1. A scholarly journey to autoethnography: a way to understand, survive and resist

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Autoethnography as a qualitative research method uses the autobiography of the researcher, often highlighting related experiences, and examining those incidences in relation to the cultural context. The process of doing autoethnography is a performative approach that searches for meaning and understanding. This method, which evolved from narratives and the first-person storying of the autobiography combined with ethnographic practices, has emerged slowly over the last two decades from the shadows of the qualitative field. Yet, autoethnography maintains a questionable and tenuous status among the genre of interpretive methods: narratives, biographies, autobiographies, counter stories and oral histories (Denzin, 2013; Ellis, 2001, 2016). Accordingly, the method still exists at the boundaries of scholarly inquiry (Sambrook & Herrmann, 2018; Sparkes, 2007). Autoethnography has not only been termed as experimental, but has been labeled as self-indulgent and narcissistic (Krizek, 2003) and as a method devoid of validity and reliability (Maréchal, 2010). One major argument that is often lobbed against the method is that the “self” is centered and is all powerful since the researcher both generates the data and analyzes it (Coffey, 1999; Denzin & Lincoln, 2002).

However, in this chapter, it is argued that autoethnography stands apart in the category of interpretive methods because it occupies a progressive and unique position mainly because of its valiance: that is, it employs not only revelation, reflexivity and self-critique, but goes further by locating the autobiography within a cultural context that is subsequently analyzed. This courageous methodological approach is interactive as the researcher works through the tension within the text in the presence of the other, the reader. Therein, subjectivity is not represented as a stance to be accounted for by the research; it is instead boldly foregrounded as an essential operant. While sharing and reflecting on personal experiences, the researcher, who is using their personal episodes to tell, is scaffolding the autobiography by involving and speaking to the social, political and cultural environment in which the life stories unfold. This practice of platforming ensconces autoethnography in a myriad of dualities, as it is simultaneously a method and a text; a private matter and an issue seen by others; an insider’s perspective and an outsider’s analysis; and an ongoing struggle and yet a fait accompli.

The use of autoethnography is clearly visible among feminist researchers in their sociological examinations of a wide range of topics, with lived experiences of the women researchers being assessed using the phenomenon of gender as the culture that frames the assessment (Coia & Taylor, 2013; Edwards, 2017; Griffin, 2012;

Taber, 2005). Indeed, one key characteristic in autoethnographic work is that the research is generated by investigators who possess or take an oppositional standpoint. A second feature that is often linked to this method that merges autobiography with ethnography is that it engenders transformative learning, as the researcher is entering into the process of understanding and is thereby changing their relationship to the phenomenon (Custer, 2014; Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Raab, 2013). Another marker of the method is that its location is dynamic and awash in intersectionality because it is the meeting of the story within a story told by the subject and analyzed by and for the other. Furthermore, autoethnographies occur at the intersection of the personal and the political; they juggle the dimensions of the micro (personal) and the macro (society). Though over the last decade a trend has emerged in autoethnographic work, as autoethnographers are examining the intersection between the individual and the workplace, with the office or the organization representing the cultural community context (meso) to the individual's experience (Chang, Longman & Franco, 2014; Herrmann, Barnhill & Poole, 2013; Kempster & Stewart, 2010; Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2017; Parry & Boyle, 2009; Vickers, 2007).

This chapter provides a historical picture of my journey from producing and constructing narratives to embracing autoethnography, tracing the progression across 20 years of researching gender. The examination first looks at the common ground shared by narratives, autoethnographies and collaborative autoethnographies, and gives examples of each method. In the next section of this chapter, the methodological and ethical issues of autoethnographic research are discussed.

MAJOR LIFE PARTNERS: GENDER CONSCIOUSNESS, THE NARRATIVE AND THE THEORETICAL FRAME

In my research domain, gender is a social construct that extends beyond the notions that women comprise over half the world's population; it is essential to know that in my life, as a Black woman, gender has an accompanying hierarchical system, race, which disparately influences the lives of many women, especially women of color. So, in this gendered frame, my life and research partners (gender/race) provide an accompanying consciousness that attends to the forces that shape and determine my existence in an androcentric world. Grounding my work in a feminist awareness of gender operationalizes a research focus that recognizes societal power relations and how gender-bound socialization impacts the researcher and the researched, operating in our everyday lives and permeating each stratum.

As a woman of color, I am ever mindful that I exist on the margins of society and so I operate with a mindfulness of the world inside of my "province of community" and am ever watchful of the world outside of my circle of familiarity, knowing that beyond that boundary, I am seen as the "other." Using a theoretical frame that arises from Black feminist thought (BFT) has forged an outlook that holds that "the daily living of Black women in a society that is racist and sexist has produced a collective consciousness that resists being defined as less than, resists being stereotyped as

undesirable, and seeks to define and empower its members by interpreting existence as a triumph" (Johnson-Bailey, 1998, p. 38). The organic result of operationalizing this premise has been to tell my own story and to practice what hooks (1989) called "talking back" occasionally using "tongues of fire" (hooks, 1990).

MAKING SENSE OF THE WORLD BY STORYING

To make meaning of our existence we recall, reflect and review the stories that comprise our lives, grouping occurrences to find patterns and to understand what is happening. Narratives are seen as an intimate expression, a way to reveal, and a way to build a connection between the storyteller and the audience. Additionally, narratives are also a way of deciphering the surrounding world, our communities, our families, and our workplaces. We remember our childhood, our foremothers in the stories that are passed from one generation to the next. Researchers that use life story methodology and oral historians (Clandinin, Caine, Lessard & Huber, 2016; Gluck & Patai, 1991; Witherell & Noddings, 1991) assert that women's stories are different from those told by men in significant ways: women have an order to language, cultural cues, and reasoning encompassed in storying that is shaped by a gender consciousness that is bounded by a patriarchal world. Accordingly, women tend to speak with an awareness of the others, seldom setting forth an isolationist point of view. It is as Brody, Witherell, Donald and Lundblad (1991, p. 267) remind us, "When given permission to use personal narratives to discover and reorganize the stories of their lives, adults will invariably explore themes of gender and culture."

From my perspective as a woman, narratives have been vital in my life and work, as I have situated myself among my foremothers by the stories told to me by my mother, aunt and grandmother in the pre-civil rights days when they had to fight for dignity and survival in a world that did not value them. In the sharing of these stories and in standing on the knowledge of these stories, I have come to know the power of voice, silence, and resistance. The teachings from their stories have helped me survive in an unfamiliar and occasionally hostile academic world and have become invaluable to my scholarship and research practice.

Early in my academic career I used narratives because they possessed a format that had immediacy and a direct presentation style that did not mask truth or lend itself to misinterpretation. The straightforwardness of the narrative format is especially important as a way to define life when one is marginalized or a member of the disenfranchised gendered majority of women. Narrative or stories have a strong tradition among women, both inside and outside of the academy (Gluck & Patai, 1991; Riessman, 1993; Vaz, 1997; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). The wide acceptance of narratives by feminist scholars is grounded in the implicit collaborations and interactive nature of the design. Overall, the narrative research design format is noted for attending to the power disparities because it honors and gives space to the voice or the actual words of the participants. When narrative research is produced as a personal and singular effort, it is routinely framed by the cultural setting. In addition, when

narratives are done by feminist researchers, the genre requires feminist researchers to depict the circumstances of the women participants by placing the participants, their partners in the process, into a cultural context and to routinely include an exploration of how research can “other” or disempower the participant.

In the beginning of my research journey, I used narrative methodology to explore my teaching praxis, as demonstrated in the chapter, “Learning in the Dimension of Otherness: A Tool for Insight and Empowerment” (Johnson-Bailey, 2010). In the following excerpt from the chapter, I discuss my understanding of homeplace (hooks, 1990), while remaining ever mindful of the culture that is casting a gendered and racialized backdrop. Working and researching women of color taught me that these women had developed a consciousness sharpened by their resistant stance to societal subjugation. Interestingly, the concept of community among these women was not based on geography, but was grounded on the ties fastened by positional connectedness. Their standpoint resonated with me, most especially since the women used their place along the margins as a site for learning and transformation. In the following passage, the concept of shared marginality shapes the story and the storyteller’s personal narrative position and is simultaneously being used as a tool in this research study. It is a story within a story, where I talk about the importance of my grandmother, Sarah, to my identity and to my research agenda, which focuses on Black women and their lived experiences:

I know this for certain, “I am the granddaughter of Sarah, a functionally illiterate woman who could read people better than I now read books.” It is often my sketchy memories of her and the stories that my mother tells me of Sarah Parks, whom I summon when I need strength of mind or a second sight for finding my way.

It is the absence of stories in literature and in popular media of women like Sarah and her front-porch-rocking-chair women of 13th avenue with whom she shared and deciphered life that makes the telling and handing down of stories even more essential in preserving the record of people like me, a Black woman, so that I will know my history and value my legacy. It is through family narratives, the small unit of my parent’s lineage and the larger community of African Americans with whom I am acquainted that I understand my past, my present and where my kin are on their journey in becoming. Any depictions of a people who exist outside of the norm or the mainstream are too often left to the majority to determine and represent. (Johnson-Bailey, 2010, p. 78)

Considering that the stories of women, especially those like Sarah, are missing from the literature, affirms the importance of the autoethnographic-based research that foregrounds the phenomenon of gender.

In this work cited above, I clarified how a culturally informed and sensitive lens has guided my research. In continuing to describe my reasoning for using a personal and culturally based methodology, I now offer another excerpt from this same work that reveals how the women participants had a commonly held worldview that directed their actions and coping:

In my study of reentry Black women I found that a heterogeneous sampling of Black women arrived at the same way of reacting to their educational dilemmas, through negotia-

tion, resistance, and silence (Johnson-Bailey, 2001). Each African American woman in the study possessed an understanding of the forces that shape and determine their existences and therefore often assumed an oppositional world view to frame their experiences. Using what Dubois (1953) called “double consciousness” and what Collins (1990) referred to as an “outsider-within perspective,” these women seemed ever aware of life outside of the parameters of their lived experiences. These community-based analyses were more pronounced or generationally clear among Black women who can remember drinking “colored water”: those women who were over fifty years old and could recall drinking from “colored only” water fountains of the segregated United States.

... This understanding of how the narrative is told and shaped from different perspectives depending on one’s position in society is seen in an African proverb, “The stories of the hunt will be tales of glory until the day when the animals have their own historians.” (Johnson-Bailey, 2010, p. 78)

As expressed in the African proverb that concludes the preceding excerpt, the authority held by the person writing or creating the narrative work shapes the composition, as the narrator determines presentation and the very framing of the story. Consequently, the power that is vested in the researcher further attests to the significance of the contributions being made by the scholars who focus on gendered experiences by turning their research lens inward to conduct autoethnographic work.

A CHALLENGING NEW RESEARCH VENTURE: COLLABORATIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

For me it was a natural progression to move from doing narrative research on others using a gender-attentive lens to entering into collaborative autoethnography. I have used reflexivity to explicitly present and explore my connection to the dilemmas in my life (Pillow, 2003), such as managing the promotion and tenure process, surviving being bullied in the workplace, and learning to transition from faculty member to administrator. Autoethnography revealed my personal connection to the problem with the intent to make explicit any inherent biases that I brought to the study, hoping to lay bare any power dynamics. Using my journals, teaching reflections, interviews and personal communications with students and colleagues helped me to look back on and critique problems that have occurred in my praxis or in my career.

While individual reflexivity is crucial to the process of autoethnography, the act of recalling took on a more structured path when doing a collaborative autoethnography. The method consisted of discussing our individual lives and finding areas of understanding and difference. As a precursor to writing, my research partner and I talked about our own experiences in the academy, trading stories and learning from one another. We found common ground regarding the role that gender and race played in American society and in our lives. As co-researchers, a Black woman and a White man, we knew that although our perceptions of our gendered and racial differences were a part of our daily interactions, we could connect as people who have the opportunity to reject or reshape our assigned hierarchal relationship. While we are close in age, born two years and four days apart, our narratives of coming of age

and coming to consciousness were incongruent. However, we learned that the first step in getting beyond the barriers and boundaries is acknowledging that they are present rather than pretending that they do not exist. In fact, by regularly discussing the barriers, we can on occasion choose to ignore them or defy their ability to define us. We found that we shared a sincere and somewhat naive belief that people are free to act beyond the cultural confines imposed by their fears. Although we carried those invisible knapsacks of privilege and disenfranchisement (McIntosh, 1995), we found the common ground of our working-class families, Catholic school histories, first-generation college experiences, leftist political leanings, a passion for Motown, and generational understandings of the world as children marked and forever changed by the U.S. civil rights struggle and the Kennedy and King assassinations as a basis for understanding and developing our collaborative autoethnography. The journey was one of transitions, similarities and differences.

The resulting research and my initial foray into collaborative autoethnographic work, "Different Worlds and Divergent Paths: Academic Careers Defined by Race and Gender" (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008), was a shared study of two professors: Ronald M. Cervero, a White man, and me, a Black woman. Whereas my research partner, Ron, used Critical Theory as his frame, I relied on the tenets of BFT (Collins, 1990), which encouraged the use of personal experiences as a criterion in research, allowing me to analyze my academic life with a lens conversant with societal inequities. We participated in each other's narratives, using cooperative inquiry (Reason, 1994) to direct a narrative dialogue. The cooperative work developed into a testimonio (Beverly, 1993) that was placed in the larger societal position of how gender and race manifests in the lives of academics. Our autoethnographic work necessitated that we each talked and then talked back in this collaborative effort (Chang, Longman & Franco, 2014). As I walk through the opening of my story, which appears in the beginning of "Different Worlds and Divergent Paths," note how the narrative stands in dialogue with the academic culture. I began the article:

So becoming a full-professor should have been a joyous occasion. Yet between being repeatedly advised, "Don't go up in your first year of eligibility. People will think you are arrogant;" and ... being asked incredulously by a former White woman student, now an assistant professor, "Who did you f _ _ _ to get there in nine years?" and by several Black and White colleagues, "Weren't you the only Black to make it out of the College of Education this year?" and hearing comments such as, "Really? I can't believe it. Congratulations!" I am weary and battle-scarred. And so "My soul looks back in wonder at how I got over." ... What I will say of my life as an academic is that it is the best job in the world, but it has a *special intellectual and elitist brand of hell*. My five years in rank as an assistant professor and five years in rank as an associate professor are not typical for a Black woman in higher education. Women faculty and faculty of color routinely spend more time in rank than their White male counterparts (Menges & Exum, 1983; Ronstein, Rothblum & Solomon, 1993) ... For Juanita, a major sub-theme for relationships with colleagues and students is lack of respect and under-respect, which are sometimes manifested as student resistance, stereotyping, a questioning of credentials, and suspicions of research on "otherness."

The article (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008) continues by situating me within the complex culture of academia, as I explain the advantages and disadvantages of membership:

The benefits of my job as a faculty member are bountiful: I've dipped my toes in the Nile, seen the stars from Down Under, met incredible scholars, and had the wonderful freedom that comes with being in the professoriate – the luxury of being paid to nurture my intellect and live in my own mind. However, I have also faced challenges and suspicions from my colleagues and students about my place and intellect, struggled with self-doubt, and wrestled with my imposed outsider status and my isolation. While these issues are part of the life of many academics, I believe that they are exacerbated by the racism and sexism extant in our society, and that the academy is a reflection of that society.

My collaborator, Ron, joins in the autographic journey by offering his testimony of how he has viewed me moving through our shared academic space:

Even when Juanita is carrying out her administrative responsibilities related to student admissions, she is sometimes viewed as hostile if having to reject a White student. Students attempt to bypass her organizationally mandated authority and make appeals to me or higher-level administrators, but these same students never characterize others' actions in the process as personal or antagonistic." ... The characterization of Black women as angry best defines for these colleagues and students why a Black woman would do research that has critical race theory at its center. Perhaps the only stereotype that does more harm to Black women in the workplace than the angry or loving Black woman is the representation that characterizes Black women as "strong" (Scott, 1991). This interpretation of the Black superwoman forces Black women into a narrow space between heroic imagery and burdensome experiences. "More than once," Juanita recalls, "I have come out of meetings where I was embattled over one issue or another and colleagues have said, 'I didn't speak up because I knew you could take care of yourself.'" The dangers of accepting this myth as accurate is that Black women are perceived as not requiring any safeguarding or considerations, as being capable of fending for themselves, and as being able to endure any hardships confronting them.

This collaborative autoethnography between colleagues (Ron and me) became more than a telling among co-workers because the doing and performative nature was an empowering and transformative act for both of us. The sharing and reflecting on our individual and mutual experiences proved to be a dynamic methodological exercise that bridged and fused our separate narratives into a joint account with our varied societal perspectives (our cultural backgrounds) acting as a validating tool that deepened our understanding of our partner and of ourselves, and explicated how our shared academic environment was a different existence for each of us because one of us was a White man and one of us was an "other" – a Black woman. The power and beauty of this collaborative autoethnographic method is that it unfolds in the course of disclosing and the resulting narrative offering can give the reader an up-close view of an intimate process of shared storing.

STANDING ON MY OWN: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY ABOUT BULLYING

The first attempt to create a stand-alone autoethnography was “Academic Incivility and Bullying as a Gendered and Racialized Phenomena” (Johnson-Bailey, 2015). For me, it was an act of bravery because there was no co-creator to offer protection and no way to mask the setting, my workplace. I was not writing about my teaching praxis, but talking about a difficult time in my career. This following excerpt is me telling and me “talking back” to the pain of being alone, vulnerable and afraid. It is my effort to struggle against the stereotyping of me as a woman who does not know her place and it is also an attempt to claim my anger at being bullied, when I had been admonished to be a “strong Black woman” and to “not take it personally” and to “rise above it” and to “make sure I wasn’t misreading the situation.” Griffin (2012) refers to my act of stepping out to say what I know to be true for me, when she writes that such resistance is an endeavor to “critically narrate the pride and pain of Black womanhood.” It is done, as Ngunjiri and Hernandez (2017) say, with an understanding of and despite one’s personal confluent intersection of gender, race and class, and against and amidst the identified organizational setting. As I stood in the space of resistance, I wrote about being bullied in this 2015 article:

When I reflect on my twenty-year career in the professoriate, I am delighted that despite my fears, I chose the career of my dreams ... In looking back over the years, although I am saturated by the memories of joy and made glad by the journey, most especially the Ph.D.s who I’ve minted, the courses I’ve created, and the publications that I’ve produced. However, my remembrances are somewhat obfuscated by my existence in America as a Black woman in the sacred academic domain. I cannot help but recall the painful moments that left behind broken places. ... The complications along the way, the bumps and bruises, the moments of cognitive dissonance when I was forced to confront academic bullying and incivility, were the times when my positional power as the professor did not provide protection. These situations were made all the more devastating because of my naïve assumption that educated people would be progressive and that the academic environment was a place awash with fairness and tolerance. Imagine my astonishment when I discovered that this revered place was not sacrosanct, but an American workplace that did not exist apart and superior to the outside world – above the clouds in an ivory tower. ... What happens when you walk into a class prepared to teach a subject that your credentials report that you have mastered and your students refuse to see you as the authority or repudiate your subject mastery? ... These instances where a student questions a woman professor’s authority are often scenarios that demonstrate the worthlessness of positional power in certain conflicts (Thomas et. al, 2013; Thompson & Louque, 2005). The literature on Black women’s experiences in academia overwhelmingly posit that Black women professors’ positional power is trumped by the ability of students to activate a powerful system that has a vested interest in protecting its intended consumers, the students (Chepyator-Thomson, 2000; Johnson-Bailey & Lee, 2005; Sheared et al., 2010). I believe that the behavior of this student who constantly and aggressively challenged me was actually a smoke screen for resistance to positional authority and to my mastery (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008; Maher & Tetreault, 1994; Smith, 1999; Smith, 2004).

In the act of creating this autoethnographic work about bullying, I knew that I was engaging in a purposeful act of not only telling my story, but was offering a direct critique of my students, colleagues and my workplace. In this instance, as the autoethnographer, I made two deliberate choices. First, I focused more on my incidents involving students because I believe these examples are readily understood by my readers (who would recognize some of the behaviors described) and also because I was more emotionally removed from the students since we don't share a common identity. Honestly and primarily, I felt there was less risk involved in talking about my dilemmas involving students. Additionally, the examples that I offered – not being recognized as the professor, being interrupted when speaking, and having your knowledge challenged – were gendered microaggressions that are routinely experienced by women professors.

Secondly, my next deliberate choice occurred because I struggled with recounting incidents of bullying involving my peers, other professors, where these colleagues identity could be masked. As a researcher, I must have consent from participants and in this case, I decided that I certainly did not want to seek the permission and involvement from people who had bullied me, as the very exercise would have been disempowering. Therefore, I chose a bullying incident involving colleagues that occurred away from my campus and at an academic retreat that was comprised of professors from Southern Africa, the United States, Canada and Latin America, which meant that the varied and large numbers of participants provided a layer of confidentiality. However, I did seek out three conference participants to discuss with them what I believed to be an instance of gender-based harassment; our conversations helped me establish trustworthiness in the recounting the incident.

Quite unexpectedly, I found developing the autoethnography on bullying more difficult than doing narrative work or collaborative autoethnography. The stumbling block was not the implicit risk of being the center of the story and of divulging painful situations. The predicament involved in working on this autoethnography concerned the care necessitated in writing about such a volatile and sensitive issue. Bullying is not openly discussed in academic circles; it's a taboo subject, as the academic environment offers fertile ground for abuse given that professors use subjectivity to guide our votes on our colleagues' membership, tenure and rank (Keashly & Neuman, 2010). So, in writing about the topic of bullying based primarily on gender, I was going against the accepted notion of higher education as a progressive environment, despite the fact that women are concentrated in the lower ranks of the professoriate and the administration, and notwithstanding the fact that women faculty members still describe the academic climate as chilly (Harper, Baldwin, Gansneder & Chronister, 2001; Maranto & Griffin, 2011). Therefore, I assert that my autoethnographic work that uses a gender conscious lens to examine an under-researched topic takes on special importance. Such research that is being done across the academy by women researchers not only fills a gap in the literature, but also imparts a rare and often absent personal perspective.

METHODOLOGICAL MATTERS: IS AUTOETHNOGRAPHY REAL RESEARCH?

In reviewing the three examples offered, the narrative, the collaborative autoethnography and the autoethnography, a progression is noted. First, there is an increased level of intimacy from the narrative to the autoethnography, as the researcher not only tells the story but interacts with the context to demystify and place the experience into its societal milieu. The narrative relates the setting and uses the literature to support the story. Whereas, in the autoethnography the researcher goes beyond telling what happened, to include why it happened, who watched it happened, and then explains the normativity of the occurrence within the academic setting. Additionally, as one moves from the narrative to the autoethnography, the level of reflexivity deepens, as the narrator stands alone in the recounting and centering of the experiences.

Questions of the worth, robustness and ethics in autoethnographic work are topics that are routinely addressed in discussions about the methodology. These concerns stem from the fact that most research is done by empiricists, using traditional tools, such as questionnaires, surveys, and observations – instruments grounded in rationality and structure. Indeed, qualitative researchers using interview formats, focus groups, observations and fieldwork stress the importance of being systematic in the process. Therefore, it is not surprising that a methodology where the researcher tells about their lived experiences through autobiography and simultaneously explores the intersection of that story within the cultural context engenders discussion, debate and unease about veracity.

Perhaps the easiest of the concerns to address about autoethnography is that of worth or value. What does autoethnography offer as a method? Unequivocally, the method offers unfiltered direct insight and connection to a story where the meaning and interpretation are embedded. There is no doubt about intent and, as Ellis (2001) maintains, the researcher has done the job of looking inward and then setting the story outward. This state of engaged reciprocity can offer deep understandings of a phenomenon (Raab, 2013). Another issue related to worth lies in the topic being researched. Invariably, the value of knowing about the experiences being studied rests with the readers' interest in the topic. Certainly, this is true of all research, as there are empirical studies that fail to find an audience.

Secondly, issues on the robustness of autoethnography center on discussions of validity, reliability and generalizability. While qualitative work is more focused on trustworthiness than on reliability and validity, admittedly, the common concern across these terms is "Can you prove it and is it real and have others experienced this?" The response as regards validity rests with the connection established between the autoethnography and the reader in assessing the following: did you get it, did you believe it, did it evoke a response? Addressing these areas of understanding is an important litmus test for the autoethnographer and their work. Ellis (2016) says that her ultimate assessment for validity is whether the reader understood the meaning despite the unfamiliarity of the experience being reported. For Denzin (2013), reliability for the autoethnographer is about the narrator's integrity as the one who has

lived the experience or observed it and then subsequently recounted it and analyzed it. So a good query regarding reliability is if the story has a richness of details that breathes authenticity. Finally, the third methodological concern, generalizability, is the same across all qualitative studies. It is not the goal of the qualitative research to make claims that the findings from the study can be discovered and/or applied in other settings (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Patton, 2014). However, I would assert, as I do about robust qualitative studies, that a well-done autoethnographic study imparts meaning and understanding that is conditionally applicable.

Another often mentioned methodological topic regarding autoethnography is the idea of ethics. On the topic of ethics, the discussion shifts depending on whether the researcher or narrator is relating a singular experience that does not involve others, offering a narrative where others are involved, or doing collaborative autoethnography (including meta-autoethnography). The ethical considerations are the same across the majority of methodologies in the qualitative genre: confidentiality, informed consent, representation, power disparities, control of the narrative, ownership of the story and risk. Primarily, these contemplations are not as prevalent in autoethnography, as the researcher's experiences are the data and the researcher is the participant. However, the matter of risk looms large for the autoethnographer because of the self-revelatory nature of the methodology. For me, engaging in the autoethnography is a process of dancing with my experiences, memories, thoughts about others, and sometimes my pain. The result of this journey of self-examination and discovery results in new understandings (data/findings/conclusions) that are then presented as my research. Consequently, there is an inherent jeopardy in being so transparent – in revealing what is newly discovered and as yet untold, unknown and unaccepted.

Even though matters of confidentiality, ownership and representation seem unlikely in autoethnography, such issues can arise. For example, when other people are represented in the narrative how can you ensure that they are represented in a way that they will perceive as authentic? The answer is that beyond the procedure of self-triangulating, you cannot know if others will see their representation as genuine. Conversely, when the work is collaborative, then it is important to obtain informed consent using traditional human subjects' methods and to work with any research partners within a framework that Zylinska (2005) calls the "politics of openness" where there are discussions and deliberations about ethical matters.

FINAL THOUGHTS ON AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

For the purpose of discussing my use of autoethnography, I studied my list of publications to ascertain when I started using narratives and when and how I made the transition to autoethnography. It was a slow development that started with my doctoral research, where I was discouraged from doing narratives and especially from telling and analyzing my own story. So my venture into narratives and eventually autoethnography started in the public domain, with the publication of my book, *Sistahs in College: Making a Way Out of No Way* (2001) and continued in articles

in trade publications, such as *Ms.* magazine. As non-academic book publishers embraced the narratives because of their public appeal, they grew in popularity. Over the next decade, as the methodology received some acceptance in academia and as I became established in my career, I welcomed the research practice because it had cultural appeal. As a woman, I am comfortable with women's talk (stories) and as a Black woman from the Southern United States, I hail from a strong oral tradition that is linked to my West African roots.

Although I believe that my background and cultural roots provided me a natural foray into the narrative dominion, I'm no different from anyone else. We all have stories to tell, examine and share. A first step is to critically examine a phenomenon that stops you and begs for a closer look – one that leaves you asking: what just happened; why did that happen; what does that mean; how has it affected me? Autoethnographic research provides a scholarly way to ask and attempt to address such questions. Often, I find the beginnings of a narrative expedition in the footnotes of my work, in the margins where I make comments, or in my email exchanges with my students, coauthors and colleagues, or in my journals. After completing an article or a book chapter or any scholarly endeavor there are ideas left unexpressed and unexamined. Those can be the origins of autoethnographic inquiry.

While narratives and autoethnographic work comprise only one-third of my publications, it is revealing that I consider the narratives and autoethnographies the most significant work that I have produced and it is interesting that these works are the most often cited of my publications. Moreover, this body of work is what helped me to understand and survive in the ivory tower, where I am an interloper; and in the act of creating the autoethnographic work, I resisted, thrived and was transformed.

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