

“Self-nography”

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While it is incredibly difficult to accurately (and without bias or too much detail) discuss my entire lifetime within the confines of this “self-nography”, I will try my best to focus on just a few aspects of life that have been prevalent. Growing up, I was a part of a very large Italian family, which included massive gatherings of all family members during the holiday seasons. This would often include almost fifty people, all essentially looking like the cast of The Sopranos. Unfortunately, these gatherings did not last long into my lifetime whatsoever. By the time I was 11, most of my family had left this mortal coil behind. Many died from freak medical issues (A.L.S, cancer, etc.), which prompted me to pursue a life of science. I had seen the anguish and pain in those I cared about and wanted nothing more than to help them. Viewing this from a cultural standpoint, I realized that my upbringing was very similar to many others throughout humanity’s existence. From once having a large “community” to having but a few immediate family members left was a common thread in the early years of our hominin ancestors. Throughout this semester I have been thinking about whether or not losing such a vast majority of a community for an early hominin may have driven the survivors to seek out other communities, and what the implications of such an interaction may be.

After the doom and gloom of my early years, we moved around a lot so it was difficult for me to maintain friendships and build a community of my own. However, once we finally established a “home base” in Oregon, Wisconsin, I established a very large community network. This network includes people from all walks of life, and I still

maintain contact with most of them. This is an example of how my upbringing (and the tragedies therein) allowed me to have a better grasp of death and other traumatic life events, which in turn has allowed me to be very approachable to all manner of folk. The older I've gotten, and the more those around me have begun to lose loved ones reminds me just how difficult it was being a child and having to grapple with so much death. However, I don't view that tragic upbringing as a bad thing, quite the opposite in fact. If I hadn't had those experiences in those formative years, my own internal dialogue may be entirely different. Language is particularly fascinating to me, and I find myself code-switching almost constantly depending on whom I am talking with. The adaptive function of being able to accurately gauge people's preferred manner of speaking has allowed me to experience some fantastic opportunities, particularly in the field of science. Whether it was sheer luck or something else, I managed to apply my "social intelligence" within the laboratory setting. This "social intelligence" I refer to, to me, is a way of being able to gauge one's own value within a setting, and then market that value accordingly. For instance, one of the laboratories I was working for (Reed Research Group), hired me on at an entry-level position, but within six months I was running my own cell culture suite (handling all research design and execution, cell culture, and other managerial duties), and six months after that I was published for my research.

I would not have been able to find myself in such a fortuitous position if I did not have the ability to converse (and market myself) in such a capacity. It is also a lot of luck, which I acknowledge as part of my own bias. This is something we have also discussed in class: identity and the way it functions in both the community and internally

(Ke-Schutte, 2022). Given the success of self-understanding, I have continued to pursue science (currently as an anthropologist, with a human-focused-lens), in the hopes that I can one day help to repair humanity's relationship with itself. So much of my own existence is so similar, yet so different, to those I've interacted with throughout the years. While my religious beliefs do not align with any others I have met (I'm a scientist by trade, and a spiritualist by nature), they have allowed me to remain open-minded when conversing with others. Sadly, religion is one of those areas of humanity where people can exhibit zealotry, which can alienate other humans to the point of violence at times.

While I have not had a particularly long life as of yet, I feel as though it has been incredibly rich and fulfilling, despite the hardship and tragedy of my youth. I know that I am fortunate for such an existence, and I am grateful and appreciative of the community network I have in my adult life. I try not to let my own internal biases interrupt interactions with humans from any walk of life, but it does not always work. I have found myself, specifically when death is involved, in a "heightened state" of sensitivity to others' emotions. This is definitely a remnant of the trauma I experienced during years that are traditionally the "care-free" years of a human.

Overall, the person I exhibit stems from the culmination of a lifetime's worth of experiences, internalizations, and external catalysts. The same can be said of any other person on this planet, which is one of the most comforting things one can understand in my opinion. As I continue to age, and experience this wild ride of life, I continue to grow in my understanding of the world around me, and I continue to try to help the world through any way I can.

.Ke-Schutte, Jay and Joshua Babcock. 2023. "Toward a non-

binary semiotics of intersectionality: Linguistic anthropology in the wake of coloniality."

Journal of Linguistic Anthropology

33(2): 112–130. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jola.12397>.