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Autoethnography: An Overview

*Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams & Arthur P. Bochner**

Abstract: »Autoethnografie: ein Überblick«. Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience. This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product.

Keywords: autoethnography; relational ethics; co-constructed narratives; interactive interviews; narrative; ethnography; personal narrative; narrative ethnographies.

1. History of Autoethnography

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005). This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others (Spry, 2001) and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008). A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product.

The “crisis of confidence” inspired by postmodernism in the 1980s introduced new and abundant opportunities to reform social science and reconceive the objectives and forms of social science inquiry. Scholars became increasingly troubled by social science’s ontological, epistemological, and axiological

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limitations (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In particular, scholars began illustrating how the “facts” and “truths” scientists “found” were inextricably tied to the vocabularies and paradigms the scientists used to represent them (Kuhn, 1996; Rorty, 1982); they recognized the impossibility of and lack of desire for master, universal narratives (De Certeau, 1984; Lyotard, 1984); they understood new relationships between authors, audiences, and texts (Barthes, 1977; Derrida, 1978; Radway, 1984); and they realized that stories were complex, constitutive, meaningful phenomena that taught morals and ethics, introduced unique ways of thinking and feeling, and helped people make sense of themselves and others (Adams, 2008; Bochner, 2001, 2002; Fisher, 1984). Furthermore, there was an increasing need to resist colonialist, sterile research impulses of authoritatively entering a culture, exploiting cultural members, and then recklessly leaving to write about the culture for monetary and/or professional gain, while disregarding relational ties to cultural members (Conquergood, 1991; Ellis, 2007; Riedmann, 1993).

Gradually, scholars across a wide spectrum of disciplines began to consider what social sciences would become if they were closer to literature than to physics, if they proffered stories rather than theories, and if they were self-consciously value-centered rather than pretending to be value free (Bochner, 1994). Many of these scholars turned to autoethnography because they were seeking a positive response to critiques of canonical ideas about what research is and how research should be done. In particular, they wanted to concentrate on ways of producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience, research that would sensitize readers to issues of identity politics, to experiences shrouded in silence, and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Autoethnographers recognize the innumerable ways personal experience influences the research process. For instance, a researcher decides who, what, when, where, and how to research, decisions necessarily tied to institutional requirements (e.g., Institutional Review Boards), resources (e.g., funding), and personal circumstance (e.g., a researcher studying cancer because of personal experience with cancer). A researcher may also change names and places for protection (Fine, 1993), compress years of research into a single text, and construct a study in a pre-determined way (e.g., using an introduction, literature review, methods section, findings, and conclusion; Tullis Owen, McRae, Adams & Vitale, 2009). Even though some researchers still assume that research can be done from a neutral, impersonal, and objective stance (Atkinson, 1997; Buzard, 2003; Delamont, 2009), most now recognize that such an assumption is not tenable (Bochner, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Rorty, 1982). Consequently, autoethnography is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don’t exist.

Furthermore, scholars began recognizing that different kinds of people possess different assumptions about the world – a multitude of ways of speaking, writing, valuing and believing – and that conventional ways of doing and thinking about research were narrow, limiting, and parochial. These differences can stem from race (Anzaldúa, 1987; Boylorn, 2006; Davis, 2009), gender (Blair, Brown & Baxter, 1994; Keller, 1995), sexuality (Foster, 2008; Glave, 2005), age (Dossa, 1999; Paulson & Willig, 2008), ability (Couser, 1997; Gerber, 1996), class (hooks, 2000; Dykins Callahan, 2008), education (Delpit, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999), or religion (Droogsma, 2007; Minkowitz, 1995). For the most part, those who advocate and insist on canonical forms of doing and writing research are advocating a White, masculine, heterosexual, middle/upper-classed, Christian, able-bodied perspective. Following these conventions, a researcher not only disregards other ways of knowing but also implies that other ways necessarily are unsatisfactory and invalid. Autoethnography, on the other hand, expands and opens up a wider lens on the world, eschewing rigid definitions of what constitutes meaningful and useful research; this approach also helps us understand how the kinds of people we claim, or are perceived, to be influence interpretations of what we study, how we study it, and what we say about our topic (Adams, 2005; Wood, 2009).

2. Doing Autoethnography: The Process

As a method, autoethnography combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography. When writing an autobiography, an author retroactively and selectively writes about past experiences. Usually, the author does not live through these experiences solely to make them part of a published document; rather, these experiences are assembled using hindsight (Bruner, 1993; Denzin, 1989, Freeman, 2004). In writing, the author also may interview others as well as consult with texts like photographs, journals, and recordings to help with recall (Delany, 2004; Didion, 2005; Goodall, 2006; Herrmann, 2005).

Most often, autobiographers write about “epiphanies” – remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of a person’s life (Bochner & Ellis, 1992; Couser, 1997; Denzin, 1989), times of existential crises that forced a person to attend to and analyze lived experience (Zaner, 2004), and events after which life does not seem quite the same. While epiphanies are self-claimed phenomena in which one person may consider an experience transformative while another may not, these epiphanies reveal ways a person could negotiate “intense situations” and “effects that linger – recollections, memories, images, feelings – long after a crucial incident is supposedly finished” (Bochner, 1984, p. 595).

When researchers do ethnography, they study a culture’s relational practices, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences for the purpose of helping insiders (cultural members) and outsiders (cultural strangers) better

understand the culture (Maso, 2001). Ethnographers do this by becoming participant observers in the culture – that is, by taking field notes of cultural happenings as well as their part in and others' engagement with these happenings (Geertz, 1973; Goodall, 2001). An ethnographer also may interview cultural members (Berry, 2005; Nicholas, 2004), examine members' ways of speaking and relating (Ellis, 1986; Lindquist, 2002), investigate uses of space and place (Corey, 1996; Makagon, 2004; Philipsen, 1976), and/or analyze artifacts such as clothing and architecture (Borchard, 1998), and texts such as books, movies, and photographs (Goodall, 2006; Neumann, 1999; Thomas, 2010).

When researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity. However, in addition to telling about experiences, autoethnographers often are required by social science publishing conventions to analyze these experiences. As Mitch Allen says, an autoethnographer must

look at experience analytically. Otherwise [you're] telling [your] story – and that's nice – but people do that on Oprah [a U.S.-based television program] every day. Why is your story more valid than anyone else's? What makes your story more valid is that you are a researcher. You have a set of theoretical and methodological tools and a research literature to use. That's your advantage. If you can't frame it around these tools and literature and just frame it as 'my story,' then why or how should I privilege your story over anyone else's I see 25 times a day on TV? (personal interview, May 4, 2006)

Autoethnographers must not only use their methodological tools and research literature to analyze experience, but also must consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies; they must use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders. To accomplish this might require comparing and contrasting personal experience against existing research (Ronai, 1995, 1996), interviewing cultural members (Foster, 2006; Marvasti, 2006; Tillmann-Healy, 2001), and/or examining relevant cultural artifacts (Boylorn, 2008; Denzin, 2006).

3. Writing Autoethnography: The Product

In order for authors to write an autobiography, in most cases they are expected to possess a fine command of the print medium (Adams, 2008; Lorde, 1984; Gergen & Gergen, 2010 for using additional ways of doing and presenting research within a performative social science approach). An autobiography should be aesthetic and evocative, engage readers, and use conventions of storytelling such as character, scene, and plot development (Ellis & Ellingson, 2000), and/or chronological or fragmented story progression (Didion, 2005; Frank, 1995). An autobiography must also illustrate new perspectives on per-

sonal experience – on epiphanies – by finding and filling a “gap” in existing, related storylines (Couser, 1997; Goodall, 2001).

Autobiographers can make texts aesthetic and evocative by using techniques of “showing” (Adams, 2006; Lamott, 1994), which are designed to bring “readers into the scene” – particularly into thoughts, emotions, and actions (Ellis, 2004, p. 142) – in order to “experience an experience” (Ellis, 1993, p. 711; Ellis & Bochner, 2006). Most often through the use of conversation, showing allows writers to make events engaging and emotionally rich. “Telling” is a writing strategy that works with “showing” in that it provides readers some distance from the events described so that they might think about the events in a more abstract way. Adding some “telling” to a story that “shows” is an efficient way to convey information needed to appreciate what is going on, and a way to communicate information that does not necessitate the immediacy of dialogue and sensuous engagement.

Autobiographers also can make a text artful and evocative by altering authorial points of view. Sometimes autobiographers may use first-person to tell a story, typically when they personally observed or lived through an interaction and participated in an intimate and immediate “eyewitness account” (Cauley, 2008, p. 442). Sometimes autobiographers may use second-person to bring readers into a scene, to actively witness, with the author, an experience, to be a part of rather than distanced from an event (e.g., Glave, 2005; McCauley, 1996; Pelias, 2000). Autobiographers also may use second-person to describe moments that are felt too difficult to claim (Glave, 2005; Pelias, 2000; McCauley, 1996). Sometimes autobiographers may use third-person to establish the context for an interaction, report findings, and present what others do or say (Cauley, 2008).

When researchers write ethnographies, they produce a “thick description” of a culture (Geertz, 1973, p. 10; Goodall, 2001). The purpose of this description is to help facilitate understanding of a culture for insiders and outsiders, and is created by (inductively) discerning patterns of cultural experience – repeated feelings, stories, and happenings – as evidenced by field notes, interviews, and/or artifacts (Jorgenson, 2002).

When researchers write autoethnographies, they seek to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience. They accomplish this by first discerning patterns of cultural experience evidenced by field notes, interviews, and/or artifacts, and then describing these patterns using facets of storytelling (e.g., character and plot development), showing and telling, and alterations of authorial voice. Thus, the autoethnographer not only tries to make personal experience meaningful and cultural experience engaging, but also, by producing accessible texts, she or he may be able to reach wider and more diverse mass audiences that traditional research usually disregards, a move that can make personal and social change possible for more people (Bochner, 1997; Ellis, 1995; Goodall, 2006; hooks, 1994).

4. Autoethnographic Potentials, Issues, and Criticisms

4.1 Forms of and Approaches to Autoethnography

The forms of autoethnography differ in how much emphasis is placed on the study of others, the researcher's self and interaction with others, traditional analysis, and the interview context, as well as on power relationships.

Indigenous/native ethnographies, for example, develop from colonized or economically subordinated people, and are used to address and disrupt power in research, particularly a (outside) researcher's right and authority to study (exotic) others. Once at the service of the (White, masculine, heterosexual, middle/upper-classed, Christian, able-bodied) ethnographer, indigenous/native ethnographers now work to construct their own personal and cultural stories; they no longer find (forced) subjugation excusable (see Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008).

Narrative ethnographies refer to texts presented in the form of stories that incorporate the ethnographer's experiences into the ethnographic descriptions and analysis of others. Here the emphasis is on the ethnographic study of others, which is accomplished partly by attending to encounters between the narrator and members of the groups being studied (Tedlock, 1991), and the narrative often intersects with analyses of patterns and processes.

Reflexive, dyadic interviews focus on the interactively produced meanings and emotional dynamics of the interview itself. Though the focus is on the participant and her or his story, the words, thoughts, and feelings of the researcher also are considered, e.g., personal motivation for doing a project, knowledge of the topics discussed, emotional responses to an interview, and ways in which the interviewer may have been changed by the process of interviewing. Even though the researcher's experience isn't the main focus, personal reflection adds context and layers to the story being told about participants (Ellis, 2004).

Reflexive ethnographies document ways a researcher changes as a result of doing fieldwork. Reflexive/narrative ethnographies exist on a continuum ranging from starting research from the ethnographer's biography, to the ethnographer studying her or his life alongside cultural members' lives, to ethnographic memoirs (Ellis, 2004, p. 50) or "confessional tales" (Van Maanen, 1988) where the ethnographer's backstage research endeavors become the focus of investigation (Ellis, 2004).

Layered accounts often focus on the author's experience alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature. This form emphasizes the procedural nature of research. Similar to grounded theory, layered accounts illustrate how "data collection and analysis proceed simultaneously" (Charmaz, 1983, p. 110) and frame existing research as a "source of questions and comparisons" rather than a "measure of truth" (p. 117). But unlike grounded theory, layered ac-

counts use vignettes, reflexivity, multiple voices, and introspection (Ellis, 1991) to “invoke” readers to enter into the “emergent experience” of doing and writing research (Ronai, 1992, p. 123), conceive of identity as an “emergent process” (Rambo, 2005, p. 583), and consider evocative, concrete texts to be as important as abstract analyses (Ronai, 1995, 1996).

Interactive interviews provide an “in-depth and intimate understanding of people’s experiences with emotionally charged and sensitive topics” (Ellis, Kiesinger & Tillmann-Healy, 1997, p. 121). Interactive interviews are collaborative endeavors between researchers and participants, research activities in which researchers and participants – one and the same – probe together about issues that transpire, in conversation, about particular topics (e.g., eating disorders). Interactive interviews usually consist of multiple interview sessions, and, unlike traditional one-on-one interviews with strangers, are situated within the context of emerging and well-established relationships among participants and interviewers (Adams, 2008). The emphasis in these research contexts is on what can be learned from interaction within the interview setting as well as on the stories that each person brings to the research encounter (Mey & Mruck, 2010).

Similar to interactive interviews, community autoethnographies use the personal experience of researchers-in-collaboration to illustrate how a community manifests particular social/cultural issues (e.g., whiteness; Toyosaki, Pensoneau-Conway, Wendt & Leathers, 2009). Community autoethnographies thus not only facilitate “community-building” research practices but also make opportunities for “cultural and social intervention” possible (p. 59; see Karoff & Schönberger, 2010).

Co-constructed narratives illustrate the meanings of relational experiences, particularly how people collaboratively cope with the ambiguities, uncertainties, and contradictions of being friends, family, and/or intimate partners. Co-constructed narratives view relationships as jointly-authored, incomplete, and historically situated affairs. Joint activity structures co-constructed research projects. Often told about or around an epiphany, each person first writes her or his experience, and then shares and reacts to the story the other wrote at the same time (see Bochner & Ellis, 1995; Toyosaki & Pensoneau, 2005; Vande Berg & Trujillo, 2008).

Personal narratives are stories about authors who view themselves as the phenomenon and write evocative narratives specifically focused on their academic, research, and personal lives (e.g., Berry, 2007; Goodall, 2006; Poulos, 2008; Tillmann, 2009). These often are the most controversial forms of autoethnography for traditional social scientists, especially if they are not accompanied by more traditional analysis and/or connections to scholarly literature. Personal narratives propose to understand a self or some aspect of a life as it intersects with a cultural context, connect to other participants as co-researchers, and invite readers to enter the author’s world and to use what they

learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives (Ellis, 2004, p. 46).

4.2 Writing as Therapeutic

Writing is a way of knowing, a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2000). Consequently, writing personal stories can be therapeutic for authors as we write to make sense of ourselves and our experiences (Kiesinger, 2002; Poulos, 2008), purge our burdens (Atkinson, 2007), and question canonical stories – conventional, authoritative, and “projective” storylines that “plot” how “ideal social selves” should live (Tololyan, 1987, p. 218; Bochner, 2001, 2002). In so doing, we seek to improve and better understand our relationships (Adams, 2006; Wyatt, 2008), reduce prejudice (Ellis, 2002a, 2009), encourage personal responsibility and agency (Pelias, 2000, 2007), raise consciousness and promote cultural change (Ellis, 2002b; Goodall, 2006), and give people a voice that, before writing, they may not have felt they had (Boylorn, 2006; Jago 2002).

Writing personal stories can also be therapeutic for participants and readers. For example, in the United States, during the 1960s, feminist Betty Friedan (1964) identified the “problem that has no name” – the “vague, chronic discontent” many White, middle-class women experienced because of not being able to engage in “personal development,” particularly of not being able to work outside of the home in equal, supportive working environments (Wood, 2009, p. 78). Friedan observed that many women, as homemakers, did not talk to each other about such a feeling. Isolated to home-work for most of the day, these women did not have the opportunity to share stories of discontent; thus, they felt alone in their struggle, as if their isolation and feelings were issues with which they had to contend personally. Friedan thus turned to writing in order to introduce and share women’s stories. Her writing not only came to function as therapeutic for many women, but also motivated significant cultural change in our understanding of and public policies toward women’s rights (Kiegelmann, 2010).

Writing personal stories thus makes “witnessing” possible (Denzin, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2006) – the ability for participants and readers to observe and, consequently, better testify on behalf of an event, problem, or experience (e.g., Greenspan, 1998; Rogers, 2004); writing allows a researcher, an author, to identify other problems that are cloaked in secrecy – e.g., government conspiracy (Goodall, 2006), isolation a person may feel after being diagnosed with an illness (Frank, 1995), and harmful gender norms (Crawley, 2002; Pelias, 2007). As witnesses, autoethnographers not only work with others to validate the meaning of their pain, but also allow participants and readers to feel validated and/or better able to cope with or want to change their circumstances.

4.3 Relational Ethics

Researchers do not exist in isolation. We live connected to social networks that include friends and relatives, partners and children, co-workers and students, and we work in universities and research facilities. Consequently, when we conduct and write research, we implicate others in our work. For instance, if a woman studies and develops anti-smoking campaigns within a university, tobacco companies may refrain from financially contributing to the university because of her research; even though she is doing the research herself, she may speak on behalf of others – in this case, on behalf of her university. Likewise, in traditional ethnographies, the location of the communities being written about usually are identifiable to readers as are some of the participants being featured in our representations of our fieldwork (see Vidich & Bensmann, 1958).

These “relational ethics” are heightened for autoethnographers (Ellis, 2007). In using personal experience, autoethnographers not only implicate themselves with their work, but also close, intimate others (Adams, 2006; Etherington, 2007; Trahar, 2009). For instance, if a son tells a story that mentions his mother, she is implicated by what he says; it is difficult to mask his mother without altering the meaning and purpose of the story. Similar to people identifiable in a community study such as the minister, town mayor, or other elected official, the author’s mother is easily recognizable. Or if an autoethnographer writes a story about a particular neighbor’s racist acts, the neighbor is implicated by the words even though the autoethnographer may never mention the name of the neighbor (Ellis, 2009). She may try to mask the location of the community, but it does not take much work to find out where she lives (and, consequently, may not take much work to identify the neighbor about whom she speaks).

Furthermore, autoethnographers often maintain and value interpersonal ties with their participants, thus making relational ethics more complicated. Participants often begin as or become friends through the research process. We do not normally regard them as impersonal “subjects” only to be mined for data. Consequently, ethical issues affiliated with friendship become an important part of the research process and product (Tillmann-Healy, 2001, 2003; Tillmann, 2009; Kiegelmann, 2010).

Autoethnographers thus consider “relational concerns” as a crucial dimension of inquiry (Ellis, 2007, p. 25; Trahar, 2009) that must be kept uppermost in their minds throughout the research and writing process. On many occasions, this obligates autoethnographers to show their work to others implicated in or by their texts, allowing these others to respond, and/or acknowledging how these others feel about what is being written about them and allowing them to talk back to how they have been represented in the text. Similar to traditional ethnographers, autoethnographers also may have to protect the privacy and safety of others by altering identifying characteristics such as circumstance,

topics discussed, or characteristics like race, gender, name, place, or appearance. While the essence and meaningfulness of the research story is more important than the precise recounting of detail (Bochner, 2002; Tullis Owen et al., 2009), autoethnographers must stay aware of how these protective devices can influence the integrity of their research as well as how their work is interpreted and understood. Most of the time, they also have to be able to continue to live in the world of relationships in which their research is embedded after the research is completed.

4.4 Reliability, Generalizability, and Validity

Autoethnographers value narrative truth based on what a story of experience does – how it is used, understood, and responded to for and by us and others as writers, participants, audiences, and humans (Bochner, 1994; Denzin, 1989). Autoethnographers also recognize how what we understand and refer to as “truth” changes as the genre of writing or representing experience changes (e.g., fiction or nonfiction; memoir, history, or science). Moreover, we acknowledge the importance of contingency. We know that memory is fallible, that it is impossible to recall or report on events in language that exactly represents how those events were lived and felt; and we recognize that people who have experienced the “same” event often tell different stories about what happened (Tullis Owen et al., 2009). Consequently, when terms such as reliability, validity, and generalizability are applied to autoethnography, the context, meaning and utility of these terms are altered.

For an autoethnographer, questions of reliability refer to the narrator’s credibility. Could the narrator have had the experiences described, given available “factual evidence”? Does the narrator believe that this is actually what happened to her or him (Bochner, 2002, p. 86)? Has the narrator taken “literary license” to the point that the story is better viewed as fiction than a truthful account?

Closely related to reliability are issues of validity. For autoethnographers, validity means that a work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible, a feeling that what has been represented could be true. The story is coherent. It connects readers to writers and provides continuity in their lives. “What matters is the way in which the story enables the reader to enter the subjective world of the teller – to see the world from her or his point of view, even if this world does not ‘match reality’” (Plummer, 2001, p. 401). An autoethnography can also be judged in terms of whether it helps readers communicate with others different from themselves or offer a way to improve the lives of participants and readers or the author’s own (Ellis, 2004, p. 124). In particular, autoethnographers ask: “How useful is the story?” and “To what uses might the story be put?” (Bochner, 2002).

Generalizability is also important to autoethnographers, though not in the traditional, social scientific meaning that stems from, and applies to, large random samples of respondents. In autoethnography, the focus of generalizability moves from respondents to readers, and is always being tested by readers as they determine if a story speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know; it is determined by whether the (specific) autoethnographer is able to illuminate (general) unfamiliar cultural processes (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis & Ellingson, 2000). Readers provide validation by comparing their lives to ours, by thinking about how our lives are similar and different and the reasons why, and by feeling that the stories have informed them about unfamiliar people or lives (Ellis, 2004, p. 195; Flick, 2010).

5. Critiques and Responses

As part ethnography and part autobiography, autoethnographers are often criticized as if we were seeking to achieve the same goals as more canonical work in traditional ethnography or in the performance arts. Critics want to hold autoethnography accountable to criteria normally applied to traditional ethnographies or to autobiographical standards of writing. Thus, autoethnography is criticized for either being too artful and not scientific, or too scientific and not sufficiently artful.

As part ethnography, autoethnography is dismissed for social scientific standards as being insufficiently rigorous, theoretical, and analytical, and too aesthetic, emotional, and therapeutic (Ellis, 2009; hooks, 1994; Keller, 1995). Autoethnographers are criticized for doing too little fieldwork, for observing too few cultural members, for not spending enough time with (different) others (Buzard, 2003; Fine, 2003; Delamont, 2009). Furthermore, in using personal experience, autoethnographers are thought to not only use supposedly biased data (Anderson, 2006; Atkinson, 1997; Gans, 1999), but are also navel-gazers (Madison, 2006), self-absorbed narcissists who don't fulfill scholarly obligations of hypothesizing, analyzing, and theorizing.

As part autobiography, autoethnography is dismissed for autobiographical writing standards, as being insufficiently aesthetic and literary and not artful enough. Autoethnographers are viewed as catering to the sociological, scientific imagination and trying to achieve legitimacy as scientists. Consequently, critics say that autoethnographers disregard the literary, artistic imagination and the need to be talented artists (Gingrich-Philbrook, 2005). Moro (2006), for example, believes it takes a "dam good" writer to write autoethnography.

These criticisms erroneously position art and science at odds with each other, a condition that autoethnography seeks to correct. Autoethnography, as method, attempts to disrupt the binary of science and art. Autoethnographers believe research can be rigorous, theoretical, and analytical and emotional, therapeutic, and inclusive of personal and social phenomena. Autoethnogra-

phers also value the need to write and represent research in evocative, aesthetic ways (e.g., Ellis, 1995, 2004; Pelias, 2000). One can write in aesthetically compelling ways without citing fiction or being educated as a literary or performance scholar. The questions most important to autoethnographers are: who reads our work, how are they affected by it, and how does it keep a conversation going?

Furthermore, in a world of (methodological) difference, autoethnographers find it futile to debate whether autoethnography is a valid research process or product (Bochner, 2000; Ellis, 2009). Unless we agree on a goal, we cannot agree on the terms by which we can judge how to achieve it. Simply put, autoethnographers take a different point of view toward the subject matter of social science. In Rorty's words, these different views are "not issue(s) to be resolved, only" instead they are "difference(s) to be lived with" (1982, p. 197). Autoethnographers view research and writing as socially-just acts; rather than a preoccupation with accuracy, the goal is to produce analytical, accessible texts that change us and the world we live in for the better (Holman Jones, 2005, p. 764).

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