



A/r/tographic inquiry in sport and exercise research: a pilot study examining methodology versatility, feasibility and participatory opportunities

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ABSTRACT

This research paper centres on a pilot study where a/r/tography, an arts-based methodology, was implemented into a sport and exercise research context. A/r/tography is yet to be employed in this particular research context; therefore, an emphasis is placed on exploring the versatility and feasibility of this methodology when applied to the field of sport and exercise. In addition, we explore whether a/r/tography offers anything new and/or unique in comparison to other arts-based research that has already been conducted in this domain. In the paper that follows, we outline what a/r/tography is; why it could be considered as a methodological approach in sport and exercise research; and how it has been used in other research domains such as the social sciences. The remainder of the paper is dedicated to outlining the method that was undertaken in the a/r/tographic inquiry. A/r/tography was implemented with one swimmer participant and focused on the 'normalised' yet destructive 'slim to win' body practices found to be occurring in swimming culture. Four interrelated parts of the a/r/tographic inquiry process are highlighted so other sociocultural sport researchers can understand how to implement the approach. The feasibility and educative outcomes of the methodology are also discussed. The final section of the paper outlines the learning outcomes for the swimmer participant after engaging with the a/r/tographic inquiry process. A critical discussion is also presented outlining whether a/r/tography offers anything new than other arts-based research.

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Preface

**Justine (pseudonym), my coach tells me about my weight every day and if I miss a session, he will go on about how I need to lose so much weight. And he's like, 'you used to be fit but look at the size of you now!' He always mocks me about it. And like, I haven't even put much weight on and the only reason was because I was depressed with my living situation. I have been working so hard to get it off and I have, but when I tell my coach that I have lost weight, he just looks me up and down and laughs. I am living with this new family and it is heaps better but the parents always make comments about my weight when the Dad is obese himself. And as well as all of that, my gym coach says in front of the whole squad every gym session about how much weight I need to lose. Like I understand that they are doing it because they care but it is too much to hear every single day.*

As I (Author 1) reflect on this recent conversation with a young swimming friend, I find myself being really affected by it, not because I can resonate from my own experiences as a swimmer, and not because I am surprised that this kind of thing is still happening in Australian swimming culture. This conversation really

affected me because I have spent so much time with this young girl both in and out of the pool, educating and sharing my own stories and experiences as a swimmer. I have told this girl every single encounter I have ever endured, from being reprimanded by coaches for not having the ideal body shape to the extreme measures that I took to conform my body to 'their' expectations. I really believed that from our conversations that she would have been able to better identify what was going on in her current situation. She knows that there is no scientific evidence to prove that being lean means you swim faster. She knows the short and long term effects I have experienced as a result of coaches and team managers telling me that I needed to lose weight all the time. What concerns me is that despite my attempts to educate her through storytelling, the first time my young friend is blatantly exposed to the 'slim to win' ideology, she engages in risky weight loss techniques highlighting just how quickly she embodied the ideology. I am not disputing that storytelling did not affect her positively in other ways. I had just hoped that I may have prevented her from engaging in the same risky weight loss techniques that I engaged with knowing full well the consequences. I remind myself of what Smith (2013) said in regard to narrative habitus¹ and that is 'narrative habitus can affect what stories will be heard and passed over as not-for-me' (p. 25). My inability to reach out to this girl got me thinking. Are there other ways to educate swimmers, providing them with a set of tools that might assist them to better analyse situations, conversations and encounters? Coincidentally, during the time this was all happening for my swimming friend, a colleague (Author 2) told me about the success that she has had with a/r/tography in terms of education and challenging thinking in the arts. She also mentioned how a/r/tography has been used with eating disorder 'out patients' with positive results. I must admit that I was sceptical when I heard the word 'art'. I am not an artist and I just don't get how 'art' and 'art teaching' are going to assist athletes who might have limited art ability or interest in art. But, given that recent conversation with my young swimming friend, I was open and willing to explore other ways that might enhance the educate opportunities for swimmers.

Introduction

Recently, Phoenix and Rich (2016) made calls for sport and exercise researchers to consider broader ways to collect and present qualitative research, which offers alternative ways to/and in addition to 'text based' research. This is because diversifying the ways research is conducted, collected and presented makes possible new ways to explore affect and embodied issues in sport and exercise (Phoenix and Rich 2016). Methodologically speaking, Azzarito (2010) has also urged sport and exercise researchers to employ more diverse approaches so that those who participate in the research have the opportunity to 'speak' or 'express' meaningfully about their body experiences. These points are vital because research that is conducted and presented in broader ways will produce new knowledge of the phenomenon being studied through the interrogation and understanding of the social (Phoenix and Rich 2016).

The audience can also benefit from research being collected and presented in broader ways. Enright and O'Sullivan (2012) explained that when knowledge is presented differently, it has the potential to reach more diverse audiences (i.e. academic; diverse general population; participants). In addition, when the audience engages with alternate forms of research, particular kinds of emotional and visceral responses can be evoked where they have the opportunity to resonate in different and powerful ways (Author 3 and Another 2016). Research participants can also benefit as explained by Phoenix and Rich (2016) as it allows researchers to engage with 'participants' embodied experiences in more empathetic and participatory ways' (p. 140).

One alternate way of conducting qualitative research is through the use of arts-based methodologies. Arts-based research is known for utilising the expressive qualities of artistic form to convey meaning and to enlarge human understanding (Barone and Eisner 2012). A/r/tography is an arts-based methodology and is the focus of this paper as the Authors implement it into the research domain of sport and exercise research for the first time. A/r/tography (described in more detail below) can be described as research that centres on 'living inquiry and reflective practice through examination of the in-between spaces of art-making/ researching/ teaching (a/r/t)' (Beare 2009, p. 163). This means that a/r/tographic research makes use of the identities, roles and understandings of artist/researcher/teacher to reflect an

approach to research that is dedicated to perceiving the world artistically and educationally (Springgay *et al.* 2008). A/r/tography falls under the umbrella of arts-based research because of actual making of artistic expressions as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies (Knowles and Cole 2008).

As a/r/tography is yet to be implemented into the research context of sport and exercise, the purpose of this pilot study is to first examine the versatility and feasibility of this methodology when implemented into this context. Also, we examine the potential participatory (i.e. educative) opportunities for a participant who undertakes the a/r/tographic inquiry process. This is done by implementing an a/r/tographic inquiry which focuses on the 'normalised' yet destructive body practices found to be occurring in swimming culture. We also explore whether the a/r/tography methodology offers anything new to other arts-based research which has been previously conducted in the qualitative research domain of sport and exercise. In so doing, three research questions guided this study; (i) *Can a/r/tography as a methodology be implemented into a sport and exercise research context with an athlete participant?* (ii) *What are the participatory opportunities for a swimmer who engages in the a/r/tographic inquiry process?* and (iii) *Does a/r/tography offer anything new and unique to sport and exercise research?* In so doing, the findings of this research will assist us to understand the feasibility of implementing a/r/tography into a sport and exercise research context. This is a particularly important concept given that McNiff (2007) has stated that the use of art-based research methods outside the circumscribed area of people already committed to artistic expression can be a challenging (yet intriguing) concept. In addition, the participatory benefits of this specific arts-based methodological approach will become known. In particular, the degree to which a/r/tographic inquiry might provide emancipatory and/or educative opportunities. This is of particular interest given that the focus of inquiry centres on (destructive) 'slim to win' and 'meritocratic' (Author 1 and Another 2008, Author 1 2010) ideologies that continue to saturate sporting cultures (Papathomas and Lavalée 2010, Author 1 and Others 2012, Author 3 2015, Busanich *et al.* 2016). Finally, this research will highlight whether a/r/tography offers anything new to other arts-based research that has been conducted in the domain of qualitative research in sport exercise and health. All of these points are important in terms of advancing the rationale for a broader practical application of art-based methodologies by addressing the complexity and diversity of implementation (McNiff 2007), presentation (Author 3 and Another 2016, Phoenix and Rich 2016) as well as learning and knowing (Phoenix and Rich 2016). AQ3

While 'arts based' methodologies are yet to gain momentum within the domain of sport and exercise research, the use of 'arts based' methods has been employed by a number of researchers over the last six or so years in this domain (e.g. Author 3, 2013; Author 3 and Another 2016, Busanich *et al.* 2016, Blodgett *et al.* 2013, Carless and Douglas 2010). For the purpose of this paper, it is important to highlight the differences between 'arts based' method/s and methodology in order to contextualise what follows. As Blodgett *et al.* (2013) and Boydell *et al.* (2012) explain, 'arts-based methods' refer to the use of art in qualitative research in order to generate, interpret and/or communicate information. Simply speaking, 'arts based' methods are tools used to collect, present and analyse data or lived experiences. Specifically in the context of sport and exercise, some 'arts based methods' have included the use of drawings (Gravestock 2010); mandala drawings (Blodgett *et al.* 2013); song (Carless 2011, Douglas 2012); photography (Phoenix 2010, Mills and Hoeber 2013); dance (Author 3 and Another 2016); video (Houge Mackenzie and Kerr 2012); collage (Busanich *et al.* 2016); film (Klugge *et al.* 2010); 3D body scans (Tarr and Thomas 2011); and poetry (Author 1 and Another 2016, Author 3 and Another 2016). AQ4

Arts-based methodology differs to method in that the tenets of creative arts are adapted in order to answer social questions (Leavy 2009). Methodologically speaking, arts-based practices have been developed and implemented for all phases of the research process: theoretical, data collection, analysis, interpretation and representation (Leavy 2009).

A/r/tography: arts-based methodology

A number of different a/r/tographers have described a/r/tography in various ways. For instance, Irwin (2004) describes a/r/tography as an inquiry of the world through processes inherent to art

making and writing that acknowledges and incorporates the practices of artist, researcher and teacher. A/r/tographic centres on an inquiry that breathes new life into how we encounter, perceive, understand and know phenomena (MacDonald and Moss 2015). For La Jevic and Springgay (2008), a/r/tography is a mode of scholarly inquiry that explores the spaces of art making, researching and teaching with an importance being placed on being 'in process' rather than examining 'a process' (Winter *et al.* 2009). AQ5

The 'r' is particularly important in a/r/tography as it presents an equality and co-existence between the artist/researcher/teacher in the research process (Springgay *et al.* 2005). If we examine components of the word a/r/tography, a/r/t emphasises an 'unfolding between process and product, text and person, presence and absence, art and audience, teacher and student, author and reader; it also resides on the edges of these dualisms' (Springgay *et al.* 2005, p. 901) while 'graphy' makes associations with text highlighting a connection between art and text, aligning the arts alongside the narrative as a joint initiative (Springgay *et al.* 2005). Drawing from the above a/r/tographer's definitions and explanations, the authors of this research paper see a/r/tography to be the application of three different roles/lenses/approaches/perspectives, those being artist/researcher/teacher to the research process. The roles and practices of artist, researcher and teacher are engaged with and by both the researchers and also the participant in equal ways in and through the research process as a means of answering social questions. The lenses of artist, researcher and teacher align powerfully with Aristotle's three realms of knowledge: poesis (making), theoria (knowing) and praxis (doing) (Springgay *et al.* 2005, MacDonald 2014). By giving attention to the circumstances and spaces in and between making, knowing and doing, a/r/tography has the potential to enable knowledge and understanding through a process laden with artistic and educational inquiry, evolving in an organic and non-heirarchical manner (MacDonald 2014). Artist, teacher and researcher perspectives and practices can be applied to problematise, consider and re-imagine. It is within this creative constructivist space that self and other can be drawn to transform their beliefs, knowledge and practices. AQ6

A/r/tgraphy inquiry unfolds rhizomatically² (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) and as such the inquiry process is prioritised and honoured in a/r/tgraphy, where meaning is perceived as a living and evolving entity that is always moving, growing and becoming other (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, Winter *et al.* 2009). In relation to this specific pilot study, a/r/tography was enacted as a means to question and unsettle existing perceptions (i.e. slim to win ideologies). Such inquiry is valuable in its capacity to embrace and acknowledge how 'meaning making can be disturbing, unexpected, and hesitant' (Bickel 2008, p. 87), where symbolic or imaged representations can facilitate levels of meanings and emotions that are often unspeakable and/or inaccessible by many other means (O'Donaghue 2006). AQ9

There are a number of benefits for employing a/r/tography as a methodological approach. First, as O'Sullivan (2006) explains, the a/r/tographic inquiry can enable 'our typical ways of being in the world to be challenged and our systems of knowledge disrupted' (p. 1). In this sense, a/r/tography has the potential to provide participants with the tools necessary to continue problematising dominant ideologies (i.e. slim to win, an area of concern outlined in preface). Like other arts-based methodologies, another benefit is that a/r/tography allows the participant and researcher to be co-investigators in the research process (Leavy 2009). Participants can engage in a/r/tography as co- or inter-investigators within a vein of inquiry, where individuals can be led (by an a/r/tographer or researcher) to negotiate and recognise their own motivations, purpose and situational context for engaging in the inquiry process (Springgay *et al.* 2005, Leavy 2009). This limits the power differentials often found in researcher/participant relationships. A/r/tography is particularly useful for research projects that aim to describe, explore or discover as these methods are generally attentive to processes (Leavy 2009). AQ10

While a/r/tography is yet to be employed in the research domain of sport and exercise, it has been employed by a number of researchers in the social sciences and arts. Springgay (2003), for example, conducted an a/r/tographic inquiry into intercorporeality and the construction of body knowledge with positive results. Specifically, she enacted a/r/tography to re-represent the body as tactile and felt, emphasising the criticality of senses in body research. Within her inquiry, Springgay experimented



with artistic explorations and renderings of folding and folded cloth as a means of interrogating and re-representing theoretical concerns with bodies. In doing so, she applied a model of intercorporeality (Weiss 1999) to elucidate how knowing and being can be informed through generative understandings of touch, fantasy and performance (Springgay 2003). Within her a/r/tographic inquiry, images and writing as process and product were drawn together in renderings, where cloth was portrayed and described as evocative of memories and domesticity, where linens were starched, scoured and darned in acts of cleaning that sought to remove or conceal soil of bodies, and in turn the presence of stories. Springgay (2003) explains that 'this approach to inquiry includes seeing the unordinary and finding ways to express the hidden, the difficult, and the uncertain' (p. 6). Springgay's (2003) point of 'seeing' is of particular interest in relation this paper, where we have sought to ascertain whether a/r/tography and the taking on of the roles artist, teacher and researcher might provide one swimmer with the opportunity to 'see', becoming consciously aware and learning about 'slim to win', an ideology that has been found to be deeply entrenched in Australian swimming culture with detrimental effects (Author 1 and Another 2008, Author 1 and Another, in press, Author 1 and Others 2012).

AQ11

More recently, Strohschein (2016) employed the creative practice of collage as part of her a/r/tographic investigation to explore affective experience in the development of eating disorders, as well as its influence and potential in the recovery process. It was revealed in Strohschein's (2016) research that collage as an integral part of her a/r/tographic inquiry enabled the channelling of thought and feeling into an affective and embodied practice that was sensory and enlivening, 'from the sounds of cutting or ripping paper to the different textures of the materials, the process of collaging engaged the senses' (p. 30). As such, a/r/tography was enacted as part of the participant remedial experience in eating disorder recovery, and it was found that it opened up 'pedagogical spaces where both self and other have been transformed through a creative becoming' (Strohschein 2016, p. 73).

Our a/r/tographic inquiry

In this next section of the paper, the four interrelated parts of the a/r/tographic inquiry process will be explained. While this approach can be employed flexibly, we have purposely outlined the process what we (the authors) and the participant undertook in order to illuminate how one might go about enacting a/r/tography. These interrelated parts are presented not to be restrictive, but rather to contextualise what follows and to expand the methods outlined in previous a/r/tography research (i.e. Springgay *et al.* 2005).

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Presenting the 'slim to win' narrative

First, a narrative representation (presented directly below) outlining a former elite swimmer's lived experience which was generated from Author 1's (2010) research was presented to the participant. This narrative was purposely chosen by the researchers as it contained several 'slim to win' themes found to be permeating Australian swimming culture and in turn causing long-term effects for the athletes (i.e. eating disorders; depression) (Author 1 2010, Author 1 and Others 2012). These 'slim to win' themes included body surveillance such as daily weigh-ins/skin folds (coaches/self); discipline and punishment (coaches/team managers punishing swimmers for not maintaining the ideal swimmer body shape); and docility and conformity (swimmer undertaking extreme measures to lose weight). Several of these themes were also evident in the conversation between the young swimmer and Author 1 included in the preface.

The narrative³ (see below) was emailed to the participant two days prior to our meeting with her. At this stage in the process, the swimmer participant was simply asked to read the story prior to our face-to-face meeting with her. Due to the sensitive nature of the story, the participant was also told that she could contact the researchers if distress was caused as a result of engaging with the below narrative and counselling could be arranged.

Mandy

'16 years old'

I stand onto the scales and look down. The three coaches who are surrounding me look at each other and then start to speak.

Coach: '55 kilograms. You have put on two kilograms.'

My heart sinks. I cannot understand why I would have a weight increase. I have been so careful with what I have been eating.

Coaches: 'you have put on weight. For the next three days, you will be required to eat every meal at the same table as us. You are only to eat fruit and salad. Do you understand?'

I nod, feeling intimidated standing there on my own. I feel alone.

Coaches: 'If you are going to continue putting on weight, you are going to have to change your eating habits to keep your weight down.'

I know that I should not respond but I cannot help myself.

Mandy: 'Look around you guys. Do you see many other swimmers here ranked number one in the world? Go for it, just do it!'

I can see that they are surprised by my response and they leave.

That morning at breakfast, I do as I have been told. I get a plate and fill it with fruit. Instead of sitting with my team mates, I sit with the three coaches. Out of the corner of my eye, I notice the eyes of my team mates looking at me. I can see them whispering, wondering why I have to sit with the coaches. I notice that everyone has a plate full of pancakes. I become angry and frustrated. For the next three days, I continue with my punishment. I wonder why I am being punished for so long for a two kilogramme weight increase. During this time, I become withdrawn from my team mates and from the coaches. Despite my efforts of ignoring my surrounds at meal times, it is impossible to ignore the coaches who are sitting with me. I notice how they stuff one hot dog after another into their mouths. When the coaches finish the pile of food on their plates, they return to the food bar, filling their plates again. I pick up a piece of fruit and take it to my mouth. The eyes of the coaches fixate on me, watching me as I put the fruit into my mouth. I feel self-conscious and stop eating. I am starving, so hungry after the heavy training we have done today. I have swum two sessions today totally 18 kilometres. My body is craving food. After I finish dinner, I head back to my room with a senior female teammate.

Senior female swimmer: 'Why aren't you allowed to eat with the other swimmers?' Mandy: 'I have put on weight and the coaches want me to sit with them so they can see what I am eating. I am only allowed to eat fruit and vegetables.'

Senior female swimmer: 'Come up to my room, I will show you how I have learned to maintain my weight.'

I enter her room. We are on our own.

Senior female swimmer: 'After each meal, I just stick my fingers down my throat and vomit. It is a way that I can eat and still maintain my weight.'

She takes me into the bathroom and shows me how to do it. Her dinner comes up. I then model her every move. I stick my fingers down my throat and as I do I think about the body that I need to have, a body that will be accepted by the coaches (Author 1 2010).

Taking on three different roles: a/r/tographic inquiry

Second, a face-to-face meeting was carried out with the swimmer participant. Both Author 1 and Author 2 conducted this meeting via Skype as the swimmer participant was geographically separated to them. At the beginning of the meeting, two documents were emailed to the participant. The first document included a table (see Table 1) which doubled as an interview guide. This was purposely constructed into a format where the participant could interact with the three different roles of artist/teacher/researcher in an uncomplicated way. The second document included a list of artistic mediums. The artistic mediums outline possible creation tools which enable the participant to bring her thoughts; ideas; feelings; understanding; and learning into visual/artistic reality. The participant was able to choose a creation tool capitalising on her personal artistic strengths. Some of the artistic mediums included in our list were: poetry; photography; painting; drawing; clay; creative story writing; sculpture; textiles; mixed media; and video art. We purposely waited until the commencement of the meeting before we forwarded these documents because we did not want the participant to engage with them prior as some of the artistic content could be viewed as confusing without the appropriate context or explanation provided.

Table 1. A/r/tographic inquiry interview guide constructed into a table: an adaption of R.A.T wheel designed by Author 2 (see Author 2 and Author 1 [under review](#)).

	A/r/tographic consideration	Notes taken by swimmer participant
Researcher	<div><div>(1) What stands out for you having read Mandy's story that you will explore in your art work?</div><div>(2) What message do you want to convey in/through my artwork, and why?</div><div>(3) Are there particular people you might benefit from talking to/activities to engage in to learn more about the topic you want to communicate in your artwork, or artistic processes you want to enact?</div><div>(4) How will my personal experiences, perceptions and biases contribute to the artwork I make?</div></div>	<div><div>• The coaches are disconnected. They don't care or realise what they are doing to the children. And where are the parents? Do they not care or are the kids too scared to tell the parents? Why does this happen?</div><div>• Being alone and away from help or someone who cares enough</div><div>• Being on the side of the children not on the side of being winners or winning. I think my art work could help the parents see what their kids are feeling and if they cared just a bit be on their side</div><div>• I want to learn if there is a hierarchy of coaching in swimming or a monitoring body? Who are the coaches trained and monitored by?</div><div>• Having a young daughter, it makes me angrier. Positioning as a parent</div></div>
Artist	<div><div>(1) What medium/s might you use to explore and then illustrate an aspect of Mandy's story?</div><div>(2) How might my ideas be reflected in my artwork? <i>(E.g. The questions in the researcher lens will have helped you determine what you want to say – Now you need to consider how you will do this. How might you use various artistic elements and principles to do this?)</i></div><div>(3) What artistic principles/elements might I utilise to inform how I visually express my intended meaning/message? <i>Are there any other elements you might consider incorporating into your work? (i.e text). It can help to look at different imagery/artworks and think about how you might appropriate examples or approaches to help you communicate your own meaning.</i></div></div>	<div><div>• Watercolour, black ink pens and maybe photos or collage</div><div>• Large gold medal and the paint for the people</div><div>• Figurative with people in it – someone alone amongst a lot of other people – large images representing the coaches being intimidating. Could use specific colours which could represent the emotions of the swimmer</div><div>• Larger shapes for the coaches. Swimmers are lonely but surrounded by people</div></div>
Teacher	<div><div>(1) What do you want people to understand about Mandy's story when they interact with your artwork?</div><div>(2) How might your unique perspective and artistic interpretation enhance the potential meanings others might make from Mandy's story?</div></div>	<div><div>• Communicating properly with the children not on the surface level but on the human being level. Parents and coaches</div><div>• People can be alone and vulnerable even though they are surrounded by people who supposedly there to care about them. The swimmer could gain something that being alone is not normal as they may have perceived it was normal</div><div>• Why does it seem wrong for me and not for others</div></div>

The table/interview guide (see Table 1) and the discussion of Mandy's story (above) served as the focus of this meeting and the a/r/tographic inquiry which followed. There were numerous key questions/statements that were generated by Author 1 and Author 2 as a means of enabling the participant to hone into each specific role of artist, teacher and researcher. While the primary questions used to hone into each specific role of artist, teacher and researcher have been included in the table below, for the purpose of publication, a number of guiding questions relating to each role were removed. This stage of the a/r/tographic inquiry process required careful facilitation by Author 1 and Author 2 to ensure that the participant properly honed into each of the three roles in order to better understand and analyse Mandy's story. Through the use of guiding questions (i.e. why are you choosing that medium; artist perspective) and a number of different analogies (i.e. peel back the layers of onion in Mandy's story to reveal different themes; research perspective), the three roles/perspectives enabled the participant to engage with Mandy's story in a deep and unique way. It is at this point where meanings and understandings began to be interrogated and ruptured (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). As the participant engaged with the key questions from each role/perspective/lens, she was able to take notes relating to that particular

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role (right hand column in Table 1). This was purposely done so the participant could refer to her notes and points at a later time, particularly when it came time to produce her a/r/tographic rendering.

After Author 1 and Author 2 had taken the participant through each of the three roles outlined in table and in the last five minutes of the face-to-face meeting, Author 2 asked the swimmer participant if she could share an a/r/tographic rendering that she had created as a result of another inquiry. Author 2's rendering was created after she engaged with a young swimmer's story from Author 1's (2010) PhD work. In the story, the 11-year-old girl got punished by her swimming coach after she was caught eating an ice cream. The young girl was made to run 10 km in the middle of the night with her coach at the training camp as punishment.

While the sharing of Author 2's a/r/tographic rendering had ethical approval and the participant's consent, it is important to note that when we commenced the meeting with the swimmer participant, we were unsure with how the participant might react to Author 2's a/r/tographic work, particularly as Author 2 is an artist. However, at the end of the meeting, we felt that the participant was really confident in the a/r/tographic process and the impending creation of her rendering. While Author 2's a/r/tographic rendering provided a visual example for the swimmer participant, no critical discussion was undertaken in regard to the 'what', 'why' and 'how' of the rendering or the story that it stemmed from. This is because we did not want to influence the participant's thinking. While the visual example of Author 2's a/r/tographic rendering (presented directly below) was helpful for the participant in this case, we do not feel that this particular element of the process is necessary for other researchers wanting to employ the a/r/tographic methodology (Figure 1).

AQ14

Author 2's a/r/tographic example of Carly's lived experience from Australian swimming culture.

A little girl dares to dream

Unburdened by adult worries

Her sense of light heartedness

Is what enables possibility and reality to entwine

She quietly curls into a ball

Then the nightmare begins

You waited just long enough for her to uncoil

Summoned her from her safe space

Stripped her of her dignity,



Figure 1. Carly's story, Author 2, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 30 x 30 cm diptych, 2016.



Any sense of accomplishment and revelry

Crushed

Left alone in the dark with her own thoughts

She begins to invest in your oppression

5 **Creation of the a/r/tographic rendering**

Third, the swimmer participant spent two weeks completing her a/r/tographic rendering. During this period, she was able to refer to Mandy's story, as well as the table and subsequent notes that she took during the face-to-face meeting to assist her (see Table 1). During this time, the participant had the opportunity to clarify details and ask questions; however, she did not need further clarification or discussion. The Authors offered to provide the participant with any art materials that she required; however, these were not needed. Directly below is the a/r/tographic rendering produced by the swimmer participant in response to Mandy's story.

Reflections

In the final stage of the a/r/tographic process, a series of four questions were asked to the swimmer participant as a means of reflection and closure to the a/r/tographic inquiry process. This reflection was important in terms of the participant verbalising her conscious understanding of Mandy's story and why she made the artist, teacher and researcher decisions she did in relation to her rendering. We also had a number of sub-questions prepared if we needed to further extend the participant's telling (e.g. What is happening in the art work you have made?); however, these were not required in this instance. This reflective process was conducted online due to geographic separation and time change differences between the swimmer participant and the researchers, although this step can be conducted via Skype, email or face to face. This reflective stage of the process can be viewed directly below. The swimmer participant's responses remain unaltered and are in italics below.

(1) Tell us about your a/r/tographic rendering?

In my artwork, there are a group of girls on the right hand side. They are supposed to be just ordinary happy girls. Then there is a coach rolling a huge gold medal over the top of girls and we can see that he is walking on top of the ones that have already been crushed 'by the search for the gold medal'. These girls have either not had the right body shape or did not win any gold medals. They are grey because they have lost themselves under the pressure and abuse from the coach – and parents, who can be seen standing on top of the gold medal. The coach and the parents are smiling a ridiculous smile and have gold medal eyes because they have been sort of mesmerised by the power of the gold. They can no longer see the girls with those eyes. They are totally unaware of the girls and what is happening to them.

I chose watercolour and fine liner because it gave me the ability to create the details of the people more easily. I made the huge gold medal the central focus of the picture as this reflects the reality in life. The people are smaller than the gold.

(2) What do you want people to understand about Mandy's story when they interact with your artwork?

The key idea in my artwork is that the lust for gold is so overpowering to parents and coaches that they make themselves blind to what they are doing to other human beings. They become insensitive fools who will stomp on children not caring or not knowing what the effects of their behaviour are. I would want people who saw the artwork to question what is happening to those girls. Most people don't realise the cost of all this so called 'success' and I would want them to find out what the real cost is, or at least be concerned and alert to the fact that it's not a bed of roses for these children.



Figure 2. A/r/tographic rendering produced by participant after engaging with Mandy's story and the a/r/tographic process (Table 1). Water colour and pen drawing.

- (3) What have you learned about Mandy's story by engaging in the process of making an artwork in relation to her story?

My thinking about Mandy's story has evolved a lot since I first read her story and began my artwork. I can see that I now look at it as the bigger picture – in that this must be happening to a lot of young people in sport. And really the bigger picture is simply that we as a society place so much importance on winning, in every aspect of our children's lives, that we must be doing a lot of unknown damage to our children. The pressure of having to be better than our friends and peers no matter the cost, is unnatural and quite awful when you look at it from the outside.

- (4) How has engaging in art making practices and processes enabled you to elicit alternate or enriched understandings of written stories?

For some reason being able to draw and paint the ideas I had in reaction to Mandy's story really allowed me to feel the anger I felt and follow it through to the bigger picture I arrived at. Being able to draw instead of write was easier because I feel I included a lot of information that I just couldn't have written down – and that could be read from a drawing very quickly. I found that with the artwork I could bypass my 'thinking' channel and just express myself and my ideas as I saw them visually.

Conclusion

In this closing section, we reflect on the versatility of a/r/tography as an arts-based methodological approach when implemented into the research domain of sport and exercise. Also, we will outline the participatory benefits of this methodological approach. We also critically discuss whether a/r/tography offers anything new or unique to other arts-based research that has been previously conducted in sport and exercise research. We address this by bringing to the fore Author 1's sociocultural sport researcher voice/perspective; Author 2's artist/art teacher voice; Author 3's art-based researcher voice as well as reflecting on the swimmer participant's voice.

This pilot study reveals how a/r/tography was successfully implemented into the sport and exercise research context. By adapting much of the artistic language previously made use of by a/r/tographers in a/r/tographic research (i.e. Irwin 2004, Springaay, 2004, Springgay *et al.* 2005, Leavy 2009, Strohschein 2016), this approach was made *accessible* highlighting its *versatility*. There were a number of positive outcomes for the swimmer participant (explained further below), such as educative opportunities which 'de-normalised' the 'normalised' meritocratic practices and ideologies found to be saturating sporting cultures. Specifically, through the use of a/r/tography as an interpretive method of inquiry and representation, the swimmer participant was able to tease out, problematise, re-imagine and transform the multiple themes or layers embedded within an existing narrative (Leggo 2008). The swimmer participant engaged with processes of inquiry inherent to artist, researcher and teacher practice to identify and contend with critical events within Mandy's story. Through her artistic creation (see above), the swimmer participant was able to visually render her research encounter of how she perceived 'slim to win' practices and the implications for Mandy. This is reflected not only in the participant's artwork (see Figure 2) but was also revealed in what she explained during the reflections part of the a/r/tographic inquiry process. We reflect on the voice of the participant below.

The girls that did not have the right body shape of did not win any gold medals are grey because they have lost themselves under the pressure and abuse from the coach – and parents, who can be seen standing on top of the gold medal. The coach and the parents are smiling a ridiculous smile and have gold medal eyes because they have been sort of mesmerised by the power of the gold. They can no longer see the girls with those eyes. They are totally unaware of the girls and what is happening to them.

As a result of engaging in the process, the swimmer participant was able to identify multiple themes occurring in Mandy's story such as athlete abuse; the cost of a gold medal; parental neglect; technocracy; and winning at all costs (see reflections for expansion of these points). For the swimmer participant, this a/r/tographic exploration and subsequent development of a visual rendering allowed her to 'pull together shards from other lives to make something new' (Sameshina 2008, p. 45); to corroborate and collaborate between perspectives, practices and propensities as artist, researcher and teacher to render unspoken essences inherent to Mandy's story. In this respect, the a/r/tographic inquiry process became an enactive space of living inquiry that embraced a 'messiness' in meaning-making and knowledge production for the swimmer participant (Leavy 2009, MacDonald 2014). Artistic inquiry as an embodied act was also revealed by the swimmer participant. This point is reflected on below:

For some reason being able to draw and paint the ideas I had in reaction to Mandy's story really allowed me to feel the anger I felt and follow it through to the bigger picture I arrived at. Being able to draw instead of write was easier because I feel I included a lot of information that I just couldn't have written down.

We now draw on the voices of the Authors who provide their perspectives of a/r/tography and the versatility when implemented into the domain of sport and exercise research.

Sociocultural sport researcher voice (Author 1)

At the commencement of this research investigation, I recall asking Author 2 questions such as;

- You want swimmers to think like an artist; art teacher and researcher as a means of critically engaging with others' lived experience?*
- How does that work when they might not care about art or have a clue how to teach art?*
- I just don't understand yet how taking on the role of art teacher or artist is going to assist swimmers' learning and knowing?*

After a period of time, I came to learn that the a/r/tographic inquiry approach is about the taking on of three different roles of artist; art teacher and research as a means of critically engaging with something (i.e. story; lived experience). Through a distinct set of lenses/questions/tools (as we have provided above in Table 1), the participant was able to be guided as they took up each role/perspective. Each role/lens provided the participant with a unique way to look at; analyse and understand Mandy's lived experience and the detrimental coaching practices that she was subjected to. It enabled the swimmer participant to

think deeply; critically and in ways or perspectives that she had not considered before. In this respect, the swimmer participant was able to identify and analyse the multiple layers of Mandy's story and the cultural activities occurring in Australian swimming. The a/r/tographic inquiry also assisted my own learning. For example, I knew Mandy's story really well as I had interviewed Mandy for my PhD research six years earlier and we co-constructed her story of experience. However, this a/r/tographic process enabled me to think about alternate ways to represent Mandy's experience (embodied encounter) and my analysis of it. Subsequently, a/r/tography has provided me with a set of tools that I will apply to various other investigations.

We now draw on the voice of Author 2, who as an artist and art teacher provides us with her unique perspective in regard to how the a/r/tographic inquiry process was applied to the research context of sport and exercise, a context which she is unfamiliar with.

Artist and art teacher voice (Author 2)

As an artist and arts-based teacher, I have found the methods of making and articulating meaning integral to a/r/tographic inquiry to have immense potential for explicating phenomena and the associated embodied experiences of participants in sports-based contexts. My experience of adopting a/r/tographic methods to render lived experiences within a sporting culture enabled me to connect with interface the disjuncture of my unfamiliarity with the context, and establish rich and personally meaningful connections with the practices and associated implications inherent to that culture. I was in turn affected by the power and significance of meaning made and communicated by the participant in her own a/r/tographic rendering and associated creative inquiry process. My interaction with her rendering enabled me to obtain further diverse perspectives of various stakeholder involvements that I had not fully considered, nor prioritised in my own rendering. Such is the power of a purposeful creative inquiry that honours personal perspective, and allows for diverse interpretation and meanings to be made.

Qualitative researcher in sport and exercise

As a qualitative researcher who employs creative methods in the field of sport and exercise, I was excited about being involved in this a/r/tographic process with a swimming athlete. I think our participant articulates her experiences well; the process enables people to bypass thinking that might involve text-based methods and share her experience with us visually. There is something new, meaningful and personal shared through these approaches to inquiry and that is what, as qualitative researchers, we hope to achieve. When I entered the field of sport and exercise research, I felt I was encouraged to 'science out' the personal subjectivity of the meanings of our experiences. Now, I trust these methodologies and methods can 'science in' the meanings and our bodies back into experience together with our participants.

In regard to whether a/r/tography offers anything new or unique than previous arts-based research, there are numerous reasons as to why researchers in sport and exercise might choose to use a/r/tography. Some of these reasons (i.e. participant and researcher being co-investigators in the research process) have been established in general arts-based literature, while some are more unique to a/r/tography. First, and echoing rationales presented in the arts-based literature, a/r/tography provides a unique way of examining and showing affect and embodied issues by interrogating an idea (slim to win) through the lens of artist/teacher and researcher, three perspectives not usually adopted in art-based research. The three lenses of artist, researcher and teacher which are utilised in a/r/tography align powerfully with Aristotle's three realms of knowledge: poesis (making), theoria (knowing) and praxis (doing) (MacDonald 2014). Few researcher approaches have articulated this.

In terms of the outcomes of this a/r/tographic investigation specifically, the findings have revealed how through the implementation of the practices of artist, teacher and researcher, the swimmer participant produced an aesthetic representation that drew together analysis, prose and imagery to render what she found to be occurring, inferred and unspoken in Mandy's story and Australian swimming culture. By interweaving the artistic and analytic, a powerful connection was encouraged by furthering means for interpretation and communication (Springgay *et al.* 2008, MacDonald and Moss 2015).

Accordingly, the analytic and aesthetic qualities of a/r/tography were able to (in this case) bring the unspoken to light. Whether other arts-based research provides the same educational outcomes for participants making use of a different process remains to be seen and warrants further investigation.

While we have outlined many benefits in regard to the implementation of this methodological approach, we would also like to make known some potential limitations. For instance, this pilot study was implemented with one adult female swimmer; therefore, it is difficult to predict how others, such as adolescent athletes and senior male swimming coaches, might take up the a/r/tographic approach. This point (along with the preface) subsequently forms the impetus of our next investigation where we will implement an a/r/tographic inquiry with a group of adolescent swimmers to determine if and how a/r/tography might assist their learning and understanding of the damaging body practices that have become normalised in Australian swimming culture.

The next limitation somewhat follows on from the first and relates to those who might not be open to artistic inquiry. The swimmer participant involved in this pilot study was open to artistic inquiry and the a/r/tography process even though she did not consider herself to be an artist nor had previously engaged in any artistic endeavours prior to this investigation. However, it could be problematic for those how are not open or receptive to artistic inquiry. This could in turn impact the a/r/tographic inquiry and any potential educative benefits of the process.

Finally, while the inherent benefits of art-based research are outlined in this pilot study, Author 3 and Another (2016) caution in regard to what is seen to count as scholarly 'output' at some universities given the ever-changing landscape of a neoliberal university culture. For some, arts-based research might not measure up to other 'science'-based research publications.

In closing, this pilot study outlined how a/r/tography as a methodological approach can successfully be implemented into a sport and exercise research context. Also, it showed the multiple educative benefits for one swimmer participant. Like Springgay (2003) explained, this approach to inquiry provided the opportunity to see the unordinary and found 'ways to express the hidden, the difficult, and the uncertain' (p. 6). This was highlighted through the swimmer participant's a/r/tographic rendering and also in her follow-up responses. As the swimmer disclosed, the process allowed her to bypass her thinking and just express her ideas visually. In closing, a/r/tography provided an enactive space or platform for the participant to engage with and acquire knowledge in different ways to what has been previously undertaken in the sport and exercise research context.

AQ16

Notes

1. Narrative habitus 'is the unchosen force in any choice to be interpellated by a story, and the complementary rejection of the interpellation that other stories would effect if a person were caught up in them' (Frank 2010, p. 53).
2. 'A/r/tography is a research methodology that entangles and performs what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) refer to as a rhizome'. A rhizome is an assemblage that moves and flows in dynamic momentum. The rhizome is an interstitial space, open and vulnerable where meanings and understandings are interrogated and ruptured. Building on the concept of the rhizome, a/r/tography radically transforms the idea of theory as an abstract system (Springgay *et al.* 2008).
3. This storied representation was part of Author 1's 2010 PhD research. This story was carefully co-constructed by Author 1 and a swimmer participant to reveal her perceptions of body practices that she was subjected to in Australian swimming culture.

AQ8

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

AQ17

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