

REFLECTIVE ESSAY

Resurrecting a dead manuscript: Tales from the crypt

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Several years ago, I (Carrie) offered my undergraduate research team the opportunity to complete an experiment, but not the typical kind undergraduates usually participate in. I proposed that we work together to update and revise a previously rejected manuscript of mine. Over several years (thanks COVID-19 pandemic), we worked together in person and online to rewrite and refine the piece. We had the paper accepted for publication in the *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology*, and now we are thrilled to have the opportunity to reflect on our collective and individual experiences with this project. Active involvement in a research project can greatly benefit students by linking conducting research and teaching (Healey, 2005). As indicated by the three students' perspectives, their active involvement in the research, publication, and dissemination processes has greatly furthered their academic ability and their respective paths within psychology. The aim of our essay is to provide an authentic account of the experiences and outcomes of the authors.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

When Dr. Scherzer approached our research team with the prospect at hand, all of us were overcome with both excitement and anticipation. As undergraduate students, it had only been a dream to publish research, and we were presented with a real-world opportunity. We used to excitedly chatter about what it would be like to contribute to sport psychology research, and now we have. To be trusted so completely by a professor fostered an incredible working environment, and we are all so glad we said yes to revitalizing this manuscript a few years back. Altogether, we spent between a year and a half to 2 years working to update the literature, run additional analyses, and provide a fresh interpretation of the results. The most unique part about this project was that we were essentially tasked to critique our superior and produce a new and improved manuscript. Becoming a research assistant was a lot more than being an assistant to research. When we reflect on the people we were when we met Dr. Scherzer compared to who we are now writing this reflection, we are almost not the same people. We are better people, better students, and—pertaining to this reflection—better researchers.

As undergraduate students we needed to consume as much material relating to the manuscript as possible. The manuscript examined the relationships among disordered eating, exercise dependence, and proneness to injury, and Dr. Scherzer encouraged each member of the team to dive deep into truly understanding the material at hand. It was imperative for all of

us to be on the same page and understand each section of the project. As undergraduate students, this meant reading the original manuscript multiple times and spending many late nights conducting literature reviews to further blend old and new concepts for the manuscript. Each group member investigated different areas of research related to disordered eating or related to sport. For example, Meaghan examined articles that looked into the female athlete triad, which is a combination of disordered eating, menstrual dysfunction, and athletic injury that female athletes are at an increased risk of developing. Once the group had a strong grasp on the contemporary literature related to disordered eating and exercise dependence, the writing process began by dividing the sections amongst each individual group member. Jeremy rewrote the introduction and disordered eating sections; Meaghan composed the section discussing the relationship between exercise dependence and disordered eating, as well as how these concepts impact injury prevalence amongst athletes; and Robert disseminated the relevant research on exercise dependence, in addition to writing the sections regarding the purpose and hypotheses of the study. The group delegated the sections based on the interest and strengths of each group member, demonstrating the democratic nature of the project. We were eager to have first-hand experience in the realm of sport psychology. Once we had gained the relevant background knowledge required for the manuscript, we began to divide tasks amongst ourselves. The writing experience involved both independent work and collaboration. Robert noted that he vividly remembers the first time he sat down to edit his supervisor's work; he made exactly two changes, and neither of them were significant. This was the first time he realized how challenging it is to write a manuscript all on your own.

While the initial writing process was very individualized, the revision process was conducted as a group. The group held meetings with each member present, including Dr. Scherzer, to revise each individual section in preparation for publication. We would then sit down as a team and go through our work line by line, a collaborative writing process. This same procedure was used to further amend the manuscript based on the recommendations provided by journal reviewers. This part of the process is where Jeremy felt he got the most out of his research assistant experience. He said,

I would come into each meeting confident, but there was always a part of me that was anxious. Until we would start writing. Hearing other team members' thought processes, seeing their thinking, and then reading how they articulated their ideas was the most valuable part of my experience.

As well, the collaborative process expedited the building of close relationships between the group, which many research assistants do not get to experience. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic required the group to collaborate in a flexible manner. As the pandemic began in the middle of the editing process of the project, the group was forced to move online, using online video chat software and shared documents to edit the manuscript. Overall, the task of reviving a dead manuscript was a great learning opportunity provided by Dr. Scherzer that many students do not encounter.

Personal reflections (by order of seniority)

Jeremy

My time working with Dr. Scherzer has been one of the most impactful experiences in my development as an academic. I would without a doubt be a different person had I not had the privilege I did. I worked in a variety of research settings, discovered the importance of a healthy working environment, and learned the value of honest feedback as a research assistant with Dr. Scherzer.

I began as a naive second year student who did not really understand how to be a student, let alone conduct academic research. I learned how to collect data, conduct systematic literature reviews, and was given the opportunity to learn how to write and publish a manuscript—which is not something every undergraduate research assistant can say. I gained more of an understanding of the research process through being a research assistant than I did in all of my psychology coursework combined. Working with such a wide range of duties allowed me to understand what goes into a study from multiple different angles. Having a diverse background as a research assistant allowed for a very seamless, and confident, transition into an independent study. Additionally, I attribute my strengths as a researcher to my diverse experiences as a student, as they helped establish a strong foundation for my understanding of researching.

I have been a research assistant with Dr. Scherzer for approximately 5 years. Along with the wide range of learning experiences, I also saw the extreme value in fostering a positive working environment. Dr. Scherzer takes time out of every meeting to check in with her assistants as people. There is a lot of stress and anxiety as an undergraduate student, especially when trying to figure out what research is, let alone how to get involved. A safe working environment, such as the one facilitated in my experience, encouraged me as a research assistant to make mistakes and view them as learning opportunities rather than shortcomings. Furthermore, the fear that may exist due to certain student-professor dynamics was greatly reduced due to Dr. Scherzer's nature. Putting aside the projects and stress of working in academia, an environment that encouraged vulnerability made me feel part of something greater than just a project.

There are two instances where Dr. Scherzer had a profound impact on me as a researcher. The first was when she told me that it was "highly unlikely" that I would meet the GPA criteria to be able to apply to my university's honours program, and the second was when she told me that my thesis idea for said honours thesis was not reasonable given the resources accessible. It is very easy for students to get carried away with their ideas, and an honest supervisor can help students navigate the strengths and opportunities to come to the best end-point. In my experience, working with an honest supervisor helped keep me grounded during the highs and lows of research. In each of these cases I was crushed, but Dr. Scherzer's honesty allowed me to fully grasp what I needed to do to be a successful academic.

Meaghan

I met Dr. Scherzer in a second-year psychology course that I had enrolled in as an elective as I was trying to determine if psychology was the path I wanted to take. From the very first class I knew that I had found something special. Dr. Scherzer's wonderful sense of humour

and guidance encouraged me to explore the world of psychology. When she extended the invitation for me to join the research team, I was ecstatic and quickly learned a great deal about both psychology and myself. Our positive team environment fostered a great amount of growth in understanding what route of psychology I wanted to pursue. I went from thinking I wanted to enter a counseling program, to sport psychology, and finally I have landed on forensic psychology as my passion. The foundational skills I learned while a part of this team helped me prepare for my honours thesis and has inspired me to publish my honours thesis.

Robert

Being the most recent addition to the group, I was tasked with playing “catch-up” with Meaghan and Jeremy in reading and understanding the literature on disordered eating and exercise dependence. Thus, I sought support from both of them in knowing the proper terms and concepts required to rewrite the relevant manuscript. Since I joined the group relatively early in my academic career, I had a very rudimentary understanding of the field of psychology. Working within this group taught me the interdisciplinary nature of psychology. For example, the manuscript on disordered eating, exercise dependence, and athletic injury has elements of both clinical and sport psychology. Furthermore, the individual interests and guidance of Dr. Scherzer, Meaghan, and Jeremy helped me decide where I wanted to place my future studies within the realm of psychology—health psychology.

PROFESSOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Like so many in academia, the number of projects and boxes of data in my possession far outnumber the number of hours I have to work through them. A few years ago, I had my first full-year sabbatical and had established lofty goals for myself, including re-writing a long ago rejected journal manuscript. I accomplished a lot while on sabbatical, but this particular project was once again pushed to the side. Upon my return, I had three eager research assistants in my lab and no new projects on the docket. Needing work for them (and needing to assuage my guilt over not getting to this particular project), I thought I would try something new. All too often, it seems, undergraduate students gain research experience particularly in grunt work. That was certainly my experience as an undergraduate student, and thus far had largely been the opportunities for my research team. So, I took a risk and asked them if they'd like to work with me on updating and rewriting the old manuscript, and they all said yes with a mix of excitement and a soupçon of trepidation.

What followed is one of the most incredible collaborations I have ever been a part of. While the students acknowledged feeling weird giving me edits on my writing, they found their voices. And what we accomplished was more than a little magical. Bit by bit we reworked sections, updating literature and making four voices one. We would meet periodically in a study room at the library and connect a laptop to a projector so we could all see and edit the section together. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, we took a break but reconvened on Google Meet with a shared Google Doc. And slowly but surely a better manuscript took shape.

Involving my research assistants as full partners on this project was the only way to get us where we are now. When we were having our group writing sessions, we were four people contributing and editing together. At times I would wordsmith a sentence or section, but it was rare that whatever I suggested was the final word; I think part of my contribution was helping

the students get out of their heads and whatever was tripping them up, but then they would go on to improve whatever I gave them.

I spent my undergraduate years being told what research to do and how to make it fit with whatever my supervisor was working on. My undergraduate thesis had little to nothing to do with what I wanted to study, and I swore I would be a different kind of supervisor. While my students were given the content area (and data set), they pretty much ran with it from there, with me being more of a cheerleader as opposed to slave driver. Or at least that's how I hope they perceived it.

TANGIBLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Dr. Scherzer tasked the group with rewriting a manuscript that was rejected from publication in 2001. This manuscript disseminated research that examined the relationship between exercise dependence, disordered eating, and athletic injury (Scherzer et al., 2021). In addition to learning about the manuscript writing process, Dr. Scherzer's research group was able to gain experience of the publication process. This included deciding on which journal would best fit the manuscript and receiving multiple revision requests from journal editors. In an effort that spanned multiple years, the group had finally published the new and improved manuscript in the *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology*. Due to the unique learning experience provided by the project, the group presented at two different conferences held by Mount Royal University. At *Research Days 2021*, Jeremy, Meaghan, and Robert discussed the process and benefits of becoming research assistants. At *Celebrate! Teaching and Learning*, the entire group, including Dr. Scherzer, presented the ways in which the project influenced the perspectives of both faculty and students involved. Furthermore, due to the unique, collaborative nature of the initial manuscript revitalization project, the group developed the current reflective essay.

The work we put forth can be examined within the realm of "student as producer" (Neary, 2010), which is the concept of combining both teaching and research. The concept of student as producer promotes growth for students in a non-traditional setting as it often puts the power in student hands. In our experience, one of the unique aspects of this project was the sense of ownership we each had; each of us was able to reflect on our own contributions, and the end result was us truly embodying the concept of students as producers.

CONCLUSION

The intent of this essay was to examine the experience of the project and how it influenced both student and professor alike. When introducing a new assignment or project in classes, I (Carrie) always say something along the lines of "this will either be spectacular, or it will bomb." In many ways, this endeavour—having undergraduate students edit and rewrite a manuscript of mine—fell into the same category. And I am delighted that it has been a spectacular experience for all of us.

It also seems like we were onto something. Since we first began this project, Schinke et al. (2021) published an article providing information on how to get published in sport and exercise psychology. They outlined common pitfalls, but more importantly provided a section-by-section guide to creating a strong manuscript. We are pleased to note that even without their guidance, we followed much of their advice in our process of journal selection and

manuscript development. Overall, this has been a great exercise for our team in trust, learning, and growth.

NOTE ON CONTRIBUTOR

Carrie B. Scherzer is an associate professor of psychology at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Alberta. She is a clinical psychologist by training, certified mental performance consultant, and teaches undergraduate classes in psychopathology and sport psychology.

Jeremy B. Trenchuk is a graduate from Mount Royal University in Calgary, Alberta. He has a Bachelor of Arts in psychology (honours) and has research interests in athletic identity, counselling, and statistics.

Meaghan Peters recently completed her bachelor's degree in psychology (honours) at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Alberta. She is currently working as a behavioural aide for a pediatric clinic and volunteers at a children's advocacy centre. Her research interests lie in forensic psychology, and she plans to complete a master's degree in this area.

Robert Mazury is a recent graduate from Mount Royal University with a BA in psychology (honours). His research interests are sport and health psychology, with his honours thesis examining how cognitive dissonance impacts exercise behaviour and cognition.

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