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**Ostrich or eagle?  
Protection and professionalism in sport science and coaching**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Ostrich or eagle? Protection and professionalism in sport science and coaching**

In this presentation I examine the processes of professionalisation and mutual development within and between two occupational groups in the UK - sport and exercise scientists and sports coaches. At the outset I acknowledge the 'cultural turn' in science and use my own positionality, based on 30 years of experience within both communities, to inform the analysis. The main questions addressed here are whether these two interdependent groups have found a satisfactory professional relationship and how they have adjusted to the destabilising forces of late modernity. The issue of child protection in sport is used as a case study through which to examine these questions. The readiness of the two groups to acknowledge and embrace associated ethical and professional practices differs considerably. It is argued that sports coaching has addressed protection issues much more readily and effectively than has sport science. It is also suggested that the preoccupation of sport science with scholarly activity undermines the realisation of its aspiration for professional and chartered status. The emphasis of both occupational groups on 'performance enhancement', both scholarly and/or athletic, has led them to suffer from diminished social and political perspectives which benefit neither. The paper concludes with some reflections on the potential for both occupations to learn from attending to wider external reference points.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this address, I shall examine the processes of professionalisation and mutual development within and between two occupational groups in the UK - sport and exercise scientists and sports coaches. I address coaches because I understand that they have been especially targeted to attend today. I address sport and exercise scientists as one group because much of what I have to say applies to them both. To simplify matters I shall use the word 'science' to cover both.

In case you are worried that I come to bury science and coaching, not to praise them, then let me make myself clear at the outset with this cautionary note, adapted for sport from a recent Editorial in the medical journal *The Lancet* (2001(358): 253, July 28<sup>th</sup>):

Zealous would-be regulators need to bear certain things in mind. First, there are many *coaches and scientists* [physicians and surgeons] who do not need to be told to treat their *athletes* [patients] in a polite manner or to keep their skills and knowledge up to date. They already do. Second, there are many involved in *research* [clinical trials] who treat enrolled *athletes* [patients] as participants and not mere subjects. Third, many of those who give of their own limited time to provide reviews of their peers' work are doing so to the best of their ability. The most successful reforms will harness the enthusiasm and professionalism of this silent majority who are doing a good job, and provide the structures and resources that allow them to do it better.

(original in square brackets, italics added)

What I have to say is informed and shaped by my own experiences as a player, official, coach and sports administrator, from club to international level, and as a multidisciplinary sport scientist, over rather more decades than I care to recall. In other words, my motives are entirely honourable!

The main questions of interest today are whether these two interdependent groups have found a satisfactory professional relationship and how they have adjusted to the destabilising forces of late modernity. In particular, I shall raise questions about the impact of the associated 'cultural turn' on the two occupations, in relation to both our knowledge claims and our professional practice. Are we ostrich, with our head buried in

the sand, or eagle, with the vision to see for miles and benefit from the widest possible landscape? I shall use the issue of sexual abuse and child/athlete protection in sport as a case study through which to examine these questions because it lies at the heart of the athlete/practitioner relationship, for both coaches and scientists. My contentions are: that coaching has addressed protection issues much more readily and more effectively than science; that both occupations suffer from the 'ostrich' syndrome; and that, in order to develop the perspective of the 'eagle', both should attend to wider external reference points.

In keeping with contemporary reflexive sociology, by which the researcher reveals themselves in their writing, I consider it important to acknowledge my authorial voice here and not to pretend that my views come 'from nowhere'. No doubt like many of you, I had an unconditional love affair with sport throughout my teenage years and early twenties. I was almost completely gender blind until I took on responsibility for trying to secure press coverage for my main sport. My athletic career and my intellectual development as a student and lecturer ran along parallel but separate paths. It was not until towards the end of my active years as an athlete that I began to question some of the things that I had witnessed. I began to use the social sciences to help me make sense of this thing called sport and of some of the social injustices that I had, at last, begun to recognise. By the mid 1980s I left my work on developing a computer-based match analysis system for coaches and started to research instead social questions about women's status as sports leaders and coaches. Researching sex discrimination led me towards the sexual harassment literature and it was only a small step from there to studies on sexual abuse. Once I arrived at this point, I realised that this particular research terrain - of sexual abuse in sport - was completely uncharted.

My aim today, then, is to use some of the research from the past 15 years or so in this field to add to the existing dialogue about professionalism in science and coaching. I shall use three video clips to help me in this task. I shall not rehearse the contentious definitions that underpin this subject, except to note that no distinction is drawn here between sexual abuse of the child, under 18, and that of the athlete, of any age. My

arguments about protection, then, rest on moral not legal definitions. (A rationale for this, together with a reviews of terms, is available elsewhere (Brackenridge 2001)). Also, I shall draw only from work on sexual abuse (as opposed to other forms such as physical and emotional abuse or bullying). The rest of the paper is structured as follows:

1. **Protection** - A review of the dimensions of protection in sport, and of some of the available prevalence data from sport and professional discourses used to explain sexual abuse.
2. **Professionalism** – A discussion of the professional standing of the two occupations and their responses to protection issues in the context of late modernity
3. **Conclusions**

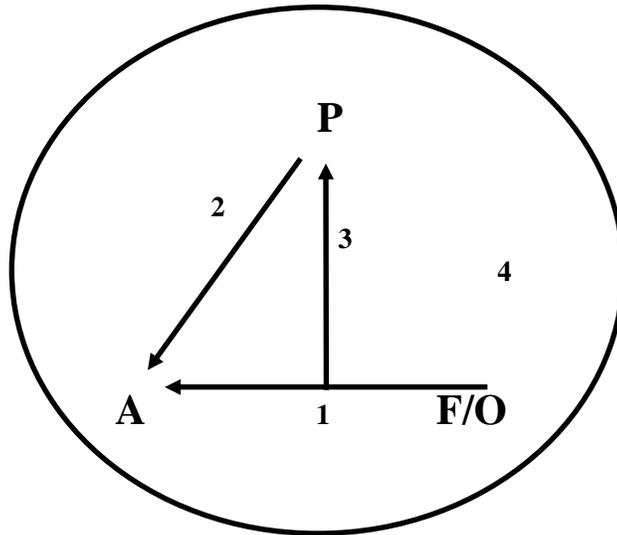
## 2.0 PROTECTION

### 2.1 Four dimensions of protection in sport

There are four dimensions of protection that sports professionals should attend to in relation to sexual abuse (see Figure 1):

1. **Protecting the athlete from others:** recognising and referring anyone who has been subjected to sexual misconduct by someone else, whether *inside* sport (by another staff member or athlete) or *outside* sport (by someone in the family or peer group);
2. **Protecting the athlete from oneself:** observing and encouraging good practice when working with athletes in order to avoid perpetrating abuse;
3. **Protecting oneself from the athlete or others:** taking precautions to avoid false allegations against oneself by athletes or their peers or families;
4. **Protecting one's profession:** safeguarding the good name and integrity of sport, coaching and science.

**Figure 1** Four dimensions of protection in sport



Where:

P = professional (scientist or coach)

A = athlete

F/O = family or other (includes peer coaches and other athletes)

Whilst this may seem like a simple description of a very complex issue I find it a useful organising framework against which to monitor and evaluate the process of child/athlete protection. It is this process that I shall take today as a proxy for the state of professionalism in both science and coaching. On one of my listserves, I receive an average of about 20-30 notices each week of breaches of these protections, in law, the clergy, medicine, dentistry, physiotherapy, teaching, coaching ... no occupation is exempt.

Many of you will recall the first major sexual abuse scandal in British sport. Paul Hickson, a former British swimming coach, was convicted in 1995 for 17 years for rape and sexual assaults of swimmers in his care over about a 20 year period. He was a highly respected coach, who had the trust of parents and the alibi of Olympic coaching status.

He used so-called ‘fitness tests’ and massage as a pretext for grooming and molesting female swimmers. This first video clip is from a *Crimewatch File* reconstruction of the Paul Hickson case. The particular swimmer featured here was a key witness in the trial.

As you watch the clip, ask yourself:

- a) What emotions does this evoke in you?
- b) What dimensions of protection are involved here?
- c) Why do you think this happened?

Extract of police interview with female swimmer [3 minutes]

[“He raped me and worse ... he was so respected ... you’re the first person I have told ... swimming takes over your life ... he made me feel so dirty ... you just want to be the best ... I pretended everything was OK ... there was no-one to talk to ...”]

## **2.2 Evidence of abuse in sport**

For a variety of reasons - including variations in epistemology, definitions, measurement instruments and methods, research designs and response rates - great caution should be observed when considering statistics about sexual abuse in any setting. Indeed, one leading expert in this field says of prevalence studies:

... any attempt to arrive at a realistic estimate of the actual rate of child sexual abuse ... has to rely on assumptions, guesswork, and a bit of putting one’s finger in the wind.

(Grubin 1998: 11)

General estimates that one in four girls and one in six boys experience sexual abuse before reaching adulthood are common in the literature (e.g. Russell 1984; Creighton and Noyes 1989). One meta-analysis (Salter reported in Doyle 1994: 41) found that an average of 28.5 per cent of the population remembered instances of being sexually abused as children, and reports from North America indicate even higher prevalence

figures than those from Britain (Whetsell-Mitchell 1995; MacMillan *et al.* 1997). It is consistently reported that most victims are female and the vast majority of abusers male (Grubin 1998).

Many experiences of abuse and harassment go unreported. Where reports are received in the criminal justice or social care systems they are usually not recorded in ways that identify them as sport-related, making it difficult to track data from sport incidents. There are relatively few prevalence studies of sexual exploitation in. However, data from three countries - Canada (Kirby and Greaves 1996; Kirby, Greaves and Hanvisky 2000), Norway (Fasting, Brackenridge and Sundgot-Borgen 2000) and Australia (Leahy, Pretty and Tenenbaum 2001) - are available, all of which indicate that this is a serious issue for sport. I shall briefly report some of the findings from the survey phases of these three studies (although all three also included interview phases).

21.8 per cent of respondents to the Canadian survey of high performance and recently retired Olympic athletes (N = 1,200) replied that they had had sexual intercourse with persons in positions of authority in sport. 8.6 per cent reported they had experienced *forced* sexual intercourse, or rape, by such persons. These persons included team doctors, managers and physios, not just coaches.

In Norway, a survey of the top 660 female athletes, aged 15 to 39, representing 58 sport disciplines asked about experiences of sexual harassment, including abuse (Fasting *et al.* 2000). More than half of the participants (284 or 51 per cent among the athletes and 305 or 59 per cent among the controls) had experienced one or more forms of sexual harassment (including abuse). More of the athletes (15 per cent) had experienced sexual harassment from authority figures in sport than controls had done from supervisors or teachers (9 per cent). This indicates that authority figures in sport may exhibit behaviour towards athletes that is not tolerated or accepted in workplaces or educational institutions. The older the Norwegian athletes were, the more they reported being sexually harassed by a sport authority figure.

In a recent cross-sectional, retrospective survey of over 2,000 male and female athletes in Australia, (Leahy *et al.* 2001) 21.9 per cent of elite athletes and 17.7 per cent of club athletes reported having experienced sexual abuse at some point in their lives. Of these, almost half of the elite group and over a quarter of the club group indicated that this had occurred in sport. Females from both elite and club groups reported higher prevalence rates than males, and elite females reported the highest rates of all.

55 per cent of the Canadian female athletes and 29 per cent of the males reported experiencing upsetting putdowns or humiliation in sport. The female athletes in the Norwegian study (Fasting *et al.* 2000) experienced more or less the same types of sexual harassment in sport as they did outside sport but there was a difference between the type of harassment they experienced from authority figures and from peer athletes. Ridicule was the most common form of sexual harassment from other athletes: with authority figures in sport it was unwanted physical contact.

Thus far, there has been no prevalence study of sexual abuse in sport in the UK, due to resistance from the British Olympic Association in the mid 1990s. However, I am pleased to report that a proposal for a national prevalence study will be considered later this month by the Steering Group of the new Sport England/NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit.

### **2.3 Explanations of abuse in sport ('ostrich')**

I have recently detailed the dominant discourses about sexual abuse and child protection in sport organisations (Brackenridge 2001). Today, I am borrowing and adapting a framework from White (1995) who suggests that there are six reductionist models by which the problem of sexual exploitation by 'helping professionals' is defined and strategised within those professions. I consider that both coaches and sport and exercise scientists can be classed as helping professionals so White's messages are applicable here.

***Perpetrator morality deficit model*** – sexual abuse by professionals arises from individual evil by someone lacking moral control - in other words a psychopathic predator. According to this analysis, both scientists and coaches need to screen out those whose evil is masked by an image of goodness.

***Victim morality deficit model*** - sexual abuse by professionals arises from malicious, seductive and/or manipulative complainants. The professional coping strategy here is victim-blaming or scapegoating the complainant in various ways (see Brackenridge 2001: 176).

***Clinical model*** – the exploiting professional is suffering from a temporary “aberration in judgement emerging from chronic or transient emotional disturbance” (White 1995: 178). This is often reflected in professionals claiming they need therapy for alcohol or drug abuse or other life crises that have ‘caused’ them to transgress.

***Anomie/organisational morality deficit model*** – exploitation arises from professionals whose organisations lack clear ethical standards and explicit boundaries for the client-worker relationship. The response to this model is to produce codes of conduct that professionals can claim then gives them a script for defining appropriateness.

***Training deficit model*** – sexually abusive professionals suffer from a lack of knowledge and skill and a training deficit caused by inadequate professional socialisation. The strategy for handling this is to provide rehabilitative training for those who have exhibited poor boundary maintenance in their relationship with athletes

***Environmental model*** – an idiosyncratic, situational moment of “chemistry between the exploiter and his or her environment” (White 1995: 179). Because this is deemed to be a one-off occasion the best strategy is to relocate the exploiting practitioner.

These explanatory models of sexual abuse by professionals all fall short because they reduce to a simple *event* something that is a complex *process*. That process is located

within the organisational communities of science and coaching. It is these organisational communities or cultures that permit abuses of all types to go unchallenged.

The next video clip is from a recent Channel 4 TV newscast. It describes the processes that led to the conviction of another swimming coach, Mike Drew. When watching this, ask yourself:

- a) Which dimensions of protection are apparent here?
- b) How could Drew's abuses continue undetected for so long?
- c) Which of the 6 models might be used to explain Drew's behaviour?

Extract from Drew piece [5 minutes 10 seconds]

[Interview with male swimmer ... home/hotel room/growth measurements ... hot bath/massage/pretext of stimulating hormones and growth "The worst time was when he booked an hotel room ... I consider it rape ... It wasn't until I was an adult ... he was the highest coach in the country ... 16 counts of buggery and indecent assault." Summary from journalist... Far from being an isolated case... after the Hickson case Drew said "... anyone with concerns can come to me."]

It is only by recognising the culture of sexual exploitation that shared responsibility for the problems of sexual abuse by professionals will be accepted. In order to understand this culture in coaching and science it is first necessary to examine the professional development and status of these two occupational groups. Do they suffer from the kind of cultural closure or introversion that facilitates sexual exploitation?

### **3.0 PROFESSIONALISM**

#### **3.1 Mutuality and professional development**

Are coaching and science trades or professions? Not the latter, clearly, since, notwithstanding the current accreditation system, neither group yet has in place a complete organisational infrastructure or all the necessary features associated with

professional status, such as chartered status, a licence to practice, fully comprehensive quality assurance schemes, explicit ethical norms, disciplinary and defence systems and so on. It is the case, however, that the authorities responsible for both sports coaching and science have aspirations for them to become fully-fledged professions. The *UK Vision For Coaching* states:

By 2012 the practice of coaching in the UK will be elevated to a *profession* acknowledged as central to the development of sport and fulfilment of individual potential ... Coaching will have professional and ethical values and inclusive and equitable practice

(UK Sport 2001a: 5. Italics added)

... and the Government's own *Plan For Sport* (2001: 32) includes consulting

... with NGBs on the establishment of an independent professional coaches association by the end of March 2002.

As members here will know, BASES officers have been hard at work in recent years to provide a platform for eventual Chartered Status, by enlarging membership, signing a Memorandum of Co-operation with cognate groups and attempting to exclude from scientific practice those without recognised qualifications. Indeed, in the most recent BASES annual report, Neil Spurway writes:

Deleted: ,

... there are people claiming to provide scientific support to elite athletes who are not even BASES members. At best, this situation is unregulated: at worst, it gives scope for charlatans.

(BASES 2001a: 3)

BASES and Sports Coach UK may both claim to be 'professional associations' representing the interests of coach and scientist memberships. To this extent, both constituencies would probably claim that demonstrating 'professionalism' is a necessary precondition for becoming a Profession with a capital 'P'. But how responsive are the two occupational groups to embracing change and meeting the challenge of professional developments, and to what extent is this a symbiotic relationship?

I perceive some tensions in the relationship between the two occupations that cause me to question whether they are mutually reinforcing, mutually antagonistic or independent? As I understand it, the purpose of our science is to serve athletic performance or exercise through the development and application of scientific knowledge in specific sport or exercise contexts. The purpose of coaching is to enhance performance through deliberate interventions in preparation, training and tactics. Their shared goal - of athletic performance enhancement - is not necessarily compatible with their other goals. In the case of coaching, as we saw with Paula Radcliffe's husband at the recent World Athletic Championships in Canada, respect for and the development of the athlete as a person sometimes gives way under pressure for competitive results. Similarly, the generation of scientific knowledge and pressure for results in the Research Assessment Exercise is so great now that scientists, most of whom are based in academic institutions, can perhaps be forgiven for sometimes placing papers above people.

The two occupational groups should be closely linked and mutually interdependent at the functional end of the business. Scientists seeking sound ecological validity ground their research in practical problems. Coaches seeking sound science should select scientists who can speak to them in the language of sporting practice. Neil Spurway (BASES 2001a: 4) claimed that the multidisciplinary sport science seminar on July 10<sup>th</sup> this year

... clearly demonstrated how Sport Science had added to the recent achievements of UK sport particularly at the Sydney Olympics.

However, it was evident at the conference of UK Sports Institute World Class Advisors in Loughborough last March (Sport England/UK Sport 2001) that this sentiment was not shared. One (anonymous) WCA who had been engaged in post-Olympic debriefs with governing bodies said:

The trouble with sport science is that ...  
Unsophisticated demand + research-focussed supply = no effective application

He and his review team concluded, in relation to sport science and medicine, that:

- they were not utilised effectively in the World Class Programme
- despite some improvements in sports medicine, sport science was “perceived to have gone backwards”
- coaches had little faith in British scientists to deliver support and benefits, and sport scientists had little confidence in coaches’ knowledge to enable them to ask the right questions
- there was no system in place to monitor or evaluate science or medical services

Now, these views might well be sport-specific. Indeed, some sports were reported to demonstrate very sophisticated demand for science but to be dissatisfied and/or frustrated with the supply. One reviewer reported “There are deeply held suspicions [amongst coaches] based on historic experiences of research-motivated scientists...” but others suggested that coaches themselves lacked the time or interest, drive or ambition to become involved with scientists.

In short, there was little direct support for the view that science and coaching have yet reached a mutually respectful and productive professional relationship. One reason for this might be the lack of monitoring and evaluation practices evident in NGBs. Many science researchers in the academy feel that they are monitored and evaluated to death under the Research Assessment Exercise, Subject Review and institutional audit. Such a culture is new to most NGBs yet can provide them with invaluable external perspectives and feedback. Director of UK Sport, Liz Nicholl, has made it clear that governing bodies are expected to modernise and that this process might lead eventually to devolved funding powers (UK Sport 2001a: 38). As part of the modernisation process, and in order to move “from a blame culture to a creative one, from a bureaucratic to a ‘can do’ one” (Sport England/UK Sport 2001), NGBs will be subjected to external monitoring and evaluation every four years, some every two years, and to annual internal monitoring and evaluation.

The World Class reviewers listed the following indicators of an open culture (that together give the perspective of ‘the eagle’):

- systematic analysis or benchmarking
- looking outside
- listening to new voices
- trying new experiments
- using assessment systems
- taking personal responsibility
- accountability for pushing performance indicators ...

Together, these are evidence of real organisational innovation and learning. How would BASES measure up to a similar evaluation process?

### **3.2 Ethical grounding**

Common to both science support and coaching should be standards of professional practice (Preston 1998) that safeguard the health and welfare of the client/athlete, including freedom from sexual exploitation. These standards cannot be achieved if science is focussed only on scholarly activity (research and knowledge development) and coaching focussed only on competitive results. As Dan Gould said in his keynote to the recent ISSP World Congress “Completing a study is only 20-30 per cent of the job – The other 70 per cent is taking the idea to where it makes an impact” (Gould 2001). As a relative newcomer to the academy, sport and exercise science has comparatively few senior staff with substantive academic management or business management skills. Most scientific leaders are just that – scientists. Too few of us, and I count myself in here, pay attention to the wider management, social and ethical issues that contribute to professionalism. The appalling response rate to last year’s Equity Audit in BASES (12 per cent to the postal survey for quantitative data and an even more depressing 12 per cent to a list of named members for the qualitative data) is one indicator that our scientists are either under time pressure to prioritise their scholarly duties or just not

interested in wider social and ethical issues. A BASES workshop on sexual abuse and professional protection was also cancelled owing to zero response from members. But it is precisely these wider social and ethical issues that must be confronted if professional status is ever to be earned. Addressing them will help us to avoid the occupational closure or ostrich syndrome that gives rise to a culture of sexual exploitation. Some examples with respect to sexual abuse and protection include:

- how to identify and maintain good practice
  - how to prevent false allegations
  - how to recognise and refer athletes with histories of sexual abuse
  - how to deal with emotional ties with clients (transference and counter-transference)
  - whistle-blowing on malpractice by peers
- ... and many others.

Until such time as both coaching and science have built these issues into their professional development and accreditation schemes then neither can be regarded as having met the criteria for a profession. Thus far, thanks to collaborative work between Sports Coach UK (formerly the National Coaching Foundation), NGBs and the NSPCC, coaches have been offered, and have taken, many more opportunities to attend educational workshops on sexual abuse and protection. These workshops cover: awareness of abuse, child protection policy development, policy implementation and, most recently, how to manage self-protection for coaches (including whistle-blowing).

Coaching in the UK has made a start, therefore, in addressing sexual exploitation as part of a wider suite of ethics-related issues. Coaching is currently facing up to the challenge that, if it wants to be a Profession then it must eventually develop professional structures and practices. In other words, it has to have a *moral* vision as well as a *performance* one. But what do we, as scientists, want to be? BASES is a scholarly body concerned to both develop knowledge *and* to represent the professional and occupational interests of its members. Somehow, it has to find a better balance between these two objectives. How might this be achieved?

### 3.3 Benefits of the cultural turn

As my research students will quickly attest, I am not a great fan of postmodernism as a scholarly pursuit but I do think that there are some potential benefits for both coaching and science in examining the effects the 'cultural turn' on these two occupations. The late modern condition of western society has led us into an interesting intellectual crisis whereby both conventional wisdoms and the fundamental premises of science have been severely tested. Under the destabilising conditions of late modernity, the nature of truth is now contested, knowledge is deemed to be socially constructed and power exercised through discourses rather than established traditions or sources of authority. Now, while I agree that

The power of discourse is undeniable ... it is not detached from the material circumstances of rape, assault or other forms of sexual violence in sport that athletes experience on a daily basis. Sexual exploitation in sport ... is much more than just a 'discursive formation'. For all too many athletes, male and female, child and adult, it is a miserable and degrading experience that not only undermines their personal sporting hopes and aspirations but also inflicts long term damage on their self esteem and life chances. The time horizon for these athletes is much shorter than that for social theorists. Athletes want to understand *now* why they have been made to suffer and what can be done to prevent others facing the same exploitative experiences.

(Brackenridge 2001: 4)

Despite my reservations about postmodern deconstruction, however, I have to concede that one of the benefits of re-examining our knowledge claims is that we come to look differently at our occupational worlds and perhaps even to change our professional practices. Some brave, new-generation, sport and leisure scientists have subjected our conventional knowledge systems and positivist methods to intensive deconstruction, (for example, Aitchison 1999; Summers 2000; Hooper 2001). For those seeking jobs in the conventional sport science departments this might be deemed a risky strategy! But their approach is supported by more established scientific critics both inside (Ingham *et al.* 1999; Sparkes 1998 and 1999; Talbot 1998) and outside sport (e.g. Harding 1998). The gradual acceptance of qualitative methods, reflexive writing and multiple meanings within the community of sport and exercise science are just some effects of the cultural

turn. Once traditional scientists (or even sport science students) have grasped the concept of social construction then there is no turning back. The ‘sociological imagination’ that is unleashed as a consequence provokes new kinds of scientific questions, new thinking and the sharpness and energy of perpetual uncertainty. Under these conditions, no profession populated by strong social critics can sustain occupational closure for long.

Here is an example of social construction from a typical science support or coaching scenario – the skinfold measure (with acknowledgements to A.J. Ayer for adapting his philosophical example of the wine glass):

Is taking a skinfold measure ...

1. a kinesiological assessment of fat?
2. a necessary intervention to monitor fitness?
3. sign of interest in the athlete’s welfare?
4. the exercise of power?
5. an opportunity to offer counselling?
6. an assertion of dominance?
7. a memory prompt of childhood trauma?
8. a personal invasion of privacy?
9. a response to flirtation?
10. a sexual overture/the start of sexual grooming?
11. something else entirely ... ?

For Paul Hickson and Mike Drew, this type of activity provided a legitimate front for the deliberate sexual exploitation of athletes. Countless coaches and scientists are engaged daily in simple routines like this that can lead to erosion of the athlete-professional boundary. Only by thinking outside the box about the definitions of such situations, both by the athlete and by ourselves, will we as practitioners understand the potential for things to go wrong. If coaches or scientists believe in truth as a given, objective reality, then it is no wonder that they cannot perceive the processes by which power is

constructed within these occupations, nor its effects on their own professional or scholarly practice.

### **3.4 Embedding the four dimensions of protection in professional practice (‘eagle’)**

Only by embedding all four dimensions of protection into our professional practice will we have a hope of developing eagle-like vision. But, to borrow Juri Hanin’s formula, this this must be done by using the three As - awareness, acceptance and then action. The imposition of externally-developed codes of practice and ethics on an occupational group without their full understanding, consent and involvement is a project doomed to failure (Forster 1998). Some NGBs are only now discovering this, having bought off-the-peg policies for child protection or athlete welfare from external consultants without developing any ownership of the process amongst their practice community. Of course, there are plenty of other professional models available, from school teaching to medicine to counselling. There are also fairly clear structural levers that can be applied to shift an occupational community in a particular direction, such as the giving or withholding of grants, awarding or not of competition or conference venues, or the banning of non-compliant groups or individuals. Without ownership, however, commitment to the four dimensions of protection is unlikely to be strong and unlikely to lead to sustained cultural change.

## **2.0 CONCLUSIONS**

I have argued that sexual abuse and protection issues are centrally relevant and important to both coaches and scientists, and that these two occupations would benefit from embedding the four dimensions of protection in their professional development strategies. Denial of sexual abuse in some governing bodies, and by some coaches, lasted approximately 15 years. It is unclear how long it will last in sport and exercise science. Perhaps the development of a moral vision for both occupations will help us to reconcile the short-termism of the ‘more medals mantra’ with the long-term imperatives of professional and personal development. Reality checks with external reference points,

athlete empowerment initiatives, whistle-blowing systems and integral ethics education will all assist in this task.

Both Sports Coach UK and BASES have growing memberships, strong international links, flashy new magazines, and continuing professional development workshop programmes. But how are these surface developments to be matched by deep and visionary thinking about the moral direction in which both groups are moving? Are they to be eagles, soaring high with a wide vision, or ostriches with their heads stuck in the sand?

This final video clip asks what can be done about sexual abuse by professionals. The messages it relays apply as much to coaching and sport and exercise science as to any other occupation.

Extract from Broken Boundaries [3 minutes]

[Couples and individuals reflecting on professional abuse. Boundary issues can happen to anyone ... silence condones ... power ...]

Researchers in both the UK (Bringer 2000) and in Denmark (Toftegaard Nielson 2001), have found discrepancies between what coaches *judge* to be right and wrong in respect of sexual boundaries with athletes and what they actually *do*. In Denmark, the coaches knew clearly what was right and wrong by legal standards yet a number had broken the law in practice. In the UK, Bringer's preliminary doctoral research results suggest that, whereas coaches are clear about where they draw the line personally, they would not judge their coaching peers for overstepping it. In other words, they are prepared to turn a blind eye. In her prevalence study of sexual abuse in elite Australian sport Trisha Leahy also interviewed one hundred athletes, around half of whom had had sexual abuse experiences (Leahy *et al.* 2001). She reported that:

The prevalence of the bystander effect (people who knew something was going on but did nothing), the inconsistency of the quality of support received, and the failure of helping professionals to respond appropriately has significant

implications for both prevention of, and intervention in, sexual abuse in sport and in the wider community.

(Leahy *et al.*2001: 241)

I would go further and suggest that the coach or scientist who 'knows and yet does nothing' undermines not only the trust that athletes have in them but also the potential for their entire occupation to ever achieve professional status.

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