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I'm Interested in Autoethnography, but How Do I Do It?

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What led to this article/presentation

- Teaching in Qualitative Research Graduate Certificate Program
- Reviewing autoethnography submissions for TQR
- Composing autoethnography for TQR conference
- Developing it into article
- Working on autoethnography book with Dr. Chenail

A common refrain: “Where can I learn how to actually *do* autoethnography?”



Methodology with many parents

Autoethnography is a unique qualitative methodology that draws upon several qualitative traditions:

- Narrative research
- Autobiography
- Ethnography
- Arts-based research

The unit of analysis is *you*, the author, and the researcher.



Getting Started: The Research Question

It is important that the research question reflects the focus of autoethnography, which is exploring a cultural issue through one's personal story.

An autoethnographic study is a form of cultural analysis.

As you develop your research question, ask yourself:

- What is the cultural issue/feature you would like to address?
- What is it that you want to learn through your study?
- What is the aspect of your own lived experience that you are interested in exploring?



Sample Research Questions

What impact did the 9/11 terrorist attacks have on me, as a survivor, and on my overall sense of self? (McIntyre, 2016)

What are the intrapersonal conflict experiences that originate from the researcher's complex cultural background of Chabad-Lubavitch? (Silverman, 2017)

What makes me the teacher I am? What has made me into the teacher I am? (Vasconcelos, 2011)

Practice Pause: Composing Autoethnography RQs

If you develop an autoethnography, what might be *your* Research Question?

What cultural issue that is reflected in your life intrigues you?

What experience have you had that you would like to explore for deeper understanding of social influences?



Data Collection

- Self-observations
- Field notes
- Self-reflective journaling
- Photographs, letters, diaries
- Reports, records, legal documents
- Chronology
- Interviews
- Family rituals and proverbs

Note: Consider issues of confidentiality





Practice Pause: Data Collection

- Based on your autoethnographic research questions, identify three types of data you would have access to for your study:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Data Analysis

General, descriptive qualitative research: descriptive coding, in vivo coding, emotion coding

Ethnographic research: focus on both individual and societal issues, triangulation, pattern recognition

Narrative inquiry: chronology, turning points, themes, sub-plots, critical incidents, metaphors

Arts-based qualitative research: collage, poetry, scripts, painting, dance

Some combination of the above enriches and strengthens the analysis.



Ethics of Conducting Autoethnographic Research

Everyone knows the story is about the life of the author/researcher.

- How will publishing this autoethnography reflect upon your family members, co-workers, or friends that may be referenced in your story?
- Do you have a responsibility as the researcher to obtain their consent to be identified in your story?
- How will you manage protecting the privacy and confidentiality of those in your story?
- How will you care for yourself in the midst of a highly emotional project?

Writing the Autoethnographic Report

Chang (2008) refers to different orientations and outlines four different writing styles pertinent to autoethnography:


- descriptive-realistic
- confessional-emotive (“evocative” – Ellis)
- analytical-interpretive
- imaginative-creative (“performative” – Spry)

Many autoethnographic reports consist primarily of the reconstructed story, which we would characterize as the results. While this style of reporting can be moving, compelling, and lead to important insights for the reader, it does not provide readers with two outcomes we feel are important: an understanding of the research process, and a means to assess the trustworthiness of the findings.



Elements to Include

We suggest you include:

- an introduction to the context and purpose of the study
 - a review of literature that frames the key concepts of cultural analysis explored in the study and highlights prior research in this area
 - a description of the procedures followed to collect and analyze the autoethnographic data
 - a presentation of results (the story)
 - a discussion of those findings and how they contribute new understanding
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In closing.....

Autoethnography is not something we “do” that is separate from who we are, how we engage with the world, and the ways we reflect upon our lives.

As Carolyn Ellis (2013) eloquently stated in her Preface to the *Handbook of Autoethnography*,

“For most of us, autoethnography is not simply a way of knowing about the world; it has become a way of being in the world, one that requires living consciously, emotionally, and reflexively. It asks that we not only examine our lives but also consider how and why we think, act, and feel as we do. Autoethnography requires that we observe ourselves observing, that we interrogate what we think and believe, and that we challenge our own assumptions, asking over and over if we have penetrated as many layers of our own defenses, fears, and insecurities as our project requires. It asks that we rethink and revise our lives, making conscious decisions about who and what we want to be. And in the process, it seeks a story that is hopeful, where authors ultimately write themselves as survivors of the story they are living” (p. 10).