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4 **Telling Tales in Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology:**
5 **The How, What and Why of Creative Analytical Practices**
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28 **Abstract**

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

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

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49 **Telling Tales in Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology:**

50 **The How, What and Why of Creative Analytical Practices**

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

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

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

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

81 Given the increased publication of qualitative research in sport, exercise and, more
82 contemporarily performance, psychology (SEPP) (see McGannon et al., 2019), we sought to
83 explore whether the hope expressed over two decades ago by Andrew Sparkes (2002) has
84 been addressed. At a first glance, there are clear signs of development as evidenced by the
85 following examples of CAPs engaged with, and presented by, scholars within SEPP:
86 confessional tales (e.g., Darpatova-Hruzewicz, 2022), autoethnography (e.g., Butryn, 2009),
87 creative non-fiction (e.g., Cavallerio et al., 2016), creative fiction (e.g., Douglas & Carless,
88 2009), polyphonic vignettes (e.g., Middleton et al., 2022), poetry (e.g., Sparkes & Douglas,
89 2007), infographics (e.g., Smith et al., 2019), narrative videos (e.g., Everard et al., 2022), art-
90 based research through drawings (Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2016) and comics (e.g., Forde,
91 2022). Concurrently, owing to the diversification of CAPs and different philosophical
92 positions adopted by researchers engaging with CAPs, there has been development in
93 proposals of how the quality of CAPs should be judged. Rather than new criteria, proposals
94 have been made to judge qualitative work using a relativist approach in which criteria used
95 are study specific, flexible and reflect development of the research over time. Doing so
96 allows researchers to move beyond pre-ordained notions of validity to produce new
97 knowledge (Burke, 2016). While such advances are encouraging, a single swallow does not a

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

107 **Methodology**

108 A scoping review was deemed appropriate due to the emergent use of CAPs and our
109 desire to map the range and identify gaps in how CAPs have been used by sport and exercise
110 psychology researchers (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005). With a desire to remain inclusive,
111 critical, and reflexive in our analysis of the available literature (Chambers et al., 2018), we
112 undertook the review from a relativist ontological and social constructionist epistemological
113 position. We approached our analysis similarly to other recent scoping reviews in SEPP (e.g.,
114 Hägglund et al., 2024) and embraced a ‘connoisseurship’ position (Eisner, 1991; McGannon
115 et al., 2019), in which we sought to appreciate and critique the diverse exemplars of CAPs
116 used by SEPP researchers. While connoisseurship has been previously characterised as a
117 position through which researchers might grasp the vast array of complex information shared
118 across SEPP (Sparkes & Smith, 2016), this approach was also well suited to scoping the
119 complex and nuanced CAPs literature in the SEPP context. Following Arksey and O’Malley’s
120 (2005) methodological framework for scoping reviews, we followed the following six stages
121 in an iterative manner: 1) identifying the research questions (see introduction); 2) identifying
122 relevant studies; 3) study selection; 4) charting the data; 5) collating, summarizing, and

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

125 **Identifying Relevant Studies and Study Selection**

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

145 **Charting the Data**

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

148 commonalities in how authors had engaged with CAPs and what form of CAPs had been
149 used by recording the philosophical foundation, data collection and analysis methods as well
150 as the form of CAP used by the author(s) of each article (see Supplementary Table 1). We
151 continued our charting process with Thierry, Ross, Francesca and Christopher separately
152 reviewing the eligible articles and noting down observations about any other relevant
153 information related to our research aims (e.g., rationale for, or reflections on, using CAPs).
154 Charting of the included articles was done with the aim of individually synthesising and
155 interpreting key themes related to the use of CAPs within SEPP (cf. Arksey & O'Malley,
156 2005).

157 **Collating, Summarising and Reporting the Results**

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

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

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

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

192 **Transparency and Openness**

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

198 **Where Are We Now? Descriptive Results from the Scoping Review**

199 The calls made by Sparkes (2002) and others (e.g., Denison & Markula, 2003) for
200 scholars to engage in CAPs and expand their repertoire of representational forms appears to
201 have been heeded by SEPP researchers. The initial uptake in CAPs from 2004 – 2013, while
202 limited in number (i.e., five), featured a variety of different representative approaches,
203 including the use of creative non-fiction stories (Carless & Sparkes, 2008; Gilbourne &
204 Richardson, 2006), autoethnographies (Butryn, 2011; Dzikus et al., 2012) and a poetic
205 representation (Sparkes & Douglas, 2007). In comparison, 2014-2023 saw a dramatic rise in
206 the use of CAPs with 23 of the 43 articles included in the review published in the last five
207 years (i.e., 2019-2023). Nevertheless, as we outline in the first theme of our results section,
208 ‘The Ascent of Creative Non-Fiction and Composite Stories’, the increase in use of CAPs has
209 not been followed by an increase in the diversity of CAPs used as forms of representation.

210 The second and third theme, ‘Centralising Marginalised Voices’ and ‘Researchers as
211 Storytellers’ respectively, delve into reasons why SEPP scholars have chosen to use CAPs to
212 represent their findings. Finally, our descriptive overview ends with a focus on how SEPP
213 researchers have proposed judging the quality of CAPs in SEPP literature.

214 **The Ascent of Creative Non-Fiction and Composite Stories**

215 The increased use of CAPs by researchers was primarily tied to an increase in creative
216 non-fiction (CNF) and composite approaches to storytelling. CNF is a type of CAP that
217 makes it clear to readers the stories constructed by the researcher are based on ‘real’ events
218 and people and that the researcher was ‘there’ in the action as a participant observer in the
219 field or has generated data by other methods in a systematic way. A CNF story is therefore
220 deeply committed to the ‘truth’ but uses many of the techniques (e.g., characters, dialogue) of
221 fiction for its emotional vibrancy and compelling qualities manner (see Sparkes 2002a,
222 2002b; Smith et al., 2015 for further detail). CNF was the dominant form of representation

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

229 The main way authors have chosen to engage with CNF (i.e., 70%) was through
230 composite approaches to represent findings. Composite approaches to CNF storytelling
231 generally involve the amalgamation of quotations from the interview transcripts of multiple
232 participants to show a finding from the analysis in a creative manner. Authors have used a
233 variety of composite storytelling methods such as composite vignettes (e.g., Ely &
234 Ronkainen, 2021; Cartigny et al., 2021; Schinke et al., 2017), composite narratives (e.g.,
235 Seguin & Culver, 2022) or the use of composite characters (Giffin et al., 2023; Middleton et
236 al., 2020, 2021, 2022). The construction of some composite accounts was done to provide a
237 'truthful' representation of the findings developed through interviews and analysis (e.g.,
238 Devaney et al., 2022; Ely & Ronkainen, 2021). Alternatively, some authors chose to craft
239 composite accounts following the rationale that the creation of a composite fictional character
240 enhanced the naturalistic generalizability (see Smith, 2018) of findings (e.g., Book et al.,
241 2021). Further, some authors developed multiple characters in storytelling formats such as
242 polyphonic (i.e., multivoiced) vignettes to avoid presenting a 'singular truth' (e.g., Middleton
243 et al., 2021, 2022). Composite storytelling approaches were also used to protect participants
244 anonymity and confidentiality through amalgamating their stories (e.g., Book et al., 2021).

245 **Centralising Marginalised Voices**

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

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

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

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

281 **Researchers as Storytellers**

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

292 On a different note, for some researchers, embracing a storyteller position meant
293 telling their own story through an autoethnographic approach (e.g., Cooper et al., 2020; Irish
294 et al., 2018). Autoethnography is a form of CAP that focuses on “writing about the personal
295 and its relationship to culture” (Ellis, 2004, p. 37). Authors of the reviewed articles used a
296 variety of autoethnographic approaches. *Analytical autoethnographies* (e.g., Cooper et al.,
297 2020; Gould et al., 2023) aligned with the more traditional view of social science, taking

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

313 **Judging the Quality of CAPs**

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

323 of the work, with this nuanced by the authors, their topic, and their intended audience. To this
324 end, researchers often described a desire for the reader to judge the work according to its
325 expression of reality, generativity and impact, aesthetic merit, evocation and illumination, or
326 vividness (see, e.g., Carless et al., 2014). The development of an evocative account was
327 viewed as facilitating the opportunity for readers to connect with the story at a deeper level
328 and develop a vicarious understanding of another's life (e.g., Schinke et al., 2017). While
329 there was little evidence of *substantial* adaptation for intended audiences (e.g., adapting for
330 reading age, educational or demographic background), there is growing evidence that authors'
331 hopes for authenticity and reality is being reflected in their style and craft (see Book et al.,
332 2021; Irish et al., 2018; Carless et al., 2014).

333 **Critical Thoughts**

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

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

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

359 **Is there a hesitancy to push the boundaries?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

406 One reason for choosing a creative form of representation is to engage with the
407 writing process in an embodied manner and produce evocative representations that engender
408 embodied reactions in those who read the story (McMahon & McGannon, 2016; Richardson,
409 2000). While many authors of the reviewed papers listed the development of an evocative
410 story to engender verisimilitude as a criterion for judging the quality of their work, this was
411 an aim for few beyond those authoring evocative autoethnographies. Evoking an embodied
412 feeling in those who engage with one’s work can lead to a deeper connection and different
413 understanding of the complex stories being shared (Richardson, 2000). **Andrew provided an
414 example of how stories may be used in an impactful way in an education setting with his
415 account of using an ethnographic fictive piece about the ‘Absent Other’ to assist university
416 students with exploring complex issues (Sparkes, 1997). The authenticity and emotive force
417 of the story, as commented on by reviewers with similar life stories to that of the character in
418 the story, provided students with the impetus to engage in “stimulating, insightful, at times
419 emotionally tense debate” (Sparkes, 1997, p. 34) that may not have otherwise occurred.**

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

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

430 **Who Are We Writing Our Stories With?**

431 The writing of creative and evocative stories likely entails replacing “Occam with
432 Fitzgerald or Hemmingway” as inspirations when developing professional writing skills
433 (Gergen, 2016, p. 14). **Moving from simple and direct writing to using imagery and**
434 **metaphors to imply meaning beyond the written text can be a difficult process for researchers**
435 **who have spent many hours, days, years being taught and mentored to write one way. Thus**
436 **far, researchers** looking to become creative storytellers have focused on ‘stretching’ their
437 skillsets to enable them to become more ‘multiskilled’ by drawing on their own experiential
438 knowledge and imaginations to craft their tales and working collaboratively with their co-
439 authors who act as critical friends to each other by posing challenging questions (Cavallerio,
440 2022). As a result, authors have sought to stretch *themselves* rather than invite collaboration
441 from experts in other fields and those with lived experience and experiential knowledge to
442 meaningfully influence the research (i.e., beyond a tokenistic consultation or opportunity for
443 feedback). There was no mention in the reviewed papers of forging new collaborations and
444 networks to co-construct their representations with creative writers, poets, and/or actors to
445 respect and learn from their expertise. Yet, recognising and accounting for different forms of
446 knowledge (e.g., scientific knowledge, craft knowledge, experiential knowledge) and
447 ensuring these are respected, valued, and blended can contribute to a deeper understanding of

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

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

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

474 **Where Could We Go?**

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

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

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

497 What criteria are relevant and appropriate for passing judgement on different forms of
498 representation? Making such judgments, as noted earlier in this article requires the art of
499 appreciation, or *connoisseurship*, as described by Eisner (1991) and advocated for by Sparkes
500 and Smith (2014). Connoisseurship involves the ability to make fine-grained discriminations
501 among complex and subtle qualities. Importantly, there is nothing in connoisseurship as a
502 form of appreciation that requires our judgements about something be positive. What this
503 requires is that we risk our own prejudices when encountering something new or unfamiliar.
504 At a basic level this might include a reconsideration of how journal articles are expected to be
505 structured and presented if they are to be published. For instance, the sound advice presented
506 recently by editors from five international sport and exercise psychology journals on how to
507 structure a paper noted that each methodological approach comes with its own writing style,
508 or storying, in relation to the results section (Schinke et al., 2021). However, non-traditional
509 forms of representation were minimally considered. While this is understandable given the
510 word-limit imposed on them in producing their article (i.e., you cannot cover everything), this
511 may, unwittingly, disadvantage and discourage experimentation with representational forms
512 by scholars in SEPP. It might also help explain why, according to our scoping review, that
513 creative non-fictions and the use of composite stories are dominant. In short, it might be
514 easier to fit this form of representation into the structure suggested by Schinke and colleagues
515 (2021) which would then make it more acceptable to journal editors and reviewers. This may
516 be more difficult to do for other forms of representation. Either way, it might mean there
517 needs to be greater flexibility in how journal articles are structured if CAPs in SEPPs are to
518 develop and flourish in future years. Furthermore, journal reviewing might need to shift from
519 being a cognitive, linear and rationale act and move towards a messy, tentative, contingent,
520 and deeply embodied judgement of new forms of representation (Sparkes, 2020).

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

542

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