never reach your potential in sport. So, they encouraged me to have other things in my life and develop other interests and hobbies alongside running". Other athletes reported shifting towards this perspective towards the latter stages or the end of their athletics career. For athletes who migrated towards this understanding, it appeared to be prompted by either their own awareness of the short-term nature of an athletics career or paralleled a broader cultural movement towards these alternative narratives. Samantha reports:

Maybe it is because I'm getting older, but I definitely feel like there is a big push now around being 'more than just an athlete'. Whereas before, I don't really feel like that was promoted. There is definitely a shift now and it's like you might actually perform better if you have other things in your life. So, I feel like I can give more space and time to develop those things. To be honest, I was a bit annoyed I hadn't done it before, but then again, I didn't really feel like that was something I could do.

Although an increased cultural awareness and acceptance of developing oneself beyond sport appears to be emerging (English Institute of Sport, 2019), this is a storyline that remains laced with tension within elite settings. For example, some athletes inferred how this storyline is imbued with negative connotations as it is often promoted once athletes are approaching the end of their athletics careers is sometimes depicted as a ‘coping mechanism’ for dealing with injury or is offered only when athletes are no longer able to compete due to injury. Furthermore, for athletes who embodied this narrative earlier in their career, they reported feeling increasing pressure to conform to the dominant resilience narrative of injury. Jane reports:

Over the years, everything had become so professional that I felt like the enjoyment was kind of squeezed out of it. Although I was quite relaxed about things, I then felt bad about it afterwards. Usually, when I’m injured, I just focus on other areas of my life but then it became this thing of, well could you have come back quicker if you’d had cross-trained more or done more? I started to think am I just not strong enough or just not cut out to deal with these things?

Considering the above, I would encourage future researchers and practitioners to create a space for these alternative storylines by increasing their acceptance throughout all stages of the athlete socialisation process (Coker-Cranney et al., 2020). These findings add to the collective body of research that points to the notion that promoting a multidimensional self and a sustainable narrative that continues despite fluctuations in form and fitness, is conducive to the long-term development and well-being of elite athletes (Carless & Douglas, 2013). Further, our findings are also consistent with recent sustainability research within elite athletics, where athletes reported how having a balanced life would enable them to cope with the unpredictable

nature of elite sport and in turn assist them in achieving their sporting goals (Dohlsten et al., 2020). Although this storyline may also present tensions for athletes (see Ronkainen et al., 2021), by reducing the stigma attached to the prioritisation of a life outside of elite sport, athletes may be better placed to manage the disruptions induced by injury, reduce the emotional toll of injury, and be better equipped to navigate both through and beyond the tumultuous world of elite sport.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This original and rigorous study aimed to explore how the broader socio-cultural narratives that circulate within elite sport settings shape injured athletes' experiences. From analysing life-story interviews of 15 elite track athletes, this study uncovered six injury narrative typologies: Resilience, Merry-Go-Round, Longevity, Pendulum, Snowball, and More to Me. Novel insights are provided into how athletes' experiences of injury, well-being, and athletics careers were influenced by the types of stories they told and the narratives they embodied. In doing so, this study extends the sport injury psychology evidence-base by highlighting how socio-cultural practices and processes (e.g., culture of risk, sport ethic, performance narrative) influenced the thoughts, feeling, and behaviours of athletes throughout the full spectrum of injury, from prevention to rehabilitation, return to sport to retirement and beyond.

The above findings also identified the emergence of some additional socio-cultural sporting practices and values (i.e., training smart, coach's prioritisation of long-term athlete development, athletes increased awareness and acceptance of developing oneself beyond sport) and highlighted their implications in influencing alternative injury scripts (i.e., longevity, more to me). Although these emerging socio-cultural trends have been identified and spoken about in the mainstream media

(English Institute of Sport, 2019; Stulberg & Magnus, 2017), an academic examination has been limited, perhaps reflecting their contemporary nature. Future researchers may look to explore and story these emerging socio-cultural trends. In doing so, it would not only enrich our understanding of these alternative injury scripts but increase their accessibility as “any one story only has meaning in relation to others” (Frank, 2010, p.54). Furthermore, as Carless and Douglas (2012) suggest, if we, as researchers continue to only listen for and research certain types of stories, then we too “contribute to an impoverished narrative thread” which limits athletes’ future possibilities (p. 396).

In line with enriching athletes’ future possibilities, the narrative typologies identified in this study have several applied implications, which will be expanded upon in the later chapters (see chapter six, seven). However, it is important to note that first, these findings highlighted how athletes need access to a multiplicity of stories, especially when their current narrative is no longer taking care of them (e.g., resilience) or is problematic to live by (e.g., snowball). Therefore, equipping athletes, coaches, and practitioners with alternative injury narratives could help expand the injury narrative repertoire and thus expand the opportunities available to athletes to make sense of their injury experiences (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, 2009b; see chapter six, seven). Second, by exposing athletes, coaches, and practitioners to certain narratives (e.g., the different temporal phases of the merry-go-round, or the inherent dangers of the snowball narrative), they may be able to anticipate some of the challenges of these storylines. Therefore, intervention strategies can be put in place *before* rather than after problems occur (Brock & Kleiber, 1994; Smith & Sparkes, 2009b). Such adaptations may reduce the uptake of risk-taking behaviour and better

support athletes in managing the disruptions and the personal trauma associated with injury (Williams, 2020; for applied considerations see chapter seven).

By identifying the diverse meanings of sports injury that exist in elite sport setting and presenting them in a storied format so that they are more “vivid and morally recognisable” (Frank, 2010, p. 75), I hope to have created a space for new perspectives of injury to be recognised, validated, and understood. These perspectives may counter some of the silences imposed by the dominant injury scripts that suppress injured athletes’ experiences by depicting injury as being ‘part and parcel’ of elite sport (Douglas & Carless, 2006; Hughes & Coakley, 1991; Nixon, 1992). As part of the remaining chapters, I will look to disseminate these findings in user-friendly and evocative formats (chapter six), to engage other athletes, coaches, and service-providers with these diverse injury perspectives (see chapter six, seven). By sharing these narratives, I hope to initiate and facilitate new conversations around injury by bringing these experiences into the public discourse, and by placing athletes and sporting communities into dialogue with one another, using these narratives as a reference point (see chapters six and seven). Such conversations may reduce the stigma associated with certain experiences (Brock & Kleiber, 1994), create empathy and understanding around marginalised injury perspectives, whilst also encouraging athletes, coaches, and practitioners alike to reflect upon and consider alternative injury scripts. By creating and sharing these narratives, this body of research aims to make a modest contribution towards expanding the narrative landscape so that the many ways of experiencing injury are seen and heard and the opportunity to frame or re-frame an injury experience is diverse and rich with multiple possibilities.

**Chapter 5**  
**Sharing and Discussing Sports Injury Narratives with Elite Athletes: Reflecting  
on Member Reflections**

## 5.0 Abstract

While the notion of creating and sharing multiple narratives in sport, exercise, and health settings to promote a more diverse landscape is often discussed (e.g., Sanders et al., 2020), the process of, and tensions in doing so are less articulated. Extending the previous chapter that identified the narrative typologies that scaffold elite track athletes' stories of sports injury experiences (Everard et al., 2021), this study aimed to critically reflect (i.e., introspective, intersubjective; Finlay, 2002) on member reflections with participants to understand how these storylines were received and interpreted. Data was analysed using a reflexive thematic analysis. Using narrative theory as a theoretical lens (e.g., Frank, 2004, 2010; Nelson, 2001; Ochs & Capps, 2001), five reflexive themes were identified: (a) confronting the dominant narrative, (b) embracing new materialism, (c) extending boundaries of tellability, (d) linear and polyphonic narratives, and (e) symbolic violence. This study provides evidence of how the process of member reflections can enrich and extend our theoretical understandings and offers considerations about how to shift our social and cultural worlds to become more inclusive and diverse.

## **5.1 Introduction**

Storytelling is a fundamental condition of human life, integral to the survival of the human species (Harari, 2014; Papathomas, 2016). Through the stories we learn to tell ourselves about our lives and our bodies, we construct identities, impose order on our experiences, and make sense of the actions in our lives (Phoenix & Sparkes, 2009). Due to the inherent capacity of stories and storytelling, researchers have turned their focus to the interpretation of stories, through narrative inquiry (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, 2009b). Narrative inquiry is premised on the assumption that although we may tell unique stories of our experiences, they are derived from the narrative scripts available within our culture as they help to structure, locate, and underpin our storytelling (Frank, 2010, see chapter two and four). Implicit within narrative inquiry, therefore, is the assumption that the more narratives an individual has access to, the more opportunity and flexibility they have to experience life in diverse and meaningful ways (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, 2009b). In line with these assumptions, if one narrative becomes dominant and silences alternative ways of being, difficulties can arise, as individuals are restricted to one storyline within which to frame, express, and understand both their own and others' experiences (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, 2009b). In these instances, Frank (2010) and Smith and Sparkes (2009b) argued, that there is a need to increase the accessibility and availability of alternative narratives within an individual's social and cultural world. By doing so, individuals have greater flexibility in making sense of their experiences, marginalised perspectives have a greater voice, and individuals can expand both their own and others' empathy and understanding of diverse personal experiences. Therefore, our exposure and access to inclusive and diverse narratives are important as the possibilities for living differently and taking care of ourselves and others are enhanced (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b).



Against this backdrop, in aiming to counter the dominant performance narrative within elite sport, which can negate and normalise injury experiences (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2019 Williams, 2020), the previous chapter identified and foregrounded six diverse injury narrative typologies (i.e., resilience, merry-go-round, longevity, pendulum, snowball, and more-to me) that scaffolded the stories of elite injured athletes. Aligned with narrative inquiry, I postulated that these narratives could be used to broaden the injury narrative landscape. In doing so, it may help increase empathy and understanding around perspectives of injury that have been previously silenced and suppressed (e.g., merry-go-round), raise awareness of the dangers inherent within certain storylines (e.g., snowball), and offer athletes alternative injury scripts (e.g., more-to-me, longevity) to help re-frame their experiences in a more constructive manner if necessary. However, while this idea of creating and sharing multiple narratives with a view to cultivating a more inclusive narrative landscape is often discussed and recommended, the process of doing so is less articulated. This limited insight is surprising, as previous narrative researchers have highlighted how offering individuals more narratives does not necessarily mean they will engage with them (Frank, 2010; Sparkes & Smith, 2011, Sparkes, 1996; Sparkes & Stewart, 2019). For example, narrative researchers have highlighted how individuals have an embodied sense of attraction towards certain stories and a simultaneous rejection of others (Sparkes & Stewart, 2019), while communities play an important role in the authorising of certain storylines and silencing of others (Perrier et al., 2015). It is important, therefore, that in aiming to broaden narrative landscapes and extend opportunities to frame and interpret human experiences, that narrative researchers not only identify diverse narratives but also understand how individuals engage with and

respond to them. One methodological tool that can help to provide such insight, I would argue, is member reflections (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

Member reflections are a relational process that involves sharing and discussing research findings with participants. Put another way, “it’s a practical opportunity to acknowledge and/or explore with participants the existence of contradictions and differences in knowing” (Smith & McGannon, 2018, p.108). In doing so, this co-participatory process and dialogue is argued to have the potential to lead to more robust and intellectually enriched understandings. However, this relational process of sharing research findings with participants has also been identified as critical in enabling tensions to be uncovered, problematised, and reflected upon, leading to further understanding and theorization (Cavallerio et al., 2020; Smith & McGannon, 2018). To this end, the current chapter aims to extend theoretical understanding of how elite athletes engaged with diverse injury narratives by critically reflecting upon, problematising, and further theorising (e.g., Frank, 2010, Nelson, 2001) the challenges and tensions that emerged when sharing and discussing these narrative findings with participants. Enriching theoretical understanding of how participants respond to these narratives can provide pedagogical insights into the process of shifting social and cultural worlds to become more inclusive and diverse (Goodson & Gill, 2011). Finally, by turning the analytical gaze upon myself and critically reflecting upon the process of both storying and sharing these narratives with participants, it can help answer calls for more reflexive accounts of the member reflections process and contribute towards “raising the curtain” on the process of conducting research for the neophyte researcher (Tuval-Mashiach, 2017, p.126).

## 5.2 Methods

### 5.2.1 Narrative Study

The member reflections presented in this current study were carried out in the previous study (chapter four) that explored the socio-cultural narratives that circulate in elite sports cultures and influence injured athletes' experiences. The narrative inquiry perspective adopted was a storied resource perspective (Smith & Sparkes, 2008a, see chapter four). To help contextualize the current study, a brief outline of the six injury narratives identified is outlined below:

- **Resilience Narrative:** Describes a maintenance in well-being and athletic trajectory despite injury setbacks. Within the resilience narrative injury is viewed as a physical problem to be 'fixed', as it follows the plotline of "yesterday I was healthy, today I am injured but through working hard, I will be healthy and perform again".
- **Merry-Go-Round Narrative:** Reflects a cyclical plot of highs and lows where chronic and recurring sports injuries continually affected athletes' well-being and sporting careers. Athletes' stories started with "what could be", shifted to "what should be", and ended reflecting on "what could have been".
- **Longevity Narrative:** A progressive storyline of "time lost from injury is time gained in the longer term" as athletes aim for a more balanced and long-term view of their health, well-being, and performance.
- **Pendulum Narrative:** Athletes' stories of injuries that alternated between longevity and performance narratives, subject to external (environment) and internal (body self-relationship) influences.
- **Snowball Narrative:** A downward trajectory of physical and psychological decline following a series of sports injuries. It encapsulates the normalization

of risk-taking behaviours and sporting cultural norms on athletes' physical and mental well-being.

- More to Me Narrative: Athletics and injury are viewed within the broader context of athletes' lives as this storyline embodies the plotline of "my injuries and sport do not define me as there is more to me".

### **5.2.2 Procedure**

Thirteen out of the 15 participants engaged in member reflections. This process involved sharing the six injury narratives with participants. Each narrative was communicated aurally which involved outlining the plot of each narrative to participants, the temporal phases of each narrative, and the consequences of each narrative on athletes' well-being and sporting careers. I decided to share all six narratives with each participant so as not to categorise or finalise participants, by indicating that their story aligned with a certain narrative, as well as supporting the notion of giving individuals access to multiple injury narratives (Frank, 2010; Smith & Sparkes, 2009b). After each injury typology was presented, participants were invited to reflect upon whether the storyline resonated with their own or others' experiences and/or to offer their impressions or thoughts on the narrative. Ideas and issues raised by the participants were followed up with curiosity-driven questions in the form of probes. To provoke further reflection and dialogue, two closing questions were asked: What narrative(s) grabbed your attention the most? and What narrative(s) do you think are most common or uncommon and why? Interviews took place either in-person, online, or via mobile or telephone interviewing subject to COVID-19 requirements. Each interview lasted between 50 to 120 minutes, was recorded, and transcribed verbatim. To protect participant confidentiality, all identifiable information was removed, and pseudonyms were used.

These member reflection interviews informed the construction of the finalised narratives (see chapter four). For example, information generated within these encounters helped refine the narratives by providing more contextual and nuanced insights (Smith & McGannon, 2018). However, following these interviews, I also noted how the process of sharing these injury narratives with participants created tensions and challenges. For example, the participant's responses prompted me to reflect on how I had storied these narratives with my supervisors and created new questions and new debates relating to engaging elite athletes with diverse injury narratives. These questions and debates were further reflected upon by engaging in reflexivity (i.e., reflexive journaling) which is an active process that involves reflection, examination, scrutiny, and interrogation of the research process including the subjectivity of the researcher, the research participants, the data produced, and the context of the research itself (Renganathan, 2009). Given my 'insider' status as a former athlete who had endured several injuries, my research philosophy (i.e., interpretivism), and that member reflections are a collaborative process, it was decided with my supervisors, to utilise both introspective reflexivity (i.e., a process of using self-understanding for interpretations and general insight; Finlay, 2002) and intersubjective reflexivity (i.e., a process of reflecting on the researcher concerning the participants; Finlay, 2002). These processes of introspective and intersubjective reflexivity were developed using a research journal, to help situate my own identities, with myself ultimately becoming a site of analysis and the subject of critique (McGannon & Metz, 2010). To illustrate, I used this reflexive journal to help 'see' myself within the member reflections encounters by questioning my reactions to situations; exploring my own biases and assumptions, and acknowledging viewpoints outside of my own (e.g., questioning my assumption that the performance narrative is

oppressive). Moreover, I used it to consider how my experiences and background may frame how I interpret situations (e.g., how my physiotherapist background may influence my understanding of the merry-go-round) by questioning what do I know, why do I know it, and how do I know it? (McGannon & Metz, 2010). To further develop these reflexive processes, I shared these reflections, the transcribed interviews, and my interpretations of the data with my supervisors regularly who provided a theoretical sounding board by posing challenging questions to me and encouraging reflection upon, and exploration of, alternative explanations and interpretations (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

### **5.2.3 Data Analysis**

An RTA was used to analyse the dataset (i.e., reflexive journal and member reflections transcripts) (Braun & Clarke, 2020). An RTA was chosen as it enabled me to analyse the data deductively (i.e., using the pre-existing narratives as a lens through which to interpret the data; Braun & Clarke, 2022), inductively (e.g., participants' responses to the diverse injury narratives), reflexively, and theoretically. The use of this method of analysis also enabled me to elicit an enriched understanding as to how and why interpersonal tensions, reactions, and responses to the diverse injury narratives may have occurred by interrogating and unpacking both the semantic and latent meanings of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2020, 2022). The first step of an RTA involved me familiarizing myself with the data through immersion, which involved reading and re-reading the dataset. Initial codes were then created which aimed to capture significant meanings of the dataset relevant to the research question (i.e., how elite athletes engage with diverse injury narratives). To this end, data from the member reflections transcripts were highlighted and coded (e.g., "rejecting the snowball narrative"). My reflexivity journal was further consulted to explore and code my

experiences of storying and sharing these narratives with participants, (e.g., “feeling vulnerable”, “feeling side-lined”). Following this stage, initial codes were collated to form overarching themes. This process also involved drawing upon theory to build analytical depth (e.g., tellability; Norrick, 2005), further reflexivity on my reflections using critical friends’ discussions (Smith & McGannon, 2018), and further data immersion to re-create the ‘context’ and feel of the data. The themes were then further reviewed, collapsed, and refined by comparing them against the coded extracts and sending written drafts to my supervisors for alternative interpretations and review. Given the theoretical underpinnings of these themes (i.e., from pre-existing narratives and narrative theory), they were named to reflect these theoretical concepts. To provide a coherent, rich, and nuanced account of the overall story, each theme was constructed around any interpersonal tensions that emerged from participants’ responses to one narrative, and interpersonal tensions that emerged, in the context of the other narratives presented. Five reflexive themes were identified: *confronting the dominant narrative*, *embracing new materialism*, *extending boundaries of tellability*, *linear and polyphonic narratives*, *symbolic violence*.

## **5.3 Findings**

### **5.3.1 Confronting the Dominant Narrative**

The resilience narrative is reflective of the dominant restitution narrative of health (Frank, 2013) and promotes the idea that “working hard” will return athletes to their pre-injury state. It is the dominant injury storyline within elite sport, promoted as the story athletes should live by and should tell about injury (chapter four). However, this narrative does not always fit injured athletes’ experiences (e.g., when injury can’t be fixed), which reinforces the need for a multiplicity of storylines (Frank, 2013). Yet, during the member reflections, the dominance of the resilience narrative was

reiterated, with the participants validating the notion that this was the “right” and “only” way to approach injury. This dominance was further articulated in the participants’ reactions to alternative injury narratives, as I witnessed and noted how quickly and easily, they were silenced and marginalised. For example, the following reflexive notes provide insight into an exchange with one participant who embodied the resilience narrative:

The participant today displayed a cold demeanour, portraying injuries as being ‘no big deal . . . my problem to deal with on my own and who cares, it’s not the end of the world.’ When presented with injury narratives that differed from his own experiences, such as the merry-go-round, he responded in an unempathetic fashion, ‘I think that’s quite a common attitude to injury within athletics . . . I guess the injury just becomes a mental block and they keep finding excuses for stuff. . . . I know a load of athletes who say, ‘my body let me down’, but really did they do the rehab? Eventually, after discussing all six storylines, he concluded by saying, ‘in my opinion, the resilience narrative is the best one as it is the most logical steps towards getting better . . . I’d hope that I could put myself in that category and I’d also hope that other people would want to be like that too.’ Challenging him on how not all injured athletes’ experiences fit that storyline, he immediately became defensive and deflected towards my own injury experiences, posing several challenging and closed-ended questions to me. For example, ‘do you think you wasted time after *your* injuries? Do you think if *you* had done more, it would have helped you more these past few years?’

Feeling the heat rise within my body, and quickly averting my gaze, I scrambled to respond and not react to his interrogation. I tried to contextualise



my injury experiences for him, but I found it difficult to convey such a complex and emotional experience within the same narrow parameters that he afforded for his own injuries. I also allowed him to speak about his injury experiences, in his own words, and in the context of his full life history. Yet, I did not feel that he allowed me the same freedom and capacity to articulate my own injury experiences. Eventually, I succumbed to the assumption that I had not worked hard enough to overcome my injury, thereby failing to return to my previous standards of performance and defaulting to structuring my injury story around the dominant resilience narrative. Reflecting upon this encounter myself and with my co-authors, I became increasingly aware of how the resilience narrative had dominated and shaped our conversation; the exchange had allowed his type of injury story to breathe and create the contours within which I had to express my own and others' injury experiences.

The above encounter provides a window into the challenging and confrontational nature of everyday interactions whereby resisting and contesting these dominant narratives occurs (Griffin & Phoenix, 2016). It aligns with previous research which reports how athletes are often silenced by dominant narrative scripts and report needing to “play the part of the athlete” (Carless & Douglas, 2013, p.704), which involves manipulating their personal story to fit the dominant cultural script (Carless & Douglas, 2013; McGannon et al., 2021). Reflections generated from the above encounter, also provide evidence of how “notoriously evidence resistance” dominant narratives can be. Not only do they absorb opposition, but they can also prevent it from rising in the first place (Nelson, 2001, p.201). Drawing upon narrative theory (Frank, 2013) to contextualise these findings, we can begin to problematise as to why this might be the case. First, dominant narratives such as the resilience narrative are

totalitarian and so can stifle alternative dialogue by creating the conditions that restrict the capacity for an alternative storyline to emerge (Douglas & Carless, 2006). Athletes embodying dominant narratives can also possess a sense of self that is contingent on this all-encompassing perspective and so when questioned, they can quickly become defensive or deflect to protect their own identities (Douglas & Carless, 2006). Inherent within that deflection is that those who tell alternative stories risk being ostracised from a community; hence they are easily silenced or suppressed (Douglas & Carless, 2009). Within the context of the above encounter, the capacity of a dominant perspective to dictate also resided in the “high-degree of rhetoric finessing” (Bamberg, 2004, p.363) required to articulate a counter-story. After reflecting alone and with my supervisors I recognised that I had not claimed authorship over my injury story yet and thus my ability to voice it was limited.

By bringing these tensions to the fore, critically reflecting, and theoretically interpreting them, it can help problematise how to counteract the challenges of making alternative perspectives heard. For example, the above encounter raises awareness of the importance of both researchers, athletes, and supporting networks recognising how their own “stories, lives, and actions may be hidden, normalised, and naturalised by a dominant narrative script” (Douglas, 2014, p.240). Indeed, it is imperative that we collectively reflect upon our own storylines, to ensure that we do not serve to perpetuate an ‘impoverished narrative thread’ (Carless & Douglas, 2013, p. 396), by either defaulting to reiterating dominant discourses or scaffolding dialogical encounters so that it limits the capacity for another storyline to emerge. Raising my awareness of these issues was also acutely important before disseminating these narrative findings more broadly (chapters six, seven). Furthermore, as counter-narratives only come into being with the stories they resist, the above encounter

foregrounds the need to provide athletes with the opportunity and space to “rhetorically finesse” (Bamberg, 2004, p.363) their alternative injury stories and thus claim ownership over their embodiment of counter-narratives. Indeed, insights generated from the above reflections extend our understanding of how we may begin to offer relational resistance to the capacity of dominant injury narratives in negating, trivialising, and marginalising storytellers of a different perspective (Douglas & Carless, 2009).

### **5.2.2 Embracing New Materialism**

In stark contrast to the dominant resilience narrative, with its cold, detached, and staccato rhythm, the merry-go-round storyline is taut with pain and anguish, ripe with emotions, and brimming with complexity and nuance (chapter four). When presenting this narrative to the participants whose injury experiences represented the ‘constant ups and downs’ of this narrative’s shifting plotlines, feelings of embarrassment, shame, and frustration were observed to ‘bubble’ to the surface. These feelings stemmed from participants’ reflections on the lack of credibility and understanding that their injury experiences received by those within their sporting network. Simon reported:

It was just so frustrating, one day the Achilles would be fine and the next day I could barely walk. So, your coach is just looking at you like this doesn’t add up. Because I was injured for so long, people assumed that I hadn’t been doing the rehab, which I had, but it just wasn’t fixing it . . . so a lot of times I would just play the injury down and do the training session, which is not a sensible thing to do but felt easier than letting people down.

This lack of recognition and understanding of injury experiences that are cyclical, repetitive, and ongoing in nature is well documented in the literature

(McGannon et al., 2021; Russell & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2015). Indeed, athletes who incur overuse, chronic, or repetitive strain injuries are often reported to experience a mental health toll far greater than those who experience acute injuries due to their ambiguity, invisibility, and persistent nature (Russell & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2015). This lack of recognition can occur as the resilience and restitution narratives create the conditions within all other injury experiences are to be understood (i.e., injury can be fixed). However, to counteract this influence and from reflecting upon participants' reactions to this merry-go-round narrative, I began to contemplate if an understanding of the physiological nature of these athletes' injuries (i.e., chronic and recurring tendinopathies) was necessary to help create a space for these injury experiences to be validated and accepted. For example, drawing upon my physiotherapy background and the extensive physiological literature on chronic tendinopathies, I was aware that rehabilitation is unlikely to 'fix' the injury but will at best *manage* symptoms (i.e., pain, swelling, function) (Cardoso et al., 2019). The nature of pain can be unpredictable and may not always be compatible with what is available for viewing on an MRI report, due to chronic pain sensitisation (Rio et al., 2014). Moreover, despite the efforts of several leading researchers in the field, "tendon pain remains an enigma . . . It is baffling for clinicians and scientists alike. It is difficult to understand why it is so persistent and why it comes and goes with little reason" (Rio et al., 2014, p.9).

Reflecting upon these inherent physiological components with my supervisors, I began to consider if a material appreciation could extend our representation of this injury narrative. For example, we concluded the merry-go-round storyline by depicting how athletes were confined by the actions of their past, perpetually entrapped by the "what could have been" plotline. Yet, now I re-considered, how these

athletes were not only confined by the linguistics (e.g., “what could have been”) they employed but by the materiality of their bodies, which may have also restricted their ability to experience injury differently (Smith & Monforte, 2020). This realisation was further provoked by reflections on these participants’ reactions to alternative injury narratives such as longevity. Gemma reported, “that was the mentality I had when I was injured, if I can miss out now, I’ll get it back at the end. But in my case, my body did just kind of give up on me”. Although counter-narratives are often offered as a panacea to confining storylines, this response made me question, even if counter-narratives are made culturally available, are they always materially accessible? Athletes’ responses to the longevity narrative also incited within me, feelings of guilt and apprehension. By depicting these injury storylines without accounting for material factors, was I further negating their injury experiences and compounding the shame and pain they felt by inferring that they could experience injury differently, as Liam responded:

In terms of the nature of the injury and what I did to the body, the damage was done. Time-travel, yes, I would have approached it like that longevity one from the start. But I only know those things now having been through them.

These concerns identified by reflecting upon participants’ responses, led to a reconsideration of this merry-go-round storyline. However, ‘injecting’ this narrative with a biological understanding of injury was not without its epistemological and ontological concerns. As I believe that knowledge is constructed and fallible (Smith & Deemer, 2000), I questioned, do I really know the ‘true’ nature and realities incurred from these participants’ injuries? Are all chronic tendinopathies unrecoverable and so alternative ways of experiencing injury are foreclosed? However, accounting for the need for a materialised sensitivity to this storyline and addressing these onto-

epistemological concerns, fortunately, at the time of writing, new theoretical concepts were being integrated into narrative inquiry, named *new materialism* (Smith & Monforte, 2020). New materialism aims to address the critique of constructivism having an excessive focus on human meaning-making without accounting for material factors by shifting the analytical focus from stories and narratives to assemblages, whereby narratives and the material world are given the same ontological status (Smith & Monforte, 2020). New materialism aims to deconstruct the language/reality dichotomy by operating from neither a post-positivism nor social constructivism viewpoint but instead cutting through this divide by adopting a *flat* ontology and proposing that the sociocultural world and the material world are mutually articulated forces that maintain a symbiotic relationship (Monforte, 2018). Under the rubric of new materialism, the material body is viewed not in terms of what it is (i.e., its nature) but how it acts (i.e., its agentic capacity). Therefore, it avoids simplistic essentialist ideas of the human body, whilst allowing for a consideration of the capacity of the body to coalesce with stories to coproduce certain injury experiences (Monforte, 2018).

Embracing the concepts of new materialism allowed for further problematisation over how to extend theoretical understanding of this merry-go-round narrative in new, exciting, and thought-provoking directions. For example, as new materialism foregrounds the body, placing it in the same ontological plane as the stories we tell about our experiences, it could generate a more nuanced understanding of how athletes' bodies act to trigger the various 'peaks and troughs' of this storyline and co-create the periods of uncertainty and chaos depicted within this narrative. Creating this contextualised understanding might cultivate greater empathy towards these athletes' injury experiences by accounting for not only the social and cultural

influences but how their material bodies and rehabilitative environments may have also co-constructed these experiences. Furthermore, raising our awareness of the performative capacities of material forces could create new opportunities for athletes to re-frame their injury experiences. For example, by adopting a new materialism lens, we could observe how the following participant's depiction of her 'spikes' (i.e., training shoes), could be perpetuating the 'ups and downs' of the merry-go-round cycle, as Kayleigh reports, "I would almost shudder when I saw them. I knew that once I wore them, the Achilles would flare up again". By altering these material objects or encouraging athletes to story and potentially re-story their experiences around them, it is likely to extend the opportunities available to athletes to experience injury in diverse and multiple ways. Indeed, by breathing new conceptual life into this narrative, it could help create new understandings that offer athletes new opportunities to voice their experiences and thus create new possibilities to move beyond this storyline's confining experiences. Accordingly, these reflections and theoretical interpretations provide more generalised insights into how certain narratives may require a materialised sensitivity (Smith & Monforte, 2020) to enhance the possibilities for individuals to make sense of the experiences they contain and to evoke the validation, empathy, and understanding that they warrant within an individual's social and cultural world.

### **5.3.3 Extending Boundaries of Tellability**

The realities of 'lifting the veil' on the darker side of elite sport were exposed during participants' responses to the snowball narrative (chapter four). Several researchers have called for the need to showcase stories that expose the material consequences of athletes abiding by the dominant performance narrative and sport ethic (i.e., pushing their limits, striving for distinction; Hughes & Coakley, 1991;

McGannon et al., 2021), such as those embedded within the snowball narrative (i.e., stories of physical and psychological decline). By doing so, researchers theorise that it can help resist these dominant cultural norms and values including ‘playing through pain’ or ‘sacrificing one’s body for sport’ by invoking discussion regarding their problematic nature and their implications on athletes’ physical and mental well-being (McGannon et al., 2021). However, when presented with the snowball narrative most athletes immediately foreclosed any further discussion by instantly distancing themselves from this storyline, exemplified in Sarah’s response, “no, I don’t resonate with that at all, it sounds like an addict”. Nevertheless, when prompted further (e.g., do you know anyone else whose experiences may resonate with this storyline?), they offered insight into this cultural script and the behaviours it promotes, indicating that it was indeed a storyline not too far beyond the realm of their awareness. John reported:

It’s like that horrible question: Would you win a gold medal at the Olympics if it meant that you were going to spend the rest of your life in a wheelchair, most athletes would say ‘yes’ to that, which is bad . . . I mean the sport just isn’t worth that, surely?

Their reaction stirred a deep curiosity within me: Why were athletes so unwilling to discuss this storyline? Why did they feel the need to instantly reject and distance themselves from it? After all, athletes embodying the snowball narrative epitomise the revered sport ethic (Hughes & Coakley, 1991); they pushed the boundaries of their physical and mental capabilities and although surpassing these limits incited their demise, they can leave the sport knowing that they gave it their all, surely fulfilling their sporting ethical duties. Why then did it invoke such a reaction in the participants? Was I articulating their fears? Does it highlight the darker side of



sport that athletes do not wish to consider? Discussing these issues further with my supervisors coupled with reading around the concept of tellability, helped to situate and problematise these concerns.

Tellability refers to a gradient dimension of narrative negotiated by the teller and the listener in particular local contexts (Ochs & Capps, 2001). The lower boundary of tellability refers to that which is sufficient to warrant listener interest and the upper boundary is where the story can become no longer tellable, as it upsets listeners by going beyond that which is deemed appropriate or acceptable to hear (Norrick, 2005). Eakin (2004, p.3) discussed the precarious balance that life writers often find themselves in between “not telling the truth” and “telling too much truth”. When a story’s tellability moves towards this upper boundary, then individuals can become quick in dismissing their identification with it, as it becomes unwelcome and difficult to hear (Eakin, 2004).

Considering the participants' reactions coupled with these issues of upper boundary tellability (Norrick, 2005), I began to consider my portrayal of this storyline. This contemplation was further provoked by a conversation with a participant whose injury experiences, I felt, in ways had since reflected this snowball narrative. Yet, when presented with this narrative, he instantly rejected any affiliation with it. I then gently reminded him of a media article in which he spoke about neglecting his physical health and pushing things too far, leading to a string of injuries and underperformances from which he had only just recovered. Confronted with this information, he expressed being extremely angry that the article had “pinned” him to “that story,” criticizing the media for exaggerating his issues to make a point, which deflected from his own messaging that neglecting physical health “can be subtle and can happen to anyone”. This reflection remained with me as I debated with my supervisors how ‘best’ to

portray the snowball narrative. I had explained to athletes that this narrative was graded; the extent of the demise was dependent on the extent to which athletes let things snowball. Nevertheless, the examples I had included of athletes embodying and exemplifying this storyline were in some ways, extreme cases. Was I too exaggerating the issue to make a point? Should I be more subtle in my portrayal of this narrative so that more athletes can recognise themselves in it? Finally, was I telling ‘too much truth’ and would a more diluted version of this narrative help maintain it within the boundaries of tellability so that it would be heard (Eakin, 2004)?

These ongoing debates with my supervisory team were further complicated by an event in my own life that coincided with the timing of writing up these narrative findings. One of my friends in the sport had passed away due to a long battle with an eating disorder. I had witnessed first-hand her various struggles with both injuries and eating issues over the years and her unfortunate physical and psychological decline. Although I cannot even begin to understand both the extent of her struggles and where they stemmed from, I was acutely aware that some of them were in part induced by the sporting cultural norms (Hughes & Coakley, 1991) and the performance narrative (Douglas & Carless, 2006) that she found herself enmeshed in. Her death was a stark reminder of the very real and very irreversible consequences that these cultural norms and values can incur. As someone in the process of writing about these issues within our sport, it would be very difficult to not have been influenced by such an event. To further complicate matters, one of the main participants (i.e., Ben) whose stories reflected this snowball narrative was also unavailable for member reflections. Therefore, I was left pondering, had I represented these athletes’ experiences? Or was my own personal agenda disguised within my portrayal of this snowball narrative?

I found refuge in my data, my reflexivity journal, critical friends, and the multiple texts that helped to crystallise my thinking around this narrative. As I read Ben's story for the umpteenth time, I was shocked once again by his internalisation of these sporting cultural norms and the extent to which he had let his physical and psychological health decline, which he himself depicted clearly. Yet, I was also acutely aware that it was between the fissures of the stock responses to which he clung very tightly, it was underneath the silences, it was in his hidden gestures, his tone of voice, and his sequencing of phrases, that this narrative was also created. As narrative theorists all aspects of textual discourse are taken seriously, all have inherent meaning, and so are interpreted freely (Josselson, 2011). However, how could he possibly know that and if he was presented with this storyline, would he reject it with the same veracity as the other participants? Would he too be angry that I had colonised his experiences and funnelled them into 'that story' (Caddick et al., 2019)?

Navigating these issues of interpretative authority (Josselson, 2011) and relational ethics (Caddick et al., 2019) is murky water, especially for a neophyte researcher. Several researchers caution against claiming mastery over the stories we tell of other people's lives and underscore the need to invite participants into a dialogue about our interpretations of the findings (Caddick et al., 2019). However, what happens if the very participants we are writing about report that they aren't available for this process, despite several attempts made? Or perhaps they do not want to hear our interpretations? Against the backdrop of navigating these contentious issues, the words of Cavallerio et al. (2020) provided some clarity. They contested for the need of researchers to stand up for the purpose that they claim for the research and highlighted how, "If we argue that we hope for our research to promote change, raise awareness, and provoke discussion, then we need to be ready to face both the positive

and the negative consequences of our aims” (Cavallerio et al., 2020, p. 56). Throughout the process of conducting these member reflections and contemplating over the many challenges that bubbled to the surface, the intentions of this research project became crystal clear. As a narrative researcher, I knew my role was to share these untold stories, to shed light on those experiences that are too often silenced and suppressed, swept under the proverbial rug of ‘this is sport’ (Douglas & Carless, 2006). These member reflections helped identify the conditions that negate the telling of these stories, that is, the upper boundaries of tellability (Norrick, 2005), which I hoped to challenge.

Consistent with these realisations, I recognised the importance of not diluting these stories to make them more accessible but instead extending the boundaries of what people are willing to listen to by making these stories heard (Smith & Sparkes, 2008b). The purpose of extending these upper boundaries of tellability are twofold. First, so that those experiencing this narrative have the opportunity for narrative repair by believing that their experiences are deemed worthy of hearing and so they become willing to share them (Smith & Sparkes, 2008b). Second, to warn against the inherent dangers that a storyline like this can incur so that one’s devastating ending could prevent another’s beginning (Frank, 2010). As I begin to disseminate this research to wider audiences, I reflected upon how these ‘untellable’ injury stories, that showcase the negative implications of internalising dominant cultural scripts, will in ways serve as the ‘sacrificial lamb’ in creating a space for such injury experiences to be acknowledged and discussed. However, the challenges I face in storying and sharing such stories are not new and like all qualitative researchers who have carried such a burden (e.g., Cavallerio et al., 2020), I can only hope that by giving presence to these

marginalised perspectives it can afford these ‘untold’ injury stories the opportunity to breathe (Frank 2010).

### **5.3.4 Linear and Polyphonic Narratives**

Counter-narratives are advocated as a means of liberating and emancipating agency by resisting dominant perspectives (Bamberg, 2004) and offering individuals alternative ways of storying their experiences, should the needs and conditions arise (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, 2009b). Cautioning this outlook, researchers warn against giving counter-narratives too much credence, as individuals may not engage with them (Frank, 2010; Perrier et al., 2015; Sparkes, 1996; Sparkes & Stewart, 2019). Making sense of the events in our lives is after all “a fluid process which involves taking on board certain stories while allowing other competing stories to float in the river of not for me” (Frank, 2006, p. 424). For several participants, the longevity narrative, which presents a countervailing perspective to athletes’ health, well-being, and performance potential, was viewed as “not for me”.

Central to athletes’ rejection of this competing storyline was the predilection of those competing within elite sport to adopt a performance narrative, which is at odds with the longevity narrative. The performance narrative lionises the idea that prioritising performance outcomes and epitomising the sport ethic (Hughes & Coakley 1991), by taking risks and challenging limits is the *only* way of achieving success within elite sport. The strongest countervailing argument against the longevity narrative took the form of this domineering performance perspective. Laura reported:

I just think if you’re too cautious you’re not going to be able to compete with the best. I’d prefer to take the risk, rather than take more days off and stay in one piece, but then find I can’t compete with the best ones anyway.

The entrenched nature of this performance narrative creates a stifling context for other ways of approaching both injuries and training to emerge. In attempting to “de-stabilise, devalue, and decolonise” master narratives, Nelson (2001, p. 167) highlights how we must point out the inconvenient truths of these dominant perspectives and put more counter-narratives into circulation. Accordingly, I challenged the above participant; gently reminding her of the various injuries she had endured because of her embodiment of this perspective and referencing other elite athletes adopting this longevity approach. Yet, master narratives possess the twin capacity to deprive opportunity and infiltrate consciousness as individuals may come to internalise them as part of their identity (Nelson, 2001). This was exemplified in Laura’s response:

I mean it is an outlook I would love to have on things, but there is the athlete you wish you could be and the one you are. Sadly, as much as I like to think I’ve changed having gone through all the injuries, I just don’t think I have. I would still push through things, even though I would be thinking ‘oh last time I did this I got injured.’ The (performance group) are like that though, and they do still run well. But I’d still be more reckless than cautious. I think that’s just how I am and I’m probably just going to keep going like that, to be honest.

Although I was frustrated that I was met with such resistance to this longevity narrative, it was this very resistance that prompted me to explore further. Reflecting upon this encounter with my supervisors, we began to consider what does this performance narrative *give* athletes and why do they cling to it with such certainty and in such an all-encompassing manner, especially after it has led them into periods of burn-out, injury, and underperformances as this participant herself had noted? Aside from the value placed upon the performance narrative (Douglas & Carless, 2006,

2009), some of the answers to the above may reside in these narratives' contrasting structures (Ezzy, 2000). The performance narrative, for example, represents a linear narrative structure whereby there is an over-simplification of the plot orientated towards a singular outcome in the future, assumed to be under the control of actions in the present. Alternatively, a polyphonic narrative embraces uncertainty and the finite nature of the human condition in controlling the outcomes of the future (Ezzy, 2000). For example, the longevity narrative is subjective, deciphered on a case-by-case basis and by an athlete's body which is fluid and dynamic. This may render it more intangible to some. John who embodies the longevity narrative reported, "I guess if you're used to crunching numbers and recording weekly mileage then it would be difficult to take a step back and listen to your body . . . but we all know, your body doesn't respond to exact numbers". Paradoxically, while linear narratives may appear more certain, they are far more precarious as they invest heavily in one particular future, when the future itself is quite unpredictable (Ezzy, 2000).

Despite the precarity embedded within linear narratives, simple narratives with uncomplicated plotlines that build upon concepts embedded within the public discourse are said to enable certain narratives to attain and maintenance dominance within societies (Autesserre, 2012). It is perhaps the simplicity of the performance narrative and its reflection of neoliberal Westernised ideals of individualism (Caddick et al., 2019) that give rise to its collective pull, as in high-pressure situations, athletes often seek the path of least resistance. Amanda reports:

Working hard is the one thing you have control of and so it's easy to latch onto, especially under stress. You just want the simplest option, which is to try hard and push through, instead of having patience and being mature and rational about it.

Reflecting upon these contrasting structures and participants' reactions to the inherent ambiguities of the longevity narrative, I debated with my supervisors about how this counter-narrative could become more accessible to the elite community. For example, could we make it more definable by developing athletes' subjective awareness of their bodies so that they have the 'tools' to decipher the boundaries of this 'training smart' and longevity perspective more clearly? To exemplify, Joan who embodies the longevity narrative reported:

I've just developed a sense of what works well for my body, so even with this current injury, I knew I could have run through it, but equally, I didn't want it to turn into something worse than it originally was, so I stopped running and got it checked out. . . the people around me also have the same approach so that helps, we would take days off or cross-train instead if we felt we were putting ourselves at risk of injury, we're older now so know how to listen to our bodies more.

By sharing personal stories of their bodies, injuries, and training athletes may learn to develop the ability to connect what is disparate, as 'stories offer a sense of subjectivity' "an awareness of what is interior, expressed in signs that are exterior" (Frank, 2006, p. 422). Second, the more stories available that characterise the concepts embedded within the longevity narrative, the more accessible it will become. This is because for a narrative to become locatable, it needs to break into a person's narrative habitus, that is, their inner library of stories (Frank, 2010). This inner library reflects the sum of stories an individual accumulates that influences their predisposition to hear certain storylines (Frank, 2010). However, predispositions can change and are not final. If enough new stories break into our inner libraries, we can reshape our accumulation of stories and thus our predispositions to hear certain stories can change over time



gradually and incrementally (Frank, 2010). Through what Frank (2010) terms – narrative ambush– we could also render a counter-narrative more culturally digestible by collecting and amplifying stories of its nature, for example by sharing them in evocative and compelling formats. In doing so, it may inspire individuals to create new sections within their inner libraries (Smith, 2013b).

These contextual and theoretical insights unfold towards more general understandings that to increase the opportunities and possibilities for multiple and diverse perspectives to be heard, it is vital to not only create and share alternative storylines but harness the capacity of stories that exemplify these counternarratives to both ambush and alter predispositions (Smith, 2013b). Accordingly, the above example helped raise my awareness that connecting athletes with these counternarratives is likely to require multiple and evocative stories over time, to gradually stretch their narrative habitus to becoming receptive to hearing them. However, by doing so, athletes may come to alter their predispositions and begin to view a counternarrative as one that they and others can take “on board” (Frank, 2006, p.424).

### **5.3.5 Symbolic Violence**

As dominant narratives within elite sport, I have readily depicted the performance and resilience narrative as oppressive and constraining, limiting individuals’ experiences to those that may become problem-saturated (Douglas & Carless, 2006). Nonetheless, while conducting these reflections and aiming to create the conditions for a multiplicity of perspectives, I became mindful of how these storylines may also enable certain individuals. Aside from the domineering orientation of these narratives, I began to consider these storylines in and of themselves and appreciate how like any cultural script, they are Janus-faced (i.e., two contrasting

aspects), in that they serve to limit or liberate their storyteller, depending on the conditions and contexts in which they are applied. While de-colonizing their domineering status is certainly a fruitful task, negating them completely may deprive individuals of the opportunity to draw upon narratives that their needs and conditions may necessitate (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, 2009b).

My reflections upon these dominant discourses came to fruition during my encounter with a participant named Samantha. Her experiences of injury reflected the pendulum narrative, where athletes alternate between a performance and a longevity storyline as they try to make sense of their own injury experiences (see chapter four). Her responses to these narratives incited conversations regarding the difficulties in finding an approach that best fits her own experiences and the importance to her in maintaining elements of the performance narrative to ensure that her authenticity was preserved. These discussions then centred around the depth to which she had embodied the performance narrative and how it previously supported her. She reports:

People say to me, “running is your life” . . . now I know that that is an unhealthy relationship to have. People think I am obsessive, but running took me away from other things, it gave me a focus and something to put my all into. It was positive and I wasn’t getting that from anything else in my life at the time . . . I’ve been in situations where I’ve had to learn to survive, and without athletics, to guide my sort of development, I guess I could be, not a drug addict, that’s not me, but would I have believed that I could have a different life . . . So, I built my sense of self around it, but it was beneficial for me and for other people in the group to do that. I only thought about this recently when people say, “running is my life,” that could be why I have had such a narrow focus,

and pushing myself, I don't even know is it because I want to succeed anymore or is it just surviving.

Samantha's words were reminiscent of other participants' depiction of the resilience narrative, in reporting how it offered them a viable pathway during times of chaos and uncertainty. Although the concrete hope and orientation towards a singular outcome embedded within these narratives are inherently dangerous, after reflecting upon this encounter with my supervisors, we began to consider, how during certain periods individuals may feel as though they need something concrete to grasp onto. For Samantha, who reported fighting several intersecting waves of oppression, in being, black, female and from low-socio-economic standing, the performance narrative was offered to her not as a form of oppression but as a means of liberation and empowerment within her contextual climate. She reports:

My teacher just empowered us, all of us girls at school. She showed us what it is we could do, not to settle, but to push and keep pushing. She told us you can do anything that you want if you put your mind to it, and she challenged us in so many ways, not because she wanted us to be amazing athletes or anything, but she wanted us to be able to know what it was we needed to do to break those boundaries within our society and our local area too.

Cautioning the propensity to champion certain storylines whilst condemning others, reflecting upon this encounter reminded me of the importance to remain mindful that an individual's social and material realities may render storylines such as the performance and resilience narrative suitable. Although reducing the dominance of any one narrative is important, by maintaining a more egalitarian perspective of these prevailing discourses, it could reduce the risk of potentially committing "symbolic violence" (Frank, 2004, p. 115). According to Frank (2004, p. 115),

symbolic violence comprises the “often very subtle ways” in which we can infringe on a person’s sense of alterity (i.e., otherness) by suggesting that an individual is wrong to live their lives by a certain type of story and projecting one’s preferences for another storyline (Smith, 2008). Following other scholars (Caddick et al., 2019; Smith, 2008), I acknowledge that I am limited by how much I can empathize with another’s situation. For example, I have never been in a position whereby my choices were restricted to survival, therefore, my ability to fully grasp Samantha’s lived experiences is an elusive concept. Yet, by remaining conscious of the equivocal nature of the dominant narrative she embodies, I am more likely to respect and honour her sense of ‘otherness’ and remain compassionate and open to exploring this viewpoint.

The theoretical insights generated from the above encounter helped provide a springboard towards navigating future pedagogical encounters. For example, when looking to share these narratives with athletes and supporting networks, I recognized that maintaining a balanced perspective may encourage them to engage with narratives in a more dialectical manner, rather than further polarizing contrasting perspectives. These insights also highlighted to me the importance of not allowing the domineering nature of certain narratives to eclipse my outlook as a narrative researcher but instead remaining open to the many viewpoints they can offer someone (Frank, 2000). In doing so, it could help reinforce the inherent nature of narrative theory, which is to offer the individual the flexibility and opportunity to choose the storyline which best fits their own experiences (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, 2009b).

## **5.4 Conclusion**

This study has extended the previous findings (chapter four) and narrative research more generally (Smith & Sparkes, 2011), by reflecting upon and further theorising how elite athletes engaged with diverse injury narratives. By grappling with

participants' responses and drawing upon narrative theory as a means of problematising theorising about and with them (Frank, 2013), I have generated critical insights into the challenges and tensions incurred when storying and sharing diverse injury narratives. I would argue that this study provides novel understandings of how member reflections and reflexivity can enrich (e.g., tellability) and extend (e.g., new materialism) our theoretical understandings of how individuals respond to and engage with diverse narratives, which can further help to critically consider the challenges of creating an inclusive narrative landscape. Contextualising such understandings to this thesis, by reflecting upon how participants engaged with, and responded to, these narratives, it helped prepare me for navigating future pedagogical encounters and disseminating these research findings more broadly (see chapters six and seven). For example, the above reflections made me acutely aware of how the dominant resilient narrative of injury can scaffold interpersonal encounters such that alternative injury perspectives are marginalised. Moreover, the above reflections helped facilitate an understanding of the importance of incorporating a materialised sensitivity into certain narratives and primed me for the challenges I may face in sharing both 'untellable' and alternative injury narratives with athletes and supporting networks. Finally, given the challenges of engaging elite athletes with diverse injury narratives, this reflexive study also helped bring to the fore the importance of communicating narrative findings in ways that can enhance athletes' and support networks' engagement with them. Previous narrative researchers have called for the need to share narrative findings in accessible, evocative, and powerful ways, to 'ambush' individuals into taking new perspectives on board, or to 'show rather than tell' more sensitive or problematic storylines (Cavallerio, 2022; Smith et al., 2015). To this end, the following chapter will look to draw up ABKT (i.e., video narratives) to communicate these six narratives

in ways that enhance athletes and sporting communities' engagement with them. Moreover, by translating the research findings into more accessible, relevant, and meaningful, formats it can help facilitate the impact and uptake of sport injury psychology research which has had limited transferability to athletes and sporting communities to date.

**Chapter 6**  
**Construction and Communication of Evidence-Based Video Narratives in Elite**  
**Sport: Knowledge Translation of Sports Injury Experiences**

## **6.0 Abstract**

A knowledge-transfer ‘gap’ exists within the sport injury psychology literature (Evans & Brewer, 2022). This gap has led to recent calls to translate the evidence base into more accessible, relevant, and multi-sensory formats to facilitate research uptake and impact (Bekker et al., 2017). Heeding this recommendation and informed by narrative inquiry (Frank, 2010), the purpose of this multi-study chapter was twofold: Study 1 aimed to construct videos that translated the evidenced-based narratives of sports injury experiences developed in chapter four, by working collaboratively with a digital learning practitioner, videographer, and user-group (i.e., elite athletes). Study 2 explored end-users perspectives of these video narratives in communicating sports injury research by conducting 11 focus group interviews with 69 participants (i.e., athletes, coaches, and practitioners). A reflexive thematic analysis identified that the video narratives communicated sport injury psychology research in accessible, evocative, and relevant ways. Considerations of how to implement these video narratives into professional practice are critically discussed.



## 6.1 Introduction

In elite sport, where athletes' livelihoods can often be dependent upon sports participation, the impact of a sports injury on athletes' well-being, mental health, and long-term athletic career potential can be devastating (Rice et al., 2016). Acknowledging these long-standing psychosocial challenges of injury for athletes, researchers in the field of sport injury psychology have endeavoured to both reduce the risk of injury occurrence and support athletes' well-being and welfare following injury (Evans & Brewer, 2022). Yet, while this field of research has significantly advanced our theoretical, empirical, and applied understandings of sports injury, the uptake and impact of this scholarship have been limited. Put another way, the sport injury psychology evidence-base has remained essentially hermetic, with limited transferability to those who could potentially derive value from its use (e.g., athletes, coaches, practitioners; Leggat, 2020). Given the recent calls both within academia (e.g., Barker-Ruchti et al., 2019; Wadey & Day, 2022) and the public discourse (e.g., Baroness Grey-Thompson, 2015) to support the well-being, mental health, and longevity of elite injured athletes, this knowledge-transfer gap is now a timely and pressing concern.

Considering the need to reduce this knowledge-transfer gap (see Wadey & Day, 2022), and to help inform future research, it is first important to consider *why* this 'gap' might exist. Two pertinent issues have been foregrounded by researchers so far (Leggat, 2020). The first issue relates to dissemination, whereby the research is not reaching end-users (i.e., athletes, coaches, practitioners). For example, published research behind paywalls limits access to research findings. The second issue relates to translation, whereby the knowledge reaches end-users, but is not able to be understood or acted upon by them. Shedding further insights into these issues, both

within the sport injury psychology literature and beyond, coaches and practitioners have outlined their barriers to accessing and implementing research knowledge, which, *inter alia*, include not knowing where to find information, lack of time, inaccessible language, unclear relevance, and research that lacks practical applicability (McCormick et al., 2020). Accounting for these challenges, sport psychology researchers have advocated for alternative ways of disseminating research, which allow the intended audience to both access research knowledge and then engage with it (McCormick et al., 2020). For example, previously Bekker et al. (2017) advised translating research into a ‘product’ that is digestible and can be implemented into professional practice. Other researchers have highlighted how coaches and practitioners prefer knowledge to be presented in more multi-sensory formats, including audio or visual methods, and dispersed via educational workshops, rather than through journals or conferences (Fullagar et al., 2019; Szedlak et al., 2019). Consistent with these preferences, athletes reported how online videos were one of their most preferred methods of seeking information on sport psychological issues (McCormick et al., 2020). Yet, despite these suggestions, it has been argued that the sport injury literature continues to be predominately “written for researchers by researchers” (Bekker et al., 2017, p. 5) and dispersed in peer-reviewed journals and academic texts thereby, perpetuating this knowledge-transfer gap (Leggat, 2020).

One multi-sensory approach that could potentially address the dissemination and translation challenges within the field of sport injury psychology, and support injured athletes, is video narratives (Archibald et al., 2021). Informed by narrative inquiry (Frank, 2010), video narratives can be defined as an ABKT that is, they are an art-form (i.e., short-form videos) used to communicate research evidence (i.e., evidence-based narratives) through exchange or dissemination (Archibald et al.,

2021). Narrative understandings have been theorized to support athletes by generating contextualized insights into their lived experiences, and/or by expanding the psychosocial-cultural resources available to them and their support networks to understand, interpret, and make sense of their experiences (McGannon et al., 2021; Williams, 2020). Given the power of narratives to “get under people’s skin”, and affect the terms in which they think, feel, and behave, expanding the narrative resources available to athletes and others can also expand athletes' sense of possibility regarding who they are and who they might become in the future (Frank, 2010, p.48; Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, 2009b)

Given these functions of narratives in both enhancing understanding and expanding possibilities for individuals, some researchers have aimed to harness the communicative capacities of narratives to disseminate their findings beyond journal publications. For example, researchers have used narratives to educate others about abuse within sport (McMahon et al., 2018, 2022), amplify marginalized mental health perspectives (Carless & Douglas, 2016), and disperse physical activity research more broadly (Smith et al., 2015). Drawing from this literature, narratives have been illustrated to help communicate complex information in ways that are highly accessible to diverse audiences. For example, by using personal stories, and providing a credible plot and characters, narratives can engage diverse audiences by using a format of communication that is authentic, engaging, and familiar (Smith et al., 2015).

Leveraging this capacity of narratives and combining it with visual representation arguably holds greater potential to translate and disseminate research in more accessible and powerful ways; hence, it is of growing interest to knowledge translation (KT) researchers (Archibald et al., 2021). To illustrate, the accessibility of this format is enhanced by societal shifts, as by the end of 2022, video-based content

is predicted to account for 82% of consumer internet traffic, which is indicative of its preference, proliferation, and popularity within the broader community (Cisco, 2020). Furthermore, given the increasing calls to democratize research knowledge, videos could potentially broaden the scope and reach of research as they can be dispersed freely online through various forums and websites (Carless & Douglas, 2016). As an ABKT tool, video narratives also have the potential to impart knowledge in meaningful ways by creating shared and embodied understandings (Archibald et al., 2018). For example, within a sporting context, narrative scholars have advocated for the use of videos by illustrating how the visually appealing, emotive, and evocative nature of videos could potentially communicate storied research in more impactful ways than audio or written formats (Smith et al., 2015). This capacity of video narratives to communicate storied research more powerfully, could in part relate to how videos can harness the emotive qualities of storied research by amplifying affect. As Rich and O'Connell (2012) depict, it is the affective quality of images which underscores the potential for visual representations above other possible forms. This is because affect 'makes us care about things' and thus creates resonances to research knowledge in ways that go beyond the threshold of articulated reading (Rich & O'Connell, 2012). Yet, despite video narratives offering this fruitful alternative to traditional text-based forms of dissemination, by communicating research knowledge in ways that are "contextual, kinaesthetic, and sensory" (Halford & Knowles, 2005, p.1), the obscurity surrounding both the construction, and end-users' perceptions, of such an ABKT tool, has restricted its uptake to date (Archibald et al., 2018). This obscurity perhaps explains why it has received limited research attention across sport psychology generally and within sport injury psychology specifically.

Recognizing the need to translate sport injury psychology research in

accessible and impactful ways (e.g., Leggat, 2020) the purpose of this multi-study chapter is to extend the literature by constructing (Study 1) and exploring end-users perceptions of (Study 2) video narratives of sports injury experiences of elite track athletes. The narratives underpinning the videos within this study were developed in chapter four and answered calls for research on elite track athletes because of the normalization of injury and subsequent negation of injury experiences embedded within the culture of this sport (Howe, 2004). By foregrounding the many ways elite track athletes experience injury, these six injury narratives (i.e., resilience, merry-go-round, longevity, pendulum, snowball, and more-to-me) aim to enhance understanding around diverse injury perspectives and expand the narrative resources available for athletes and support networks to frame or re-frame injury experiences within elite sport. To facilitate the impact and uptake of this research, I aimed to translate these six injury narratives by drawing upon an innovative and timely ABKT tool (i.e., video) to help communicate the findings in more accessible and impactful ways. Moreover, given the challenges of engaging elite athletes with these diverse injury perspectives (see chapter five), communicating this evidence-base in more evocative and emotive ways could potentially enhance athletes' and support networks' connection to these diverse injury perspectives.

Aligned with this remit of communicating the narrative findings in more accessible, relevant, and powerful ways, the aim of the first study was to translate the existing evidence-base into a video format for dissemination. By foregrounding the construction of these video narratives, I hope to extend the sport injury psychology literature by providing an evidence-base for other researchers who may intend to translate and disseminate sport injury psychology research. Following the construction of these videos and aligned with the knowledge-transfer gap, Study 2 aims to

understand end-users' perspectives of the video narratives as a communication tool using narrative pedagogy (Goodson & Gill, 2011). Understanding end-users' perspectives of video narratives are pertinent in enhancing the future uptake and relevancy of this emerging ABKT tool (Archibald & Scott, 2019). To illustrate, by generating insight into how end-users engage with video narratives and what properties of the video narratives potentially facilitate this engagement, it can ensure that future sport injury KT researchers can harness these elements when aiming to disseminate their findings more broadly (Archibald & Scott, 2019). Moreover, given recent calls to work, 'with', rather than, 'on', participants (Wadey & Day, 2022), understanding end-users' perspectives of how video narratives communicate research, can ensure that the future use of video narratives is also tailored to end-users', as opposed to solely researchers, suggestions.

## **6.2 Study 1: Construction of Video Narratives**

Guided by narrative inquiry which proposes that our lives are storied, and selves are narratively constructed (Frank, 2010), this study is informed by six evidenced-based sports injury narratives (Everard et al., 2021; see chapter four).

### **6.2.1 Method**

#### ***6.2.1.1 Participants and Positioning***

To promote a collaborative approach in the construction of the video narratives (Smith et al., 2022), a DLP and user-group (i.e., elite athletes) were initially recruited. The DLP had extensive experience in developing short-form evidence-based videos (> 10 years) and prior experience in constructing videos for sporting audiences. For the user-group, a purposive sampling strategy (i.e., criterion-based) was used to recruit information-rich participants, whose role was to provide continual critical feedback throughout the construction process. Aligning with the underpinning research

(Everard et al., 2021, see chapter four) the criteria were that they had to be *elite* (i.e., World or Olympic Level), *track* athletes, who had prior *experiences* of sports injuries. Six current elite track athletes ( $n^{\text{male}} = 3$ ,  $n^{\text{female}} = 3$ ) with a mean age of 27.3 ( $S = 3.44$ ) were recruited and agreed to form a user-group. From the researcher's perspective, my own background as a physiotherapist, previous elite track athlete with previous experiences of injuries, positioned me as a cultural 'insider' to this research project (Berger, 2015). While this 'insider' knowledge was useful for having an embodied and contextual understanding of how to represent these narrative findings, it also presented some challenges. For example, given my 'insider' status, in the early phases of the video construction, I often agreed with the user-group suggestions that the videos lacked the "look and feel" of an elite athlete video, but then struggled to articulate *why* the videos lacked these elements to the DLP. However, in these instances, my supervisors, who could be classified as cultural 'outsiders' (Berger, 2015), acted as critical friends by questioning and probing me on my 'insider' knowledge (e.g., What's missing? Why is that important? How should a video on elite sport *feel*?). In doing so, it enabled me to better articulate feedback to the DLP and to engage in more critical dialogue with the user-group to help tease out *how* the videos could be reconstructed to capture more contextualized understandings. My supervisors also had extensive knowledge of both the sport injury psychology and narrative inquiry literature and therefore helped to ensure that the videos held academic integrity throughout the construction process.

### **6.2.1.2 Procedure**

Both university ethical board approval and relational ethical approval by participants in the previous study were sought from the outset of the study. Upon receiving ethical approval, the construction of the video narratives began, which

occurred over nine months and comprised several ‘steps’. While these ‘steps’ are now listed systematically, they occurred dynamically and iteratively in practice and are intended here to provide a heuristic rather than a formulaic guide for readers and future researchers. Throughout each ‘step’, I met with individual members of the user-group either in-person or via online platforms (e.g., Zoom), to discuss and review video edits. Following these meetings and to enhance the rigour of the research, I wrote up notes and communicated the findings to my supervisors to debate, interpret, and reflect upon (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Communication with the DLP occurred online via email, zoom, and platforms for sharing and editing material (i.e., slack and frame.io). Constructing the videos was a collaborative process. Nonetheless, to protect against the possibility of ‘cobiquity,’ whereby researchers inflate claims of co-production within participatory research (Smith et al., 2022), I wish to accentuate that decision-making was primarily determined by the DLP and research team. To guide the decision-making process the DLP drew upon his experimental knowledge and previous experience in constructing educational videos (i.e., craft knowledge; Smith et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the research team including myself and my supervisors were guided by narrative inquiry (Frank, 2010), literature guidelines, and the evidence base (i.e., Everard et al., 2021, see chapter four) which informed these video narratives. This approach was taken due to a consideration of the user-groups time and lack of resources (e.g., money) available to accommodate the user-groups input in a more co-productive manner (Smith et al., 2022). That said, the user-groups involvement extended beyond being merely ‘tokenistic’ (Smith et al., 2022), as considerable changes were made to the videos subject to the user-group’s ongoing feedback, as will be demonstrated in the following sections.



The first step in the construction process was to create the narrative *scripts* with the DLP, user-group, and supervisory team. I wrote the first draft of the scripts informed by the six narrative typologies developed in chapter four. However, in this draft, I aimed to prioritize participant quotations over the authors' interpretations, to 'show rather than tell' these athletes' experiences, and to illustrate how narrative typologies can 'speak' themselves through personal stories of injury. To accommodate for a short-form video duration of five minutes – as recommended by the DLP, supported by the visual media literature (Lambert, 2013), and subsequently approved by the user-group – the content of each narrative was also re-written in a condensed format to circa 800 words. To render the narrative scripts more accessible and relatable to non-academic audiences (Scott et al., 2012), they were further edited, subject to feedback from the user-group. To facilitate this process, the first draft of each script was sent to three available members of the user-group who individually reviewed the scripts and indicated where the content could be made more user-friendly. In some cases, conceptual terminology was removed. For example, within the pendulum narrative, the term "liminality" was removed, yet the concept of liminality was still explained (i.e., athletes can move back and forth between opposing narratives and can embody both), to maintain the theoretical and empirical integrity of the paper. In other cases, academic terminology was removed. For example, "diagnosis" and "prognosis" (i.e., athletes whose injuries had a definite diagnosis and prognosis) and the messaging was re-worded to provide a more accessible explanation (i.e., athletes with a clear path to recovery). Accommodating these suggestions from the user-group, the narrative scripts were subsequently re-written before being reviewed by my supervisory team to ensure that the content held academic integrity. The scripts were re-sent to the three members of the user-group who reported that the content was clear and

comprehensible. Finally, the DLP reviewed the scripts and confirmed that they could be appropriately translated into video content.

In the second step, the auditory material was created. Here, I provided a voice-over of the narrative script, which was depicted using a third-person narration. This decision was guided by narrative literature that reports how third-person narrations promote a spectator perspective and allow for a fuller and more refined explanation of events when compared to first-person narrations (Oatley, 1999; Wylie, 2003). However, to enhance the verisimilitude and relatability of participants' quotations, these were depicted using the first person. This is because first-person narrations have been advocated to foster a greater sense of identification with narrative characters and to promote more emotive responses (Oatley, 1999; Wylie, 2003). To expand, Oatley (1999) depicts how most writers advocate moving back and forth between identification and spectator perspectives, fashioned by first- and third-person narrations respectively. In doing so, it helps create an optimal aesthetic distance, whereby the recipient can experience emotions and reflect upon them to assimilate their meaning. To reflect the diversity of voices contained within the original narrative study, to ensure adequate representation, and to enhance the transferability of the video narratives (Smith, 2018), male and female athletes from various countries (Ireland, United Kingdom, Germany, Australia) were asked to create the voice-overs for the participant quotations.

In the third step, the visual content was created. To begin, I worked with the DLP in a collaborative manner to create the visual material that could help situate the narrative content (i.e., injury and elite track and field) by drawing upon several sources: YouTube, Stock, and Art-grid (subject to copyright). A previous narrative communication study had indicated that locating the characters of the story in a

believable and relevant context is an important factor in creating narrative authenticity (Smith et al., 2015). Aligning with this recommendation and feedback from the user-group, multiple contexts were selected within which athletes may experience injury, rehabilitate from injury, and discuss injury. These included the gym, track, park, pool, and athletes' homes. However, early feedback from the user-group revealed that the visual material was too generic (i.e., it wasn't contextual to elite environments, the characters didn't 'look like' elite athletes), it wasn't evocative or sensual enough (i.e., it didn't move the watcher or evoke embodied reactions) and it was incongruent with the narrative scripts. One member of the user-group reported, "I think the narration is great and the messages are really relatable, but I don't know it was just missing something . . . when I was watching it (merry-go-round), I wasn't exactly getting heartbreak from it. It also just didn't have the 'feel' that I would expect from an elite athlete video". This ongoing feedback highlighted the necessity to create some additional visual material that was firstly both contextual and congruent, as Rossiter and Garcia (2010, p.41) depict; "There are two narratives in a digital story, the overt narrative heard in the voice-over, and the covert narrative perceived by the viewer from the images. The two must act in accord". Secondly, the user-groups ongoing references to both 'feel' and emotion encouraged me and my supervisory team to extend beyond merely illustrative examples of the narrative content and instead strive to translate the research in more multi-sensory and embodied ways. Therefore, we aimed to create additional visual content that had performative, haptic, and affective dimensions (Sparkes, 2017). Accordingly, a videographer with experience working within elite sport and injury and recommended by the user-group was recruited to create bespoke visual material.

Following the decision to create additional visual material, informed consent

was obtained to record two groups of elite track athletes on two separate occasions. To create a contextual and relatable backdrop to the study, based upon consultations with the user-group and videographer, athletes were recorded participating in a track-based training session within an elite training environment. Elite training environments are synonymous with injury (Howe, 2004), and upon recording the footage, I observed how this training context was littered with symbolic and ubiquitous meanings of injury. To illustrate, the performative content of the six injury typologies was conveyed in the semiotic presence of foam rollers, rehabilitation bands and equipment, coupled with athletes training and performing injury management strategies (e.g., rehabilitation exercises, massage), set against the backdrop of circulating conversations about injury. In capturing this familiar environment in which injury was omnipresent, I aimed to both enhance the translation of the narrative content and engage the exposed sensibilities of end-users through embodied memory (Merchant, 2011).

Drawing upon the phenomenology research, which provides “a bridge towards understanding how viewers engage with images” (Marks, 2000, p. 150), embodied memory relates to the capacity of the audience to reconstruct an understanding of what the experiences, situations, and objects on the screen felt like. This reconstruction is possible as through previous and repeated exposure to similar situations, experiences, and objects, the audience commits to memory the sensations, emotions, and practices that they elicit in the body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Therefore, even when the viewers’ exposure to them is only partial, for example, via sight and sound, they can draw upon their embodied memory to experience them more fully (Merchant, 2011). To this end, by evoking embodied memory, end-users can be brought into a dyadic relationship with the narrative content. Put another way, evoking embodied memory, could call on

viewers to become communicative bodies, in which the experiences of another can only be apprehended through all the senses of their own body (Frank, 2013). Indeed, embodiment could translate these storylines in ways that transcend the verbal, by inviting others to recognize themselves in the narratives presented (Frank, 2013).

To further enhance both the authenticity and embodied translation of the six storylines, we aimed to communicate the ‘expected feel’ of an elite athlete video and promote a sense of haptic-visibility, whereby “the eyes themselves function as organs of touch” (Marks, 2000, p. 162). To this end, the videographer captured more close-up kinaesthetic footage of athletes in motion, by running alongside athletes at certain points while other times placing the camera at various angles and locations around the track to capture multiple and moving vantage points. Such footage would subsequently be used to provide more visceral accounts of athletes running through pain (i.e., snowball narrative), or to convey an embodied sense of forward momentum as illustrated within the longevity narrative. Moreover, rather than producing a polished and sanitized account of the body (MacDougall, 2006), the videographer captured athletes in acute states of sensory activity, breathing, sweating, rubbing, slapping, spitting, and sniffing. In doing so, we hoped to produce a vivid, detailed, and authentic construction of the ‘lived and fleshy’ sporting body, which opens more directly onto a viewer’s sensorium (Howes, 1991; Sparkes, 2017).

Finally, given the potential capacity of video to amplify the affective qualities of storied research (Smith et al., 2015), which can connect and engage audiences with the material presented, the videographer created more emotive material by capturing ‘close-up’ footage of athletes’ facial expressions and bodies. The face in film is of particular importance as although it is seen in passing, it is a stable object of our attention, expressing “tiny local movements that the rest of the body usually keep

hidden” (Deleuze, 2005, p.90; MacDougall, 2006). Drawing upon the philosophical works of Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Deleuze (2005), several film theorists have also argued that audiences do not simply watch films but are embodied and active perceivers. Hence, they may involuntarily and unconsciously mimic the postures or expressions depicted on screen (MacDougall, 2006; Marks, 2000). This mimesis is delineated by Merleau-Ponty (1962) as “postural impregnation of my own body by the conduct that I witness” (p.118). By imitating these facial expressions or postures, the audience may subsequently experience emotions or feelings appropriate to them. In line with these assumptions, MacDougall (2006) reports, how a videographer’s ability to evoke emotive and corporeal responses in viewers, therefore, may be, “as basic as showing them certain facial expressions” (p. 23). Accordingly, by capturing ‘close up’ footage of athletes grimacing, clenching, frowning, downward and side glancing, smiling, and laughing, we sought to evoke the wide spectrum of emotions depicted across all six video narratives. Once sufficient emotive, performative, and contextual visual material was obtained, recording ceased. Overall, four hours’ worth of footage was collected and stored on a password-protected computer. I then devoted considerable attention to matching this footage and other visual material to the narrative content using frame.io software. Subsequent feedback from the user-group revealed that the visual content had “the look and feel” of an elite athlete video, was emotive, and conveyed the narrative contents “much more congruently”.

The fourth step ensured that the textual information matched the narrative voice-over was created. The inclusion of text was suggested by the DLP and further supported by both the user-group and literature guidelines (see Scott & Le, 2021). While the DLP collaborated the textual and auditory material, it was continuously modified throughout, subject to feedback from the user-group, and research team

including me and my supervisors. For example, in some cases, both the research team and user-group felt that it was useful to accentuate key messages by providing a summary of keywords, rather than having the full text of the voice-over displayed. The formatting of the participants' quotations was further modified from the original format created by the DLP. This modification was based upon feedback from the user-group, who reported that individualizing some participant quotations could help express the idiosyncrasy of each athlete's voice within the collective storyline more potently. Finally, the background music was selected to help contribute to the flow of the narration, support the emotions depicted within the videos, and enable viewers to connect more potently to the content depicted (Kämpfe et al., 2011).

Multiple drafting was then required to collaborate these various elements (i.e., narrative, auditory, visual, textual material, background music) and to render the videos suitable for dissemination. Once the DLP received all the content, he created the video using Final Cut Pro software and subsequently uploaded them to frame.io. Here, I was able to edit the video in real-time, by pausing the video, suggesting where edits needed to be made, based upon collective feedback (i.e., user-group, DLP, supervisors, literature guidelines) and linking alternative content. These changes were then made by the DLP, and a new version of the video was uploaded for further review and editing. This iterative process created between 11 to 18 drafts of each video. The final version was deemed ready for review when there were no additional comments from the user-group, supervisory team, and DLP.

#### ***6.2.1.3 Methodological Rigour***

Guided by a relativist position for judging the quality of qualitative research (Sparkes & Smith, 2009) and drawing upon previous narrative communication guidelines (Scott et al., 2012; Scott & Le, 2021; Smith et al., 2015), in judging the

quality of the videos, I invite viewers to consider the following five characterizing traits: (a) authenticity: Are the video narratives authentic? Do they have a credible and relatable plot, content, and characters? (b) relatability: Do they resonate with viewers? (c) accessibility: Are the videos informative and easy to understand? (d) engagement: Are they evocative and visually appealing? (e) content: Are they empirically driven (Everard et al., 2021, see chapter four) and informed by narrative inquiry (Frank, 2010)? Extending the list of traits used to judge video narratives, this study proposes two new criteria which were deemed imperative throughout in creating a valuable and critical resource: video coherence and cohesiveness. Within the current study, I define coherence as the fit between visual, auditory, textual material, and background music. For example, was the video narrative consistent throughout? I define cohesiveness as the connection between the video narrative contents. For example, did the narration flow from one temporal phase to the next?

To assist the reader's responses to these questions, I drew upon the following strategies. First, I assessed these traits throughout the development process by posing questions to the user-group and my supervisors who acted as critical friends (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Where amendments were suggested, I worked collaboratively with the DLP to make changes. For example, to enhance the cohesiveness of the videos, the user-group suggested a pause between the different temporal phases of the merry-go-round to allow for the previous material to "sink in" before transitioning to the next. To enhance the relatability, congruence, and cohesiveness of the videos, they further suggested having a central character interspersed throughout certain videos to "help bring it together a bit more".

Second, following the completion of the videos, external reflections were sought and received from three other elite athletes ( $n^{\text{female}}=2$ ,  $n^{\text{male}}=1$ ) in the user-group



who were asked to review the videos using the ‘think-out-loud’ method (Houston et al., 2011). This method has been indicated as a useful tool in assessing for engagement and comprehensibility and involves the participants vocalizing their thoughts, feelings, and opinions whilst interacting with the videos (Houston et al., 2011). Participants reported how the videos were authentic, relatable, congruent, emotionally, and intellectually engaging. One athlete reported, “Usually, I’m so distracted by emails and texts pinging, but I was completely absorbed for those five minutes. It felt really relatable, and I know this will be relevant to other athletes and coaches too”.

### **6.2.2 Findings**

Six video narratives were developed. These included: Resilience: [Resilience - YouTube](#); Merry-Go-Round: [Merry Go Round - YouTube](#); Longevity: [Longevity - YouTube](#); Pendulum: [Pendulum - YouTube](#); Snowball: [Snowball - YouTube](#); More-to-Me: [More to Me - YouTube](#)

## **6.3 Study 2: Communication of Video Narratives**

Following the construction of the video narratives, Study 2 aimed to explore how these video narratives could act as a communication tool in translating and disseminating research knowledge, by gathering feedback from end-users (i.e., athletes, coaches, practitioners). To guide the exploration of these video narratives, I drew upon narrative pedagogy, that is, an educational tool that involves sharing narratives with participants and then collaborating with participants by engaging in meaning-making, deep dialogue, and exchange to generate new understandings about the issue in contention (Goodson & Gill, 2011). Indeed, previous narrative pedagogy researchers have illustrated how narratives are not only a way for individuals to make sense of their experiences (e.g., by expanding narrative resources, Frank, 2010), but allow for pedagogical encounters, which facilitate an understanding of issues through

reciprocal exchange (McMahon et al., 2022). My rationale for using narrative pedagogy is that it aligned with my guiding research philosophy (i.e., ontological relativism, epistemological constructionism), and was suited to exploring the aims and scope of Study 2 by allowing me to collaborate with end-users equitably to construct knowledge through reciprocal dialogue (McMahon et al., 2018).

### **6.3.1 Method**

#### ***6.3.1.1 Participants***

Criterion-based and maximum-variation sampling strategies were used to recruit participants and enhance the study's potential generalizability (i.e., naturalistic generalizability and transferability; Smith, 2018). Criterion-based sampling was used to recruit participants who were: (a) elite athletes, that is both semi-elite (i.e., competing in talent development programs or a second-tier standard; Swann et al., 2015) and competitive elite athletes (e.g., World or Olympic level; Swann et al., 2015) (b) participated in track and field, and (c) 18+ years old. In total, 23 athletes were recruited from the United Kingdom, Ireland, and the United States ( $n^{\text{female}}=13$ ,  $n^{\text{male}}=10$ ). To extend the scope and reach of the study beyond athletes and given that injury narratives can work on and through practitioners (Howe, 2004), the support team were also recruited to assess for the transferability of the research findings: (a) elite track and field coaches, and (b) elite practitioners that have worked within track and field and/or across other elite sports (i.e., sport psychologists, physiotherapists, physiologists, strength and conditioning coaches, nutritionists, performance/lifestyle advisors, performance directors). Collectively, 46 elite practitioners accepted the invitation to participate: 17 sport psychologists, 10 physiotherapists; five nutritionists, four strength and conditioning coaches, three lifestyle advisors, three track and field coaches, two physiologists, and two performance directors.

### 6.3.1.2 Procedure

Identified as being particularly advantageous for exploratory studies (Sparkes & Smith, 2014), focus groups were chosen as the method of data collection as they can encourage a lively collaboration and promote more spontaneous, expressive, and emotional views. To capitalize on *shared* experiences, mitigate the influence of power dynamics, and reduce the potential implication of unwillingness to share information for fear of criticism, homogenous focus groups were used for both elite coaches and athletes. Meanwhile, service providers were organized in a heterogenous manner (i.e., a mix of service providers), to reflect real-world settings where service providers act collectively to support injured athletes by dispersing and implementing evidence-based research. Overall, 11 focus groups were conducted with between 3-to-16 participants included in each ( $m=6.2$ ).

Guided by narrative pedagogy (Goodson & Gill, 2011), I sought to establish an accepting and empathetic environment by creating and building rapport with and among participants. To this end, at the outset of the focus group, details of the research project were outlined, informed consent was obtained, and participants were invited to introduce themselves and share their own experiences of injury and/or working with elite injured athletes. Moreover, throughout the pedagogy process, I drew upon my own experiences as a cultural insider where appropriate to help build rapport and contribute to the reciprocation and deep dialogue necessary for pedagogy (McMahon et al., 2022). The narrative pedagogy process comprised of three phases; narration, collaboration, and location, which were conducted in turn, for each video narrative, dynamically and reciprocally. To begin, I shared the video narrative with the focus group (i.e., narration). After initial sharing, the video narratives were then examined by posing open-ended questions (e.g.,

“What were your perceptions/thoughts/impressions of the video?”) and collaborating with participants to better understand how the video narratives could act as a communication tool in translating and disseminating injury experiences.

Following this process of collaboration, the third phase, location, began. In this phase, I aimed to locate the research, which involves linking the narratives to their wider contexts including social and cultural practices (McMahon et al., 2018). To assist this stage, information was presented in a PowerPoint presentation (see appendix) which included details of the existing evidence-base informing the videos (i.e., Everard et al., 2021), details of how the videos presented related to other forms of research, and some theoretical insights into narrative inquiry (i.e., how athletes’ stories are underpinned by socio-cultural plotlines, and the need for a multiplicity of storylines). This PowerPoint further included information that attended to the pedagogical and theoretical challenges to disseminating the injury narratives identified in chapter five. Building upon chapter five, I enhanced the materialised sensitivity of the *merry-go-round* by including research on the physiological aspects of chronic injuries (Smith & Monforte, 2020). Similarly, I enhanced the accessibility of the *longevity* narrative by including research on sustainability within sport (e.g., Dohlsten et al., 2020). While all the above information was included in a PowerPoint presentation, it was integrated and discussed in an ad-hoc and intuitive manner, as previous narrative pedagogy researchers indicated that introducing too much academic material can disrupt the flow and process of narrative exchange (McGannon et al., 2018). Considering this contextual information, participants were then invited to further discuss the video narratives in relation to how they communicate research knowledge, how they could be

improved upon, and how they may be used by participants, before concluding the focus groups. Each focus group lasted between 100-120 minutes. All data were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

#### **6.3.1.3 Data Analysis**

An RTA was chosen to analyse the qualitative dataset (Braun & Clarke 2020). An RTA was chosen as it focuses on patterned meanings concerning a research question and allowed for theoretical and analytical flexibility during the interpretative stages of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020). The process of doing an RTA involved several phases which were fluid and recursive rather than rigid and structured. To begin, I familiarized myself with the material which involved reading and re-reading the transcripts, listening and re-listening to the audio tapes. In doing so, I aimed to capture ideas about potential patterns of meanings through immersion. Following this stage, initial codes were then created which aimed to capture significant meanings of the dataset relevant to the research question (i.e., end-users' perspectives of the video narratives as a communication tool). These codes were then clustered together to form overarching themes, which related to patterns of meaning united by a shared idea (Braun & Clarke, 2020). For example, the codes "narratives are relatable", "narratives are emotive", "narratives promote critical thinking", were collated and combined to form the theme "meaningful connections". During this phase, to help build analytical depth and frame the interpretations made, I drew upon narrative inquiry (Frank, 2010), the visual media literature (Archibald et al., 2021), and previous narrative communication studies (Smith et al., 2015). Writing also began in this phase and formed part of the analysis (Richardson, 2000) as multiple drafts of these preliminary themes were sent to my supervisors for review, who provided feedback both in writing and in person, as part of critical friends' discussions (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Once

the preliminary themes were formed, they were further reviewed, collapsed, and refined by comparing them against both the transcripts and coded dataset. To facilitate this process, an overall story was written for each transcript and reviewed against the overall story captured within the themes presented (Trainor & Bundon, 2020). Finally, the themes were defined to ‘capture’ interpretative stories of the data and sequenced in a coherent format, to try a *build a story* that could convey the relevance of this dataset to both the research question and the context of this study in a compelling manner. To illustrate, for the video narratives to act as a communication tool that could facilitate the translation and dissemination of research knowledge, end-users first had to understand the information presented (*communicating lived and diverse sports injury experiences*), engage with it (*meaningful connections*), and *take the information on board*. In doing so, it may subsequently lead to them sharing this research (*knowledge dissemination*), which promotes a wider consideration of the use of video narratives as a communication tool.

#### **6.3.1.4 Methodological Rigour**

I invite readers to consider the following characterizing traits (Sparkes & Smith, 2009): (a) topic of the research: Is it relevant, timely, and significant? (b) coherence of the research: Does the study hang together in terms of purpose, methods, and results? And (c) rigour of the research: Is the sample appropriate? Do the data and themes generated provide significant and meaningful claims? To assist readers in answering these questions, I attended to these characterizing traits in numerous ways. For example, the topic of the research was considered timely and significant given recent and ongoing calls to bridge the knowledge-transfer gap (Evans & Brewer, 2022; Leggat, 2020). Coherence of the research was accounted for by critical friends’ discussions in the form of ongoing feedback from my supervisory team (e.g., how do

these themes answer/relate to the research question). The rigour of the research was attended to by selecting an information-rich sample, the use of maximum-variation sampling to enhance the study's generalizability, and prolonged data collection (i.e., focus groups lasting 100-120 minutes) in line with narrative pedagogy guidelines (McMahon et al., 2022). Moreover, analytical rigour was developed using reflexive journalling (Finlay, 2002), and critical friends' conversations to discuss multiple interpretations (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

### **6.3.2 Findings**

#### ***6.3.2.1 Communicating Lived and Diverse Sports Injury Experiences***

This theme relates to how the video narratives helped communicate research knowledge in a comprehensible manner by disseminating diverse and lived experiences of injury in a format that was accessible, multi-sensory, and easily identifiable. To begin, participants indicated how communicating athletes' injury experiences as 'typologies' (e.g., snowball, merry-go-round) created a conceptual understanding that enhanced the translation of this sport injury research. For example, participants reported how these injury typologies provided them with a "frame of reference" to help "make sense" of either their own and/or others' injury experiences. This "frame of reference" relates to the overarching explanation or plot which helps connect injury experiences in a coherent and structured manner. As each event furnishes an understanding of why the next event might occur; this capacity of narratives renders them a suitable vehicle for a comprehensive understanding and articulation of injury experiences. The following physiotherapist depicted:

I just really liked the way you framed it, just that idea of moving from 'what could be', to 'what should be', and then looking back at 'what could have been', because you see that happen and when you are watching it you can understand

why it happens . . . so yeah, pretty powerful in terms of just explaining that to people and the psychological impact it can have on athletes . . . It just makes it make sense.

Participants also indicated how drawing upon illustrative examples of athletes' personal stories of injury to articulate these diverse typologies, and the use of "real-world language", fashioned an accessible understanding of these experiences. The following sport psychologist reported:

It's just real, and it resonates because that is what is actually said in sport. That badge of honour stuff is real-world language and some of the quotes in there are literally word for word what I hear coaches and athletes say. It's also someone's actual experience, which is really useful like, it's not just some perception or theory. I think when we take it too far away from what is actually said in sport it gets trickier to understand

Moreover, some participants articulated how depicting certain injury typologies as analogies (i.e., merry-go-round, pendulum, snowball) combined with a visual and kinaesthetic representation translated the concepts embedded within each narrative more powerfully. This was achieved by evoking both sensory and embodied reactions, opening alternative avenues for understanding and engaging with the material presented. One sport psychologist described:

I really liked the analogies and I think when you're telling stories, using analogies is so important. That pendulum one, even when I was watching the pendulum swinging, my mind was just going, it just makes it easier to visualize and watching it I was thinking of how your energy might shift in both directions. So, it's just a nice way to be able to hold conversations, like 'when you see that, how does it feel and how does that impact you in terms of your



thoughts, feelings, and behaviours around these different situations’. I just think it's a really useful way to engage people and create conversations.

In addition to helping them conceptualize, visualize, and embody each injury experience in and of itself, organizing research knowledge into different typologies provided a heuristic guide for interpreting diverse injury experiences by making them distinguishable. The following sport psychologist reported: “It’s really helpful to have it explained as a term . . . because otherwise, it’s like ‘Oh I've heard that story, and then that other story, and then there's my story’, but I don't know how they all really relate”. Indeed, narratives help make the “blooming buzzing confusion of the world habitable by providing us with guidance systems to understand both our own and others” experiences (Frank, 2010, p. 48). These guidance systems help organize our lives into foregrounds and backgrounds of attention, by selecting what we pay attention to and how we evaluate what has been selected (Frank, 2010). By organizing sports injury experiences into typologies, it enabled the information to be pulled from the background to the fore by making it more intelligible, recognizable, and identifiable, as was typified in the following coach’s response:

The videos are great because they break it all down and show you that you could have multiple athletes in front of you and so many different narratives. So, it just makes it easier to identify these things. Because, if you don't bring your awareness to this stuff, then it's easy to bypass it as a coach or physio and ultimately, we are the people who can help the athletes. But realistically, unless you stumble upon those narratives yourself, you’re not going to recognize it as a thing or even come from that perspective.

Overall, this theme illustrates how the video narratives provided a comprehensible and accessible understanding of athletes’ injury experiences. By drawing upon personal

stories, providing an overarching plot, and marrying this content with appropriate visual material, it acted as a resource to help interpret and understand each injury experience in and of itself whilst further conceptualizing the diverse ways that athletes may experience injury. Moreover, by enabling participants to identify the narratives that underpin athletes' injury stories, it was indicated to potentially enhance their capacity to both work with and support injured athletes.

#### ***6.3.2.2 Meaningful Connections***

This theme relates to how the authenticity, relatability, and compelling nature of the video narratives helped communicate research knowledge in impactful ways by enabling participants to build meaningful connections with the information presented. As narratives aim to retain rather than wash out the messiness and complexities of human experiences (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a), the capacity of the video narratives to articulate the nuances, tensions, and contradictions of injury, displayed in vibrant and visceral ways, was reported by several participants to lead to a construction of injury experiences that was authentic, relatable, and relevant. While some participants indicated that the authenticity of the videos could be improved upon by depicting stories of injury rather than narrative typologies, the verisimilitude of the typologies enabled participants to locate themselves or others within the storylines presented, which was a recurring theme throughout the focus groups. In some cases, this location enabled participants to form an interpersonal and embodied relationship with the material presented, by linking it to their own prior experiences (MacDougall, 2006). The following athlete depicted: "It was really well put together and it just felt really authentic. You can draw stuff from each one and I feel like we can all draw experiences from all of them because it does feel like those are actually real experiences. It just felt really relatable."

Adding to the authenticity, tangibility, and resonance of the video narratives were the participant quotations interspersed throughout the videos with matching visual representations. Participants reported how the “tone of voice and expression” and “genuineness of the way they are talking about injury” made the injury experiences feel “real and relevant”. Participants reported how these characteristics helped shift the messaging from being abstract and conceptual to real and felt, as one sport psychologist reported, “The voices of the athletes were really the essential part because they turn it from dictating how you *should* feel, to this is how people *actually* feel”. The paradoxes embedded within each storyline were further reported by participants to provide a rich contextualization of the different injury experiences and enhance their engagement by encouraging them to think critically with the information presented. One nutritionist reported:

I really appreciated how you presented the pros and cons of each narrative, because, in the beginning, it’s like, ‘Oh yeah, this is the right narrative to have, and then it’s like, oh wait, you have to think about this part a bit more’. So, I think having both sides of the coin throughout the videos was really helpful because it *gets the gears going* like, ‘Okay, this might work in these ways, but what about these other aspects?’

Finally, the video narratives were deemed to be evocative. Participants across focus groups expressed a wide range of sentiments in response to the video narratives including, “my own feeling watching that was just sadness, that must be so awful”; “that narrative felt quite upbeat and positive”; and “that made me quite upset, which is why I had to step away”. The capacity of these video narratives to generate emotional impact is reflective of their ability to connect viewers. As Oatley (2002) explains, narratives tend to elicit emotions when we identify with and draw parallels

to, the characters, plot, and content of stories. Eliciting emotions can mobilize viewers by promoting a deeper understanding and affinity with the content, in addition to empathizing with characters for whom they may have previously felt nothing for (Oatley, 2002).

Overall, adopting a theoretical narrative focus, I would argue that the capacity of these video narratives to build resonance with viewers, compel, evoke emotion, enabled participants to not just think *about* the stories presented but to think *with* them (Frank, 2013). Thinking about stories involves reducing their content and analysing that content. Alternatively, thinking with stories involves joining with the story, adopting its logic and temporality, feeling its nuances and complexities, and experiencing it affecting one's own life (Frank, 2013). Within the context of narrative translation, thinking with stories helps foster this emotional and embodied engagement and thus, awakens the recipient, connecting them to the material presented in powerful and meaningful ways.

#### ***6.3.2.3 Taking the Information on Board***

This theme relates to participants' ability to accept, absorb, and apply the information communicated within the videos to their own lives or practice, which was evidenced in multiple ways. First, throughout focus groups, participants recalled specific messages, quotations, or elements from each storyline which can be explained by the effects of stories on memory (Scott et al., 2012). Moreover, when stories are communicated through video the capacity to process information in an "automatic, relatively effortless way" (Scott et al., 2012, p.162), is enhanced as videos provide touchpoints which allow viewers to connect the disseminated information to their own lived experiences (Mirkovski et al., 2019). Second, narratives can "ambush" people and encourage them to "take on board" new perspectives, that they may have never

previously considered, thus expanding their narrative repertoire (Frank, 2010, p. 58). For example, the following athlete reported, “I think the longevity video was quite eye-opening, about how this injury now might prolong a future career in running. It’s just not something I ever thought about before, but watching that, it’s definitely opened my eyes to it”. As Frank depicts (2010, p.31), through evocative and intimate portrayals, narratives can render alternative perspectives, not “only plausible but compelling”. Disseminating research findings visually is further reported to prompt viewers into accepting new information by disrupting their sensorium, that is, the sum of their perceptions (Howes, 1991). By orientating images, sounds, and movement differently from how viewers usually perceive the world, it can provoke audiences into seeing things in a new light, thus opening them up to new perceptions, as illustrated in the above participant’s statement (MacDougall, 2006).

Third, the applicability of the information presented was enhanced through the capacities of these videos to make the invisible seen. Firstly, by rendering abstract concepts more concrete through visual representation (Archibald et al., 2018). Secondly, by capturing and holding viewers' imagination (Frank, 2010). These properties of imaginative opening and tangibility had important connotations in disseminating this sports injury research. For example, rather than informing participants on the dangers of risk-taking behaviours within sport, the snowball narrative which encapsulates the normalization of risk-taking and the physical and psychological decline it may incur, was reported to evoke participants' imagination, enabling them to “get caught up” in the story (Frank, 2010, p.48). By “getting under their skin”, this storyline acted on participants leading them to consider a potential alteration of behaviours in the future (Frank, 2010, p.48), which was typified in the following athlete’s response:

I think they were really good to help me see what I needed to see because I'm not back running yet, but my personality and my mindset are that I've missed all this time, so I need to rush back and catch up. But then, that snowball one, I could just imagine myself in it and could see myself getting caught in that cycle quite easily. So, that's highlighted to me, that if I feel pain to just tell my coach, because I know I'm likely to push through, but hopefully by telling someone it will help create some accountability.

Finally, narratives' shape-shifting capacities allow for multiple people to locate themselves in them, so they can fit multiple circumstances (Frank, 2010). It was this creative freedom afforded by the narratives presented which enabled participants to adapt the information within each storyline to fit their own cultural or contextual conditions. Therefore, rather than the information being disregarded as irrelevant, it could be constructed so that became fit for purpose, as was evidenced by the following sport psychologist's response:

I think Sarah is right, the longevity narrative is a hard sell, especially now with a shorter Olympic cycle, because the narrative within our organization is that we don't have time, and time out is expensive. But then, we could flip that longevity narrative on its head and be like, 'We are worried about time out just like you are, so let's take the time out strategically and build those elements of longevity into the program so we can stop them breaking down later'. I think that'd be good, I think that would work.

Indeed, the memorable, compelling, imaginative, and shape-shifting capacities of narratives provide a fruitful avenue for facilitating both the impact and uptake of sport injury research by ultimately enhancing end-users' potential to 'take' the information on board.

#### **6.3.2.4 Knowledge Dissemination**

The video narratives were indicated as being an effective and impactful form of disseminating sport injury research by translating it into a format that is engaging, relevant, and easily disposable. To begin, participants illustrated how the videos contained the *type* of information they wanted to engage with, thereby enhancing the videos disseminating capabilities, as they were deemed relevant, timely, and meaningful. One athlete reported:

I just don't think there is enough out there on this sort of stuff. When I had my stress fracture, I was just frantically searching online for someone who had experienced it, but apart from finding out that it takes six weeks to heal, there wasn't really anything about anyone's experiences, and it would have been so nice to hear from an actual athlete, rather than like the NHS. So, I think a lot of athletes would engage with this.

Accessibility to the diverse injury perspectives depicted within the videos was also reported to be the type of information that could help positively contribute to the online injury media landscape. Participants reported how these diverse injury perspectives would be readily accepted and broadcasted, as they would help dilute the pervasive presence of the dominant resilience narrative of injury, which is continually promoted and perpetuated via online messages that depict “the glorification of the grind”, even though, it is “not common in everyone's story”. Second, disseminating sport injury information through the medium of video was reported to provide a viable platform for the research to remain relevant and current within this culturally mediated climate. One performance manager depicted:

I think the videos are brilliant, and with the influence now of social media, they are the way to go, because this is the feedback that we are getting from

athletes all the time that we need to update our education to match the platforms that they're using. So, those short-form videos are great because athletes tell us this is what they are engaging with. So, in terms of getting a message across, that could be really positive, and I just think they're really nicely neatly packaged.

Certainly, disseminating research in a video format was reported by participants to create a critical opening to extend both the scope and reach of this sport injury research beyond non-academic audiences (Scarnato, 2019). To this end, participants suggested disseminating the videos online via social media platforms or websites, to ensure that the findings are accessible and beneficial to not only athletes, service providers, and coaches but also non-sporting communities including athletes' families and friends. However, some participants indicated that dispersing the videos online without creating the opportunity for dialogue, could limit their potential impact, as the following coach reported, "I think it's really easy to just passively scroll on social media, and you might watch a video but not actually engage in what it's telling you". In line with this statement and to facilitate engagement, participants suggested dispersing the videos within pedagogical settings that encourage dialogue and reflection, for example, as part of practitioner, coach, or athlete education. The following lifestyle advisor reported: "I think the videos are a great tool, but I think it's the reinforcing of it that helps, what we're doing right now, the conversations we're having, I think the two are important for connecting and properly engaging with them." Indeed, like other narrative communication studies (e.g., Smith et al., 2015), it is the dialogical capacity of narratives that allows them to unlock their full potential. Therefore, in disseminating video narratives creating opportunities where they can be discussed, and perhaps continually discussed, is a pertinent consideration.



## 6.4 Overall Conclusion

Heeding recommendations to bridge the knowledge-transfer gap within sport-injury psychology and answering calls to communicate research in more accessible ways (Leggat, 2020), this multi-study chapter is the first to translate and disseminate an existing sport injury psychology evidence base (Everard et al., 2021; see chapter four) using a novel and timely ABKT tool (i.e., video narratives). Exploring end-users' perspectives of the constructed video narratives, further generated insight into *how and what properties* of this ABKT tool could contribute towards facilitating both the impact and uptake of sport injury research. For example, participants revealed how the use of real-world language, lived experiences, participant voices, an over-arching plot, and authentic, emotive, and congruent visual material allowed the video narratives to communicate sport injury research in accessible, evocative, and relatable ways. In doing so, the videos engaged end-users by enabling them to both *think with* and *take on board* the material presented. By detailing the processes that led to the construction of the video narratives, I hope to have helped mitigate the ongoing obscurity surrounding the development of ABKT tools and thus provided an evidence-base and springboard for subsequent studies to explore the translation of research into accessible formats (Archibald et al., 2018). In line with the future proliferation of this ABKT tool, the video narratives demonstrated naturalistic generalizability (i.e., participants from multiple perspectives and roles reported resonating with the findings) and transferability (i.e., participants from other sports [boxing, golf, swimming] reported that the findings could be adopted to their discipline). That said, the video narratives were indicated to have limited transferability to team sports, which presents an avenue for future research.

In addition to enhancing the accessibility and availability of this sport-injury

psychology research, the videos also helped overcome some of the challenges to engaging athletes with diverse injury perspectives (see chapter five), by showing rather than telling athletes of the dangers inherent within certain storylines and by ‘ambushing’ athletes into taking new perspectives of injury on board. The video narratives were further illustrated to enhance end-users’ understanding of the types of narratives that may underpin athletes’ injury stories and elicit empathic responses towards injured athletes’ experiences. Collectively, these findings extend the previous chapter (chapter five) by continuing to expand the opportunities for diverse ways of experiencing injury to be seen and heard. These findings also point to the applied value of narratives in impacting injured athletes, which will be further discussed in the following chapter. Given the potential functions of narratives in supporting injured athletes, there are several ways in which these video narratives could be integrated into practice, which warrants further consideration.

In line with participants' suggestions, the videos could be used as part of athlete, coach, and practitioner educational workshops. To this end, practitioners could look toward using these video narratives to facilitate storytelling workshops amongst elite injured athletes, by acting as templates for athletes to discuss their own injury stories, whilst expanding their opportunities for meaning-making by exposing them to alternative injury narratives (Williams, 2020). Moreover, practitioners could use these narratives as a tool to help reflect and problematize their current or past experiences of working with injured athletes, and critically discuss how best to support athletes in these experiences or how to be proactive in preventing such experiences from occurring in the future (e.g., snowball). The video narratives could further be used within sporting institutions to encourage practitioners and coaches to reflect upon the injury narratives (i.e., socio-cultural discourses) that they or the institution promote

and consider the implications of such perspectives on injured athletes. Such discussions could help shift the focus away from locating the ‘problem’ of injury within the injured athlete (Wadey & Day 2022), by exclusively focusing on how *they* think, feel, behave around injury, and instead prompt a broader consideration of how socio-cultural contexts *create the conditions* for athletes to think, feel, and behave around injury.

Against this backdrop, as the use and impact of digital technologies continue to grow and intensify, presenting research in digitized formats that is easily accessible to both athletes and sporting communities provides an invaluable opportunity to promote a more equitable and diverse sports injury landscape (Scarnato, 2019). To illustrate, previous research has highlighted the impact that the privileging of dominant injury discourses (i.e., injury as part and parcel of sport) can have on athletes when the media is concentrated in the hands of a few powerful actors (McGannon et al., 2021). As sport injury psychology researchers and practitioners, we are now presented with a critical opening to counter and dilute these messages through “ethically responsible media production practices that choose to represent subjugated knowledge, underprivileged voices, and the diversity of human experiences” (Scarnato, 2019, p. 394). Within the current study, these multiple injury perspectives act to humanise elite athletes by showcasing experiences of injury (e.g., merry-go-round, pendulum, snowball) that diversify from the common conceptualisations of athletes as ‘superhumans’ who overcome injury from being ‘tough committed athletes’ (Gledhill, 2021; Everard et al., 2021; Turner, 2018). By dispersing these videos more broadly, it may help reduce the stigmatisation of injury within elite sport and encourage athletes to speak out or seek help for mental health concerns associated with injury (Gledhill, 2021; McGannon et al., 2021). To further amplify these multiple injury perspectives,

especially both marginalized (e.g., merry-go-round) and alternative (e.g., longevity) injury narratives, future researchers and practitioners may look to draw upon stories, that is personal tales of athletes' experiences, which are available within the digital landscape that exemplify these diverse narrative types. Indeed, as the "types in a typology of are of narratives and not people" (Frank, 2010, p.119), storied accounts, available within the public domain, may enhance both the relatability and contemporary portrayal of these injury perspectives (e.g., McGannon et al., 2021). Overall, enhancing the accessibility and availability of sport-injury research and amplifying the many ways athletes experience injury, may help 'prick' the wider consciousness and promote a broader duty of care to elite injured athletes.

**Chapter 7**  
**Examining the Applied Value of Narratives for Professional Practice: An**  
**Exploration of Narratives in Action**

## 7.0 Abstract

Building upon chapter six, the purpose of this chapter was to extend empirical understanding of the applied value of the video narratives (see chapter six) for athletes, coaches, and practitioners. Underpinned by narrative pedagogy (Goodson & Gill, 2011), the aims of this chapter were twofold: (a) to explore narratives in action (i.e., how they acted on, for, and with participants within the pedagogical encounters) and (b) to work *with* stakeholders (i.e., athletes, coaches, and practitioners) to consider their views on the applied value of video-narratives and pedagogical discussions for professional practice (i.e., how they could work on, for, and with others moving forward). Aligned with narrative pedagogy, 11 focus group interviews were conducted with 69 elite participants (i.e., athletes, coaches, and practitioners). A reflexive thematic analysis revealed that the video narratives worked on, for, and with participants within pedagogical encounters and were indicated to work for athletes, coaches, and practitioners in the future. Four themes were identified: *forewarned is forearmed*, *sense-making*, *fostering connections*, *pricking the social consciousness*. These themes showcase the applied value of narratives in supporting injured athletes across personal (e.g., psychological well-being), social (e.g., enhancing interpersonal relationships), and cultural (e.g., raising the social consciousness of injury) levels. Overall, this chapter contributes towards bridging the knowledge-practice gap by outlining the applied value of this PhD's research findings. Moreover, this chapter extends the practical lens by providing an illustrative example of a novel and alternative injury management resource, that diversifies from the predominant cognitive-based interventions within sport injury psychology.

## 7.1 Introduction

Since its inception, researchers in the field of sport injury psychology have aimed to both predict and prevent injury occurrence and support athletes' welfare and wellbeing in recovering from injury (Evans & Brewer, 2022). Aligned with this aim, Brock and Kleiber (1994) were the first to advocate for a narrative approach to sports injury by highlighting how narratives can complement the dominant biomedical view of injury and bring the suffering individual "fully into clinical focus" (p. 427). Moreover, they outlined the applied value of narratives, by indicating how they could be used to raise practitioners' awareness of the structure of elite athletes' injury stories, thus enabling them to better identify roadblocks and "avenues to healing" injured athletes (Brock & Kleiber, 1994, p.429). Building upon these applied suggestions, researchers have since highlighted how narratives are actors that can do things *on*, *for*, *in*, and *with* athletes (Frank, 2010; Williams, 2020). For example, researchers have suggested that narratives can work *for* injured athletes by expanding the narrative resources available to them and others (i.e., coaches and practitioners) to make sense of their injury experiences, and *on* and *with* athletes, by raising awareness of the dangers embedded within injury stories (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2019; Smith & Sparkes, 2009b; Williams, 2020). As social actors, narratives have been further indicated to shape meanings of injury in ways that counter dominant cultural norms (McGannon et al., 2021). Given the power of stories to 'do things' and to breathe meaning into who we are and what we might become in the future, McGannon et al. (2021) suggested sharing injury narratives with athletes, coaches, and practitioners and using them as entry points for reflection, understanding, and change. In line with these suggestions and given that our understanding of the applied value of narratives has

been largely based on theoretical suggestions, a critical perusal of narratives in action warrants further consideration.

Generating empirical insights into narratives in action, and how they might do things *on*, *for*, and *with* athletes, coaches, and practitioners, has important implications for advancing our applied understanding of injury narratives. To expand, as sports injury narratives have yet to be shared and discussed with multiple stakeholders (i.e., athletes, coaches, practitioners), at present it is unknown whether sports injury narratives can work *for* injured athletes by enabling them to make sense of their experiences, or implicate their physical and mental well-being as suggested (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2019; Brock & Kleiber, 1994; McGannon et al., 2021; Williams, 2020). Moreover, current theorising regarding the practical considerations of sports injury narratives has been researcher-led, as stakeholders' perspectives of how narratives may influence an athlete's risk, response, and management of injury are unknown. Accordingly, there could possibly be more expansive and alternative ways that sports injury narratives may impact injured athletes and perhaps in ways that align more closely with the needs of stakeholders. Given this limited research attention, coupled with the on-going concerns over the knowledge-practice gap within sport-injury psychology, whereby research is being created but having limited uptake into practice (Leggat et al., 2021), understanding both stakeholders' perspectives of sports injury narratives, and narratives in action, is a timely and pertinent consideration.

Alongside this knowledge-practice gap, an understanding of the applied value of sports injury narratives could also answer calls for an alternative and novel sport injury resource that extends beyond a psychological perspective (Wadey & Day, 2022). To expand, the literature to date has predominately aimed to facilitate athletes' psychological experiences of injury through the development of interventions that



have stress management at their core and employ cognitive-behavioural means (Brewer & Evans, 2022; Ivarsson et al., 2017). Although these interventions have been associated with improved outcomes, given that recent scholarship has indicated that injuries are as much social and cultural in nature as they are personal (Wiese-Bjornstal, 2019), this focus on cognitive strategies alone may not adequately support athletes for whom relationships and their environment are a key concern (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017). Moreover, these interventions focus only on ‘upskilling’ the injured athlete and hence negate social responsibility by promoting a neoliberal health agenda whereby the injured athlete is deemed as being solely responsible for managing their injury experiences (Wadey & Day, 2022). Alternatively, adopting a narrative approach differs from cognitive interventions by shifting the focus away from solely concentrating on the internal processes of the injured athlete and instead providing socio-cultural resources that athletes and support networks (e.g., coaches, practitioners) can draw upon and discuss within interpersonal settings to help make sense of athletes’ injury experiences. In this regard, narratives can enhance the social consciousness of injury, as instead of locating the problem of injury within the injured athlete and how *they* think, feel, and behave around injury, they prompt consideration of how the broader socio-cultural contexts also *create the conditions* for athletes to think, feel, and behave around injury. Considering the potential of narratives to act as a novel and alternative resource for supporting injured athletes, creating an understanding of the applied value of narratives warrants further research.

The purpose of this chapter was to extend empirical understanding of the applied value of video narratives (see chapter six) for athletes, coaches, and practitioners. Underpinned by narrative pedagogy (Goodson & Gill, 2011), the study’s aims were twofold: (a) to explore the video narratives in action (i.e., how they acted

*on, for, and with* participants within the pedagogical encounters) and (b) to work *with* stakeholders (i.e., athletes, coaches, and practitioners) to consider their views on the applied value of video narratives and pedagogical discussions for professional practice (i.e., how they could work *on, for, and with* others moving forward). Generating empirical insights into the applied value of the video narratives will also build upon and extend the findings from the previous chapter. To expand, in the previous chapter, given the ongoing calls to support injured athletes' well-being and welfare, I highlighted the need to communicate sport injury psychology research in ways that athletes and support networks can both access and engage with. By translating the narratives into a video format and disseminating them to athletes, coaches, and practitioners, the video narratives were indicated to facilitate the impact and uptake of the six injury narratives by communicating the findings in accessible, evocative, and meaningful ways. For example, athletes, coaches, and practitioners, described how the video narratives helped them to understand the diverse ways in which athletes may experience injury, resonate and empathise with injured athletes' experiences, and take on board the information presented thus expanding their injury narrative repertoire. Building upon this study, it is now important to understand what the applied value of these six injury narratives might be for athletes, coaches, and practitioners. Given that they can understand, resonate, and engage with the findings, what might these six video narratives do for them? Can they support athletes' well-being and welfare as suggested? How and in what ways might they work *on, for, and with* athletes, coaches, and practitioners?

## **7.2 Methodology**

### **7.2.1 Participants**

Following university ethical board approval, a purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit participants. Criterion-based sampling was used to recruit participants who were: (a) elite athletes, that is both semi-elite (i.e., competing in talent development programs or a second-tier standard; Swann et al., 2015) and competitive elite athletes (e.g., World or Olympic level; Swann et al., 2015); (b) participated in track and field; (c) 18+ years old. In total, 23 athletes were recruited from the United Kingdom, Ireland, and the United States ( $n^{\text{female}}=13$ ,  $n^{\text{male}}=10$ ). To extend the scope and reach of the study beyond athletes and given that injury narratives can work on and through practitioners and coaches (Howe, 2004), the following participants were recruited (a) elite track and field coaches, and (b) elite practitioners that have worked within track and field and/or across other elite sports (i.e., boxing, golf, swimming, rugby). Collectively, 46 elite practitioners accepted the invitation to participate: 17 sport psychologists, 10 physiotherapists; five nutritionists, four strength and conditioning coaches, three lifestyle advisors, three track and field coaches, two physiologists, and two performance directors

### **7.2.2 Procedure and Data Collection**

Narrative pedagogy was used to explore the research question (i.e., the applied value of narratives in working *on*, *for*, and *with* participants). This methodology can be understood as an educational tool that involves sharing narratives with participants and then collaborating with participants to explore the narratives presented by engaging in meaning-making, deep dialogue, and exchange (Goodson & Gill, 2011). Narrative pedagogy was an appropriate methodology as it first allowed for an exploration of narratives in action, that is, how narratives may act *on*, *for*, and *with*

participants when shared and discussed within pedagogical encounters. For example, previous research (Douglas & Carless, 2008) has illustrated how the process of pedagogy (i.e., sharing athletes' stories with coaches), yielded self-discovery and increased empathy and understanding in coaches, as they questioned, summarised, and incorporated athletes' stories into their own prior understanding. McMahon et al. (2018) also used narrative pedagogy to educate parents on the experiences of abuse within sport. By sharing athletes' stories of abuse with parents within pedagogical encounters, the authors highlighted how the process of narrative pedagogy enhanced parents' capacity to identify unacceptable coaching practices. Second, by mutually facilitating each other's narrative reflections, the process of narrative pedagogy can permit the researcher to work *with* rather than *on* stakeholders in a reciprocal and collaborative manner to explore the issue in contention (i.e., research question).

To capitalise on the collaborative nature of narrative pedagogy, whereby deeper meanings can emerge through shared dialogue and exchange, focus groups were chosen as the method of data collection. This is because the dialogue in focus groups exemplifies "a cascading effect in which each person's turn of the conversation links to or tumbles out of the topics . . . allowing a deeper understanding to be reached" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p.183). To account for *shared* experiences, mitigate the influence of power dynamics, and reduce the potential implication of unwillingness to share information for fear of criticism, homogenous focus groups were used for both elite coaches and athletes (McMahon et al., 2018). Meanwhile, practitioners were organised in a heterogenous manner (i.e., a mix of practitioners) to reflect real-world settings where practitioners act collectively to support injured athletes (Hess et al., 2019). Furthermore, to account for the influence of organisational settings, practitioners were recruited from, and focus groups conducted within, their respective

sporting organisations. Overall, 11 focus groups were conducted with 3 to 16 participants included in each ( $m = 6.2$ ). Typically, it is recommended that focus groups consist of four to eight people (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) and for the most part this sample size was achieved ( $n = 7$ ). However, due to issues with recruiting elite track and field coaches, and a decision to split one of the recruited focus groups into smaller sizes due to a potential issue of power dynamics, three of the focus groups contained a reduced sample size of three participants. In these instances, to help mitigate the possibility of limited interaction between participants due to a decreased sample size, I offered greater insight into my own experiences to contribute to the debates and discussions formed. Due to increased interest in the project, one focus group further exceeded the above recommendation of 10 participants (Sparkes & Smith, 2014), with 16 participants. Rather than exclude participants from taking part, I tried to ensure that each participant had the opportunity to vocalise their opinion and contribute to the collective discussions being formed.

Guided by narrative pedagogy (Goodson & Gill, 2011), I first sought to establish an accepting and empathetic environment within focus groups by creating and building rapport with and among participants. As Goodson and Gill (2011) recommend, building trust is essential to the narrative pedagogy process, as power relationships can affect one's ability to engage in meaningful exchange with one another. To this end, I employed several techniques outlined by McMahon et al. (2018) for building trust and rapport within narrative pedagogy settings. To start, focus groups took place at a location and time that was convenient for participants. At the outset of the focus group, details of the research project were outlined, informed consent was obtained, and participants were invited to introduce themselves and share their own experiences of injury or working with elite injured athletes. There were no

time constraints placed on the focus group interviews, and participants could control the pace of the discussion by asking them if they would like to move onto the next phase (McMahon et al., 2018). To manage possible power dynamics amongst participants, I took on the role of the moderator to create a supportive environment in which personal, multiple, and conflicting opinions are elicited (Smith & Sparkes, 2016).

The process of narrative pedagogy comprised of three phases: narration (i.e., sharing the video narratives), collaboration (i.e., discussing the video narratives), and location (i.e., linking the narratives to their broader social and cultural context). Each of these phases was conducted for each of the six video narratives. However, these phases did not occur systematically but instead dynamically and reciprocally, with “a natural flow between each phase that involved an interplay of sharing, listening, and storytelling” (McMahon et al., 2018, p. 11). The first phase ‘narration’ involved sharing a video narrative with the focus group. Following the initial sharing of the video narrative, the collaboration phase began, as the video narrative was then examined by posing questions in an open-ended manner, (e.g., “What are your impressions of the video?”). According to Goodson and Gill (2011), the collaboration phase involves exploring the meanings in the stories for the purpose of better understanding the lived experiences being told. To this end, participants discussed their thoughts around the narrative presented, what they thought was happening, how it related to their own or others’ experiences, and the impact the narrative had on them and could potentially have on others. To assist this process of collaboration, I also drew upon my own experiences as a cultural insider (i.e., previous elite track athlete and physiotherapist), where appropriate, to help build

rapport and contribute to the reciprocation and deep dialogue necessary for pedagogy (McMahon et al., 2022). Moreover, when participants posed questions to me regarding the video narratives (e.g., how does someone get off the merry-go-round?), I offered some cautionary insights and/or turned the question around and asked all the participants what they thought, to reinforce the collaborative nature of the encounter.

Following this process of collaboration, the third phase, location, began. In this phase, I aimed to locate the research, which involves linking the narratives to their wider contexts including social and cultural practices (McMahon et al., 2018). To assist this stage, information was presented in a PowerPoint presentation (see Appendix I) which included details of the existing evidence-base informing the videos (i.e., Everard et al., 2021), details of how the videos presented related to other forms of research, and some theoretical insights into narrative inquiry (i.e., how athletes' stories are underpinned by socio-cultural plotlines, and the need for a multiplicity of storylines). This PowerPoint presentation further included information that attended to the pedagogical and theoretical challenges of disseminating the injury narratives as identified in chapter five. Building upon chapter five, the materialised sensitivity of the *merry-go-round* was enhanced by including research on the physiological aspects of chronic injuries (Smith & Monforte, 2020). Similarly, the accessibility of the *longevity* narrative was accounted for by including research on sustainability within sport (e.g., Dohlsten et al., 2020). While all the above information was included in a PowerPoint presentation, it was integrated and discussed in an ad-hoc and intuitive manner, as previous narrative pedagogy

researchers indicated that introducing too much academic material can disrupt the flow and process of narrative exchange (McGannon et al., 2018).

Considering the contextual information provided, participants were then invited to further discuss the video narratives (i.e., further collaboration). Overall, this reciprocal process of narrative pedagogy (i.e., narration, collaboration, location) allowed for an exploration of how the video narratives acted on participants and was reflected in statements including, “I feel less alone”, or “it (video narrative) made me think about my own injury story”. To generate further insights into the applied value of narratives, closing questions were posed around what the video narratives could ‘do’ for athletes, coaches, and practitioners moving forward, including how they felt the videos could be used to inform professional practice or what influence they felt the videos might have on athletes, coaches, or practitioners in the future. Participants were also invited to contact me with any further questions or insight following the focus groups. Several participants did follow up with emails regarding how they used the video narratives in practice as part of one-to-one sessions with athletes, either as ‘ice-breakers’ to prompt dialogue around sensitive topics relating to injury or to facilitate athletes in making sense of their injury experiences. Each focus group lasted between 100-120 minutes. All focus groups were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

### **7.2.3 Data Analysis**

An RTA was used to analyse the dataset (Braun & Clarke 2019, 2020). An RTA was chosen as it allowed for the data to be analysed inductively (e.g., stakeholders responses), deductively (e.g., narrative inquiry; Frank, 2010), reflexively (e.g., considering my positioning in the study), and critically (e.g., challenging socio-



cultural norms). The process of doing an RTA was fluid and recursive rather than rigid and structured and occurred in an ongoing manner over several months. To begin, I familiarised myself with the data which involved capturing ideas about potential patterns of meanings through immersion by reading and re-reading the transcripts and listening and re-listening to the audio recordings. Initial codes were then created which aimed to capture significant meanings of the dataset relevant to the research question (i.e., the applied value of the video narratives). In line with the narrative pedagogy process, the data that helped address this research question was represented across two temporal phases. For example, in some instances, the data was past or present-focused, and indicated how the video narratives acted *on*, *for*, or *with* participants within the pedagogical encounters (e.g., I feel less alone, it made me realise). In other instances, the data was future-focused and represented participants' views on what the video narratives and pedagogical discussions could 'do' for athletes, coaches, or practitioners moving forward (e.g., I think the video narratives could help athletes make sense of their injury experiences). As both temporal aspects of the data (i.e., past and future-focused), were intertwined in participants' discussions throughout the transcripts, both temporal aspects were used to provide an overall account of the applied value of narratives. Several codes were formed in the initial stages including "narratives as a preventative tool", "narratives as a frame of reference", "narratives generate and facilitate dialogue". Codes were then clustered together to form overarching themes (i.e., "patterns of shared meaning underpinned or united by a core concept"; Braun & Clarke 2019, p. 593). For example, the codes including "narratives prepare athletes for injury set-backs", "narratives as cheat sheets", "narratives as an early warning sign", "narratives incentivise behavioural change" were collated and combined into an overarching theme named "forewarned is forearmed". During this

phase, to help frame the interpretations made, I drew upon narrative inquiry (Frank, 2010), the sport injury psychology literature (e.g., Gledhill, 2021; Putukian, 2016; Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017), and the broader narrative literature (e.g., Frank, 2004, 2013; Goodson & Gill, 2011; Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, 2009b). Writing also began in this phase and formed part of the analysis (Richardson, 2000), as multiple drafts of these preliminary themes were sent to my supervisors who provided a critical sounding board throughout (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The interpretations were further developed by drawing upon reflexivity, as well as re-listening to the audio transcripts to ensure that the ‘feel’ and context was maintained. The themes were also reviewed against transcripts and the entire data set before they were further refined and combined into larger themes. To assist this stage, an overall story was written for each transcript, and then compared with the overall story captured within the themes presented (Trainor & Bundon, 2020). Themes were then defined to ‘capture’ interpretative stories of the data and organised to showcase how video narratives and pedagogical discussions can ‘do things’ for athletes, coaches, and practitioners. The final stage involved editing the report, ensuring that the quotations selected were reflective of the interpretations made and that the findings provided an overall rich, nuanced, and coherent account of the story.

Throughout the process of constructing the themes, analytical rigour was enhanced via the use of critical friends (Smith & McGannon, 2018) and reflexivity (Finlay, 2002). Critical friends’ discussions helped shed new analytical insight into the themes being formed in several ways. First, my supervisors offered alternative interpretations of the data which were further discussed and reflected upon, helping to develop more well-rounded themes. Second, they ensured that my interpretations were not speculative but instead informed by the data. Such feedback brought to my

attention, how at times, I was perhaps describing what was inferred within the pedagogical encounters as opposed to what was described by the participants themselves (Wolcott, 2001). Third, they prompted me to offer a more critical interpretation of how the video narratives and pedagogical discussions may impact injured athletes. Such reflections raised my awareness of the possible limitations of the data I had collected. For example, within the pedagogical encounters, although the discussions around the video narratives were open and collaborative, towards the close of the pedagogical encounters, discussions mainly centred on how the video narratives could support athletes, or how they acted on participants in a constructive way. On reflection, I could have probed more in these closing stages as to how these video narratives when discussed and shared could also constrain athletes or asked participants about the possible dangers of implementing a narrative approach into practice. Such discussions would have led to a more nuanced dataset and interpretations. Nonetheless, to help balance the data presented which mainly celebrates the use of video narratives and pedagogy, I offered some possible counteracting arguments throughout. Finally, feedback from critical friends helped improve the clarity of the writing, and in turn, the clarity of the ideas presented.

Alongside critical friends' discussions, analytical rigour was further enhanced by engaging in reflexive journaling (Finlay, 2002; McGannon & Metz, 2010). My reflections on this dataset centred around four key tensions. These tensions included first maintaining the context and 'feel' of the data, which, I felt, was lost at times from fragmenting the data into codes. The second tension involved trying to remain open and inductive in the analysis and consider 'what is being said here', as well as turning to theory to enrich the interpretations being made. Third, my reflections centred around the tensions I felt from trying to interpret quotations of participants to whom I

was a cultural outsider (i.e., coaches, practitioners). Finally, I reflected upon the ‘unspoken’ tensions between myself and the participants (e.g., viewing the narratives as being prescriptive and definitive versus hermeneutic, wanting ‘concrete’ follow-up actions).

## **7.3 Findings**

The following themes discuss how the video narratives and pedagogical discussions were illustrated (i.e., present focus, by acting on participants) and indicated (i.e., future-focused, stakeholders’ views) to work *on*, *for*, and *with* athletes, coaches, and practitioners. Overall, these themes point to the applied value of the video narratives when dispersed and shared within pedagogical settings to support injured athletes across personal, social, and cultural levels. Four themes are outlined and discussed: *Forewarned is Forearmed*; *Sense-Making*; *Fostering Connections*; *Pricking the Social Consciousness*.

### **7.3.1 Forewarned is Forearmed**

This theme predominately describes participants’ views on how the video narratives and pedagogical discussions could act to support injured athletes’ risk, response, and management of injury in the future. To expand, participants highlighted how the video narratives and pedagogical discussions could be used to prepare athletes for injury setbacks by forewarning them of possible ‘trouble’ ahead and by acting as “route maps” to help navigate their future injury experiences. The necessity of this education was described by participants to be especially pertinent within the current cultural climate, whereby a “cherry-picking” of reality is often made visible, leaving athletes ill-equipped to navigate seemingly unforeseen circumstances. To illustrate one coach reported:

I think if you could educate athletes early on these different perspectives, it might get them to understand that your journey is never this linear upward stairway, and if athletes could really come to understand that from a younger age, then they might be able to take the hits when they happen, because everyone still believes or expects to get that stairways to success, and something I've kind of learnt about this game, after years of it, is that you cannot predict it, you can't say how things are going to go, and I think what's really important to all of this is the acceptance of things, and you know it's hard, because no one wants to say that you might never get to where you want to go, or that you might always be injured, or that you might fall out of love with the sport. But, I think athletes need to be made aware of these things, because it's like coaches and parents are always talking about success, success, success, naturally that's what we want. . . and so we tend to avoid talking about injury . . . or the 'bad stories', but ultimately it is not going to be a negative talking to someone about injury, if anything it is much worse having not talked about it and then they are completely lost if it does happen, so I think it needs to be brought to the table *before* it even happens.

As described by the above participant, injury can represent a loss in the destination or map that previously guided an athlete's life (e.g., "stairways to success") causing chaos and confusion (e.g., "completely lost if it does happen"). However, as illustrated by the above participant, by bringing injury "to the table before it even happens", the video narratives and pedagogical discussions could support athletes' future well-being by protecting them against the possibility of narrative wreckage, which occurs when the previous narrative or map that has guided an individual's life path is broken, and

in the absence of alternative narratives to regain coherence of their life story, they are left ‘shipwrecked’ by the storm (Frank, 2013).

Building upon this example, participants alluded to three ways in which the video narratives and pedagogical discussions could help prevent narrative wreckage (Frank, 2013). First, by raising athletes’ awareness of the possibility of injury setbacks. For example, previous research illustrates how the storyline of elite athletes as being ‘invincible’ and ‘superhuman’ can preclude them from ever conceiving injury as a possibility that could happen to them (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017). To illustrate, one athlete reported, “It was just something that I never even thought about before, and I definitely wasn’t prepared for it, so I think if I had seen this beforehand, I might have been better equipped to deal with it”. Second, participants highlighted how the video narratives could help pre-emptively manage expectations around injury experiences and elite sport (i.e., it is not always a smooth and linear process). Lastly, participants indicated how the video narratives could provide athletes with multiple “cheat sheets”, to help shape and guide their future narrative journey. For example, the following lifestyle advisor described:

I think these video narratives could almost give the less experienced athletes a bit of a ‘head start’ in dealing with injury, because I imagine more experienced athletes and some of the athletes talking in the videos have almost stumbled upon their own narrative, because they’ve experienced a couple of injuries and they have had to figure out a narrative that helps them think about it and manage it, whereas, this is a bit of a cheat sheet for less experienced athletes because they’ve already got six different ones to pick from.

These “cheat sheets” proposed by the above participant are synonymous with the concept of narrative maps proposed by Pollner and Stein (1996), which refer to pre-

representations that newcomers in an unfamiliar world get from stories told by those who have already been there. Narrative maps are said to provide “orientation, information, and advice” to those at the threshold of a new social world to help navigate their future experiences and thus as indicated by the above participant, can offer athletes “a head start” in dealing with injury (Pollner & Stein, 1996 p. 201).

Aligned with this concept of narrative maps, researchers within sport and exercise psychology have indicated how narrative maps can shape future actions by directing individuals towards certain states and away from others (Phoenix & Sparkes, 2006). To this end, the video narratives and pedagogical discussions were illustrated to direct athletes towards certain states (e.g., prioritising their long-term health by ‘opening their eyes’ to the longevity narrative, see chapter six) and away from others (e.g., risk of injury by raising their awareness of the dangers inherent within certain storylines). Indeed, participants indicated how the video narratives and pedagogical discussions could help direct athletes away from the risk of injury by acting as an “early warning system” that enables athletes and support networks to identify “red flags . . . a bit like a canary in the coalmines”, and thus become proactive in implementing injury prevention and management strategies. Moreover, by showing rather than telling athletes about the consequences of risk-taking behaviours within sport (Chapter 5), the video narratives were illustrated to *act on* participants within the pedagogical encounters and incentivise future behavioural change, as one athlete exemplified:

Sometimes it’s hard, because I don’t want to admit to my coach that I’m rushing back to training or pushing through the pain . . . but watching that is sort of a confirmation that these people are saying ‘don’t do it’. So, it sort of gives me an incentive to be like if I know that I can’t stop myself from pushing

through the pain, at least if I tell my coach then he will know and be inclined to tell me to stop . . . but it was also just good for making me realise like okay, if you do push through the pain, you could be a few more years out or a few years down the line and it could happen again, so yeah it just gives me an incentive to be like you need to stop yourself from snowballing into something worse.

By forewarning athletes of the possible destinations that certain storylines may lead to (e.g., snowball narrative; physical and psychological decline), it can act *on* athletes to counter risk-taking behaviours by incentivising them to create new maps (i.e., act on injury symptoms rather than ignore), that might lead to new possible destinations. This capacity of the video narratives and pedagogical discussions to equip athletes with multiple narrative resources to frame, interpret, and respond to injury onset was further indicated to have important implications for resisting the normalisation of injury embedded within elite sport (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2019). For example, as illustrated by the following athlete, the video narratives could impact athletes' response and future management of injury by granting them permission to speak up and act on their injury symptoms:

I think for athletes who may have different niggles or small injuries or who are running through pain, and either they are afraid to speak up about it, or they just think it will be grand, I'll just run through it. After watching this, they might be more inclined to go 'okay I should probably tell someone that I am feeling this, it could be okay or it could be something more, and it could lead to like the snowball effect'. So, I think after seeing this, they would be more inclined to say or do something about what they're feeling.



Overall, this theme illustrates (i.e., narratives in action) and indicates (i.e., stakeholders' views) how exposing participants to the video narratives and encouraging discussion around them within pedagogical encounters can work *on* athletes by teaching them and others what to pay attention to and how to respond to certain actions, as well as *for* athletes, by forewarning them of possible 'trouble' ahead and providing them with maps to help navigate this future terrain. That said, athletes also need to be supported by their broader socio-cultural environment to help facilitate them in creating new routes and new directions if necessary. Moreover, although these video narratives can help prepare athletes for injury setbacks and equip them with the resources for navigating their future injury experiences, as Pollner and Stein (1996) suggest, the full meaning of the map, and thus what lies ahead, only becomes evident once the novice embarks on the journey.

### **7.3.2 Sense-Making**

This theme relates to how the video narratives were illustrated to work *for* injured athletes by acting as frames of reference that when shared and discussed within pedagogical encounters facilitated athletes in making sense of their injury experiences, and ultimately supported their psychological well-being. Moreover, participants indicated how the video narratives *could* facilitate athletes in making sense of their injury experiences in the future, by enabling athletes to generate awareness, reflection, and perspective on their own injury experiences, by acting to initiate and facilitate dialogue around injury, and by prompting athletes to disclose their injury concerns to others.

Within pedagogical encounters, the video narratives were illustrated to work *for* athlete participants by providing them with a frame of reference to recognise,

interpret, and understand their own injury experiences. For example, the following athlete reported:

It helps put a title to what you're going through, so when you're watching them, you could identify yourself in the videos, obviously none of them are going to mirror exact personal experiences, but if you look at it like a continuum, there is a lot covered, so it helps you identify the different ways you might be feeling throughout injury, which is always changing too.

To further facilitate athletes in making sense of their injury experiences, athletes used the video narratives within pedagogical encounters as building blocks to either structure their own injury story or form a bricolage of their own experiences, as one athlete described: "I could resonate with different parts of each one, because each one was like yeah that's a bit of me, that's a bit of me, so it just helps you piece together your own story a bit more".

Part of facilitating athletes in making sense of their injury experiences also involved exposing athletes to narratives of injury that may have been previously silenced or suppressed by dominant cultural norms (Carless & Douglas, 2013). As indicated by narrative scholars, individuals are believed to need alignment between what they are experiencing and the narrative scripts available within their culture to help template that experience (Frank, 2006; McLeod, 1997). Therefore, when dominant injury narratives (e.g., resilience) suppress alternative injury storylines, it can create narrative tensions that threaten sense of self, identity, and mental well-being (Williams, 2020). However, by giving presence to these alternative injury meanings within the pedagogical encounters, it generated the opportunity for athletes to gain coherence between what they are/were experiencing and the narrative resources

available to frame, interpret, and understand that experience (Douglas & Carless, 2009). For example, the following athlete reported:

I think the merry-go-round one, just having your experiences recognised is very liberating, because it's almost a relief to be like 'okay this is something', I'm feeling something real, that other people experience too . . . and there's a name on what I am experiencing, which almost helps you externalise it a bit more.

As described by the above participant, by recognising that the experiences and challenges we face are not entirely personal but instead part of a shared human experience, it can liberate individuals from the “prison of selfhood” by connecting them to broader meta-narratives and a wider understanding of being in the world (Goodson & Gill, 2011, p.67). By making lived experiences narratable it is further indicated to enhance the recognition and validation of these experiences to others (e.g., “I'm feeling something real, that other people experience too”) (Frank, 2010). Building upon this idea, by narrating personal experiences of injury within a collective storyline, the video narratives and pedagogical discussions were further illustrated to facilitate athletes in making sense of their injury experiences, by “dispersing feelings of anxiety” around injury and normalising and rationalising their injury concerns, as echoed in the following athlete's reflection:

It made me feel less alone because there have been particular thoughts, I've been having that I hadn't realised like, 'oh all these other athletes are thinking that same specific thought', so actually, it made me realise that every athlete whose been injured is having similar thoughts, it's not just me.

Alongside normalising and validating athletes' injury experiences, exposing athletes to multiple injury narratives (i.e., video narratives) and creating dialogical

opportunities within the pedagogical encounters, offered athletes the opportunity to re-construct their injury experiences, if necessary, thus expanding their sense of who they are and who they might become in the future (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, 2009b; Sparkes, 1996). For example, the following participant exemplified:

I am definitely on the merry-go-round, but I guess I'm starting to see it now, as each time I go round I am learning something new about my body or myself and hopefully that is moving me closer to one day getting off the merry-go-round, because each year I'm getting closer than the year before.

As Bruner (1990) indicates, meaning-making is a continuous interpretative process. Therefore, the meanings athletes ascribe to their injury experiences are never finalised but remain open to being continuously revisited, revised, and re-constructed (Douglas, 2014). While the local and cultural conventions of telling may not always afford athletes the opportunity to construct their story in ways that are inclusive of their experiences (see chapter five), by offering athletes this opportunity within pedagogical encounters to construct and reconstruct their injury story, the story could be thickened in various ways beyond pedagogical encounters through the habitual act of telling and re telling so that it grows in salience in the thinking of the athlete and in the conversations that take place in the world around them (Denison & Winslade, 2006).

Recognising the importance of facilitating athletes in making sense of their experiences, in diverse and meaningful ways, sport psychologists highlighted how the video narratives could be used within sport psychology sessions in the future. For example, sport psychologists highlighted how the videos could be used to help facilitate athletes in cultivating awareness, reflection, and perspective on their own injury story. For example, the following sport psychologist described how the video

narratives could be used to enable athletes to externalise and problematise their own injury experiences, by discussing them from a third-person perspective:

I do think it's such a useful tool to use with an athlete, so like I have an athlete now, whose experiences are really similar to that merry-go-round narrative and so I think this could really work, so with her, I would want to watch this video with her and be like 'how does this resonate with you?' and then ask her now that you're watching this video what type of things would you tell that athlete? I think that would present a great opportunity of her recognising 'Oh well, they got really down on themselves', or they started blaming themselves or they could have done this or that, and then that would be a great opportunity to be like 'well remember you kind of slipped into that'; so I think it would be a fun tool to use in a session with an athlete to take the pressure off their experiences, talk about somebody else's, and then tie it back to them.

As indicated by the above participant, the video narratives could be used to help athletes both recognise the type of story they may feel a part of, and to externalise their injury story. Facilitating this process could have important implications for supporting athletes psychological well-being, as within narrative therapy, it is highlighted how by bringing awareness to the socio-cultural plotline or narrative that underpins an individual's story, it can help deconstruct a potentially problematic storyline, by enabling individuals to observe the story as something separate from themselves, thus loosening the hold of the dominant plotline over the individual's life (see chapter eight). Moreover, as indicated by Frank (2010, p. 123), "naming types of stories can enable people to understand what stories they are telling and how their own responses and plans – their sense of possibility- are conducted by those stories".

Therefore, the video narratives could be used within sport psychology sessions to facilitate athletes in both storying and re-storying their injury experiences in a more constructive light.

In line with storying athletes' injury experiences, sport psychologists highlighted how the video narratives could help initiate and facilitate dialogue around athletes' injury experiences, and thus help "get athletes started" in constructing their own injury story. To exemplify, the following sport psychologist described:

Sometimes it's getting started in making sense of the journey they have been on that is the hardest part. So, it's fantastic that we have this resource that helps get them started. I almost see them as different suits to try on; so like 'try that on see does it fit', 'yeah that's kind of it, but not quite', okay, 'what about this other one' . . . and it's almost the conversation that comes out of that . . . around the fitness of things, that can lead to the good stuff, and help them create their own bespoke injury meaning.

As indicated by the above participant, the video narratives could serve as a prompt for athletes to begin to disclose and construct an understanding of their own injury experiences. Building upon this idea, participants highlighted how by normalising athletes' injury experiences and by recognising that they are not alone in these experiences, the video narratives could prompt athletes to seek support in the future. For example, the following athlete reported:

I think it (video narrative) could help athletes realise like 'okay this is normal', I'm not the only one experiencing this, and you're not a failure for experiencing it, because for me, whenever I was injured I would just sit there and be like 'oh god I'm useless' which I think a lot of athletes do . . . but yeah

just knowing that it's normal might help people be more vocal about injury, and when you vocalise it you're going to get a lot more support, because otherwise it is easy to go under the radar, and people don't really realise what's happening or what's being going on.

As Frank (2006, p.422) depicts, "people need to hear their own voices and by hearing others will become empowered to tell their own". To this end, by prompting athletes to disclose their injury experiences to others, the video narratives could have important implications for not only facilitating athletes in making sense of their injury experiences but supporting athletes' mental health and well-being.

Overall, exposing athletes to diverse injury narratives within pedagogical encounters had applied implications in facilitating athletes in making sense of their injury experiences, normalising and validating athletes' injury experiences, and creating the conditions for athletes to re-story their injury experiences in reflective, expansive, and shape-shifting ways. To this end, it was indicated that the video narratives could be implemented into one-to-one sport psychology sessions to support injured athletes at a personal level while narrating collective storylines of injury could help overcome socio-cultural barriers to seeking support for injury and prompt athletes to speak out about their injury concerns in the future.

### **7.3.2 Fostering Connections**

This theme relates to how the video narratives and pedagogical discussions can work *for* athletes, coaches, and practitioners by fostering connections. First, the video narratives and pedagogical discussions were illustrated to create connections between injured athletes within pedagogical encounters. Second, participants indicated how the video narratives and pedagogical discussions could be used to enhance interpersonal relationships between athletes and their support networks in the future, by promoting

greater empathy and understanding towards athletes' injury experiences. Finally, the video narratives and pedagogical discussions were indicated to potentially enhance both interpersonal (i.e., between injured athletes and support networks) and interdisciplinary (i.e., between practitioners) connections by acting as a conduit to facilitate more mutual dialogue and shared understandings around injured athletes' experiences.

The video narratives and pedagogical discussions were illustrated to foster connections between injured athletes by first connecting them to broader injury narratives (i.e., the video narratives), and then to each other, by evoking a reciprocal and dialogical exchange. To expand, athletes used the video narratives to story their own experiences which resonated with another athlete's experiences leading to further storytelling and so on. This cascading effect and storytelling process helped build resonance between injured athletes. For example, the following athlete reported:

I can agree with what Jane and Lee said there, just the frustration of wanting to get back running, but then when you do go back too soon, you just end up out for longer, and yeah, as they said, just the anxiety and doubt around how am I going to get back from this, especially as time goes on it just gets amplified more and more, especially when other people are still training hard and you're injured, and you are just doing rehab or whatever, it's just not the same as training, so I can definitely resonate with what they were saying.

This shared understanding (e.g., I can resonate with what they are saying) created within the pedagogical encounters, has important implications for supporting injured athletes, as such mutual resonance can call on athletes to act as communicative bodies, whereby one offers their own pain and receives the reassurance that others recognise what afflicts it, bringing them into a relationship with one another (Frank, 2013). Such



relationships can help foster awareness of how we as humans, are not bounded individuals but relational beings that exist relative to one another (Gergen, 2011). This sense of connection and solidarity was illustrated by athlete participants within pedagogical encounters, and was described to help alleviate feelings of isolation usually associated with injury, as indicated by the following three athletes:

John: I think I feel less alone, like when you get injured you feel quite alone but from the stories that you showed us and from talking to everyone in here and how everyone can relate to it, you just don't feel as alone with it, you're just less isolated with it

Simon: Yeah, I agree with John there completely, like when you're injured you almost feel like you are the only one who has ever gone through this or had these thoughts or those kind of feelings, but from seeing these and chatting to everyone, it just shows that everyone pretty much thinks the exact same things, so it gives a bit of perspective and shows that we are all literally the same

Lee: I was just thinking the same as the two lads there, seeing people talk about their injury, and the exact same thought process I would go through, like the panic and self-doubt, and then thinking outside of running, like it just shows that everyone goes through the same kind of thought process when they are in the different stages, so yeah, it definitely makes you feel like you're not the only one.

The above example also demonstrates how connecting injured athletes to these broader injury narratives and each other through the reciprocal sharing of stories, can animate a collective story that further normalises their injury experiences and thus mitigates the 'stigma' of injury by posing relational resistance to dominant cultural norms (Richardson 1990; McGannon et al., 2021). For example, the above participants

challenge dominant masculine ideals that operate a “code of silence” in relation to pain and injury by beginning to disclose their thoughts, emotions, and feelings around injury (McGannon et al., 2021, p.951; Sparkes, 1996; Spencer, 2012). These collective stories can help link individuals together into a shared consciousness, further strengthening the bond between them, whilst also offering them the deference they deserve by relationally counteracting this “code of silence” (McGannon et al., 2021, p.951).

Participants further expressed how the video narratives and pedagogical discussions could support injured athletes in the future by helping them to foster connections between injured athletes and their supporting networks. By showcasing ‘what it means to be injured’, participants indicated how the video narratives could act to strengthen interpersonal relationships, by moving support networks closer to understanding injury from an athlete’s perspective, and thus enhancing their capacity to both relate to and respond to their injury experiences. The following athlete reported:

I think it’s good to just give family and coaches, and even other athletes who haven’t been injured some insight into what it’s like to be injured because people don’t really understand it. Like, if I could show this to my family and be like look, it’s not just me, other people feel like this too, it might help them understand a bit more because I think sometimes they just think I’m being dramatic . . . because they don’t see the full picture of what it’s like to have these constant set-backs and have to pick yourself back up again, but also it’s not just the injury, it’s the being in pain, it’s the isolation, it’s how it makes you feel about your sport . . . so yeah, I think if they could watch this, they could get some insight into how deep it actually goes.

The capacity of these video narratives to create an understanding of “how deep it actually goes” can relate to their ability to cultivate empathetic and embodied reactions. As illustrated in chapter six, the video narratives were deemed to be evocative, and it is this capacity of the videos to amplify and induce affect that can ‘make us care about things’ by creating affective resonances in ways that go beyond articulated reading (Bates, 2014). For example, one physiotherapist reported:

My own feeling listening to that was just sadness. . . . I think it (merry-go-round video) could bring a lot of awareness to coaches and other support staff too, because if they were to see that video, they could maybe feel how rough or how sad an athlete can feel in that moment, and I think it’s a really useful one for us to see, because it mentioned there about a lack of empathy and how that feeds into the cycle, so I think if coaches and support staff could watch this, then if an athlete is going through that, they might be able to understand and empathise a bit more.

As illustrated by the above participant, affective responses or feelings can assist individuals in moving beyond viewing injury experiences as abstract and conceptual to real and felt. Put another way, inducing affect can shift individuals from thinking about the stories presented to thinking with them (see chapter six). Thinking with stories involves joining with the story, adopting its logic and temporality, feeling its nuances and complexities, and experiencing it affecting one’s own life, “the goal is empathy . . . not by internalising the feelings of the others but having resonance with them” (Frank, 2013, p.158). Such resonances and subsequent empathetic responses have important implications for injured athletes. For example, previous sports injury research (Gledhill, 2021; Moore et al., 2021; Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017; Trainor et al., 2020; Tracey, 2003) has indicated how injury can pose a relational rupture between

athletes and their support networks, as athletes have reported feeling as though their injury concerns would not be well received by their support network, or that their support network cannot relate or empathise with their injury experiences. Drawing upon the works of Stuewe-Portnoff (1988) to frame their narrative findings, Ronkainen and Ryba (2017) highlighted the profound implications this relational rupture can have on athletes as they reported “when my world is pervaded by a problem that you don’t recognise, a gulf opens between us” (p. 926). In this sense, by humanising athletes’ injury experiences, and enhancing support networks resonance and empathy for injured athletes’ experiences, the video narratives could help release athletes from the “agony” of “being locked within unheard” and instead act to create a “space of consolation” between athletes and supporting networks (Frank, 2004, p.104).

Alongside this space of consolation, the video narratives were further indicated to strengthen athlete-support network interpersonal ties by evoking dialogue around the shared nature of certain injury experiences. In doing so, it acted to humanise not only athletes’ experiences but also those of their support networks, who are in their own right, wounded storytellers (Frank, 2013; Sparkes, 2022). To illustrate, the following coach described:

I think that merry-go-round video almost mirrors what a coach goes through too, like questioning yourself, and when an athlete is in that spiral, you almost go through that yourself, because you don’t know what to do, and as a coach, you are always thinking what could I have done slightly differently, but it’s so hard to get it right . . . and then if they don’t manage to get back from it, some do, some don’t, you are also left with that lifetime regret of ‘what could have been’. . . . I think they (video narratives) could be a really useful tool to get

athletes and coaches to talk around some of these experiences, and I think anything that helps athletes and coaches talk and make sense of the rocky road that is any international career together, is going to be hugely beneficial.

As illustrated above, by acting as a conduit to help facilitate discussion around injury experiences, and by appealing to the humanity in both athletes and supporting networks, these video narratives can foster a greater sense of togetherness by facilitating more communal dialogue and understanding. In this sense, discussing these narratives within pedagogical encounters could act to dismantle the hierarchical perspective which assumes that coaches and practitioners either need to understand or have empathy *for* injured athletes. Instead, such encounters could help shift our understanding towards a community perspective whereby meaning-making occurs alongside one another, and empathy is viewed as “a relationship in which each understands themselves as requiring completion by the other” (Frank, 2013, p. 233).

In line with this fortified kinship, as further indicated by the above participant, the video narratives and pedagogical discussions could help promote more shared understandings and dialogue between athletes and their support networks. Building upon this idea, practitioners indicated how both the video narratives and pedagogical discussions could enhance their capacity to identify, listen, and respond to the *type* of story an athlete may feel a part of. Although athletes will likely draw from a number of these injury typologies to fabricate their injury stories, nevertheless, by using these typologies as a guide to listening, practitioners highlighted how the video narratives could sensitize them to the rhetoric of injured athletes, providing them with a frame of reference towards how an athlete may be approaching injury so they tailor their response accordingly. Echoing this view, one sport physiologist reported:

I think it's really useful for us as a team just to have some sort of context of how an athlete may be approaching an injury, especially as a peripheral team member, because I might meet an athlete for the first time who is injured for a conditioning session, and I might say like '*okay, we're going to beast you on the bike now*', but that could be the worst thing to say, because they may be the type to over-do it, or they may be trying to pursue the injury as an opportunity outside of sport, so not to be putting people into boxes, but it can help create some understanding of how an athlete may be dealing with an injury, so we make sure we're not reinforcing the wrong narrative for them or putting them into a spiral.

The pedagogical potential of the video narratives to cultivate "some understanding of how an athlete may be approaching injury" has important implications for the future support of injured athletes. To illustrate, previous research has indicated that when an athlete and their support network operate from similar narratives, it can unify them towards a common goal, alternatively, conflicting narratives can lead to frustration, anger, and poor communication (Papathomas et al., 2015b). Such miscommunications and misunderstandings were indicated to be rife within organisational setting, as participants hinted at how coaches and athletes can often draw upon storylines that differ from those espoused by practitioners. The following physiotherapist described:

Educating people about their bodies in theory is really easy, so you can explain to them in theory, what's going on and why the injury is not getting better . . . but then you're up against culture within sport, culture within their family, culture within who they are, where they live, and what they want to believe . . . so, if you're not speaking in the language that they understand or can accept,

then it's just like 'rubbish' kind of stuff, they only hear not what they want to hear, but what they *can* hear.

As Frank (2010, p. 57) depicts, when two inner libraries do not overlap, “the dialogue of the deaf” arises. Contextualising this insight to the above example, when the collection of stories that an athlete and coach have access to does not overlap with the narratives articulated by the practitioners, a rift in understanding emerges. However, the video narratives and pedagogical discussions could help bridge this gap, firstly by broadening athletes, coaches, and practitioners’ injury narrative repertoire and thereby stretching their narrative habitus to becoming receptive to hearing alternative perspectives (see chapter five). Second, as “language shapes the whole inheritance of understanding and meaning” (Goodson & Gill, 2011, p.80), these video narratives could enhance practitioners’ rhetoric for both listening and responding to injured athletes, thus expanding the granularity of communication available to them to engage athletes in a more mutual dialogue. The following sport psychologist hinted at this possibility as she described:

I think we often see that tension with athletes where they are like, I’m expecting my injury to be like that resilience one, and then there’s a frustration when it isn’t following that narrative . . . and that’s a real challenge for us, so that’s why it’s really interesting for us to see these different narratives because it could help give us the language to work around that.

Finally, the video narratives and pedagogical discussions were indicated to create connections between practitioners by facilitating communication between team members and creating more shared understandings around athletes’ injury experiences. For example, one sport psychologist reported:

For the last 15 years having been around multidisciplinary teams, that link between medical, whether it's physio or sports medicine and then psychology, it doesn't really link, and this type of dialogue can help bridge that gap in a way, because you're almost helping to create a conversation around athlete self-talk.

By facilitating communication between team members, the video narratives and pedagogical discussions were further envisaged to promote a more interdisciplinary approach to sport injury management, whereby practitioners could work more synergistically to support injured athletes (Hess et al., 2019). To exemplify, the following physiotherapist reported:

I think these videos are good at creating conversations within us as a team in terms of how we can get everyone involved in injury management, because while I may be the main port of call, everyone has the opportunity to create a positive impact, and I think we could definitely improve in that area, like linking in with X (lifestyle manager) on how we can create opportunities from the injury, like that more to me perspective, or linking in with the physiologists and S and C [strength and conditioning] guys in terms of how we can manage the conditioning side of things on that resilience narrative, so that they don't overdo it, and then marrying up the physiotherapy and psychology sessions, so I think these discussions just help us to think about how can we do more of that so that we are all working together to support the athlete.

The potential of the video narratives to help promote a more interdisciplinary approach to sports injury management has important implications, as Hess et al. (2019) depicted how sporting institutions most commonly adopt a multi-disciplinary approach to athletes' injury rehabilitation and management. Within a multidisciplinary



approach, sporting professionals operate within their respective silos towards individual, discipline-specific goals with little or no communication between team members (Hess et al., 2019). Alternatively, within an interdisciplinary approach, service-providers work more collaboratively around the injured athletes' experiences. Given that interdisciplinary approaches are indicated to result in less burnout for practitioners, greater team cohesion, and improved recovery outcomes for athletes (Hess et al., 2019), the video narratives and pedagogical discussions present important applied implications in both working *for* injured athletes and practitioners.

Overall, the video narratives and pedagogical discussions were illustrated (i.e., within pedagogical encounters) and indicated (i.e., participants views) to work *for* athletes, coaches, and practitioners, by fostering connections and creating more mutual dialogue and shared understandings around injured athletes' experiences.

#### **7.3.4 Pricking the Social Consciousness**

This theme relates to how the video narratives were illustrated to work *with* and *on* participants within pedagogical encounters by guiding their interpretation of how injury can be socially and culturally constructed and prompting reflection on the broader duty of care provided to injured athletes. By facilitating this heightened awareness, the video narratives and pedagogical discussions have important applied implications for injured athletes by raising the social consciousness of injury and promoting greater communal responsibility towards injured athletes' experiences. Specifically, the video narratives were illustrated to work *with* participants within pedagogical encounters by raising their awareness of how the broader socio-cultural contexts create the conditions for athletes to think, feel, and behave around injury. For example, one physiotherapist reported:

I think what really came out of that (i.e., merry-go-round video) was that injured athlete tag and what that does for the athlete. I think we are all guilty of creating that identity . . . it's so easy for other athletes to joke like 'oh you're best mates with the physio, or here you are again, back in the physio room', but equally, we talk about athletes quite openly, and there is a storyline of 'so and so is still injured', so I think we could be better, we could be more sensitive in terms of the language we use around injury, who we say it in front of, and maybe how we say to an athlete, because we are almost compounding that storyline of like 'your still injured then', which is feeding into all those other thoughts the athlete is having around injury.

In line with these socio-cultural understandings, dialogue that emerged in response to the video narratives also helped bring to the fore how funding, sponsorship, or scholarship contractual obligations, specifically within track and field, are often structured around a 'win at all costs' mentality espoused by the performance narrative (Douglas & Carless, 2006), which precludes athletes from behaving in ways that align with alternative injury perspectives (i.e., longevity and more-to-me). Moreover, using the video narratives as a reference point, participants highlighted contextual examples of how the media and institutions may operate in a symbiotic manner to shape how an athlete can construct and thus make sense of their own injury story as the following athlete reported:

I guess I would have had a lot of media and PR training, and one of the things they always told us was to talk about how we were going to bounce back and use the injury to work harder in other ways, so I think they encouraged us within the institution to put that story (i.e., resilience) out there to the media, but I definitely didn't feel like that, and that wasn't my narrative anyway.

Finally, the video narratives worked *with* participants within pedagogical encounters to help raise their awareness of the systemic nature of certain storylines (i.e., resilience, snowball), and how they act as a form of narrative induction within their sporting institutions. Narrative induction refers to “the social work that an institution performs to make one person’s story everyone’s story, relevant to everyone and available to everyone as a role model” (Frank, 2010, p. 61). By guiding their interpretation of how certain storylines create this socially shared frame of reference, participants were able to further reflect upon how these narratives shape and infuse how injury is managed, experienced, and expressed within their cultural climate, as well as the challenges this may present for their athletes. The following sport psychologist reported:

I’m just thinking now that we’ve probably got a program story that leans heavily towards the resilience narrative that injury is just part and parcel, you get injured, and you get on with it. Work hard and come back stronger, because our PD [performance director], he was an athlete, and had injuries but was like I hurt for a bit, and I got on with it, because you’re an athlete you’re going to hurt. I guess even that snowball one we adapt the programme to fit that story because modified training is a huge part of our programme, so there is an element where we create the program around the idea that it's okay to train not 100% because there is adaptive training. But then, are we making it worse, in terms of, are people comfortable to go I'm actually not sure if I am okay to train. . . . I would almost go as far to say that sometimes we reward that behaviour of like, ‘he just cracks on, no matter what like he will go and compete anywhere anytime’, that is seen as like a really resilient athlete and

you know I'm not sure at times if that's the best narrative for everyone, I don't know.

Collectively, the above examples point to how the video narratives and pedagogical discussions worked *with* participants to frame their understanding of how injury is socially and culturally constructed. In doing so, these video narratives and pedagogical discussions help prick the social consciousness of injury by cultivating an awareness of how broader sociocultural factors influence and implicate athletes' risk, response, and management of injury (i.e., the problem is not 'just' located within injured athletes; Wadey & Day 2022). Moreover, by using the video narratives as reference points, the above conversations helped bring to the fore how certain dominant perspectives of injury (e.g., resilience, performance) are not 'how injury is', but rather cultural scripts that are being perpetuated at an institutional and cultural level. Given that dominant narratives often operate below awareness, and it is this latent quality that gives them their power (Nelson, 2001), by generating such insights, the video narratives and pedagogical discussions have pertinent applied implications in helping to problematise dominant narratives and thus create space for more inclusive and expansive ways of supporting injured athletes to emerge.

This problematization of dominant narratives (i.e., resilience, performance), was further evidenced as participants' responses to the video narratives within pedagogical encounters acted to animate collective storylines that foregrounded the 'inconvenient facts' of these dominant perspectives. According to Nelson (2001, p.167), inconvenient facts are those that dominant narratives "run roughshod over . . . as they call the narrative's credibility into question". These inconvenient facts included participants' descriptions of how the totalizing nature of dominant injury perspectives (i.e., resilience, performance), can create the scaffolding within which all

other injury experiences are to be expressed, managed, and understood. In doing so, participants indicated how these dominant perspectives can create tensions for athletes, arising from the disparity between how athletes expect they *should* think, feel, and behave in relation to injury, versus their reality. These tensions were reported to implicate athletes' ability to communicate to support networks and create feelings of isolation, disillusionment, and/or a loss of control for athletes if 'hard work' no longer provided a linear pathway back to their pre-injury state. The pedagogical discussions in response to the video narratives further brought to the fore how dominant perspectives can foreclose athletes from engaging with alternative injury perspectives that may protect their long-term health and well-being (e.g., longevity, more-to-me). Finally, participants illustrated how these dominant perspectives can create stigmatisation, misunderstandings, and limit support for athletes whose injury experiences may differ from these dominant cultural scripts, as the following sport psychologist reported:

I think because our narrative is just 'work hard' like just 'pure graft', work hard and it will be fine, when it starts to not look like that, the coaches just can't understand it, so then they just go with, 'oh they've not been doing the rehab properly', or 'they've sacked it off', because they almost need something more tangible to be able to explain it, so, they'll just go with the story that's more tangible even though it's not real, it doesn't reflect the athletes' or even the physio teams' journey, but they can't handle a non-tangible explanation.

The above examples demonstrate how dispersing these video narratives within pedagogical settings helps create and shape storylines that pose resistance to dominant cultural norms by collectively articulating their "inconvenient facts" (Nelson, 2001, p.167). Such inconvenient facts can help promote a more critical consideration of

dominant perspectives and thus prompt consideration of the broader duty of care provided to injured athletes. For example, within the pedagogical encounters, conversations around these inconvenient facts were illustrated to act *on* practitioners as they began to consider *their* role in shaping an athlete's injury experiences. Indeed, by extending the gaze beyond the injured athlete, some practitioners began to reflect upon how they may be championing certain storylines and socialising athletes to them in ways that are potentially harmful to them. Such reflections created tensions, and moral dilemmas for practitioners, as illustrated by the following sport psychologist:

I think these narratives kind of hold the mirror up to us as a team as well, in terms of how we manage things. I think I am the narratives that we use within the institution because we have adopted these at times like the snowball and pushing through things, so I think it's a good one for us to reflect on as well, like what are the narratives that we are using, because it's got to be the right thing for somebody to get them to engage in the way that we want them to. I've definitely seen this go both ways, where people have felt like they can't report because it's going to be seen as a weakness of like 'here I am again in the physio room', and equally I think we need to be careful with the ones who will just push through, so yeah, it's a good one for us to reflect on too.

The above statement demonstrates how the video narratives and pedagogical discussions worked *on* participants by raising their awareness of how, as practitioners, they may be acting as "artificial persons" who speak on behalf of institutional procedures and organisational rules (Frank, 2004, p.127), as exemplified in the above participant's statement, "I am the narratives that we use within the institution". This awareness can have important applied implications as it can encourage practitioners to think critically of the implications of the narratives of injury they promote, rather

than being complicit in a system that is ultimately damaging to an athlete's long-term health and psychological well-being. For example, the above participant recognised how as practitioners they may be operating collusively to promote a 'culture of risk', whereby athletes are socialised into believing that accepting pain and injury is an integral part of their participation in high-level sport (e.g., I've seen it where athletes feel like they can't disclose because it's going to be seen as a sign of weakness; Nixon 1992; Chapter two). By generating this awareness within pedagogical encounters, the video narratives and pedagogical discussions demonstrate their applied value for injured athletes, as they help shift the perception of injury beyond a neoliberal health agenda, whereby the athlete is seen as solely responsible for the psychological management of injury, towards a more communal approach. Overall, by working both *with* and *on* participants, the video narratives and pedagogical discussions helped 'prick' the wider consciousness and promote a broader duty of care for injured athletes.

#### **7.4 Conclusion**

By exploring narratives in action, alongside multiple stakeholders' perspectives of the video narratives, this chapter extended empirical understanding of how injury narratives can 'do things' *on*, *for*, and *with* athletes, coaches, and practitioners when dispersed and shared within pedagogical encounters. Collectively, these findings highlight the applied value of video narratives and pedagogical activities in supporting injured athletes personally, socially, and culturally. For example, the video narratives and pedagogical discussion were illustrated to work *for* athletes, coaches, and practitioners by facilitating them in making sense of athletes' injury experiences and enhancing interpersonal relationships, *on* athletes by mitigating feelings of isolation around injury and prompting future behavioural change, and *with*

athletes, coaches, and practitioners by guiding interpretation of how injury is socially and culturally constructed and prompting greater communal responsibility towards injury. By illustrating the applied value of the video narratives, this study contributes towards bridging the knowledge-practice gap (Leggat, 2020).

Alongside bridging the knowledge-practice gap, this study also extends the practical lens, by providing an illustrative example of a novel and alternative injury management resource, that diversifies from the predominant cognitive-based interventions within sport injury psychology. The findings presented represent a shift away from focusing solely on the cognitive processes of athletes and instead illustrate how targeting the socio-cultural context through broadening injury discourses and facilitating interpersonal dialogue, it can shape the conditions to help support athletes' thoughts, feelings, and emotions in relation to injury. Furthermore, the current findings demonstrate new and multiple opportunities for supporting injured athletes that have received limited attention within the sport injury psychology literature. For example, the theme "sense-making" highlights how the video narratives could be used as part of a narrative therapy intervention (see chapter eight) to facilitate athletes in constructing and reconstructing their own injury story if necessary. The theme "forewarned is forearmed" illustrates how the narratives could not only act to prevent injury occurrence but prepare athletes for their future management of injury and thus protect their future well-being (Bolling et al., 2020). Moreover, the theme 'fostering connections' illustrates the importance of using the narratives as a conduit to facilitate interpersonal dialogue which can help mitigate feelings of isolation around injury and improve interpersonal relations. Finally, the theme 'pricking the social consciousness' adds to previous narrative findings (McGannon et al., 2021) in illustrating how narratives and pedagogical activities can help animate collective storylines that pose



resistance to dominant and potentially damaging cultural norms by prompting consideration of the wider structures that influence athletes' injury experiences. These findings present important potential implications for supporting athletes' psychological risk, response, and management of injury.

By extending the analytical gaze beyond the injured athletes, this study further helped raise the social consciousness of injury by foregrounding a resource to support injured athletes that spans personal, social, and cultural domains. By operating beyond an intrapersonal level, the current findings help open up new lines of enquiry for supporting injured athletes in ways that challenge the neoliberal view that athletes should be solely responsible for their injury experiences. For example, given the potential of narratives to act on individuals and shape future behaviours, by encouraging practitioners to reflect upon how they may be championing discourses on behalf of the institution that are harmful for athletes (see "pricking the social consciousness"), the video narratives and pedagogical discussions may prompt practitioners to shift from being 'cultural allies' of leadership to 'cultural architects' who are involved in the design and execution of cultural change (McDougall et al., 2020). Sport psychologists now have increasing opportunities to work in a broader organisational role with different groups and personnel from across the sports organisation (see Wagstaff, 2019). Therefore, they are ideally positioned to help ensure that alternative and marginalised injury viewpoints are heard by educating others within the organisation on these perspectives and ensuring that diverse ways of experiencing injury are catered for within injury service provision and management. Moreover, the video narratives when dispersed in narrative pedagogy settings were illustrated to create and shape collective storylines that pose resistance to dominant narratives by communally articulating the 'inconvenient facts' of such perspectives

(Nelson, 2001). Such collective storylines could be harnessed to ‘ambush’ individuals in positions of leadership who perpetuate the exclusivity of dominant perspectives to help place taken-for-granted assumptions into flux and create a space for alternative and multiple perspectives to emerge. Considering this potential opportunity for creating cultural change, future research may look towards conducting pedagogical discussions around diverse injury narratives in an ongoing way with practitioners and sporting institutions and consider how they could work co-productively to support them in integrating diverse perspectives of injury into practice.

In line with the future integration of these diverse injury perspectives into practice, the challenges and tensions that arose from sharing these diverse perspectives with athletes, coaches, and practitioners warrants consideration. Firstly, it is important to note that narrative typologies do risk placing athletes’ injury experiences into ‘boxes’ and circumscribing athletes to one possible way of being. Within the pedagogical encounters, efforts were made to inform participants on how no athlete’s experiences can be reduced to any one narrative type. However, while at times this concept was well understood by participants, at other times it was unclear whether participants fully grasped this understanding (e.g., participant questioning on how we get athletes off the merry-go-round and towards the longevity narrative). Moreover, several practitioners highlighted their concerns over exposing athletes to these video narratives without context or discussion, as it may create pressure for athletes that they have to fit a certain narrative type. Therefore, integrating these narratives into practice is likely to require a relative foregrounding of the theoretical concepts of narrative inquiry and should be integrated as part of ongoing pedagogical discussions. In doing so, it can act to sustain the capacity of narratives to work for athletes, coaches, and

practitioners as an interpretative and open resource for understanding and working with injured athletes' experiences in flexible, creative, and shape-shifting ways.

Secondly, participants sometimes referred to the video narratives as 'mindsets', which hints at an interpretation of these narratives as cognitive structures as opposed to socio-cultural plotlines that athletes appropriate into their own personal stories. To this end, researchers need to reflect upon their own conceptualisations of narratives (Smith & Sparkes, 2008a), and consider how best to engage with such disparities. Moreover, if researchers aim to promote a more 'thick social and thin individual' viewpoint of narratives, reflection upon how to navigate the tensions they may incur, from promoting a socio-cultural approach to injury management, as opposed to the dominant cognitive and individualistic approach that sporting institutions typically adhere to, is of important consideration. Finally, although practitioners highlighted how the narratives were useful in raising their awareness of athletes' injury stories, several practitioners were left pondering 'what now?' and required more "concrete follow-up actions". Herein, lie important questions for future narrative researchers to consider and problematise. For example, how can we best engage with the tensions embedded within these questions (e.g., concrete follow-up actions, individual narratives)? How can we integrate a narrative approach into sporting environments, when there are no "specifiable marching orders for action", which runs counter-intuitive to the "sound scientific principles" often guiding and shaping the conduct within these very sporting institutions (Gergen & Gergen, 2006, p. 119; Sparkes, 1996, p. 482)? Indeed, while I would argue that narratives have much to offer practitioners in dealing with the ambiguous nature of injury and elite sport, by equipping them with flexible resources that can enable them to hear, critically reflect

upon, and think with athletes' injury stories, these inherent tensions (e.g., the need for concrete follow-up actions) remain unpacked.

With these points in mind, this chapter has offered a modest contribution towards extending our empirical understanding of the applied value of injury narratives in working *on*, *for*, and *with* athletes, coaches, and practitioners. In doing so, this chapter opens up new ways of supporting injured athletes, and creates new questions, challenges, and debates, for future research to consider.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusion**

## 8.0 Overview

In this thesis I have offered a rigorous and nuanced understanding of how athletes construct meaning from their sports injury experiences from a psycho-social-cultural perspective. In conceptualising six injury narratives and translating them into a video format for dissemination to athletes, coaches, and practitioners, this programme of research further illustrates the practical applicability of this PhD's research findings. In this final chapter, these insights are brought together to highlight the conceptual, empirical, theoretical, and practical contributions of this thesis to the sport injury psychology evidence-base. The implications of these contributions in enhancing and enriching understandings of sports injury are further discussed across four domains (i.e., *enhanced social consciousness, nuanced and idiosyncratic understandings, multiple meanings, broadening the narrative landscape*). Some suggestions on how to implement the findings from this PhD into practice are then provided. Finally, this chapter and the entire thesis closes by proposing avenues for future research, as well as offering some reflections and concluding thoughts on the process of conducting this body of research.

### 8.1 Summary of Studies

The central purpose of this thesis was to extend theoretical and empirical understandings of the diverse meanings athletes construct from their injury experiences from a psycho-social-cultural perspective (see chapters three and four). By foregrounding and identifying multiple meanings from injury, this thesis further aimed to broaden athletes' perspectives and possibilities from injury (see chapters four, five, six, and seven). From a practical perspective, this thesis intended to bridge the on-going know-do gap. First, through enhancing the accessibility and availability of the research findings, by translating them

into a video format for dissemination (i.e., video narratives; chapter six). Second, through exploring the applied value of the video narratives when shared and discussed within pedagogical encounters (see chapter seven).

The first study in this thesis (chapter three), is an empirical study which explores one potential meaning athletes may experience from injury, named *SIRG* (Roy-Davis et al., 2017). *SIRG* is a timely phenomenon which provides a counteracting perspective to the predominant negative conceptualisations of injury within the sport injury psychology literature, by highlighting how injury can act as a catalyst for positive change (Roy-Davis et al., 2017). Drawing upon the tenets of a meta-study methodology (Paterson et al., 2001), this study appraised the literature on *SIRG* by conducting a meta-method, meta-data, and meta-theory analysis. These insights were then integrated into a synthesis to create a framework that extends current understandings of this phenomenon by offering novel interpretations of this collective body of research (Paterson et al., 2001). For example, the meta-synthesis created provides a more cohesive understanding of *SIRG* and its dimensions (i.e., personal, athletic, corporeal, social). It also offers novel insights into the origins of *SIRG*, its temporality, and how it is personally, socially, and culturally constructed.

Building and expanding upon the scope of study one and acknowledging the tensions of promoting the development of one potential meaning from injury (see chapters one and three), study two (chapter four) explores the multiple meanings elite track athletes may derive from their injury experiences, across the lifespan, using a narrative inquiry approach (Frank, 2010). Research was conducted with elite track athletes because of the limited psychological research on the experiences of injury within this population, alongside the normalization of injury embedded within the culture of this sport (Howe, 2004; see chapter two). To counter

this normalization and breathe meaning into the many ways athletes experience injury, co-constructed life-history interviews and timelining was conducted with 15 elite track athletes over 18 months. Interviews were analysed using a DNA (Frank, 2010), to explore not only *what* the athletes said (i.e., content) but *how* they said it (i.e., form), and the narrative and cultural resources they drew upon to construct their experiences. Athletes' stories of injury mapped six narrative typologies: *resilience*, *merry-go-round*, *longevity*, *pendulum*, *snowball*, and *more-to-me*. Each narrative typology was discussed in turn by focusing on the underlying plot and the implications of these plotlines on athletes' well-being and sporting careers. Given the potential implications of these narratives to fulfil the aims of this thesis in both broadening athletes' perspectives and possibilities of injury, and in informing practice, they provided the conceptual foundation for the remaining studies in this thesis.

The third study (chapter five) extended understandings of these six injury narratives by further theorising how elite track athletes engaged with them. This study involved critically reflecting (i.e., introspective, intersubjective; Finlay, 2002) upon the challenges and tensions incurred when storying and sharing these six injury narratives during member reflections *with* participants (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Using narrative theory (Frank, 2004, 2013; Nelson, 2001; Ochs & Caps, 2001) and the narrative typologies as a lens to problematize and interpret the findings, data was analysed using an RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Five reflexive themes were identified: (a) confronting the dominant narrative, (b) embracing new materialism, (c) extending boundaries of tellability, (d) linear and polyphonic narratives, and (e) symbolic violence. Overall, this study provides novel understandings of how member reflections and reflexivity can enrich (e.g., tellability) and extend (e.g., new materialism) our theoretical understanding of how individuals respond to and engage with diverse



narratives. Moreover, this study enabled me to critically consider and problematize the challenges of cultivating an inclusive narrative landscape wherein diverse injury perspectives can be seen and heard.

The fourth study in this thesis (chapter six) aimed to bridge the ongoing knowledge-transfer gap within sport injury psychology by drawing upon an innovative and timely ABKT tool (i.e., video narratives; Archibald et al., 2021) to translate and disseminate the six injury narrative typologies. This multi-study chapter first outlines the construction of these evidenced-based video narratives which involved working collaboratively with a DLP, videographer, and user-group (i.e., elite athletes). Secondly, this study explored end-users' (i.e., athletes, coaches, practitioners) perspectives of these video narratives in communicating sport injury research by conducting 11 focus group interviews with 69 participants. An RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2020) identified that the video narratives communicated sport injury psychology research in comprehensive, evocative, and relatable ways, connecting end-users to the injury narratives presented by enabling them to both *think with* and *take on board* the information presented. Overall, this study helped to facilitate the impact and uptake of this PhD's research findings, by rendering them more accessible and available to diverse audiences.

The final study in this thesis (chapter seven), further aimed to bridge the knowledge-practice gap (Brewer & Evans, 2022; Leggat, 2020), by exploring the applied value of the video narratives. Drawing upon the tenets of narrative pedagogy (Goodson & Gill, 2011), focus groups were conducted with athletes, coaches, and practitioners, to explore these video narratives in action and co-construct an understanding of how they may work *on*, *for*, and *with* athletes, coaches, and practitioners. An RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2020) revealed that the video narratives when

dispersed and discussed within pedagogical settings collectively supported injured athletes across personal (e.g., psychological well-being), social (e.g., enhanced interpersonal relationships), and cultural (e.g., promoting more communal responsibility of injury) levels. Moreover, this study articulates the diverse ways in which the video narratives could be readily implemented into practice, thus providing avenues for future intervention strategies that align with stakeholders' needs. In highlighting the applied value of video narratives and pedagogical discussions, this study foregrounds the use of an alternative and novel sport injury psychology resource.

## **8.2 Conceptual and Empirical Contributions**

This section addresses the conceptual and empirical contributions of this body of research. First, this thesis has extended conceptualisations of injury by generating a broader, nuanced, and more subjective understanding of the multiple meanings athletes derive from their injury experiences (see chapters two, three, and four). To expand, the meta-synthesis in chapter three provided a more cohesive and comprehensive conceptual understanding of one meaning from injury, SIRG, and its dimensions, extending the previous literature that was somewhat fragmented in nature (Wadey & Everard, 2020). Building upon the scope of chapter three, chapter four drew upon narrative inquiry (Frank, 2010) to identify and foreground diverse injury meanings, in the form of six injury narrative typologies, (i.e., *resilience*, *merry-go-round*, *longevity*, *pendulum*, *snowball*, and *more-to-me*). Naming these injury meanings as distinct typologies was illustrated to enhance conceptual understanding of each injury experience in and of itself, whilst acting as a heuristic guide for interpreting the diverse ways that athletes may make sense of their injury experiences (see chapter six). This novel conceptualisation of how athletes construct meaning from injury extends the literature which has largely been informed by the integrated model

of response to sport injury (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998). Aligned with this model, scholarship to date has focused on specific factors or variables influencing injury rehabilitation or outcomes, creating a fragmented and reductionist understanding of injury (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017; Walker et al., 2007). Alternatively, these six injury narratives provide a more holistic, cohesive, and subjective conceptualisation of injury. For example, by identifying the overarching socio-cultural plotline or explanation that underpins athletes' injury stories, these narratives help connect athletes' psychological experiences of injury in a coherent and structured manner (e.g., event A leads to event B and culminates in event C; Day et al., 2020). Moreover, these injury typologies were indicated to enhance supporting networks capacity to identify, understand, and work with injured athletes' experiences (see chapters six and seven).

Second, this thesis extends empirical understanding of the lived experiences of elite track athletes. Providing context-specific insights into the challenges and experiences of elite track athletes has important implications, as currently there has been a plethora of research into reducing the high-injury rate within this cohort (Bargoria et al., 2020; Jelvegård et al., 2016; Timpka et al., 2015), with little to no research attributed to supporting the well-being and welfare of athletes enduring this high-injury rate (see chapter two). By conveying these athletes' storied perspectives of injury, evocatively and authentically (i.e., through video), it was illustrated to connect supporting networks to the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of elite injured track athletes in powerful and empathetic ways (i.e., thinking with their stories; Chapter six). Moreover, the video narratives and pedagogical discussions helped generate empirical insights into how the policies and infrastructure surrounding track and field can preclude athletes from engaging with alternative injury perspectives that promote their long-term well-being and career longevity. Such findings extend previous track

and field research which places the responsibility of psychological risk of, and response to, injury solely on the injured athletes by, for example, suggesting that they “do not let environmental or economic strain interfere with their judgement concerning dynamic load management” (Bargoria et al., 2020, p. 718). By raising awareness of issues that implicate elite track athletes’ experiences of injury beyond an intrapersonal agenda, it can help ensure that athletes not only have strategies for managing their injury experiences, but that broader policies and practices are put in place to support their safety, well-being, and future career potential (Wadey et al., 2018).

Third, exploring athletes’ injury experiences in relation to their career history further adds to our empirical understanding of injury, as these six-injury narratives provide novel insights into how elite track athletes made sense of their injury experiences from prevention to rehabilitation, return to sport, to retirement and beyond (Everard et al., 2021). Indeed, while the acute impact of athletes’ injury experiences has garnered much research attention, the longer-term psychological impact remains relatively unexplored (Hind et al., 2020; Turner et al., 2000; Wiese-Bjornstal, 2009). In accounting for the diachronicity of athletes’ injury experiences, the current findings help cultivate important insights into the cumulative and longer-term impact of injury on athletes’ well-being, mental health, and long-term athletic career potential (e.g., merry-go-round, snowball; see chapter four). Foregrounding these experiences and sharing them with athletes, coaches, and practitioners could help ensure that interventions are put in place to support these athletes, who may be more adversely affected than those experiencing shorter-term injuries. Moreover, athletes are often reported to risk injury in the pursuit of short-term performance gains, over the longer-term implications of injury (McGannon et al., 2021; Wiese-Bjornstal, 2019).

However, by exposing athletes to the potential physical and psychological consequences of long-term risk-taking behaviours (i.e., snowball narrative), findings from chapter seven illustrated how we can help counteract this short-cited view by providing athletes with alternative frames of reference to interpret and respond to their injury experiences. Exposing athletes' social networks to these perspectives was further indicated to encourage them to reflect upon the risks they may be imposing on their athletes (see chapter seven). Certainly, by empirically exploring how elite athletes experience injury across the life-course, it offers important implications for supporting the well-being, mental health, and long-term career potential, of elite injured athletes.

### **8.3 Theoretical Contributions**

Heeding calls for more theoretical growth within sport injury psychology that accounts for socio-cultural contexts and influences, this thesis advanced theoretical understandings of sport injury from a psycho-social-cultural perspective (Brewer, 2020; Wadey, 2020, Wadey & Day, 2022; Wiese-Bjornstal, 2019). New, integrative, and theoretical insights into SIRG, its temporality, and how it can be developed across personal, social, and cultural levels, were developed within chapter three. Building upon this chapter and acknowledging the tensions of promoting the development of one potential meaning from injury, the remainder of this thesis adopted a narrative inquiry lens (Frank, 2010) to explore multiple meanings from injury (chapter four). As narrative inquiry explains how the broader socio-cultural landscape influences an individual's experiences, the narrative understandings foregrounded within this body of research advance our understanding of how athletes' psychological experiences of injury are socially and culturally constructed (Frank, 2010, Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, 2009b). To expand, the six

narrative typologies provide novel insights into not only *what* stories athletes tell about injury, but *how* they construct these stories from the broader socio-cultural values, norms, plotlines, and resources available within their sporting communities. Building upon this study, within chapter five, I critically reflected upon, further problematised, and theorised how elite track athletes responded to these diverse injury narratives. In doing so, it helped to enrich (i.e., tellability) and extend (i.e., new materialism) theoretical understanding of the challenges of shifting athletes' social and cultural worlds to become more inclusive and diverse. To further enhance the communal responsibility of injury by theorising beyond an intrapersonal perspective; chapter seven drew upon narrative pedagogy (Goodson & Gill, 2011) to postulate *how* these narrative typologies can work *on*, *for*, and *with* athletes, coaches, and practitioners to support injured athletes across personal, social, and cultural levels.

Insights generated from this systematic line of enquiry extend our understanding of how the socio-cultural narratives available to athletes can constrain or enable how they make sense of their injury experiences (see chapters four and five). Findings from chapters five, and seven further illustrated how certain socio-cultural storylines (i.e., snowball, resilience, performance) can come to dominate through interpersonal conversations, practitioner influences, the media, and discourses promoted within institutional settings. The dominance of these narratives was illustrated to potentially limit and foreclose the opportunities and flexibility available to athletes to make sense of their injury experiences in diverse and meaningful ways. Taken together, these psycho-social-cultural insights extend our understanding of injury beyond a cognitive lens, whereby primacy is given to how the injured athlete thinks about and interprets the situations they find themselves in (Wiese-Bjornstal et

al., 1998). Alternatively, these psycho-social-cultural insights prompt a broader consideration of how the socio-cultural contexts (i.e., available narratives) and interpersonal encounters negotiate the conditions for an athlete to think about and interpret the situations they find themselves in.

#### **8.4 Methodological Contributions**

The methodological contributions of this thesis reside in the diverse and novel methodological approaches taken (i.e., DNA, reflexivity, member reflections, ABKT, pedagogy), to advance understandings, uptake, and the practical applicability of this sport injury psychology research. First, drawing upon the work of Frank (2010, 2013), and Smith and Sparkes (2004, 2005), Sparkes and Smith (2003, 2005), and Douglas and Carless (2006, 2009), this thesis made a novel contribution to the literature, by adopting a DNA to identify the *types* of narratives that underpin athletes' injury stories (see chapter four). In doing so, this study extended the literature by foregrounding new and context-specific *typologies* of injury within elite sport. Second, answering calls for more reflexive accounts of the process of doing research for the neophyte researcher (Cavallerio et al., 2020; Tuval-Mashiach, 2017), within chapter five, I offered critical, novel, and nuanced insights into the process of storying and sharing these six injury narratives with participants. In doing so, this chapter helped foreground the use of member reflections and reflexivity as a resource to generate theoretical insights into how individuals engage with diverse narrative perspectives, alongside pedagogical insights into the process of cultivating of a more inclusive injury narrative landscape.

Third, to help bridge the ongoing knowledge-transfer gap within sport injury psychology, chapter six highlighted the use of a novel and timely ABKT tool (i.e., videos; Archibald et al., 2021) to translate and disseminate the existing

evidence-base (chapter four). By detailing the processes that led to the construction of the video narratives, this chapter helped mitigate the ongoing obscurity surrounding the development of ABKT tools (Archibald et al., 2018). By exploring end-users' perspectives of the constructed video narratives, this chapter further generated insight into *how and what properties of* this ABKT tool (i.e., video narratives) could contribute towards facilitating both the impact and uptake of sport injury research. Taken together, these insights provide a methodological contribution to the sport injury psychology literature by furnishing an evidence-base and springboard for subsequent sport injury psychology researchers to explore the translation of their research into accessible formats (Archibald et al., 2018). Finally, answering calls to use methodological approaches that allow researchers to work 'with' rather than 'on' participants (Leggat et al., 2021; Wadey & Day, 2022), I drew upon narrative pedagogy to engage athletes, coaches, and practitioners with these diverse injury perspectives (i.e., video narratives) in a collaborative manner. Working 'with' participants in a mutual and reciprocal type arrangement allowed for a deeper understanding of multiple stakeholders' perspectives on how video narratives could be applied in practice.

## **8.5 Practical Contributions**

The practical contributions of this thesis reside in the efforts made to bridge the knowledge-practice gap by enhancing the accessibility and applicability of the research findings to non-academic audiences. Translating the research findings into a relevant, evocative, and timely format was illustrated to enhance the impact and uptake of the research findings. Firstly, by communicating the research findings in a format that allows athletes, coaches, and practitioners to understand, resonate, and engage with the research findings. Secondly, by translating the research findings into a



‘product’ (i.e., videos) that can be readily implemented into practice. Communicating sport injury research in a video format was further indicated to enhance the applied value of the research by expanding the reach and scope of the research findings, democratising research knowledge, and contributing towards expanding the injury narrative landscape (see chapter six).

Building upon this chapter, findings from chapter seven further extend the practical contributions of this thesis by enhancing understandings of the applied value of narratives. Indeed, while several narrative researchers have postulated that narratives may support injured athletes, chapter seven, was the first study to empirically explore narratives in action, and how they work *on*, *for*, and *with* athletes, coaches, and practitioners. To expand, findings revealed how narratives can work *for* athletes, coaches, and practitioners by facilitating them in making sense of their own or athletes' injury experiences and enhancing interpersonal relationships, *on* athletes by mitigating feelings of isolation around injury and prompting future behavioural change, and *with* athletes, coaches, and practitioners by guiding their interpretation of how injury is socially and culturally constructed alongside prompting greater communal responsibility towards injury. By working ‘with’ participants, this chapter further revealed how the video narratives could be implemented into practice, in line with stakeholders’ perspectives. Taken together, these insights helped bridge the knowledge practice gap by demonstrating the applied value of narratives in supporting injured athletes across personal, social, and cultural levels. Moreover, this chapter helps extend the practical lens by foregrounding an alternative injury management resource for supporting athletes that diversifies from the cognitive-based interventions that the sport injury psychology literature has traditionally adhered to (Ledingham et al, 2020). Finally, this chapter offers new and multiple ways of supporting injured

athletes (e.g., preparing for injury setbacks rather than focusing solely on prevention) and opens new lines of enquiry for how these video narratives may be integrated into professional practice in the future.

## **8.6 Expanding and Enriching the Field of Sport Injury Psychology**

Overall, the conceptual, empirical, theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions identified enrich and expand upon our understanding of sports injury in several ways. Within this section, I would like to discuss four pertinent implications that I feel this body of research has made in terms of advancing understanding of sports injuries and supporting injured athletes: *Individual to Collective, Idiosyncratic and Nuanced Understandings, Multiple Meanings, and Broadening the Injury Narrative Repertoire.*

### **8.6.1 Individual to Collective**

The interdisciplinary discourse (i.e., psycho-social-cultural), foregrounded within this thesis helps shift our understanding of injury from being an individual to a collective experience. This collective understanding has important implications both in terms of raising the social consciousness of injury and in promoting a broader, more critical, and more nuanced understanding of athletes' injury experiences (Wadey et al., 2018). For example, within the context of this programme of research, we can view an athlete's risk-taking behaviours resulting in repeated or catastrophic injury (e.g., snowball, merry-go-round), as one that may have been influenced by their behavioural responses to the injury onset, conversations with others, the narratives available within their sporting contexts, and the broader cultural norms that promote risk-taking behaviours within sport. Therefore, practitioners and institutions may seek to address these multi-faceted aspects by implementing a holistic and communal approach to both support the injured athlete and prevent such situations from occurring in the

future. Alternatively, adopting a cognitive lens, the problem of injury is ‘housed’ within the injured athlete and their response to the injury onset. Notwithstanding the merit of offering athletes resources to help manage their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours around injury; by promoting the idea that the athlete is responsible for their injury, it may foster feelings of self-blame, stigma, and shame all of which have been linked to an increased risk of future injury occurrence (Timpka et al., 2015). Moreover, although the individual may look to alter their individual responses to injury, within the broader context “nothing is discovered or learned that might prevent such actions from occurring in the future” (Gergen, 2011, p. 11). Finally, as demonstrated within this PhD, by considering psychological interventions that move beyond solely focusing on ‘upskilling’ the injured athlete (Wadey & Day, 2022), it can offer new, alternative, and more expansive ways of supporting injured athletes (see chapter seven).

### ***8.6.2 Idiosyncratic and Nuanced Understandings***

The narrative underpinnings of this thesis help provide a more nuanced and idiosyncratic interpretation of injury. To expand, the literature to date has predominantly simplified athletes’ injury experiences into neat binary categorizations. For example, the integrated model of response to sport injury (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998) reduces athletes’ injury experiences into having positive or negative outcomes depending on the recovery status. As the sport injury psychology literature is predominately informed by this model, it too has inherited these dichotomous understandings of injury by highlighting how athletes’ psychosocial responses to injury shift from being negative to positive as the injury recovery progresses (Gledhill et al., 2018). Conversely, interpreting athletes’ injury experiences through a narrative lens helps move our understanding of injury beyond these binary categorizations, by

highlighting the multiple ways in which athletes can make sense of their injury experiences. Moreover, through a narrative lens, it is understood that the meanings athletes derive from injury can both constrain or enable them, depending on the conditions and contexts in which they are applied. To illustrate, the resilience narrative could liberate an athlete, by providing them with a pathway to recovery and enabling them to remain focused and motivated towards injury rehabilitation. However, if their injury prolongs or no longer follows the predicted pathway to recovery, athletes' construction of their injury experiences around the resilience narrative could lead to burn-out, narrative wreckage, and a loss of motivation for the injury recovery process (see chapter four). Adopting this narrative understanding of injury was indicated to encourage service-providers to think critically about what works well for whom in what situations (see chapter seven). This nuanced and critical understanding, I would argue, is likely to better inform practice by accounting for the temporal, complex, and dynamic nature of athletes' injury experiences, as opposed to highlighting possible binary outcomes or responses from injury, the nexus of which is likely to change anyway depending on the conditions and contexts in which they occur.

### ***8.6.3 Multiple Meanings***

Within the context of injury management, adopting a narrative inquiry approach helps shift our understanding beyond prescribing certain injury recovery outcomes or meanings (e.g., SIRC, overcoming injury) to highlighting the need for athletes to have access to multiple injury meanings. This shift in perspective from advocating for the development of a certain injury meaning to allowing the athlete to have the flexibility and opportunity to choose the injury meaning that best fits their experience has important implications in terms of the future support of injured athletes. To illustrate, previous research has demonstrated how prescribing 'positive' storylines

of injury (e.g., SIRG) can create pressure for injured athletes to conform to a cultural script that they must return from injury stronger, which can subsequently prevent athletes from authentically developing from their injury experiences (Howells & Everard, 2020). This story of ‘triumph following adversity’ although promoted within sporting cultures can create tensions for athletes by leading them to believe that they are coping failures if their embodied experiences of injury fail to align with this cultural narrative (Wadey et al., 2019; see chapter three). Within chapter seven athletes, coaches, and practitioners also reported how athletes can experience tension between how they think they should feel about injury (e.g., resilience narrative, work hard and return to pre-injury state) versus how they actually feel. These tensions were illustrated to heighten feelings of anxiety around injury, prevent athletes from disclosing and making sense of their injury experiences, and lead athletes into believing that they were not ‘cut out’ to be an elite athlete. Alternatively, adopting a narrative inquiry focus (Frank, 2010) can ensure that multiple ways of experiencing injury are acknowledged, so that athletes can normalise and validate their injury experiences, whilst also having access to alternative injury meanings to help re-frame their injury experiences if necessary. Moreover, rather than highlighting a sequence of steps or factors to achieve a certain injury outcome, within a narrative perspective, athletes have the agency and freedom to choose their own injury narrative path in their own time.

#### ***8.6.4 Broadening the Injury Narrative Repertoire***

In line with offering athletes’ multiple injury perspectives, this thesis answered calls to extend the narrative resources available to elite injured athletes to make sense of their injury experiences (McGannon et al., 2021, Williams, 2020). The six injury narrative typologies identified, helped extend the literature by breathing

meaning into multiple perspectives of injury, some of which may have been previously silenced or suppressed by dominant cultural norms (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2019; McGannon et al., 2021). Moreover, these six injury narratives were translated into a video format for dissemination beyond academic audiences. Communicating these injury narratives visually and in a digitized format was illustrated to enhance athletes and support networks engagement with these diverse perspectives by harnessing the evocative qualities of narratives whilst extending the scope and reach of the injury narratives (see chapter six). These narratives were also shared with athletes, coaches, and practitioners within pedagogical encounters. The findings revealed how these six injury narratives helped expand the injury narrative landscape by ambushing athletes into taking new perspectives of injury on board, enhancing empathy and understanding around marginalised perspectives of injury, and challenging the dominant perspective of injury (i.e., resilience) thus creating space for alternative perspectives of injury to emerge.

Expanding the narrative resources for injured athletes to make sense of their experiences was illustrated to have several pertinent implications for athletes' well-being and welfare and thus highlights the importance of the narrative understandings developed within this PhD for supporting injured athletes. Firstly, by exposing athletes to multiple injury narratives it helped to counter the normalisation of injury within elite sport and thus can help reduce the uptake of risk-taking behaviours in the future by offering athletes alternative frames of reference to interpret and respond to their injury experiences (see chapter seven). Secondly, by humanising athletes' injury experiences, and by showcasing storylines of injury that represent vulnerability and fragility, it helped to counteract dominant cultural norms that portray athletes as being 'superhumans' and 'machines' or dominant ideals of masculinity that operate a 'code

of silence’ in relation to injury concerns (Gledhill, 2021; McGannon et al., 2021; Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 2018; Wiese-Bjornstal, 2019; Sparkes, 1996; Spencer, 2012). Such resistance supported athletes’ well-being and welfare by mitigating the stigma and isolation surrounding injury experiences and encouraging athletes to begin to disclose mental health challenges concerning injury (see chapter seven). Thirdly, showcasing diverse perspectives of injury helped promote a sense of togetherness and solidarity amongst injured athletes and was indicated to create more shared understandings between athletes and supporting networks. Communicating athletes’ injury stories in evocative and compelling formats further prompted support networks to resonate and think *with* athletes’ injury stories, thus enhancing interpersonal ties between athletes and their support network. Finally, by challenging the dominant resilience narrative and highlighting the many ways in which athletes may make sense of their injury experiences, it was indicated to help ‘prick’ the wider consciousness which could lead to structural changes that promote a broader duty of care to injured athletes. Overall, the findings generated within this PhD highlight how expanding the socio-cultural narratives that are ‘out there’ in relation to athletes’ injury experiences can offer important, timely, and holistic implications for assisting athletes in managing disruptions of injury, reducing the risk of injury occurrence, and easing the trauma associated with injury (Williams, 2020).

## **8.7 Practical Applications**

Chapter seven provides a cumulative understanding of the applied value of this research in supporting injured athletes’ experiences across personal, social, and cultural levels. Adopting the MMSI (Wadey et al., 2018), and to further mobilise the practical application of this body of research, I will now discuss how the video

narratives and insights generated within this thesis could be implemented into practice across intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, cultural, and policy levels.

### ***8.7.1 Intrapersonal***

Aligning with the advocacy for an alternative intervention for supporting injured athletes that addresses socio-cultural influences (chapter seven), the video narratives and narrative understandings of injury developed within this PhD could be used to facilitate narrative therapy. Narrative therapy operates from a social constructivist perspective and views individuals as authors of the meanings in their lives, whereby the interpretative understandings they have of events can limit or expand their possible actions (Polkinghorne, 2004). As an intervention strategy, narrative therapy is a person-centred approach that seeks to assist individuals in revising their internalization of culturally imposed stories that may be restrictive or problematic, into stories that are more expansive and inclusive of themselves and their situations (Polkinghorne, 2004). This process involves firstly facilitating individuals in constructing their story, and then identifying or bringing to awareness the culturally imposed narrative or plotline which may frame their story. Within a sport injury context, sport psychology practitioners have six video narratives to either act as templates to help facilitate the athlete in constructing their injury story and/or to possibly help identify the type of culturally imposed plotline that the injured athlete may be internalising. This understanding could help raise the injured athlete's awareness of how their injury story is not only personal but also socially and culturally constructed.

As part of the narrative therapy process once individuals identify the dominant/problematic plotline shaping their story, it can be held out for examination and deconstruction (Denison & Winslade, 2006). This deconstruction is reported to



enable individuals to view how their understanding of events, is not how things are, but rather how they have been constructed to be, thereby loosening the hold of the dominant narrative over the individual's life story (Polkinghorne, 2004). This process of deconstruction also creates space for the socially supplied story of the individual to be replaced with an alternative story in which the individual is viewed as an agent in the construction of their life/events (Polkinghorne, 2004). Within this remit, a sport psychologist could draw upon the video narratives to facilitate this process by offering the injured athlete alternative narratives to help problematise their own injury story against other possible storylines. This process of deconstruction is further reported to be facilitated by two techniques labelled externalization and unique outcomes (Denison & Winslade, 2006; Polkinghorne, 2004). In the unique outcomes technique, the individual is asked to recall events which may have been left out by the dominant plotline. To facilitate this process, the sport psychologist could draw upon the video narratives to pose questions and discuss whether the athlete's injury story ever resonated with any of the alternative injury narratives presented (e.g., longevity, more-to-me). Narrative therapists highlight how the recognition of events that cannot be integrated into a dominant plotline, can serve to un-do that plotline and create space for a more complex and nuanced understanding (Polkinghorne, 2004). In this sense, this 'unique outcome' process may act to challenge the linear nature of certain dominant discourses (e.g., resilience, performance narrative) and un-do their totalitarian perspective by raising awareness of events that cannot be integrated into their all-encompassing perspective (see chapter five).

Additionally, the process of externalization seeks to establish a rhetorical separation of the person from the problematic or dominant plotline by speaking about it as if it is another person or object which is unduly influencing the athlete (Sudano,

2011). Within a sport injury context, sport psychologists may look at externalising ‘the injured athlete’ or ‘what should be’ discourse within the merry-go-round narrative by referring to this construct as a noun (e.g., injured athlete). To further externalise and create a richer description of the meaning of this construct in the athlete’s life, the sport psychologist could discuss the athlete’s responses or actions to ‘the injured athlete’ or ‘what should be’ plotline. For example, these responses may have included training harder or running through pain. In these instances, the sport psychologist could help problematise and raise awareness of how this interpretation may be situated in the athletes socially prescribed understanding of the performance narrative where pain and injury are viewed as necessary for success (Douglas & Carless, 2006), or dominant cultural norms of injury being viewed as a sign of weakness (Howe, 2004). The sport psychologist could also re-introduce alternative narratives that offer alternative interpretations of injury (e.g., longevity, more-to-me). Nevertheless, re-authoring the athlete’s injury story does not involve simply accepting an alternate already available socially authored plot, but rather seeks to integrate the contents of the old story with the newly available contents which occurs in an ongoing manner in conversation with the sport psychologist (Polkinghorne, 2004). To my knowledge, aside from one study which explored the externalization component of narrative therapy with injured athletes (Sudano, 2011), narrative therapy has yet to be considered as an intervention for injured athletes. Given the potential of narrative therapy to simultaneously address the systemic socio-cultural issues influencing injured athletes’ experiences whilst empowering athletes to reclaim agency over the events occurring within their lives, narrative therapy presents an exciting avenue for future researchers or practitioners to consider.

### ***8.7.2 Interpersonal Level***

At an interpersonal level, the video narratives could be used to facilitate storytelling sessions, whereby drawing upon the principles of narrative pedagogy (i.e., fostering an open, empathetic, and collaborative environment) athletes can share their injury experiences to a compassionate and understanding audience (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2019; Williams, 2020). Within chapter seven, sharing the video narratives to injured athletes within pedagogical settings was illustrated to facilitate athletes in constructing their own injury story, disclosing their thoughts and feelings around injury, and expanding their opportunities for meaning-making by exposing them to alternative injury narratives. Sharing and discussing these video narratives was illustrated to help mitigate feelings of isolation and stigma associated with injury by normalising athletes' injury experiences and connecting them to broader meta-narratives and to each other through the reciprocal sharing of stories. Given the potential power of such storytelling sessions to support the psychological well-being and mental health of injured athletes (see chapter seven), storytelling sessions could be introduced into institutional settings as part of the injury rehabilitation and recovery process. These sessions could be delivered and facilitated by sport psychologists, over a certain timeframe, and incorporate elements of education (e.g., how their injury experiences may be socially and culturally constructed) and narrative therapy (e.g., asking athletes to reflect or share their own injury story and identify the dominant plotline).

In addition to storytelling sessions, educational sessions can be provided to younger athletes, coaches, and parents. Aligning with the recommendations provided by athletes, coaches, and practitioners, by sharing and discussing these video narratives, it could help prepare younger athletes for the potential impact of injury and pre-emptively equip them with the narrative resources to help navigate the experience

if necessary (see chapter seven). Moreover, given that parents and coaches have an active role in shaping the injury experiences of athletes, but may be limited in terms of their own collection of injury narratives (Cavallerio et al., 2016, 2022), the expansion of their injury narrative repertoire could have important implications for their support to injured athletes.

### ***8.7.3 Institutional Level***

These video narratives also hold important implications for practitioners operating within sporting institutions and can be readily implemented as part of their continuous professional development training. As part of this training, practitioners may look to use these narratives as a template to promote shared understandings and interdisciplinary discourse around their athletes' injury experiences. This collaborative approach could help enhance the provision of care to injured athletes (Hess et al., 2019). For example, the practitioners could collectively discuss how they could support an athlete whose story of injury they identify as being framed around the merry-go-round narrative. This identification and discussion would enable early signposting of sport psychology support for the athlete (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b). They could then collectively consider how to educate the athlete and coach on any physiological changes that may co-create the peaks and troughs of this injury cycle (see chapter five), as well as linking the athlete into strength and conditioning services to help manage any potential flare-ups. The team could also collectively consider the language they use with the athlete (e.g., sensitivity around the injured athlete discourse), and consider using more dialectical (e.g., enhance the capacity) versus binary language (e.g., strengthen or fix) to shift the athletes' perception away from the dominant medicalisation of injury, towards a more bio-psycho-social understanding. Finally, by increasing practitioners' sensitivity towards the inherent dangers of the

shifting plotlines embedded within the merry-go-round, they may collectively act to challenge the athlete's injury stories that reflect these plotlines (e.g., what should be) and instead offer alternative interpretations.

In promoting this interdisciplinary management of injury, it is important to remain cognizant that although physiotherapists, strength and conditioning coaches, and physiologists have an active role in supporting and shaping injured athletes' experiences, they receive limited sport psychology training (Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2015). Educating these service-providers on the importance of athletes having access to a multiplicity of injury narratives, could help to 'upskill' these service-providers and encourage them to consider how they communicate to injured athletes to expand their potential possibilities from injury. For example, they may consider how they shape their messaging around the injury rehabilitation process, so that it focuses not only on how they intend to rehabilitate the injury and return the athlete to sport, but also seeks to inform athletes that the recovery process may not always be linear (e.g., dangers of resilience). Moreover, if applicable, they could expand their messaging to highlight how the rehabilitation period can enable athletes to work on issues that may prevent against injuries in the future and thus prolong their athletics career (e.g., longevity), or can offer athletes the opportunity to develop in areas outside of sport (e.g., more-to-me). Building upon this idea of expanding athletes' possibilities and perspectives from injury, sport psychologists could draw upon the findings presented in chapter three to highlight (if applicable) how the injury can act as an opportunity for the athlete to develop not only from a performance or athletic perspective but also from a personal, corporeal, and social perspective.

#### ***8.7.4 Cultural/Policy***

As discussed in chapter seven, the policies and the infrastructure surrounding elite athletes can preclude them from engaging with alternative injury perspectives which may protect their mental well-being and long-term performance potential. Nevertheless, previous research has demonstrated how the pervasive power and digitized nature of video can help heighten the political currency of marginalised and alternative perspectives and subsequently promote policy change to account for these perspectives (Kent, 2015; Walsh et al., 2010). Moreover, within elite track and field, contemporary examples as to how policy changes can occur in response to athletes' stories are provided in the most recent examples of Alison Felix amongst others speaking out against the pregnancy discrimination they faced within elite sport. Their collective stories led to sporting brands and institutions changing their policies to accommodate for maternity cover for all female athletes. Considering both the capacity of athletes' stories and video to give presence to marginalised issues that can subsequently result in policy changes, the video narratives could be used to ambush policy makers into broadening the metrics of their funding criteria (see Poucher et al., 2022). Moreover, they could be used to advocate for material and financial protection to injured athletes to help reduce the pressure athletes may face to prematurely return to sport. Such changes would align with the recommendations forwarded by the Baroness Grey-Thompson report in 2015, which called for sporting institutions to consider the potential of an insurance scheme that protects injured athletes against material losses. However, a recent review published by the House of Lords (2021) on the national plan for health, sport, and well-being, reported being "unimpressed" by progress made to implementing the recommendations highlighted by the Duty of Care review. Such findings highlight the importance of mobilising these video narratives to

help ‘prick’ the wider consciousness and advocate for a broader duty of care to injured athletes.

## **8.8 Future Avenues**

Although this research has advanced understandings of injury across multiple domains, there are several ways in which this research could be expanded upon, creating avenues for future research. To begin, although the findings presented were identified as having transferability to other individual sports (i.e., boxing, swimming, golf, rowing, canoeing), they were indicated to have limited transferability to team sports (chapter six). Therefore, future research may look to explore and identify the narratives that circulate and frame the injury experiences of athletes participating in team sports. While the narrative typologies identified within the current thesis were derived by exploring the injury experiences of athletes across different countries (i.e., Australia, Ireland, UK, Belgium, Netherlands, USA; chapter four), these countries operate from a Westernised philosophy. Expanding the scope of study to explore how other cultural ideologies may impact on athletes’ experiences of injury, could not only increase our understanding of the diverse cross-cultural conceptualisations of injury within elite sport, but enhance the cultural competencies of staff who may work with athletes from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Given that no story conforms exclusively to one narrative type, but rather people operate within typologies to fabricate their stories (Frank, 2010), future research may look to explore how athletes story their injury experiences using these six injury narratives as available resources. By observing the temporal dynamics of storytelling over time, it could allow future research to observe the creative ways in which athletes may draw upon diverse narratives to craft their injury experiences as well as how their narrative may shift over time (Williams, 2020; Sparkes, 1996). As

the types in typologies are of narratives not people, such storied insights may enhance the relatability of these injury narratives and provide illustrative examples to practitioners of how these injury narratives operate to shape athletes' injury experiences. In exploring athletes' stories of injury, future research may also look to draw upon more creative methods (e.g., poetry, diary entries, visual methods; Sparkes, 2002) to allow injured athletes to express their injury stories. For example, in translating these injury narratives into videos, I observed how visual representation not only illustrates storied research but adds additional embodied and emotive insight. Visual methods, alongside other creative methodologies (e.g., poetry, diaries, ethno-dramas) may therefore act as a fruitful tool for future researchers to explore athletes' injury stories in both complementary and congruent ways (Phoenix & Rich, 2016).

Building upon the narrative typologies presented in this PhD thesis, future researchers would also do well to breathe new conceptual life into these narrative typologies. For example, future research may look towards drawing upon more phenomenological research to offer more embodied interpretations of how athletes come to experience these typologies in, through, and out of their body (Frank, 2010). Moreover, future research could draw upon the concepts of new materialism foregrounded by Smith and Monforte (2020; chapter five). By shifting the analytical focus from stories and narratives to assemblages whereby narratives and the material world are given the same ontological status, it could generate novel and thought-provoking insights into how injured athletes' material world (e.g., bodies, rehabilitative environments, sporting equipment) coalesce with the narrative typologies presented here to co-create their injury experiences. Such insights could be especially fruitful for certain typologies (e.g., merry-go-round, snowball) whereby the material body could possibly limit an athlete's capacity to engage with alternative



narratives. Moreover, adopting this viewpoint, the conventional view of sport injury, that has dominated the literature, of the social, psychological, and biological (see Brewer et al., 2002) as separate domains of reality is abandoned. This invitation from Smith and Monforte 2020 provides an exciting and novel trajectory of future research in this field and has the potential to lead to a more transdisciplinary rather than multi or interdisciplinary discourse.

In terms of practical application, one of the limitations of this PhD was the absence of a follow-up pedagogical discussion with the athletes, coaches, and practitioners in chapter six and seven. While the one-off encounters allowed for an in-depth exploration and observation of the applied value of narratives and pedagogy in supporting injured athletes, Goodson & Gill (2011) highlight how narrative pedagogy is highly dependent on post-interactive reflection (i.e., reflection and reciprocation after interaction discussion). Given the capacity of narratives to act on individuals to shape their future actions (Frank, 2010), in addition to the transformative potential of narrative pedagogy to shift how individuals perceive and interpret the world around them (Goodson & Gill, 2011), future research could look to build upon the findings here, and conduct more longitudinal research with athletes, coaches, and practitioners. In doing so, they may be able to observe, over time, how sharing and discussing these injury narratives may act on athletes, coaches, and practitioners to frame their future responses, interpretations, and behaviours towards injury experiences and management within elite sport settings. Moreover, future researchers may look to work in a co-productive manner with athletes, coaches, and practitioners to discern how they could potentially integrate these narratives into sporting institutions, and potentially create social and cultural change by broadening the injury narrative repertoire within elite sport.

## **8.9 Reflections on Conducting this Research**

Having possessed a dual identity throughout this research project, in being both a researcher and a member of the community being studied (Berger, 2015), I wish to offer some final reflections on the process of conducting this research as a cultural insider. By providing some insight into my experiences, my hope is that I can contextualise my role as the researcher and author of this thesis and offer insights that may resonate with other researchers in a similar position.

Firstly, to contextualise my dual identity, at the outset and during this PhD thesis, I was an elite track athlete, embedded within an elite training environment. Moreover, I had embodied experiences of past and current injuries, as for the first three years of conducting this research I was almost constantly injured or experiencing some form of intermittent pain. These lived experiences shaped both the origin and direction of this thesis (see chapter one). Moreover, they influenced my conversations with athletes and supporting networks, my interpretations, and the debates offered within this body of research. For example, this thesis is concerned with interpreting stories of injury of elite track athletes. However, I have swam in a sea of stories regarding injury, since my first entry into elite athletics at the age of fourteen and perhaps even before then. These stories are likely to have coloured how I framed my interpretations, and after identifying the narratives that underpinned the 15 elite athletes' stories, I recognised that although I had never heard these stories articulated in a conceptual sense, they were in many ways familiar to me.

According to Berger (2015), remaining reflexive of one's positioning in relation to the researched is imperative in enabling the researcher to maintain awareness of themselves as part of the world they are studying, and can enhance the quality of the research by enabling the researcher to consider how they may have

assisted and hindered the co-construction of data and findings. Being a cultural insider offers many benefits during data collection and analysis, including being able to hear the unsaid, appreciating the nuanced reactions of the participants, and being sensitized to certain dimensions of the data. However, this cultural insider status also carries many tensions including the dangers of self-involvement to the degree that it blocks other voices being heard, or unconscious editing throughout the analysis phase (Berger, 2015). Against these possible claims, during both the data collection and analysis phase of chapter four, which formed the conceptual basis for this thesis, I often reflected upon how I shied away from disclosing my own experiences to participants. Moreover, I reported feeling disconnected from the athletes' stories during the interpretative stages of analysis, viewing them in a matter-of-fact manner as "participant data". This disconnection was surprising to me at the time, as I was currently injured during the analysis phase, and expected for these stories to spark some form of emotive or embodied reactions. Reflecting upon this now, I may have, in some ways, struggled to shake the shackles of my positivist upbringings and so felt the need to remain as a distanced and evacuative observer. Alternatively, it is likely that my own injury experiences were too acutely painful both physically and emotionally that I felt the need to keep a self-protective distance, to become a monadic body, closed off from the stories communicated by the bodies on the pages in front of me (Frank, 2010). As a neophyte researcher, I also doubled down on this self-protective shielding by fortifying my interpretations with the theoretical insights and words of others to help protect against the possibility of my work being seen as 'not academic enough' or worse unrepresentative of the athletes' experiences, and instead reflective of my own personal agenda.

Throughout the course of the research project however, I felt this self-protective guard beginning to loosen and my own voice emerging. The member reflections study was critical for this process as it allowed me to bring my own experiences into the fold. Moreover, it enabled me to acknowledge my positioning as someone who has crafted this research project as well as allowing me to more critically consider how I have been impacted by the process of constructing and sharing these different narratives. Building upon this study, when translating these narratives into a video format for dissemination, I recognised the paradox in acknowledging and appreciating what the elite athlete group could bring to the construction of these video narratives both in terms of their embodied, contextual, and lay knowledge, whilst subsequently ignoring the value of my own. Moreover, during the final study of this thesis (chapter six, seven), I had ‘retired’ from elite sport, and in many ways felt better able to access more embodied memories of injury and the culture of elite sport. Indeed, this personal shift in perspective from being embedded in the sport to somewhat of an outsider, I felt, gave me an appreciation of how helpful an ‘insider’ understanding can be, whilst also affording me some more critical distance to analyse and frame this PhD’s research findings.

Finally, I wish to offer some reflections on the impact that conducting and sharing research can have on researchers who are cultural insiders to the topic being explored. While this positioning did afford me several benefits including perhaps being able to channel any residual feelings from my sporting career into action and being able to empathise, respond to, and engage with the tensions and nuances of injury and elite sport, it also presented several challenges. For example, during data collection, I often felt hypocritical for questioning athletes on

dominant cultural norms, when I, myself, had embodied them and was subsequently challenged on the matter (e.g., see chapter four; “we’ve all run through pain, you’ve done the same”). The participant’s perceived knowledge of my own injury experiences was also quite unsettling and at times I longed to be a ‘cultural outsider’, as their informed understanding of my injury experiences created a dynamic of comparison both upward and downward (see chapter five), both of which affected me equally. As I began to disseminate this research more broadly (i.e., via online platforms and to various sporting institutions/athletics clubs), my fears and doubts over being perceived as the ‘injured’ or ‘failed’ athlete, who did not follow the accepted script of redemption, or who used their PhD to seek redemption for their injury experiences, began to accumulate and escalate. I worried not only about the impact that this perception would have on me personally, but how it may illegitimise the stories of the 15 elite athletes who had willingly shared their experiences as well as undermine the value of this research project in promoting a more equitable sport injury landscape. Prior to disseminating this research, I reflected upon such issues in my reflexivity journal, and shared my fears and concerns with my ‘critical friends’ which collectively included my elite athlete friends, family, partner, and supervisors. In some ways, they assuaged my concerns. First, my athlete friends reminded me of the value of this research being shared by an athlete who had experienced injury, highlighting how it would add to the authenticity and relatedness of the research being shared. Second, my critical friends encouraged me to share my own injury story, where appropriate, at the outset of disseminating this research. This allowed me to claim authorship over my own injury story and had enormous value I feel in connecting with the participants and in facilitating a more open and receptive environment.

## **8.10 Concluding Thoughts**

The aim of this programme of research was to create a deeper understanding of the diverse ways in which athletes make sense of their injury experiences from a psycho-social-cultural perspective. In doing so, this thesis has extended the opportunities available to injured athletes to frame, interpret, and understand their injury experiences by creating and sharing diverse narrative typologies in an accessible format with both athletes and supporting networks. Moreover, this thesis has provided a detailed picture of the applied implications of these six narrative typologies in supporting injured athletes by addressing both personal and socio-cultural factors. In this chapter, I have summarised the conceptual, empirical, theoretical, and practical contributions of this thesis to the sport injury psychology literature alongside four pertinent implications that these contributions have made to how we can support injured athletes in the future. Finally, this chapter discussed how the research findings could be implemented into practice, and suggested avenues worthy of future exploration. Overall, given my own experiences of working with athletes and sporting communities and their interest and willingness to understand and work with multiple injury narratives, coupled with the broader shifts in society towards athletes mental health and well-being, my hope is this research will continue to act as a resource for creating a more inclusive socio-cultural sport injury landscape, wherein the opportunity to frame or re-frame an injury experience is diverse and rich with multiple possibilities.

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## **Appendices**

## Appendix A: Ethical Approval Narrative Inquiry Study



Dear Ciara Everard,

Re. A Narrative Inquiry Approach into Athletes' Responses to Injury

Thank you for submitting your ethics application for consideration.

I can confirm that your application has been considered by the SHAS Ethics Committee and that ethical approval is granted. Please find attached your signed approval form.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Jamie North".

Jamie North

Faculty of SHAS Ethics Committee



## Appendix B: Participant Informed Consent Form Narrative Inquiry Study



Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of the project: A Narrative inquiry Approach into Athletes' Responses to Injury

Main investigator and contact details: Ciara Everard – 186102@live.stmarys.ac.uk

Members of the research team: Ciara Everard, Dr Ross Wadey, Dr. Karen Howells

1. I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet which is attached to this form. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.
3. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.
4. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
5. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me.

Name of participant (print).....

Signed.....

Date.....

---

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of Project: A Narrative Inquiry Approach into Athletes' Responses to Injury

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Participant Information Leaflet Narrative Inquiry Study



### **Participant Information leaflet**

#### **The Research Project:**

You are invited to participate in this research project to explore your insights into sustaining a sporting injury. All elements of this research will be carried out by myself, Ciara Everard, a postgraduate researcher from St. Mary's University. Before you decide to take part in this research project, please ensure that you read all elements of the research project, including its purpose, what it involves and any benefits or risks you may endure from participating in this research project. Please feel free to ask any questions, if anything is unclear.

The title of this research project is "A narrative inquiry approach into athletes' responses to injury". The purpose of this study will be to explore how athletes use stories circulating in their environment to make sense of their injury experience. It will enable athletes to tell their story with regards to what injury means to them which will assist researchers in extending the literature by gaining insight into the diverse ways in which athletes respond to the injury experience. Furthermore, by examining athletes over an extensive timeframe (18 months) it will enable researchers to explore how athletes adapt to injury over time providing novel insights into the dynamic nature of sports injury experiences.

By participating in this study, you will be making a paramount contribution to our understanding of the complex nature of sport injury by enabling us to understand how athletes respond to injury. The data collected may be published at a later date in scientific journals so that researchers, athletes, and practitioners can understand and benefit from the information you provide. All information will remain anonymous and access to data will be restricted to me and my supervisor only.

For further information on the study, please contact either myself at [186102@live.stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:186102@live.stmarys.ac.uk) or my supervisor Dr Ross Wadey at [ross.wadey@stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:ross.wadey@stmarys.ac.uk). The University contact details, should you wish to contact them is [020 8240 4000](tel:02082404000).

#### **Section 2: Your Participation in the Research Project**

##### **Why have you been asked to take part?**

You have been invited to partake in this research project as you are an athlete who has sustained an injury at some point throughout your sporting career.

### What will this research involve?

If you choose to take part in this research project, you will be invited to take part in a range of different research activities and will be involved in the study for a period of 18 months.

The table below describes each of the research activities that will take place, alongside the maximum frequency and duration. You are not required to partake in all of the following research activities and can decide to participate in only certain elements if you wish. You are free to withdraw from or enter the study at any time.

Activity	What will happen?	How long will it take?
Initial life history interview.	This Interview will begin with a grand tour question “tell me about your life” and follow an unstructured format providing you with an opportunity to discuss your life history in a way that is relevant and meaningful to you. In order to facilitate this process, the interviewer will look to create a timeline with you with regards to significant life events, adversities or turning points you have experienced over the course of your sporting career. These conversations will be recorded with your permission.	You will have one interview at a time or place of your choosing, lasting between one to three hours. If you are unable to attend the interviews in person, then these interviews will be conducted via an online third-party platforms (e.g. Skype)
Observation	If it is appropriate, you may be observed during a training session of your choosing. This will involve a training session that you are already due to complete and will not be an additional requirement. The primary investigator will observe the training session and you will be aware that you are being observed.  Observation will also require observing your online database if you provide verbal consent to do so. This will involve observing your social media accounts, web results or any blogs or online forums that you participate in. If you consent to this observation, you will be informed with regards to what elements of your online database are being observed and reported on. You have the right to refuse that certain or all elements of your online database are not included in the study and have the right to withdraw any observations throughout the study without prejudice.	You may be observed for up to one hour at a training session of your choosing.

Focus group	A small group discussion with other athletes to discuss your injury experience.	You will only be asked to participate in one focus group, lasting between one to two hours.
Diary	You will be asked to complete a diary entry following each interview session with the primary researcher to reflect on the points discussed in the interview. You will also be asked to reflect on any significant life events that occurred throughout the twelve-month period of the research project.	Diaries can be recorded in video, audio or written format. There will be a minimum of four diary entries plus any additional entries you wish to record. Diary entries should take approximately 10-15 minutes to record and can be conducted at a time and location of your choosing.
Follow-up interviews	You will meet with the primary researcher two to three times following your initial interview to discuss your injury experiences further or any significant events that have occurred in between interview sessions.	There will be two to three follow up interviews, each lasting between one and two hours. This will be conducted at a time and place of your choosing. If you are unable to attend the interview in person, they will be conducted via an online third-party platforms (e.g. Skype).
Photo Elicitation	You may be asked to provide photographs which represent something significant to you, for example, something significant with regards to your injury experience or a photograph that represents something about you as a person. These photographs will be used to elicit discussion throughout the interview process.	

### **When and where will this research take place?**

This research will be conducted over an eighteen-month period with multiple points of data collection. Interviews will be arranged at a time and a place of your choosing, however, if you are unable to attend the interview in person, they will be conducted via online third-party platforms (e.g. Skype). We would aspire to have at least two months between each interview.

### **What are the potential benefits of taking part?**

Participants will benefit from taking part in this research project as it gives them an opportunity to disclose their thoughts and feelings regarding injury experiences. Emotional disclosure with regards to injury is reported to have several benefits for an athlete's recovery, well-being, and their relationships (Salim & Wadey, 2018).

Furthermore, this research project aims to develop a range of narratives to template an athletes' injury experience. To date, there is an over-emphasis on the performance narrative within the sporting domain which emphasises that "life is sport and sport is life". It is reported that when a single narrative type becomes dominant, it overrides or silences alternative stories. By creating other narratives, it may help expand opportunities for athletes to fit their lived experiences into the contours of more satisfactory and appropriate narratives especially when the dominant narratives in sport does not fit their own experiences, take care of them, or are problematic to live by (Smith & Sparkes, 2009).

**What are the potential disadvantages or risk of participating?**

There are no risks involved in taking part in this research project. However, for some athletes discussing their injury experience may be a disturbing task. To safeguard you against any particular adverse effects you may experience from discussing your injury, you will be debriefed after the initial session and have an opportunity to articulate any concerns you may have. Furthermore, you are free to choose what activities you wish to be involved in and are not obliged to partake in any activities that you don't feel comfortable with. If you wish to terminate any of the research activities throughout the study, you are free to do so without prejudice.

**How can I withdraw from the study?**

If you agree to take part in this research but would like to stop at a later date, you may do so at any time by contacting one of the researchers using the details below. You do not need to give a reason and can withdraw without prejudice at any stage throughout the research project. If you choose to withdraw, no further data would be collected. However, any data already collected may be retained and used for the study unless you request for it to be removed.

**How will my information be kept confidential?**

Your participation in this research project will be strictly confidential. Throughout the study, you may be identified in research data including audio recordings and transcriptions of interviews and focus groups, in notes taken by the chief investigator during observation, and in your diary entries. The data will be analysed by the chief investigator, overseen by the research supervisor. It will not be accessible to anyone else. You will never be identified in any published data. Although direct quotations may be published, a pseudonym will be used, and any identifying information will be removed.

Any hard copies of data that include your personal information will be stored in a locked drawer in a filing cabinet within a secure building at St Mary's University. All electronic data will be stored on St Mary's University servers and password protected. Any data in which you are identified will be accessible only to the chief investigator and research supervisor. Both personal and research data will be stored securely for ten years before being destroyed, in line with St Mary's University policy.

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP TOGETHER WITH A COPY OF YOUR CONSENT FORM

## Appendix D: Ethical Approval Form: Narrative Pedagogy Study



St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London

26 July 2021

SMU\_ETHICS\_2020-21\_243

**Ciara Everard (SAHPS):** 'Using narrative pedagogy in sports injury research'

Dear Ciara

### University Ethics Sub-Committee

Thank you for re-submitting your ethics application for consideration.

I can confirm that all required amendments have been made and that you therefore have ethical approval to undertake your research.

This approval is subject to any government and St Mary's University research guidelines relating to Covid19 which may change from time to time.

Yours sincerely

Matthew James  
Chair, Ethics Sub-Committee

Cc Ross Wadey

St Mary's University, Waldegrave Road, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, London TW1 4SX  
Switchboard 020 8240 4000, Fax 020 8240 4255, [www.stmarys.ac.uk](http://www.stmarys.ac.uk)

St Mary's University, Twickenham. A company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales under number 5977277  
Registered Office Waldegrave Road, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham TW1 4SX. Registered Charity Number 1120192

## Appendix E: Participant Informed Consent Form Narrative Pedagogy Study

Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of the project: Using Narrative Pedagogy in Sports Injury Research.

Main investigator and contact details: Ciara Everard – 186102@live.stmarys.ac.uk

Members of the research team: Ciara Everard, Dr Ross Wadey, Dr. Karen Howells

1. I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet which is attached to this form. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.
3. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.
4. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me.

Name of participant (print).....

Signed.....

Date.....

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---  
If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of Project: Using Narrative Pedagogy in Sports Injury Research

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F: Narrative Pedagogy Study Consent Form for Videos

Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of the project: Using Narrative Pedagogy in Sports Injury Research.

Main investigator and contact details: Ciara Everard – 186102@live.stmarys.ac.uk

Members of the research team: Ciara Everard, Dr Ross Wadey, Dr. Karen Howells

1. I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet which is attached to this form. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. I understand that the videos created will be used for public consumption and available worldwide on social media platforms (i.e., You-tube, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc.)

3. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.

4. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded. However, I am aware that I will be identifiable from the videos created.

5. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.

6. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me.

Name of participant (print).....

Signed.....

Date.....

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If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of Project: Using Narrative Pedagogy in Sports Injury Research

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix G: Participant Information leaflet: Video Creation

### The Research Project:

You are invited to participate in this research project which involves storying injured athletes' experiences. As part of this research project, you will be recorded while you are training at the athletics track, completing gym exercises, and chatting amongst your friends. This content will be used for the creation of videos which are designed to communicate the different ways athletes experience injury within elite sport. All elements of this research will be carried out by myself, Ciara Everard, a postgraduate researcher from St. Mary's University. Before you decide to take part in this research project, please ensure that you have read all elements of the research project, including its purpose, what it involves and any benefits or risks you may endure from participating in this research project. Please feel free to ask any questions if anything is unclear.

The purpose of this study will be to develop videos to communicate six sport injury stories which highlight the different ways athletes experience injury. The purpose of communicating these stories in a video format is to make the research more readily accessible to athletes, coaches, and practitioners. The six injury narratives we will be creating are Resilience, Merry-Go-Round, Longevity, Pendulum, More-to-Me, and Snowball Narrative. Each of these narratives depicts the different ways in which athletes can make sense of their injury experiences and the impact of these meanings on their well-being and sporting careers. Below, I will outline the storyline of each of these narratives.

**Resilience Narrative:** In the resilience narrative, athletes view injury as part and parcel of the sport and maintain their well-being and commitment to the sport by internalising the messages of control the controllable, success in sport is measured by effort, and work hard whilst injured.

**Merry-Go-Round Narrative:** In the merry-go-round narrative, athletes experience chronic recurring injuries, and this plotline shifts from "*what could be*", to "*what should be*" to "*what could have been*" as athletes' well-being and body self-relationship gradually deteriorates over time.

**Longevity Narrative:** In the longevity narratives athletes view *time lost* from injury as *time gained* in the longer term as this is a progressive redemptive storyline where athletes overcome their injuries to arrive a better place further down the line.

**Pendulum Narrative:** In the pendulum narrative athletes alternate between two opposing storylines the longevity narrative which promotes long-term health and performance and the performance narrative which prioritises short-term performance objectives over longer-term implications of injury. This alternation in storylines creates some confusion and perturbations in athletes' well-being and sporting performances.

**More-to-Me Narrative:** In the More-to-Me narrative athletes maintain their well-being by framing injury within the broader context of their lives as this storyline reads as "*My injuries and sport do not define me as there is more to me*".

**Snowball Narrative:** The snowball narrative represents a downhill trajectory of physical and psychological decline.

We are hoping to portray these narratives in a video-format, for most of the videos, we have used content available on YouTube, however, to enhance the transferability and authenticity of these videos, we are hoping to create some elite track footage to add to video content. By helping to create this content, you will be making a paramount contribution to increasing the accessibility and dissemination of research concerning injury experiences. These videos will be made available to a selected group of participants first as part of a larger study, before disseminating them on a wider platform (e.g., social media) so that they reach a wider audience.

For further information on the study, please contact either myself at [186102@live.stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:186102@live.stmarys.ac.uk) or my supervisor Dr Ross Wadey at [ross.wadey@stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:ross.wadey@stmarys.ac.uk). The University contact details, should you wish to contact them is [020 8240 4000](tel:02082404000).

## **Section 2: Your Participation in the Research Project**

### **Why have you been asked to take part?**

You have been invited to take part in this research project as you are a track athlete and therefore, represent the participants in this study.

### **What will this research involve?**

If you choose to take part in this research project, you will be recorded while taking part in a training session at St. Mary's University. We are hoping to capture the experience of training in an elite environment and capture various elements of the narratives outlined above, hence you will be recorded while training, chatting amongst friends, or performing rehab or warm-up exercises. The recording will take place over the course of two training sessions and there will be no further requirement of you beyond that. If you do not want certain footage to be recorded, that is fine. If after the training session, you want the footage to be deleted, please let me know, and it will be removed. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

### **When and where will this research take place?**

This research will be conducted on two occasions of the participants choosing and will be carried out at St. Marys University Athletics Track and the High-Performance Gym also located at St. Mary's University subject to COVID-19 restrictions.

### **What are the potential benefits of taking part?**

By taking part in this research project, you are helping to support other injured athletes by creating awareness of the different ways athletes experience injury. Further, you are contributing towards informing coaches and service-providers about elite athletes' injury experiences, so they can better support injured athletes. You are helping to create a resource for injured athletes which offers them six different storylines to help make sense of their injury experiences.

**What are the potential disadvantages or risk of participating?**

This video-footage will be made widely available and so you need to be comfortable with sharing this content to wider audiences. You are free to choose what footage is used of you, and if after reviewing the videos, you wish for certain footage to be removed, we can do so. If you wish to terminate any of the research activities throughout the study, you are free to do so without prejudice. Should you find any of the videos to be distressing, you can discuss this anonymously at the Samaritans ([www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org), Phone number: 116 123) or AfterTrauma ([www.aftertrauma.org](http://www.aftertrauma.org)).

**How can I withdraw from the study?**

If you agree to take part in this research but would like to stop at a later date, you may do so at any time by contacting one of the researchers using the details below. You do not need to give a reason and can withdraw without prejudice at any stage throughout the research project. If you choose to withdraw, any footage taken of you will be withdrawn from the videos upon your request. However, the videos will be made widely available and hence after publication control over what content is already available in the public domain will be limited.

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP TOGETHER WITH A COPY OF YOUR CONSENT FORM

## Appendix H: Participant Information leaflet: Narrative Pedagogy Study

### The Research Project:

You are invited to participate in this research project which involves discussing the various ways in which athletes story their injury experiences. In a previous study, we uncovered the six different ways in which athletes story their injury experiences which are outlined below. In this study, we will discuss these different injury narratives and together we will establish the applicability of these injury narratives and how they may be used in professional practice. All elements of this research will be carried out by myself, Ciara Everard, a postgraduate researcher from St. Mary's University. Before you decide to take part in this research project, please ensure that you read all elements of the research project, including its' purpose, what it involves and any benefits or risks you may endure from participating in this research project. Please feel free to ask any questions if anything is unclear.

The six injury narratives we will be discussing are as follows:

**Resilience Narrative:** In the resilience narrative, athletes view injury as part and parcel of the sport and maintain their well-being and commitment to the sport by internalising the messages of control the controllable, success in sport is measured by effort, and work hard whilst injured.

**Merry-Go-Round Narrative:** In the merry-go-round narrative, athletes experience chronic recurring injuries, and this plotline shifts from "*what could be to what should be to what could have been*" as athletes' well-being and body self-relationship gradually deteriorates over time.

**Longevity Narrative:** In the longevity narratives athletes view *time lost* from injury as *time gained* in the longer term as this is a progressive redemptive storyline where athletes overcome their injuries to arrive a better place further down the line.

**Pendulum Narrative:** In the pendulum narrative athletes alternate between two opposing storylines the longevity narrative which promotes long-term health and performance and the performance narrative which prioritises short-term performance objectives over longer-term implications of injury. This alternation in storylines creates some confusion and perturbations in their well-being and sporting performances.

**More-to-Me Narrative:** In the More-to-Me narrative athletes maintain their well-being by framing injury within the broader context of their lives as this storyline reads as "*My injuries and sport do not define me as there is more to me*".

**Snowball Narrative:** The snowball narrative represents a downhill trajectory of physical and psychological decline.

An outline of each of these narratives will be communicated to you in the format of a video. Once you have watched the videos, we will discuss the nature of these different storylines, whether they resonate with injured athletes' experiences and tease out the complexities of these different storylines to further understand them. The primary researcher will provide you with some background information, regarding how these narratives were created and a brief review of the literature

surrounding injury and elite sport so you can contextualise these narrative types. Following this presentation, we will discuss these narratives further with a particular focus on how they be used in an applied setting to help both injured athletes and those supporting them.

By participating in this study, you will be making a paramount contribution to understanding how to support injured athletes. The data collected may be published at a later date in scientific journals so that researchers, athletes, and practitioners can understand and benefit from the information you provide. All information will remain anonymous and access to personal identifiable data will be restricted to me and my supervisor only.

For further information on the study, please contact either myself at [186102@live.stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:186102@live.stmarys.ac.uk) or my supervisor Dr Ross Wadey at [ross.wadey@stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:ross.wadey@stmarys.ac.uk). The University contact details, should you wish to contact them is [020 8240 4000](tel:02082404000).

## **Section 2: Your Participation in the Research Project**

### **Why have you been asked to take part?**

You have been invited to take part in this research project as you are either an athlete participating in track and field or are a coach, service provider or organisation in track and field and/or elite sport.

### **What will this research involve?**

If you choose to take part in this research project, you will be invited to take part in either an interview or focus-group discussion. You may be required to conduct a follow-up interview if necessary. All interviews and focus-groups will last between one to two hours.

During the interviews and focus-group sessions, the primary researcher will communicate the different narrative types to you via videos. Once you have watched the videos, we will discuss the nature of these different storylines, whether they resonate with injured athletes' experiences and tease out the complexities of these different storylines to further understand them. The primary researcher will provide you with some background information, regarding how these narratives were created and a brief review of the literature surrounding injury and elite sport so you can contextualise these narrative types. Following this presentation, we will discuss these narratives further with a particular focus on how they can be used in an applied setting to help both injured athletes and those supporting them.

You are not required to partake in all of the research activities and can decide to participate in only certain elements if you wish. All participants asked to participate in the focus-group can opt for a one-to-one interview if they prefer. You are free to withdraw from or enter the study at any time.

### **When and where will this research take place?**

This research will be conducted over a three-month period with two points of data collection. Interviews will be arranged at a time and a place of your choosing, subject to COVID-19 restrictions. All interviews and focus-groups can be conducted online via third-party forums (e.g., Skype) and there will be no obligation to conduct the interviews in person.

**What are the potential benefits of taking part?**

By taking part in this research project, you will have the opportunity to learn about how injured athletes story their injury experiences, how socio-cultural contexts frame their injury experiences, and how the different ways in which athletes story their injury can influence their well-being and sporting careers. This can assist you in dealing with your own injury experiences or in supporting injured athletes. Further, you will be helping to enhance the accessibility and applicability of this information by contributing towards our understanding of the applied value of these narratives. Overall, you will be contributing towards supporting the needs and experiences of injured athletes.

**What are the potential disadvantages or risk of participating?**

There are no risks involved in taking part in this research project. However, for some athletes or service providers discussing injury experiences may be a disturbing task. To safeguard you against any adverse effects you may experience from discussing injuries, you will be debriefed after the initial session and have an opportunity to articulate any concerns you may have. We will also provide you with contact details to the Samaritans ([www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org), Phone number, 116 123) and AfterTrauma ([www.aftertrauma.org](http://www.aftertrauma.org)) should you wish to chat to somebody anonymously following the interview. Furthermore, you are free to choose what activities you wish to be involved in and are not obliged to partake in any activities that you do not feel comfortable with. If you wish to terminate any of the research activities throughout the study, you are free to do so without prejudice.

**How can I withdraw from the study?**

If you agree to take part in this research but would like to stop at a later date, you may do so at any time by contacting one of the researchers using the details below. You do not need to give a reason and can withdraw without prejudice at any stage throughout the research project. If you choose to withdraw, no further data would be collected. However, any data already collected may be retained and used for the study unless you request for it to be removed.

**How will my information be kept confidential?**

Your participation in this research project will be strictly confidential. Throughout the study, you may be identified in research data including audio recordings and transcriptions of interviews and focus groups, in notes taken by the primary researcher during observation. The data will be analysed by the primary researcher, overseen by the research supervisor. It will not be accessible to anyone else. You will never be identified in any published data. Although direct quotations may be published, a pseudonym will be used, and any identifying information will be removed.

Any hard copies of data that include your personal information will be stored in a locked drawer in a filing cabinet within a secure building at St Mary's University. All electronic data will be stored on St Mary's University servers and password protected. Any data in which you are identified will be accessible only to the primary researcher and research supervisor. Both personal and research data will be stored securely for ten years before being destroyed, in line with St Mary's University policy.

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP TOGETHER WITH A COPY OF YOUR CONSENT FORM

## **Appendix I: Narrative Pedagogy PowerPoint Presentation**





1



2

1

27/11/2022

### OVERVIEW

- Discuss the various ways athletes experience injury
- Identified from longitudinal study
- 15 elite track athletes from different countries (US, Australia, Belgium, Netherlands, UK and Ireland)
- Three interviews over an 18 month period
- Six injury narratives identified

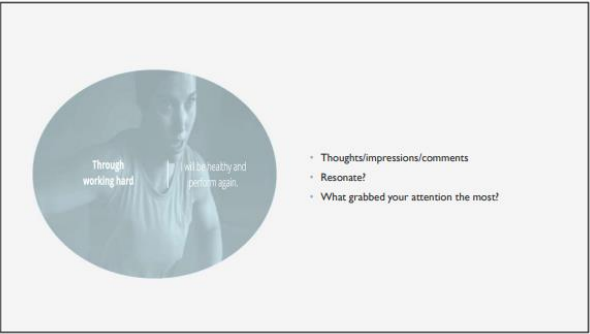
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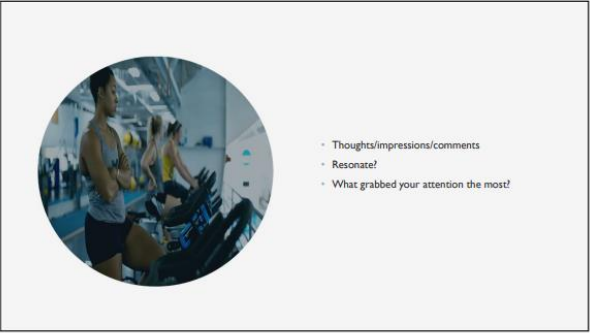
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8

**Tendon Position Statement:** "Tendon pain is baffling for clinicians and scientists alike. It is difficult to understand why it is so persistent and why it comes and goes with little reason. Despite ongoing research, there is no consensus on tendon pathobiology and the complex relationship between tendon pathology, pain, and function is incompletely understood. There has been a surge of tendinopathy treatments, most of which are insufficient, poorly supported, and warrant further exploration (Cardoso et al, 2019)."

“And it wasn't the emotion of one bad session. It was those three years of injury frustration just pouring out of me.”

*-The Longevity Narrative*

9

**WHAT CAN WE DO?**

- Would understanding the biological elements of tendinopathies help?
- How could we increase understanding around the issue?

10


27/11/202

11


- Thoughts/impressions/comments
- Resonate?
- What grabbed your attention the most?

12

### CONTRASTING PERSPECTIVES



*I think I would always be on the side of being a bit reckless rather than being cautious because if you're too cautious you are never going to be able to compete with the best ones anyway*



*I guess if you are someone who is used to crunching numbers, then it would be hard to take those days but your body doesn't respond to exact numbers and we all know people with the perfect training diaries who never perform.*

13




LONGEVITY  
IN SPORT

- Train smart nor hard (Stulberg & Magnus)
- Athletes who missed > 5 weeks of training, 7 times less likely to achieve their sporting goals (RaySmith et al., 2015)
- Athlete-centered coaches

14


27/11,



**THE  
PENDULUM  
NARRATIVE**

Twitter Instagram

15



*Certainly, I believe in training smart, but I don't want to turn training smart into training soft*

- Thoughts/impressions/comments
- Resonate?
- What grabbed your attention the most?

16



17



**The Snowball Narrative**

However, other athletes were in fact too far gone and self-aware within the sport no longer possible.


- Thoughts/impressions/comments
- Resonate?
- What grabbed your attention the most?

18

27/11/



19



- Thoughts/impressions/comments
- Resonate?
- What grabbed your attention the most?

20

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

- Overall experience of watching and discussing these six injury narratives?
- Overview of videos – authentic? Captured real-life experiences? Ways in which they could be improved upon?
- Do you think these videos could be a useful resource for you, for your athletes?
- How might they be used by athletes/coaches/practitioners?
- What if any impact could they have for athletes? for coaches? For practitioners?
- How best to make these resources available?
- Any other comments?

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## REFERENCES

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