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…