

St. Francis Xavier University

Workshop—Learning to Love Research:
Session 4—Exploring Research Methodologies

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AE520
Research Project

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AUTO -

ETHNOGRAPHY





TWO CORE ELEMENTS



The self, and
context

“

Auto-ethnography, a form of qualitative research in which the researcher is an object of study, reflects on his or her personal experiences, and connects them to broader cultural, social, and political contexts.

(Anderson, 2006; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Purcell, 2013)

1.

THE SELF

The researcher as the
object of study

WHAT SCHOLARS **BRING TO**, & **TAKE AWAY** FROM THEIR WORK

Sharing experience.

- In addressing self, one can contribute to the development of a broader knowledge base
- Such knowledge can be made more accessible to non-academic audiences through studies rooted in personal experiences

Personal insights.

- Biases, and limits of one's personal life become the focus of investigation
- An understanding of how contextual elements—culture, time, place, society, and politics—shape one's development becomes more apparent and understood

(Adams, Ellis, & Jones, 2017; Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008)

2.

CONTEXT

The importance of cultural,
social, and political contexts

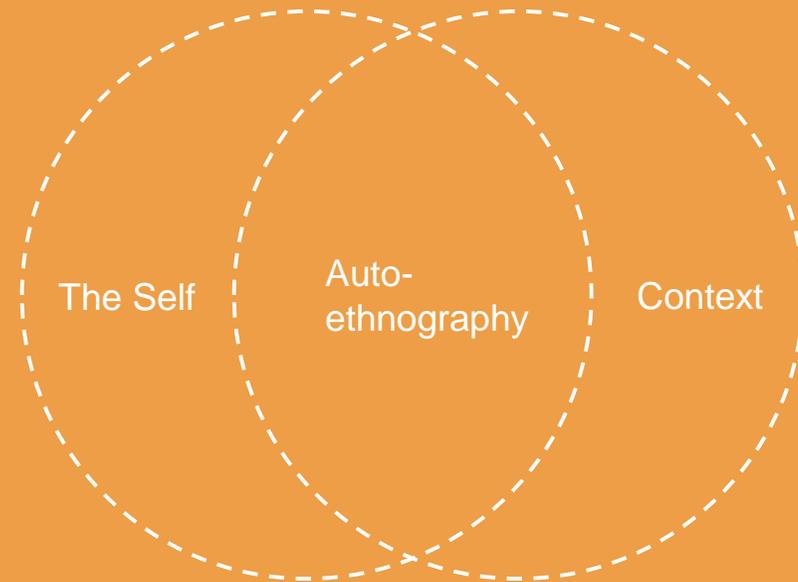
INFORMING & INFORMED—THE WORLD WE LIVE WITHIN

Culture is the central lens that a researcher must use when conducting an ethnographic study. Where auto-ethnography differs is that the lens applied is rooted in some aspect of the researchers life, lived in context, which reveals layers of consciousness to help form an representative understanding of the needs or experiences of a larger group. The researcher acts as an “insider” (Adams, Ellis, & Jones, 2017, p. 3) of a given cultural experience, placing it in context to the social, and political elements which surround the individual to help inform a broader practice.

(Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)

PLACING ONE'S EXPERIENCE IN TO CONTEXT

As a research method that uses personal experience to describe and interpret cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices, auto-ethnography aims to show “people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles” (Bochner & Ellis, 2006, p. 111).



COMMON RESEARCH METHODS

Narrative

"First person ... multi-genre ... short stories, poetry, novels ... fragmented and layered writing" can inform autoethnographic research like they do in self-study and narrative. (Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2009, p. 22)

Memory & Conversations

Memory, hindsight, and conversations with others can be used to call on past experiences to inform one's research

Critical Incidents

Analysing incidents can help researchers to identify their most engaged & distanced moments, their most helpful & puzzling actions, and what surprised them the most. (Brookfield, 2012)

Documents & Artifacts

Photographs, journals, and other recordings can help to provide necessary information and details we can't recall via other means

'Thick Description'

"Culture ... is a context, something within which they [social events, behaviours, institutions, or processes] can be intelligibly—that is, *thickly*-described" (Geertz, 1973, p. 14)

A CRITICAL EYE

Understanding what auto—
ethnography is, and isn't

1. NARRATIVE, SELF STUDY, & **AUTO- ETHNOGRAPHY**

Differentiating between methodologies that privilege self and make use of autobiographical and narrative research methods



SIMILARITIES & DIFFERENCES

Narrative.

- Focuses on narrative materials to research, analyse, and understand the way people create meaning in their lives
- Important “stories” are presented in such a way that others can understand and appreciate their significance

Self Study.

- Individuals reflect on their practice to improve specific aspects of it
- Typically research is focused on the interaction of an educator with a specific interest group
- Much of the existing research is focused on areas of formal education

Auto-ethnography.

- Considers culture, context, time, and place(s) and the awareness of a research in relation to these
- Personal stories are assumed to be representative of a larger group and used as a basis for understanding a particular phenomenon
- Personal experiences are viewed as data to inform research efforts

(Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008; Adult Education Department, 2018)

CAUTIONS FORMED FROM CRITIQUE

1. The differences between narrative, self study, and auto-ethnography can be nuanced and researchers should be intentional about their methodology of choice. Understanding what a given methodology is, and what it isn't, is essential in employing the appropriate methods to conduct research, and supportive of a process that can develop findings based on a identifiable and standardized approach. Although similarities do exist between these research methodologies firmly rooted in autobiographical and narrative methods, there are delineations between them that should be recognized by researchers to ensure they stay on track with their identified research plan.

2. VALUE & CREDIBILITY AS RESEARCH

Understanding auto-ethnographic approaches to research, and whether they should be considered research at all



UNDERSTANDING VALUE & CREDIBILITY

2a.

"...research is a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. Autoethnography does not fit under the scope of this definition ... even if the research involves interviews about deeply intimate and controversial topics."
(Hodges, 2016, p. 21)

2b.

"...'evocative or emotional autoethnography' may have the unintended consequence of eclipsing other visions of what autoethnography can be ..." as autoethnography "has become almost exclusively identified with those advocating the descriptive literary approach"
(Anderson, 2006, p. 374)

CAUTIONS FORMED FROM CRITIQUE

2a. Researchers should be mindful of the research methods they choose to employ when completing an auto-ethnographic study. A certain depth of critical inquiry should connect any findings from experiences back to the cultural, social, and political contexts they exist within. Depending on the context of the research itself, and the audience it is generated for, the validity and credibility may be questioned depending on differing understandings of what constitutes research.

2b. Even within auto-ethnography, the chosen approach to completing a study should consider more than one perspective; an *analytic auto-ethnography* approach (Anderson, 2006) may provide some balance against more traditional ethnographic practices.

RESEARCH PROJECT **FIT**

Connecting auto-ethnography
to my research project



DOES PLACE MATTER?

Investigating how important *place* is for fostering community leadership

RESEARCH PROJECT OVERVIEW



Purpose.

To investigate whether *place* plays a significant role in shaping the learning experiences most influential in developing community leadership

Questions.

- How does one's relationship to the spaces in community where they learn impact the likelihood that they, or others, will view them as a leader?
- To what extent do learning experiences embedded within community development efforts resonate more deeply with, and have a greater impact on developing leadership skills, than formal learning experiences?
- Does an individual's understanding of *place*— "locations endowed with meaning" (Johnson, 2012, p. 830) significantly shape the learning they experience in specific spaces?

JUSTIFYING METHODOLOGY SELECTION

My purpose for participating in this Master of Adult Education program is two-fold. First, I want to better understand why certain learning experiences resonate so deeply with me, contributing to my development as a community leader. Second, I am interested in investigating how similar learning experiences can be designed to engage, educate, and empower others.

Given that my research interests have been shaped significantly by cultural, personal, and historical experiences, and recognising that these experiences influence my interpretation of the research I will conduct, selecting an auto-ethnographic approach for this research seems appropriate.

Additionally, given that the selected theoretical framework—social constructivism— under which this research project will be conducted considers the role of social contexts to mutually build and construct knowledge, and is used to describe, understand, and interpret multiple context-bound realities, there seems to be a necessary alignment between my research goals, and both my framework and methodology of choice.

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THANKS!

Any questions?

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