Autoethnography:
A Social Science Inquiry Method

Yes, you can use your personal story for your professional work!!!

Outline

Part I: Autoethnography as Method

- Interest in Self in Social Sciences
- What is Autoethnography?
- Benefits of Autoethnography
- Pitfalls to Avoid

Part II: How to Do Autoethnography

1. Data Collection
2. Data Analysis & Interpretation
3. Writing

The Publication Information

Autoethnography as Method
(2008, Left Coast Press)

Interest in Self in Social Sciences

- The popularity of self-narratives—such as memoir, autobiography, diary, journal, self-reflective essay—is not new especially in the disciplines of Arts and Humanities.

- Social scientists' interest in self is waxing on the back of postmodernism.

- The study of the researcher self as a subject of scientific investigation is becoming acceptable in many social science disciplines: anthropology (Reed-Danahay, 1997), sociology (Denzin, 1997, 2006; Lucal, 1999), communications (Ellis, 1995, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000, 2006), education (Romo, 2004), religion (Nash, 2002, 2004), nursing (Smith, 2005; Kelley & Bethalal, 2005), etc.

What is Autoethnography

- "…autoethnography should be ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation" (Chang, 2008, p. 48)
- A/E uses **personal experience** as primary data
- A/E Interprets **self as a cultural being** in relation to others
- A/E explores the relationship between self and others (in its cultural context) through the **systematic investigative process** of data collection, analysis, and interpretation
- A/E is **both a process and a product**.

Benefits of Autoethnography

- It helps researchers see their connection to the society/culture where they come from.
- It helps them understand their relationship to others (others of similarity, others of difference, and others of opposition). ***This is particularly helpful for professionals who work with people from various backgrounds: e.g., ministers, educators, social workers, and healthcare providers.***
- It allows them to delve deeply into primary data—researchers' autobiographical information—for social science research.
- The narrative-based writing allows authors to connect with readers easily.

Pitfalls to Avoid

- Excessive focus on self in isolation from others
- Overemphasis on narration than analysis and interpretation of self
- Exclusive reliance on personal memory and recalling as a data source
- Negligence of ethical standards regarding others in self-narratives
- Inappropriate application of the label "autoethnography"

Autoethnographic Data Collection

1. Personal memory data
   - Chronicling the past
   - Inventorying the self
   - Visualizing self
2. Self-observational data
   - Systematic self-observation
   - Interactive self-observation
3. Self-reflective data
   - Journal
   - Culture-gram
   - Self-narrative reading responses
4. External data
   - Interview
   - Documents
   - Other Artifacts

Exercise I:
Personal Memory Data Collection

"Select and chronologically list major events or experiences from your life…. Select one event/experience

from your timeline, which led to

significant cultural self-discovery.

Describe its circumstances and explain

why it is important in your life" (p. 74).

Exercise II:

Personal Inventory Data Collection

"List 5 mentors, in order of importance, who have made significant impacts on your life…. Select one and explain how this person has influenced you" (p. 80).

Exercise III:
Self-reflective Data Collection

Complete the culture-gram of

your self-identity.

Data Analysis & Interpretation

- **The purpose of autoethnographic data analysis and interpretation is to gain the cultural understanding of the relationship between self and others (society).**

- **Triangulation of data source and content to increase the credibility and quality of the qualitative study**

- **Multiple data analysis & interpretation strategies (pp. 132-137)**

- **Employment of literature as a framework for analysis/interpretation**

Exercise IV:
Data Analysis & Interpretation

Review data you have collected and identify who are your "others of similarity," "others of difference," and "others of opposition."

- The definitions of these other-concepts can be found in page 26.

Writing

- Descriptive-realistic style
- Confessional-emotive style
- Analytical-interpretive style
- Creative-imaginative style
- Different combinations of styles can be employed within an autoethnography although one style can be dominant.

The End…

Announcement of an upcoming "Autoethnography Writing Workshop"!!!

Thank you for coming…