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# Making the Case for Poetic Representations: An Example in Action

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As part of the emergence of new writing practices in the social sciences, qualitative researchers have begun to harness the potential of poetic representations as a means of analyzing social worlds and communicating their findings to others. To date, however, this genre has received little attention in sport psychology. The purpose of this article, therefore, is to raise awareness and generate discussion about poetic representations. First, the potential benefits of using this genre are outlined. Next, based on interview data from a study that explored the motivations of elite female golfers, the process of constructing a poetic representation about the experiences of one of the participants is described. The products of this endeavor and the reactions of various audiences to it are then presented. Finally, the issue of judging poetic representations is discussed.

In their review of a decade of research in sport psychology journals, Culver, Gilbert, and Trudel (2003) pointed out that over 80% of studies published between 1990 and 1999 were quantitative in nature. They also noted that qualitative researchers generally limited themselves to the interview method of data collection. Culver and colleagues might have added that the findings of these qualitative studies have been normally represented using the conventions of the "realist" tale, as described by Sparkes (2002). For Van Maanen (1988), one characteristic of such tales is experiential authority. This involves an almost complete absence of the author from most segments of the final text. Instead, only the words, actions, and (presumably) thoughts of the members of the studied culture are visible in the text. A second and related characteristic is the predominance of the participant's point of view. Here, extensive, closely edited quotations are used to convey to the reader that the views expressed are not those of the researcher but rather are the authentic and representative remarks transcribed straight from the mouths of the participants. The third characteristic is interpretive omnipotence. This involves connecting a cultural description to a theoretical problem of interest in the researcher's disciplinary

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community. Data are then put forward as facts marshalled in accordance with the light they might shed on the generic topic and the researcher's stand on the matter. These conventions are neither good nor bad in themselves. Sparkes (2002) commented,

> The realist conventions connect theory to data in a way that creates spaces for participant voices to be heard in a coherent context, and with specific points in mind. When well constructed, data-rich realist tales can provide compelling, detailed, and complex depictions of the social world. . . . I see no reason why realist tales should not continue to make a significant contribution to our understanding of sport and physical activity. (pp. 55–56)

Having acknowledged that the realist tale as a form of writing and method of inquiry provides a powerful way of analyzing and knowing about the social world, Sparkes (2002) emphasized that it does have limitations, and it is not the only tale that can, or should, be told by qualitative researchers. Against the backdrop of the dual crises of legitimation and representation in the social sciences, he noted that scholars in a range of disciplines have come to realize that form and content are inseparable, and how we write about a phenomenon shapes how we come to understand it. With this knowledge, there has been some experimentation with alternative forms of representation. A variety of tales are now available for use. These include confessional tales, autoethnography, poetic representations, ethnodrama, and fictional representations.

It is beyond the scope of this article to consider the potential benefits of the different genres that sport psychologists might opt for in representing their findings to others (see Sparkes, 2002). Accordingly, we focus solely on poetic representations with a view of raising awareness and generating discussion. First, the potential benefits of using this genre are outlined. Next, based on interview data from a study conducted by the primary investigator (Kitrina Douglas, 2004), who explores the motivations of 7 elite female golf professionals, the process of constructing a poetic representation of the experiences of one of the participants is described. Next, examples of these poetic representations are presented in full. The reactions of various audiences to this form of representation are then considered. Finally, we reflect on the criteria that might be used to pass judgment on our work.

## Some Potential Benefits of Poetic Representations

Poets have often focused their attention on sport, and athletes have often used poetry to express their feelings about their sport involvement. Here, the poems are intended and presented as poems per se—as poetry for its own sake. In contrast, a poetic representation is where researchers transform their data into what Glesne (1997) described as a poem-like composition, often arranging the exact words of the participant to create a meaningful representation of the participant's lived experience. The process involves word reduction while at the same time illuminating the wholeness and interconnectedness of thoughts. Here, poetry is used as a vehicle to present the data and the findings of a study to an audience. Such a tactic, according to Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997), can help researchers rethink the data and work on additional ways of highlighting them. Likewise, for

Richardson (2000), "settling words together in new configurations lets us see, and *feel* the world in new dimensions. Poetry is thus a *practical* and *powerful* method for analyzing social worlds" (p. 933).

The use of poetic representations in the domain of sport and physical activity has been limited (e.g., see Sparkes, Nilges, Swan, & Dowling, 2003; Swan, 1999). In other disciplines, however, qualitative researchers have both advocated and harnessed the potential of poetic representations as a means of analyzing social worlds and generating different ways of knowing about these worlds and their place in them (e.g., see Cahnmann, 2003; Glesne, 1997; Hill, 2005; Kendell & Murray, 2005; MacNeil, 2000; Poindexter, 2002; Richardson, 2000, 2002). In giving their reasons for choosing this genre, these scholars have claimed a number of benefits.

One benefit, according to Kendall and Murray (2005) and Richardson (2000, 2002), relates to the issue of accuracy. Here, the claim is that writing interviews as poems allows the speaker's pauses, repetitions, alliterations, narrative strategies, rhythms, and so on to be honored and, therefore, might actually be a better way of representing the speaker than the normal practice of quoting in prose snippets. Linked to this is the issue of honesty. As Glesne (1997) and Richardson (2000) pointed out, the orchestrations and constructions of the researcher as author are normally glossed over when interview data are presented in realist tales. In contrast, they argue, transforming data into poetry actually displays the role of the prose trope in constituting knowledge, and it is a continual reminder to the reader or listener that the text has been artfully constructed.

Another important benefit claimed by Brady (2005), Kendall and Murray (2005), Poindexter (2002), Richardson (2002), and Sparkes et al. (2003) relates to the power of poetic representations to create evocative and open-ended connections to the data for the researcher, reader, and listener. Given their ability to touch both the cognitive and the sensory in the reader and the listener, poetic representations can touch us where we live, in our bodies. This gives them more of a chance than realist tales to communicate core narratives and evoke the emotional dimensions of experience with an economy of words. In this regard, reading and listening are not passive processes. Kendall and Murray (2005) pointed out that when interviews are transformed into poetic representations, people respond differently to them because they are conditioned to respond differently to poetry than to prose. They stated,

> When presented as a poem, people may approach them more slowly, expecting to hear them in their heads and being more alert to their patterns of sound, image, and ideas and more willing to engage emotionally with what is being said. (p. 746)

Therefore, when the dynamics of the reading or listening process are changed, the potential arises to elicit different responses.

According to Glesne (1997), Poindexter (2002), Richardson, (2000, 2002), and Sparkes et al. (2003), by engaging the emotions and touching us in and through our bodies, poetic representations can provide the researcher, reader, and listener with a different and compelling lens through which to view the same scenery and, thereby, understand the data and themselves in alternative and more complex ways. Thus, Swan (1999) chose a poetic representation to allow both him and the reader to see the familiar site of the locker room in new ways. He also argued that the use

of this genre allows readers greater interpretive freedom to make their own sense of the events and the people focused on so that they are better able to transfer this understanding to their own lives. Swan stated,

> I have tried to use forms of verse that allow the reader to feel the emotional context of the data and to produce a story. . . . There is no plot in this poem, as in narrative, yet voice is given to the reader to make sense, to feel and to rupture the tranquility of assumed relationships. (p. 46)

In a similar fashion, Sparkes et al. (2003) argued that the poetic representations they present are designed to stimulate and encourage multiple interpretations by evoking a range of responses in readers who might be differently positioned toward the text. Readers are invited to make their own conclusions and are not filtered toward a researcher-dominated interpretation and ending as they are in a realist tale.

Given the volume of data generated by interviews, another benefit of poetic representations, according to Sparkes et al. (2003), is their ability to communicate the findings of a study in an economic and condensed form that encapsulates the essence of events and experiences. As Glesne (1997) noted, instead of piecing together aspects of a person's story into a chronological, representational puzzle (with pieces missing), poetic transcription encourages the writer to search for the "essence conveyed, the hues, the textures, and then drawing from all the portions of the interviews to juxtapose details into a somewhat abstract re-presentation. Somewhat like a photographer, who lets us know a person in a different way" (p. 206). The reader, therefore, comes to know the life of another with the minimum of words.

For example, Woods (1999) interviewed a teacher about her experience with a government inspection of her school and then created a poetic representation called *Ofsted Blues*. It is 25 lines in length and uses the teacher's own words in an attempt to present the essence of her response in a way that creates a vivid, immediate, emotional experience for the reader to integrate the sociological and the poetic at the professional, political, and personal levels. Woods acknowledged that this poem would not make the 20th-century book of verse. He stated that he found it to be a useful way of getting key points about this teacher's experiences on an overhead projector during presentations and emphasizing the prominent features of the experience in one display. In neither case would it have been possible to present the teacher's original unedited utterance, which ran several pages: "The constraint here is not just one of the publisher's restrictions on word count, though that is a serious consideration; but also one of judging how best to get the teachers feelings over to readers or audience" (Woods, p. 59).

Finally, given the ability of poetic representations to communicate the findings of a study or the key moments in an individual life in a condensed form with an economy of words and a paring down of contextual detail, they are better able to maintain the anonymity of the participants than the standard realist tale that relies on "thick description." This is likely to be an important benefit when the lives of high-level and well-known sports persons are explored and the findings presented for public consumption.

## Constructing a Poetic Representation

Given the potential benefits of poetic representations, we opted to use this genre to communicate the findings of one participant involved in a larger interview-based study that explored the multiple meanings of motivation over time for a group of 7 elite female golf professionals. Leanne (a pseudonym) was one of the golfers interviewed by Kitrina Douglas (herself a former elite golfer). As a young amateur golfer, Leanne rose through the rankings rapidly to achieve success at the international level. This success continued when she joined the professional ranks. Despite all this success, however, Leanne did not enjoy her involvement in golf and retired prematurely from the game. As such, hers was an example of an atypical career trajectory when compared with the other 6 participants in the study.

The data generated from the interviews with the other 6 participants were presented by Douglas (2004) in the traditional realist format as described by Sparkes (2002). In Leanne's case, however, the decision was made to present the data in the form of a poetic representation for the following reasons. First, there was the pragmatic issue of maintaining anonymity given her revelations of "throwing games." Beyond this issue, however, Leanne's willingness to share highly poignant and emotional moments during the interviews set her apart from the other participants. This was particularly so with regard to the rich language she used to describe such moments and other issues in her life.

Furthermore, once these interviews had been transcribed verbatim, in the first reading strong narrative threads and epiphanous moments stood out and demanded attention. Linked to this was the way in which Leanne mentioned specific events and then returned to them at various points in the interview in such a way as to give the text a poetic feel. Finally, the rhythm and timing of her phrasing, in combination with the other features mentioned earlier, suggested that the transcript was more malleable to an alternative representation style than the transcripts generated by the other participants in the study. This was confirmed when the poetic rhythms in Leanne's speech were further highlighted as the interview transcripts were coded and then subjected to a content analysis in order to identify key themes and categories. In this regard, as Richardson (2002) pointed out, "When the goal of poetic representation is to re-present significant moments in lived experience, such as something epiphanous, the short poem and especially a sequence of short poems with an implied narrative works well" (p. 880).

With regard to the procedures for constructing a poetic representation, we need to recognize that this is a creative, emergent, and changing process. Therefore, Richardson (2002) suggested that it is not possible or desirable to provide a complete or definitive list of how tos and not tos. She does, however, share some recommendations and practices that she and others have found useful in constructing poetic representations from interviews and interview experiences. One of these is summarized by Richardson as follows:

> Following social research protocol, I used only Louisa May's [her participant] words, tone, and diction, but relied upon poetic devices such as repetition, off-rhyme, sounds, meter, and pauses to convey her narrative. The speech style is Louisa May's, the words are hers, but the poetic representation, including

> the ordering of the material, are my own. . . . I have taken liberties with the placement of the words, but not with Louisa May's language or her sense-making process. (p. 883)

Such practices have informed the work of several scholars in their production of poetic representations (e.g., see Glesne, 1997; Kendall & Murray, 2005; MacNeil, 2000). Similarly, these practices informed the transformation of Leanne's interview data of 35 pages into a poetic representation. That is, only her words, and, where possible, in the order in which they are spoken, are used to give a sense of the narrative flow of her speech and convey some of the meanings she attached to specific events. In order to maintain anonymity, however, place names, dates, and certain colloquialisms had to be changed. As part of this process of transformation, similar to Kendall and Murray (2005), Poindexter (2002), and Sparkes et al. (2003), Kitrina repeatedly listened to the tape recording of the interviews in order to select the parts identified by established narrative markers (e.g., "What happened was"). During these multiple listenings she also paid careful attention to the stresses and accents Leanne placed on certain words and phrases. Gradually, as she listened to the tapes alongside the transcript, Kitrina sensed how the phrases and lines fell into grouped stanzas, or verses, that focused on important themes and events in Leanne's life. Furthermore, similar to Poindexter (2002), Kitrina searched for unambiguous phrases, strong statements, eloquent expressions, wording that appealed to her, and portions of the narrative that she felt strongly captured Leanne as she had come to know her through the study. This was particularly so when these phrases expressed the feelings and emotions of certain moments in her life and golfing career.

Particular attention was given to Leanne's repetitions and how these formed key themes in her story. For example, Leanne continually returned to the powerful influence of her father, who motivated her to take up golf and succeed in this sport. Likewise, she returned to the intense feelings of pressure she felt when others expected her to always win and expressed how this fuelled a fear of losing in finals that led her to throw some games. The contradictions and unhappiness that Leanne experienced in playing golf tours, along with her gradual realization that she could make her own decisions and retire prematurely if she wanted to, were also recurrent themes in the interviews. Given the importance of these key themes in Leanne's life, each was used as a framing device for the construction of a poetic representation.

To provide some insights into this process, the following are extracts from pages 1 and 2 and 4–6 of a 35-page interview transcript with Leanne. The words that are underlined are some of those used in the poem titled "My Dad."

(From pages 1 and 2)

**Researcher:** Can you tell me how you started to play golf, how you came into the game, can you remember?

**Leanne:** Yes well my Dad was a keen golfer and it seemed the most natural thing to do. My Dad was out playing golf and I wanted to do what Dad did. So I got a [identifying colloquialism] club cut down. I would have been about four.

I remember starting, I remember being chuffed to bits managing to play three holes, then six holes then nine holes and just gradually got up to standard.

**Researcher:** Do you remember anything that you liked or disliked about it at that age?

**Leanne:** No I disliked hitting bad shots big time and in teaching kids I notice that they have this thing that a couple of weak shots they expect all shots to be good. I was like that. And that is not the case. But no I had a wicked temper, My Dad was always sending me home.

**Researcher:** Really?

**Leanne:** Yes, that's what I hated about it. I couldn't accept bad shots.

**Researcher:** What did it do to you? Why didn't you like playing bad shots?

**Leanne:** I would get really angry with myself because it wasn't, you know, I hadn't performed. I hadn't done the right thing and on many occasions, not that many, but on a few a couple of occasions on a couple of occasions I broke clubs, particularly putters.

**Researcher:** Yes. Do you remember what you liked about it?

**Leanne:** I liked being with my Dad. I liked that thrill of just hitting a ball.

**Researcher:** What is that thrill?

**Leanne:** It is hard to explain. You get . . . it's just such a such a sense of achievement. The way the ball feels on your club face. You know how good it feels on your hand and the end result. That sort of thing. It is difficult to describe. It is such a great feeling. You know and I think because you want that feeling all the time and if you don't it tends to do reversal like this love hate. You know, when you are playing well you just love the game and when you are playing badly it is like the end of the world.

**Researcher:** Yeah.

**Leanne:** Kill somebody or do something. That's how I felt.

**Researcher:** Can you tell me sort of how you then progressed through golf?

**Leanne:** Right, well first there was the British Girls Championship was being held at The [name] golf club.

**Researcher:** How old were you at that time?

**Leanne:** 10 so it was [date removed]. And a lady at the [name] club says to my Dad she must have had an LGU calendar or something because she says to my Dad that would be an ideal opportunity for [name removed] to see if she likes playing competitions and I had just got my handicap so . . . in those days there didn't need to be a handicap there wasn't a handicap restriction and it was straight match play. So I went down and played and didn't like it.

(From pages 4–6)

**Researcher:** Your family expected you to play golf?

**Leanne:** I think my father. My father . . . but you see having said that I think our family, [pause] the family were very close but we don't really talk and I was always under the impression that they wanted me to play golf. And it's far from the truth, I mean as long as I was happy, they were happy. But at the time, I played for my Dad. I played my heart out for my Dad. It's for him.

**Researcher:** So you had a really close relationship?

**Leanne:** Dad and I were really close. Similar to your Dad, I would have said, there was a bond but it doesn't mean to say that you loved your mother less or even your father less it's just that you bonded more with him.

**Researcher:** So, if you were playing for him, did that carry out all the way through your professional golf—were you playing for him?

**Leanne:** Yes, yes.

**Researcher:** So then when he died what happened then?

**Leanne:** Well . . . for a short while, you know, I completely lost the plot for a short while . . . as you know. But no I just felt all of a sudden I couldn't, I couldn't, just do it for me. I had never done it for me. . . . Emotionally I had had enough. And, you know, my great friend [name] and when my Dad dies he was great. I told him how I was feeling and I just hated being on the golf course. . . . I just didn't want to be on the golf course at the end of the day.

**Researcher:** So the huge drive for all of your golf career was for your father.

**Leanne:** Yeah.

**Researcher:** What did he give you back in return for you playing golf?

**Leanne:** I think it was just nothing other than the fact that I had pleased him and his pleasure was my enough for me.

**Researcher:** He made you feel good because he was happy?

**Leanne:** But he wasn't the sort of guy who, you know, I got a hand shake and a [colloquialism] pat on the back "well done [colloquialism similar to darling]," and that was me winning the national title "well done [name]." That's what I got, a pat on the back. And I could tell he was proud . . . that made me feel good.

The poem "My Dad" will now be presented in full. This will be followed by three other poems that were constructed in a similar fashion from different parts of the interview transcript with Leanne.

**My Dad**

Dad was a keen golfer
Seemed the natural thing to do
My Dad was out playing golf
And that's what I wanted to do

I got a little club cut down.
I would have been 'bout four
I remember being chuffed to bits
Playing 3 holes 6 then 9

I disliked hitting bad shots
Expected all to be good
I had a wicked temper,
So my Dad—he sent me home.

I liked being with my Dad
I liked that thrill of hitting
A sense of achievement
Feeling the ball on your club

First there were the Girls events
I was 10 or so
Lady says to my Dad
She must have a go

An opportunity to try
To play in competitions
I'd just got my handicap
Played, but didn't like it

At the time I played for Dad
Played my heart out for my Dad
It was for him, we were really close
Doesn't mean I didn't love mother

My Dad died in '96
Yet, I couldn't, I couldn't
I couldn't play, for my self
I played, but didn't like it

For a short while there I lost the plot
For a short while—as you know.
Just felt—couldn't do it for me
I had never done it for me

Golf for me was my Dad's pleasure
His pleasure was enough
Hand shake—pat on the back 'well done'
That was me winning—That's what I got

**The Pressure**

I don't think I've ever told
This story to anyone
But since this isn't me
This is anonymous; I threw a few games.

In the world team
Playing in Bangkok in the semi-finals
I stood on the 16th one up,
But I didn't want to be there.

There's better things to do than being on a golf course
I am in this wonderful place, for goodness sake
And I thought oooh now
have you ever
Now you've probably never done this

But do you know it is actually
more difficult
To deliberately hit a bad shot
Without making it look—as if you've hit a bad shot

I thought 'I'll hit it in the trees'
I hit it in—it came back out!
Eventually on 18th all square, had a 10 ft putt to halve
I thought that—I'll just try, you know
Just
hit it too hard

I deliberately lipped out, the relief was fantastic
I knew, I just don't know
Just the pressure, just didn't want it any more
And that was when I was 18, didn't want the pressure.

The pressure of winning, I played in a lot of finals
I never lost, it was the more I play and win
I am going to lose one and then
devastated
Rather lose in the first round, than get to the final and lose.
I don't know, I think because I never lost
I never wanted to lose.
Yeah,
I think
I wanted to be happy.

**Playing the Tour**

I had always imagined me to be a professional golfer
Wanted a fairy godmother to cast a spell,
be successful
I didn't want to do hard work

I can't remember ever, not being able to play golf
But then again golf was natural to me
Being able, not necessarily wanting to, expected to
Yes

Our family were very close, but we don't really talk
I always thought they wanted me to play
Things got harder
weaker
giving up
had enough

A great friend told him how I felt, hated being on the golf course
He insisted there was the person and the golfer
Take the golfer with you
he said

And so that worked for two years—Golf became my business
Okay I might not want to be here, but this is now a living,
That only lasted a while you know. I just didn't want to be there

**Coming To My Senses**

I think we are all actresses
I think you have to be
It is a big stage
You go on to perform

Playing the part?
I mean—you don't want to be there
You've got to play the part
That's what it felt like

Then it starts to beat you
Then you're thrown away
And then I thought
I am an adult
I don't have to do this

I don't have anybody
To answer to any more
You know
I can stop

## Reactions to the Poetic Representations

Given the claims made earlier in this article about the potential benefits of using poetic representations, it is important to consider how various audiences have reacted to their use. With regard to Leanne's reactions to the poetic representations of her life and motivations for playing golf, the following excerpt from Kitrina's field notes describes her initial reaction.

> [I am about to drive home from Cornwall, but I wait because I have a prearranged phone call with Leanne.] She answers the phone chirpily. I explain about my reasons for telephoning, I explain a little about how the study is progressing and remind her about the background to the study—the lack of opportunity for women in sport—that in the modern Olympics it was suggested women should be there to place the garland around the necks of men, I talked about Victorian doctors warning women if they went for a run their wombs would fall out—Leanne interrupted "mine would" she said "and I'm sure I saw yours in Spain once." It was proving difficult to have a serious conversation—we laughed a lot.
>
> I told her she has a pseudonym "that's great" she replied "a two syllable name, I always wanted that." Finally I began to talk about her case study and the poems. At this point I tentatively asked her if I could read one. She agreed and so I chose the shortest! At the end of the reading there was a pause—I wondered what she was thinking and was fearing the worst. She then said "I don't know what to say—that is exactly how I felt—that's *incredible*." Her positive reaction gave me the confidence to read another and another. Each one receiving full support for "capturing her."
>
> We chatted about her golf for another hour. "No one ever asked how I was" she said, "it was all about my golf, how did you score, where did you finish—no one ever asked how I was." Leanne encouraged me greatly about my study. And I did need it. She wanted to read the poems again for herself.
>
> *Field notes 8pm. Sunday 1st June 2003*

The poems were then sent to Leanne to read at her leisure. At a follow-up interview a month later her reaction was "gosh, did I really say that?" At this interview, Leanne stated that when she first read the poems she was concerned that she might be identified by them and was worried about the implications of her revealing that she had thrown a tournament. She stated, "When I read the poems my first thought was 'Could anyone recognize me from the poems?' Then I thought, no they probably

couldn't be sure and then, you know, now I don't care if anyone recognizes me." Later in the interview Leanne confirmed that she "didn't care" if she was identified as the golfer in the poems. On reflection and in discussion with Kitrina, Leanne acknowledged that given the nature and form of the poetic representation, it would be extremely unlikely that anyone could identify her and, indeed, that this was one of the benefits of using this genre in relation to her experiences.

Leanne then proceeded to describe her experience of reading through the poems and the emotions this evoked in her. For her, it was a difficult but enlightening process. It was important that she recognized herself in the poems and felt that the person in them was the essence of her. At the same time she recognized herself, however, she also became aware of things she had not seen before in her life, and this generated emotions that she had not anticipated. Leanne commented,

> It captured me and how I felt. Reading "My Dad" was difficult, I realized I hadn't come to terms with his death, I hadn't realized how hard it has been and didn't realize what a hard time I have been having [pause]. That line, "doesn't mean I didn't love mother" [pause], it really hit me [pause]. It highlighted problems I am still having and why I still get upset and annoyed at things. Reading that was like getting to the root cause [pause] it was like looking in the mirror for the first time. . . . I had hidden myself from myself and now I am beginning to understand things.

According to Leanne, reading the poems was a catalyst to her reflecting on problems in her life that were related to her experiences in golf. They illuminated issues that caused her emotional pain but did so in a way that enabled her to address the key issues involved with greater confidence. As she stated, "I had hidden myself from myself and now I am beginning to understand things." Having reflected on the poems, Leanne also reported feeling stronger and more able to deal with her experiences in an open manner. As she commented, "That's me—that's ugly, now what can I do to make it better?" In this regard the poetic representations appear to have met the criterion of catalytic validity that, according to Lather (1986), refers to the degree to which the research process reorientates, focuses, and energizes participants to see their situation differently and act on this new knowledge. They also seem to have met the related criteria of ontological and educative authenticity as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (2000) in which the level of awareness of the research participant is raised in relation to a specific issue. The poetic representations also appear to have met Lincoln and Guba's criteria for catalytic and tactical authenticity that refer, in the first instance, to the ability of the inquiry to prompt action on the part of the research participant.

The kind of reaction just described contrasted directly to how Leanne reacted to reading a case report of her interviews that was framed by the conventions of the realist tale as described by Sparkes (2002). During a telephone conversation with Kitrina, Leanne stated,

> The poems were easier to read and highlighted everything without having to go through lots of pages. I'm a lazy reader, this [the case report] was more difficult because there were more pages. . . . It's like I've got this letter from my lawyer and it was like that—I just go to the bullet points.

Thus, not only was Leanne reading the poetic representation differently, she was also reading herself in the text differently. Furthermore, based on her own reactions and as part of her looking forward with a way to "making things better," Leanne felt that other women golfers could benefit from accessing her experiences via the poems that, even though they did not name her, importantly captured how she felt in an accessible manner. Leanne also believed that the poems would stimulate parents and officials to reflect on how young women are socialized into the world of golf and the part they play in this process. As such, she felt it was very important that the poems be shared with others.

These poems have been shared with a variety of audiences with the permission of Leanne. In the first instance, they were made available to the other 6 players involved in the study of motivation. All of them reacted positively to the poems, and they instigated a discussion on a range of topics relating to the various reasons that women get involved in golf. Furthermore, one of the players read the poems very intently. When she had finished reading them she said, "I've thrown events too." It would appear that by opening up a sensitive issue in a powerful manner, the poetic representations of Leanne's life had created a space for another player to admit to such an act, even though her circumstances were very different. Again, this admission generated further discussion in the interview on this issue and how it related to the player's motivations in golf.

At a local level, the poems have been used for teaching purposes at Kitrina's university with master's-level students as part of a module on the mental well-being of athletes. The responses of the students to the use of poetry have been very positive. The most frequent comments are that the poems touch on subjects in ways that they would not have expected, that they allow for a holistic understanding of the individual and issues relating to motivation and mental well-being, and that they allow for humor, emotions, pain, and values to be considered in a multilayered way in relation to issues of motivation. Thus, they begin to think about and understand this topic differently. The students also acknowledge that the poems were evocative and stimulated them to reflect on their own relationships with others in the contexts of their different sporting backgrounds. For example, a number of fathers have said that the poems caused them to reflect on their relationships with their daughters, and many of the women students stated that the poems caused them to reflect on relationships with their fathers.

A number of the students also stated that they recognized the benefits of using poetic representations and would attempt to use this genre in the future. Such evidence suggests that, for these students, the poetic representations displayed the second aspect of ontological and educative authenticity described by Lincoln and Guba (2000), which relates to raising the level of awareness regarding a specific issue for individuals who come into contact with athletes for some social or organizational purpose. The comments by the students also suggested that the criteria of impact, as defined by Richardson (2000), were being met in that new questions were generated for the students and they were also moved to attempt new research practices.

Beyond the local, at an international conference attended by sport psychologists, Kitrina read the poem "My Dad" as part of a workshop on new forms of representation. The delegates found the poem to be a useful and powerful way to explore the reasons for which some women might become involved in golf.

Furthermore, a conference delegate approached her afterward and, in a way similar to Leanne, described her father passing away and how the poem had caused her to reflect on her relationship with him and how this influenced her decision to become involved in her particular sport. At another international conference, where all the poems were read as part of a presentation that focused on the motivations of women for playing golf, officials of the golf federation of one European country arranged an emergency meeting the following morning to discuss the implications of the research. The chairperson of the federation informed Kitrina that he had gotten very little sleep that night thinking about the issues that the poems has raised for him regarding young players. He stated, "We have to consider seriously the effect our golf programs are having on youth in [name of country]." Once again, this suggests that the second aspect of ontological and educative authenticity as described by Lincoln and Guba (2000) was met by the poetic representation in this particular context.

Such reactions resonate with those of MacNeil (2000), who reported that when the participants in her study heard a poetic representation she had constructed as part of a larger evaluation report, they found that the language and format put their work, thoughts, and experiences into an accessible medium. They also commented on the ability of the poem to communicate in a language different from traditional evaluation reporting. It is also important that the participants believed that the poetic representation made them think about themselves and their roles very differently. Likewise, Poindexter (2002) stated,

> Poetry formed from the respondents' words . . . may be of use in classes and training sessions. Several times I have used poetry crafted from research interviews to end presentations and workshops, as well as in conference and poster sessions, and have found that listeners and readers tend to be moved by their simplicity and power. (p. 713)

Similar sentiments are voiced by Sparkes et al. (2003) in relation to their own use of poetic representations to explore issues in sport and physical activity. For example, they found that when using poems with students, the poems appeared to help bridge the gap between teacher and student and between language and meaning. When the students heard or read the poems, they wanted to talk about them, to say what they felt and what they believed in relation to what the issues meant in their lives and the life of the subjects of the poems. That is, the poems seemed to engage students in ways that more traditional realist telling did not and opened up a different kind of dialogue that drew on an affective, as well as cognitive, domain. For them, as for us, poetic transcriptions have proved themselves to be a useful, accessible, and inclusive way to communicate the findings of qualitative studies to a wide range of audiences that include players, coaches, teachers, health professionals, and laypersons. As such, they have the potential to act as a valuable pedagogical tool for disseminating information generated by qualitative research projects. In relation to this, poetic representations might be of use to sport psychologists in applied settings. For example, they might be used to explore with athletes and coaches the processes of adaptive coping with stress and anxiety in a competitive environment. Likewise, poetic representations could be used to help athletes and coaches better understand the emotional dimensions of experiencing

a serious or career-ending injury. Given the potential benefits of the use of poems in an applied setting, we suggest that this might be a fruitful avenue to explore in the future.

## Reflections

In this article we have attempted to make a case for the use of poetic representations in sport psychology. This said, we do not claim that poetic representations are the only way, or even the best way, to represent all social research knowledge. Neither do we suggest that all researchers include poetic transcriptions in their reporting. We recognize that not all researchers will find it in their internal tool kits to work with data in this manner. Furthermore, as Sparkes et al. (2003) emphasized, "producing a poetic representation that is useful, effective and works is no easy task" (p. 175). In this regard, as a literary writer and a qualitative researcher, Piirto (2002) asked about the qualifications that arts-based researchers might need to have before they attempt to produce poetry. For example, is it necessary to have studied or performed an art form before using it in a high-stakes arena such as theses or papers submitted to peer-reviewed journals? If so, how long should the person study and practice the art form? Finally, should we accept inferior poems as qualitative research?

In responding to her own questions, Piirto (2002) acknowledged that although poetic representations might be flawed in a literary sense, they can, in specific pedagogical contexts, be eminently useful for stimulating reflection on important issues. That is, a poem can work and be effective in relation to its intended purposes and audience. The same can be said of the poetic representation produced by Kitrina. The ways in which the participants, students, teachers, coaches, and others have reacted to her poems suggest that they work on a number of levels ranging from the emotional to the pedagogical.

Having acknowledged the difficulties of producing poetic representations, we do not advocate that all researchers become poets. Similar to Richardson (2002), however, we do believe

> (a) that for some kinds of knowledge, poetic representation may be preferable to representation in prose, and (b) that poetic representation is a viable method for seeing beyond social scientific conventions and discursive practices, and therefore should be of interest to those concerned with epistemological issues and challenges. (p. 877)

Furthermore, we do advocate that researchers be exposed to what poets do so that if they wish to, they might reap the benefits of poetic craft and practice in their work.

As part of this exposure to what poets do, we need to recognize that the data generated in qualitative research do not self-evidently lend themselves to the construction of poetic forms. Even if the data do lend themselves to such a transformation, this might not be the best choice in all circumstances. As Glesne (1997) noted, poetic transcriptions and representations are not always appropriate: "It depends on the inclination of the presenter, the nature of the data, the intended purpose for writing up one's research, and the intended audience" (p. 218). There are many effective ways to analyze and represent data; it is just that some experiences

might be best expressed in a particular form on certain occasions. In view of this, as Sparkes (2002) emphasized, just as scholars take responsibility for theoretical and methodological decisions, so must they make informed, critical, strategic, and principled decisions regarding representational issues. Where it is appropriate to use a poetic representation, and when it is done well, it can be an additional way of understanding a phenomenon. As Richardson (2002) stated, "Science is one lens, creative arts another. Do we not see more deeply through two lenses?" (p. 888).

Of course, as Cahnmann (2003), Sparkes (2002), and Sparkes et al. (2003) recognized, despite the benefits claimed for it, using poetic representations in an area dominated by scientific and realist tales is not without its professional risks. This is particularly so in terms of the legitimacy granted to it as a form of inquiry and as a way of communicating the findings of a study. In relation to this issue, Poindexter (2002) commented,

> The disadvantages of using poetry is that its usefulness as a form of data representation is debated and controversial. Although there are accepted norms and standards for other methods of presenting data, there are none for research poetry. Do we evaluate them by artistic or scientific means? Do we judge them because we better understand a type of situation or a group of people or because we more fully understand one particular person? (p. 713)

As if in response to this question, Richardson (2002) suggested that one can write poetic representations in order to "fulfill as best as possible both traditional research and traditional poetic criteria" (p. 883). This said, in her earlier work Richardson (1993) clearly intimated that standard criteria such as validity and reliability, along with traditional notions of truth, are problematic with regard to judging poetic representations. For her, presenting a poem as *findings* resituates ideas of validity and reliability from *knowing* to *telling* and brings other more relevant criteria into play for judging the work. Sparkes (2002) also suggested that it is inappropriate to apply only traditional criteria to experimental forms of representation if they are to be given a fair chance to prove their worth. For him, different and emerging criteria need to be evoked that call on multiple sources, including the arts and aesthetics, as well as the sciences. Here, rather than seek from these multiple sources a set of foundational, permanent, absolute, or universal criteria to judge a particular kind of representation, scholars might see criteria in a nonfoundational manner as characterizing traits that, operating in the form of lists, can act as a starting point for discussions about how any particular effort might be judged depending on its purposes and the circumstances in which it is produced.

Drawing on the work of Pelias (1999), Poindexter (2002), and Richardson (2000), we suggest that the following might be appropriate criteria for judging the poetic representations we have presented. First, with regard to aesthetic merit: Do they succeed aesthetically? Are they artistically shaped? Are they recognizable as being poetic in form? Are they satisfying? Do they invite a range of interpretive responses? Do they call for an aesthetic transaction and encounter between the writer and reader? Do they create evocative and open-ended connections to the data? Do they work? Are they effective in relation to their intended purposes and audiences? Second, with regard to their impact: Do they evoke the emotional dimensions of Leanne's experiences? Do they affect the reader emotionally and intellectually?

Do they make a substantive contribution, and do they further empathy and understanding? Do they generate new questions about motivational issues? Do they move people to action? Third, in terms of ontological and educative authenticity, as described by Lincoln and Guba (2000), have they raised the level of awareness of Leanne and the other research participants, and have they also raised the awareness of the individuals who surround them and shape their experiences in their sports organizations? In this sense, we might ask if they have been useful for stimulating reflection. Finally, there are ethical questions that might be asked. For example, did Kitrina have permission to portray Leanne in the way she did? Did Leanne have a chance to contribute and share her views as part of the process? Was she happy with the outcome? Did she find the representation of her to be fair and respectful? Did the poetic representation maintain her anonymity?

We feel confident that we are able to answer yes to each of these questions. It is important to note, however, that the criteria we have listed are intended to act as a starting point for judging our poetic representations rather than a template for all occasions. Other scholars for different intents and purposes might choose different criteria. They might add or subtract from our list depending on circumstances. As Sparkes (2002) emphasized, lists of criteria are challenged, changed, and modified in their application to actual inquiries and actual writing practices. As such, the limits of modification are a *practical* matter that takes place in specific contexts, all of which act as an invitation to a dialogue about what poetic representations are, how they work, how they might be judged, and the role they might play (if any) in developing different kinds of understanding about the phenomena that are of interest to sport psychologists. We hope this article is able to make a contribution to this dialogue, and we look forward to future debates on the issues we have raised regarding alternative forms of representation.

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