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## Can Writing Be Wrong? Collaborative Autoethnography as Critical Reflective Practice in Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology

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### Abstract

Critical reflective practice (CRP) facilitates macro-level reflections about social contexts and power structures through the interrogation of one's own experiences (Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010). Despite the importance of CRP, examples of how one actually engages in CRP are scarce in sport psychology. Moreover, given that writing in academia is traditionally "author evacuated" (Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010, p. 512), it is questionable how traditional writing practices help facilitate critical reflections. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine how sport psychology professionals can engage in CRP through the use of author-centered writing. Specifically, we responded to Knowles and Gilbourne's (2010) call to use autoethnography as a way to engage in, as well as document, critical reflective writing. Through author-centered writing, we reflected on normalized practices that can hinder CRP. The detailed written accounts and collaborative process helped us recognize how the personal is political (Hanisch, 2006), and why culture and power are always important for sport psychology professionals to consider.

### Keywords

Critical Reflections, Evocative Autoethnography, Applied Psychology

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# Can Writing Be Wrong? Collaborative Autoethnography as Critical Reflective Practice in Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology

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*Critical reflective practice (CRP) facilitates macro-level reflections about social contexts and power structures through the interrogation of one's own experiences (Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010). Despite the importance of CRP, examples of how one actually engages in CRP are scarce in sport psychology. Moreover, given that writing in academia is traditionally "author evacuated" (Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010, p. 512), it is questionable how traditional writing practices help facilitate critical reflections. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine how sport psychology professionals can engage in CRP through the use of author-centered writing. Specifically, we responded to Knowles and Gilbourne's (2010) call to use autoethnography as a way to engage in, as well as document, critical reflective writing. Through author-centered writing, we reflected on normalized practices that can hinder CRP. The detailed written accounts and collaborative process helped us recognize how the personal is political (Hanisch, 2006), and why culture and power are always important for sport psychology professionals to consider. Keywords: Critical Reflections, Evocative Autoethnography, Applied Psychology*

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## Prologue

### Scene 1: Jyväskylä, Finland, January 2011

*I walk into my writing professor's office seeking some professional advice. "What's on your mind, Sae-Mi?" he asks.*

*"I'm nervous, Marlen. I think my sport psychology master's practicum notes are wrong," I explain. "I thoroughly wrote down my thoughts, worries, and observations that are not quantifiable. But after reading some articles on practicum note taking, I see that I was supposed to be objective and concise."*

*"I'm also writing an abstract for a conference and I got feedback that I should be more neutral," I explain, wringing my hands at the word, "neutral." I wanted to be honest and write about my own process deciding which psychological skill training technique to implement, but my professor said that I should write more objectively. But I actually don't understand what that means."*

Marlen nods his head as I pause for a moment. I continue emphatically, “‘I’ influenced the process. The services we provided have a cultural context. It seems misleading and overly simplistic to me to just conclude, ‘We implemented goal setting and it was effective; thus, goal setting is an effective intervention for coaches.’ But I guess it’s not appropriate to write about the other stuff... I should just get to the bottom line?”

“That’s interesting” he replies, smiling. “Of course, you are present in your practice and in your research. You are also present in your writing. And that’s ok! Not only can you use ‘I,’ but you can also explicitly write about yourself, too. And there’s some value in it.”

I look at him with a blank face. “But... the textbook says... the professor said I should be objective. Isn’t my writing wrong?”

Marlen shakes his head, “There are many different reasons to take practicum-related notes. We have to understand our audience, purpose, and genre, of course. So, some of your writing needs to be presented to a specific audience, perhaps a practicum instructor, and as such has a specific purpose and genre. What you submit as practicum notes should fulfill these genre expectations of ‘objectivity’ so that the focus is on the client and the intervention. However, wouldn’t it also be useful to reflect on your personal experiences in the practicum, especially in relation to broader cultures of training, consultation, and professional development?” he asks. “Couldn’t that be valid research? Valid professional development and practice?”

I frown and nod slowly, trying to process his words. He eagerly continues, “So why not take all kinds of notes in the practicum and then use them as data for different purposes? There are also different research methodologies that use personal, reflective writing as a means of understanding cultural phenomena. One of these methods is called autoethnography. Have you heard of it?”

I start feeling excited, “So you mean thinking and writing about yourself and your context is valid?”

His eyes twinkle as he tells me that not only are my original practicum notes valid but that I am also allowed to write about myself and bring myself into my writing. “Your autoethnography title could even be ‘Can Writing Be Wrong?’” he chuckles. This is the first time ‘I’ am part of my practice or my writing. I think it is the first time that I ever considered myself as a central part of anything. It is the first time ‘I’ became relevant.

Our first scene illustrates the struggle many writers face when navigating the complex genre demands of writing in various contexts, especially when composing specialized texts within new communities of practice (da Cunha & Montané, 2019; Gotti, 2008; Swales, 1990). Sae-Mi, the first author, felt challenged to understand the genre expectations for clinical field notes while training in sport psychology at a university in central Finland. Her consternation about such writing served as the catalyst for our 8-year long exploration of autoethnographic writing and critical reflective practice (CRP). Although Sae-Mi first voiced her struggle to Marlen, a professor with whom she had studied as a master’s student, this project gained momentum as she was pursuing her Ph.D. when she engaged Jana, a former classmate and now professional colleague, in her further need to explore and document CRP through autoethnographic writing. As we document throughout this paper, the collaboration between Sae-Mi and Jana was vital in shifting from personal reflections to critical reflections about their practices and their field (Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010). Moreover, the difficulties of engaging in, and documenting, CRP also motivated us to be transparent in this manuscript about how we struggled with writing and critically reflecting, and to share our process as a potential solution to how sport, exercise, and performance psychology (SEPP) professionals can use (collaborative) autoethnography as CRP.

In the next section, we provide context to the field of (cultural) SEPP and CRP. Then, we introduce the authors, the major characters of the stories. Once we have situated the reader, we share our process and product of CRP through the use of ethnographic fiction (Davis & Ellis, 2008). In Act 1, we will show the crisis of the story, the process of Sae-Mi engaging in author-centered writing and exploring the dominant practices in SEPP that helped and hindered CRP. In Act 2, we show our solution to the crisis, which was to progress from personal writing to collaborative autoethnography. The collaborative process facilitated CRP for all those involved. We also illustrate how analysis took place through a collaborative CRP process. In Act 3, we examine the lessons learned from engaging in CRP through autoethnography and summarize the affordances of practicing CRP in SEPP.

We acknowledge how our paper unconventionally blurs the distinction between process and product of CRP. We do this in order to illustrate the cyclical, rather than linear, relationship between the two and to underscore the benefits of author-centered reflective writing.

### **Cultural Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology**

Sport, exercise, and performance psychology (SEPP) investigates how psychological factors such as motivation or anxiety may affect performance and how practitioners may help performers improve from a psychological standpoint (Weinberg & Gould, 2019). In applied SEPP, one typically works with athletes and performers to systematically develop the psychological dimensions to performance through the use of psychological skills training techniques such as goal setting or arousal regulation. This performance enhancement agenda is one of the main aims of applied SEPP. Nevertheless, despite the fact that we ourselves and those with whom we work are all cultural beings (Hanrahan, 2010), SEPP has traditionally excluded considerations of culture, identities, or power (Ryba et al., 2013). Researchers have critiqued SEPP as largely situated in ethnocentric ways of thinking and being, which have been so engrained and normalized that SEPP was once portrayed as sitting outside the bounds of culture (Blodgett et al., 2014; Ryba & Schinke, 2009). More recently however, SEPP-related research has indicated a cultural turn, more firmly considering culture as a significant impact in both practice and research. Despite the growth of cultural SEPP in the past decade, gaps persist between research, theory, and practice. For example, Kamphoff et al. (2010) found that only 10.5% of the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) 5214 conference program abstracts from 1986 to 2007 included a meaningful or conceptual discussion of cultural diversity. A follow up study of AASP abstracts from 2008 to 2017 found that the diversity discussions within AASP abstracts has increased minimally since the Kamphoff et al. study (Bejar et al., 2019). Moreover, a survey of 35 Anglophone SEPP graduate programs found that only 54% offered training that had a primary focus on cultural competence development; however, only 31% of programs actually required their students to actually take the training (Lee, 2015). More recently, Lee et al. (2020) found that SEPP practitioners still have minimal awareness of how their cultural identifiers (e.g., gender, race) affect their work as SEPP professionals.

The traditional exclusion of discussions of culture, power, and identities also occurs in clinical note taking. Adequate documentation of services is important for service delivery and a practitioners' best protection against potential concerns that can arise in one's practice; thus, best practices for clinical note taking encourages one's notes to be germane, concise (Leupker, 2010), and "author evacuated" (Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010, p. 512). Although we recognize the necessity for brevity in clinical note taking, with the exclusion of "I" in texts, we also argue that it is no wonder we feel challenged to see our work as culturally situated and how we, as cultural beings, impact our work. In this paper, we argue that it seems unlikely that SEPP's normative writing practices, as it currently stands, are concerned with facilitating critical

reflections. The exact state of cultural competence development in SEPP is still unclear. From the evidence available, however, it is our assessment that sociocultural and political considerations are lacking in the field leading to deficiencies in cultural competence, not just affecting clients but practitioners' self-awareness as well.

### Why Critical Reflections?

One way scholars have proposed to help gain more critical and cultural awareness is through reflective practice, which has been proposed as a way professionals can become more competent (Huntley et al., 2014; Knowles et al., 2014; Schinke et al., 2015). In fact, as of October 2009, the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences listed on its website that they not only require professionals to engage in reflective practice, but they also require documentation of one's reflective practice. Knowles et al. (2014) outlined three different types of reflections: technical reflections, practical reflections, and critical reflections.

Technical reflections, which are the most formal form of reflections in SEPP, focus on issues related to effectiveness and mechanics of service delivery such as evaluating whether one's intervention was appropriate and effective. One example of a technical reflection would be the type of notes typically employed in practicum training, those alluded to by Sae-Mi in the prologue. These traditional practicum notes are expected to include "subjective" observations of the client, "objective" facts about the client, "assessment" of the client, and "plan" for future sessions or interventions (Cameron & Turtle-Song, 2002). These reflections, however, leave little room for considering the "I."

Practical reflections, on the other hand, focus on exploring "personal meaning within a situation" (Knowles et al., 2014, p. 11) such as reflecting on how the personal (e.g., one's values or philosophy related to practice) influences one's approach. While technical and practical reflections could be considered "bettering of life *as we know it*" (Ingham et al., 1999, p. 249, emphasis in original), critical reflections could allow us to imagine "[bettering] life *as we might wish it to be*" (Ingham et al., 1999, p. 249, emphasis in original) by reflecting on the opportunities and constraints of current social arrangements. Critical reflections shift one's focus beyond the immediate service delivery to more abstract, but deeper reflections about normative social practices and their consequences. Knowles et al. (2001) explained:

At this [critical reflection] level, issues of justice and emancipation enter deliberations over the value of professional goals and practice. The practitioner makes links between the setting of everyday practice and broader social structure and forces and may contribute to ethical decision making in practice. (p. 192)

An example of CRP can be found in the prologue where Marlen helped Sae-Mi identify and question dominant ideas of *objectivity* within a SEPP community of practice that inform subsequent thinking and organization of professional practices. The question of science versus literature, objectivity versus subjectivity is not new in sport sciences (e.g., Richardson, 2000), but it was only through this conversation that the first author started questioning the philosophical underpinnings of knowledge and research. Her awareness of how her academic subculture privileged objectivity in thinking and writing led her to examine the consequences of removing *I* from one's writing (and thinking) and explore alternative methodologies that were more in line with her ontological and epistemological assumptions. Through these macro-level reflections of examining oneself in context of the larger society, one can use oneself as a proxy to interrogate, understand, and even disrupt the broader power structures of society (Butryn, 2009; Gilbourne et al., 2014; Knowles et al., 2012). Furthermore, critical reflections

could help prevent practitioners, and the field more broadly, from falling into “uncritical acceptance of prior learning to the degree that it is seen unquestionably to represent some form of ‘truth,’ a truth that is beyond chastisement” (Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010, p. 510).

### **Autoethnography as Critical Reflective Practice**

In addition to advocating for more CRP research, researchers have proposed autoethnography as a promising way to facilitate as well as document CRP (Huntley et al., 2014; Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010). Autoethnography is a methodology that has developed in response to the criticisms of ethnocentrism in ethnographic research (Ellis, 2003). Rather than exploring a foreign culture through one’s own lens assuming one’s lens were neutral, researchers suggested we (critically) embrace our own lens and consider it a valid way of understanding ourselves and the world around us (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Butryn, 2009). Referring to both the process and product of writing, in autoethnography researchers write to make sense of their worlds and their relationships to social structures and culture (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Purdy et al., 2008). For example, Grant and Zeeman (2012) illustrated this process of understanding the self in relation to the social structures and culture through autoethnographic writing in their account of the first author’s adolescence, showing how his experiences were related to the school, town, and other institutions around him. Thus, autoethnography not only encompasses elements of reflective practice, but it also has the promise to be critical in nature.

Although personal experiences are central to autoethnography, not all personal writings are autoethnographies. Jones et al. (2013) outlined four characteristics of autoethnography: “(a) purposefully commenting on/critiquing of culture and cultural practices, (b) making contributions to existing research, (c) embracing vulnerability with purpose, and (d) creating a reciprocal relationship with audiences in order to compel a response” (p. 22). Moreover, not all autoethnographies necessarily serve an explicit critical focus of examining issues of power and justice. Autoethnography can serve five purposes as a methodology:

- (1) “disrupting norms of research practice and representation
- (2) working from insider knowledge
- (3) maneuvering through pain, confusion, anger, and uncertainty and making life better
- (4) breaking silence, (re)claiming voice, and ‘writing to right’ (Bolen, 2012)
- (5) making work accessible” (Jones et al., 2013, p. 32)

By embracing autoethnography as a form of CRP and purposefully aiming to disrupt norms and (re)claim what has been silenced, autoethnography could be “the critical scholarship that does the labor of sharp critique, interruption, and hope – labor that helps us become smarter for us, for others and for all of us together” (Toyosaki & Pensoneau-Conway, 2013, p. 558).

### **Autoethnography as Critical Reflective Practice in Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology**

Since Knowles and Gilbourne’s (2010) call for the use of autoethnography for CRP in SEPP research, there have been minimal responses. Although not directly responding to Knowles and Gilbourne, there have been several autoethnographic accounts that have been reflective in nature. For example, Mills (2015) wrote an autoethnography exploring his context and development of his coaching identity. Another example is Purdy et al.’s (2008) autoethnography examining how power relations in coaching affected an elite rowing

program's functioning and performance. One could infer that these researchers engaged in a process similar to CRP as they examined issues of power and identity, but the insights provided for CRP are limited since the authors themselves did not identify their accounts as process and products of CRP.

Directly responding to Knowles and Gilbourne (2010), Gilbourne et al. (2014) used an autoethnographic short story to examine, and challenge, taken for granted truths. Through a short story titled *The Travel Writer*, the authors examined one of the author's experiences growing up in a mining community in the UK. While this short story provides an account for what CRP could look like, Knowles et al. (2012) are the only researchers to date who have explicitly outlined their process of engaging in CRP. They layered reflections of the second author's diary entries of his sport psychology practice at a major sporting event by incorporating critical friends who helped guide his critical reflections. Nevertheless, as a field, SEPP has remained relatively silent on using autoethnography as CRP. In fact, Cropley et al. (2012) observed that practitioners such as coaches may not fully understand what reflective practice is, let alone understand how to do it. In a review of reflective practice research in sport from 2001 to 2012, Huntley et al. (2014) also found that research illustrating how to engage in reflective practice, especially CRP, is scant. Additionally, Huntley et al. observed that autoethnographies "spend much of their articles *telling* the reader about their approach rather than *showing* them the process of reflection in action" (2014, p. 9, emphasis in original). The need for researchers to continue to defend their alternative research approaches subsequently restrict them from illustrating the process of application or detailing insights gained from adopting the alternative approach (Huntley et al., 2014). With minimal autoethnographies making the process of CRP explicit and presenting CRP in diverse ways, it could continue to be difficult for a student or novice professional, especially those not trained in the critical social sciences, to know how to start or engage in critical reflections.

### Current Research Aims

In this article, we respond to Knowles and Gilbourne's (2010) call to use autoethnography as a way to facilitate CRP in SEPP. We do so in the form of a collaborative autoethnography, in which we find meaning in the similarities and differences of experiences while exploring the influence of the socio-cultural context and both local and global communities of practice (McPhail-Bell & Redman-MacLaren, 2019). The purpose of this study was to autoethnographically present two early career SEPP professionals' accounts of exploring CRP to demonstrate *how* one could use collaborative autoethnography as a way to engage in CRP in SEPP. The specific aims of our work are (a) to illustrate the process of using individual and collaborative autoethnographic writing to facilitate CRP, and (b) to identify affordances of CRP to SEPP. By examining the role of collaborative reflection and writing in applied psychological research, we demonstrate how author-centered reflective writing, specifically autoethnography, demonstrates the process of CRP as well as creates a product that can be disseminated.

As the scene in the prologue hints, we purposefully aligned ourselves with the tradition of evocative autoethnography (Bochner & Ellis, 2016) because it aids in *showing* rather than simply *telling* how our personally meaningful stories connect to larger issues in the field of SEPP. Our purpose was not to engage in extensive theoretical analysis of our stories, such as in an analytical autoethnography. Rather, the goal was to use stories to show the process of CRP and to help readers understand not only the sociocultural context of our personal stories but also empathize with the emotions felt (McMahon, 2016). We write in a confessions-emotive writing style, which "expose personal details that may provoke emotional reactions from readers" (Chang, 2013, pp. 118-119). Thus, we will continue to present short stories in



the form of scenes to show the process as well as insights gained from our CRP. We situate our experiences and analyses of these experiences “dramatically”, respective of Kenneth Burke (1985), as a series of acts and scenes in order to juxtapose our personal thoughts, motives, and experiences with socioculturally-constructed knowledge.

## The Characters

We are a three-person research team, comprised of two early career academic-practitioners and an instructor-facilitator, who began exploring autoethnographic writing as a form of CRP, recognizing the significance of critical reflection in the applied SEPP experience. Sae-Mi and Jana both completed their master’s and doctoral programs at the same schools and so had numerous opportunities to build trust and rapport as classmates, co-researchers, and fellow practitioners throughout the writing of this manuscript. Additionally, as their former instructor and a qualitative researcher, Marlen regularly invited outreach and consultation from former students.

**Sae-Mi.** I am currently an assistant professor of SEPP in the United States. I grew up in the United States before moving back to South Korea at age 8 where my parents were originally from. I lived in South Korea for most of my life until I moved to Finland to pursue a master’s degree in SEPP, which is where I met my co-authors.

I lived a fairly comfortable and privileged life. Although we had some family hardships during my childhood such as financial constraints or the discrimination my parents faced as a newly immigrated South Korean couple in the United States, I was never really explicitly exposed to this. I was young at the time, of course. But I was also the younger child of two children and my family helped shield me from these hardships. It was never *my* concern.

This comfortable life took somewhat of a shift when I moved back to the United States to get my Ph.D. I thought I would easily fit in because of my early childhood experiences of growing up in the United States. The discrimination I experienced and observed, however, surprised me. I naively thought the world had evolved since we lived in a world where Obama was president! Perhaps I was exposed to this before, but I just didn’t realize it. Maybe being introduced to cultural SEPP during my master’s program, although I felt resistant to the ideas at the time I was learning it, helped me become more aware. Or maybe it is just easier to understand (or impossible to ignore) discrimination when it is happening to you directly. Writing eventually became an outlet and a refuge to explore my experiences and how I was situated in the world.

**Jana.** I am currently a SEPP assistant professor in the United States. I am originally from Brazil, where I grew up and obtained my undergraduate degree in psychology. I pursued a master’s degree in sport and exercise psychology in Finland and my doctoral degree in the United States. I met my co-authors in Finland, although Sae-Mi and I only became close friends in Germany, where we did an exchange in a European master’s program.

I grew up as a privileged person who could go to a good private school, live with relative safety (considering the overall safety in Brazil), and live with enough money for some family fun in the summer. I never thought about this privilege or my identities before I left Brazil. As I traveled abroad for my education, however, it became more apparent that my identities were socially constructed. For example, I grew up as a White person in Brazil and only found out that I was not White, but actually considered Latina when I moved to the United States. Despite the arbitrary nature of socially constructed racial categories, they had a real impact on how I navigated my life in the United States. This project became a space where I explored the contexts of my experiences and shifting identities.

I also believe it is relevant to share that I am a former elite volleyball athlete who grew up within a sport culture in which athletes were celebrated for “sucking it up” and being tough, physically and mentally. This strong athletic identity did not shift depending on country (it shifted with time), and perhaps due to this background, I do not think I questioned the world around me as much as Sae-Mi did, even though we had similar academic trajectories. I was more focused on overcoming obstacles rather than critiquing them.

**Marlen.** I earned an undergraduate degree in psychology in the United States, specialized in expressive arts therapies and counseling in my master’s degree, and have since spent more than 20 years as a language and writing educator. Upon first exposure to autoethnography in my doctoral program in Composition and TESOL, I quickly understood that there existed a variety of autoethnographic subgenres and recognized the possibilities of application in numerous disciplines.

While teaching for the language center at a university in Finland, I regularly encouraged autoethnography among my academic writing students. It is there where I met Sae-Mi and Jana and informally became their mentor. Thinking back to my own graduate practicum in counseling and professional practice experiences in community mental health, I considered the importance of my own personal, reflective notes for discussion during supervision and professional development. When Sae-Mi discussed her practicum experience with me, I encouraged her to consider various forms of writing as useful as they construct and reflect on her experiences. We considered these might be valuable in future explorations of professional and personal identity in her field of SEPP.

Today I teach in a variety of psychology, education, and English programs, typically as a writing and research specialist. Due to the level of investment and engagement I have witnessed in student autoethnographers, I continue to recommend and explore this method as an alternative to typical genres of “author evacuated” (Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010, p. 512) writing; I find that autoethnography is particularly effective at helping professionals better understand, reflectively and critically, their professional identities and experiences.

## Act 1: The Journey

### Scene 1: Jyväskylä, Finland, January 2011

*“So... How do I even start?” I ask, Marlen.*

*“Why don’t you go through your notes first, Sae-Mi? Then maybe you can write a reflection of your reflections?” he suggests.*

*I stomp through the snow as fast as I can to get home. I am eager to get started. I turn on my computer and pull up my practicum folder. I scan through my files as I process what happened. I had written approximately 92 pages of notes about my practicum. That was a total of 30,808 words. A lot of my notes were records of facts. Since I did not speak Finnish, I often had to guess what was going on during the team practices. I tried to record everything I could. For example, based on my observations, what did I think the team was experiencing? How were the players interacting with each other and could I notice any changes? This way, I could ask the Finnish coach or co-consultant about some of my observations later.*

*The other half of my notes, on the other hand, were all about my personal thoughts of the experience: I am frustrated about not being able to understand the Finnish language. I am confused about whether I am being effective. I feel I am wasting my time by going to so many practices. I am excited when the coach finally acknowledges me and asks questions and so on. Before meeting Marlen, I was about to delete most of these notes. I was supposed to keep my notes objective and concise (American Psychological Association, 2007; Cameron & Turtle-*

Song, 2002; Luepker, 2010). *My notes, in reality, were an absolute emotional roller coaster. I felt embarrassed and ashamed about writing them in the first place.*

*However, scrolling through these notes, I consider that my own reflections about the practicum have critical validity; it occurred to me that my previous assumptions about service delivery were incredibly naïve. Prior to this reflection above, I thought the content of SEPP would stand alone and speak for itself: I, the practitioner, am just the medium; who I am does not matter; and as long as my practice is sound, the results will be positive, and I will be doing great work. It is almost like my philosophy was to just “get out of the way” (e.g., be confident, don’t be nervous, be friendly, speak clearly) and let SEPP work on its own. I worried more about what the “right” intervention would be and not about what the process before, during, and after looked like. Nevertheless, after realizing that my personal input is part of the process, I realized I am always shaping the SEPP delivery process. My identities, as well as my previous assumptions, knowledge, and values, are always influencing how I practice SEPP and how it is received. Understanding myself, my client, and our context was vital to effective SEPP practice.*

*I wonder what is being lost by privileging “author evacuated” (Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010, p. 512) writing in research and in clinical note taking. Couldn’t there be benefits to seeing myself as not only an inevitable part of knowledge construction but a valuable part of it? And wouldn’t it be valuable to have professionals explore their whole experiences including their emotions, especially for novice practitioners since we know it’s a confusing and emotional time (Tod et al., 2009)? Couldn’t author-centered writing be a form of inquiry into knowledge and self (McGannon & Smith, 2015; Richardson, 2000)? This is when my focus in SEPP shifted from content to people.*

## **Scene 2. Morgantown, WV, USA; June 2013.**

*I (Sae-Mi) am slouched on my chair with my chin propped up on my hand. I swipe my two fingers down to scroll down the computer screen to read my student evaluations.*

*“It’s hot” I think. I didn’t realize it already gets this hot in June...*

*Suddenly, my stomach drops. I bolt up from my chair and stare at my screen to read,*

*“I am more pissed at this university than her... the fact that the university let a woman from Korea (not even from England or something) teach about American sports is ludicrous.”*

*I feel my heart beating faster. I can feel my cheeks burning up.*

*This is not the first time I received comments like this in my student evaluations but... it stings every single time. I try to shake it off but I am unable to move. It feels like the air has been let out of my body.*

*“I realize it sounds stupid to say this, but I didn’t realize I was Korean,” I think to myself. I notice the deep frown on my forehead.*

*“No, of course I knew I was Korean. To be more exact, I didn’t realize what it meant to be Korean. I didn’t realize it meant I wasn’t qualified to teach about sports. I didn’t realize it meant I didn’t belong. I naively thought the brief childhood years I spent in the U.S. and the lack of an accent was enough to “pass.” I didn’t realize my lack of teaching skills as a new teacher would be perceived by others as being due to my gender or my ethnicity,” I think as I bite into the tip of my thumb. I feel angry and sad. I don’t know what to do or who to talk to about this.*

*I finally realize what social identities mean. It is not about how I see myself, but about how others perceive me. I realize my identities say something about me whether I want it to or not. I realize my identities say something about me and I have little control over how others perceive me. I realize identities matter always.*

*Experiences like this continue. I notice overt and subtle microaggressions towards myself and others around me. I notice how those from traditionally marginalized populations in SEPP are treated and socially excluded in both explicit and subtle manners. How they are subtly excluded from social circles and professional opportunities or how their ideas are dismissed for being different. But why wouldn't it be different? We are from different backgrounds.*

*Whenever I try to bring this up, they reply, "But we are all different."*

*"Yes," I think. "But we only ever talk about certain 'differences' and not others" I reply. I want to take more gender studies or ethnic studies classes, especially after I teach sport sociology more and read more about cultural SEPP.*

*I am told, "Yes, do what you want, but focus on the 'foundations' of SEPP first. Then, add your own specialty and interest."*

*"I thought understanding people was the foundation of SEPP?" I ponder. I try to share my insights with someone, but I fear it falling on deaf ears.*

#### **Scene 4: Las Vegas, NV, USA, October 2014**

*I (Sae-Mi) run into a former colleague at a conference who asks, "How are you? What are you doing now?"*

*"Oh, I started consulting with an athletic team as the main consultant! It's been a lot of fun, I'm excited to do more," I say.*

*"But... you HATE SEPP!" my colleague shouts, looking slightly surprised.*

*"No, I don't!"*

*"Yes, you do!"*

*"No, I don't!"*

*"Yes, you do!"*

*We banter back and forth.*

*"What do you mean?" I finally ask, taken aback. I can feel my cheeks starting to get warm.*

*"I mean, you always talk about how bad SEPP is and how it's not inclusive and how it's exploitive and stuff. I just assumed you weren't interested in consulting!" My colleague laughs as he walks off.*

*I linger behind. "Why... would he say that? Yes, I am critical of the field because I do not believe the performance enhancement agenda is always in line with the agenda to promote clients' well-being. I do not feel that the field is inclusive. I often find myself not represented in the theories or research and I talk to, and read of, those who share similarly critical viewpoints. But do I come off as HATING SEPP? Is it wrong to want the field to be better? Isn't everyone supposed to be critical of the field and ourselves?" Thoughts race through my head, as I feel slightly less comfortable in my surrounding environment.*

*I try to shake this off and not be so overly sensitive, but my thoughts continue to intrude. I know that autoethnographic writing encourages and challenges one's understanding of self and the world. As a consequence, we "might develop different points of view, challenge the status quo, query established truths, and be comfortable to lay bare experiences that might evoke sentiments such as uncertainty and unease" (Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010, p. 516). Was this what was happening? Was I just experiencing the consequences of challenging the norm? Or am I just doing it wrong? I feel I am doing it all wrong...*

*I try to remember, "Knowles and Gilbourne (2010) warned us of this. Even as they were calling for more autoethnographies for CRP, they also expressed caution. They said CRP cannot be facilitated in the face of compulsion or coercion. They hoped for 'the ideal speech situation' (Habermas as cited in Knowles & Gilbourne 2010, p. 509) where one can feel safe*

*to engage in CRP without fear of repercussions” I think. Maybe our field is not an ideal speech situation. Or maybe I am doing it wrong. I keep going back and forth.*

### **Act 3: The Journey. With Friends**

#### **Scene 1: Morgantown, WV, USA, May 2015**

*“You know, we could write a lengthier article based on these ideas” Sae-Mi says as I (Jana) type up the last sentences to our multicultural supervision paper. “Yeah, sure” I reply without much thought.*

*Sae-Mi continues, “Because I’ve actually been trying to write an autoethnography for forever now and do CRP.”*

*“That’s cool” I reply, my eyes still on the screen.*

*“I don’t know why I’m so stuck. I feel like I just write about everything that makes me confused or angry” she says shaking her head. I finally look up from my screen, “Yeah, you always say everything is stupid” I say with a laugh, mimicking how she emphasizes the word, stupid.*

*“Right?” she says laughing. “I guess it’s scary because I feel really vulnerable and exposed. And it’s really confusing to know if I’m doing it right...” Her voice trails off. She starts doodling on the piece of paper in front of her.*

*Sae-Mi definitely seems to notice many wrongs in the world. But she also seems increasingly... mad? Sad? I realize I’m not sure. If only she could focus more on the positives, I think.*

*“Maybe... you want to write it with me?” she finally asks.*

*I can hear the hope in her voice. “What do I say? I don’t think I can tell her that I’m not interested,” I think. I watch her draw squiggly lines on her paper. “Maybe it could be interesting... I don’t always agree with her rants, but maybe it will help me learn something. As her best friend, at the least, I could help her feel supported” I think.*

*“Sure,” I finally say.*

*“Yay!” Sae-Mi shouts. I laugh as she starts dancing in her chair. “Can I show you what I’ve done?” she asks eagerly.*

*“Um.. I guess?” I reply with a shrug. Sae-Mi excitedly pulls up files on her computer. She shows me all her practicum notes and the blog she had been keeping.*

*“Oh gosh,” I think to myself. “What have I gotten myself into?” I notice I’m shaking my head as I skim through her notes. I am taken back by the amount of writing she’s done. “How do you have this much to say about your practicum?” I ask laughing. “I usually try to write my notes as quickly as I can!” I say.*

*“You know I overthink everything” she says laughing. “But these self-reflections and ‘recalling’ are supposed to be tools for data collection because it allows us to examine our current thoughts about the topic” (Chang, 2013) she says. “I just don’t know how to make sense of this all so I keep writing... and it just gets overwhelming.”*

*“No kidding,” I reply. I feel her watching me so I continue to skim through her notes until something catches my eye. “Ok, so this is actually pretty interesting. I see you wrote about the incident in supervision class where you said you didn’t think we discussed cultural competence issues enough. I actually have some different thoughts about it that I didn’t tell you because you seemed upset at the time...” I say. I glance up to see her reaction.*

*“Oh yeah?” she asks, raising her eyebrows.*

*“Yeah well, I don’t know. I have to think back to what I wanted to say. Maybe I should start writing my reflections directly onto your blog?”*

*“Perfect” she replies. “And remember, we don’t have to agree. Try not to censor and be honest with your reflections. We can continue to add layers to each other’s reflections. Then, we can discuss it all together with Marlen too.”*

*“Ok. Sure...” I reply hesitantly. I wonder if I could really be honest with my reflections.*

*Despite my hesitation to share my honest views about Sae-Mi with her, Marlen also encourages me not to censor my thoughts. He even suggests we both write autobiographies about our lives and how we arrived at the current moment and this project. “It’s called recalling, ‘a free-spirited way of bringing out memories about critical events, people, place, behaviors, talks, thoughts, perspectives, opinions, and emotions pertaining to the research topic’” (Chang, 2013, p. 113) he says through the Skype screen. “It will help you further your exploration of your own journeys and it can help you realize how you see the world and what you take for granted. You can share them with one another and read them before we meet again next time” he says, cheerfully.*

*“Ok,” I reply with a shrug. I wonder if I should tell them I’m afraid we have too much data, too much written already, but I catch myself.*

## **Scene 2: Morgantown, WV/Tampa, FL, USA, Skype Meeting with All Authors, July 2015**

*“Why is this [writing the autoethnography] something you HAVE to do? It’s been 5 years! Why is it something that you can’t let go?” Marlen pushes.*

*I (Jana) honestly wonder the same thing. I feel like I do understand Sae-Mi better now that I’ve read her autobiography and exchanged a few reflective blogs. I realized she is experiencing and noticing discrimination in the United States more so than before when she lived in South Korea and Finland. No wonder she wanted to study discrimination and microaggressions (Sue, 2010) now. They were everywhere from people telling her they are so glad she’s not like the other Asians to people wanting to be congratulated for trying our international colleagues’ “ethnic” foods and proclaiming that they like it. But I don’t feel like I quite understand why she wants to pursue this particular project, especially since she seems anxious about our slow progress.*

*“Because... because I am tired of being told I am wrong,” Sae-Mi finally bursts out in frustration. “I don’t understand how people are just ok with how things are. Aren’t we missing out by exploring something different? Why is it ok to just ignore difference or the discrimination that comes from being different? I mean... even I am different. People see me as different. Am I just imagining things? I don’t know.” She pauses to catch her breath. She is hunched over the computer. I don’t think she realizes she is raising her voice.*

*She continues, “I guess I can’t let this project go because... even though it frustrates me we aren’t moving forward with the manuscript, at least it’s a place I don’t have to silence myself. I am finally allowed, and even encouraged, to examine the contexts and consequences of my own experiences. Writing, but also reading the work of those who are also challenging dominant narratives in SEPP like those who say we should focus more on people and the therapeutic relationship (e.g., Andersen, 2000), and those who advocate for a critical and cultural turn (e.g., Ryba et al., 2010). Reading their work shows me it’s not just me. There are people who envision a different way of doing SEPP, but this assurance disappears in the real world. I feel like I’m the problem for wanting to talk about difference, identities, culture, discrimination... I question whether any of my thoughts are valid or whether I even belong in this academic space or even this country sometimes. At least writing provides an outlet for me to vent and discuss with others (albeit through readings). I guess I can imagine a different way of understanding myself and the world with you, Marlen, and this project. I’m not ‘just’ a hater. I am a reflective practitioner here and I have something to say.”*

*She looks relieved to have answered Marlen's question to some degree, but I can see her fists are still clenched. I want to say something supportive in response, but I don't know what to say. The more I hear her speak, the more I feel... guilty?*

*"Ok. Let's keep working on this. Jana, what do you think?" I hear Marlen ask me through the computer screen. To my surprise, I start to tear up. "I don't know. I guess I am just sad to see Sae-Mi in so much... pain? I didn't realize it before, but I am realizing this is not just an academic project for her. This is personal." I feel a tear trickle down my cheek. Marlen looks calmly at the computer screen. His look is comforting. I can't see Sae-Mi, but I can feel her tense up on the couch next to me. I can feel she is uncomfortable.*

*So many thoughts are racing through my head. I know Sae-Mi felt surprised after she read my autobiography, I think. I worried whether she felt hurt by my honest comments that I sometimes perceive her reflections as rants. As being too much. It was hard for me to write my autobiography portion of the research project because I did not want her to think that no one immediately around her supported her. Because it's not true! I think.*

*Or is it? Was I hurting rather than helping by listening and then shrugging her observations or concerns off with my advice of, "that's just life" or "there's always people who don't care about difference or discrimination. Just ignore them." Now that I'm thinking about it, deep down, I don't think I was really listening to her in the first place. I saw her world through my lens, my lens of thinking everyone should be practical. If there are systemic problems, your job is to control the controllable and adjust to the rest. Wasn't this the SEPP way? But... is it the only way? This was definitely not Sae-Mi's way.*

*I finally speak, "I guess it's just now dawning on me how everything Sae-Mi was experiencing and witnessing has been affecting her personally. It sounds like she's tried to question why she (and others) were positioned as different and 'other-ed' (McCabe, 2009) in the United States, but even the act of questioning was not allowed. And now it almost seems like she sees herself differently from how I see her. I see her as a strong and intelligent person, but it almost sounds like she doesn't see this in herself anymore. And no wonder she feels that way. It even took me, one of her closest friends, this long to think her questioning of the world had validity. And that makes me feel sad and guilty, even though I don't think that's the point." I wipe away another tear. I don't think Sae-Mi wants my guilt or sympathies but... I don't know what to do.*

*We pause as we process this unstructured yet honest and emotional exchange. I focus back on the computer screen as Marlen begins to speak, "See? There is a narrative here. It's like Sae-Mi is Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz, who is on her path of (self) discovery. Jana is like the characters that join Dorothy on her journey and help her. I (Marlen) am the Good Witch, Glinda, guiding you all down the yellow brick road!!" I briefly pause as I conjure up the image. The comparison makes sense to me. I smile to myself at the image of Marlen as the good witch who has luscious blond hair instead of his current bald head. I also see myself standing tall next to him. The heartless robot...*

*Marlen continues to explain narrative inquiry and how he sees it working in our reflective practice. "Doesn't the narrative of the Wizard of Oz fit here? See how the thoughts or feelings you felt were random and chaotic make more sense under a type of narrative framework? Some believe that it is through these stories and narratives we tell that we make sense of experiences and even ourselves (McGannon & Smith, 2015; Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Some would even suggest that 'constructing a story is more powerful than having a story' (Ramirez-Esparza & Pennebaker, 2006, p. 215). It sounds like you are constructing and reconstructing stories over time as a way to make sense of your personal experiences. We are also reflecting on the connections between our personal stories and broader social issues by exploring which stories or voices have been widely accepted and which have been silenced. That's why personal stories can have political implications (Hanisch, 2006). I would say this*

discussion in itself is CRP! In collaborative autoethnography, this meeting is also part of our data. These could constitute ‘probing sessions... [and] interactive interviews’ (Chang, 2013, p. 114) where we examine our experiences further through collective conversations.”

“Huh... interesting.” Sae-Mi says. But I can see she is still trying to process what was said from the frown on her face. I can relate to her confusion. I enjoy our meetings and the connections and insights we construct through our discussions. However, it is never clear to me exactly how to move forward next in terms of writing an actual manuscript. I decide to chime in. “I think that makes sense. But... so... how do we analyze all this so we can write this article and share this process with the world?” I ask with a nervous laugh.

He pauses to think. “Well, isn’t this the analysis?” he asks. “Isn’t this conversation, in itself, the performing and product of CRP? It’s our personal story, but isn’t it also somewhat a universal Wizard of Oz story of exploration, collaboration, shared-ness, and change? Haven’t we tried to share, to emote, to challenge, and to truly express care? And doesn’t that encourage us (and others) to ask ourselves what we take for granted in our everyday lives and give us space to imagine something different?”

“I guess so...?” I agree. I still feel confused about how to logistically move forward. Will academic journals consider our discussions as analysis? As CRP? I feel they will ask us to defend everything. I feel unsure. The uncertainty feels like a break in my head that stops my reflective thinking. I guess this is a part of going against established ways of doing research. You have to justify why a different approach is valid, I think. Maybe this is why Sae-Mi felt so defensive and exhausted (Tod, 2012).

Due to our hesitation, we agree to continue to engage in meta-reflections and document our thoughts on our blog from time to time. Based on Marlen’s suggestions, we also agree to read more about different scholars such as bell hooks, Audre Lord, and Foucault to help develop and frame our understandings of difference and social justice.

### Act 3: The Lesson

#### Scene 1: Chico, CA/Green Bay, WI, USA, Skype Meeting Between Sae-Mi and Jana, July 2018

“Oh my gosh, I hate how I am sensitive about everything now. I blame you for this!” I (Jana) say chuckling.

“Oh no, what happened?” Sae-Mi asks.

“The other day I was telling someone that America actually refers to the continent and not just a country and they insisted I was wrong! I would have just shrugged it off before since it is a fairly minor issue and assumed their ignorance was their own problem. But now I feel a bit more compelled to engage and speak with them even about something like this. In the era of, ‘build that wall’ and ‘You aren’t really American!’ I feel like I have some responsibility to talk to people and maybe show them how there is more than one ‘truth.’”

“Oh no, I’m sorry. Don’t argue with these people! In this case, America as a continent is a fact” she sighs. “They are just wrong unless they were making some sort of insightful comment about borders being a social construction or something?” she asks with a half laugh, half sigh.

“No, it was not an insightful comment” I laugh. “I guess what I mean is, overall, I realized my former ‘whatever’ attitude does have social implications. Sometimes, it’s not enough for me to disengage like I’d been doing before, especially when it comes to injustices. I recognize that I have other options and I can choose what to do instead of defaulting to ignoring problems.” I reply.



*“That’s interesting” she says nodding. “But what made you go from shrugging things off to thinking you may want to take a different approach of talking about and addressing what you notice?” she asks.*

*“I honestly can’t pinpoint the exact moment” I reply. “I don’t think it was one thing, but it was everything we went through, including this collaborative autoethnography project. One big influence was reading your autobiography and getting to see everything you saw all at once. It was interesting to read it because I could not interrupt or interject and had to fully follow your narrative from start to finish. Your story was kind of my story too, you know? Because we shared so many experiences together going from Finland to Germany to Morgantown. So, in some ways reading your story felt like my story, our common story. But for the first time, I was not the main character of this story. I saw our story from your lens, which was obviously different from my own. That made me realize we were always influencing each other. I was impacting you in a negative way even though my thoughts and actions were well-intentioned.”*

*“That makes sense,” Sae-Mi says as she nods. “But you are a really empathetic person! You are one of the nicest people I know!” Sae-Mi says, laughing. “I just know you have tried to walk in others’ shoes before and tried to see where they are coming from.”*

*“I guess?” I shrug as I look down from the screen. Sae-Mi laughs, knowing compliments can make me feel awkward.*

*“How do you think this process was different from that though?” she asks.*

*“Umm...” I pause to think about her question. “I guess this was the first time I decentered myself in my own story too. I guess seeing more clearly of how my attitude of ‘just be more positive’ and ‘control the controllable,’ led to my actually taking inaction. To see how I was impacting you but also myself was very powerful and memorable. I had to challenge and confront some of the consequences to my core beliefs and also some of the dominant ways of how we practice SEPP. Brushing it off and just being positive might have a place in our work, but it is not always the answer and it certainly does not always challenge oppressive power structures that are embedded in our society, field, and our own minds.”*

*I see Sae-Mi nodding as I continue, “If we were conversing, I wonder if I would have been able to decenter myself in my own story that way. I think I may have interjected my thoughts and interpretations in the conversation. I wonder if that would have changed your interpretations or even silenced you. At the time, I don’t even think you realized how you were being impacted by everything you saw and experienced.”*

*“I agree” says Sae-Mi nodding her head. “I didn’t realize the extent of how I was internalizing dominant ideas, which just led me to focus on my own hurt and disappointment until we started collaborating together and you pointed it out. If we had talked about it first instead of writing about it and you responded with something like, ‘it’s not a big deal just move on,’ I would definitely have stopped talking. Maybe even stopped reflecting? Who knows.”*

*I nod. “From reading your writing, I felt that I could better see and feel what you saw and felt in the world. But writing about my own journey and myself really helped too. I realized there was more to what we see and experience than meets the eye. I identified I had a more conservative (liberal feminist) approach to difference and change, which means I believed change could only occur from joining the system and reforming it from within! I didn’t realize this before. But as we continued to write together and also from reading Audre Lorde (1984) saying “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (p. 110), I realized there were other ways, even more radical ways, to think and bring about social change. I started to explore and contextualize why I did what I did and believed what I did. For example, now that I think of it, I do think being socialized as an athlete made it more familiar to me to just conform to the status quo rather than question or challenge it. And this realization allowed me to change the things I do if I felt it wasn’t working for me.”*

*“Ok, so maybe this is why autoethnography, especially collaborative autoethnography, could be particularly useful in facilitating CRP” Sae-Mi replies. “Collaborative autoethnography invites you to tell your own story, but the collaborative process also requires you to decenter yourself from your own story and see how you are a character in others’ stories too. It helps you realize how your personal story is a part of a broader social story and helps you zoom in and zoom out (Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010) to see yourself from multiple angles, leading us to see how the personal is not just personal but also has political implications” she says.*

*“Yes, I think you are right” I reply. “I want to make sure we emphasize the importance of decentering ourselves in our own stories. It seems in the comparing of our stories to construct a shared story can help show how you are not always the hero, the good guy, the main protagonist even in your own stories depending on the lens you adopt.”*

*“Yes, definitely” Sae-Mi says nodding. “This reminds me, I watched a slam poem about advocacy the other day and what we are talking about reminds me of a part of the poem that really stood out to me. They said, “but to tell me you know my pain is to stab yourself in the leg because you saw me get shot. We have two different wounds, and looking at yours does nothing to heal mine” (Simpson & Bostley, 2015). Just looking back at my stories even now, it is clear I cared about, and reflected on, issues that directly impacted me the most. But that has also prevented me from recognizing how I, too, am upholding oppressive power structures that are causing others’ pain. I have learned from this process too and it has also forced me to look beyond my own experiences to recognize that, even as I’ve cared about racism all this time, I have, for example, perpetuated anti-Black racism myself and ignored it in my own Asian community. I am a part of the status quo that continues to uphold anti-Blackness, which leads to life and death consequences for the Black community” she says shaking her head. It is just so easy to only care about your own struggles and point fingers while ignoring others. And we need a way to not only reflect on our own stories, but to be able to decenter ourselves and interrogate it.”*

*“Yes, I agree” I reply. “I think this constant centering and decentering, or maybe zoom in and zoom out as Knowles and Gilbourne (2010) called it, is very important especially when taking an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1991). Recognizing that we are a part of a system that has intersecting systems of oppression, which lead us to experience privileges and marginalization depending on the contexts we are situated in is always important to recognize. It is important to always start with self-reflection, but to realize that your story is also a part of a grander narrative. And adopting another character’s viewpoint and seeing yourself as a non-main character in your own story could perhaps help you engage more readily in CRP,” I say.*

*Sae-Mi nods in agreement. “Maybe this could be a practical implication of autoethnography. Our process is something others could try to follow and one way for those in SEPP to engage in CRP” Sae-Mi continues. “For example, supervisors could get their students to start by writing an autobiography, including details about their career and how their identities fit into their life and work, and reflect on the process and product together. Critical theoretical perspectives might then be utilized, just as we did, as a way to better understand and interrogate those experiences.”*

*“Yes. I like this idea” I say as I start jotting down some notes.*

## **Conclusion**

We get excited about the idea that autoethnography becomes our way of life, an ethical code of being *in* the world, being *with* others, and being there *for* others . . . a difference-friendly world, where assimilation to majority or dominant

cultural norms is no longer the price of equal respect (Fraser, 1996, as cited in Toyosaki & Pensoneau-Conway, 2013, p. 559, emphasis in original).

In this paper, we explored the possibilities of CRP through the use of author-centered writing, specifically through an evocative, collaborative autoethnography situated within SEPP practice. We illustrated both the process as well as the product of CRP and offered one possible way of conducting CRP through a collaborative, reflective process. Due to the unstructured nature of the project where process and product were naturally and explicitly blurred, this project ended up taking 8 years. The project spanned across continents, through different career stages, and with multiple characters involved. Without author-centered reflections and, most importantly, author-centered writing that helped facilitate and document our journey, we are unsure we would have come to explicit interrogations of our transnational careers and developed these insights. Collaborations were made simpler due to our written documentation. Co-authors could follow the journey as well as take the time to process reflections fully, in different ways, and over time. Thus, we not only propose that author-centered writing can facilitate CRP, but that autoethnography serves as one way to facilitate and document process and product of one's CRP.

When autoethnographers do embrace their vulnerability, it is “the dialogic relationship of self and culture – the ‘I’ and ‘we’ – that autoethnographers emphasize when making themselves vulnerable by making personal experiences available for consideration” (Jones et al., 2013, p. 24). Through an act of vulnerability (and courage), autoethnographers can create space for more diverse and critical conversations, which we believe can facilitate social justice and change. Although we did not start out with an explicit social justice focus, this process led us to be more cognizant of the consequences of the status quo. In this sense, our autoethnography served all five purposes outlined by Jones et al. (2013). Initially, Sae-Mi started the autoethnography project as a way to examine the pain, confusion, anger, and uncertainty she was experiencing in new cultural and academic settings. Through author-centred writing, Sae-Mi attempted to (re)claim her voice that she felt was silenced in academia. In doing so, we inevitably disrupted dominant norms about not only how to write and conduct research but challenged norms related to how we think about identities, our relationship with the knowledge we construct, and the dominant ways SEPP is practiced. Finally, by working with insider knowledge and writing in an evocative manner, which fully embraces the emotionality and personal experiences and perspectives, we believe we created a product (about our process) that is accessible to all, not only academics. As a result of this project (and other experiences), we have a more purposeful commitment to social justice and change. We have come to believe there are multiple ways to facilitate social justice and that “maybe seeking social justice is not only about seeking social justice, but about critiquing and interrupting the minute moments of social injustice that permeate our everyday identity performances, and hoping for a better tomorrow with others in our lives” (Toyosaki & Pensoneau-Conway, 2013, p. 561).

Although this was our personal journey, our process has several practical and pedagogical implications. Because of our struggle to include author-centered writing and CRP into our own work, one of our goals for this paper was to offer an example of how CRP via autoethnography could be accomplished. There is no one right way to engage in autoethnography, which can be empowering but also extremely confusing. We hope that the description of the process, barriers, and emotions involved in our journey can be helpful to other professionals seeking to use collaborative autoethnography to engage in CRP. Through thoughtful and meaningful collaborations and with critical theoretical engagement, one can extend tactical and practical reflections to take a critical turn, one that focuses on power and one that examines social justice implications.

Finally, we reiterate the importance of reflecting on power dynamics in writing and CRP. For example, we do not think it is an accident that we felt more comfortable pursuing publication of this autoethnography only once we secured jobs. Although autoethnography holds potential, as Knowles and Gilbourne (2010) cautioned, one cannot engage in true CRP in the face of compulsion or coercion. Initially, we thought we needed to know more critical theories to correctly do, and publish, our CRP. Although this was valuable, to be honest, what ultimately gave us the push to move from privately reflecting to pursuing collaborative dialogue through this publication was job security. Even though we still feel somewhat vulnerable as early career professionals, as illustrated through our short stories, we wholeheartedly advocate that autoethnography can help professionals think critically about their experiences in SEPP. As such, it would be beneficial to find ways to include author-centered writing as part of SEPP training, including in research and in clinical note taking. Moreover, we invite the field to critically reflect on how we can create systems and practices that facilitate an “ideal speech situation” (Habermas as cited in Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010, p. 509) for mentees, especially those at the margins. How could academia be a true place of exploration and learning, where one feels free to engage in CRP and question the status quo without fear of consequence? We join Knowles and Gilbourne’s (2010) call for the continued use of autoethnography as a method and genre to document, further facilitate, and disseminate the process and learned outcomes of CRP.

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