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One foot in the cave - a sensorial adventure of a first-time caver

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore the sensory dimensions of a first-time caver. As part of my doctoral research within the topic of the senses in sporting performance, this is an attempt to investigate how the senses may be evoked, articulated and made sense of. The title is worded to reflect my unfamiliarity with caving; one foot in the cave which could just as easily have been one foot in the senses. This is but one foot and hopefully more feet will follow. Having spent the past few months immersed within the sensory literature of prominent anthropologists and the embodiment linkages with phenomenology I have finally begun to wrangle with the issue of how do I collect sense data? This paper is one step in that direction, detailing our efforts to capture sense-language data (you can't capture senses any more than sensations – only reports of these feelings – adrenaline traces are traces of adrenaline, not feelings of adrenaline) and thereafter to use a structured method for data interpretation; the 'body-anchored interview', after Stelter (2010). The paper concludes that whilst it is a foot that has been placed carefully and intentionally, there being a desired direction in mind for the research, detours may be taken, detours which may not always be a nuisance and may lead to new discoveries.

Editors' Note: *One foot in the cave* (2020) is a prequel to *Upward Skydiving* (Palmer and Hughes, 2011, in Volume 5 of JQRSS) which is recommended to visit in conjunction, both papers forming a rich backstory to ongoing research into the senses by both authors. I recall in 2010 Chris Hughes saying to me, 'if I am going to do some research in to sensory experience for my PhD, I suppose I better have one… what have you got? This was the result.

Introduction

In providing a textured, vivid account of my caving experience, I invite readers to create their own recollections of novice experiences in sport or challenging physical activity and to let their imaginations run free for a short while. The account of this particular sensorial adventure stems from data collected before and during the caving event with some deeper perspectives emerging about the experience from a post-event body-anchored interview which was a form of structured, reflective and

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analytical interview. The aim of the exercise is to accurately represent the sensory adventure in question. That this requires the use of textured language of the sort that Geertz (1972) would term as 'thick description' and the equally appropriate 'thick participation' of Samudra (2008), need not detract from its methodological value. Indeed, its desired value is purely that a possible future sensory investigation method might be developed that could enable further representation of sensory data. Somewhat in the shadows of the expansive writings of Howes (1991, 2003, 2005, 2006) this piece inevitably falls short of his significant theorising and interpretation. Also, whilst phenomenology contributes greatly to the methodological groundwork for this study, the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Husserl (1931) seems to promote such comprehensive analysis of lived experience that the complete theorisation of that lived experience may be thought impossible, or at least unfeasible. However, the auto-phenomenography of Gruppetta (2004) and Allen-Collinson (2011), which puts the researcher centre stage in a participatory position, may be more appropriate as context specific references for this research. It is this active involvement or what Wacquant (2004:6) terms as 'observant participation' that has progressively seen much methodological development, similar to the auto-ethnographic methods as advocated by Sparkes (2002). Pink (2009) also notes the applicability of phenomenology and auto-ethnography to create a foundation for a sensory backdrop enabling a sound basis for more longitudinal studies. What follows is a discussion about the methodological basis for researching within the senses which thus sets the scene for the data collection and data handling methods experimented with in this study.

Sensory journeys

The sensory dimensions of sporting participation have bubbled under the surface of much sports sociology for many years. Contemporary embodiment debates have continued against the foundation laid by Merleau-Ponty (1962) with the intent to overcome the mind-body dualism of much thinking. With anthropologists such as Classen (1994, 1997, 2005); Falk (1994); Howes (1991, 2003, 2005); Stoller (1989, 1997) and Geurts (2002) seizing the moment to explore and document the sensory modalities of diverse cultures, few sociologists and fewer sports-related researchers (other than for example, Hockey 2006; Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2007; Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2011; Sparkes, 2002, 2009, 2010) have sought to grasp the sensory journeys of sports people. I say grasp due to the fact that these forages into the sensory world are very much in their infancy and in particular, these few attempts have tended to engage with the phenomenology of the sporting body as opposed to breaking the hegemony of sight which has been a focus of Howes (1991, 2005). This need not detract from the contribution made by Howes who using mostly ethnography, and as Stoller (1989) would term 'sensory scholarship', represents the sensory modalities of differing cultures and provides insightful and evocative

accounts that have been highly theorized. From a methodological perspective, Howes and Classen (1991:259) have plotted a 'paradigm for sensing' that directs potential researchers towards the appropriate research questions for exploring the sensorium within a cultural context. They continue that in order to uncover the sensory dimensions of a given culture, the question faced by those seeking to uncover these sensory orders is 'which senses are emphasized or repressed, and by what means and to which ends? (Howes and Classen, 1991:259)'.

It is at this juncture that there appears to be a stark methodological contrast with the sociological stance. The ethnographic accounts of anthropologists typically encompass the tribe, village and ultimately culture, whilst there are a small but growing number of sociologists who believe the sensory dimension of the sports person to require engagement in the phenomenology of the body. This advance in anthropological thinking indicates some tentative progress within sports sociology which is noted by Allen-Collinson and Hockey (2010) who recommend that once the interrelationships between the three levels of categorization (embodied, embodied via auxiliaries, and inter-embodiment) are empirically charted, only then does it become possible using phenomenological methods, to develop general statements about the structures of experiences involved, and thereafter to posit theoretical generalizations about particular modalities of sporting touch. Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007:116) alongside (Ahmed 2004, Ford and Brown 2006, Hargreaves and Vertinsky 2007, Howson 2005 and Wainwright and Turner, 2003) point out that the sociology of sport has primarily considered the body at an abstract, theoretical level. To understand the sensuous and sensing sporting body requires engaging with the phenomenology of the body, thus enabling a more 'fleshy perspective' argues Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007). It is against this backdrop that Allen-Collinson and Hockey (2011) suggest that charting the embodied, embodied via auxiliaries and inter-embodiment of sports people is required to address the senses in more structured detail within sport and physical activity. To meet these recommendations requires considering the sensory experiences of sports people who engage with equipment: (an auxiliary), for example, the grip or feel of a particular weighted cricket bat may provoke a distinctively different sensory experience both externally and viscerally. Also, how teammates are collectively inter-embodied may be explored within a team setting, indeed, Allen-Collinson and Hockey (2011) sought to explore their own inter-embodiment as running partners via reflective accounts of training together whilst Allen-Collinson (2008) plots her own embodied participation within the sport through a feminist phenomenological account.

Likewise, Downey (2005) provides a compelling 'phenomenologically inspired ethnography' to illuminate the cultural dynamics of the Brazilian dance/martial art

called Capoeira. His participatory apprenticeship journey into this sub-culture briefly documents his and others' sensory understanding and appreciation within this martial art. Far from being the definitive aim of his account, this sensory uncovering provides context to the lived experience of participating within this dynamic art-form. We witness a bridging of the two distinctive methodological perspectives within Downey's account and one may argue that his approaches as a field researcher and for working with data build considerably upon the groundwork laid by Wacquant (2004), who in a similarly evocative account details the boxing sub-culture of deprived communities in Chicago. Both these studies are extensive in their time frame and depth of focus however, it is worth considering that although such an all-encompassing sports sensory study is very much in its infancy and such advancement will take time, there are opportunities to accurately represent sensory findings, even though previous research has relatively scant consideration of the senses as the primary focus within sport.

Apparent methodological preferences

Sparkes (2009) draws upon anthropological findings to suggest an ethnographic approach to researching the topic of the senses in sport. In particular, Sparkes' comments echo the 'sensuous scholarship' perspective advocated by Stoller (1997: xvii) and urges those considering sporting participation to, in Stoller`s words, 'accept sensuousness'. Indeed, being an advocate of the growing auto-ethnographic approach, Sparkes urges that an imaginative, creative perspective be adapted to evocatively represent the sensuous journeys experienced by sports people. This may be one evaluative measure which might be applied to our endeavour to represent the sensorial adventure of a first-time caver. Gruppetta (2004) and Allen-Collinson (2009) discuss the notion of autophenomenography and subsequently applies this methodological approach to her continuous exploration of her running experiences. Put simply, autophenomenography is an autobiographical genre in which the phenomenological researcher is both the researcher and participant in her/his study of a particular phenomenon or phenomena (Allen-Collinson, 2011).

It is not within the scope or intent of this paper to fully critique the philosophical thread of phenomenology as Allen-Collinson (2009) usefully provides a detailed overview of the tradition within a sporting focus. However, to emphasize its growing relevance, phenomenology in sport and sport science, for Whitson (1976:54), can enable the understanding of the finer details of performance, claiming that, 'it is necessary to get at what he understands himself to be trying to do and beyond this, to understand the cultural context and life experiences which have led him to view the world in this particular way'. Further, for van Manen (1997:9) phenomenological research 'is the study of the lived experience' and that it is 'the study of the essences or primordialities of phenomena'. Whilst according to Brown and Payne (2009) and

for Merleau Ponty (1962), it is the social and sub-cultural perception of experiences through bodies, in other words, a way of knowing the world through our bodies. It is this kind of researcher-and-data engagement that we wished to explore in the caving experience; the sensorium of a first-time caving body. Allen-Collinson (2011:51) notes that four elements within phenomenological method were appropriate for her autophenomenographic account. These include: description, epoche/bracketing and reduction, essences and finally, intentionality. These elements are derived from the foundational work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) however, it is worth noting at this point that the specifics of such elements have been subjected to much debate whilst the key proponents of Husserl (1931), Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Heidegger (1962) have all approached phenomenology from distinctively different epistemological and ontological positions which has invariably questioned the relevance and context of the bracketing of personal experiences as a part of the research protocol (Allen-Collinson (2011).

Caving in theory - a theoretical phenomenology

In approaching the cave environment from a completely inexperienced perspective, my capacity to bracket out all tacit assumptions and known understanding of the phenomena was considerably reduced – there was little known understanding to bracket. However, for Allen-Collinson (2011) meeting the 'unique adequacy requirement' for familiarity with the phenomena, compromises the epoche or bracketing element of the phenomenological method. Familiarity with the phenomena renders the bracketing process as problematic, indeed, for Husserl (1999:33) if 'consciousness is always conscious of something' then inevitably, this bracketing process appears to be extremely difficult to overcome. Merleau-Ponty (1962) questions whether we can fully reduce our prior understandings, hence his phenomenology that is considered to be existential in nature. Husserl`s 'transcendental' phenomenology also appears to contrast distinctively with Heidegger`s hermeneutic stance given that we are already always in and of the world which may render bracketing as deeply problematic. This briefly demonstrates the contrasting perspectives of the key proponents and although having never previously experienced a cave, I will have undoubtedly experienced the inevitable meteorological and physiological conditions albeit in differing contexts. Gearing (2004), Ashworth (1999) and Allen-Collinson (2011) question the possibility of total reduction however; Allen-Collinson (2011) believes that the attempt to temporarily suspend prior assumptions could be encouraging at the practical research level. I will again attempt to draw parallels with the ethnographic work of Stoller (1989). Stoller points out that it wasn't until he began to accept the sensuous surroundings of the Songhay in Niger that he was able to engage and understand the Songhay sensorium, for example, when he was participating in rituals including an initiation in which he 'ate power' in the form of the Kusu or magic cake (Stoller, 1997). Similarly, Howes

and Classen (1991) recommend a 'being of two sensoria' whereby unfamiliar smells and sounds otherwise neglected are appreciated and understanding is sought. What we witness from these approaches may be a similarity with the phenomenological process of bracketing however, no reference is made to either mode of bracketing in phenomenology.

One possibility to overcome such familiarity and bracketing dilemmas could be to use the first-person narrative of a first-time caver and enable more experienced cavers to contribute their own caving narratives to form a collective first-time caving narrative. Allen-Collinson (2011) provides a compelling argument towards the auto-style of data collection however, my concern is that such singular narratives are indeed, quite rightly, individual, and are thus subjected to much theoretical scrutiny. Abram (1996:56) points out that,

> To the sensing body, no thing presents itself as utterly passive or inert. Only by affirming the animate-ness of perceived things do we allow our words to emerge directly from the depths of our ongoing reciprocity with the world.

It is towards this connection of the perceived things or as Gendlin (1981, 1996, 1997) would term 'felt sense or felt meaning' that is methodologically appropriate to the current research focus. Indeed, Stelter (2008) considers such an approach viable for psychotherapeutic work. Although Stelter (2008) approaches this from his own psychotherapeutic perspective he does acknowledge that this process could be equally appropriate within coaching psychology and sport. Within the caving scenario, according to Stelter (2008), it is these felt senses or felt meanings that may enable an entrance and anchor to the caver's experience. At this point we understand that first we need to have an identity story (an auto-phenomenological account of the cave) and then according to Stelter (2010) by reading or listening to the identity stories of others, we can then potentially reflect on our own identity projects complete with our struggles and achievements. To achieve this would require a skilful interviewer who will attempt to tease out the caving story (identity story). This person in the second-person position will help the interviewee in the first-person position or as Stelter (2002, 2004, 2007) points out, will coach or act as an active listener who will support the interviewee throughout. Polanyi (1966) notes that as experiences are often pre-reflective, body-anchored and part of our tacit knowledge then there may be certain difficulties in accessing such accounts. Given that the felt sense of our actions and of our relationships to the world is initially pre-linguistic or non-discursive (Stelter, 2008), then the amalgamation of the caving identity stories created by cavers of differing experience, may create a sensuous caving identity story. This is on the understanding that 'personal accounts and self-experiences are bodily based and always connected to practice' (Stelter, 2008:55).

In drawing upon these approaches to data gathering and analysing of sensory data I aimed to experiment through this episode of field research in caving. There is, as of yet, no preferences for methods and data collection on my behalf, I am simply designing a menu based upon tried and tested recipes that may eventually create a suitable approach for working within this area. Given that the expected sensory experiences would take place bound within the instant context of the cave, I decided to try using a Dictaphone that was securely stored within my clothing. Using a microphone and with the device on continuous record, I would aim to record my sensuous journey as it unfolded. I would provide a running commentary of the caving experience from a totally novice perspective. Using the phenomenological method of data immersion, I would subsequently be able to review, re-listen and reflectively create the cave narrative, and then, use Stelter's (2010) body-anchored interview process to open the narrative to the consideration and contribution of fellow cavers.

Experimenting with first-hand data about the caving experience

What follows are the before (anticipatory), during (lived) and after (reflective) personal sense-accounts from that experience, followed by a discussion developing from the body anchored interview process implementing Stelter's method (2010). The interview was designed to create a second-order interpretation of the lived experiences, i.e. an interpretation of Chris' sense-memories of being a novice caver. The point being to experiment with a method of working with realistic 'messy data', that is, data not derived solely from recall such as in reflective interviews, focus group discussions or questionnaires. The aim of the field research strategy (down in the cave) and subsequent body-anchored interview was to gain an honest, corporeal reaction to the stimulus, captured at the moment of sensing new things when a person may be struggling to cope, or potentially be overloaded with new sense-data. Part of the purpose behind the field research strategy was to attempt to record what was being envisaged or anticipated about an event beforehand. Thereafter, to compare that data with the rich sense-oriented account of experiencing and living through the event recalled at the body-anchored interview 10 days after the caving experience. The data from the before and the during phases may reveal some valuable insights for how a person might be coached in this novice context, given that 'coaching' may connote more than just leading a person through an unfamiliar environment.

Caving in practice – a living phenomenology

Before

Similarly, to Allen-Collinson (2011:57) who attempts to 'heighten reflexivity', subject to criticism by her own 'insider' assumptions of the phenomena, I plot my assumptions of the cave and my pre-cave body. What does a cave smell like? I believe damp, musty and stale. I have the assumption that there will be a woodland smell, why? Where are these assumptions from? It will be wet and muddy; my

Wellington boots will squelch through the terrain. I envisage a tight environment that will reduce echo and possibly hinder verbal communication. My own body will probably provide the most auditory stimulus. I will be panting and groaning, my body will be moving uncomfortably and thus I assume I will be noisy and clumsy. I envisage long, smooth rocks with a narrow, tight passageway; indeed, I have a visual picture of the opening to the cave in my mind. I imagine a triangular shaped entrance and see my caving partner Clive, effortlessly slipping into the cave as I ponder my uncomfortable entrance on the outside. The rock may be smooth to the touch however, as with the auditory assumptions, it is the feeling of my own body that dominates my haptic assumptions. I'm comfortable when wearing football boots or my light running shoes, I'm nimble and agile, I can cover the terrain with certainty. The thought of negotiating a dark, rocky environment in Wellington boots makes me feel weary. How responsive will my feet be, or my whole body be to this alien environment? Will my sense of touch be of similar importance underground as is when playing football or running?

During my drive to meet Clive I feel hungry, I have eaten breakfast as usual however, I feel uneasy and hungry for some reason. I find myself gripping the steering wheel hard, stimulating different levels of touch, I seem distanced from the drive and, upon arriving at my destination, I have the strange feeling of 'how did I get here?' It is not a particularly cold day, however I feel as though the clothes that I have brought will be insufficient. I have brought plenty of layers, yet I assume I will be particularly cold. I am apprehensive about the inevitable tight, close environment and I ponder how this may resonate with my claustrophobic feeling when playing squash. My pre-cave sensorium is relatively void of exteroceptive information. Other than my dark, wet, close assumptions, I have no previous sensory information to create an anticipated cave experience. On the other hand, such limited knowledge doesn't appear to limit my visceral assumptions of the cave. I feel light and wobbly; the whole idea of being underground just doesn't sit comfortably with me. It doesn't sit comfortably in my bladder; it's in the deep recesses of my stomach. Where is my centre of gravity? I don't have control of the situation either in terms of safety or planned route however, I remind myself that I do have control of my body. I seem to reassure myself to listen to my body, trust my body and trust my caving partner.

During

Clive fixes some ropes and a ladder for us to climb down maybe 20 feet into the depths of the cave. He explains the intricacies of the procedure, yet my mind is elsewhere, I'm absorbed by this alien atmosphere, I am slightly dazed. I wriggle my way down the ladder, my body seems rigid, the rocks scrape against my back and helmet forcing my headlamp out of position and thus creating more darkness. I'm

scared, I can't see and clumsy feet scrape around, searching franticly for foot holds. The rope sears into my tender palms as I grip and pull in panic. My lamp is only illuminating the space above my head, I can't see anything in front of my face, yet I can feel the cold, wet stone only inches from my nose. I bang my head, helmet and lamp against the rock again as I squeeze down this narrow drop into the cave system. The noise of banging the helmet is deafening, startling, like a jolt, and then a noise that sounds like grating bones as the plastic helmet rubs against the rock. There is also the temporary loss of sight before my eyes find the arc of my light beam once again and the helmet sits back in position. A little more wriggling and scratching and my feet eventually reach a muddy puddle at the foot of the cave. 'It's the feeling of being underground that is really eerie, it's like being in a different world'.

We take a breather for a few seconds and Clive scurries off ahead of me. My visual system is working overtime, I seek to examine every foot and hand position, I don't want to fall, I want to stay upright even though the rock above my head forces me to crouch. The rock scrapes my back and helmet, my gait struggles to find efficiency and comfort. I am panting uncontrollably; I've squirmed 20 metres yet I pant and huff as though I've just run 20 miles. I don't hear anything else other than my deep noisy breath, I'm panicking... The cave opens slightly and provides a little rest-bite from the crouching and crawling position. I tell myself to 'feel my way through my boots'. I have realised that I am panicking and I try to reassure myself to relax and use my body to feel and negotiate the environment. I've been rushing, trying to get from A to B as quickly as possible. I look at my hands and rub the gritty silt deposits between my fingers, the rock is quite delicate, it crumbles in places, and there are little valleys in the mud floor where the knees of previous cavers have been crawling on all fours. 'Listen to your body Chris'.

Clive has gone, he's left me to find my own way, he wants me to figure this out for myself. 'Listen to your body Chris, see the shape and make the shape'. I have reconfigured my approach; I now look to assess the shape and dimension of the rock and then mimic this shape with my body. My eyes see and then my body reacts, I try to visualise the shape of my body and then use my sense of touch to tell me how close or tight to the rock I need to be. 'Smooth means feet, rough and jagged means hands'. My efficiency seems to be improving, I'm beginning to feel comfortable. We're 30 minutes into the cave and I have devised a method whereby smooth faced rock allows me to concentrate on my footwork and rough or jagged edged rock requires more handwork. 'See the shape and make the shape, smooth feet, rough hands' I tell myself as I squelch through the muddy silt. My breathing is deep yet reassuringly consistent. I am able to manoeuvre myself whilst providing a commentary into the Dictaphone. I feel quite good. Brief, wider chambers allow a little rest and time to think about the smells and sounds of the cave. It's stale and

damp, there are no distinctive smells and other than the faint sound of dripping water and our bodies. It is silent.

Upon resuming my advance, I seem to struggle, ‘my balance has just gone’, I’ve been sat down for 60 seconds maximum and suddenly I’m all over the place. ‘What’s happened to me, my balance has just gone?’ I scramble and scratch at the gritty rock, my feet splash and slop through the silt and I keep crashing against the side of the cave. I’m disorientated, I panic again and I pant and splutter. Slowly I regain what efficiency I had found earlier, ‘See the shape and make the shape, smooth feet, rough hands’. ‘Stand up, ouch, ouch, ouch, my knees ache, I feel heavy’. I scramble maybe another 20 metres and we pause to rest. A faint rumbling noise filters through the cave, ‘sounds like a washing machine, maybe an extraction fan’. We enter a large chamber that allows a standing position. The noise is louder, ‘it’s never a main road is it?’ nah, it’s too continuous, more like the roar of a waterfall’. Suddenly within a couple of steps the air smells fresh and lively, I can hear the splashing almost bubbling sound of running water, I feel less constricted. We reach a small trickle of water, the sort you would see running down a steep road after a sharp shower. ‘Christ, is that all it is’, this faint sounding trickle has been extenuated, echoing through the cave, two minutes ago it was a main road, five minutes ago it was a washing machine. ‘The terrain has totally changed, it’s more jagged’. The cave is wider at this point and strangely appears to be more alive than the narrow muddy passages we have just crawled through. The air is clearer, it’s refreshing and it clears my head, I feel comfortable, I can stand easily with balance. ‘It’s warmer here, that water is freezing though’. There is a paradoxical feeling within the chamber, it’s warmer yet the water is icy cold and the air is fresher. We progress further and with every step the water becomes noisier, it’s wetter now, ‘it’s totally changed, you wouldn’t think it was the same cave, it’s a different place’. We are walking along an underground river, and alarmingly, the roof is coming down, but I try to ignore it. My eyes inspect every rock for a suitable foot placement as we walk, it’s really slippery. Slowly I continue, my balance again is troublesome, I struggle to crouch whilst maintaining a solid footing, my hands are working overtime to keep balance and maintain body position.

‘Do you want to take the lead?’ asks Clive and I realise that the passageway is becoming increasingly tight as the water level ‘rises’. (It wasn’t actually rising, we were getting forced lower by the roof). ‘I don’t like this’. ‘What do you feel now, a little extra commitment? ‘Just a bit, now then, now then, argh, bloody hell’. The air is moister, the faint trickle is now a gushing stream and the route ahead appears extremely narrow, the roof seems to be coming down further as well. I try to maintain a solid hunched position, still on my feet, just; I don’t want to get too wet. I uncomfortably wriggle a little further and I realise that this approach is totally

useless. Knees and elbows in, [expressed with energy and colourful expletives] 'it's freezing, how are we going to get through here?' 'Just trust it, listen to my back'. I try to regain some composure as I now have maybe 18 inches of space in which to manoeuvre. I'm freezing, the icy cold water is inside my pants and boots, I can barely feel my hands and stomach. I continue to crawl and squirm through the water, the tight environment means nothing, I'm progressing purely to get out of the water. 'Stand up, stand up, drain the water out of your clothes'. We have wriggled 30 metres through this freezing muddy water and again my balance is all over the place. I am no longer here to experience the cave, I'm here to progress through it and get out, I forget about the cold, it's not there, I continue to move, 'see the shape and make the shape'. We wade and crawl another 40 metres and finally reach a dry open chamber.

After a 20-minute break we head back the way we came this time with me leading. I don't feel any pressure or added fear, if anything, I feel more confident. 'Listen through your back' I tell myself as I negotiate the tight wet passage that only 30 minutes ago caused me major problems. I'm thinking aloud, 'listen through your back, see the shape and make the shape, smooth means feet and rough means hands'. The return seems quicker, I'm leading us and it feels good. Clive encourages me, 'you're moving so much better now' as I crouch, stretch, turn and ease my body through tight spaces and muddy passages. The environment is no longer alien to me, strangely, there is no environment, it is purely a route. The rock formations, mud or darkness no longer interest me, it's about me moving, it's about me, my body, moving better within this cave. Wriggle, squirm, crouch, stretch, short steps and shuffle dominate my thinking. I'm playing the old computer game Tetris. The one where different shapes would come down the computer screen and you quickly had to find a corresponding space to put them in to avoid the shapes getting backed up. This is a conveyer belt of rock shapes, 'see the shape and make the shape'. My eyes see it and my body is feeling it. My eyes are now scanning the distant passage, there is a gathering of shapes going on, what is the third shape coming up? 'Wriggle, squirm, crouch and then stretch', I'm building a routine, I'm completing one move whilst assessing the second and then moving my body to allow an efficient transition between moves two and three, coming up. It's Tetris only with real rock.

In what appears to be the blink of an eye we reach the bottom of the ladder. A quick breather and Clive shoots up the ladder as quick as you like, two minutes and we'll be out I think to myself, fresh air and a good stretch. I clip myself into the rope system and place my foot on the bottom rung. I realised and called up, 'this is not going to be as easy as you just made it look'. Two rungs in and I'm panicking, I'm probably only four feet off the cave floor, yet I panic like crazy. I can't find my footing, I have the same problem as earlier, I can't illuminate my lower body due to the tight space, I seem to be swinging uncontrollably. The gap seems tighter this

time, I probably have six inches of free space around my body and I can't flex my legs in order to find the rungs. Clive tries to calm me down and talk me through it but it's useless, panic has taken over and I'm scratching and wriggling without thought. 'I can't move' I shout, I'm worried. I manage to free one foot then the other and make the two steps back to the bottom. This needs more thought and considerably more composure. I illuminate the space above my head, there is a slight turn about half way up the climb, I need to reach that point with a particular body position. As I dangle hopelessly on this ladder I ponder my next few steps and imagine my advance. My eyes are assessing the climb ahead yet; as I put my foot in the next rung my sense of touch seems to take over. This time I advance quicker and more efficiently, I create a picture of my body shape within the tight area and I try to generate my desired movement sequence. I scramble and eventually manage to claw my way out of the gap, much to my relief.

After

The outside is bright and detailed; this is what it must feel like to have successful laser eye surgery. The tree lined path appears immaculate, branches and leaves have such definition and vivid detail. It's fresh, the air carries the faint scent of the wild garlic that grows parallel with the path, and the stream is crystal clear and gargles over the stones and pebbles. The cave is gone; it is no longer part of my consciousness, what cave?

Clive and I try to reflect and recreate our caving journey over a curry and pint of beer in a nearby pub. What cave? Yes, we have just experienced the cave collectively yet there is nothing there, no images or strange feelings, I don't recollect the stale smell or change in temperature. No gritty texture between my fingers and no washing machine. We assumed that we would plan, do and review the cave experience. With the first two elements completed and recorded why can't we review? Where have all these sensory experiences gone? Nothing comes back during the drive home, brief little reflections of the ladder section or the tight, wet section in the underground river but no detail, nothing. I note my reflections over the coming days but it's limiting, I listen to the audio recording but it's still limiting. Three times I listen to the audio and slowly I begin to reflect, over and over I listen whilst writing the story, again I get something different from it, again I write and re-draft. I listen and make the body positions as I write in an attempt to aid recall, over and over, refining and re-drafting. I play the audio continuously as I write and finally there is this story.

Body anchored interview

The act of constructing a coherent caving story to accurately represent my sensuous lived experience might go some way to address the familiarity/bracketing concerns raised by Garfinkel (2002) and Allen-Collinson (2011). Chiefly that me,

according to Garfinkel (2002), as an inexperienced caver has only a limited amount of familiarity with the activity in order to accurately analyse the cave findings. Also, that in creating a true representation of my experiences via the immersion and creation of the story, I as the storyteller can only tell the story, not subject it to rigorous analysis. In short, I have written an autobiography of a first-time caving experience, I can publish it and only then might it be subjected to wider criticism. However, within our research strategy, I as a novice caver could receive distinctly different criticism from both non-cavers and experienced cavers, once my caving autobiography is told in the body-anchored interview (Stelter, 2010). Later, if published, readers over time may also contribute their experiential stories of a cave, that might ultimately generate a collective cave identity.

Given the stock of knowledge that an experienced caver would bring to the interview process, it was decided to subject my caving story to the consideration of three cavers who were once in my novice position and who have experienced, and for that matter, sensed similar caves. Indeed, such listening may have possibly allowed these experienced contributors to reflect upon their own caving identities. Having received no details about the story the three cavers were assigned different roles within the interview process. One would interview me from the second-person perspective, asking specific questions that interested him as an experienced caver and generally tease out my caving story. The other two were simply encouraged to listen and seek to uncover the underlying themes of the story and for that matter introduce their own caving identity stories, in other words they would act as an audience during the interview. After the interview the 'silent' two were asked to recount and interpret my story as told to the first interviewer. The interview lasted 50 minutes and was recorded with both Dictaphone and video camera. In a relaxed environment my story was told and relived, particular areas were probed by the interviewer yet it was I, as the novice caver that elaborated and explained in detail my lived and sensed experiences.

I felt comfortable and totally at ease, it was my story, I owned it, all I was doing was telling it. Interestingly, what all three cavers did was bring their own experiences to the process, for example, *Alex* noted the similarities between caving and rock climbing in the dark and *Barry* explained how he has developed an olfactory identification with particular caves which is in stark contrast to my considerably novice olfactory appreciation. Most notably, *Carl* delved deeper into the analysis and questioned where my initial fears and anticipations of the cave had been created. Having never experienced a cave before, where did these fears come from? He continued to consider that in his view, it wasn't the sensuous nature of the cave that stimulated such fears but my prior experiences of individually dark, damp or close environments and my distinct unfamiliarity with the environment and activity.

Indeed, it would appear that my efforts to bracket out my assumptions via engaging an alien environment were insufficient; more fuel to the debate regarding bracketing. The interview became extremely dynamic and interactive with each person bringing their own collection of experiences to my narrative. Interestingly, our bodies were used to demonstrate positions, grips and holds and it was at this point that props or prompts would have been beneficial to generate an instant collective sensory understanding. What concluded the interview was a collective consideration that caving and other outdoor sports, as activities that are associated with a relatively high level of risk, require a certain degree of sensuous consideration and negotiation. This led to the question, can the senses be coached? Given the depth and range of outdoor education experience involved within the caving narrative, the focus of the process shifted to rock faces and river rapids to consider or resonate with the novice sensuous experience and its implication for the teaching/coaching process within a relatively risky and formidable environment. I instantly began to recollect times when, working as a professional chef, key members of my kitchen team would come together each with different palates and experiences, each with similar ideas towards a shared objective to create a fantastic dish. Stelter (2010) points out that the intention of dialogue is to reach new understanding and in doing so, to form a totally new basis from which to think and act. In dialogue, one not only solves problems, one dissolves them. We do not merely try to reach agreement; we try to create a context from which many new agreements might come. It is against this backdrop that I believe this initial, first step into the cave has proved beneficial to the methodological juncture that I currently face. Having drawn upon multiple perspectives from the topic of the senses collectively to reach this point in my research, it felt right to draw upon several differently experienced caving perspectives to generate and add depth to this initial caving story.

Conclusion

What this brief encounter with an unfamiliar sport does for this initial exploration of methodological tools is illuminate the limitations of gathering sensory data and establishing a context within which to present it. In attempting to bracket prior assumptions from the caving experience, it could be concluded that, just as many other previous researchers have noted, complete bracketing is inevitably impossible however, in engaging a totally new sport, such a limitation may be briefly overcome or suspended. This undoubtedly contrasts with the views of Garfinkel (2002), however, given the inexperience of the researcher in caving, there seemed little actual prior experience to bracket. In effect, the body-anchored interview drew in experience from professional outdoor coaches, to help Chris whose plea was… ‘Here I am, a novice, can you help me understand what I have been through’?

To return to the original intention of this piece, it proved that the use of the Dictaphone in such challenging situations is indeed practical, accurate, safe and easy to use. It may be worth noting that during the cave-story-generation process I was surprised to notice how relatively little verbal data was actually recorded, compared to the overall range and detail of sense data I remember about the event. During my reflections it became apparent that I didn't simply provide a running commentary of the event. Prior to entering the cave, I did however intend to elaborate and record as much sights, smells and sounds as possible. Without being overly descriptive I just chatted my way through the cave, the Dictaphone was my 'fly on the wall'. What the Dictaphone did enable was an accurate recording of me thinking aloud and it is to this point that I believe the true merit of the strategy lays. The equipment was unobtrusive and extremely effective in recording quick simple instances. There was no conscious effort to press record or stop and with a little careful storing the equipment went unnoticed throughout. In accepting sensuousness as a participant and researcher, this form of data collection was most encouraging and extremely useful to the reflective immersion period.

The assumed protocol of plan, do and review undoubtedly broke down at the review phase which as we assumed would take place immediately post-cave. Given, as Stetler (2010) points out, that experiences are pre-reflexive, this is not surprising. Indeed, Stetler's concept of anchoring and second-person perspective during the interview process coupled with the data immersion and reliving, advocated by Giorgi (1999), provided a reflexive textured account which was later subjected to the consideration and contribution of those who were unfamiliar with the research event entirely, yet experienced in caving to contribute meaningfully. The simplicity of the recorded cave data enabled much 'reliving' through memory and also the ability to almost transcribe the data several times over until an accurate representation was achieved. In using the interview findings as a mirror against the participation phase, I was able to subject the data to rigorous critique by experienced cavers who were at that stage totally familiar with my lived experiences. This sensory familiarity during the body anchored interview could have been increased via the use of ropes or rock, or my clothing could have been used to evoke smells and photos or video could have visually prompted sensuous knowledge from the experienced cavers. Indeed, photo elicitation has become a contemporary data-capture tool to the ethnographer through the developments of Harper (2002) upon the original template created by Collier Jnr (1967). Tilley (2007), Pink (2009), Harris and Guillemin (2011) and more recently, Neely (2019) all discuss the possible benefits of using such props within sensory ethnography, however, as of yet there remains little consideration of this approach within sport and physical activity. The dynamic nature of the interview process was enjoyable for all involved, however, the use of props and prompts may have provided

much more sensory consideration, indeed, this will be explored further in the near future of this project: see *Upward Skydiving* (Palmer and Hughes, 2011).

This initial exploration has hopefully offered a methodology that may overcome the bracketed out assumptions of me as an inexperienced caver whilst subjecting the story to analysis by experienced cavers who would meet the recommendations of Garfinkel (2002) and then contribute to the caving dialogue as suggested by Stelter (2008, 2010). It is this blend of intention, experience, narrative, analysis and dialogue that I believe is required to further explore the sensory experiences of sports people. Although it is neither the intent nor possibility of these findings to be theorized and regarded as totally representational, this forage into sensory methodology is the first step and a starting point for ongoing research. In my view, that sensory data is significantly difficult to measure, quantify and store poses not only methodological difficulty but methodological opportunity. As of yet, there remains no obvious methodological approach and data handling template to tackle the senses either within wider anthropological research or that in sport and physical activity. This may not be a disadvantage for research as each project seems to deserve its own theoretical rationale to be made from the stock phenomenological methodology. However, it is the lack of debate regarding the use and application of knowledge about the senses collectively within sport and physical activity that may have limited its practical development. What many anthropologists, ethnographers and the few sports sociologists previously mentioned do demonstrate, is that it may be timely to address the senses critically and practically, and this is my first step towards such a contributing.

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Reviewer Comments

The sporting world is filled with passionate performances, athletes pitted against athletes battling for supremacy in emotion-laden dramas, often played out in front of capacity crowds of cheering fans or in the imaginations of sporting-wannabees the world over. For those that pit themselves against the challenges of the natural environment, whether they be the adrenaline-seeking junkies taking on the most extreme environments that Mother Nature has to offer, or those seeking to enjoy and explore the natural world simply for pleasure, the (in)famous quote suggesting that sport is more than just a matter of life or death, often rings even truer. So, why is it that there have been so few attempts to capture the essence of these experiences in the research literature? Perhaps this has something to do with the problems inherent in getting to grips with what can often be messy, hard-to-handle phenomenological data and the subsequent challenge of articulating meaning through the limited powers of language? These are, however, the key issues that the authors attempt to tackle head-on in this research. Exploring new territory, trying different strategies and applying techniques tested out in other fields, this article serves as evidence that good progress is being made. Whilst the summits have yet to be peaked, the authors make great gains in mapping the terrain and providing guidance for others who may wish to follow in their footsteps – whether that be into the caves, down the rapids or any other physical activity that deserves greater sensory attention and recognition. I for one have had my eyes opened to new ways of thinking, and sensing, and can feel the surge of adrenaline building up in anticipation of testing out different ways to capture sensory-orientated data in all it's glory and the opportunities to re-live and reflect on experiences through body-anchored interviewing.