

# Dreams of Social Inclusion

## True Experiences of Street Soccer through Fictional Representation

Julian F. P. Macnaughton & John Meldrum

---

### Abstract

*While sport has potential to be both divisive and exclusionary, at its best, sport offers vital benefits, including improved mental health, self-esteem, physical wellbeing, and positive community development and integration (Skinner, Zakus & Cowell, 2008). Recently, numerous sport for development opportunities serving marginalized people have emerged, with street soccer making a prominent global rise. Only a handful of studies have been conducted on street soccer, focusing almost exclusively on outcome benefits. Our study provides a rich, ethnographic look into the lived experience of a local, grassroots street soccer team in Victoria, BC, Canada. Drawing on nineteen months of participant observation, and thirty interviews, our original fictional representation highlights both tensions and positive contributions of street soccer, in contributing to the positive dialogue on sport, social inclusion, and creative approaches to qualitative research. Ultimately, our study will be deemed successful based on its catalytic validity and ability to move people to action (Sparkes, 2002).*

**Keywords:** social inclusion, street soccer, fictional representation, truth, creative analytic practice

Sport has increasingly been recognized for its ability to bring people together and promote social inclusion (Magee, 2011; Sherry & Strybosch, 2012). Individual benefits of sport participation may include: improved self-esteem, physical wellbeing and mental health (Skinner, Zakus, & Cowell, 2008). Broader societal benefits may include crime prevention, health, education, economic benefits, and community development and integration (Skinner et al., 2008). By improving access to recreation and sporting opportunities, we can play a fundamental role in improving the social ills of marginalized populations (Trussell & Mair 2010). Facilitating increased access to sport for marginalized populations may not remedy all social inequalities, however, sport offers a unique context to improve individual welfare and build more inclusive communities (Jarvie, 2003).

Over the past decade, a global shift toward increased consideration and understanding of the social determinants of health and health inequities has occurred (Gore & Kothari, 2012; Ward, Meyer, Verity, Gill, & Luong 2011). The importance of our research is further illustrated by considering the social determinants of health and the damaging effects social exclusion has at both individual and societal levels (Carey, Riley, & Hammond, 2011). There is a strong connection between the social determinants of health, the social gradient, and social inclusion (Ward et al., 2011). It is clear, people lower on the social gradient have limited access to social opportunities including sports and leisure activities, further perpetuating their exclusion, and negatively impacting their health (Collins, 2004). As the positive potential of sport for social inclusion has gained recognition, there has been an emergence of different sport-based programs.

In recent years, street soccer has become a leading choice for sport for development programs. Street soccer is a global phenomenon and is found in more than 70 different nations (Streetfootballworld, 2015, para. 3). Through international networks such as Streetfootballworld, teams can connect to share resources, knowledge, and funding. Roughly twelve teams are affiliated with Street Soccer Canada. Street Soccer Canada's mission is to: "engage and connect with marginalized shelter users and individuals that have been isolated or on the fringes, using the positive power of sport to enrich and empower" (Street Soccer Canada, 2013, para. 2).

Despite researchers and community stakeholders growing interest in these programs, there remains a paucity of research illustrating how such programs influence social inclusion (Skinner et al., 2008; Trussell & Mair, 2010). Sporting activities, such as street soccer, offer an excellent opportunity to foster a sense of belonging for marginalized populations, but also hold potential for conflict and disappointment. If public providers and non-profits are to successfully provide recreation spaces that promote social inclusion—while also recognizing and reducing potential negative impacts on program participants—they must intimately understand the culture of these programs (Seippel, 2006; Spaaij, 2012; Trussell

& Mair, 2010). A central focus for researchers then, should be documenting volunteer and participant experiences in sport for inclusion programs to illuminate how participation influences social inclusion, and what tensions exist within these experiences.

Researchers have studied sport and social inclusion programs, but no studies known to us have drawn on participant and volunteer experiences to explicitly understand how a local, free, drop-in, street soccer program impacts social inclusion. In this vein, we have drawn on the lead researcher's nineteen months of involvement in street soccer in presenting an ethnographic account of the Victoria Dreams street soccer program. Through an original fictional representation, this study shares our own insights with the hope of facilitating wider access to the social reality of Victoria Dreams street soccer group. Additionally, this study contributes to the broader, ongoing discussion of creative approaches to research. We begin by reviewing the existing literature on social inclusion, and street soccer. We then outline our methods, providing details for this study while framing them within a broader discussion of fictional representation methodology. The "results" are then storied through an original fictional representation and followed by a discussion of ontological and epistemological considerations as related to knowledge, truth and validity. To conclude, we offer some final thoughts on fictional representation while reconnecting with research implications on sport and social inclusion.

## Literature Review

To better illustrate the meaning of social inclusion, it is useful to further examine what it means to be socially *excluded*. Researchers have identified four distinct determinants of social exclusion including: "denial of participation in civil affairs, denial of social goods, exclusion from social production, and economic social exclusion" (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010, p. 32). Denial of participation in civil affairs may occur from systemic forms of discrimination, legal sanctions, or other institutional mechanisms preventing a person from fully engaging in social pursuits. Denial of social goods occurs when a person does not have access to housing, employment, education or healthcare. Exclusion from social production is a restriction of engagement in cultural and social activities, including sports and leisure. This restriction often results from not having enough money to participate. Economic exclusion occurs when a person is unable to secure a job or generate personal income. As illustrated, these determinants are not exclusive, but rather interact to compound experiences of exclusion (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010). While most participants in this study suffer exclusion through all of the aforementioned facets, this study focuses foremost on the exclusion from social production.

Social inclusion may be dependent then, on four main dimensions as described by Burchardt, Le Grand and Piachaud (1999): the capacity to consume; participation in economically or socially valuable activities; political engagement in local or national decision-making; and social interaction with family, friends and the community. Clearly, a complexity of intersections and factors can be used to define exclusion or inclusion, but simply put, exclusion is the negative, and inclusion is the positive. Again, it is the social interaction and capacity to participate with friends in the community on which our study focuses.

While sport and leisure participation may not satisfy all characterizations of social inclusion, it offers an accessible and impactful starting point. For stakeholders seeking to build social inclusion through sport and leisure, research suggests community-based social services should be low-cost or free, and located in a centralized area (Trussell & Mair 2010). Further, service providers should recognize people may be reluctant to participate if required to publicly declare or prove their low-income status to gain subsidies, and that marginalized people accessing public recreation or sport opportunities often report feeling unwelcomed (Trussell & Mair, 2010).

Though limited, the existing body of academic research on street soccer offers some important findings. Magee & Jeanes (2011) documented their experience of taking a group of Welsh players to the Homeless World Cup. First held in 2003, the Homeless World Cup is the hallmark event for many street soccer teams and was conceptualized by Mel Young and Harald Schmied as a way to “change the lives of homeless people through football” (Homeless World Cup, 2013, para. 3). Magee and Jeanes (2011) suggested the tournament experience was generally positive, but noted not all players benefitted equally. Specifically, there were times players felt overwhelmed and embarrassed after losing games by significant scores. Overall, Magee and Jeanes (2011) noted the tournament was successful in (1) encouraging and motivating players to be physically active, (2) providing an inclusive environment to raise self-esteem and personal dignity, and (3) challenging stereotypical views and media representations of homeless people. In a separate study, Welty Peachey, Cohen, Borland, and Lyras (2011) focused on volunteer experiences with Street Soccer USA—also at the Homeless World Cup—and noted interactions between participants and volunteers built increased understanding and community cohesion. Finally, (Author Citation) found local-level street soccer participants experienced expanded access to social capital, increased self-esteem, motivation to live healthier, and improved confidence and life-skills. While these past studies offer important insights into the Homeless World Cup, the lived experiences leading to these purported benefits—particularly at the local team level—require further investigation.

## Methodology

Determining how to collect, analyze and represent qualitative data is a discussion wrought with conflict and ambiguity (Lichtman, 2013). However, a major strength of qualitative research is also this lack of hard boundaries, empowering researchers to draw on a combination of methodological approaches. Fictional representation encompasses a range of techniques and the process each researcher uses varies. Sparkes (2002) suggested all research tells a “tale.” Quantitative studies attach researcher objectivity, reliability, and validity, as means to construct truth in the “scientific tales” they present (Hopper et al., 2008; Sparkes 2002). Traditional qualitative research and representations use different language, but these “realist tales” apply many of the same underpinnings in positioning their research as true. Through triangulation, coding, process notes, and member-checks, researchers ensure they “got it right” (Patton 2002; Sparkes 2002). Contrary to these more traditional approaches, fictional representation does not always follow a strict methodological approach. While some fictional representations include a highly detailed methods section including data collection, analysis, editing, and the writing process, others include no methods section at all. In the author-evacuated positivist world of scientific tales, such omissions would be fatal. However, in fictional representation, some researchers maintain these details are unnecessary and actually detract from the impact of their work (Clough, 1999). While we have not explicitly revealed which aspects of this story were adapted, we have included methodological details below, which may help some readers further appreciate this study.

This fictional representation was based directly on the lead researcher’s nineteen months of participant observation with the Victoria Dreams at weekly practices. The Victoria Dreams are a local, volunteer-run, non-profit street soccer organization with the mission to “use sport as social inclusion to empower and build self-esteem (Victoria Dreams, 2013, para. 2). Participants are men and women who may be homeless, in transitional or low-income housing, or suffering from mental health or addictions issues. Practices are held weekly on a drop-in basis, and are open to anyone. At the time we began the study, the group was entering their fourth season. The Victoria Dreams are independent in their day-to-day operations, but do consult with and receive some funding from Street Soccer Canada. Outside of tournaments or possible selection to the world cup team, social inclusion is experienced primarily at the local level.

Over a nineteen-month period—February 2013 to August 2014—the lead researcher engaged in participant observation through weekly Sunday afternoon practices and conducted a combined 30 interviews with both participants and volunteers. Duration and format of interviews varied given the participatory nature of the study. Whenever possible, interviews were recorded and transcribed

verbatim, and extensive field notes were taken. This prolonged engagement, and frequency of direct observations was vital in gaining a rich, firsthand perspective of the Victoria Dreams (Patton, 1990; Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2011). Additionally, the lead researcher participated in two tournaments with the Dreams, including a 24-hour road trip to Comox, and a three-day two-night trip to Vancouver, where he and other teams slept together at an emergency shelter, ate their meals together, and spent their downtime socializing. For both trips, the lead researcher drove his personal van full with participants. These tournaments served as pivotal bonding moments that deepened our personal connections and trust, while furthering our understanding of the Dreams. They also broadened our range of contacts, and provided us the chance to meet with other teams' players, coaches, volunteers, and the founder of Street Soccer Canada, who openly shared both the challenges and successes they faced.

Early in the study, it became clear traditional qualitative reporting methods were not ideal for capturing the complexity of the Dreams. As we familiarized ourselves with emerging qualitative approaches, we were drawn to fictional representation, a form of creative analytical practice (CAP) (Parry & Johnson, 2007). Encompassing a variety of creative techniques, CAP moves away from traditional qualitative representations. In utilizing CAP, Berbarry (2015) noted we can use traditional data collection techniques and apply a creative representation to them, but ideally our data collection and study design should also be informed by our intention to use CAP in our representation. Accordingly, our research was guided by CAP from the start, informing our methodological decisions, and prompting the lead researcher to immerse himself as deeply as possible into the world of street soccer.

As the study progressed, the lead researcher began experimenting with different literary techniques and identified fictional representation as an ideal genre. Ultimately, a fictional representation was selected because of its ability to tell a "better story," one that would be vivid and engaging, and appeal to a wider audience, while maintaining a factual basis and inspiration (Sparkes, 2002). To create an engaging story, a number of conventional literary techniques were used. Aspects of, "story, situation, persona, character, scene and summary" were actively considered (Narayan, 2007, p. 130). Compared to a strictly factual ethnography, our fictional representation provides a colourful and more memorable account. Initial drafts were shared informally with participants, volunteers, friends and colleagues. Through this reflective process, valuable insight on the meaning readers were drawing was gained. In response to their comments, the story was reworked with the intention of creating a more meaningful and emotional account of street soccer.

Narayan (2007) highlighted the role of editing as a critical piece of fictional representation noting, as an editor of "others" stories, our intervention as author is of paramount importance. Here we are reminded of the negotiation between

reader and researcher. The researchers package events and observations into the text, which the reader “unpacks” and experiences in relation to their own history. A truth is negotiated through this process, and at its most successful, catalytic validity achieved. Sparkes (2002) identified catalytic validity as the ability for research to influence the reader or consumer to feel a deep emotional response, actively influencing their life and ultimately moving them to action.

The process for fictional representation differs between researchers—and between creative nonfiction and creative fiction—but the goal remains to create an “experience of believing” (Clough, 1999). The story must speak to the reader. To be successful it matters not about reporting exact factual details, but matters most that it *feels* authentic. This authenticity, plausibility, and realness, can be described as verisimilitude (Sparkes, 2002). To achieve verisimilitude, the researcher must have an intimate and “authentic” understanding of the subject they are writing about. Within fictional representation, this intimacy is often characterized as a result of the researcher “being there” through prolonged engagement and observation (Sparkes, 2002). The following composition draws on multiple experiences and interactions with players, volunteers, community sponsors, and national-level organizers in presenting our own observations and insights into street soccer.

## Findings—The Dreams

### The Rendezvous—This is Our Team

*It's five-fifteen am Saturday morning, and I'm supposed to pick up Jerry before meeting the rest of our group. He's 20 minutes late, but he finally shows up. Jerry is flustered and sits down in the passenger seat beside me. He's an imposing frame, bald with tattoos and shifty blue eyes. He's in his mid-sixties. He's talkative, unpredictable, and a true soccer fanatic. I like Jerry, but I'm already plotting how I might get him into the back seat for the rest of this road trip. He smells terribly of smoke and sweat, so I crack my window. Jerry apologizes for oversleeping. “The cops woke me up at three in the morning,” he says. “My son died last night, he was in a plane crash—so we have to win today, we have to do it for my son.”*

*“I'm so sorry Jerry, that's terrible, I didn't even know you had kids.”*

*“Yes, my son was a pilot. I have two daughters, they're both doctors, they're millionaires. I used to be a pilot too, in the Vietnam War—I'm an American, but they still won't pay my pension.” It's the first time I've really chatted with Jerry. He has some incredible stories. He served together with Elvis and they became best friends—he has a picture at home to prove it. Following his army days, he moved to Brazil where he played professional soccer for ten years. He's wearing a Barcelona team jersey, personally autographed by some of the world's greatest players. It was a gift in honour of his commitment to the game. I don't push Jerry on any of the details, but I wonder which parts of his incredible stories are really true.*

*We meet the rest of our group on a notorious downtown street corner. Our team, “The Victoria Dreams” was cobbled together at last week’s practice and through a Facebook invite. If you were available and wanted to join, you were in. Our team is impressively diverse. Marie and her teenage kids, Galen and Sabrina, are a First Nations family living in subsidized housing. Edgar, from Mexico, spent the last couple of years in and out of homeless shelters—he has a job now and rents an apartment. Edgar is our unofficial captain and best player.*

*Edgar has been with the team since it formed three years ago. I’ve gotten to know Edgar well—he’s an open, honest, and sensitive individual. According to Edgar, he’s been playing soccer his whole life, and played in a competitive men’s league back in his hometown. When he first immigrated to Canada he struggled to make connections in the community. Already shy, his limited English compounded his lack of confidence.*

*“When I first came here, I was really depressed. I didn’t know anybody, and I didn’t have any family here. In Mexico family is with you everyday, you are never alone. I wanted to leave, I didn’t want to stay no more in Canada. I found a shelter where they played ping-pong, and I started going there every night. I’d play ping-pong all night, with anyone—some of them were drunk, but it was really good. Then I met an old guy who spoke Spanish. He was my first friend here, so I kept going back to this shelter to see him. One day, a lady came into the shelter. Actually, I remember it was a really bad day. I was so depressed; I thought I would go home in the next couple weeks. Well, the lady, Lisa, she put up a poster and told everyone she was starting a soccer team and needed players. It was the best day of my Canadian life—you know, I love soccer, but I could not afford to play here. Well, she said everything would be free, and they would have food at every practice. A lot of people wanted to join. I think a lot of bad things were happening in people’s lives that day, but the feeling changed in the shelter, people were really excited.*

*Since I joined this team I feel like I have a new family. It’s different than friends you make on the street. We play for each other and we got really nice team shirts, and new soccer boots. I’ve been to Vancouver twice for tournaments, and to Kelowna. We came first place in Kelowna—I want to be the champions again this year. Actually, the Dreams helped me a lot, because I also found a job through them. Darren is the guy who owns a catering company and makes food for us every practice. After a couple months playing, he invited me to come and work for him. So I go to different parties and help set up and make food. My life is a lot better. I miss my family, but I want to stay in Canada. The Dreams means everything to me. When I have a bad week, it doesn’t matter because I can come play on Sunday and score some nice goals. I want to make this team the best. But it’s hard—a lot of players stopped coming and our head volunteer isn’t around. They asked me to make Facebook posts but I’m not so good at writing, so I need more help. I’m worried the team won’t last. But in the future, I’m going to have my own little restaurant. I want to have all the team players over, make them some dinner—you know, I’m going to do that, it would be really nice.”*

*Paul is the newest member, and has moved here from Ghana. Paul is charismatic, always smiling but shy. He's lean and athletic, with bursts of speed. I wonder how he got involved with this group—he's a high school student, and seems well cared for. Evan is about thirty—he's struggled through his life battling addictions and a learning disability, but recently took up soccer. He is dedicated to the team, and loves to play. He's a bit "top-heavy", but is an effective defender despite his lack of fitness and skill. Evan commutes an hour on the bus to attend practices—he is a diehard member, and refers to himself and teammates as a "bunch of misfits." The final player for today is Robert. Robert is also First Nations and a regular since the team's formation two years ago. Robert is short and round, but displays gifted hand-eye coordination—he played "any sport he could join" growing up. Robert has two young daughters and lives on a nearby reservation. Robert has attended every tournament the team has ever played—he is our goalkeeper.*

### The Supporting Cast

*It's a three-hour drive each way to the tournament, but we're planning to make it there and back all in one day. I'm driving my station wagon, and Edgar is driving Darren's BMW. Darren is a long-time street soccer supporter and generous "food-guy" for the team. We get the "team debit card" from Darren to cover gas, and a grocery bag full of bagel sandwiches he's made as snacks. Darren never plays soccer with the team. Darren is not independently wealthy, nor is his business a runaway success, yet he never fails to deliver food after practices. Darren is a friend of Lisa's, and helped her form the original team.*

*Lisa, the founder, is a reporter at a local newspaper. She heard about street soccer a few years ago, and thought Victoria would be an ideal community to start a team. She worked tirelessly the first year building connections and support for the team. She secured free soccer balls, jerseys, and cleats from a local sports store. Through a charity tournament, she received donations from the local fire station, and police association. She published a series of articles documenting the rise of the team, including the qualification of a Victoria player to the world cup tournament in Paris. This past year Lisa has been away on assignment in Asia, and team leadership and sponsorship efforts have suffered. In her absence volunteers have come and gone, and the team has dwindled. Lisa is keen to get back, to "keep her baby alive." Lisa is genuinely committed to social justice and improving the community, but she is also busy professionally.*

### Navigating the Road Trip

*Jerry's gone inside Seven-Eleven to buy a coffee, so I offer Marie the front seat of my car, and she accepts. I'm nervous about offending Jerry but he doesn't seem to notice. He assumes his new spot in the backseat without protest—I wonder if his backpack and gear are introducing bedbugs to my car, and I instantly feel guilty for thinking it.*

*It's a beautiful drive to Comox Valley, and conversation flows effortlessly. Robert explains the usual format for Street Soccer Canada tournaments. Teams play on mini-fields, about a quarter of a full-sized field. There are three players plus a goalie on the field per team. The nets are roughly hockey-sized, and the goalie must stay within the six-foot crease line. Substitutions are unlimited, and made frequently "on-the-fly." At the official Homeless World Cup men and women play separately, but for local tournaments like this, everyone plays together. Today's tournament is the "Western Qualifier" for Street Soccer Canada, and will be used to select six players for the national team. The team will head to Poland for two weeks, all expenses paid. Robert says he was selected to go last year to Mexico, but there was some confusion with paperwork and his Visa—the disappointment is still raw in his voice.*

### Diversity of Teams

*I'm getting excited to meet the other teams. There will be representatives from Calgary, Kelowna, Comox, and three teams from Vancouver. When we arrive at the field teams mingle, smoke and laugh with each other. There's familiarity between players, with lots of returning members. Everyone has soccer cleats, matching team jerseys, equipment, and coaches are running warm-ups. I'm introduced to the head of Street Soccer Canada and learn more about the program. The model in Ontario, where Street Soccer Canada started, is vastly sophisticated from the fledgling teams here in BC. There are six teams in the Toronto area, and a board of directors running things. Street Soccer is promoted on a regular basis through workshops at the Salvation Army, and players have the chance to work in a laundry and dry-cleaning business started by the team.*

*In contrast, the Victoria Dreams appear to have very little infrastructure, but somehow stay afloat. They meet every Sunday, and play soccer for an hour. Teams are assembled as people arrive, usually four players per side. If a team is too strong, someone swaps sides. The games are fun, but competitive. The first time I showed up, about six months ago, I was struck by the diversity of players. I spoke to an older man who said he'd come with his friend to cheer him up because he was having a terrible day. They'd seen a poster at the shelter, and noticed it said soccer and free food. I haven't seen either of them since. Now, for the summer season, we are playing outside. The game format remains the same, but it seems like fewer players are showing up. Two weeks ago only 3 people came to play. Most of the players fit the bill of "marginalized" but others I can't figure out—a government worker, a law student, and a young couple driving a new car, but none of them are acting as "volunteers." The regular members know I'm a student, and know I'm there to research the team, as well as play soccer. I feel like an insider now, and today's tournament has solidified my membership into the group.*

## Let the Games Begin

*Our first game of the day is against Vancouver. They have a talented side, and boast a former Homeless World Cup team Canada member. I am instructed to “watch out” for him, not to let him shoot. He scores three goals—our team scores none.*

*“That’s ok guys. First game, we just got to get focused. We need to move the ball faster.” Edgar is upbeat despite the lopsided loss. Our second game we really do play better. It is a close match. We finally score a goal, but lose two to one in the last minute. By game three our group is determined to win. Sabrina scores the opening goal, top corner and even the other team is cheering. The game goes back and forth with great goaltending at both ends. It ends in a tie, and we earn our first point of the tournament. With only one point, we have to win our next game to make it into the playoffs.*

## Eye on the Prize

*Edgar leaned over the ball and struck a perfect shot just inside the far post. Our team erupted—we’d secured a spot into the quarterfinals. There was a sense of relief, mixed with a burden of new expectations. Ecstatic, our team captain Edgar gathered everyone together, and explained we must win our first playoff game if we were to become champions. We were introduced to our newest teammate. His name was Abelo. Edgar had spotted him on the adjacent field, passing a ball with a young and athletic group of African men. Edgar didn’t need to explain further. Those who were supposed to get the message did, and sat on the bench. It was an uncomfortable feeling, being selected to play while seeing the dejection of those sitting on the sidelines. Edgar’s enthusiasm to win at any cost was painful, but we were not the only team guilty of this kind of exclusion. Our opponents also played their best four players, and their coach shouted instructions aggressively from the sidelines. I was selected to start for this important game, but was soon called off the field by Edgar for a substitution—my lack of production was frustrating him. As I took my place on the bench beside Jerry, I considered the mantra of street soccer, and the goal of social inclusion. There was an irony to the whole tournament, as a selection process for the world cup team—only three players would be chosen for the Canadian team, while another forty would be excluded. In the end, we lost our only playoff game, despite Abelo’s dominant play. The finals saw Vancouver versus a team from Calgary. The level of skill was impressively high, as was the competitive drive of the players. The game was a draw and required a shootout. Vancouver’s goalie stopped all three shooters to secure the championship.*

*At the conclusion of the tournament our team seemed proud and cohesive again. Edgar and Robert recounted their goals, and surmised we were probably the third best team, because we’d lost in the quarterfinals to the eventual champions. Marie, Galen, and Paul seemed more impressed with the outing and sunshine than with the outcome of the games. For some players, winning was a really big deal, for others, it wasn’t. Throughout the day there was background chatter of who might be selected for the*

*World Cup team, mixed with an impromptu water-fight, smoke breaks, a free lunch, t-shirt, and lots of soccer.*

### The Barbecue—A Chance to Be Heard

*The tournament culminated with a barbecue staged at a nearby campground turned permanent housing spot for many of Comox's otherwise homeless population. The dinner was incredible, a bounty of food and legion of volunteers serving it—beyond hotdogs and hamburgers, there was steak, halibut, homemade salads, and chocolate desserts. It was revealed one community member had covered all of the food costs, but wished to remain anonymous. The barbecue was followed with some thoughtful and moving words by one host organizer:*

*"In the small community of Comox, homelessness and addiction has been a pervasive and contentious issue. Last year city council wanted to shut this very campground down, because it was not zoned for permanent residents and they claimed it was not safe. With the support of community members and a new mayor, we have maintained this site as a viable housing option for the homeless. Further, this space has become home to the new Comox street soccer team. Every week the team welcomes new players to play soccer and share a meal together. Today, we have been honoured and humbled to share good sportsmanship and friendly competition with all of you. I know some days in the future may not be as good or easy as today—but in those down times, and cold nights, we hope you can draw on and find resiliency in the special memories of today. There will be more soccer in the future, and more opportunities for everyone to enjoy together. We hope you found some inspiration in playing soccer today and can transfer the positives you have gained into other avenues of your life. You are all part of our team, and the greater street soccer community."*

*Next the mic was passed around so a member from each team could speak. I was struck by the words of one young man who remarked with such earnestness:*

*"When I started playing street soccer just a few months ago I never imagined how far it could take me. I never imagined in my life that I could be here and do this. Thank you so much, and thank you for the volunteers and food."*

*A player from another team, wearing large hoop earrings sitting at the far end of the table yelled at him "I can't hear you!" The first man replied, "clean the shit out of your ears and maybe you'll hear me." The man's teammates cheered at this quick retort. The young man who'd asked him to speak up looked sheepishly away. I saw nervous whispers between volunteers—the tone of camaraderie and sportsmanship waned temporarily. It was a revealing exchange. I was reminded that so many of these players came from "hard" lives. It was clear that egos were fragile, and maintaining "face" remained paramount to the participant's survival. However, as the mic continued around, and different players had their chance to speak, the significance of the day was not lost. Players who'd likely never held a microphone, were asked to share their thoughts—one anxiety ridden man managed a simple "thank you so much everyone,"*

*but he was beaming with pride, having demonstrated the courage to stand up and speak. It was incredible to witness.*

### A Final Word

*The Comox team coach and outreach worker for the homeless campsite closed with a final story. That morning one of his players had woken up early, unable to sleep in anticipation of the tournament. He'd decided to walk into town, and had come across a man asleep on a bench in the park. He walked past the man but then noticed a pair of soccer cleats clutched under his arm. He woke the man up, and led him back to the camp where they had breakfast. It turns out the sleeping man had missed the rendezvous with his team caravan the night before in Vancouver, but decided to make it out on his own. He'd caught the last ferry, then hitchhiked the rest of the way up island. He didn't have a phone and didn't know where the tournament was, but he figured he'd find it. He turned out to be the goalie for the eventual tournament winning team—the same goalie that'd stymied our chances in the quarterfinal. I pondered what compelled him to go to such lengths for a street soccer tournament—what does street soccer offer that isn't available in his daily life? As I considered the answer to this question, I realized the motivation for each and every participant was unique, but centered on belonging.*

### The Insightful Road Home

*Sweaty, exhausted, and over-fed, we piled into the wagon for the long drive back. Evan was seated next to me, and as the chatter in the backseats lulled, I asked him how he got started with street soccer.*

*“Well, I was only about two years clean, and working one day a week, but I had ties to the street community, although not using, I knew lots of people down there because I worked there at the shelter. And you know I'm a little reluctant at first to join any kind of group, because I'm really shy. So I just kind of took a chance and showed up, and the first day I showed up, although I was nervous, I seen the level of everyone else, and my skill levels were low, but it didn't really matter because I was just there to make friends and be a part of something, and to stay active and busy. Connecting to other people has been a huge part of me staying clean. Through the years I've really gotten to know these guys and they are like brothers and sisters to me. You know we see each other on the street and we stop and talk and really ask each other how we are doing.”*

*So what is it about street soccer, what's different about being a member of the Dreams, versus meeting people at a shelter or through another kind of drop-in program? I asked Evan what he thought.*

*“With my experience, I've always noticed that it starts from within. You start healing within, and it goes outwards. Your life becomes so much better when you've overcome the inner struggle. When other people see the blossoming, that inspires them*

*to blossom too. We build real strong friendships through our ties in soccer you know, together as a team. And sometimes we have our differences but all in all we always get along. And every time we go to a tournament or we play a game, I always walk away with a feeling of a little stronger friendship with these guys. Since day one, when I came to soccer right, people were patting me on the back when I scored, encouraging me, that's what I really need. I need a sense of community and building my confidence in life, because when you're down and out you have no confidence, you're just down spiralling out. You know before when I was on the street, yeah I had friends, but they weren't really friends, they were just people that I knew, like I wouldn't trust them. But I feel like I could trust the people I play with, and I kind of have to because they are my team. When you are on the street you can't really trust anyone."*

*Intuitively, Evan's explanation made perfect sense, and I'd witnessed and experienced the same thing myself in playing sports that required teamwork and trust. Yet, I'd always taken for granted my access to these opportunities and the benefits of supportive teammates and communities which recreation and leisure participation facilitate. But what about the role of competition, do we need tournaments and competitions and score keeping? Evan told me about the second year he played with the team, and how he'd scored his first ever goal in a tournament.*

*"I haven't touched drugs in a long time, but that goal gave me the same feeling, I was just lifted, it was like a magic moment man, it was a magic moment. Not only that, but I really came out of my shell and started talking with other people at the tournament, and shook their hands, and made connections with other people. I know most of those people are going to be at the next tournament, so it's kind of like, maybe you're not best friends, but you're friends, and next time we play it's like, oh I remember you."*

## Back to Victoria

*It was nearly midnight by the time we got back into town. Everyone was exhausted but thrilled with the day. The following week there was practice as usual for the Victoria Dreams. Most of the group from last week's tournament turned up, plus a couple of new players. Paul had invited a young woman to come and play, also a new immigrant from Africa. She'd never played soccer before, but was keen to try. She'd heard from Paul about the adventure of last week's tournament and wanted to get involved.*

*I saw Jerry later that week walking through downtown. He was carrying a soccer ball and talking loudly to himself. I realized then Jerry is schizophrenic, but more importantly, I realized the true significance and potential of the Victoria Dreams street soccer team. Soccer is one of the few places that Jerry fits, where he feels a part of something meaningful. The Victoria Dreams provide a safe place, where anyone is welcome, without public declaration of housing status, socioeconomic status, mental health or disability—you aren't required to prove you belong here, inclusion is absolute.*

## Discussion

Using fictional representation, a researcher makes certain philosophical assumptions about knowledge and truth. Fictional representations “work” based on the ontological assumption that people’s subjective experiences are the foundation of their own beliefs and knowledge—their own reality. However, in reading a fictional representation, there is an interaction that takes place between the researcher and reader—together they create shared meanings and understandings of knowledge and truth, through an intersubjective process or “relativistic ontology” (Hopper et al., 2008). For example, when reading an article, the reader also draws on and incorporates their past experiences, and their “location.” In processing a fictional representation, the reader contextualizes new information with their old knowledge. This experience generates a response, and new piece of knowledge. Epistemologically then, an effective fictional representation assumes people are active agents, in control of their emotions and decision making—here the researcher assumes a voluntaristic view of people (p. 217).

A well written fictional representation is one that creates a strong sense of truth, an account that resonates with the reader. The experience and knowledge found in fictional representation is “as true and untrue as the reader makes it in consciousness” (Clough, 1999, p. 439). In a sense, how believable and engaging the researcher’s story is will determine the extent to which it becomes incorporated as knowledge and accepted as truth. As Sandelowski (1994) offered: “when you talk with me about my research do not ask what I found; I found nothing. Ask me what I invented, what I made up from and out of my data. . . I have told the truth. . . the proof is whether you believe them and whether they appeal to your heart” (p. 442). Similarly, we “found nothing” in the objective and empirical sense, but rather selectively crafted an experience for our readers hoping to elicit an emotional response—ultimately, it is the reader who “finds” something. Fictional representation allows readers a chance to discover more truths than facts alone would. By manipulating and creating characters and scenes, a range of truths and perspectives are experienced which readers would otherwise not be exposed to, effectively setting the truth free from the restraints of factual reporting (Vickers, 2010). Rolfe (2002, p. 89) suggested fiction could be seen as a “lie that helps us see the truth.” It is assumed the insights and knowledge a reader gains from a fictional representation are very real, and therefore can be internalized and used as legitimate knowledge.

Fictional representation assumes the reader will internalize their reading experience and draw knowledge out of this experience. The readers cannot separate themselves from the text, and as an emotional being, they must react. The reader response is real, thus the “knowledge” they acquire is real, and therefore legitimized. The question is raised whether this knowledge is “valid” or not. Sparkes

(2002) discussed this at length, and suggested when evaluating the fictional representation genre we cannot use traditional “scientific” views of validity. Instead, we should judge validity based on whether “the writing has made a difference and whether it has moved people to action,” what he terms catalytic validity (p. 202).

The purpose of this study was to provide an engaging and meaningful snapshot of the Victoria Dreams through which readers could develop their own assessments and insights into the program, by highlighting: (1) the demographic of players and their interpersonal interactions, (2) the atmosphere at local practices and regional tournaments, (3) basic gameplay and rules, and (4) the potential contribution of street soccer to social inclusion. Our goal was to facilitate a more intimate understanding of both the tensions and benefits of street soccer in building social inclusion. While we strove to construct an authentic story, some latitude was exercised in blending fact with fiction. Within this flexibility of praxis, we sought to construct a stronger truth, and greater sense of verisimilitude—to influence and engage the reader, and hopefully encourage a positive dialogue on sport, social inclusion, and the role of street soccer.

As a relatively inexperienced writer attempting a first fictional representation, the lead researcher was initially excited at the freedom he perceived fictional representation to embody. However, as he quickly encountered, fictional representation was not the “freeing” piece of research he’d envisioned. Stylistically, he was particularly apprehensive of falling prey to clichés and self-indulgent writing. Further, the story grew very quickly, and it was challenging to isolate and focus on which themes would be most salient to the reader.

As the lead researcher wrote, edited, and re-wrote the stories, he envisioned street soccer from multiple perspectives, and recognized the power he had as researcher. Whereas some methodologies imply objectivity and constrain the researcher with the burden of a strict “scientific” process, fictional representation enlightens the researcher to include their own subjectivity while also considering the subjectivity of the reader, in exploring and interpreting social phenomenon. As St. Pierre (1997) stated: “If data are the foundation on which knowledge rests, it is important to trouble the common-sense understanding of that signifier in post-foundational research that aims to produce different knowledge and to produce knowledge differently” (p. 176). Ultimately, it is the individual reader who will decide if this study has been successful, if it has achieved catalytic validity and moves people to action.

## Conclusion

Through our study, we strove to openly explore the tensions and negative aspects of street soccer, while also recognizing the positive implications. For example, the episode where a new player was brought in as a “ringer” for the semi-final

game, implicitly communicated to others they were not worthy to play, a very factual account of a difficult situation experienced by the lead researcher. Street soccer volunteers and organizers often espoused empowering participants to take ownership and occupy leadership roles as a way for participants to build their confidence and life skills through sport. There were clear instances these benefits were realized, however, we are cognizant of times—such as the incident described above—where expectations and responsibilities placed on participants exceeded their skill-set and led to negative experiences. Additionally, we recognize lessons learned *on the field* do not always develop into portable skills to be used *off the field*. To improve transfer, Gould and Carson (2008) noted learning opportunities should emerge organically with participants engaging of their own free will, rather than being “taught” through an instructor. In our study, the negative emotions and feelings players felt when they were passed-over for the world cup team, or benched in favour of a “ringer,” arguably presented real-world learning opportunities which emerged naturally, offering genuine opportunity to build resiliency and life skills. However, more detailed examination of marginalized participants’ ability to navigate disappointment and the role of competition within street soccer and other sport for inclusion programs is warranted. It is unclear at what point our expectations of participants may exceed their capacity, and lead to more damage than good. Future street soccer studies based on participant journaling or video-diaries could provide compelling insights on the role of expectations we place on participants and the disappointments and stress they experience.

To truly honour the voices of the participants we were required to think deeply about all aspects of their lives—what would they say, how would they act, what was most important to them? While characters were based very closely on actual participants, and most of the dialogue was quoted verbatim, we do not believe simply interviewing, recording, reproducing verbatim, and analyzing the participant’s words would have spawned the same sense of understanding or empathy, or translated to the same level of verisimilitude for readers, as this fictional representation has offered.

We have not measured outcomes, nor proven causality in linking street soccer to the many benefits which sport for development programs often claim. Rather, we have opened a window onto the Victoria Dreams and their unique culture. While our distinct viewpoints and experiences secure the foundation in which this window rests, there is open space for the reader to explore and experience their own insights. As highlighted in our introduction, social exclusion has critical repercussions for both individuals and communities at large. In exploring both the tensions and positive contributions of the Victoria Dreams, we have illustrated how participation in street soccer may provide a sense of social inclusion, so integral to the health and wellbeing of marginalized populations.

## References

- Berbary, L. (2015) Creative analytic practices: onto-episto-theoretical attachments, uses, and constructions within humanist qualitative leisure research. *International Leisure Review*, 2(1), 27-55.
- Burchardt, T., Le Grand, J., & Piachaud, D. (1999) "Social exclusion in Britain 1991- 1995" *Social Policy and Administration*, 33(3): 227-244.
- Carey, G., Riley, T., & Hammond, B. (2012). The Australian government's social inclusion agenda: The intersection between public health and social policy. *Critical Public Health*, 22(1), 47-59.
- Clough, P. (1999). Crises of schooling and the "crisis of representation": The story of Rob. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 5(3), 428.
- Collins, M. (2004). Sport, physical activity and social exclusion. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 22(8), 727-740. doi: 10.1080/02640410410001712430
- Gould, D., & Carson, S. (2008). Life skills development through sport: Current status and future directions. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 1(1), 58-78.
- Gore, D., & Kothari, A. (2012). Social determinants of health in Canada: Are healthy living initiatives there yet? A policy analysis. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 11(1), 41-41. doi: 10.1186/1475-9276-11-41
- Homeless World Cup (2013). Retrieved from <http://www.homelessworldcup.org/about>
- Hopper, T. F., Madill, L. E., Bratseth, C. D., Cameron, K. A., Coble, J. D., & Nimmon, L. E. (2008). Multiple Voices in Health, Sport, Recreation, and Physical Education Research: Revealing Unfamiliar Spaces in a Polyvocal Review of Qualitative Research Genres, 214–235.
- Jarvie, G. (2003). Communitarianism, sport and social capital: Neighbourly insights into Scottish sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 38(2), 139-153. doi: 10.1177/1012690203038002001
- Lichtman, M. (2012). *Qualitative Research in Education: A User's Guide*. Sage.
- Magee, J. (2011). Disengagement, demotivation, vulnerable groups and sporting inclusion: A case study of the homeless world cup. *Soccer and Society*, 12(2), 159-173.
- Magee, J., & Jeanes, R. (2011). Football's coming home: A critical evaluation of the homeless world cup as an intervention to combat social exclusion. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 48(1), 3-19. doi: 10.1177/1012690211428391
- Mikkonen, J., & Raphael, D. (2010). *Social determinants of health: The Canadian facts*. Toronto: York University School of Health Policy and Management.
- Narayan, K. (2007). Tools to shape texts: what creative nonfiction can offer ethnography. *Anthropology and Humanism*, 32(2), 130–144. doi:10.1525/ahu.2007.32.2.130.
- Parry, D. C., & Johnson, C. W. (2007) Contextualizing leisure research to encompass complexity in lived leisure experience: the need for creative analytic practice. *Leisure Sciences*, 29(2), 119-130
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Rolfe, G. (2002) "A Lie that Helps us See the Truth: research, truth and fiction in the helping professions" *Reflective Practice*, 3(1), 89-102.
- Sandelowski, M. (1994). The proof is in the pottery: Towards a poetic for qualitative enquiry. In J. Morse (Ed.), *Critical issues in qualitative research methods*. London: Sage. Stevens, W. (1953). Selected poems. London: Faber.
- Seippel, Ø. (2006). Sport and social capital. *Acta Sociologica*, 49(2), 169-183. doi: 10.1177/0001699306064771
- Sherry, E., & Strybosch, V. (2012). A kick in the right direction: Longitudinal outcomes of the Australian community street soccer program. *Soccer and Society*, 13(4), 495-509.
- Skinner, J., Zakus, D. H., & Cowell, J. (2008). Development through sport: Building social capital in disadvantaged communities. *Sport Management Review*, 11(3), 253-275. doi: 10.1016/S1441-3523(08)70112-8
- Spaaij, R. (2012). Building social and cultural capital among young people in disadvantaged communities: Lessons from a Brazilian sport- based intervention program. *Sport, Education and Society*, 17(1), 77-95.

- Sparkes, C. A. (2002). *Telling tales in sport and physical activity: a qualitative journey*. Windsor, ON: Human Kinetics.
- St. Pierre, B. (1997) Methodology in the fold and the irruption of transgressive data. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 10(2), 175-189.
- Streetfootballworld (2015). Retrieved from <http://streetfootballworld.org/aboutus/what-we-do>
- Street Soccer Canada (2013). Retrieved from <http://www.streetsoccercanada.org/about-street-soccer-canada/>
- Thomas, J.R., Nelson, J.K., & Silverman, S.J. (2011). *Research methods in physical activity* (6th ed.). Portland, Oregon: Book News, Inc.
- Trussell, D. E., & Mair, H. (2010). Seeking judgment free spaces: Poverty, leisure, and social inclusion. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 42(4), 513.
- Vickers, M. H. (2010). The creation of fiction to share other truths and different viewpoints: A creative journey and an interpretive process. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(7), 556–565. Retrieved from <http://qix.sagepub.com/content/16/7/556>
- Victoria Dreams (2013). Retrieved from <http://victoriastreetsooccer.com/>
- Ward, P. R., Meyer, S., Verity, F., Gill, T.K., & Luong, T. (2011). Complex problems require complex solutions: The utility of social quality theory for addressing the Social Determinants of Health. *BMC Public Health*, 11(630), 1-9.
- Welty Peachey, J., Cohen, A., Borland, J., Lyras, A. (2011). Building social capital: examining the impact of street soccer USA on its volunteers. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 48(1), 20-37. doi: 10.1177/1012690211432068

**Julian F.P. Macnaughton** is a third year Doctoral student at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, where he studies Recreation and Leisure in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences. His research interests are grounded in social justice, with a particular focus on social capital, community building, sport policy, and social inclusion of marginalized populations.

**John Meldrum** is an Assistant Professor, and Director of School of Exercise Science, Physical and Health Education at the University of Victoria, B.C., Canada. His research focuses on understanding human relationship and the attachment to people, places and activities in a health, leisure, sport or community context.