Telling Tales in Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology: The How, What and Why of Creative Analytical Practices

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Abstract

There has been a significant increase in interest in qualitative methodologies since the turn of the century. One reason for this increased interest is a desire to understand the different ways which can inform how we understand social reality and, as researchers, describe and represent the social reality of those we work with. Creative Analytical Practices (CAPs) are one novel way in which researchers have worked to analyse and (re-)present knowledge developed through stories shared by those they've engaged in the research process. This scoping review provides a descriptive overview of the extent, range and nature of the use of CAPs in sport, exercise and performance psychology (SEPP) by reviewing research using a form of CAP to represent research findings published over the past 20 years in six high profile SEPP journals. Based on the analysis of 43 published articles four descriptive themes are presented: 'The ascent of creative non-fiction and composite stories', 'Centralising marginalised voices', 'Researchers as storytellers', and 'Judging the quality of CAPs'. Critical thoughts, developed from a connoisseurship position, are then shared in the form of three questions posed to current and potential authors of CAPs: 'Is there a hesitancy to push the boundaries?', 'Why choose to engage with CAPs as a form of representation?' and 'Who are we writing our stories with?'. The review ends with the authors' thoughts on how SEPP researchers can begin to use CAPs to move from describing 'what is' to imagining 'what could be'.

Keywords: creative non-fiction; qualitative research; representation; storyteller; story analyst

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Towards the end of the twentieth century Andrew Sparkes (1992, 1995) wrote that the crisis in representation had begun to impact qualitative research being conducted in sport and exercise contexts. As he noted, scientific writing with a focus on neutral, objective, abstracted, and detached representation was the dominant form of writing in sport and exercise related research. However, researchers had begun to question the methods used to describe social reality and the ability of researchers to directly capture the lived experiences of those they worked with (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). For Sparkes (1992, 1995), a main implication of the crisis was present in how scholars chose to represent their research findings. To this end, Richardson (2000) advocated for researchers to move beyond "conventional social scientific writing" (p. 9) and engage in creative analytical practices (CAPs). As described by McMahon (2016), CAPs envelop different creative representation practices used to show the layers of complexity and theory in research findings. As such, CAPs are both creative and analytic in that they involve researchers using imaginative writing methods to examine social reality. The writing product, which cannot be separated from the creative writing process, offers the potential to increase the types of audiences able to grasp the complexity of social reality by providing the opportunity for readers to connect with findings at an emotional and sensory level (Frank, 2000; Richardson, 2000).

Ten years after first writing about the crisis of representation in sport, exercise and physical activity related research, in the epilogue of '*Telling Tales in Sport and Physical Activity: A Qualitative Journey',* Sparkes (2002) indicated that scholars interested in sport and physical activity were "beginning to experiment with new forms of representation and writing practices" which, he argued, was "significant – and encouraging" (Sparkes, 2022, p.

225). Nevertheless, he noted several creative forms (e.g., poetic, fictional) of representation remained rare. To this end, he expressed the following sentiment:

> I hope that this book will encourage qualitative researchers in sport and physical activity to experiment with how they represent their findings in the future, as part of an emerging research community that is spoken, written, performed, and experienced from many sites. I also hope this book will assist scholars in these domains to make reflexive, disciplined, principled and strategic choices about when to use different forms of representation. (p. xi)

Given the increased publication of qualitative research in sport, exercise and, more contemporarily performance, psychology (SEPP) (see McGannon et al., 2019), we sought to explore whether the hope expressed over two decades ago by Andrew Sparkes (2002) has been addressed. At a first glance, there are clear signs of development as evidenced by the following examples of CAPs engaged with, and presented by, scholars within SEPP: confessional tales (e.g., Darpatova-Hruzewicz, 2022), autoethnography (e.g., Butryn, 2009), creative non-fiction (e.g., Cavallerio et al., 2016), creative fiction (e.g., Douglas & Carless, 2009), polyphonic vignettes (e.g., Middleton et al., 2022), poetry (e.g., Sparkes & Douglas, 2007), infographics (e.g., Smith et al., 2019), narrative videos (e.g., Everard et al., 2022), art-based research through drawings (Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2016) and comics (e.g., Forde, 2022). Concurrently, owing to the diversification of CAPs and different philosophical positions adopted by researchers engaging with CAPs, there has been development in proposals of how the quality of CAPs should be judged. Rather than new criteria, proposals have been made to judge qualitative work using a relativist approach in which criteria used are study specific, flexible and reflect development of the research over time. Doing so allows researchers to move beyond pre-ordained notions of validity to produce new knowledge (Burke, 2016). While such advances are encouraging, a single swallow does not a

summer make, and a cursory glance at this list of CAPs examples might mislead the reader into perceiving CAPs work as "established" or "mature". To extend Aristotle's aphorism, for researchers to know if the current flush of warmth truly reflects the colour and splendour of summer (i.e., the establishment of CAP), we decided to undertake a critical scoping review with the aim of understanding what CAPs SEPP scholars have used, how they have proposed judging their use of CAPs and the reasons SEPP scholars have given for using CAPs to represent their findings. In doing so, we hoped to take stock of the extent, range, and nature of CAPs work within the SEPP field over the past 20-years, and to use this knowledge to identify potential future directions for data representation.

Methodology

A scoping review was deemed appropriate due to the emergent use of CAPs and our desire to map the range and identify gaps in how CAPs have been used by sport and exercise psychology researchers (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). With a desire to remain inclusive, critical, and reflexive in our analysis of the available literature (Chambers et al., 2018), we undertook the review from a relativist ontological and social constructionist epistemological position. We approached our analysis similarly to other recent scoping reviews in SEPP (e.g., Hägglund et al., 2024) and embraced a 'connoisseurship' position (Eisner, 1991; McGannon et al., 2019), in which we sought to appreciate and critique the diverse exemplars of CAPs used by SEPP researchers. While connoisseurship has been previously characterised as a position through which researchers might grasp the vast array of complex information shared across SEPP (Sparkes & Smith, 2016), this approach was also well suited to scoping the complex and nuanced CAPs literature in the SEPP context. Following Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) methodological framework for scoping reviews, we followed the following six stages in an iterative manner: 1) identifying the research questions (see introduction); 2) identifying relevant studies; 3) study selection; 4) charting the data; 5) collating, summarizing, and

reporting the results, and (6) consultation. The study was exempted from approval by an ethics committee due to the sole use of secondary data.

Identifying Relevant Studies and Study Selection

To be included in our review manuscripts had to be: (1) published in English, (2) using a form of CAP to represent findings and (3) published in a peer-reviewed journal primarily focused on SEPP. Our selection of journals to search for SEPP-focused articles was informed by previous reviews of qualitative literature in SEPP for specific decades by Culver and colleagues (2003; 2012) and McGannon and colleagues (2019). Our critical review included published papers covering two decades from 2003 – 2023 in six high-profile SEPP psychology journals (i.e., *The Sport Psychologist*, *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, and *Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology*). While we recognised SEPP researchers also publish in broader multi-disciplinary outlets and qualitative research specific journals (e.g., Forde, 2022) we felt that focusing our review on these SEPP-specific journals could provide useful insights into the use of CAPs in the SEPP domain. Our initial inclusion criteria were broad and related to looking for any article which mentioned the use of any form of CAP in the title and/or abstract to optimise the identification of work in which SEPP scholars had used CAPs. Our manual search of each journal's online repository returned 48 articles which we believed potentially used a form of CAP. During the next stage of sampling, we read each article and excluded five at this stage because the authors used a traditional form of representation (for more detail see Berbary, 2019). The final sample included 43 articles.

Charting the Data

We collaboratively developed a process to chart a mixture of general and specific information from the selected articles. We began by developing an initial understanding of

commonalities in how authors had engaged with CAPs and what form of CAPs had been used by recording the philosophical foundation, data collection and analysis methods as well as the form of CAP used by the author(s) of each article (see Supplementary Table 1). We continued our charting process with Thierry, Ross, Francesca and Christopher separately reviewing the eligible articles and noting down observations about any other relevant information related to our research aims (e.g., rationale for, or reflections on, using CAPs). Charting of the included articles was done with the aim of individually synthesising and interpreting key themes related to the use of CAPs within SEPP (cf. Arksey & O'Malley, 2005).

Collating, Summarising and Reporting the Results

Meetings were held periodically during the charting process to enable authors to feedback and discuss observations and interpretations and in an iterative and collaborative manner (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). The collation and summation of our analysis developed through further meetings between the authors, and an ongoing iterative process of comparing inductive codes, returning to the manuscripts we were reviewing, writing out our initial impressions and meeting as critical friends to discuss our interpretations (see Smith & McGannon, 2018). Aligned with our philosophical positioning, we recognise who we are impacted our discussions and the development of the findings we report here. Thierry proposed the idea for the review after having an article featuring a polyphonic story awarded paper of the year in *Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology* (Middleton et al., 2022). While Thierry was fortunate to develop as a qualitative scholar under the supervision of a supervisor who pushed him to consider CAPs in his doctoral work, he had to overcome the awe with which he regarded his co-authors to speak during meetings. Later in the review process, Francesca shared a similar feeling of, despite having recently edited a book on CAPs (Cavallerio, 2022), at first being unsure about how much to contribute to conversations.

Nevertheless, while Ross, Christopher and Andrew were more senior researchers (i.e., full professors in contrast to assistant professors) they each strove to ensure that Thierry and Francesca felt that their thoughts were valued.

The collaborative nature with which the senior authors approached the review was borne out of their desire to continually learn. Ross enjoys experimenting with various forms of CAP to experience them, learn them, and be stretched. He has been blessed to work with many creative people who have educated him on the use of CAPs (e.g., creative non-fiction, ethnodrama, narrative videos), some of which has been published (e.g., Jackman et al., 2024). Christopher's desire to explore novel ways of representing ethnographic research findings has led to his collaboration on several papers featuring different forms of CAPs in recent years. Andrew has been a long-time advocate of CAPs and mentored numerous sport and exercise psychology researchers who have sought to engage with CAPs. Andrew's impact on the current manuscript extends to his prior work providing the current set of co-authors with inspiration and guidance in their own journeys to becoming creative storytellers.

Following the tenets of connoisseurship, our intellectual curiosity guided the collation of our individual insights aimed at showcasing and advancing the scholarly understanding of the "what, how, and why" of the use of CAPs in SEPP. By synthesising what has come, we hoped to better inform where this line of scholarship *could* go in the future. Working together collaboratively, we developed four broad synthesised themes to address the research aims.

Transparency and Openness

The study's design and analysis were not preregistered. However, all methods used to develop the findings and critical thoughts shared have been cited appropriately in the text. Articles included in the review have been identified in the reference list and are available via the respective journal repositories. Authors names are unblinded in the interest of being transparent and open about our connection to the findings shared.

Where Are We Now? Descriptive Results from the Scoping Review

The calls made by Sparkes (2002) and others (e.g., Denison & Markula, 2003) for scholars to engage in CAPs and expand their repertoire of representational forms appears to have been heeded by SEPP researchers. The initial uptake in CAPs from 2004 – 2013, while limited in number (i.e., five), featured a variety of different representative approaches, including the use of creative non-fiction stories (Carless & Sparkes, 2008; Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006), autoethnographies (Butryn, 2011; Dzikus et al., 2012) and a poetic representation (Sparkes & Douglas, 2007). In comparison, 2014-2023 saw a dramatic rise in the use of CAPs with 23 of the 43 articles included in the review published in the last five years (i.e., 2019-2023). Nevertheless, as we outline in the first theme of our results section, 'The Ascent of Creative Non-Fiction and Composite Stories', the increase in use of CAPs has not been followed by an increase in the diversity of CAPs used as forms of representation. The second and third theme, 'Centralising Marginalised Voices' and 'Researchers as Storytellers' respectively, delve into reasons why SEPP scholars have chosen to use CAPs to represent their findings. Finally, our descriptive overview ends with a focus on how SEPP researchers have proposed judging the quality of CAPs in SEPP literature.

The Ascent of Creative Non-Fiction and Composite Stories

The increased use of CAPs by researchers was primarily tied to an increase in creative non-fiction (CNF) and composite approaches to storytelling. CNF is a type of CAP that makes it clear to readers the stories constructed by the researcher are based on 'real' events and people and that the researcher was 'there' in the action as a participant observer in the field or has generated data by other methods in a systematic way. A CNF story is therefore deeply committed to the 'truth' but uses many of the techniques (e.g., characters, dialogue) of fiction for its emotional vibrancy and compelling qualities manner (see Sparkes 2002a, 2002b; Smith et al., 2015 for further detail). CNF was the dominant form of representation

used (i.e., 79%) by authors in the reviewed articles. The primary rationale for using CNF was to allow for a shift in the agency of the voices featured in research from researchers to those they considered to be participants (e.g., Carless et al., 2014). Most authors attempted to preserve participants' voices by reorganising and fitting together direct quotes as much as possible, while also trying to creatively develop a compelling story, in line with the 'show rather than tell' mantra characterising this approach (e.g., Schinke et al., 2016a, 2016b).

The main way authors have chosen to engage with CNF (i.e., 70%) was through composite approaches to represent findings. Composite approaches to CNF storytelling generally involve the amalgamation of quotations from the interview transcripts of multiple participants to show a finding from the analysis in a creative manner. Authors have used a variety of composite storytelling methods such as composite vignettes (e.g., Ely & Ronkainen, 2021; Cartigny et al., 2021; Schinke et al., 2017), composite narratives (e.g., Seguin & Culver, 2022) or the use of composite characters (Giffin et al., 2023; Middleton et al., 2020, 2021, 2022). The construction of some composite accounts was done to provide a 'truthful' representation of the findings developed through interviews and analysis (e.g., Devaney et al., 2022; Ely & Ronkainen, 2021). Alternatively, some authors chose to craft composite accounts following the rationale that the creation of a composite fictional character enhanced the naturalistic generalizability (see Smith, 2018) of findings (e.g., Book et al., 2021). Further, some authors developed multiple characters in storytelling formats such as polyphonic (i.e., multivoiced) vignettes to avoid presenting a 'singular truth' (e.g., Middleton et al., 2021, 2022). Composite storytelling approaches were also used to protect participants anonymity and confidentiality through amalgamating their stories (e.g., Book et al., 2021).

Centralising Marginalised Voices

Protecting participants anonymity and confidentiality was important to many scholars who engaged with individuals from what they described as marginalised backgrounds (Book

et al., 2021) and/or individuals whose stories were underrepresented in SEPP literature (Ivarsson et al., 2019). For example, authors of the reviewed articles recruited participants from (forced) migrant backgrounds (e.g., Giffin et al., 2023; Middleton et al., 2020; Schinke et al., 2016a, 2016b), individuals with a physical disability (e.g., Carless et al., 2014; Irish et al., 2018; Javorina et al., 2020), and individuals struggling with their mental health (e.g., Hallward et al., 2023; McLoughlin et al., 2023; Peacock et al., 2018). Some researchers felt these participants, often silenced in their community and/or sporting context, would not have otherwise felt comfortable sharing their stories with an outsider if not assured of confidentiality. Other researchers aimed to provide a platform for athletes to share stories connected to "taboo and silenced issues in sport" (Douglas & Carless, 2009, p. 312). Erickson and colleagues (2016) provided an example in their work with elite athletes who had faced the consequences of competing against those who had used performance enhancing drugs.

To remain open to different perspectives on the 'reality' faced by marginalised individuals engaged in SEPP contexts researchers philosophically underpinned their work in ontological and epistemological standpoints that valued either the subjective or intersubjective construction of knowledge and allowed for new ways of thinking and/or doing to be developed. For some researchers this meant underpinning their work ontologically in critical realism and epistemologically in social constructivism (e.g., Ely & Ronkainen 2019; Giffin et al., 2023), while for others it meant assuming a relativist ontological and social constructionist position (e.g., Irish et al., 2018; Middleton et al. 2022). Interestingly, for many researchers the centralisation of marginalised voices was primarily focused on during the data collection phase. For some researchers, this may have been due to an acknowledged lack of understanding and awareness of the stories which would be shared by participants (e.g., Duncan et al., 2018; Middleton et al., 2021, 2022). To remain open to different stories, researchers used a variety of data collection methods which were philosophically aligned,

fostered the development of rich data on the part of those sharing their stories and aimed to shift control of which stories were shared to the participants. For some, this meant the use of multiple data collection methods (e.g., observation, field notes, interviews; Darpatova-Hruzewicz & Book, 2021) and for others it meant the use of novel methods such as arts-based interviews in which participants were asked to draw a picture to answer a single question to help them visualise and control the story they wished to share (e.g., Middleton et al., 2021). Rarer was the recognition of participants ability to contribute to the co-writing of stories to be shared as research findings (e.g., Carless et al., 2014).

Researchers as Storytellers

The acknowledgement of researcher(s) positions as storyteller(s) also featured prominently in the reviewed papers. Some authors embraced the storyteller position as central to their research process and recognised the story as the site and focus of the analysis process (e.g., DeLisio et al., 2021; Li et al., 2023; Uphill & Hemmings, 2017). Alternatively, many scholars first engaged with interview data as story analysts by using analytical procedures, strategies, and techniques to abstractly scrutinize, explain, and think about certain features in the stories shared by participants (Sparkes, 2002). Thematic (e.g., Hings et al., 2018; Lassman et al., 2022), thematic narrative (e.g., Chroni et al., 2021) and narrative (e.g., Beggan, 2023; Collard & Marlow, 2016) forms of analysis were especially popular for authors who used a form of CNF as the final representation of their analysis.

On a different note, for some researchers, embracing a storyteller position meant telling their own story through an autoethnographic approach (e.g., Cooper et al., 2020; Irish et al., 2018). Autoethnography is a form of CAP that focuses on “writing about the personal and its relationship to culture” (Ellis, 2004, p. 37). Authors of the reviewed articles used a variety of autoethnographic approaches. *Analytical autoethnographies* (e.g., Cooper et al., 2020; Gould et al., 2023) aligned with the more traditional view of social science, taking

representation back into the control of reason and analysis (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). On the other hand, *evocative autoethnographies* (e.g., Butryn, 2009; Irish et al., 2018) invited readers into the author's world, including both emotional and sensory experiences, allowing them to think and feel with the story portrayed (Ellis, 2004; Bochner & Ellis, 2016). The personal stories provided focus on aspects related to social justice and inclusivity in sport (e.g., whiteness, Butryn, 2009; deafness, Irish et al., 2018) or concepts related to SEPP literature (e.g., mental toughness, Cooper et al., 2020; positive youth development, Preston & Fraser-Thomas, 2018) and by adopting an autoethnographic approach aimed to use real life examples to bring the topics to life. All the papers examined except one (i.e., Butryn, 2009) focused on one author's story but were written by a group of authors, where the other authors acted as critical friends to help make sense of experiences (and Butryn's work includes a reflective discussion with a trusted colleague). These "team members" are recognised in different ways across the papers, with some being briefly acknowledged in terms of their critical friends' role (e.g., Copper et al., 2020), and others becoming part of the final reflective section following the personal narratives (e.g., Irish et al., 2018).

Judging the Quality of CAPs

Writing *is* a craft and so invariably researchers also proposed guidelines to determine what constitutes *good* writing. Authors of the included articles stated considerations for the judging the quality of their results as primarily including a desire for credibility, authenticity, meaningfulness in terms of contribution or coherence. Some researchers used pre-established criteria (e.g., Ivarsson et al., 2019); however, much of the reviewed work was guided by a relativist non-foundational approach, in which criteria were not considered to be universal, but rather where quality judgements are guided by a list of characterising traits that are time- and place-bound (e.g., Crocker et al., 2021). Researchers, in some of the reviewed papers, provided great detail in outlining their position on how their readers should judge the quality

of the work, with this nuanced by the authors, their topic, and their intended audience. To this end, researchers often described a desire for the reader to judge the work according to its expression of reality, generativity and impact, aesthetic merit, evocation and illumination, or vividness (see, e.g., Carless et al., 2014). The development of an evocative account was viewed as facilitating the opportunity for readers to connect with the story at a deeper level and develop a vicarious understanding of another's life (e.g., Schinke et al., 2017). While there was little evidence of *substantial* adaptation for intended audiences (e.g., adapting for reading age, educational or demographic background), there is growing evidence that authors' hopes for authenticity and reality is being reflected in their style and craft (see Book et al., 2021; Irish et al., 2018; Carless et al., 2014).

Critical Thoughts

The final aim of many scoping reviews is the identification of gaps in the reviewed literature (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) and this is the direction our critical conversations invariably turned to: from being focused on appreciating the increased use of storytelling in SEPP research, to acknowledging there remains much terrain left untouched. Arksey and O'Malley (2005) described this phase of the scoping review as an opportunity to engage in consultation with practitioners and/or consumers of the work. We altered their suggestion to consult with each other and use our own collective experiences and expertise to inform the critical thoughts shared here. We felt comfortable doing so as the composition of our group was specifically designed with this opportunity in mind, and it aligned with the connoisseurship position we adopted for the review.

The following section presents a series of critical questions we raised amongst ourselves as we moved through the review and writing process. Aligned with our social constructionist stance, the thoughts we have in relation to each question are not meant to be taken as established truths but rather as connected to our inter-subjectively developed beliefs

of how SEPP researchers can continue to develop novel forms of CAPs (Gergen, 2016). Similar to Richardson (2000b), we believe diverse storytelling practices alleviate the sense of boredom a reader might feel when reading multiple versions of the same story. Further, we collectively believe in viewing participants as being able to play a role in the writing of the stories we share (albeit, perhaps in different ways). Finally, we are also shaped by the broadening of our conversation to include the journal reviewers' insights. A question raised about the seemingly lack of creating emotive accounts on the part of researchers pushed us to further consider why SEPP researchers have chosen and may choose to engage with creative forms of representation. As such, we encourage researchers to consider our critical thoughts as starting points for further discussion for how they may use CAPs to (re-)present their research findings and to keep them in mind as they develop their research methodology.

Is there a hesitancy to push the boundaries?

Many researchers are enculturated within a Western academic culture that remains dominated by (post-)positivistic research approaches and so may feel more comfortable making their work fit the existing rules (see Ellis, 2004). Such pressures are accentuated within the neoliberal university that is permeated by an audit culture. This culture involves the quantification and evaluation of academic work along with an increasing dependence on quantitative measures to define and assess academic productivity and efficiency as well as the reputation of individuals, disciplines and institutions (Sparkes, 2013, 2021; Spooner, 2018). Here, scholars are transformed into auditable entities who must organize themselves as a response to targets, indicators, and evaluations and to focus their energies on 'what counts.' Given that 'what counts' and, most importantly, what gets published is more likely when traditional forms of representation are used, then risk taking with CAPs is often discouraged. This sentiment seems to be matched in conversations we have had with peers and from our experiences as journal reviewers in which researchers, although curious about using CAP in

their work, have sought reassurance on how to "do" CAP credibly in order to increase the chances of publication. This may be one reason why CNF and composite storytelling approaches appear to have become dominant forms of representation methods in our field. However, aligned with our philosophical stance and desire to envision what could be, we would urge researchers to embrace the rich variety and opportunity CAPs offer.

To this end, we encourage authors to consider the audience they are writing for. Calls for researchers to disseminate their research findings beyond the walls of academia have continued growing in recent years (for a recent example see the International Society of Sport Psychology position stand: scientist practitioners; Schinke et al., 2024). This means that academics have been pushed to explore – and embrace – ways of representing research findings that could "speak" to diverse audiences, to share knowledge more widely (Dierckx et al., 2023). One way of doing so is by exploring different cultural approaches to storytelling. For example, Archibald and colleagues (2019) provide seven principles (i.e., respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy) which form a framework for Indigenous storytelling. One way they embrace their own storytelling is by using traditional Indigenous stories to culturally contextualize the lessons they wish to share. 'Coyote's story: Searching for the Bone Needle', an Indigenous story about a trickster who goes around in circles looking for a lost item (Archibald et al., p. 2-3), is an example of a story used to show the development of Indigenous research methodologies in a creative and culturally relevant manner. Writing stories our intended audiences can relate to can foster a sense of naturalistic generalizability in which readers connect the stories to their own lives thereby making them more meaningful and credible (Archibald et al., 2019, Smith, 2018).

Why choose to engage with CAPs as a form of representation?

The audience researchers aim to reach could also help provide the reason why they may choose a creative form of representation. To be clear, traditional forms of representation

are ideal for research which is “best supported by quick, to-the-point “evidence” of shared ideas, experiences, essences, or transformations” (Berbary, 2019, p. 153). As Sparkes (2002) and Sparkes and Smith (2014) pointed out, when skilfully constructed, a realist tale can connect theory to data in a way that creates spaces for peoples’ voices to be heard, with specific points in mind that provide compelling, detailed, and complex depictions of the psychological and social world. However, as described by authors of the reviewed articles, there are many reasons why one might choose to engage with CAPs, including to ‘show rather than tell’ a story or shift agency of the voice(s) featured in research findings.

One reason for choosing a creative form of representation is to engage with the writing process in an embodied manner and produce evocative representations that engender embodied reactions in those who read the story (McMahon & McGannon, 2016; Richardson, 2000). While many authors of the reviewed papers listed the development of an evocative story to engender verisimilitude as a criterion for judging the quality of their work, this was an aim for few beyond those authoring evocative autoethnographies. Evoking an embodied feeling in those who engage with one’s work can lead to a deeper connection and different understanding of the complex stories being shared (Richardson, 2000). Andrew provided an example of how stories may be used in an impactful way in an education setting with his account of using an ethnographic fictive piece about the ‘Absent Other’ to assist university students with exploring complex issues (Sparkes, 1997). The authenticity and emotive force of the story, as commented on by reviewers with similar life stories to that of the character in the story, provided students with the impetus to engage in “stimulating, insightful, at times emotionally tense debate” (Sparkes, 1997, p. 34) that may not have otherwise occurred.

Sparking discussion and creating space for engagement with complex issues is one way that stories in which CAPs can generate impact beyond the research process. Creative forms of representation also provide an opportunity to engage with readers in a mutual

relationship of exploring possibilities for working together to solve future problems (Gergen & Gergen, 2002). For Archibald and colleagues (2019), the use of Indigenous stories as metaphors to help in portraying complex findings can spark an idea for story readers. The 'fire' lit by this spark may then provide the light and courage needed for storyteller and reader to problem solve and take courageous action together. As McMahon (2016) writes, the potential herein lies for CAPs to do much more than reveal 'what is' by moving people to begin thinking and discussing the potential for 'what could be'.

Who Are We Writing Our Stories With?

The writing of creative and evocative stories likely entails replacing "Occam with Fitzgerald or Hemmingway" as inspirations when developing professional writing skills (Gergen, 2016, p. 14). Moving from simple and direct writing to using imagery and metaphors to imply meaning beyond the written text can be a difficult process for researchers who have spent many hours, days, years being taught and mentored to write one way. Thus far, researchers looking to become creative storytellers have focused on 'stretching' their skillsets to enable them to become more 'multiskilled' by drawing on their own experiential knowledge and imaginations to craft their tales and working collaboratively with their co-authors who act as critical friends to each other by posing challenging questions (Cavallerio, 2022). As a result, authors have sought to stretch *themselves* rather than invite collaboration from experts in other fields and those with lived experience and experiential knowledge to meaningfully influence the research (i.e., beyond a tokenistic consultation or opportunity for feedback). There was no mention in the reviewed papers of forging new collaborations and networks to co-construct their representations with creative writers, poets, and/or actors to respect and learn from their expertise. Yet, recognising and accounting for different forms of knowledge (e.g., scientific knowledge, craft knowledge, experiential knowledge) and ensuring these are respected, valued, and blended can contribute to a deeper understanding of

the complex issues focused on by authors of the reviewed articles (Moran, 2002). Examples beyond SEPP that have sought collaboration from the outset and centralised experiential knowledge include the award-winning short-film, *Rufus Stone*, written and produced by Kip Jones in collaboration with a professional film director, actors, and crew; an arts-based co-produced film, *Dancing Days with Young People*, created in collaboration between a researcher and teacher, a documentary film instructor, a musician, and a creative film director (Winther, 2018); and comic, *The Weight of Expectation*, written and constructed between researchers and an artist to illustrate obesity stigma (Williams & Annandale, 2018).

SEPP researchers until now have also primarily chosen to work independently rather than *with* participants. The lack of co-produced (see Smith et al., 2023) approaches to storytelling is somewhat surprising considering many authors of the reviewed papers aimed to facilitate a participant led data collection process (e.g., Ely & Ronkainen, 2019; Giffin et al., 2023) so that participants were able to "tell their story" (Book et al., 2021, p. 4). Moving forward researchers should consider how engaging in CAPs with participants may foster a reciprocal relationship in which participants self-determination is respected and valued in all aspects of the research process (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). Thierry, in collaboration with his PhD supervisor and colleagues, provided insight into how including participants during the data analysis phase can lead to shaping the focus of the story to be written (Middleton, 2022). While concerns around anonymity meant limited participant involvement in the writing process, examples were provided of participant suggested alterations to make in the writing of the final published story. Carless and colleagues' (2014) co-production of stories with two male soldiers represented the only study in which participants played an active role in the writing process. As they noted, a collaborative storytelling approach accorded participants a degree of power and provided researchers with the opportunity to witness their stories before

a broader community of academics and practitioners thereby showing they were “worthy of the attention of the scholarly community” (p. 130).

Where Could We Go?

The evidence from the scoping review suggests the use of CAPs by scholars within SEPP has increased in recent years. Importantly, this development should not be seen to have occurred at the expense of the realist tale traditionally used by qualitative researchers to represent their findings to others. Rather, the development of CAPs in SEPP is an exciting possibility for broadening representational horizons and expanding the repertoire available to scholars to communicate their findings to multiple audiences in different ways depending on purpose and context. For example, how we represent findings for or with different audiences (e.g., children, parents, coaches, performance directors) is likely to vary to ensure they are relevant and meaningful to them. As such, principled, informed, and strategic choices need to be made before engaging in various forms of CAPs. At the same time, scholars in SEPP also need to consider the skill set they bring to this task in terms of the choices they make.

Learning the skills required to craft the scientific tale favoured by quantitative researchers and the realist tale favoured by qualitative researchers takes time and effort. Leaving the safety of familiar modes of writing can, therefore, feel threatening because new skills and sensibilities are required. This is particularly so given that students within SEPP departments around the world are unlikely to have had any great exposure to the demands and rigours required in other disciplines in their university that specialise in, inter alia, poetics, creative writing, drama, or theatre production. Hence, we encourage researchers to seek guidance and support from those who have specialities beyond our own with a view to developing mutually beneficial and respectful transdisciplinary collaborations.

Stepping into unfamiliar representational territory can also feel threatening to journal editors and reviewers. For example, what constitutes a ‘good’ creative fiction or ethnodrama?

What criteria are relevant and appropriate for passing judgement on different forms of representation? Making such judgments, as noted earlier in this article requires the art of appreciation, or *connoisseurship,* as described by Eisner (1991) and advocated for by Sparkes and Smith (2014). Connoisseurship involves the ability to make fine-grained discriminations among complex and subtle qualities. Importantly, there is nothing in connoisseurship as a form of appreciation that requires our judgements about something be positive. What this requires is that we risk our own prejudices when encountering something new or unfamiliar. At a basic level this might include a reconsideration of how journal articles are expected to be structured and presented if they are to be published. For instance, the sound advice presented recently by editors from five international sport and exercise psychology journals on how to structure a paper noted that each methodological approach comes with its own writing style, or storying, in relation to the results section (Schinke et al., 2021). However, non-traditional forms of representation were minimally considered. While this is understandable given the word-limit imposed on them in producing their article (i.e., you cannot cover everything), this may, unwittingly, disadvantage and discourage experimentation with representational forms by scholars in SEPP. It might also help explain why, according to our scoping review, that creative non-fictions and the use of composite stories are dominant. In short, it might be easier to fit this form of representation into the structure suggested by Schinke and colleagues (2021) which would then make it more acceptable to journal editors and reviewers. This may be more difficult to do for other forms of representation. Either way, it might mean there needs to be greater flexibility in how journal articles are structured if CAPs in SEPPs are to develop and flourish in future years. Furthermore, journal reviewing might need to shift from being a cognitive, linear and rationale act and move towards a messy, tentative, contingent, and deeply embodied judgement of new forms of representation (Sparkes, 2020).

Finally, SEPP researchers who have engaged with CAPs have largely remained *detached* from their intended audiences; *they* have constructed the research questions, *they* have chosen the methods of data collection and analysis, *they* have selected the creative analytic practice, and *they* have decided to only disseminate their outputs to an academic audience. It might be that the next wave of research is more collaborative, with researchers working *with* rather than *on* their intended audiences (e.g., athletes, coaches, parents) from the outset of their research projects and throughout the decision making, construction, and dissemination of CAPs. Given that Richardson (2000) argued that diversifying the ways in which researchers chose to write their publications had the potential to increase the types of audiences able to understand and connect with research being conducted, we were surprised to learn from this review how few researchers shared their findings with their intended audiences, accounted for whether their CAP compelled a response from their audiences, and considered whether their CAP generated an impact with (and beyond) their audiences. The potential for audience impact has long been recognised by CAP researchers (Richardson, 2004); therefore, although our field should continue to strive to expand its genres of CAPs, the emancipatory potential of these genres has yet to be realised. To expand, it has been argued that CAPs can do much more than reveal 'what is' by moving people in spaces that open vistas of 'what could be' (McMahon, 2016). We encourage future researchers to explore and evidence the potential of CAPs to act *on*, *in*, *for*, and *with* us. In doing so, it will address Denzin's (1997) call for performative social sciences and thereby open the possibility for research to become more accessible for social action and cultural transformation.

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