

## Chapter three

# Individual and Collaborative Autoethnography for Social Science Research

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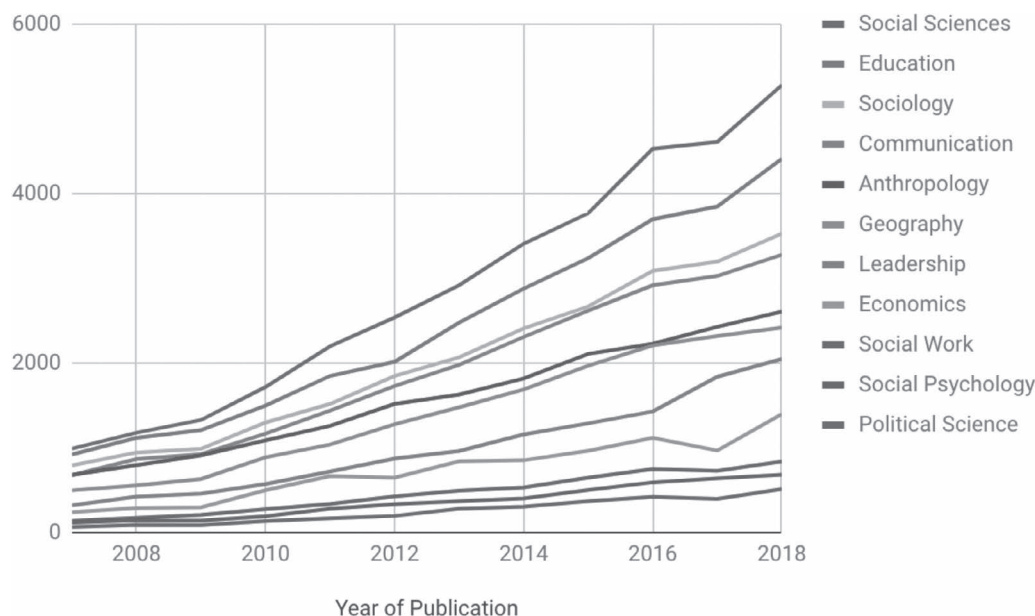
Social science researchers examine social phenomena through human experiences. Such an examination begins with the assumption that social forces and relationships shape humans and can be discovered in human experiences. Experiences have been studied quantitatively with the positivistic paradigm that privileges researchers' objectivity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the quantitative research tradition, researchers keep a distance from their research subjects to avoid influencing the subjects. Departing from this objectivistic approach, the postmodern approach to research, typically qualitative, has acknowledged and embraced the inevitable presence of researcher and participant subjectivity in the research process (Maxwell, 2012; Patton, 2014). Autoethnography, along with other social science methods, shares the assumption that a societal understanding can be gained from studying the experience of its members. However, autoethnography dramatically distinguishes itself from other objectivist or qualitative social science methods by blurring the boundary between the researcher and the researched. Transcending the conceptual distinction between researcher subjectivity and participant objectivity, autoethnographic researchers recognize their personal experiences as a valuable source for societal understanding because they are members of cultural communities and have least restrictions to accessing their own experiences and related socio-cultural contexts. Therefore, they use their personal experiences to understand the entanglement of the personal and the social.

Autoethnography in social science disciplines has experienced a notable growth in the last decade, particularly since the first edition of this *Handbook* was published in 2013. Figure 3.1 visually attests to the growth trend (Chang, 2020). It was created on the basis of a simple search in Google Scholar with the

combination of two key terms, "autoethnography" and "[a selected social science discipline]." Spot-checks of the search results revealed that the search results included research reports, methodological discussions, and practical applications of autoethnography in practitioner fields: for example, education (Vaughn & Kuby, 2019), social work (Gant et al., 2019), leadership (Chang & Bilgen, 2020; Longman et al., 2015), vocational psychology (McIlveen et al., 2010), nursing (Taylor et al., 2008), and medicine (Foster, 2013). Despite the limitations of this simple search, the results presented in Figure 3.1 unequivocally support the growing recognition of the term "autoethnography" in various social scientific disciplines.

Although the application of autoethnography is also growing as a practitioner-training tool for self-reflexivity, autoethnography has established itself as a *research* method in social science fields for a while. This tendency may stem from its origin in the ethnographic research of anthropology (Heider, 1975; Hayano, 1979; Reed-Danahay, 1997). Autoethnography, which started as a method to facilitate *participants'* understanding of their own culture, has evolved into a research method that facilitates *researchers'* exploration of sociocultural phenomena through their personal experiences (Ellis, 2004; Winkler, 2018).

This chapter is built upon this contemporary orientation of autoethnography as both a research process *and* product. Autoethnography can be conducted by individual researchers as their solo research (i.e., individual autoethnography or IAE) or by groups of researchers as collaborative research (i.e., collaborative autoethnography or CAE). Centering around similarities and differences between IAE and CAE, this chapter addresses five methodological issues of autoethnography: (a) Why to select IAE or CAE? (b) How to select research topics and investigative



**Figure 3.1** Growth of Autoethnography in Social Scientific Disciplines between 2008 and 2018 (based on Google Scholar search)

models? (c) How to collect data and make meaning through data analysis and interpretation and literature integration? (d) How to produce autoethnographic writings? (e) How to address ethical concerns in autoethnography? Each section is led by a dialogue between personified IAE, represented by a singular pronoun “I,” and personified CAE, represented by a plural pronoun “We.”

*you, that our personal experiences hold the key to understanding the sociocultural phenomenon we study in our collaborative research. However, when it comes to data processing, we may depart from you. We pool our individual data together and collaboratively analyze and interpret them. In this way, diverse experiences and perspectives on our research topic can be collected and represented in our data pool.*

## SELECTING IAE OR A CAE

**CAE:** Hey, IAE! Do you know we're close cousins?

**IAE:** Yes, I see that our names look similar. But how are we related? I work independently. I design my study by myself. I collect my personal experience as primary data and analyze and interpret the data on my own. Above all, I author my autoethnography by myself. I'm good at my solo dance and love the freedom that comes with it. Since I know my context well, I can quickly discern which experiences are relevant to my research. I cannot imagine doing my kind of individual work collaboratively. So, tell me—in what way are we close cousins?

**CAE:** We know you're good at a solo dance. You're correct that we CAE are good at working collaboratively. The “C” in our name CAE gives it away, doesn't it? However, you will be surprised to learn how much we also do individual work. When collecting our individual data, we also believe, like

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Differentiated benefits of IAE and CAE are anchored on the common tenets of autoethnography as a qualitative research method. Autoethnography is characterized as follows:

1. It draws primary data from a researcher's personal experience.
2. It engages a systematic and iterative process of qualitative research.
3. It seeks to understand the sociocultural meaning(s) of the personal experience within its context.

These common tenets have been explained in numerous methodological texts of IAE and CAE (Adams et al., 2015; Chang, 2008; Chang et al., 2013; Ellis, 2004; Hughes & Pennington, 2017; Muncey, 2010).

The first tenet of autoethnography highlights the centrality of the researcher's personal experience as

primary data. Such data include memories, memorabilia, documents, photos, other artifacts, and ongoing self-reflection and self-observation records pertaining to the research topic. Peter De Vries (2012) articulated the centrality of the researcher as a data collector as well as a data source: “You are the central character in the research so access is not problematic. You can revisit and rethink the data you collect about yourself in an ongoing way” (p. 362). This means that the autoethnographic researcher (i.e., autoethnographer) plays the dual role of researcher and participant as a “native ethnographer” of self within their cultural context(s) (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 9). This revolutionary convergence between two distinct roles benefits and challenges the traditional social science paradigm that typically explores only others as research subjects. Some critics have argued that autoethnography cannot fulfill the promise of sound social science research to be conducted objectively, ethically, and/or ethnographically (Anderson, 2006; Delamont, 2007; Tolich, 2010). Although some criticisms have helped autoethnographers sharpen their methodological discourse, others have been destructive and hostile. Elaine Campbell (2017) documented examples of such negative critiques she encountered via Twitter. Although criticisms of this “unconventional” research method have persisted, advocates of autoethnography have directed social scientists’ attention to the unique capacity of autoethnography that illuminates sociocultural phenomena through researchers’ ready and thorough access to their intimate and experiential data as native ethnographers. Supportive evidence of this autoethnographic benefit is apparent in the growing autoethnography scholarship that includes the birth of the *Handbook of Autoethnography* (Holman Jones et al., 2013) and the *Journal of Autoethnography*.

The second tenet of autoethnography highlights the systematic and iterative nature of the autoethnographic research process. De Vries’ earlier quote, “revisiting and rethinking the data . . . in an ongoing way,” does not imply that the autoethnography process is arbitrary or tenuous. Instead, autoethnography engages systematic data collection, analysis, and interpretation in an iterative manner after a research topic, purpose, and questions are determined. The iterative process of “revisiting and rethinking the data” means that researchers systematically collect, verify, analyze, reduce, expand, interpret, and further collect data in the research process. Mark Learmonth and Michael Humphreys (2012) described their iterative process of autoethnography as “writing, reading, rewriting and reading” (p. 99). The iterative process does not aimlessly meander but systematically directs research

efforts toward the ultimate goal of sociocultural discovery.

The third tenet of autoethnography defines the ultimate purpose of autoethnography: connecting the personal with the social and gaining an understanding of a social phenomenon through the researcher’s personal experiences. Sally Denshire and Alison Lee (2013) articulated the mutual embeddedness of the personal and the social in autoethnographic texts: “In emphasizing the centrality of the personal, [an autoethnographic] account arguably backgrounds the social or cultural world in which the writing occurs, or rather, reads the social and cultural through the personal” (p. 223). This articulation emphasizes autoethnography’s sociocultural mission and distinguishes this method from other forms of self-narratives, such as memoir and autobiography. Without this effort of connecting the personal to the society, autoethnography loses its function as a social science inquiry method.

IAE and CAE are rooted in these common tenets of autoethnography but have experienced a different history of growth. Carolyn Ellis’ *Final Negotiations* (1995), a germinal monograph about living with her terminally ill partner, ushered a stream of single-authored autoethnographies (IAE). Initially, autoethnography referred to IAE; this still dominates the autoethnography literature. In comparison, CAE emerged later and appeared under various labels: simply “autoethnography” or “co/autoethnography” (Taylor et al., 2014), “co-constructed autoethnography” (Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2012; Ellis, 2007), “collaborative autoethnography” (Chang et al., 2013; Geist-Martin et al., 2010; Hernandez et al., 2017), “community autoethnography” (Toyosaki et al., 2009), and “duoethnography” (Norris et al., 2012). Many of these CAE approaches have engaged “interactive interviewing” among autoethnographers or between an autoethnographer and non-autoethnographic participants (Ellis et al., 1997). Although the different labels may imply the creators’ nuanced intentions, all types of CAE involve two or more individuals in the autoethnographic process.

In this chapter, CAE is used as a categorical term for all types of autoethnographies conducted by groups of researchers. Unlike IAE, CAE researchers form a research team to explore together their shared experiences on a common research topic. The concept of “shared experiences” typically means that some or all participating CAE researchers are expected to have a personal, lived experience about their research topic so as to be able to contribute to the CAE process. Variations exist among different CAE models in terms of the size of research teams, the type of

collaboration, and the degree of individual researchers' contribution to the group process. Heewon Chang et al. (2013) provide more detailed discussion about the complexity of CAE as a research method.

Building upon the foundational understandings of the common tenets of autoethnography and distinctions between IAE and CAE, let us begin a journey of autoethnography research. At the beginning of the journey, it is important to keep in mind that the autoethnography research process does not follow one linear, and prescribed, path. Therefore, methodological suggestions for IAE and CAE must be taken as helpful guides, not as rulebooks, at different phases of the autoethnography process.

## SELECTING A RESEARCH TOPIC AND INVESTIGATIVE MODEL

*IAE: Did you notice that IAE topics can be as diverse as IAE researchers allow? In addition, I as an IAE researcher can produce IAEs on various topics. Since my sociocultural life is multidimensional and I can experience various social phenomena in my lifetime, I can write several IAEs focusing on different dimensions of life. Am I understanding correctly that you, CAE researchers, are limited in your choice of research topics because all members in your CAE team have to have shared experiences about your selected research topic?*

*CAE: You're correct that all data-contributing members in our CAE team are expected to have shared experiences about our selected research topic although the content of our personal experiences is likely to differ. This limits choices that our CAE research team can make for our project.*

*IAE: The alignment between the research topic and researchers seems complicated and restrictive for CAE projects. How do you actually find a research focus for your CAE project?*

*CAE: Perhaps in two different ways! We can first form a CAE team based on our pre-existing relationships. Then we can collaboratively decide on a research topic based on our shared experience. Alternatively, one or a few of us can also start with a pre-selected topic and then recruit other "qualifying" members to make up a research team. No one method is superior to the other. As all conscientious social scientists would do, we try to make the research topic as significant as possible to our academic disciplines and the recruitment of researchers as fitting as possible to our CAE project.*

*IAE: Although I don't worry about complex group dynamics like CAE, I'm also concerned about*

*selecting an IAE research topic that is socioculturally meaningful and personally relevant. Therefore, I can see that you and I approach the selection of a research topic similarly. However, I can also tell that complication for research topic selection rises more for you because you work with many more researchers in your research team.*

*CAE: Yes, you're correct. Let's talk more about what IAE and CAE consider when selecting a research topic and designing an autoethnographic study. In our further conversation, we're sure that our unique issues relating to logistical complexity will surface.*

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Since IAE and CAE tap into researchers' personal experiences as primary data, research topics need to be aligned with the source of relevant data. Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (2000) described their approach to selecting a research topic as follows: "I start with my personal life. I pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions" (p. 737). This personal-life approach works well as a starting point for an autoethnography, particularly for IAE. In the case of CAE, it is common that initiating autoethnographers consult with their research partners to determine their research topic together (Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2012; Hernandez et al., 2015). Other CAE researchers have also selected research topics based on their social, professional, or pedagogical interests and recruited others to join their CAE teams (Chang et al., 2014; Toyosaki et al., 2009). Engaging in literature review in the early stage of autoethnography may help researchers tie the topics to the priorities of their academic disciplines and to identify gaps in the literature. Doing this contextualizing work can offer insights into potential IAE and CAE research topics.

While researchers' "personal life" provides critical inspiration and material to autoethnography, narrating a personal story is not the end goal for social science research. Personal topics selected for autoethnography are framed as societal issues in the research process when researchers' "systematic sociological introspection" and "emotional recall" work in tandem (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Therefore, although some research topics seem closer to the "personal" end of a continuum while others are near the "social" end, autoethnographic research pays attention to both. A wide range of personal, relational, professional, and social topics have been covered by recently published IAEs and CAEs: for example, personal tragedy (Ellis, 2009); health issues (Chang, 2016); race and intersectionality



(Blalock & Akehi, 2018; Ohito, 2019); gender and sexuality (Adams, 2011; Phillips et al., 2009); religion and spirituality (Gerena, 2019; Ngunjiri, 2011); language (Marx, 2017); family relationship and dynamics (Poulos, 2008; Holman Jones, 2005); professional relationship and mentoring (Chang et al., 2014; Malin & Hackmann, 2016); professional and academic identity (McClellan, 2012; Murakami-Ramalho et al., 2008); organizational and leadership issues (Chang & Bilgen, 2020; Grenier, 2015); and social justice (Boylorn & Orbe, 2021). Practical autoethnographic research topics for IAE and CEA may also emerge from individual researchers' running lists of compelling experiences, professional curiosities, nagging issues, and intense emotions.

The choice of a research topic typically aligns with one or the other autoethnographic design. Researchers who choose IAE will begin designing a study on their own. If CAE is chosen, the initiating researcher(s) must make two more decisions: the size of the CAE team and the collaboration model that will affect subsequent research steps. A CAE team could include as few as two researchers or as many as ten or more. Small-group CAEs with two or three members are more common and tend to utilize the full-collaboration model. In this model, all research members typically contribute their personal data to their collective data pool and participate fully in all stages of research. In contrast, larger CAE teams are rare due to their logistical complexity and tend to engage the partial collaboration model in which each researcher contributes, at varying degrees, to different phases of the research process. For example, Patricia Geist-Martin et al.'s (2010) study used CAE to engage seven women about mothering. Although all participated in contributing their mothering stories and are listed as co-authors, their personal stories are quilted together instead of being combined for an integrative analysis and interpretation. Karen Longman et al.'s (2015) study exemplifies a partial collaborative model more explicitly in which 14 leaders of color, from various US Christian higher education institutions, participated in CAE by contributing their leadership development and mentoring stories through an online learning platform and video-conferencing tool. At the end, only three researchers participated in the final data analysis, interpretation, and writing. A more detailed discussion of CAE is provided in my co-authored methodology book focusing on collaborative autoethnography (Chang et al., 2013).

By now, let us imagine that autoethnographers have decided on the research topic, selected IAE or CAE, and finalized decisions on the research team size and the collaboration model. On the basis of their

personal preferences, autoethnographers further shape their research process. Some may follow a more formalized research process, while others may apply loosely constructed research plans. Moving forward, autoethnographers are advised to continue their open exploration with broadly framed research questions rather than narrowly focused ones.

## COLLECTING DATA AND MAKING MEANING

*CAE: It's clear that you as an IAE researcher and we as CAE researchers can explore the same research topics with similarly open research questions. Do you think you collect data in similar ways as we do and follow similar steps for data analysis and interpretation?*

*IAE: Let's start with the data collection. I use a variety of data collection techniques. My primary techniques include recollection, self-observation, self-reflection, and self-analysis. I recall and record my past experience as detailed and realistically as possible although I know that the accurate reconstruction of the past is not possible. To my IAE data set, I add my diaries, official documents, letters, writings, and/or other artifacts. I sometimes have conversations with others who are familiar with my experience or were involved in my past experience. Such conversations help me fill missing holes in my recollection. Whenever it is relevant to my research topic, I also observe myself systematically to see how I think, behave, and relate to others. My introspection, self-reflexivity, and self-analysis techniques help me think deeply about how I interpreted my experience then and how my interpretation of the past experience has evolved, how my sociocultural contexts influenced my meaning-making of the experience, and so on. I verify, analyze, and interpret data while collecting data, which would propel further data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The iterative process is apparent in my IAE work, isn't it?*

*CAE: Yes, and the CAE process is also iterative. We use similar data collection techniques to yours, especially when we collect our individual data. Since you explained data collection techniques and types in detail, I do not need to repeat them. Unlike you, however, we CAE researchers benefit from our group work when collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. First, we bring our individual data together, which helps expand our data pool quickly and effectively. We sometimes use focus groups among ourselves to verify collected data or elicit*

*further information on underdeveloped subtopics for CAE. As you mentioned earlier, we sometimes interview “others beyond our research team” to add diversity to our limited range of personal experiences. These others refer to non-members of our CAE research team. They are like “participants” or “interviewees” used in other qualitative projects.*

*IAE: Such conversations with others can also be valuable for my IAE project. So far, you and I concur that IAE and CAE utilize many similar data collection techniques including interviews. When it comes to data analysis and interpretation, however, I imagine that we may depart from each other because I do data analysis and interpretation alone while you, CAE researchers, use a group process. How do you analyze and interpret data as a group?*

*CAE: Not so quick! We need to speak more about data collection before speaking about data analysis and interpretation because autoethnographic data collection is more unique than data garnered from other qualitative research methods. Autoethnographic data collection is directed toward ourselves as researchers and participants at the same time.*

*IAE: Okay, but I want to make sure that we ultimately have the important discussion about analysis, interpretive meaning-making, and integration of literature in the autoethnography research process because autoethnography doesn’t end with data collection.*

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Autoethnographic data, personal experience pertaining to the research topic, can be gathered in a variety of ways: recalling, collecting artifacts and documents, interviewing others, analyzing self, observing self, and reflecting on issues pertaining to the research topic. Recalling is a free-spirited way of bringing out memories about critical events, people, places, behaviors, talks, thoughts, perspectives, opinions, and emotions pertaining to the research topic. Physical evidence of the past, such as memorabilia, photos, multimedia materials, official records, and texts including blogs, personal journals, and newspaper articles, can stimulate the researchers’ multiple senses to connect the present to the past. These materials can help researchers capture “snapshots” of memories (Muncey, 2010, p. 55).

Whereas recalling captures descriptive data from the past, self-analysis, self-observation, and self-reflection capture more processed data representing autoethnographers’ current thinking, attitudes, perceptions, habits, and emotions. One data collection technique of self-analysis is the “culturegram,” in

which researchers display their multiple cultural identities in self-selected categories (e.g., race, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, gender, sexuality, education, socio-economic status, political orientation, interest groups, and geographic affiliation) (Chang, 2008, pp. 97–100). This technique also urges researchers to evaluate their primary identities—what they consider more important—based on their *present* analysis of self. Self-observation also helps researchers capture the “taken-for-granted, habituated, and/or unconscious matter that . . . [is] unavailable for recall” (Rodriguez & Ryave, 2002, p. 4). In self-observation, researchers may use a preestablished recording log or take a narrative approach to record their present actions or describe their present environments. For example, Sally Galman (2011) used a daybook to record her daily activities, which was added to her IAE data analysis. Self-reflection, another data collection technique, allows researchers to record more deeply processed perspectives related to the research topic.

Autoethnographic data collection does not have to be a solitary activity. Autoethnographers can interview implicated others in their personal stories as well as strangers sharing experience with the research topic. CAE, in particular, embraces sustained interaction among research team members. Heewon Chang et al. (2014) explained how their CAE team members, scattered around the country, met virtually one or two times each month, like focus groups, to probe further into already collected data and generate new insights. Carolyn Ellis et al. (1997) utilized “interactive interviews” in their CAE study focusing on body image and eating disorders. In this case, they gathered and analyzed data concurrently through open conversations about their personal experiences with and social implications about eating disorders.

As autoethnographic data grow in diverse forms of text, media, and physical artifact, researchers organize and process these “snapshots” of life for meaning-making. How can a big pile of “data” be eventually transformed into a beautifully constructed, compelling autoethnographic text? No one method or process can be prescribed for autoethnographic data analysis and interpretation just as it cannot be done for other qualitative research. However, it would be safe to repeat the old wisdom of ethnographic research: that an important preparatory activity for qualitative data analysis begins with reviewing data holistically (Miles et al., 2019). Reviewing may mean reading textual data, examining artifacts, and listening to and watching recordings and transcribing them to gain a holistic sense of what has been collected to illuminate the research topic. This holistic examination

will help researchers become acquainted and re-acquainted with the whole body of data. During this time, researchers are advised to take notes on (or “memo”) recurring topics, dominant themes, unusual cases, and notable statements. They also segment/fragment data based on dominant topics through an activity called “coding.” Autoethnographers can benefit from Johnny Saldaña’s (2015) discussion of a wide range of coding techniques for qualitative research. In the earlier stages of coding, researchers are advised not to impose external categories too soon to avoid losing sight of the various meanings emerging from raw data. Codes can be combined later to form larger conceptual categories. Through the process of moving in and out of small and large categories and of fragmenting, grouping, and resorting activities, autoethnographers will discover relationships that connect the categories together to describe and ultimately construct broadly conceptualized themes grounded in data. These themes reveal essential insights about the research topic as a sociocultural phenomenon.

While data analysis is an important phase in autoethnographic research, the research should not stop at narrating or merely describing what categorized or fragmented data say or how data fragments are connected to each other. Harry Wolcott (1992) shared the wisdom of early ethnographers that data description and analysis are important but need to lead to further work, namely data interpretation for sociocultural meaning-making. This wisdom is applicable and necessary to autoethnography. Data interpretation expects researchers to connect fragmented data with each other and within their contexts so as to identify the sociocultural significance of data fragments. To see connection among data fragments (coded data), researchers need to zoom in and out of minute details with a willingness to imagine what lies beyond what is obvious in such data. Some autoethnographers may elect an intuitive and creative approach to meaning-making (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Ellis, 2004; Goodall, 2008), while others may take an analytical and systematic approach to arriving at cohesive meanings out of data fragments (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Chang et al., 2013).

Interpretive meaning-making also compels researchers to connect their findings with other realities represented in the literature. At this stage of research, more focused literature review in relation to emerging themes is useful because external perspectives found in existing literature provide a frame of reference. By comparing autoethnographers’ experiences with other perspectives, autoethnographers can strengthen, contract, or expand existing insights represented in the literature. To

maintain the autoethnographic integrity of personal stories, however, autoethnographers should not rely on literature review to formulate assumptions and narrow the boundary of an investigation at the beginning nor transform their final texts into conceptual and theoretical discussions infested with sources. Oversubscription or over-citation of extant literature would not fit the ontological and methodological paradigm of either IAE or CAE (Lapadat et al., 2010; Winkler, 2018).

## WRITING AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

*CAE: We would say that writing collaboratively is the most challenging part of CAE. As you can imagine, writing a cohesive document with multiple authors is a demanding task. Different writing habits, styles, voices, and talents can encourage autoethnographers to clash in the writing stage. Some individual preferences may be negotiable while other differences may be irreconcilable. In the process of writing a CAE, one talent can be privileged over another, and the power differential among researchers will inevitably affect decision-making.*

*IAE: I can easily imagine the struggle among CAE researchers in the writing process. You may be surprised to hear that I also experience a similar struggle during writing. My struggle is with myself and is often hidden from the public view. I struggle with questions like how vulnerable I would allow myself and how much I want to reveal about others implicated in my story. Despite my internal struggle, I can monopolize the process with my own creativity and produce a cohesive solo dance by myself. I decide if and how I would include prose, poetry, inner dialogue, visuals, and so on. I can experiment with an evocative, confessional, or creative style and select between a narrative or an analytic style. This is the freedom I enjoy in the IAE process. But I also want to learn about how you settle differences among yourselves in the CAE process.*

*CAE: There is no one way of writing a CAE. Some CAE teams may divide the writing responsibility among different authors to elevate their individual voices. In this divide-and-conquer approach, the author of each section can bring out their unique and personal story. Others find such a fragmented presentation to be dissatisfactory and decide instead to present their collective themes as the representation of their group work. In such a case, negotiation among themselves would have to be more explicit with respect to who will contribute to*



*writing and whose voice will ultimately be heard in the final production. Wise CAE teams will have already discussed this at the earlier stage of their collaboration. The first author or principal investigator is likely to be responsible for bringing cohesion to the style, structure, and presentation of the final CAE. You mentioned a variety of ways of presenting IAEs. CAEs also engage a wide range of creativity compared to typical social science writing. However, we speculate that more analytic writing, more typical to traditional social sciences, may dominate CAE, especially large-group CAE, because it's often safer for academics. Since CAE teams put extra efforts into doing collaborative work than IAE, presenting group findings is likely to be privileged over exposing individualized insights and creativity separately.*

*IAE: Despite our differences, let us think together about what makes a research product, whether IAE or CAE, stand out as an excellent autoethnography.*

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The end product of autoethnography takes different forms and shapes: for example, research reports, poetry, performative scripts, songs, films, and performing arts. Autoethnographic texts have embraced a wide range of writing styles, from a more literary-artistic style to a more scientific-analytical style. Adopting John Van Maanen's (2011) typology of ethnographic writing, Heewon Chang (2008) offered four types of autoethnographic writing styles: "imaginative-creative writing," "confessional-emotive writing," "descriptive-realistic writing," and "analytical-interpretive writing" (pp. 141–148). A fifth style, "critical-provocative writing," may be added to the list, built upon Robin Boylorn and Mark Orbe' (2021) and Stacy Holman Jones' (2016) concept of critical autoethnography. Each type is further explained with limited examples in the following paragraphs.

First, the imaginative-creative style represents the most innovative and experimental type of autoethnography, sometimes including poetry and performative dialogues, and departs most from the conventional scholarly discourse (e.g., Andreatta, 2015; Gallardo et al., 2009; Spry, 2016; Ward Randolph & Weems, 2010). Second, the confessional-emotive style distinguishes itself from the impersonal, conventional, "scientific" writing style, readily exposing personal details and provoking emotional reactions from readers (e.g., Grant, 2010; Adams, 2011). Third, the descriptive-realistic style contains rich and vivid details of autoethnographers' experiences to describe reality in engaging ways and as accurately as possible

(e.g., Murakami-Ramvalho et al., 2008; Ngunjiri, 2011). Fourth, the analytical-interpretive style tends to engage a more typical academic discourse common to social science research reports and incorporate theoretical and conceptual literature sources to support researchers' sociocultural analysis and interpretation (e.g., Knapp, 2017; Phillips et al., 2009; Reed-Danahay, 2017). Fifth, the critical provocative writing style transcends the traditional discourse of description, analysis, and interpretation to provoke criticism on social injustice through personal experiences and to advocate transformation (e.g., Ashlee et al., 2017; Boylorn & Orbe, 2021).

These autoethnographic writing styles are "ideal types" in a Max Weberian sense (Swedberg, 2018). They are conceptually distinct, but their boundaries blur in reality. It is common that one autoethnography blends different writing styles. For example, Heather Gallardo et al. (2009) merged autoethnographic poetry (imaginative-creative style) and personal stories of depression (confessional-emotive style) into a conceptual discussion of depression (analytical-interpretive style); Melinda Knapp (2017) discussed her identity formation journey as a mathematics teacher and leader by combining the descriptive-realistic style with the analytical-interpretive style. Therefore, autoethnographers should not feel restricted by the typology of autoethnographic writing styles but rather liberated by the diverse possibilities.

So far, we have explored three critical phases in the autoethnography research process: (a) making decisions on a research topic and an investigative model; (b) collecting data and making meanings; and (c) writing. All of these phases are affected by ethical concerns of social science research involving human subjects. Since ethical standards govern the entire autoethnography research process, it is appropriate to end the chapter with this critical consideration.

## IAE AND CAE RESEARCH ETHICS

*IAE: As IAE is compared with CAE, I can tell that these autoethnographic research designs have much in common although differences are obvious. What about ethical concerns for CAE and IAE? Since you work with several people, I imagine that you have to worry more explicitly about relational ethics when you research together.*

*CAE: You got it! We have to be concerned about the rights and protection of individual researchers and the power balance among us in the collaborative process. We have to think about how we include*



*diverse experiences and perspectives in the collaboration process and present our diversity cohesively in writing without privileging the most dominant voices and writing. When we dissent, we have to compromise our individual ways for the common good. If one researcher constantly feels dominated by others, intended or unintended coercion will erode the CAE's collaborative process. I imagine that you have no such ethical dilemma to deal with in the IAE process, right?*

*IAE: You're correct that I don't have to negotiate with my co-researcher or co-author. However, I do still need to internally negotiate when I select to present certain experiences rather than others. I could be tempted to hide, moderate, or misrepresent my personal stories intentionally to avoid public embarrassment, protect implicated others, or support certain scholarly positions. This temptation is not unique to individual autoethnographers; perhaps it's universal to any researcher to a certain extent. What's unique about IAE is that IAE researchers often try to solve such a dilemma privately while CAE researchers debate it openly among themselves. Therefore, I as an IAE carry a huge ethical burden because I have to demonstrate that I have conducted an ethical IAE.*

*CAE: Ah, this is a good point. How about other ethical concerns when involving interviews with others in your IAE in comparison with our CAE?*

\* \* \*

Ethics in research involving human subjects is primarily concerned about protecting and doing no harm to those involved in a study. Therefore, autoethnographers who involve only themselves in research, not external participants, may feel that they do not need to worry about ethical research standards. This assumption is terribly inaccurate for three reasons. First, autoethnography always implicates others in the researcher's personal stories because autoethnographers' personal experiences do not happen in a relational vacuum. The implicated others deserve adequate protection, especially because their inclusion in autoethnographic stories is unlikely to be voluntary without their prior consent. Second, although autoethnographers choose to disclose their personal experiences for research, the researchers must be forewarned about the potential impact of their self-disclosure on their professional and personal lives. Third, autoethnographers can engage others as interviewees in the research process, and these persons deserve protection as in any other research.

John Creswell and Cheryl Poth's (2017) framework of qualitative research ethics helps break down this large concept of research ethics into five specific kinds to be applied at different research phases: (a) anticipatory ethics; (b) procedural ethics; (c) relational ethics; (d) analysis ethics; and (e) reporting ethics. First, the "anticipatory ethics" governs autoethnographic research at the planning stage. Autoethnographers' motivation and intent in the anticipatory stage of research are not always transparently and clearly articulated in the autoethnographic process. Martin Tolich (2010) particularly critiqued the inherent problem of autoethnography: pulling others into autoethnographic research without prior consent. Since autoethnography heavily relies on data collection about past events, including people already involved in the events, the researchers need to self-regulate and self-monitor their research decisions in this anticipatory stage. As autoethnographers design their studies, they have to ask self-critical questions about their intents and decisions:

Am I (or are we) transparent about choices I/we make when designing IAE or CAE? How do I plan to balance my singularly privileged perspective as the only researcher-participant in IAE? Has this CAE team aligned the research topic with qualified team members?

Second, the "procedural ethics" refer to researchers' concern with seeking approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), if and when necessary; securing consent from those who will be interviewed prior to data collection; informing those who may appear in the researchers' personal stories when prior consent is not possible; and taking all measures possible to protect and do no harm to others who are pulled into the study voluntarily or involuntarily. Whether autoethnography research requires IRB approval is debatable. In Carol Rambo's (2007) case, her autoethnographic study accepted for publication ended up being blocked from publication by her institution's IRB due to the impossibility of securing prior consent from implicated others in her story. In Chang et al.'s (2014) case, the IRB approved their CAE study based on the proposal to secure consent from other CAE researchers. Therefore, it is critical for autoethnographers to follow their institutional requirements. In addition, autoethnographers may self-examine with the following questions:

Am I representing the autoethnography accurately to the review board? Even when official approvals and consents may not be required of autoethnographers, do we still take all necessary steps to protect and do no harm to those involved in the research?

Third, the “relational ethics” aspect is particularly relevant when collecting data about others or with interviewees (Denshire, 2014). Carolyn Ellis (2007) emphasized the importance of recognizing and valuing “mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work” along with “ethical responsibilities toward intimate others who are implicated in the stories we write about ourselves” (pp. 4–5). Her notion of relational ethics does not stop at data collection but extends to data analysis and interpretation. This type of ethics also applies to CAE in terms of how CAE members handle the power balance among themselves (Lapadat, 2017; Longman et al., 2015). The hard questions that a researcher must ask are:

Am I/Are we willing to let go of my/our valuable participants and pull certain data out of the final discovery at their wishes or with concern for the participants’ well-being? Am I willing to pull back my voice to make room for other voices?

An affirmative answer to these questions is the litmus test for ethical research.

Fourth, the concept of “analysis ethics” is applicable during data analysis and interpretation. Temptations for researchers are always lurking, temptations to overlook, overfit, overemphasize, and overgeneralize findings, especially when assumptions are to be proved and preliminary findings look rewarding. When external accountability is absent in IAE, the pressure to prove the integrity of findings may be greater. Sherick Hughes et al. (2012)’s advice that autoethnographers show their research process more explicitly may be useful. Autoethnographers may ask themselves the following questions:

How can I/we show the process from which my/our findings are derived? Am I “picking” experience to fit my pre-established conclusion or engaging a full range of experience in my data analysis?

Finally, the concept of “reporting ethics” focuses on how to protect others and how to do no harm when writing and disseminating results in writing or public presentations. This concern is related to “relational ethics.” The audience of an autoethnography makes an assumption that the written or presented text is about the researcher or author. Therefore, no true sense of confidentiality or anonymity is possible or expected of autoethnography. However, others implicated in autoethnographers’ final products are unlikely to have consented with the same intent of transparency and self-disclosure as the originators of the autoethnography. April Chatham-Carpenter (2010) and Lisa Tillmann (2009) remind autoethnographers that their vulnerability can persist along with the public presentation of their autoethnography products. Therefore, autoethnographers must consider the ethical principle of “do no harm” to themselves when they report on their lives. Autoethnographers may ask the following questions: Am I/Are we making intentional efforts to protect the privacy of others in the autoethnographic texts? Does the well-being of others supersede my/our gains? These five types of research ethics help IAE and CAE researchers self-examine their research practice and enhance the value of autoethnography as a contributing research method to social sciences.

## FURTHER THOUGHTS ON AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

The growing popularity of autoethnography as a research method, process, and product has been demonstrated in this chapter. Focusing on social science research process, I have so far provided a methodological discussion on the following phases: (a) selection of the research topic and investigation model; (b) data collection and making meaning; and (c) autoethnographic writing. Methodological specifics were compared between IAE and CAE pertaining to these phases of the autoethnographic research process. In addition, five types of research ethics were related to various stages of IAE and CAE process. This chapter may contribute to the already established, robust methodology of autoethnography as a social science research. Therefore, the methodological discussion leaves us with hopefulness that, with continuous efforts to conduct ethical research and produce responsible research products, the valuable contribution of autoethnography will continue to rise in social sciences.

While the celebratory posture is acceptable, it is also responsible for autoethnographers to confront

themselves with a self-critical question regarding overall research ethics. For example, should autoethnographers be concerned about the overrepresentation of academics' perspectives in the field because their privileged position as intellectuals, equipped with research and writing ability, has elevated their voices over others who have no capacity to write about themselves? This question is particularly relevant in the context of the growing popularity of autoethnography among academics. If the scholarly reach of academics stops within the boundaries of their own world, social scientists should be worried about the relative decrease of non-academic people's perspectives represented in publications. To combat the unintended hegemony of autoethnographers' perspectives and experiences in social sciences, researchers need to be reminded of their responsibility of engaging a wide range of perspectives and experiences, especially of the voiceless and marginal, in their inquiries. By engaging others as external participants in IAE and CAE and involving non-academics in a collaborative process, autoethnographers may be able to become a more effective conduit of the perspectives of common people, not only those voices of academically endowed autoethnographers. Such a practice of distributed power is likely to match the innovative spirit of autoethnography as it continues to expand its influence as a method and orientation to research.

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