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The Autoethnographic Call: Current Considerations and Possible Futures

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The Autoethnographic Call: Current Considerations and Possible Futures

by

Kendall Smith-Sullivan

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Communication
College of Arts and Science
University of South Florida

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To Jim

For being on the same page with me,
always

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THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC CALL:
CURRENT CONSIDERATIONS AND POSSIBLE FUTURES

Kendall Smith-Sullivan

ABSTRACT

This research examines the increase of personal narratives in the past several decades, particularly the autoethnographic approach. The project begins with a historical contextualization of personal writing and autoethnography in relation to the crisis of representation and other diverse socio-political shifts. One outcome of these cultural transitions was a proliferation of illness narratives, narrative therapy, therapeutic writing, and narrative health communication. Also included in this research are data from interviews with emerging autoethnographers and participant observation that occurred at the Third International Qualitative Inquiry Congress. The conference served as prism through which to view qualitative scholarship as a whole, as well as current issues in autoethnography and its possible futures. Issues that are explored include what motivates scholars to write autoethnographically, how they define and evaluate autoethnography, their views on its use as therapeutic practice, and their vision for the future of the autoethnographic approach. Qualitative research methods are flourishing globally, and autoethnography is uniquely positioned to expand in the years ahead, particularly in the area of health communication, cross-disciplinary academic studies, and mainstream publishing venues.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In *Human Communication as Narration*, Fisher (1987) coined the term *homo narrans* (p. 63) to capture human's primordial propensity for storytelling. Similarly, other research corroborates that people intrinsically understand the world in a general narrative and temporal framework (Bruner 1986; Carr 1986; Frank 1995; Freeman 1998; MacIntyre 1981; Monk et al. 1997). Because humans are born into a storied world, they naturally learn to make sense of it through their own as well as others' narratives. This premise is the foundation of this dissertation.

However, this research project is not just an academic endeavor---it represents a personal mission. I was ten years old when I began actively looking for answers in books because I was in emotional turmoil. Stories became my sympathetic and entertaining friends when I needed hope, comfort, and meaning. At the same time, I began the practice of journaling and wrote, even at that young age, from a place of questioning and angst. As I grew older, I continued to write as a form of problem-solving and self-reflection. Now, thirty-something years later, I still journal for my own enjoyment and well-being. Only later in my life did I discover "autoethnography" and learn more about how writing practices might be transformative and therapeutic for both writers and

readers. As a result, for the focus of my doctoral work, I chose to study autoethnography as a movement as well as a therapeutic practice.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the autoethnographic approach in several distinct ways. First, I explore the proliferation of personal writing in North America in the last several decades, then discuss briefly autoethnography's history and the simultaneous advent of the therapeutic writing movement. The latter section includes a review of illness narratives, narrative medicine, and narrative health communication which is part of the focus of my study. The heart of my project evolved from in-depth interviews with autoethnographers that I conducted at the Third International Qualitative Inquiry Congress (ICQI) in May 2007. The conference served as prism through which I viewed autoethnography as a movement and where I also engaged in participant observation by attending key social events, having informal discussions with attendees, and taking notes of my experiences. In addition, I attended several panels that addressed significant issues related to autoethnography and the future of qualitative research.

In this dissertation, I address what motivates people to write autoethnographically, how they define and evaluate autoethnography, their views on autoethnography as therapeutic, and the future of the autoethnographic approach. I also include a seminal autoethnographic chapter that details my own experience with therapeutic writing, which became the catalyst for my formal study of narrative inquiry. In the closing chapter, I present several untapped avenues for promoting autoethnography. These include expanded interdisciplinary associations as well as a call to move autoethnography into a more public arena.

Before delving into the questions that drive this research, it would be useful to clarify what I mean by “autoethnography” and review it briefly in the historical context of personal writing.

Literature Review

Autoethnographic Beginnings

Anthropologist Karl Heider was the first to use the term “autoethnography” when he studied the Dani people and published an article titled, “What do People Do? Dani Auto-Ethnography” (1975). Soon thereafter, David Hayano (1979) modified the term to refer to cultural studies whereby the researcher is a full insider by virtue of being “native” and, as a result, has an intimate familiarity with the group that is studied (p. 100). It took many years for the specific term “autoethnography” to take root and, over the past two decades, it has been described in a variety of ways. One of the most definitive and frequently cited books about the topic is *Auto/Ethnography* (1997) edited by Deborah Reed-Danahay. She puts forth her definition of the term:

In this volume, autoethnography is defined as a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text, as in the case of ethnography. Autoethnography can be done by either an anthropologist who is doing ‘home’ or ‘native’ ethnography or by a non-anthropologist/ethnographer. It can also be done by an autobiographer who places the story of his or her life within a story of the social context in which it occurs. (p. 9)

I appreciate this definition in part because it acknowledges that autoethnography is not the sole domain of anthropology, the discipline from which it originated.

Van Maanen attempts several definitions of ethnography in *Tales of the Field* (1988), including “realist,” “confessional” and “impressionistic” tales. Yet in a later work, *Representation in Ethnography* (1995), he refers very specifically to “self” or “auto” ethnographies as a distinct ethnographic category. No doubt the title of Van Maanen’s book is a response to the “crisis of representation” that raised serious questions in social science research. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), “[a] profound rupture occurred in the mid-1980’s” (p. 16). They refer to this as the “fourth moment” or crisis of representation that “called into question the issues of gender, class, and race” resulting in a frantic search for new “models of truth, method, and representation” (p. 16). As a result, “[I]ssues such as validity, reliability, and objectivity, previously thought settled, were once more problematic. Pattern and interpretive theories...were now more common as writers continued to challenge models of truth and meaning” (2000, p. 16). The crisis of representation also motivated people to listen to the voices of minorities and those who were marginalized or oppressed. This social awareness continued into the following decade.

Largely as a response to the crisis of representation, the 1990’s were a pivotal time for the growth of autoethnography and its political potential. Mary Louise Pratt (1994) addresses this aspect when defining autoethnography as a unique form of self-representation that involves “...a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or conqueror. These are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous idioms to create self-representations intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding” (p. 28). Pratt’s view is politically oriented and regards

autoethnography as a vehicle to express resistance. By the late 1990's, the term autoethnography was being used with some degree of consistency and people understood the basic applicability of the term. Goodall (2000) concludes that some ethnographers were "...simply tired of talking, of arguing, *about* the crisis of representation, and instead wanted to perform the writing experiments that were being talked about and theorized" (p. 13).

Etiology of Autoethnography

To me, it's fascinating to look at the years when the term was employed and how there are gaps in its use by scholars of various disciplines. Words that demonstrate the etiology of the term "autoethnography" are listed below in chronological order, and I compiled them primarily using two sources: Ellis and Bochner (2000, pp. 739-740) and Reed Danahay (1997, pp. 3-9). While there are dozens of synonyms or variations that relate to the term "autoethnography," I choose to include only those terms with a close affiliation to the morphemic roots of auto-ethno-graphy because that is the distinct focus of this dissertation. I have also highlighted the term autoethnography as a visual tracking guide to show when it seems to become historically prominent:

- Dani **Auto-ethnography** (Heider, 1975)
- **autoethnography** (Hayano, 1979)
- socioautobiography (Zola, 1982)
- ethnographic autobiography (Brandes, 1982)
- auto-anthropology (Strathern, 1987)
- autoethnology (Lejeune, 1989)

- interpretive biography (Denzin, 1989)
- **autoethnography** (Lionnet, 1989)
- **autoethnography** (Deck, 1990)
- ethnographic memoir (Tedlock, 1991)
- autoethnography (Pratt, 1992)
- narrative ethnography (Abu-Lughod, 1993)
- auto-observation (Adler & Adler, 1994)
- ethnographic short stories (Ellis, 1995)
- critical autobiography (Church, 1995)
- self-ethnography (Van Maanen, 1995)
- **autoethnography** (Ellis, 1995)
- reflexive ethnography (Ellis and Bochner, 1996)
- new/experimental ethnography (Ellis and Bochner, 1996)
- personal ethnography (Crawford, 1996)
- autobiographical ethnography (Reed-Danahay, 1997)

By the late 1990's, there was no need to continue inventing new terms. By then, the word "autoethnography" was used frequently and seemed to be the preferred term for this type of research. Recently, I have enjoyed reading how other scholars define autoethnography especially from the years 2000 to the present. The single most employed definition is the following from *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography* (Ellis, 2004):

It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness... Back and forth autoethnographers gaze: First they look through an ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. (p. 37)

I suspect this definition is used repeatedly because it was adapted from an Ellis and Bochner article in the often read and cited *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2000). Additionally, *The Ethnographic I* is currently the most comprehensive contemporary book devoted exclusively to the study of autoethnography. The work is not a compilation or edited version of short works, but a comprehensive textbook *about* autoethnography, *written autoethnographically* (as a novel) by one scholar. However, I believe that people also are drawn to this definition because it is poetic and captures the flavor of scholarship that also includes creative writing techniques. Another useful definition which captures the flexibility of genres, such as autoethnography, is from Goodall (2000): “[t]hink of the new ethnography as writing that *rhetorically enables intimacy in the study of a culture*. The new ethnographers want readers to take what we say *personally*. We want our words to make *differences* in their lives” (p. 14).

While creativity is encouraged when writing autoethnography, advocates of the approach still offer useful guidelines. Autoethnographers must be astute observers, consummate writers, and keen scholars. A hallmark of the genre is that the researcher becomes part of the data, and he or she *must* be capable of deep self-introspection and

vulnerability. Intrapersonal neophytes need not apply as self-reflexivity and rigorous honesty is essential! However, despite the rigors just described, one of the most liberating and attractive aspects of autoethnography is its versatility in form. Academic “data” may be constituted as short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, scripts, co-constructed narratives, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, multi-voiced accounts, twice-told tales, and social science prose (Ellis, 2004). Such allowances permit writers of autoethnography to employ their own brand of creativity, use the first person, and contribute to scholarship in a rigorous way.

No doubt more could be included in this section; however, this entire dissertation is meant to be read as an unfolding exploration and microcosmic review of the study of autoethnography as a whole. Embedded in each chapter of this dissertation are direct quotes, paraphrases, and references from seminal scholars in the field to illuminate the topic. This documentation is a creative attempt to extend the literature review beyond the “traditional” boundaries of one introductory section. Furthermore, Chapter Three features an edited transcript of a panel of autoethnographic pioneers and their in-depth insights. Several salient historical issues and influences in the field are discussed there that enhance the forthcoming literature review. While autoethnography is the specific topic discussed in this dissertation, the following section explores the historical advent of personal writing and general cultural framework underpinning the increase in personal writing.

Overview of Autobiographical Literature

Although no one knows exactly how or when language evolved, ultimately a quantum shift in communication occurred when words could supplant pictographs on cave walls to relay information. No one knows who first uttered the request, “tell me a story,” but it is unquestionable that eventually storytelling became humans’ chief vehicle for entertainment and sense-making, and the power of narrative continues today. It is beyond the scope of this project to trace the origins of language and thousands of years of consequent narrative modalities, but it is useful to recognize the innate and continuous need that humans have to understand themselves, others, and their culture within the context of stories.

Almost everyone has asked or been asked, “So what’s the story?” or we may entice others with the taunting “Let me tell you a story...” All forms of news, gossip and media capitalize our desire for the “real story” behind questionable events. People are inherently curious to hear and tell experiences in a narrative context, and even the most reserved of adults will usually lean forward wide-eyed at the potential of hearing a riveting tale.

In the academic arena, many scholars have attempted to determine the genesis of the “narrative turn” in recent years, but like so many important cultural shifts, its birth is not neatly heralded and can only be recognized when enough years have passed to retrospectively study it as a collective phenomenon. With all of these contingencies in mind, I concur with Bochner (2002) that the narrative turn is most notably connected to “...the crisis of representation, greater access to previously marginalized minority

populations, and a growing commitment to use research to make a difference, personally, emotionally, politically, and culturally” (p. 80). Similarly, many writers consider their art a form of political resistance, and many notable “literary” writers were the first to introduce personal writing to American audiences.

Literary Beginnings (in North America)

In the late 1950’s and 1960’s, women and minority writers not only found voices but gained recognition when their work was made public. James Baldwin’s *Notes of a Native Son* (1955) and Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952) and *Shadow And Act* (1964) depict prejudice against blacks in America. Similarly, Gwendolyn Brooks’ (1960) and Langston Hughes’ (1951, 1967) evocative poetry, addressed political and social inequalities of minorities. Other previously taboo topics were described by Sylvia Plath (1963, 1965), Anne Sexton (1962, 1966) and Denise Levertov (1967) whose writing about mental illness and family secrets garnered them the label of “confessional poets.” Despite the sometimes negative connotations of that term, their work ultimately became popular, respected, and highly influential. They were at the forefront of the field we regard as intimate writing.

With the same spirit of candor, Phillip Roth explored the Jewish experience in his novels (1962, 1969) as did Saul Bellow (1964) and Bernard Malamud (1956, 1966). Their fascinating and complex stories made many gentiles wish to be Jews, and suddenly *understanding diversity* was a longing, not just a political or cultural buzzword. In the same decade, Allen Ginsberg published *Howl and Other Poems* (1956), a work that set the tempo for the genesis of the Beat generation. Ginsberg was joined by Jack Kerouac

(1957) and William S. Burroughs (1959) and the trio inaugurated a new form of decadent autobiography in response to the uncertainty in which they lived. In 1952, in the *New York Times*, Holmes describes the *modus operandi* of the Beat Generation: “The absence of personal and social values is to them, not a revelation shaking the ground beneath them, but a problem demanding a day-to-day solution. *How* to live seems to them much more crucial than *why*” (p. SM19). All of the afore-mentioned writers and many of their contemporaries laid the foundation for the proliferation and interest in the power of personal narrative that is now manifesting in various forms.

The Rise of the Personal Essay: The Beat Goes On

While the Beat generation was establishing a new form of poetry and prose, the form of the personal essay also expanded. According to Phillip Lopate (1994), one of the most important features of the modern personal essay is the ability for writers to be rigorously honest with themselves and their readers. He contends “the ‘plot’ of a personal essay, its drama, its suspense, consists of watching how far the essayist can drop past his or her psychic defenses toward deeper levels of honesty” (p. xxv). Unlike traditional personal essays, the post-modern essay employs literary techniques that correspond to a new genre of novels. Both types of writing use first person voice, include personal bias and feelings, and celebrate everyday language. Although writers may include historical or scholarly allusions, readers expect them to be sincere and “reliable narrators” (Lopate, 1994). Personal essayists “tell” rather than “show” and often begin their stories with “I,” yet as the work progresses they often generalize using “we,” “us,” or the second person “you” (Wolfe, 1975). Dissimilar from autobiography or fiction,

personal essays are non-linear, and small time frames and events are the focus.

Digressions are common and include smaller climaxes rather than the traditional literary arc found in many other types of writing (Harrington, 1997).

The new journalism.

As is so often the case with cultural movements, genres and authors do not fit into tidy disciplinary categories. Writers such as Joan Didion (1968, 1979) and Norman Mailer (1955, 1965) are also pioneers of the “New Journalism” which may also be referred to as *literary journalism, intimate journalism, parajournalism, personal reporting, and creative nonfiction*. However, one of the most distinctive terms for this type of writing is “first person journalism” (Harrington, 1997). The latter term is, to me, the one that clarifies the critical difference between traditional third-person reporting and the unique form of journalism whereby reporters immerse themselves into a community and include their experiences in their stories. This is yet another instance of writing where the “how” is more important than the “why.”

Unlike fiction or essays, first-person journalists are primarily concerned with accuracy of the facts and use historical research to validate their suppositions. The writer’s purpose is to portray real-life drama and cultural values often while drawing attention to issues that need political or social reform. They do not use composite characters but frequently employ pseudonyms to protect people, places, and events. This type of writing reflects all manner of literary devices including suspense, foreshadowing and flashbacks (Harrington, 1997; Sims, 1984; Wolfe, 1975). Similar to the personal

essay, stories need not be chronological but generally follow a traditional plot with a climax and *denouement* falling toward the end of the story.

Bestselling books of first-person journalism attest to people's desires to read personal stories. Not only do people want to hear the reporter's insights, readers want to see ordinary people become the main characters in real-life dramas. In the past, personal and autobiographical writing was the exclusive domain of those who considered themselves professional writers, historians, researchers, or were celebrities, yet we have arrived at a point in time where "ordinary people" are turning to writing more than any other period in history.

Terrence Holt, who is an M.D. and who also holds a Ph.D. in literature, sees a direct correlation between the rise of illness narratives and the influence of other literary factors (2004, pp. 320-322). Holt contends "The New Journalism" had an extraordinary influence on writing and particularly on autobiography. He claims the writing was deemed "new" because of its "skepticism about authority, which it expressed by reinserting the first-person singular point of view into journalism....In its abdication of authority, the New Journalism tried to put into practice perhaps the characteristic political axiom of the time 'the personal is the political'" (pp. 321-322). Similarly, Smith and Watson (2001) contend that narratives of crisis "...have proliferated in response to widespread illness and genocidal war, to profound changes in personal life, and to the growing audience demand for personal accounts as self-help" (p. 147). This latter point is critical to understanding the momentum and popularity of illness narratives and the therapeutic writing movement.

Overview of Literature Related to Illness Narratives

Books and articles in diverse disciplines contain many synonyms for “illness narratives” and their study. Some of these include: *medical anthropology* (Kleinman, 1995); *narrative medicine* (Hawkins, 1993; Frank, 1995; Couser, 1997; Charon, 2006); *illness stories* (Frank, 1995); *disability narratives* (Couser, 1997); *psychobiography* (Freud, 1910); *euthanography* (Couser, 1997); *medical confessional* (Hawkins, 1993; Larson qtd. in Aronson, 2000); *patient tales* (Aronson, 2000); and *neuroanthropology* (Sacks, 1985).

However one of the most frequently used terms for illness narratives is “pathography” which Anne Hunsaker Hawkins (1993) defines as “a form of autobiography or biography that describes personal experience of illness, treatment, and sometimes death” (p.1). Jeffrey Aronson (2000) asserts that pathography was “originally defined in 1853 in Dunglison’s Medical Lexicon as a description of disease, and later as ‘the study of the effects of any illness on the writer’s (or other artist’s) life or art’” (para. 2). Freud’s study of Leonardo Da Vinci’s life and creative endeavors is one such example. Still, many scholars would concur with Hawkins that as “... a genre, pathography is remarkable in that it seems to have emerged *ex nihilo*; book-length personal accounts of illness are uncommon before 1950 and rarely found before 1900” (1993, p. 3).

While only a handful of illness narratives were published in the 1970’s, the 1980’s augured a new age for patient tales. Hawkins (1993) observes that in the 1980’s pathographies reflect two significant changes: (1) many pathographies are driven by

anger and (2) others advocate alternative forms of treatment (pp. 4-10). A few exemplars include *Cancer Winner* (Davison, 1977), *The Cancer Journals* (Lorde, 1980), *Heart-Sounds* (Lear, 1980), *Anatomy of an Illness* (Cousins, 1981), *The Healing Heart* (Cousins, 1984), *Bed Number Ten* (Baier & Zimmeth, 1986), *Illness as Metaphor* (Sontag, 1988), and *All of a Piece* (Webster, 1989).

The trend continued and by the 1990's, the number of illness narratives had increased exponentially. Exemplars of these personal illness stories include *Cancer in Two Voices* (Butler and Rosenblum, 1991), *Final Negotiations: A Story of Love, Loss, and Chronic Illness* (Ellis, 1995), *Drinking: A Love Story* (Knapp, 1996), *Close to the Bone: Memoirs of Hurt Rage and Desire* (Stone, 1997), and *The Tennis Partner* (Verghese, 1998).

Narrative Medicine

Seminal scholars in narrative medicine and related fields come from a variety of academic backgrounds. Hawkins has a literary background and her work *Reconstructing Illness: Studies in Pathographies* (1993) is largely based on her doctoral dissertation related to religious/spiritual autobiography and related myths and images. Currently, she teaches medical and healthcare students at Penn State. Another well-known professor, Arthur Frank, and from sociology acknowledges a great many influences on his seminal work *The Wounded Storyteller* (1995), including Hawkin's writing. Frank also notes contributions to the field from Coles in psychiatry (1989) and Kleinman in anthropology (1991, 1995), both of whom are advocates of the power of illness narratives to hurt or heal.

Frank gives more than a passing nod to Rita Charon's writing (2006) whose work marks a substantial leap toward the establishment of "narrative medicine." Her latest book, *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness* (2006), is one of the most comprehensive treatments of the subject. What makes Charon particularly interesting is she is one of the few scholars in the field who is an M.D. and a Ph.D. which she earned from the English Department of Columbia University. While Charon maintains an internal medicine practice, she incorporates personal writing into her work and not only shows her patients her notes, but encourages them to write about their illness for therapeutic purposes (2006, xii). She directs the "Programs in Narrative Medicine, Humanities and Medicine" at Columbia University with an emphasis on educating future physicians. Her goal is to help them develop "narrative competence," which she deems is medicine practiced in a way that will "recognize, absorb, interpret, and be moved by the stories of illness" (2006, vii.)

Another narrative medicine scholar, G. Thomas Couser, is known for his influential work *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing* (1997). As an example of interdisciplinary practice, Couser began his career in English and wrote his doctoral dissertation on topics related to autobiography. Currently, he is an English Professor as well as Director of the program in Disability Studies at Hofstra University. While Hawkins popularized the term *pathography*, and Charon the phrase *narrative medicine*, Couser has coined and disseminated the word *autopathography* to describe "autobiographical narrative of illness or disability." The result of illness, Couser says, is a "heightening of one's awareness of one's own mortality, threatening one's sense of

identity, and disrupting the apparent plot of one's life. Whatever form it takes, bodily dysfunction tends to heighten consciousness of self and contingency" (1997, p. 5).

Peter Kramer, a psychiatrist and author of the controversial book *Listening to Prozac* (1993), insists that, "[o]urs is the era of autopathography. Bookstore shelves groan with memoirs of heart disease and asthma. No mental disorder, from alcoholism and autism to schizophrenia, is without its confessions...a guide for every challenge" (1996, p. 27). Millions of people are interested in writing about, and reading, accounts of illness in a way that is unparalleled in history. Scholar and anthropologist Ruth Behar asserts, "I had no idea, at first, the extent to which my voice was part of a mosaic of voices, which in time would create a vigorous and unsettling interdisciplinary intellectual movement... The entire time I thought I was writing personally, I was writing collectively, forming part of the zeitgeist of my time and generation" (qtd. in Freedman and Frey, 2003, xv).

Narrative Therapy

Since Freud, mental health professionals have advocated verbally articulating one's life story, and this is a technique which is still widely used today. However, basic "talk therapy" has been modified by some psychotherapy pioneers. The term "narrative therapy" (in a verbal form) was initiated by White & Epston (1990) who expanded on Foucault's theories and marked a central change in conducting psychotherapy. They encourage their patients to "externalize" their problems, even personifying issues such as "the depression" or "the problem with your job." By objectifying obstacles, patients are able to detach from them and become better able to act as authors of their lives (or heroic

protagonists) who have an issue that simply needs to be solved. White and Epston promote framing people's lives as an unfolding story that can be infinitely rewritten to their clients' satisfaction. Similarly, Parry and Doan (1994) recognize that they can help patients tell their life stories and "re-vision" them leading to significant benefits.

Monk et al. (1997) refer to this as a "re-authoring" process. Although several therapists embraced the benefits of "narrative therapy" in the 1990's, Pennebaker (1988, 1990, 1991, 1997, 2002, 2004) has made the most substantial contribution to the field of therapeutic writing to date in the mental health field. Pennebaker is a researcher and Professor of Psychology at the University of Texas at Austin. In the 1980's, he originally began investigating human trauma and discovered that not talking about the trauma posed a significant health risk to humans. He then wondered if writing about emotional upheavals could improve health. His first writing experiment consisted of fifty students who wrote for fifteen minutes a day for four consecutive days. Students were asked to write about either emotional and traumatic topics or superficial, non-emotional topics. The conclusion of that first study was that those in the "expressive writing" group made 43 per cent fewer doctor visits than the control group who wrote only about superficial topics" (Pennebaker, 2004).

Since that initial experiment almost twenty years ago, dozens of similar experiments have replicated these results and now many other researchers and practitioners recognize the potential physical and psychological benefits of expressive writing (Pennebaker, 2004). Following Pennebaker's lead, others have established that writing can elicit positive change in peoples' physical and emotional well-being, yet the

majority of these authors study expressive writing from a clinical stance and use quantitative measures to validate their studies (Lepore and Smyth 2002; Mattingly 1994, 1998; Monk et al. 1997).

Therapeutic Writing

A variety of quantitative assessment tools are used to judge the efficacy of therapeutic writing including: the multiple code theory, State Meta-Mood Scale, Trait Meta-Mood Scale, Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale, Eysenck Personality Inventory, Taylor Manifest Anxiety Scale, Toronto Alexithymia Scale, Byrne Repression-Sensitization Scale, and the Self-Containment Scale (Pennebaker, 2002) and the Linguistic and Word Count Inquiry computer assessment program (Pennebaker, 1997). Physiological tests used include resting blood pressure levels, enzyme counts, heart rate levels, perspiration rates and blood count levels and number of visits to the doctor (Pennebaker, 2004, pp. 7-8).

In the field of psychology, psychiatry, and mental health counseling, the majority of researchers and practitioners endorse narrative frameworks and personal writing as beneficial, but they (the therapist or researcher) are *outsiders in the story*. When their findings are reported, the author is evident in the writing only as a non-biased observer who uses the passive or third person voice. Although he or she may be studying emotions, emotions are treated as “data” to be analyzed and coded. The tone of their scholarly work is formal, the content full of disciplinary jargon, and the conclusions are based on numerical findings derived from Likert-type scales. The audience is clearly academic or research practitioners. Currently, Hunt and Sampson, Mattingly, Parry and

Doan, Pennebaker, Polkinghorne, Monk et al., White and Epston are major academic researchers in this field.

In *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination*, psychiatrist Robert Coles (1989) is adamant that reading stories has the profound ability to transform people's lives. One of his most famous philosophies is that "every reader's response to a writer's call can have its own startling suggestive power" (p. xix). Coles's book is pivotal in understanding the phenomenon loosely defined as narrative therapy. While formal scholarship has many takes on the topic, a number of non-academic writers have published books to help the average person access his or her therapeutic writing skills. A dearth of self-help books, most published within the past decade, promote the transformative and healing powers of personal writing for anyone who is willing to try.

The majority of these books eschew scholarly references (even when written by scholars) and focus on creating a curriculum of writing exercises that serve as conduits for self-healing. Examples include: *Writing Out the Storm: Reading and Writing Your Way Through Serious Illness or Injury* (Abercrombie, 2002), *Writing As a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives* (DeSalvo, 1999), *Writing to Heal: A Guided Journal for Recovering from Trauma and Emotional Upheaval* (Pennebaker, 2004), *Pain and Possibility: Writing Your Way Through Personal Crisis* (Rico, 1991), *Spinning Gold out of Straw: How Stories Heal* (Rooks, 2001), *A Voice of Her Own: Women and the Journal-Writing Journey* (Schiwy, 1996), *Writing for Self-Discovery: A Personal Approach to Creative Writing* (Schneider and Killick, 1998), *Writing to Save Your Life: How to Honor Your Story Through Journaling* (Weldon,

2001), and *Writing to Heal the Soul: Transforming Grief and Loss Through Writing* (Zimmerman, 2002).

Narratives and Health Communication

When illness occurs to self or a loved one, this sense of order is disturbed. In almost every instance, when people visit a physician something has gone wrong in their life narrative. This ailment may be minor or life-threatening, such as one Frank (1995) would define as a “narrative wreck,” but in every case the patient is looking for relief. Zook (1994) even claims “that when patients come to medical encounters saying, ‘Doctor, I am sick,’ they actually want to ask ‘Can you heal my story?’” (qtd. in Geist-Martin, 2002, p. 6).

Often the problem is that patients and physicians are “not on the same page,” much less even communicating in the same language or with similar cultural values. Patients and physicians both need to understand that they come to every medical encounter with their own storied version of the world. Morris (1998) claims, “[m]edicine makes a powerful contribution to contemporary culture and to the postmodern fashioning of the self... We must recognize that maladies, while always biological, are also in part cultural artifacts, in the same way that medicine is a cultural artifact as it operates through discourses that distribute social power across individual lives” (pp. 74-75). Patients bring with them narrative resources from various factions including (but not limited to): history, their family values, community, religion, cultural group, experience, education, tradition, gender, socioeconomic background, education, geography, and perceived information about health and illness. When patients begin to tell their “story” of their

illness, they bring critical information to a physician. Their story is informed by all of the narrative resources mentioned above, and these constitute a complex situation that is more than just a physical malady.

Many health care providers are taught to focus exclusively on objective data that can be defined categorically and with external data. The problem, according to Kleinman (1995), is that a physician sees patients' self-reports as wholly subjective, thus "...the doctor is expected to decode the untrustworthy story of *illness as experience* for the evidence of that which is considered authentic, *disease as biological pathology*. In the process, the doctor is taught to regard ...the experience of the sick person---as fugitive, fungible, and therefore invalid" (p. 32). Fortunately, communication between patients and health care professionals is being taken more seriously today. With a national emphasis on patients' rights, coupled with the rising cost of malpractice suits, much of the medical community is trying harder than ever to understand the complexities of their patients' needs and backgrounds.

As I alluded to above, it is critical that physicians understand the diverse cultural perspectives and narrative accounts that surround a patient's illness. However, even if a physician or nurse can intellectually comprehend the complexities of a patient's illness, it is essential that doctors can *demonstrate* their understanding. In one study, communication researchers Jones and Beach (in press) discovered that during physician-patient interviews "...while physicians accommodate patients by answering overt questions or cautiously confirming their lay diagnoses one-third of the time, more often they resist, ignore, or passively tolerate patients' solicitations for more information or

response to their statements” (qtd. In Geist-Martin, 2002, p. 90). Ideally, a physician would understand a patient’s narrative and allow the patient to articulate it without being interrupted *or* the fear of being ignored or resisted. Simply listening attentively may elicit healing. According to Greenspan’s work, *Healing Through the Dark Emotions*:

When a person’s suffering is well listened to...an alchemical process is initiated. Something that starts out as a desperate but inarticulate anguish or a mysterious, painful sensation in the body begins to cohere as a story. Sometimes a new, unexpected story emerges...Other times it’s not a new story that emerges but an old one felt for the first time, known in all its fullness, the emotions no longer sequestered away in a dark room where no one can hear them. A new vitality emerges. (2003, pp. 15-16)

Listening to patients is an excellent start, although there are other actions that may augur transformation in a health care encounter. Laing (1961, 1990) (echoing Buber) explains: “Modes of confirmation...vary. Confirmation could be through a responsive smile (visual), a handshake (tactile), and an expression of sympathy (auditory)... A confirmatory reaction is a direct response, it is ‘to the point’, or ‘on the same wavelength’ as the initiatory or evocative action” (p. 99). How lovely it would be to have a physician not only “hear” you but acknowledge your medical encounter with a sign of confirmation.

Listening to narratives is especially important when the person is not going to become well. Morris (1998) explains:

The American Board of Internal Medicine, in its 1995 publication on physician competency in end-of-life patient care, includes an entire section dedicated to use of narratives. Such skills in listening effectively are especially crucial at the end of life, when curative intervention is often inappropriate and when suffering may be less responsive to drugs than to insights that come mainly through skillful attention to the patient's speech. (p. 265)

Another aspect that health care providers would do well to educate themselves about is how patients have pain that is somatic in origin. Fadiman (1997) contends:

It has been well known since the aftermath of the Second World War that because of the enormous psychological traumas they have suffered, refugees of all nationalities have an unusually high incidence of somatization, in which emotional problems express themselves as physical problems... [After dozens of tests] the Merced doctors began to realize that many Hmong complaints had no organic basis, though their pain was perfectly real. (p. 69)

The body-mind connection is rapidly gaining credence, especially as traditionally trained medical doctors endorse its power (Chopra 1998; Northrup 1998, 2001; Siegel 1986; Weil 1990, 2000). Similarly, the award-winning biophysicist, Pert (1997), who discovered "the molecules of emotion," contends that the language people use to describe their illnesses is revealing, as well as the particular areas of the body that are affected by the illness. Physicians might want to pay attention to phrases that refer to emotional as well as physical ailments.

The Personal Connection

My first experiences reading illness narratives occurred when I was a doctoral student. In my Communication courses, I found that professors used stories as a springboard for a myriad of scholarly conversations. In various courses through the years, we discussed in classes the emotional repercussions of being a Holocaust survivor, the potential horror of being a victim of cancer, the complexities of alcoholism, the burdens and joys of caretaking a loved one, the ironies of being a quadriplegic, and what it means to “die well.”

In the University of South Florida Communication department alone I learned that illness narratives could be used to exemplify and explore a multitude of themes including, but not limited to, qualitative methods, mortality, caretaking, illness, aging, disability, end-of-life issues, autoethnography, mental illness, physical and psychological addiction, political and cultural divides, narrative inquiry, any imaginable emotion from desire to despair, ethics, spirituality, and health communication (and the lack thereof).

Throughout my doctoral studies, I have been mesmerized by the ways in which reading and writing can have powerful therapeutic properties. As noted earlier in the chapter, from first-hand experience, I know that reading is enjoyable and usually instructive. Of more relevance, however, is my belief that writing is almost single-handedly responsible for my surviving an abusive childhood and my first marriage that was failing. Before wide-spread access to therapy, the popular self-help revolution, Dr. Phil’s television pep-talks, and the wonders of Prozac, I was clinically depressed, suicidal, and not under any doctor’s supervision.

From the age of thirteen I have kept a journal, and I believe that this self-reflexive writing practice allowed me literally to maintain my sanity until I was able to receive professional help in my late 20's. While this has been a strong hunch of mine since the 1980's, I was excited when I learned that an entire field of research had emerged related to the study of therapeutic writing, especially when I discovered that autoethnography was part of this phenomenon.

Illness, Trauma and End-of-Life Autoethnographies

While not all autoethnographies deal with personal loss, many of them do and are written in highly evocative and creative forms. Autoethnographic methods are particularly appropriate to explore and capture the lived experience of the ill, those who care for them, or those dealing with end-of-life issues. Years ago, when I first read Carolyn Ellis's book, *Final Negotiations* (1995a), about her experience and her partner's battle with emphysema, I knew that the writing was ground-breaking. As a pioneer in the field of autoethnography, Carolyn Ellis (1986, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006) has published works on a variety of subjects related to illness including abortion, minor bodily stigmas, caretaking an ill parent, and caretaking a terminally ill spouse. This burgeoning approach, connecting social science and humanities, is most notable for focusing on evocation of emotion and encouraging a "therapeutic experience for the reader and the writer and thus transgresses the boundary between research and therapy" (Bochner, 2002, p. 90). In autoethnographic writing, the researcher comes out of the shadows and *into the study*. The goal of the writing is

manifold: to include the personal and the cultural while framing this research within literary and scholarly contexts.

Interviewees Connect with Autoethnography

In this research, I began with the initial inquiry: “Why do people write autoethnographically?” and I discovered that suffering, either emotional or physical, is a driving force behind all of my interviewees’ personal narratives. For example, Elissa Foster details her marital problems that she wrote when she was in great emotional pain as her relationship collapsed and divorce became imminent. Another interviewee, Laura Ellingson, explained that her interest in cancer research came from her own experiences of having cancer. Likewise, Patricia Geist-Martin’s first personal narrative sprang from the emotional hardships of personal and physical tragedy: multiple miscarriages. Larry Russell explains his relationship with autoethnography: “I’m trying to tell you what a gift it is to me and what possibility, what meaning, it gives to my life and the kind of work I might do. I couldn’t give it up and when I talk to other people that way, we all know what that means. When I talk to Chris Poulos and say ‘it’s my life’ we know what each other means.”

What I find most interesting is not so much that these writers were somehow drawn to autoethnography, but they *continued* to write this way exclusively, or as a primary modality. They all identified themselves as “autoethnographers” or they use the term “narrative ethnographers,” but all have used the term autoethnography as a descriptor in their work. While some of my interviewees say they have to write autoethnography “just because,” others are much more definite about their reasons.

Laura Ellingson wants to change the health care system in the country---no small task. She says she will use whatever means are necessary and important to convey her message. However, no matter what her tools and terms, whether she calls it autoethnography or narrative ethnography or health communication research, her motive is to improve the medical system and the lives of patients and physicians.

While traditional scholarship was meant to educate, inform, and perhaps eventually lead to positive change, autoethnography has as a basic tenet “to help.” This aid comes from someone who is not only a qualified researcher, but someone who “has been there.” This first-hand experience of the researcher is the backbone of autoethnographic scholarship. In the pages ahead, many autoethnographers share their heartfelt experiences and vision for the future of autoethnography. However, before we delve into those details, the next Chapter will examine the methodology and research questions related to my project.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODS

In this dissertation, I concentrate on why and how autoethnographers choose to write narratively. Autoethnography is a burgeoning field of narrative inquiry, yet I noted a gap in information about the “up and coming” autoethnographers. While much is known about first-generation autoethnographers through their publications and presentations, much less is known about those scholars they have influenced. Although many of these emerging writers are generous in revealing their emotions and reflections in their writing, not much is known about other details of how or why they choose to write narratively. The second generation’s views and attitudes are important because their work will likely influence the future and trajectory of autoethnography. In my research, I am interested in discovering what motivated them to write using autoethnography as a method, who were their mentors, how they defined and evaluated autoethnography, if they viewed it as therapeutic, and how they envisioned its possible future. In this chapter, I provide an overview of my research methodology, identify the research questions I explored in this study, introduce my research participants and research site, as well as describe my methods for data collection and data analysis.

Before detailing the methodological framework for my research, I provide a background for the genesis of the project. In order to better understand the complex, interconnections and morphic qualities of my endeavor, I share how my study was

originally imagined, the ways in which it was modified with the insight of my dissertation committee, and what finally occurred after many discussions. I also hope to demonstrate how useful it is for qualitative researchers to “remain open to the unexpected” and be “willing to change the direction or focus of a research project” (Neuman, 2003, p. 146). As the reader will see in the chapters ahead, one of my challenges was learning how to become a flexible researcher, a process that entailed recognizing both my strengths and weaknesses while working and writing.

The Original Plan

In addition to a literature review of personal writing, especially illness narratives and autoethnographies related to illness and end of life issues, my original research project proposed that I interview “first generation” autoethnographers. These pioneers included (in alphabetical order) *Arthur Bochner*, University of South Florida; *Norman Denzin*, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; *Carolyn Ellis*, University of South Florida; *H. L. (Bud) Goodall*, Arizona State University; *Ronald Pelias*, Southern Illinois University and *Laurel Richardson*, The Ohio State University. The core of my research would be an attempt to better understand how these ground-breaking scholars think, write, create, feel, and teach. Because autoethnography is such a recent historical phenomenon, my stance was that insight from the pioneers of this discipline would be invaluable because they created the scholarly infrastructure from which all other autoethnographers are building their work.

My reasoning was that while excellent books about qualitative methods (as well as exemplary collections of autoethnographic writing) exist, currently there is no work

devoted exclusively to the study of the pioneers of this rapidly growing social science approach. I felt fortunate that the majority of these writers are still living, that some are my professors, and I planned to meet with others personally at the Third International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI) in Champaign, Illinois in May 2007.

The proposed model for my dissertation format was similar to the *Paris Review's* "Writers at Work" book series that includes interviews with the biggest names in a literary genre. In my case, the term "first-generation autoethnographers" was operationalized as those who had made a significant and substantial contribution to shaping the field of autoethnography using the criteria listed below:

(1) They will have numerous published academic works in the area of autoethnography, with an emphasis on academic books in which they are the sole author or co-author; also considered are their roles as editors or co-editors of influential books related to or including autoethnographic components.

(2) They will have numerous publications in peer-reviewed academic journals, again with a focus specifically on autoethnographic scholarship; consideration is especially favorable for those whose writing is consistently cited in others' publications.

(3) They will use the term "autoethnography" specifically to describe their published work; this means that the word "autoethnography" will appear in the publications' abstracts, media promotion and/or in the list of key words for journal articles; also to be considered is their self-identification as an "autoethnographer" as evidenced in their writing, biographies, and/or curriculum *vitas*.

(4) They will have been instrumental in the field of qualitative writing advancement in other activities such as consistent conference participation, creation of autoethnographic components within organizations/conferences, awards and recognition by their colleagues, offices held in national organizations, notable speaking /teaching invitations nationally and internationally, and instigation of autoethnographic community building practices such as listservs and resourceful websites.

(5) They will have contributed to the training, education, and professional development of “second-generation” autoethnographers whose current and potential scholarship will advance and enrich the discipline.

The last point was critical as it would soon become the foci of my evolving project. However, this will be discussed in more detail in a later section.

The term “second-generation autoethnographer” was operationalized by the same criteria as “first-generation autoethnographer,” but with the understanding that these writers are *emerging* qualitative research scholars who have been mentored by influential autoethnographers. The second generation would still have published, preferably book-length works, using autoethnography as a method and would either “identify” as autoethnographers or they would include the term “autoethnography” as a keyword when referring to their writing. These criteria would portend a professional trajectory that includes autoethnographic scholarship as a continued professional focus.

In addition to interviewing autoethnographers at the International Qualitative Inquiry Congress, another aspect of my research included engaging in participant-observation while there. In particular, I would attend and tape several key panels related

to the future of autoethnography, hold informal conversations, and record my experiences and observations.

I had already completed most of a multi-disciplinary analysis of the history of personal writing as well as an in-depth review of illness narratives, therapeutic writing, and narrative medicine, all of which would inform my findings. With confidence and enthusiasm, I submitted my proposal to my major advisor, Carolyn Ellis, and the dissertation committee in preparation for my defense.

One of the mysteries I will never fully understand is how in one afternoon my dissertation proposal was lovingly de-constructed by my committee, and in the course of two and half hours put back together again resulting in a new proposal that benefitted from the synergism in the room. If I were capable, I would narrate exactly what happened, but the experience was so esoteric, I cannot recall how it occurred. Similar to the aftermath of a satisfying meal, movie, or making love, we all just left the room nodding to each other and saying things like “this is good...” punctuated with more nods and grins. I do remember that Eric Eisenberg asked that I write a brief new statement of my modified plan. Then I remember Donileen Loseke affirmed that it could be a “sexy dissertation” and Art Bochner said, “Congratulations on your defense—this is the next step.” I know that Carolyn Ellis hugged me and then left to find the paperwork that would advance me officially to a “doctoral candidate.” What I do recall is I had participated in a stellar example of academic communication at its best. I had a more focused topic and one that really was leading-edge.

The Modified Plan

Via our discussion, it emerged that much was already known about the “first-generation” autoethnographers as a result of their own publications, presentations, and others’ writing about them. However, in the process of my proposal defense, we began to agree that what would be interesting is to study the *second* generation of autoethnographers---all of whom were greatly influenced by the first generation but who had far less time in the limelight. While the first-generation scholars were established and influential, the second-generation’s work was still formative; it was influenced by their predecessors but there were inevitably notable differences.

My revised mission was to interview second-generation autoethnographers in order to better understand the current and potential path of the autoethnographic movement, as they understood it. This emerging generation is on the cutting edge of establishing the trajectory of autoethnography. My contribution to the scholarly conversation was to capture these new scholars’ voices, see how they currently understand and define autoethnography, and to discover what they envision for the movement in the future. When necessary, I would include information or citations from the first-generation, but the pioneers now became the background story for the new autoethnographers who would move into my project’s limelight. Now all I had to do was figure out the details of how to make this work. I had less than a month to reconfigure my plans for interviews at the ICQI conference.

Interviewee Selection Process

After my proposal defense, my first critical task was to determine who exactly qualified as a “second-generation autoethnographer.” Who would be the most appropriate candidates for my study and how would I ensure my dissertation was precise enough to remain cohesive and focused? Initially, my goal was simply to locate emerging autoethnographers (1) who had published several works (2) whose work is cited by other researchers frequently enough to indicate their solid presence in scholarly conversation and (3) who would likely be in attendance and willing to be interviewed at the upcoming conference. One of the most useful resources I possessed was access to the preliminary program for the ICQI conference. Although I had a dog-eared printed copy that I had all but memorized in preparation for my first-generation interviews, what became even more useful was the online “search” feature of the program. With this technological tool, I was able to locate any session, panel, or presentation that included any possible derivative, variation, noun, verb, plural, or possessive of the term “autoethnography.”

Two panels yielded a wealth of data that informed my work. The first panel was “Let’s Get Personal I: First-Generation Autoethnographers Reflect on Writing Personal Narratives” and included all of those listed previously as first-generation candidates.

Immediately following this panel was “Let’s Get Personal II: Second-Generation Autoethnographers Reflect on Writing Personal Narratives” and featured (in alphabetical order) Carla Corroto, Elissa Foster, Lesa Lockford, Christopher Poulos, Carol Rambo, Tami Spry, and Mary Weems. These were the names I used as the start of my list for

potential interviewees and to whom I sent e-mails informing them of my research interests and asking for an interview at the Conference. However, in an effort to cast as wide a net as possible, I also expanded my list to include more diversity in terms of geography and academic sub-specialties. Furthermore, I deliberately sought to interview qualitative researchers engaged in health communication. Not only was this an interest of mine, but my preliminary research revealed that this is an area where autoethnography is likely to expand in the future (see Chapter 7 for more discussion of this topic). Of particular interest to me was interviewing those whose work dealt with the concept of health communication, illness, trauma, end-of-life issues, or therapeutic writing.

Still, I knew that no matter how much I planned, whom I interviewed would end up being a matter of timing and their willingness. However, there was a third factor for which I did not plan and that was serendipity/destiny/mystery/chance/or fate. As a result, several of my ten in-depth interviews transpired with people I had not originally slated for interviewing and did not fall under the category of “second generation autoethnographers.”

One interview occurred with Cliff Heegel, Carol Rambo’s husband, who is a psychologist with expertise in treating trauma. Next were interviews with Patricia Geist-Martin and Kim Etherington, who have published widely in autoethnography. They were not directly mentored by the first-generation autoethnographers, but in their health communication writing they frequently cite the latter. I also was familiar with their books and wanted to meet with them both personally. I also had an opportunity to interview Nick Trujillo, whose early ethnographic work was very influential on Bud

Goodall, a first-generation autoethnographer. Although Nick does not identify as an autoethnographer *per se*, he does use the term “autoethnography” as a keyword to refer to some of his scholarship, and he also mentored Stacy Holman Jones (1998, 2002, 2005) who is an often cited performance autoethnographer (note that the topic of performance autoethnography is fascinating, yet beyond the scope of this particular research project).

Nick’s input turned out to be invaluable, especially in reference to therapeutic writing. My final serendipitous interview was with Larry Russell whom I met by chance because he is a long-time friend and colleague of Elissa Foster’s. His insights about spirituality were touching and thought-provoking.

I was able to conduct ten in-depth personal interviews at the Qualitative Inquiry Conference from May 2nd to May 7th , 2007 with the following people (in alphabetical order): *Laura Ellingson*, Associate Professor, Department of Communication, Santa Clara University; *Kim Etherington*, Professor of Narrative and Life Story research, Bristol, United Kingdom; *Elissa Foster*, Medical Educator, Lehigh Valley Hospital, Pennsylvania (although at the time of the interview she was an Assistant Professor in Communication Studies at San Jose’ State University); *Patricia Geist-Martin*, Professor, School of Communication, San Diego State University; *Cliff Heegel*, Psychologist, The Stress and Biofeedback Clinic, Memphis, Tennessee; *Lesla Lockford*, Associate Professor, American Culture Studies, Bowling Green State University; *Chris Poulos*, Assistant Professor, Department of Communication, University of North Carolina at Greensboro; *Carol Rambo*, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Memphis; *Larry Russell*, Associate Professor, School of Communication, Hofstra University; and

Nick Trujillo, Professor of Communication Studies, Sacramento State University. Some of these interviewees became major characters in my dissertation, some minor, although all were important to the totality of the project.

Interview Process

In the interviews, I asked these autoethnographers about their experiences and writing per my interview script (see Appendix B), but I also listened for additional themes and the opportunity to ask questions that organically emerged. Holstein and Gubrium contend that both interviewer and interviewee are engaged in reciprocal “meaning-making work” (1995, p. 4), and Chirban advances this theory to include elements of self-awareness, authenticity, attunement, integrity, empathy, insight, nurturance, respect, and faith (pp. 39-55). I am particularly interested in Chirban’s theory of attunement that may occur:

... as a result of the interviewer’s attentiveness through the use of verbal and non-verbal actions...Furthermore, attunement resonates with the interviewee, and complementarity deepens the interview...As the mutual attunement occurs, the relational dimension grows. ...and a deeper awareness of one another emerges, fostering further opportunities to connect and explore. (1995, p. 42)

Although “attunement” is similar to empathy, it is distinctly different in that it acknowledges not only the concept of joint meaning-making within the interview process but views the process as an energy exchange that creates a unified whole.

While interviewing autoethnographers served a practical purpose in fulfilling my research agenda, I did not anticipate that I would find the process similar to my spiritual practice of mindfulness (Goleman, 2003; Hanh, 1992). From the very first interview to the last, I was very aware I was being given a precious gift of time, energy, emotion, and shared intellectual exchange by my interviewees. The shortest interview was 50 minutes, the longest two and a half hours, with the average meeting lasting an hour and a half. I barely knew any of interviewees, so their generosity was an act of kindness toward me but also a tribute to their respect for the field of autoethnography.

Another aspect of the interviews was shared emotionality and vulnerability. Ellis terms these interactions as “reflexive dyadic interviews” (2004, p.61). As my interviews progressed, I shared with the participants aspects of my past hurts, fears, and concerns and later recorded my personal and emotional reactions on tape and in my field notes. In the final project, I included my internal reflections with the intention that “[i]ncluding the subjective and emotional reflection of the researcher adds context and layers to the story being told about the participants” (Ellis, 2004, p. 62). Some of the vulnerabilities that I share in the text of this project are my apprehensions, missteps, mistakes, regrets, and naïveté as a neophyte researcher. If there is anything I learned in this process, it is how adaptability is one of the keys to a successful research project. I cannot say how this information might be useful to readers but, if nothing else, perhaps I will provide a little comic relief as I recount a few of my foibles and *faux pas* along the way.

Nonetheless, there were some incredibly perfect moments, as well. During the research, I loved it when my “inner-bricoleur” emerged. For instance, one of the

challenges of conducting interviews at a site that was neither my, nor my interviewees', turf was a need for locating appropriate space for interviews. Because this was my first visit to the University of Illinois at Champaign, weeks before my departure I tried to familiarize myself with a map of the main campus. I enlarged the maps and then circled and highlighted key buildings and main meeting rooms. However, as Korzybski first said, and Bateson popularized, "the map is not the territory" (1933, pp. 747-761) and when I arrived in Champaign, I had to roam the campus for hours to get my bearings. Knowing how geographically challenged I am, I felt it was very important to be familiar with the campus and especially the Illini Union, the main site for the conference (also, a small aside is that I now know it is pronounced EYE-LIE-NYE but Illeenie, like martini, and Illah-nye, like Illinois, seemed reasonable pronunciations at first). My thinking was that those whom I would interview may need my expert directions and, most importantly, I needed several options for taping locations.

Soon, I knew where all the bathrooms were in the Illini Union, as well as ATM machines, coffee vendors, snack bars and, very important for my interviews, quiet spaces. The biggest find of my reconnaissance mission was the discovery of three attractive and empty conference rooms. Like Goldilocks, I found my favorite one that I affectionately named the "Barbara Walters' Set." At the entrance, there was a lovely dark antique conference table that could seat eight easily and it had a sparkling chandelier above it. To the left was an antique couch (or facsimile) in striped green damask fabric with a mahogany mirror over it, and two metal sconces positioned to the left and right. To the right side of the room was a marble fireplace that completed the television set ambience.

At the back was my interview area: it featured two green damask striped chairs (that matched the sofa) which invited conversation. In the middle was nestled a petite table illuminated by an antique lamp with a mosaic of amber and green glass for a shade. I also moved an extra side table by “my chair,” so I could access my tape recorders, notes, and extra micro-cassettes. I also brought along a small cooler with water and snacks for interviewees. One of my regrets is that I did not remember a camera----for a researcher, that would have been a useful tool.

Six interviews were conducted in the “Barbara Walters” room but I also branched out to other locations, out of necessity. Elissa was my first interview and meeting with her in our mutual hotel made good sense. She came up to my room, and we talked for more than two hours. Nick Trujillo was hard to pin down, but I finally interviewed him between happy hour and dinner at a local tavern. I promised Kim Etherington an ice cream cone if I could interview her (she is from the UK, so a gift seemed in order), and we ended up sitting outside while having afternoon tea and snacks. My final interview was with Larry Russell, and because we were both leaving Champaign on the same plane, we decided to go to the airport where we could relax and not worry about our travel details. One of the most memorable parts of that interview was one-dollar-a-cup fresh brewed coffee, with unlimited refills. We had a wonderful exchange and celebrated our free refill coffee deal.

Because of the limited availability of my interviewees (hailing from the United Kingdom to California), it was critical that I secured enough data. Each interview was taped using 90-minute micro-cassette tapes, and two tape recorders ensured an instant

back-up. There was little room for technical errors when so much already depended on cramming in as much research as possible in less than a week's time. In the final analysis, I ended up with 15 (90-minute) tapes and more than 300 pages of transcribed material.

Participant Observation

While much of my research focused on a content analysis of personal writing and interviews with second-generation autoethnographers, I conducted on-site research as well. I arrived at the Third International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign on Wednesday May 2nd and departed Monday May 7th, 2007. In addition to attending panels and key "social" events, much of my energy was directed toward attending three panels that are significant in my research regarding the development of autoethnography and its pioneers. I gained permission to record these panels and had each participant sign a consent form.

The back-to-back panels "Let's Get Personal I and II," featuring first and second generation autoethnographers, provided illuminating contrasts between the two groups. In Chapter Three, I include a large portion of the first-generation autoethnographers' responses intact in order to illuminate the roots of the qualitative turn, especially autoethnography. Because these scholars have worked, written, and socialized with each other for decades, the synergy of the panel is palpable in their responses. In this section, they respond to what brought them into the arena of personal scholarship. While I recorded the second generation's panel in its entirety, I discovered that the emerging autoethnographers' input was more useful to this project when their quotes were placed

within the context of thematic chapters. I used replies from the second-generation panelists (in alphabetical order) including Carla Corroto, Elissa Foster, Lesa Lockford, Chris Poulos, and Tami Spry; however, some are quoted in more detail because I also conducted in-depth interviews with them. Finally, the third panel was devoted to the topic of tenure and featured an in-depth exploration of the tenure case of one of my interviewees, Chris Poulos. The substance of this latter panel clarified many of the issues related to autoethnography's future that I address in detail in my concluding chapter.

Initially, I predicted I would have time for informal interviews, but as it turned out my in-depth interviews, writing of field notes, and panel attendance left me less time than I originally anticipated for informal interviewing. I realized that in order to collect ample quality data in a short period of time, I needed to have as many in-depth interviews with salient autoethnographers as time and opportunity allowed. In the end, I was able to engage in participant observation that consisted of conversations before and after sessions, at social events, and in airports (very important). All of these informal exchanges contributed to the totality of my project. As a result, the events before, during, and after the ICQI conference became a lens through which I viewed autoethnography, and my findings are infused/embedded as subtext.

Consent and Confidentiality

Many of the ethical concerns in this study were avoided as the interviewees were not considered part of a "vulnerable population." All interviewees are adults and signed the University of South Florida's "Adult Consent Form"; similarly, as the Principal Investigator, I received proper certification necessary for interview privileges from the

Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of South Florida prior to my interviews. Likewise, all additional paperwork required by the IRB was submitted and approved prior to interviewing the participants.

Data Analysis

I have to admit that fear, adrenaline, anxiety, excitement, and caffeine surged through me for the duration of the week of the conference. I felt so much was riding on capturing this qualitative research “prism” in word/sound/ nuance that I wasn’t sure if my personal memory, my computer’s memory, my two cassette recorders, or field notebook were large enough to encapsulate the magnitude of this moment for me. Keeping the singularity of this experience in mind, I had a portable office with me at all times. My accoutrements included my laptop, two computer batteries, a power cord and all types of regular and rechargeable cassette batteries for any interview opportunity that might present itself. I was hesitant to stray too far from the Illini Union action, so during the day I wrote my field notes immediately following each interview.

During interviews I jotted notes as well, and when the day was done, I returned to the hotel and rewarded myself with a shower only after I had reviewed the days’ field notes and added to them. By the 4th day of the Conference, I began to have so many ideas that I kept a tape recorder by my bed and was astounded at how many insights presented themselves as gifts from the subconscious in the middle of the night.

Back in Tampa after the conference, the first round of transcriptions morphed from audio to hard copy. I took joy in their mere existence, like a long-awaited birth. Intuition told me to wait until all of the cassettes were transcribed before I began any

analysis. I tend to work best in chunks/blocks of time and felt that I wanted a marathon read to see “what I had captured.” I conducted my data analysis by coding them thematically using a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2000). I observed and coded patterns and themes, looking particularly for new discoveries and insights not previously anticipated. This inductive approach allowed for the emergence of data and assisted me in fine-tuning my research findings. I was not disappointed. Dozens of themes emerged and I began round one of highlighting, Post-It noting, and marginalia-izing. After my neon Post-It Notes seemed to multiply in the night like fertile bunnies, I decided I needed more structure and a bigger view of what I was doing. At the office supply store, I bought a roll of banner paper and cut a 4-foot piece that I tacked to my office wall. On this large white slate, I listed the name of every interview and what I believed were their most salient contributions. I also used this “chart” to visually track similarities and contrasts. Another tool was the reliance on a dissertation log to record topics to think about/to do/explore in the future.

Once transcribed, longer interviews ran 30 pages and shorter ones around 20 pages. Then I began the voice/correction component which involved listening again (and sometimes again and again) to see if what I heard (or sensed, if tonal) was on target. With each tape, I felt not so much like *deja vu* but that I was getting to visit again with my interviewees. It was fun---it made me laugh, frown, and write even more notes. However, I soon realized that I had too much material and it was unwieldy.

In a dramatic move, I began to excise the superfluous. I chopped words in an attempt to pare down the project to make the data more manageable, yet when I saw the

results, I realized I made an error. A *huge* error. I had butchered my interviews. I had lost nuances and tone and inflection. What I was left with were isolated phrases taken out of context and not at all what I wanted, or what I thought my interviewees would have wanted. I owed them a fair representation. While this discovery was initially viewed as a setback, I forced myself to find a way to rectify my mistake.

Instead of panicking, I remembered a technique hidden in my researcher's toolbox: "emotional introspection" (Ellis, 1991a, 1991b). I procured my tattered copy of *The Ethnographic I* (2004), and I sat on the floor of my office reading how to induce "emotional recall." I can hear Carolyn's words as she explained, "...imagine being back in the scene emotionally and physically. Revisiting the scene emotionally leads to remembering other details" (p. 188). So I held the book in one hand and, with the other, I gathered all of my conference memorabilia.

Emotional Recall

I retrieved every note, souvenir, and keepsake that preceded and appended my experience at the Conference. I lightly touched my conference name badge and unwadded folded up field notes that had been stuck in my pockets. I lingered over the receipts from my favorite breakfast diner and recalled the steaming latte that began every day of my fieldwork. Nick and I had an interview over the sound of pouring rain in a tavern--I know because I had the book of matches as a reminder. I opened the map of Champaign and one of the University of Illinois campus. I found my brochure for the free bus shuttle the school offers after 9 p.m. and soon I am *there* again. Last of all, I retrieved the item that sent me right back to the heart of the experience: my dog-eared

ICQI program and sacred coffee-stained list of people to interview---every single name has a check by it.

My husband comes home and finds me on the floor of my office with reminiscent tears in my eyes. He is immediately concerned but I stand up, kiss him quickly, and with a smile say, “I’m okay-- really, but I need to write---*now*.” At this point, he *knows* what that means when it comes to the dissertation, so he kisses me on top of the head and just asks if I need dinner. I shake my head “no” and he closes the door behind him, leaving me alone to review the uncut, sloppy, sweet, very first transcriptions. What I hope will happen does: I am in those interviews again, with all my messy fumbling and “um’s” and “ah’s” and technical concerns, and now I see the interviewees and my material in a much richer and more mature way. Like a madwoman, I turn on my computer and pull up all the original transcripts and print fresh copies. This time I start reading from scratch with no preconceived ideas. It is like falling in love with your childhood sweetheart---except you are an adult. I try to remember what I enjoyed emotionally about each interview---I do not think of it as “collecting data.” What is most interesting is that parts of the interviews that I liked (and had somehow omitted) fit into my project now in new and more complex ways than they ever could have before.

I found myself starting over with the very first transcriptions and reading them with new enthusiasm. I would find myself saying “oh yes, that can fit in here, now, in this section,” and one of those things occurred that can only happen when you are deeply familiar with your data ---I was able to “get” and “see” fresh angles and opportunities.

Not only did I have new topics, I had themes, and subthemes. I decided against another banner and now worked from jottings on super-sticky large Post-It notes.

Plan C (Almost a C-)

Without useless and derailing elaboration, the first version of my dissertation that I gave my adviser was not a success. We both agree about the nature of the problem, and I can now (almost) laugh about it, but I was not so jovial when the entire project was in jeopardy. Although my dissertation proposal called for the heart of my project to feature “four second-generation autoethnographers,” when I wrote it as planned and presented the first draft to my advisor, Carolyn, the result was beyond boring. She will say that the first dissertation draft was not “evocative” and I was “missing as the author,” and I agree with her. Yet, my most important lesson, in response to this fiasco, was that as a researcher I *must* be able to reassess, rethink, reconfigure, reimagine and, most importantly, rewrite an entire project if that is what is needed. While it was a humbling experience, Carolyn and I also found a new synergy and approach that would make the story less boring, and I could claim narrative authority. The only setback was that it would require a major revision. Instead of having four chapters that each “highlighted” one emerging autoethnographer, we chose to redesign the chapter structure using a thematic stance. While this entailed an incredible amount of rewriting, the “theme” framework yielded a far richer and more textured final project. As it is now written, the four chapters that follow correspond thematically to four main questions that I asked of interviewees:

- (1) What first motivated you to write autoethnographically?
- (2) How do you define/evaluate autoethnography?
- (3) Do you think autoethnography is therapeutic?
- (4) How do you envision autoethnography's future?

For the final version of my dissertation, I located the places in the transcripts where interviewees and others address these questions. Then, I began grouping the answers with other like responses. Very slowly (as I already learned my lesson about over-cutting too early in a process), I began to clean up what the interviewees said and then tried to arrange their responses in some coherent order, at all times working to maintain their original meanings. When appropriate, I layered in secondary references and my own musings, but primarily the interviewees' answers guided my writing. Even if I did not agree with what they said, I made sure to include their views to represent my "findings" in an inclusive way. At Carolyn's urging, I tried to think of the project as "an evocative story," and this seemed to work as I edited what the interviewees and panelists said and juxtaposed their narratives.

CHAPTER THREE

THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC CALL

I knew my personal reasons for being drawn to autoethnography, but I hoped that my in-depth interviews and participant observation at the conference would shed even more light on others' motivation for taking this particular narrative turn. When I asked interviewees my first research question: "What motivated you to write your first autoethnography?" intriguing reasons emerged as to why scholars embraced this unique social science methodology.

I looked forward to my interview with Laura Ellingson as her focus is on autoethnography as a tool in health communication. Although through the years I had talked to her briefly at other professional conferences, this time we set a definite time and place for a luxurious academic discussion. Laura has two Master's Degrees, one in creative Non-Fiction and one in Communication. She also has a graduate certificate in Women's Studies, a Ph.D. in Communication, and her doctoral dissertation became the book, *Communicating in the Clinic* (2005). Currently, she is an Associate Professor of Communication (although she was an Assistant Professor at the time of the interview) at Santa Clara University.

Laura's Story

My Master's degree was at Northern Illinois University. The first time I got the idea that your voice could be part of your story was actually in a feminist methodology

class I took in the Women's Studies program there. So I did a fairly straight up qualitative thesis about women with breast cancer, but I openly acknowledged that my interest in cancer research had come from my own experiences of having cancer. I had osteogenic sarcoma, which is a form of bone cancer, when I was an undergraduate. So my cancer was a minor sort of...not a footnote...but not much more than that either.

When I came to the University of South Florida for my Ph.D., I ended up taking qualitative methods with Carolyn Ellis, and that's where I first got words for what I experienced. It reminded me very much of being in a feminist class where you realize that there's a word for that. You know the famous saying "before we had the term sexual harassment, we just called it life?" You see all these wonderful awakenings when you realize that there's a word for what you're experiencing, and that's what happened when I heard about "autoethnography." That very first class I really started exploring. It was also a little scary, but it was very exciting and--- actually---one other thing happened.

Embodiment is a big thing for me and one that's brought me to autoethnography as well. You should never ignore your body, but my body is particularly difficult to ignore, because I've had chronic leg pain for years because the cancer I had was in my right femur and my right thigh. They rebuilt my leg using cadaver bones and metal, and muscle grafts and bone grafts, and skin grafts. I had terrible osteoarthritis and other problems in my knee. One time right before a meeting with Carolyn, I was trying a new orthopedist because I'd just moved to Florida, and he was just so cruel to me, so mean--- I was just in tears and I was running late for my appointment with Carolyn---I thought she was going to be angry at me for being late.

I walked into her office and just started crying and crying. Carolyn shut the door, and she just held me, and I cried until I could finally get out how unkind this doctor was to me. We just had this amazing conversation about my work and how much my body is present in my fieldwork and how hard it is to have to continue to deal with chronic pain, which is very depressing, too.

So I cried with her, talked to her about what had happened, how painful it was and how really it influenced my understanding of the cancer center because my own experience as a patient was so fresh. By the end of that discussion, she was my advisor and then the proverbial world opened up. I started reading everything she gave me, and I really felt very connected to Carolyn's vision of autoethnography, but I didn't want to only write about my own cancer experiences. Not because that's not as good, but because my sort of calling, or where I really connected with autoethnography, was in using my experiences and narratives of those experiences to connect to the ones I was writing about in the cancer center. I was very interested in narrative work and women's narratives about communicating with their physicians.

Laura's story about her initiation into the world of autoethnography pointed to other patterns that would emerge within my research. Serious physical pain and/or chronic trauma often precedes the writing of people's first autoethnographies. Unlike short-lived distress, these hurts are ongoing, often spanning years. Those experiencing the pain also experience the trauma of failed, or even destructive, communication practices. This miscommunication may take a variety of forms including feeling misunderstood, stigmatized, judged, unheard, patronized, shamed, or one of the most

passive yet painful communication responses: being dismissed, as Patricia Geist-Martin's story demonstrates.

Even though Patricia Geist-Martin would not be identified as a "second-generation" autoethnographer, I wanted to interview her because of her qualitative approach to health communication. In her book *Communicating Health* (2002), she and her co-authors use personal narratives throughout the work to describe the lived experience of illness, trauma, and end-of-life issue, and she also teaches qualitative research methods. Patricia's published works include three books: *Communicating Health: Personal, Political, and Cultural Complexities*, co-authored with Eileen Berlin Ray and Barbara Sharf (2002); *Courage of Conviction: Women's Words, Women's Wisdom*, co-edited with Linda Perry (1997); and *Negotiating the Crisis: DRGs and the Transformation of Hospitals* coauthored with Monica Hardesty (1992). She is a professor in the School of Communication at San Diego State University and earned her M.A. and Ph.D. in Communication with a focus on health communication.

Patricia's Story

I would say that the first time that I put myself really into a piece in first person was in the book that I edited with Linda Perry, Courage of Conviction: Women's Words, Women's Wisdom. I co-authored a book chapter in there on miscarriage. I've experienced seven miscarriages, three before my baby girl and four after her, and I did not receive very much communication that was helpful or healing or acknowledging of my emotions. I also experienced incredibly dismissive sorts of communication; people said things like "You'll get pregnant again" or "God wanted this child" and "I know

someone who had 10 miscarriages.” So, this is what they say to you over and over and over again.

Everybody has good intentions, but they were communicating in ways that were very much not acknowledging when what I wanted to talk about was the baby: the names that we had planned, the day it would have been born, how old it would have been by now, what it would have been like to celebrate an upcoming holiday---like how the baby would have been at Christmas--- or whatever. No one would let you talk about that even if you tried. So that’s what led me to do a research project where I interviewed women who had experienced miscarriage. I found over and over again the hopelessness that women and men felt surrounding miscarriage. So, I have my story in that chapter and it was my way of moving into these other women’s stories.

Like Laura, Patricia experienced repeated physical trauma and attendant emotional upheaval. In her case, however, it was not health professionals who were primarily at fault, but “well-meaning” family and friends whose inept communication skills caused her even more suffering. Furthermore, when Patricia interviewed women and their partners who had experienced miscarriages, she immediately identified with their hopelessness. Her intention in sharing her first-person narrative was to transmute her and others’ pain surrounding miscarriage into an affirmation of the experience--- unlike what she had been able to receive. Since that time, she has dedicated herself to teaching others how to communicate more empathetically and effectively in these types of circumstances.

While physical trauma is often the catalyst bringing scholars to the autoethnographic form, there are many dimensions of suffering, including interpersonal pain. With many people getting divorces, not to mention the inevitable non-marital dissolutions, a majority of people can identify with the anguish of experiencing a “failed” relationship. A break-up often taxes even the most adept interpersonal communicator, and this is the emotional struggle that brought Elissa to write her first autoethnography. I’m happy to report that Elissa is now blissfully re-partnered and she and her mate, Jay Baglia (who also has a Ph.D. in Communication from the University of South Florida), are both Medical Educators at Lehigh Valley Hospital in Pennsylvania. At the time of the interview, she was an Assistant Professor in Communication Studies at San Jose State University. Her doctoral dissertation about hospice volunteers was ethnographic and became the book *Communicating at the End of Life: Finding Magic in the Mundane* (2006).

Elissa’s Story

It was fall of 1998 and it was my first semester in the Ph.D. program. Art Bochner’s “Close Personal Relationships” course was one of the first classes that I signed up for. He announced that the final project would be a personal narrative about a relationship, which sort of freaked me out a little bit because I didn’t really understand what the sort of expectations of that would be. I happened to be having a lot of issues in my marriage at that time---pretty serious ones--- and whenever I was trying to think of what kind of relationship story I would write, there was really only one that was in the

forefront of my head. That became “Hurricanes” which was then actually published in two different versions.

*One was written more like a novel and Norm Denzin published that in *Studies of Symbolic Interaction*. But he had seen Art and I perform it at a conference and Denzin said “the novel format doesn’t really capture what I saw at the conference---can you make it more performative?” The second version became “Storm Tracking,” which is actually a script. This form required really getting the language...cutting it way down, you know adding stage directions and sound cues, and finding a way to integrate the analysis part of it into the text without citations. So, for the passages that were analysis, my main character is speaking to her interpersonal communication class. She speaks about the theories to the class while it’s obvious that she’s really talking about her own relationship at the same time, which really reflects my experiences. Because by the time I taught interpersonal communication, I was in the midst of separation and then the divorce came the following year. It was funny having such a tumultuous marriage while speaking to these bright-eyed young people who idealized the state of marriage and those sorts of things.*

In both autoethnographic works, “Hurricanes” and “Storm-Tracking,” Elissa tries to make sense of the many poignant issues related to a tumultuous break-up. She explores communication problems between the couple and others and reveals the many complexities of relationships in general.

Because all the autoethnographers I interviewed have been in academe for a large part of their lives, they are teaching while at the same time dealing with their own private

pain. Elissa writes of how hard it is to talk about the dissolution of her marriage to “bright-eyed young people.” It is only with retrospective knowledge that many of us remember having that same innocence of youth. The classroom is an overt teaching arena, but also can be where teachers learn interesting things about themselves from their students.

Such is the case with Lesa Lockford, Associate Professor of Theatre and Film in the American Culture Studies Department at Bowling Green State University, who studied with Ron Pelias at Southern Illinois University. Lesa talks about her foray into the world of personal narrative and autoethnographic practices.

Lesa’s Story

It’s very hard to locate the first autoethnography I did because personal narrative and autoethnography kind of blur in my mind. Nevertheless, I think the first piece that I actually got published was related to a student in a class who journaled about a very bad relationship in her personal life. I remember reading this very naïve journal and thinking how could she be so stupid--- and then, of course, it dawned on me that I had a similar event in my own life where I was effectively date-raped. Basically it made me ask, “How could I be so stupid?” and I started writing across the sense of myself and the sense of herself at that age, trying to put together this understanding between myself and my student.

One of my key findings is that successful autoethnographers must be willing to look at their own prejudices and assumptions. In the story above, Lesa shares how judgmental she is toward her student, when in fact that student mirrored back to her a

similar experience. Her doctoral dissertation (in Communication) explores multiple and conflicting views related to feminism, femininity, and embodiment. In a similar way, she writes about the “abject” body in fine detail in her highly self-reflective book, *Performing Femininity: Rewriting Gender Identity* (2004). Like Lesa, Tami Spry also studied performance in the doctoral program at Southern Illinois University.

Tami is currently a Professor of Communication Studies at St. Cloud University focusing on issues related to gender violence, mental illness loss, and shamanic healing rituals. She has published numerous articles featuring autoethnography and is currently working on a book, *Paper and Skin: Writing and Performing the Autoethnographic Life*. She describes what brought her to autoethnography.

Tami’s Story

Like bell hooks, I came to all of this from a space of pain and a place of pain and as hooks says, she came to theorizing with a yearning to make the pain stop, a yearning to move through that pain and make the pain have meaning. My first autoethnography, and I would look at it as autoethnography now, was a description of being sexually assaulted, and in that [piece] the personal difficulty of dealing with something like that is very significant. But what makes it worthy of other people’s attention, worthy I think of being in print, is that hopefully I tie that to issues of power in terms of women’s issues, the ways in which I was dealt with in the system at that time, and the ways in which the person who I was dating at that time reacted to me.

Then I wrote a narrative called “Kim” where I talked about the death of my mother. This kind of research [autoethnography] allows flesh-to-flesh engagement with

one another, and I don't want to romanticize that, because there's great pain when bodies come together, but there's great pleasure when bodies come together, and those spaces of pain and pleasure are spaces of critical engagement. For me those things are most important for us to articulate in the academy.

As Tami concludes, autoethnography is a vehicle that allows provocative scholarship to come to the forefront in a format to discuss the previously undiscussed, at least in academe. Similar to Lesa and Tami, Carol Rambo explores issues of sexuality, the body, gender roles, including taboo topics, that in traditional scholarship are usually written in a clinical form, in the rare case they are addressed.

Carol co-edited the book, *Everyday Sexism in the Third Millennium* (1997), with Barbara Zsembik and Joe R. Feagin and is currently the editor of the journal, *Symbolic Interaction*. She earned her Ph.D. in Sociology at University of Florida, completed her M.A. in Sociology with Carolyn Ellis at the University of South Florida, and now is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Memphis. Carol did a qualitative M.A. thesis in 1987 on the topic of erotic dancing, and she has written some of the most cited articles in autoethnographic studies.

Carol's Story

I was Carolyn Ellis's student and I was an exotic dancer when I was going through graduate school. I became fascinated with what was going on in striptease dance bars and I felt like I contained this secret and wanted to get that secret out. I felt stigmatized from talking about this in the first place because who the hell's going to listen to a dancer, right? But I get caught up in my relationship with Carolyn Ellis and

that gave me a vehicle, so it was actually a chapter in my Master's thesis. The next thing I wrote was "Multiple Reflections of Childhood Sexual Abuse" (1995), and that was another one of those empowering things to be able to write about those experiences. Secrets that you have to keep that you then have permission to come to the surface---that was probably the start of my working on some personal healing from all of that.

Carol's story typifies many elements that are common to what brings people to write autoethnographies: pain but often secret or taboo pain that has been squelched. In general, autoethnography is a venue for people to discuss their experiences with issues that make people "uncomfortable"---either physically, morally, emotionally, or mentally. In the books, *Ethnographically Speaking* (Bochner and Ellis, 2002) and *Composing Ethnography* (Ellis and Bochner, 1996), chapters include sections about emotional upheaval and tension in relationships, gender identity transformation, homosexuality, addiction, sexual abuse, mental retardation, eating disorders, racial/ethnic/religious prejudice, and serious illness. While many of these writings include descriptions of how authors dealt with their pain, they also often provide solace and ways to move toward personal healing. The comfort of reading autoethnographies comes from the acknowledgment of the often "unmentionable"---similar to what Patricia Geist experienced with the dismissive communication regarding her miscarriages or the cruelty that Laura Ellingson experienced from a doctor regarding her cancer. These are the stories that need to be shared in a non-clinical way, with the inclusion of emotions, too often a rarity in traditional scholarship. Larry Russell contends that emotions are what

link the writer's story to the reader's humanity and heart. He shares his acquaintance with autoethnography.

Larry's Story

One of the things that happens in performance studies is that we're very much aware of how texts are constructed as performances, and so a lot of the texts in performance studies have a performative emphasis, meaning that the performer is extremely present. Most of us write our own work and much of the work that we perform is personal narrative. It's also very difficult to write a piece you're in without dealing with yourself because you have to acknowledge your presence to the audience. I had performance training starting with grad school, so I was used to writing about myself and using myself as a means of investigation. In performance studies, there's now a well documented tradition in which we use our embodied experience to explore different issues.

I knew about ethnography because I had done some graduate work in the anthropology department, but I really didn't know about autoethnography. There was a wonderful anthropology teacher who was doing a course on "Writing Ethnography" and the first assignment was to describe the site of the place where we were going to do research. So I started writing this description and, as I wrote, it all came pouring out in what I now know as autoethnography. I got a tremendous response from him in class and there were other assignments, and I began to write other things and then I wrote myself into the dissertation in that way.

But I really had not read autoethnography, so I was scared about doing this form of scholarship and about my committee thinking that there was enough scholarship. So I tried to develop two voices in the writing. In retrospect, I realize now one voice was autoethnographic, and the other was a scholar's voice, and I would try to go back and forth between the two. I wrote storytelling, autoethnography, then stepped out giving background information, telling some of the history and doing a literature review and those sorts of things.

So in the dissertation, I wrote in two fonts. I used italics for autoethnography and regular font for everything else. When I defended it before my committee, they basically said this is wonderful work---now, just use the italics and get rid of everything else. I was astonished by that! They said the only criticism we have is that you need to drop all the other stuff because it was really boring. They were saying there's no need for you to have two voices, and it was a wonderful affirmation too. I was just stunned. It was like the door was opening up suddenly saying "go forth."

I mean it was really embarrassing because when I met Carolyn Ellis I had not read her work. I knew her name but I had not read her work. When I met her, she gave me her book, Final Negotiations (1995), and it was like falling in love. Like "oh my god, my soul sister"-- this is everything I want. Having met Carolyn and Art, I suddenly realized there was this body of literature which I desperately needed to read, but I was also really embarrassed because, it's not that I felt that I had invented something new, I just felt like I had a really kind committee that understood that this was the most appropriate way to deal with my dissertation.

Then to find that this [autoethnography] was indeed a tradition, not long lived, but a tradition, well, then I started reading like crazy: Art, Carolyn, Laurel---and you know these are my people. It was quite wonderful and it's very emotional and obviously it's wonderful to talk to Carolyn about things like the importance of writing about emotion and how that's an important part of our lives which we until this time had almost ignored in academia.

Larry is currently an Associate Professor of Speech, Rhetoric and Performance Studies at Hofstra University (at the time of the interview, he was an Assistant Professor) as well as an active actor and director. I found it fascinating that so many of the up and coming autoethnographers had a prior background in theater and performance, yet Larry articulates the link very well at the beginning of his story. Another fascinating link is that Larry's Ph.D. is in Communication but he has a Master's of Divinity Degree.

Similarly, Chris Poulos earned an M.A. in Religious Studies. He said, "What it basically came down to was philosophy ends at god, and theology picks up where they left off, and they end at communication...and that's the only place I could go." While many of my interviewees dealt with issues related to the body, Chris experienced a different kind of pain--- perhaps emotional, perhaps spiritual, or maybe some combination of the two. Chris Poulos almost quit graduate school before he "found" autoethnography, although I suspect that he would say that it "found" him.

Chris's Story

What happened to me was I went to graduate school and I landed in a place where I was honestly sitting in a classroom thinking I'm going to quit this doctoral

program. I took an Interpersonal Communication course and had to read nothing but quantitative studies. I just read it and I asked the professor, “Is that all there is?” and he said, yeah. What I was reading was quantitative social science research and it was sucking my soul out. At that point, I thought “What’s going to save me? How am I going to do this? How am I going to make it through graduate school if this whole thing is social science? What have I done? I’ve made a mistake.”

*I was literally on the verge of going to my advisor and saying, “I’m done” and someone handed me Bud Goodall’s book, *Casing a Promised Land* (1994). That book was a revelation to me and it was the thing that changed my life as a writer and as an academic and gave me hope. From that moment when I read Bud’s book until the end of my dissertation was just a beautiful experience. Everything just fell into place. I couldn’t not write autoethnography, so if I had to make the choice between what I do and something else, I just wouldn’t do it. It’s my passion and I love it. Job or no job, career or not career, I would still be doing this because the power of it is so great. When you see people at places like this conference [International Qualitative Inquiry Congress] responding deeply, both emotionally and intellectually, as if that were separate...that’s just a big fiction created by Descartes that the mind and the body are somehow separate entities. That is just bizarre. We’ve lived that legacy for so long that we’ve forgotten that it was just a made-up thing by a guy who was trying to come up with some philosophical endpoint doing a philosophical exercise. To me, you just have to do what you love.*

Up until I interviewed Chris, I surmised that physical and sometimes emotional pain was the catalyst for most autoethnographic writing, but I began to acknowledge that there are many kinds of suffering, including “soul” sickness. Chris describes traditional social science research as “sucking my soul out” and thinking “what’s going to save me?” He was despondent and ready to give up his doctoral studies before he read *Casing a Promised Land: The Autobiography of an Organizational Detective as Cultural Ethnographer* (Goodall 1994). In this book, among other topics, Goodall argues for the need for more interpretive ethnography in the social sciences and the work challenges the positivist monopoly on scholarship. I can’t help but find it ironic that Chris, who formally studied both philosophy and religion, is “saved” by a book with the term “promised land” in the title. Moses had nothing on Chris at that burning bush moment when he discovered “autoethnography.

However, for many scholars, autoethnography does represent a way to exist more holistically. It provides a method that permits the mind, the body, the heart, and the soul to exist simultaneously.

About writing autoethnographically, Chris concludes:

...what really seems to come out is my emotional self which is something that I think my culture, my upbringing, and my life taught me to completely ignore and deny and all I have to say to anybody who’s ever experienced this is I grew up Episcopalian--- God’s frozen people--- so it was a revelation to me actually that I could write evocatively, emotionally and that people would say ‘wow that’s really good, that really touched

something.’ So what I try to do is allow that resonance and that reality to bleed, sometimes sweat, sometimes cry, onto the page, and sometimes laugh also.

Many people pursuing the study of autoethnography come to it later in life--- after disappointments with other vocations. The word “vocation” comes from the Latin *vocare*, meaning “to call,” and indeed Chris sees autoethnography as a calling: “I think for people who are considering or on the cusp of this calling---I would say it is a calling-- -you can get sucked into it or not and that’s up to you, but once you are, know that it’s not easy. But it is powerful, and joyful, and painful, and agonizing, and exciting and thrilling and all those things, and I just say, ‘Have a great ride.’” For many people I interviewed, or heard speak at the conference, discovering narrative scholarship is indeed a saving grace.

For example, Carla Corrotto originally had a coveted position as an architect but was extremely unhappy with her chosen vocation. She is much happier now that she is an Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice. Carla shares her “accidental” venture into autoethnography:

Carla’s Story

I became an architect and was in practice in architecture in Chicago, and I didn’t want to get up in the morning. I hated the places where I worked and the people that I worked with so much I can’t even tell you. I loved being an architect---I just couldn’t stand the job. So, I thought, I can’t do this the rest of my life, I will be miserable.

I was a feminist so I thought I'll study something about feminism and architecture and get a Ph.D., and I'll teach architecture. I'll change the world and it'll be great. So, I went to a history of architecture and art program here and other places in the Midwest. I happened to go to The Ohio State University and went to their department wanting to study something about feminism and architecture, and they said you might want to study sociology. So I applied, got accepted, I enrolled, and my second quarter I took a course with Professor Laurel Richardson, and I thought everybody did narrative. I didn't get that we were an anomaly, honestly, so I wrote an autoethnography for a dissertation. It was a great experience writing an autoethnography with Laurel, and the committee was fantastic.

One finding with all of my interviewees is that each person was greatly influenced by at least one autoethnographic pioneer. Without exception, all of the up and coming autoethnographers I interviewed point to the pivotal influence of a specific mentor. In Carla's instance it was Laurel Richardson, in Chris's case it was Bud Goodall, and for Mary Weems it was Norman Denzin. Elissa was mentored by Art Bochner, and Carolyn Ellis influenced Laura, Carol and Larry. Still, many of the second-generation autoethnographers express that reading several of these pioneers' work had a synergistic effect. To that end, what may be just as important is what was happening on a larger scale historically. Each of the first-generation autoethnographer's individual work was becoming part of a substantial body of literature that would influence the social sciences.

As discussed in Chapter One, the "crisis of representation" was a critical factor in providing a context for the development of approaches such as autoethnography.

Moreover, another term for the crisis was introduced earlier with the publication and popularization of Thomas Kuhn's work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1996). Kuhn discusses the universality of all crises stating that they "begin with the blurring of a paradigm and the consequent loosening of the rules..." (1996, p. 84). Kuhn led the way in discussing how paradigms/ideas/social constructs must morph and undergo replacement. While he was initially alluding to the world of science, his theory of "paradigm shifts" was also appropriate for the optimum climate for change in social sciences.

I am always amazed at how historically groups of writers come together in taverns or cafes to discuss their craft and ambitions, but Kuhn would simply describe it as the natural course of paradigmatic development. I think of the romantic poets, Keats, Shelley, Byron and Coleridge who frequently gathered in taverns to discuss poetry and the Beat poets, young Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs who had no idea how their work would influence future writers. I also recall Dorothy Parker in Manhattan, and her friends of the Algonquin Round Table. Similarly, in the case of autoethnography, it appears that the pivotal gatherings of "the first generation" began at national symposiums, conferences, and sometimes bars and cafés. Eventually they began to read and review each other's work and later exchanges through the mail and e-mail would continue to bind the group. While my generation has had the benefit of mentors, journals, handbooks, graduate programs and conferences as aids, these folks had only their internal longings for a different kind of scholarship, and of course, each other.

Some would say autoethnography was spawned by a paradigm shift or historical factors. In Chapter One, I discussed the genesis of personal writing in North America, the crisis of representation in the social sciences, and the etiology of autoethnography. That section includes comprehensive details on how all of these factors influenced the work of autoethnographers. In the following pages, I try to capture the first-person voices of the autoethnographic pioneers who address how they “came to the field” during this process.

Let’s Get Personal

When I attended the Third International Qualitative Inquiry Conference in 2007, I attended a panel titled, “Let’s Get Personal I: First Generation Autoethnographers Reflect on Writing Personal Narratives.” It served as a model for the questions I would ask my interviewees who I considered to be the “second” generation. Below is an excerpt from the first generation autoethnographers’ responses to the question of how they entered the world of personal narrative. The first-generation autoethnographers stories are so comprehensive, that I choose to include very few of my own narrative comments. I believe it would dilute the evident synergy among them that I was able to witness and also might distract from the impact of their revelations (for a more complete rendition of a similar panel featuring these influential autoethnographic pioneers, see “Coda: Talking and Thinking about Qualitative Research” Ellis, Bochner, Denzin et al., 2007, pp. 229-267 in *Ethical Futures in Qualitative Research*).

I double-check the room number and the conference program. Check. I take a seat in the front row center so that I can record the “Let’s Get Personal I” panel. Within

ten minutes, the hall is standing room only, and I have to minimize my space and recording paraphernalia as a courtesy to other interested participants at the conference.

The room is packed as Carolyn Ellis begins.

“I don’t know that I have to introduce all the participants. Most of you, probably all of you, know these characters. This is Ron Pelias, Art Bochner, Laurel Richardson, Bud Goodall, and of course Norm Denzin, who put the weekend together. Stacy Holman Jones was supposed to be here moderating, but she’s at another session. I’m used to playing two characters at once, both the author and the participant, so I don’t mind being moderator and panel member.”

After I double-check my two tape recorders and ensure that they are indeed running and picking up sound, I allow my eyes to roam the crowd. Most of the younger attendees in the crowd sit straight with notepads in hand, preparing to take notes. The place is packed and more chairs are brought in while floor sitters gather closer together to make room for others. A few people peek in the door and shake their heads sadly when they see there is no available space---not even to stand. I feel fortunate that I have a prime seat up front and will have the first generations’ words memorialized on tape.

“We’re calling ourselves immodestly ‘first-generation’ autoethnographers, the people who’ve been out there on the front line writing and talking about personal narratives. Question one is about personal history and what I asked is ‘Discuss your experience with writing personal narratives or autoethnography. For example, what was the first personal narrative you wrote? When and why did you write it? What was your

experience with publishing it? Discuss other personal narratives that followed this one.’ Now, panelists get to pick any part of this question that they want to address.”

Norm Denzin, the director of the conference, begins to answer the question. His clothes, sandal clad feet, tousled gray hair, and demeanor are casual but when he speaks, his voice is all authority.

“When we think of autoethnography, we need to mark 1987 as the year that really gets it into the literature as a formal term, as a formal methodology. So, in that sense we are talking about a genre that is twenty years old. And so each of us came into that genre before or after 1987 for our history. What has been critical to each one of our histories has been *our relationship with each other*.

My particular entrance into the genre is at sort of two levels. First, I came through sociology in the sixties, not being taught anything about qualitative methodology. We would read anthropology accounts, and some sociological accounts, about participant observation. But to think that sociologists would write in the first person was completely taboo. When I wrote what became *The Alcoholic Self* and *The Recovering Alcoholic*, I decided that I was going to have to be in the project because I was the person doing the observing during the ethnography. But I was just going to disguise myself because I still didn’t have the freedom to---I hadn’t given myself the freedom to---write that narrative in the first person but I’m on every page of those two books. So that was sort of a disguised entry into ethnography written through the personal, but using the genre of the day to hide behind various accounts. And I used the theoretical apparatus of the book to hide myself.

It was after that book that a number of us at the Midwest and at the SSSI (Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction) meetings started doing sessions on postmodern motherhood. For four different reasons, with four different relationships with difficult mothers. But we decided we were going to do first person narratives about working our way through our childhoods and our adulthoods through our mothers. So, we started doing these sessions on mothers. I was the only male on the panel, so I wrote about my mother and they wrote about their mothers and they were all being mothers themselves. Out of that came two or three papers---one of them was called, 'I Love Lucy' which was an important piece for me and another was called 'That Psychiatrist.' Then a piece that built on these was called 'Two-Stepping in the Nineties', which was important for me because this was the early nineties and Laurel's book was out there, Carolyn's book was out there, and Art's work was out there. We were starting to coalesce this sense that the personal narrative written through the autoethnographic was a legitimate form.

So 'Two-Stepping in the Nineties' was to recover that moment when I two-stepped with my mother, dancing with the old Victrola radio in the dining room. That piece was about my mother's death and about Laurel's mother's death and trying to come to grips with the fact that I learned of my mother's death by a phone call because she excluded everybody in the family from her death. You know, in the personal narrative there is a way to recover my own relationship to myself, and I went through Carolyn and Laurel to get to that spot. There's a space in Laurel's book where she talks about where she was at the moment her mother died, and I started my two-stepping piece where I was when my mother died.

You can see that this was a deeply personal and political project for each of us, and we empower each other and in my mind the lesson, one of the lessons, is this group gives the next generation a platform to work from.”

Norm’s latter statement is the one that clarifies how this disparate group began to work together to accomplish more than they could possibly accomplish alone. They talked and wrote about tough topics such as addiction, recovery, strained relationships, and loved ones’ deaths. At the same time, one of the primary catalysts is a dissatisfaction with the “selves” that were sanctioned as “appropriate” for the academy.

Laurel Richardson addresses the issues of selves and her experience of personal and professional schism:

“Much of my life I did divide myself. I wrote poetry under the name of Laurel Richardson and I wrote academic stuff under the name of Laurel Walum, and then after awhile Laurel Walum Richardson and Laurel Richardson Walum, but there was a real division. At one point I decided wait--- this is not healthy--- this is not healthy for me or the universe that I am in, and I’m going to combine the two.

So, my first real autoethnography was when I was president of the North Central Sociological Association and I wrote a piece called ‘The Collective Story.’ Some of you may have read that. It was epiphanous for me to be in a position of power. The second time I felt that strong position of power was when I was in a Couch-Stone in Des Moines and I’d been featured. The third place of power I felt was when I was the distinguished lecturer for SSSI (Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction) and wrote ‘Paradigms Lost.’ It was about a car accident, and my coma, and my inability to have words, and my

loss. I was very concerned that I reached people, and I still am, who have that kind of trauma, who've lost voice, who've lost brains, who've lost abilities and the hopeful story about the reclaiming of the possibility to return.

But those became a tradition where I really wanted to say something as an entitled full professor at a major research university. If I don't use that position to say something, to bring the personal to the academy, who am I? If not now...if not then...when?" For me, one of the intriguing aspects of Laurel's response is her awareness that she was in a place of power in the academy and in a position to wield some clout politically. While many "newer" autoethnographers, such as me, are older by virtue of previously pursuing other professions, Laurel knew she was perfectly poised to help make a difference.

Similarly, one of Art Bochner's missions is to address the split between the personal and the academic, a topic he addresses in relation to his first autoethnographic writing. Although his early communication education included extensive quantitative analyses, these days Art is a full-fledged proponent of qualitative studies that defy Cartesian dualism. When Art begins to speak, his deep voice seems serious but he opens his response with a light-hearted quip.

"Probably the first autoethnography I ever wrote was a letter to my college sweetheart after we broke up and as far as I know it was never published." After the crowd's laughter dies down, Art continues his answer with a no-frills and direct response: "Academically speaking, the first autoethnography that has my name attached to it is a piece that Norman published in *Qualitative Inquiry* titled 'It's About Time: Narrative and

the Divided Self.’ I first presented a much briefer version of this story at an NCA convention in 1995. I had been invited by the then president of NCA to be on a panel and my assigned task was to talk about social theory. At the time, I was reading and heavily immersed in Richard Rorty, and I was particularly impressed by Rorty’s statement that if you compare what has been accomplished in the realm of social justice between the social novelists and the social theorists you come out decidedly on the side of the social novelists.

So, in presenting my own autoethnographic story about my father’s death and its meaning in relation to the divided self of the academy was a way through a story to expose what I later called the ‘institutional depression’ that circulates through the academy as a result of this split between the academic and the personal.

One of the nicest experiences I had in relation to this particular piece was an e-mail I got shortly after by somebody who I didn’t know, a retired professor in Massachusetts from another field who wrote to me and laid out what was evoked for him by that piece. He had retired early from his position as a sociologist, and this particular piece touched a nerve with regard to that. And the concluding line of this letter was essentially, ‘I would not have retired if I had thought there was an opportunity to bring the personal into the academy.’”

Art’s response makes me think of something Carol Rambo has said that correlates: “Remember that this process that we go through to become academics is itself traumatizing. So all of our colleagues, whether we’re agreeing with them or not, they went through this... This is abuse okay?” Teaching in higher education has been my sole

job for over twenty years, and I would not call the environments in which I taught abusive *per se*. I have had the joy of teaching self-expressive writing, discussing literature, humanities, and poetry and getting paid for it, all the while enjoying liberal vacations to pursue my own artistic endeavors. To me, that is a wonderful way to make a living. However, the “personal” side that is allowed *within* the classroom is often not reflected in the infrastructure of the institution as a whole, nor within its conferences, academic journals, or tenure practices and I think this is the hierarchal humiliation to which Carol may be alluding. It also makes sense that having to squelch parts of ourselves would lead to a type of “depression”--either personal or institutional as Art contends.

While the process of getting a doctorate is humbling and rigorous, I suspect it is no less “abusive” or impersonal than the process of earning other professional degrees such as those in law, medicine, or accounting. However, what I think does matter, is that once academics have earned positions of power, as Laurel referred to, that we use our clout to make the ivory tower a cozier place to live. All of the first generation autoethnographers are affecting change in momentous ways but their roads have not been easy, as Ron Pelias points out. He is the next pioneer to address the crowd. Ron begins his response with a bit of a furrow on his forehead, like he needs to get something off his chest or mind before he can relax.

“The first thing that struck me when I read this particular question is feeling some kind of need to draw some distinction between personal narrative and autoethnography. I had been working with personal narrative and so forth I guess since the late seventies, or

somewhere along the line in there, and I've done quite a bit of work in performance studies with personal narrative. But one of the things that was interesting about that work, I don't think it ever took on explicitly the burden that I think autoethnography takes on---which is to try and use the self to help explicate culture.

So, I think the first piece that I wound up writing that I would say would make a bid for autoethnography was a piece called 'The Critical Life.' That piece I presented at a pre-conference workshop with Carolyn Ellis and was lucky enough to have both Carolyn and Buddy give me some feedback on it. So I raced home and did the revisions, and I sent it out to *Communication Education*. This particular piece, really what it does, is tracks one day in the life of the academic. It tries to look at how much criticism we are involved in, in our day in and day out living. So, when I sent this off to the editor, he said, 'I kind of like this, but it's not quite scholarly enough and what we really need to do is beef this piece up with a good theoretical essay.' I kind of sighed. This was in 1999, and a number of really wonderfully eloquent justifications for autoethnography had already been out there and so forth, so I said, 'No I don't think I want to do that.' I thought that was going to be the end of it.

A couple of weeks later he says, 'What if I get some people to respond to that essay, and we'll let you have the essay the way you wrote it' so, I said, 'Okay, fine.' And he gathered together three other scholars to respond to 'The Critical Life' and it was a nice little forum to see different people trying to make some kind of sense of that--trying to weigh in on whether or not that particular piece should really 'count' in a scholarly journal."

After Ron's remarks, it is time to change my cassettes. They are 45 minutes each and as I tend to my audio tasks, I note that the audience is still riveted. We are all academics in one form or another, either students, professors, or independent scholars and this is a forum we have waited the entire conference to attend. As I double-check my recording devices, I overhear a woman behind me saying, "Carolyn Ellis is going to talk next--I just *love* her work." I smile to myself as Carolyn begins to talk. I feel very lucky to be involved in this project as Carolyn begins speaking.

"My first project was writing *Final Negotiations* which I started back in 1985, about the illness and death of my first husband. I didn't publish that until 1995, but it was really the context from which everything else started to emerge. The other significant thing for me was writing a paper called 'Systematic Sociological Introspection,' which got published in 1991, and Norm was a reviewer on that paper. But the first published autoethnography was 'There Are Survivors,' which was about my brother's death and it had originally been part of the longer book, *Final Negotiations*. Art and Laurel finally convinced me to take that piece out of *Final Negotiations* and publish it separately.

I then of course sent it to Norman Denzin who published it in *The Sociological Quarterly* and that was really the beginning for me. And it's interesting when I look back at that because that was published, and then a sociological analysis of that piece was published afterwards by Sheryl Kleinman and helped legitimate having my story in the journal. My next piece was called 'Speaking of Dying,' which is about the death of a friend of mine and that was published in *Symbolic Interaction*. Andy Fontana heard me

give it at a conference and then asked for it so publishing it was pretty easy. That piece got published under the subheading of ‘short story.’ It’s not really an article, it’s a short story, but I didn’t care because my work was getting out there. And then when *Qualitative Inquiry* began it was like...oh this is heaven, what a gift! And I published a piece about race in that first volume. So, what I learned from all of this is that it’s really important to have people out there providing feedback and sources and places to publish.”

When Carolyn finishes, the applause is loud and sustained. So many of the people I interviewed shared that her book *Final Negotiations* was their introduction to the world of autoethnography. But one of the most important points I learned from Carolyn is that community is essential, particularly in endeavors where ground-breaking scholarship is involved. The final response to the first question begins as H. L. “Bud” Goodall takes the floor.

“In 1983 I was trolling in the academic backwaters of Huntsville, Alabama at a science and engineering university that didn’t really even carry journals that were in my field. One day I received a note from the library that said there was an issue of something called *Communication Monographs* that I might want to look at that had come in. So, I went there and there was this article called “Organizational Communication as Cultural Performance” by my friend Nick Trujillo and I thought when I read it...hmmm...because all of a sudden this opened the door to doing the sort of cultural analysis via narrative that I had always wanted to do but I had never seen an opening before so I started writing.

I sent a paper off about a computer software startup company to none other than Nick Trujillo, and to my surprise they accepted the paper. Actually I should also say this: if it weren't for Nick, I wouldn't have known I was in ethnography until I was told that's what I was doing. I said, 'What? I thought I was being a creative writer,' and he said, 'No, we call that ethnography.' I said, 'Oh, ok,' and he said, 'There are some books you probably need to read.'

So, anyway, that paper became the first part of a book called *Casing a Promised Land*, and I want to tell you this story only because it's a cautionary and funny tale: I sent that book to every academic press in America and it was rejected by every one of them. I had pretty much given up on ever being able to publish it, and then I got a phone call one afternoon from Ken Withers, the editor at Southern Illinois University Press, who said, 'I've decided to publish your book.' And I said, 'Why? You've already rejected it.' And he said, 'Well, I know, but you know Penguin Press just bought the paperback rights to a book we published ten years ago called *Boswell's Clap*, which was about the sexual problems of literary men, for \$100,000.' He says, 'I have to show a loss for next year for your book that nobody's going buy...'"

As Bud concluded speaking and the panel continued to answer other questions, I was still focused on how people came to, or were drawn to, autoethnographic writing. Is it the personal, the emotional, the altruistic possibilities of the work that draws people from all over the world to this room? This is only the Third International Qualitative Inquiry Conference and it has over 800 participants from many different countries. And in this large, jam-packed room with no space for one more body, I sit on the front row

and thank my lucky stars that somehow I found my way down the autoethnographic road as well.

My Story

As I read the words she has written, questions swirl through my mind with the force of a Category 4 hurricane. Although I am generally calm and quite rational, I feel like a woman possessed by powerful and disobedient airstreams of thought and emotion. My eyes focus again on the words she has written, and I am filled with a combination of envy, admiration, and intense curiosity. The rush of thoughts culminates into a triad of pressing questions: (1) Who is this woman? (2) What is this work that she is doing? and (3) When can I meet her face-to-face?

A knock at the bedroom door startles me out of my spiral of cerebral inquiries. More persistent knocking and my husband's gentle inquiries force me to respond.

"Honey, are you okay? Are you still reading? Dinner is ready----are you coming down soon?" His soothing voice quells my inner maelstrom for the moment, and I gather my wits and words.

"I'll be down in a minute babe--- I'll be right there." Before going downstairs, I make a quick foray into the bathroom. After rudimentary flushing and hand washing, I tentatively peek into the mirror. I try not to stare too hard, nor judge myself too harshly. Still, I make a rather depressing appraisal: middle-age is not my best friend. The new wrinkles, the sprouts of grey not brown hair, the dimpled thighs and...then, out of nowhere, the nagging questions about her are back without invitation. The hurricane

questions whirl around me again: Who is this woman? What is she doing? and When can I meet her face-to-face?

Meanwhile it's time for dinner...

My husband, Jim, is no Emeril but he knows the best take-out restaurants in town. As I descend the stairs I see his big grin as he gestures proudly toward two beech wood T.V. trays. "Ta-daaaaa....for Madame...the very finest and your favorite Chicken Marsala, and for moi the infamous Sweet Sausage Linguine, compliments of Chef Antoine at Ciccio and Tony's restaurante."

He has a smile on his face that is warmer than my entrée, and I can't help loving him even more, if that is possible. How can I not love a man who (a) is a terrible cook but knows the best take-out restaurants in Soho (b) knows how to arrange the pasta artfully on our fine china plates (c) forgets the silverware but remembers the burgundy linen napkins and (d) most importantly, lights candles that illuminate every inch of our tiny downtown condo?

As we get caught up on each of our days and enjoy our rich pasta, Jim asks me a question that sobers me up despite a glass of Italian Merlot.

"You were up late last night reading----it must be a great novel. Who wrote it?" he asks.

Rarely am I speechless, but I hesitate. I know the author's name but I don't know how to explain to him something that I am just beginning to understand about her and this kind of writing. Still, my soulmate deserves to be privy to what I know, and the important effect this woman is having on my life and potentially our future.

“The author’s name is Carolyn Ellis, Dr. Carolyn Ellis, and she writes...” I stumble as I try to explain to my husband what I barely comprehend... “she is a Professor but she writes novels---well, not really novels because they’re academic, too. I mean, I have never read anything like this before and it’s, well different, and it gives me hope...”

Jim’s eyebrows arch as he interrupts me, “I didn’t realize you needed hope. Am I and the superb pasta not enough?” he asks playfully.

I am surprised with my defensive feelings. “Look, this is important. I need you to understand what is going on here. I left my job as a tenured English professor because I was looking for something else--some field I could study and earn a Ph.D. in but not have it be so left-brained and...heartless. This woman is doing something very different and it’s happening in academe. She and just a few other people, as far as I can tell. But it’s ground-breaking, it’s amazing, it’s powerful writing and it’s called “autoethnography” and she writes the way I wish I could, and well...” I catch my breath and say for the first time what I know, what I feel, but am articulating for the first time: “...and I want to study autoethnography... with her, if I can.”

Jim’s eyes are wide and he waits to see if there is more. I blow out a breath and give him a little smile and a chance to respond. He starts, tentatively, with a question,

“Is her novel...I mean this book... by Carolyn Ellis...what you stayed up reading last night?”

I nod vigorously.

“Wow, that is something. It sounds like this is important to you and your career. Look, I want to hear more about this, really. We have all night so let’s get dessert and

then tell me more. Everything. Start at the beginning. Details. And, then I have some questions...”

For the remainder of the evening I try to explain to Jim what little I understand about “autoethnography.” In the weeks following, I read more of Carolyn Ellis’s work and then branch out to explore the possibilities of seriously pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of South Florida (USF). Knowing how rigorous, expensive, and time intensive such a pursuit might be, I decide I need to talk to the graduate director of the program at USF to discuss the details. When I call Mark Neumann, he explains that he would be happy to meet me in person and then asks if I will be attending the upcoming National Communication Association (NCA) meeting in Atlanta next month. When I tell him no, he encourages me to consider the trip as it would be the perfect place to meet him, the faculty, and other graduate students from USF. Additionally, it would give me a chance to hear papers and panels about autoethnography and see it “in action.” There is just one small problem.

My Story Continues

I have spent the afternoon making my legendary homemade spaghetti, one of the few meals I cook well. It is late October of 2001 and the condo smells of ripe tomatoes, fresh basil, and a hint of onion and garlic. Our tiny cafe table is set with the good china and cloth napkins, the living room is lit with candles, and instrumental piano music plays softly. Tonight I have quite a few developments to discuss with Jim and also a new agenda. Ever since my father’s death a few months ago and the recent terrorist attack of September 11th, I have an intense need to live more purposefully. With both of my

parents now deceased and my children in college, I feel that now is the time to re-assess my life. The tricky part is that Jim and I have only been married for eight months, and now I have something to discuss with him that could affect my life in a dramatic way for the next five to six years, and I suspect impact his life almost as much. I hear the front door unlock.

Jim comes in carrying his bulky briefcase and looks a little tired but his eyes light up as he assesses the coziness of the living room and the aroma of his favorite meal.

“Wow, something smells great--is that your famous spaghetti?” I find Jim in the kitchen opening up the lids of the pots that are simmering on the stove.

“Hi Honey!” I say as I give him a big welcome home kiss and hug. “How was your day?”

“Busy, but good. I got an interesting new case today so that’s great for me and even better for the firm. Anyway, what about you? Any news?”

“Well, as a matter of fact, I do have some very interesting news. Why don’t you take off your tie and get comfortable and we can sit on the patio before dinner.” I pour us both a glass of wine and we move outside to watch the last of the sunset.

“You know how I’ve been looking into that doctoral program at USF? Well, I called the graduate director today and he was really nice.”

Jim nods and seems very happy for me. He has been worried about me especially with my father’s recent unexpected death and my dissatisfaction with my professional track, but I hope that he will be supportive about my next idea. We’re on a tight budget

and there isn't much room for unnecessary expenses. Also, since I'm not working, I feel guilty when I spend any money that is not for the basics. Still, I have to broach this topic.

I continue. "Anyway, the director's name is Mark Neumann and we talked for awhile on the phone. He asked me if I was going to NCA--the National Communication Association. It's the annual meeting for Communication people, and I said no but he really said it would be a great way to meet him in person, and Carolyn Ellis--you know the professor I want to study with who wrote Final Negotiations? Also I could meet her husband, Art Bochner, who is well-known in the field, too. Oh, and I could talk to other graduate students and see what they think about USF's graduate program..."

Jim enthusiastically responds, "Well you should go then! It sounds like a great chance to see if you really want to pursue this autoethnography business. So, when is the conference? And, it's Tampa, right?"

"Well, that's the funny part--this year the meeting happens to be the week of my birthday, and it's in Atlanta and I was thinking that maybe..."

Jim interrupts, "Well, that would be a great present for you! I was trying to figure out a really good gift for you so how about a plane ticket to Atlanta for your birthday?"

"Perfect! But I also need to stay in the hotel where the convention is---you know so I can meet everyone and go to the sessions...."

"Okay, plane ticket, hotel--we can do that--this is very important."

"Well, there are a few more things. I'll need to rent a car and also become a member of NCA so I can attend, and then there is the cost of the conference--- I know we

don't have extra money right now so just say so if you think this is too extravagant. I'll understand."

"Kendall, this has been a sad time for you lately, and I know you have been worried about your career. Don't worry about the money, Okay? I want you to be happy so go for it. NCA here you come!"

I jump up from my chair and throw my arms around him. I feel so lucky to have met him. After our hug, I head toward the kitchen to toast the garlic bread and toss the salad. Jim follows me and, after asking if he can help, his tone turns serious.

"Okay I do have one thing that I need you to try to explain to me. If you are going to study this 'autoethnography,' I need to know more about it. I think I understand it in general, but I've been wondering something: how do you know if it's really autoethnography or not just memoir or creative writing? And how do you tell if it's good or bad autoethnography?"

I am not sure how to react to his inquiries. I reply, "Well those are great questions and I don't know if I have good answers... not yet anyway. But if I end up in this doctoral program, you'll be one of the first to know!"

Although I did not realize its profundity at the time, my husband's innocent inquiries seven years ago become the focus of the next chapter of my dissertation. He wanted to know how to define and evaluate autoethnography, and I promised him I would try to get the answers. The next section features my interviewees' responses regarding these issues and also various views from the first generation as to what constitutes "meaningful" autoethnography.

CHAPTER FOUR

DEFINING AND EVALUATING AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

In this Chapter, I explore the topics of defining, evaluating, and teaching autoethnography. While I focus primarily on the responses from “second generation autoethnographers,” invariably the works from the first-generation are brought in to inform the conversation. The pioneers who wrote autoethnography have published much work that helps to “define” and evaluate autoethnography and, while they resist overly restrictive or prescriptive guidelines, each proffers useful criteria. In the latter part of the chapter, the issue of teaching autoethnography is addressed, particularly when it involves undergraduate students who have been greatly influenced by technological developments that influence their writing.

Defining Autoethnography

Role of Self, Culture and Theory

One of the first aspects of my overarching research question is how my interviewees “define” autoethnography. In Chapter One, I discuss the “narrative turn” from a historical standpoint, how personal scholarship evolved, and the etiology of the word “autoethnography.” I also include a brief literature review of autoethnography that contextualizes the term as well as discusses some variations. However, my goal in the following section is to capture personalized responses about the field from “up-and-coming” autoethnographers.

Self and Others

Elissa Foster contends that autoethnographic means “using yourself as an instrument in order to access understanding about the culture” and Laura Ellingson claims that the only problem occurs when “people are *only* writing about their own experiences and never connect them to either a research site, social movement, or larger context. Other interviewees insist on the necessity of the “self” or “auto” faction of autoethnography to be present in specific ways. Most view “self” as a significant component of autoethnography but want the writer to tie the work to the larger issues of culture, community, or politics. Yet, one contentious question is: “where is the line between self and other(s)?” Some argue that the self is “socially constructed” and within it the multitudes are contained (see Berger and Luckmann, 1966), thus, “others” are automatically included.

Conversely, Nick Trujillo asserts “ethnography is the study of others and different cultural groups and if we lose the others, if we only write about ourselves and our own experiences, that is a concern.” Like Nick, in this case, Tami Spry also focuses on the “ethno” component:

I do highlight the “ethnography” portion of autoethnography. Ethnography is a critical enterprise where the historicity of who we are intersects with one another. Autoethnography should use a story to illuminate larger social issues where the micro and the macro come together and illuminate one another. If I talk about my navel, if I gaze at my navel, it should be for the purpose of talking about the ways in which the color of that navel, the power structures of the color of the skin of

my navel speaks to, and about, the power relations in larger social issues. So, for me, pulling that into larger social issues is tantamount for autoethnography.

Nick continues to say that it is misguided when people write just about their own experiences without doing field work and then “call it ethnography and add the ‘auto’ in the beginning of it.”

Nick shares that for his book, *In Search of Naunmy's Grave* (2004), he interviewed fifty relatives, and for another work-in-progress about dog culture, he interviewed two hundred people. For him, authentic autoethnography cannot ignore the “ethno” component which entails going to a site and interviewing people. His final assessment about this question is: “Field work is hard--it’s not easy.” Some scholars, such as Nick, express the more traditional view that autoethnography should always include a designated site and interviews of others. This type of approach falls more closely under the rubric of “realist ethnography” as Van Maanen (1988) describes. Certainly this is one viable assessment of what constitutes autoethnography; however, it is certainly not the only one or necessarily the most favored.

Other Issues of Theory

At the core of the “theoretical” debate is the question of whether autoethnography is *primarily* an art or a social science method. A 2005 issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* discusses this topic in great detail. In one article, Art Bochner asserts, “. . .I think autoethnography offers alternatives. . .[w]e focus on our link to arts and humanities rather than Truth claims and our link to science” (Ellis and Bochner, 2005, p. 434). In the same article, Carolyn Ellis contends, “[a]utoethnography

shows struggle, passion, embodied life, and the collaborative creation of sense-making in situations in which people have to cope with dire circumstances and loss of meaning” (Ellis and Bochner, 2005, p. 433). She uses the backdrop of the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina as the type of event that will not be served well by traditional ethnographies, or even “analytic autoethnography” as described by Leon Anderson (2005, p. 373). Another point considered is how autoethnography can be employed as a political tool that fosters social change. Carolyn continues, “As a woman and a feminist, I think it’s important not to lose sight of the politics of autoethnography. Analysis and theorizing on the pages of social science journals is the preserve of an elite class... Autoethnography helps undercut conventions of writing that foster hierarchy and division” (Ellis and Bochner, 2005, p. 436).

Echoing this same concern in the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* issue is DeLysa Burnier, a professor of political science at Ohio University. Burnier states:

I also worry that by classifying autoethnography into two distinct genres (e.g., analytic and evocative), a series of gendered dichotomies—heart/mind, emotional/rational, literary-poetic/analytical, personal/scholarly, descriptive/theoretical—will be reinscribed within autoethnography. I am not suggesting that this is Anderson’s explicit intention, but it is almost unavoidable given the way knowledge has been socially constructed within the social sciences.

Personal, emotional, literary-poetic, and descriptive knowledge historically has been constructed as feminine, whereas scholarly, rational, analytical, and theoretical knowledge has been constructed as masculine. These are, of course,

the very gendered knowledge constructions that Krieger, Richardson, and Ellis sought to erase when they first made the turn toward autoethnography.

(2005, p. 416).

Similarly, second-generation autoethnographer Larry Russell shares his belief that a critical role of autoethnography is that it offers assistance in helping “to heal the mind-body split, so we can live within our fuller embodied experience again, not just our heads.”

Taking a middle-ground stance, Patricia Geist-Martin is less concerned about issues of sites and interviews but rather, for her, “real” autoethnography must include theory. She states:

I don't want to just read someone's story. Although I value that, I want them to take it somewhere--- to allow me to see the connections theoretically. For example, look at Lisa Tillman-Healey's piece (1996) where she connects it theoretically to eating disorders and communication--that's important. My only view is I want it to be theoretically connected. It doesn't have to be at the beginning, it could be at the end.

In a similar fashion, Elissa Foster concludes that for a personal narrative to constitute autoethnography then “you need to really frame and think about what you are doing within a larger community of social inquiry. To me it's all about blending.” Elissa also advocates for autoethnographic writing to differ substantially from other creative art forms. She continues:

I think what has not been made as clear, or probably because it's a less sexy conversation, is how autoethnography fits within a larger scholarly enterprise of inquiry into human life. How does it contribute something different from what a novelist would contribute, a poet, a musician, an artist, a performer or a playwright will contribute? For me there has to be a difference, otherwise why are we calling it autoethnography? Why aren't we studying literature? Finally, I recall one of the most interesting responses to "what do you think defines autoethnography?" Chris Poulos answers, "My dissertation advisor, who taught me qualitative methods, would say 'it depends.' It depends on the text. I told Carolyn yesterday that I like to read her writing as a body of work, not as a single piece because I think you can lose context otherwise." Chris's comeback strikes a chord with me and brings to light much of what I think the autoethnographic pioneers have advocated: promote quality scholarship but do not impose form.

Evaluating Autoethnography

First Generation Guidance

Art Bochner's words ring in my ear: "I find this incessant talk about criteria to be boring, tedious, and unproductive...For most of my academic life---almost 30 years---I have been baffled by this obsessive focus on criteria" (2000, p. 267). Art studied and taught quantitative methods at one time early in his career and has fought the good fight for decades to legitimize what he terms "alterative" ethnography. In fact, all the first-generation were steeped in hard-core traditional academic expertise long before they came to autoethnographic endeavors. As such, their awareness of the demands of

scholastic and artistic rigor is clear in all of their writing. Carolyn, Art, Ron, Laurel, Norm, and Bud all were traditionally trained in either sociology or communication. Only later did their work with personal narratives flourish. Their decades of dedication to the promulgation of narrative and autoethnography make it possible for people like me to study it in a Ph.D. program. While I see Art's desire to avoid prescriptive criteria, the exponential growth of the field brings with it new concerns regarding future evaluation of autoethnography.

Furthermore, when I reread Art's article, I noticed that even he agrees on some general principles that are highly useful in evaluating autoethnography. These include: abundant, concrete detail...structurally complex narratives, stories told in a temporal framework that rotates between past and present reflecting the nonlinear process of memory work--the curve of time....a tale of two selves...and demanding a standard of ethical self-consciousness and...a story that moves me, my heart and belly as well as my head. (2000, pp. 270-271)

In a similar fashion, aside from models of influential autoethnography such as *Final Negotiations* (Ellis, 1995) and *Casing a Promised Land* (Goodall, 1989), other books by pioneers in the field discuss "effective" narrative. A few are: *Handbook for Qualitative Research* (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, 2000, 2005), *Auto/Ethnography* (Reed-Danahay, 1997), *Writing the New Autoethnography* (Goodall, 2000), *The Ethnographic I* (Ellis, 2004) and articles by Laurel Richardson (2000) and Art Bochner (2000). Each of these works has impacted the way that autoethnography is evaluated and judged.

I think back to a piece in *Composing Ethnography* where Carolyn and Art have a dialogue about what they perceive is effective ethnography. In this section, they discuss to what extent autoethnography should be evaluated: by standards of traditional scholarship, by literary principles, or by its utility to reach and affect a mainstream audience (1996, pp. 24-31). However, my favorite response of Carolyn's, pertaining to evaluation, was published in *Qualitative Inquiry* and is titled, "Creating Criteria: An Ethnographic Short Story" (2000, pp. 273-277). In this work, it is clear that she does not advocate an "anything goes" approach to writing autoethnography, rather she advocates looking for specific attributes when assessing narrative ethnographies. This is what she hopes to find in a narrative:

I want the two sides of my brain to be engaged simultaneously or for the text to call forth one side and then the other, back and forth, until thinking and feeling merge...I privilege evocation over cognitive contemplation... [But] ...If an author has trouble writing evocative narrative...then maybe it would be best to write in a more traditional narrative. (273-274)

What I find particularly intriguing about Carolyn's response here is a blatant acknowledgment that sometimes it is better if a writer *does not try to write narratively*, depending on his or her skills. While most people would regard her as an international proponent of personal writing and autoethnography, she clearly believes that it is not an appropriate approach in all situations. Laura shares similar thoughts in the section that follows.

Laura's Theory

There are people who are gifted, lovely people who don't write narratively well enough to get away with this, and I think we need to respect that. Carolyn and I have had discussions about this before; if autoethnography is going to succeed, it cannot be for everybody. Because the fact of the matter is many people cannot write narratively. If we start saying that autoethnography is 'the only way' then we're really in trouble because it's just not possible. However, you can always have an autoethnographic component, and to me that's why it's so tied to feminism and reflexivity.

Laurel [Richardson] lays out criteria for judging what she calls 'cap' creative, analytic, practices and sets up five standards I often quote. For example, when I'm asked to review an autoethnography in a journal which I do fairly often, I look at her piece first. There is no one way to judge autoethnography, but it gives me some standards to refer to so I'm not just being hopelessly subjective. I'm able to say this is why I object, and I do believe in standards. I think that somebody's personal writing can be incredibly, personally, meaningful for them but that doesn't make it good research.

As a refresher, I grab my *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2000) and look up Laurel's article to which Laura refers. I enjoy rereading this historical context of autoethnography's beginnings but quickly turn to the section where it states: "Here are the five criteria I use when reviewing papers or monographs submitted for social science publication" (Richardson, 2000, p. 937). Although I have read this many times before, I am curious now to review it in context of my interviewees' comments and others' criteria. Laurel calls for writing that includes:

1. substantive contribution (e.g. does the writer demonstrate a deeply grounded-- if embedded-- social scientific perspective?)
2. aesthetic merit (e.g. is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring?)
3. reflexivity (e.g. is the author cognizant of the epistemology of postmodernism?)
4. impact (e.g. does it move me to action?)
5. expression of reality (e.g. does this text embody a fleshed out, embodied sense of lived experience? (p. 937).

When I reread this passage several times, I see why Laura uses it in her reviewing and teaching practice. However, at the same time I keep thinking “what a tall order!” Being a successful social scientist is a tough job and to combine that requisite with being a talented creative writer certainly intimidates me. All of this contemplation makes me wonder how my other interviewees “evaluate” their students’ or mentees’ autoethnographic writing?

Second Generation Profiles

The second generation may not have always been in traditional disciplines, yet many had educations that were formally rooted in the arts. Elissa is a talented writer with a strong background in playwriting; Laura has two Master’s Degrees, one in Creative non-fiction; Lesa is a scholar with a penchant for constructing solid performance pieces; Chris has a deep intellectual background rooted in philosophy and religion. All of these attributes inform their scholarship in rich and meaningful ways. Perhaps even more

significant, most of the second generation were mentored one-on-one by the pioneers of autoethnography---the people who set the standards for the field. For example (as stated previously), Carla was mentored first-hand by Laurel Richardson, Mary Weems by Norman Denzin, Elissa by Art Bochner, Lesa by Ron Peltas, and Carolyn Ellis acted as academic adviser for both Laura and Carol.

Historical Influences

Some of the second-generation in my age group (mid-forties and older) remember black and white television during their childhood (with no cable or satellite), an oven and no microwave, two telephones in the entire house (landlines only), one car for both Mom and Dad, and entertainment that consisted of playing outside, riding bikes, communing with nature, or reading books from the library. This was a time when McDonald's had only 4 items on the menu: hamburgers, fries, milkshakes (vanilla and chocolate) and soda (Coca-Cola brand only). That was the only fast food restaurant in town, and it certainly did not have a drive-through. Of the interviewees that I consider "up and coming" autoethnographers, I surmise their ages range from mid-thirties to early fifties and this is significant in context to how their writing is informed.

During this research, I wondered in what ways the third generation of autoethnographers may differ from the second. Since in the last five to ten years technology has become almost transparent, I began to ponder what impact this phenomenon has on developing reading and writing skills---especially on the ability to write dialogue and "thick" description.

The Techno-Third Generation

S^ with Cell Phones

Almost anywhere I go, I notice that writing e-mails and text messaging are the bulk of “graphy” in which many people engage. While this may seem innocent enough, I pondered the impact this would have on young writers who are incessantly trying to condense, abbreviate, and acronymize their writing. One article entitled “Advanced Text Message Shorthand” (Jennrich, 2008) attempts to enlighten novices by explaining dozens of “acronyms, lingo, and codes” used in text messaging, instant messaging, blogs and on-line chats. Most make basic sense to me, but there are more than a few that point to what I think bodes poorly for literacy and writing skills in the future. Ultimately this truncated style of writing will impact future scholarship and no doubt, autoethnography.

The article lists dozens of explanatory terms and, in some cases, primitive hieroglyph combinations are used for longer phrases. For instance, “I have a comment” is coded as ! while “I have a question” is referred to as ? As I continue reading the inventory of technological ciphers, I feel as if cave men should grunt and drum in the background. I learn that U8 translates to the sophisticated inquiry of “You ate?” (grammatically incorrect as well) and the deep philosophical question of “Why?” is designated merely as “Y.”

Inevitably the bulk of these conversations consist of variations on S^ to ask “What’s up” or “S’up? Is this indeed how our language is evolving? In short (pun intended), the only two acronyms that I conclude possess any imagination or complexity are ACORN meaning “A Completely Obsessive Really Nutty [Person]” and my favorite

AFZ “Acronym Free Zone” (Jennrich, 2008). With the proliferation of business letters, e-mail, and text messaging, “thin” description is not only “in,” it is the way the majority of communication is written. I personally have a difficult time writing dialogue, even though I have studied the craft for years. However, I suspect that task is slightly more problematic for writers whose daily dyadic exchanges consist of S^ and U8?

Impact of Reality Television

As I mused about the thinnest of descriptions, I also recalled another technological influence. Elissa articulates a problem that may confound those of us who teach, especially when it comes to younger students:

Autoethnography is hot among the younger crowd and I fear that some are drawn to it by the same lemming impulse that draws thousands to the auditions of ‘American Idol.’ Specifically, I fear that autoethnography looks glamorous and we know that it’s not, and it is not easy. Because autoethnography is so popular, I think that it poses somewhat of a challenge.

Personally, I am pleased that autoethnography is becoming more well-known and accepted as a research method with each passing day. Nevertheless, I see Elissa’s point, which I had not necessarily considered because the students I teach usually are in an “adult learner” program, and most are over the age of 35.

Today’s typical undergraduate students, from the ages of 18 to 22, have teathed on “reality” television shows which no doubt still constitute a large majority of their entertainment. In these shows, the average “everyday wo/man on the street” becomes the star of series like “Big Brother,” “Survivor,” “The Bachelor,” “Extreme Makeover,”

“The Biggest Loser,” and “America’s Next Top Model.” Such shows give the impression that *anyone’s* story could be interesting and even fame-worthy.

Similarly, those with a cell phone or web cam can make mini-movies and upload them on “YouTube” for instant fame. These personalized films last far more than the 15 minutes of Andy Warhol’s day. Millions of adolescents and teenagers have their own internet presence via FaceBook and MySpace and some even have their own dedicated websites and podcasts. From a communication standpoint, I think this is an exciting era and people are connecting in ways never before imagined and much more prolifically. Nonetheless, from an educational stance, technological advancements will likely inhibit formal writing skills, much less foster the patience necessary for deep and repeated revisions.

I fear I am being too pedantic and am reminded of the following quote attributed to Socrates by Plato around 500 b.c.: “Children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they allow disrespect for elders and ...chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers ” (Patty & Johnson, 1953, p. 277). I am old but not *that* old. I still have faith in problem-solving, so I turned to my interviewees for their advice and comments when it comes to teaching aspiring autoethnographers, especially if their writing is not stellar. This is particularly a problem for the youngest undergraduate students who may not have rigorous academic and/or artistic training as did the autoethnographic pioneers and their mentees.

Teaching Autoethnography

Undergraduate Instruction

Elissa's Take

I think some people are drawn to the idea of doing this kind of work because they like the idea of telling their story. Students see this as an attractive method because they get to just work from their own experience to make claims about how the world is, but sometimes they don't really get it, and there are two ways they don't get it.

Number one is the creative writing dimension of it. It can be extremely difficult and it's something that you need to work at and it doesn't just come out---your first draft is not your last draft. I think everybody who is successful works at writing. They care about it and they care about making it better. The writing itself requires attention, and you need to really think about it.

And the second part is about making claims about the world. I did not become a playwright; I did not end up going into the theatre. I was drawn into the academy because I wanted to become a scholar and that is what I am. So, I really want the enterprise of autoethnography to be a distinct and different skill from the enterprise of creative writing.

Lesa's View

As autoethnographers, we have to have the quality of being really good writers in addition to having good theoretical and analytical skills. All of that has to come together and inform this work. I think the best of autoethnography blends the theoretical, analytical, and literary. There are some instances out there of bad autoethnography that

I've seen at conferences because people find it attractive; unfortunately, sometimes you get some meager work that is neither particularly insightful of the social world or particularly good craft in terms of the literary.

Chris's Response

When I'm reviewing I always try not to ask, 'what's wrong with this piece?' but 'how can we take it from where it is, to where it should be? How can we take this piece to where it will sing?' I just read a publication that was an attempt to do a very liminal autoethnographic account of a person's experience in an art installation. It was a public art project that was a negative, dark, horrifying experience for this person. In my review, I said to the author 'This is too liminal...you are curled up in a ball crying and I don't even know what this art project looks like. You haven't taken me into the scene enough. In this case, I need to have some thick description at least and I also need you to make sense of all this.' Because what it turned out to be was this string of reflections, and I couldn't get back to reality. I couldn't get back to where I wanted to be and maybe that was the intent, but as a reader I was lost. And I think that's the danger you run if you get too liminal, too poetic.

Pitfalls and Possibilities

Chris walks me through his techniques when it comes to helping students become better writers:

I am teaching an undergraduate course in autoethnography and my students get a little caught up in the question: 'What if I'm not a good writer?' I say 'We will get to that but what we are looking for now is your truth, your

experience, your life, and let's take it in as rich and caring detail as you can. Let's really pay attention to those details.' The way I structure that course is they bring in drafts to class each week and get feedback in class from other students. Then they have to take it back and redraft it for the following class period, based on that feedback. Then I give them feedback and they incorporate that. They construct a book which is essentially their life story, it's kind of a memoir, but it's an autoethnographic account of their life. So they drafted it, each chapter, three times, and the final product usually is pretty good writing even from people who think they aren't good writers to begin with. There is a lot of process involved in the writing, a lot of care and a lot of working on it.

Chris seems to have a great deal of patience for nurturing his students, but when I ask Elissa how she fares when teaching undergraduates, she admits, "I encourage students who already have strong narrative writing ability. I can give advice once I've seen something they give me in writing and I can give them feedback to enhance what they're doing, but I don't know how to take someone from zero to ten." I think back on my own career teaching composition and research to college students and tend to empathize more with Elissa.

There are always the students who show a proclivity toward writing talent but after that, how much can really be learned? As we discussed above, there is always the possibility that budding autoethnographers will be "drawn" to autoethnography for the "auto" component almost exclusively.

Lesya speaks to this problem:

While I'm interested in my students' lives, that is not a place that I see as the genesis of something that says enough about the social world to qualify as autoethnography. Often it ends up being something that I sort of know the story before I read it. Now that seems really mean-spirited, but it has to be something that speaks to an experience that either has a broad appeal or is so idiosyncratic that it's particularly revealing. Those are the ones that often grab me the most, when it gives an insight into something I didn't know.

Elissa maintains that one of her issues with undergraduate students is their proclivity "to 'tell' and not 'show' ---and there is no dialogue or scene setting. They're just summarizing and telling something that happened instead of really bringing people into the moment to the story." Patricia echoes a similar sentiment regarding autoethnographic aesthetics: "I see pieces all the time where the writers become ventriloquists and put words into other people's mouths without actually letting them speak. So, to me personally using dialogue is especially important for those of us in communication---to not paraphrase other people's voices." However, Elissa makes a keen and gentle observation about students when she concedes: "I think when they 'can't' write this way, it is because they don't see, they really *can't see*, the difference between the kind of storying that they're doing and where they need to take it."

From my own experience teaching college composition, I know that I can usually succeed in instructing students in terms of traditional writing. Almost all students can learn to master the rudiments of a five paragraph theme that includes the usual thesis

statement, introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusions. What is far more difficult is having them identify the differences between similes and metaphors in a piece of literature and even harder learning to write using complex literary devices. To me, Art and Laurel's criteria are useful, but I particularly like the way that Carolyn actually brings up the possibility of "less effective" autoethnography. I do not believe it should be called "bad" autoethnography, but I think the future of the movement will benefit from more talk about evaluative criteria.

I obviously believe in the autoethnographic form for all the reasons mentioned previously; however, this chapter has had to address some of autoethnography's shadow side. My intention is to examine what might be called for in the future to keep it strong, viable, popular, and prolific but without acting as if it is always easy, glamorous, fun or even a good fit for everyone. I will end with a point made by Laura that struck a deep chord with me because of her deep respect for autoethnography and concern for its positive reputation as a valuable and legitimate qualitative research method:

I think we should encourage rigor in autoethnography but use standards in autoethnography's own terms--- not enforce the rigor from positivist or even post-positivist social constructionist scholars. And I don't think anybody's ever meant to say 'anything goes' --- I really don't. Yet this is the same thing that happens at feminist groups. I'm the president of a large communication feminist group. They are amazing people but because we're all going to be feminists we can't hurt anybody's feelings. We have to honor all voices and we have to come to consensus. In theory and in principle I totally respect

that, but try and get something done in a board room when you have to honor all voices equally and it's just not practical!

As a former college literature instructor, I have to admit that I feel there is another topic that needs discussion when it comes to autoethnographic forms. The majority of my interviewees embrace various forms of autoethnography including the approval of one of the most liminal forms: poetry. What follows is a brief discussion of “poetic autoethnography.”

Poetry: A Special Case

One of the “pushing the envelope” questions I asked interviewees was: “What if the poetry stood alone and had no analysis or theory in which it was positioned--could that be defined as autoethnography?” Laura counters with, “I have no problem with people calling it autoethnography, but I don't do it myself. I wouldn't say I don't believe in it, but I would say I don't appreciate it as much.” Poetry seems to be one area that teeters on autoethnographic legitimacy. Laura continues to clarify her thoughts. She believes poetry in autoethnography is appropriate only if it incorporates theoretical components. She explains her view:

I am a scholar for a reason. I want the narrative, I want the poetry, but then you can have the poems and then the academic narrative treatise. I'm very flexible as to how you do it; for example, you can have it at the top and at the bottom.

Carolyn calls that the sandwich where you have a story and then the analysis. I love layered accounts where you play with the academic voice and you put it in

between (see *The Ethnographic I*, 2004, p.198, Rambo Ronai 1992 for more on this technique).

In my interviews, answers were varied about how to define and evaluate autoethnography. Feedback ranged from applying specific criteria to using general principles as guidelines for assessment with Chris Poulos preferring that “it depends” and continues with an intriguing call to contextualize and assess autoethnography within the scholar’s entire body of work. In most cases, all of these answers seem viable, but personally (and I openly admit my bias here), I believe that when it comes to poetry there is much less room for ambiguity.

Poetic Considerations

In Chapter Six, I include poetry as part of my autoethnographic writing, but I *know* that this is not literary poetry by any stretch of the imagination. I include it because it reflects my raw emotions and that it informs the piece overall, yet I understand that it does not meet the rigorous aesthetic standards by which “regular” poetry is judged.

In our interview, Nick raises a thought-provoking point about the literary genesis of poetry and its place in more traditional scholarship:

I understand good poetry resonates with different people and so in that sense it’s a subjective personal view of what constitutes a good poem. Yet, just the fact that we’re writing poetry doesn’t make that ‘good’ poetry. Again we’re not trained as poets and we’re not trained as literary people and so we’re not really qualified to judge poetry.

To a great extent, I agree with Nick on this point, particularly when it comes to poetry.

I have attended many undergraduate and graduate classes related to writing poetry and there are fairly strict criteria in place for what literary scholars deem as “successful” poetry. Of course, through the decades, some of these criteria have changed (as in all poetry had to rhyme or house itself in the form of a sonnet, haiku, or villanelle). Nonetheless, agreed upon standards do exist by which to judge *literary* poetry, including use of features such as assonance, alliteration, sustained metaphor, simile, synecdoche, metonymy, inclusion of unique descriptive words in combination with unusual and fresh words or phrase couplings, specific formulas for beginning and ending stanzas, and minimization of adjectives adverbs and non-descriptive words (Behn, 1992; Oliver, 1994,1998; Kowit, 1995; Strand, 2003; Myers, 2004; Drury, 2006; Hoagland, 2006; Ochester, 2007). A nagging question for me is, “If we do include poetry in autoethnography, how do we judge it? Do we evaluate it according to established literary criteria?”

Poetic problems.

I personally believe that we can include poetry in autoethnography but in a minor way. If it stands alone, I feel it will detract from autoethnography’s reputation. In my opinion, most of the autoethnographic poetry I have read is just truncated prose (as mine is) and would never withstand the scrutiny of literary criteria. In cases of established writers, the poetry could be read in the context of the entire body of their rigorous academic scholarship. Regardless, I would caution that poetry that is not well-embedded in other forms will likely be a target of literary critics.

Another aspect related to this complicated topic is offered by Elissa:

I think what has not been made as clear...or probably because it's a less sexy conversation is how does autoethnography fit within a larger scholarly enterprise of inquiry into human life. That contributes something different from what a novelist would contribute, then a poet or a musician or an artist or a performer or a playwright will contribute? And for me there has to be a difference otherwise why are we calling it autoethnography. Why aren't we studying literature?

Laura maintains, "[to] me autoethnography needs to be pragmatic and say 'all writing is good for some purpose.' It is good for personal therapy or connecting with your family member or with sharing some ideas with the people who are appreciative, but it doesn't mean that it's good autoethnography from a rigor standpoint." I concur that indeed all writing serves some purpose, yet in the case of poetic autoethnography, it may be wise to differentiate writing that succeeds as scholarly or literary. However, there is another way that writing can be valuable, whether it is poetry or prose, and that is as a therapeutic outlet.

Good for Many Purposes

As noted earlier, we live in a time where words like "fast, accessible, easy, cheap, popular, and convenient" define what is often desired. For some, autoethnography is attractive for those looking for a glamorous public forum, a sympathetic audience, and instant "others" who can affirm/witness their life stories. In and of itself, this is not unnatural or undesirable. However, one of the prospective problems is that the quality of this writing may not translate into effective autoethnography.

Yet, not all writers of autoethnography will create publishable work or continue their pursuits in graduate school and that is fine. Still questions remain. What happens if students' writing does not lead to a professional career in the academy? What if they take an undergraduate autoethnography class and only earn a C? What if they only hear about autoethnography and write their own personal story at home? However, what if the story they write becomes a positive experience in their lives? What if finally being able to articulate in writing their illness, trauma, taboo, tragedy, or painful relationship is enough to make their existence on this planet a better, brighter, more livable space? In the next chapter I explore the possibilities, and potential challenges, that may occur when autoethnographic writing becomes a therapeutic tool for writers and readers.

CHAPTER FIVE

THERAPEUTIC AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

From the moment I envisioned my dissertation, exploring autoethnography as a form of “therapeutic writing” was a driving research interest. Most autoethnography deals with illness, trauma, or end-of-life issues, and I believe this is no coincidence. In Chapter One, I provide a detailed literature review that contextualizes and historicizes the therapeutic writing movement. As a continuation, this chapter is designed to reveal salient issues that relate specifically to autoethnography’s therapeutic aspects. In this section, my interviewees discuss ways that autoethnography is therapeutic for themselves and others, and they also address solutions for potential controversial aspects when teaching autoethnography.

Before reading what the interviewees share, I want to clarify my understanding and use of the words “therapeutic” and “therapy” as I employ them in this project. Many dictionaries define “therapy” as “treatment of disease” and “the act of caring for someone”; the word always functions as a noun and is frequently preceded by an adjective which further defines it (such as “shock therapy” or “physical therapy”). The word derives from the Greek *therapeia* meaning “service done to the sick” (*Merriam Webster Medical Dictionary*). Moreover, the word “therapy” usually denotes treatment that occurs over a specific period of time and has a definite end. Although therapy is chosen or administered in effort to “make better,” I can think of instances where therapy

has proven harmful such as in shock therapy or aversion therapy. While the term therapy indicates an *intent* toward healing, the *outcome* is not assuredly positive.

As a result of these semantic implications, when discussing narrative's benefits, I prefer to use the word "therapeutic" which derives from the Greek word *therapeutikos* meaning "inclined to serve" or "to attend to." Furthermore, the term therapeutic indicates a process with no specific end and a beneficial outcome is inherent in the word. Even a disaster (such as a divorce or illness) could be "therapeutic" if it is perceived as such. Most impressive to me, however, is the idea that "therapeutic writing" is personal narrative that "attends to." One does not need a therapist, a doctor, a prescription, pills, or a heating pad to engage in therapeutic writing. All that is necessary are writing utensils and a willingness to be self-expressive.

Sense-Making

One of the first questions I asked my research participants is "Do you think autoethnography is therapeutic?" Laura responds with enthusiasm:

I think autoethnographic writing is enormously therapeutic and research shows that it is very beneficial for patients to write. Journaling or "narrative construction" is very good for patients to deal with their emotions and feelings. I think it is enormously therapeutic because it's 'sense making.' It helps to get it out of your head and onto a piece of paper or onto a computer. I also find it very therapeutic because I construct stories to make sense of my own experience, and to fashion my identity to find ways of thinking about my research that are meaningful to me. But I also think the writing itself is

therapeutic even if it didn't somehow give me a new story to live in; even if it was just my journaling.

Laura brings up several points that are at the heart of formal research on therapeutic writing. One of the first is the concept of "sense-making." Probably the premiere pioneer in the field of therapeutic writing, James Pennebaker, concludes (1990), "Just as we are drawn to good stories in literature or the movies, we need to construct coherent and meaningful stories for ourselves. Good narratives or stories, then, organize seemingly infinite facets of overwhelming events. Once organized, the events are smaller and easier to deal with" (p. 103). According to his studies, writing even for a few minutes can yield positive results. While Pennebaker is in the field of psychology, it is just as easy to understand the power of writing to heal from a communication lens. As Laura said, writing can deal help with identity construction, and even journaling allows writers to construct some type of "narrative" of their lives. I also found it interesting that Laura engages in the practice of journal writing in her own research. Certainly one unique aspect of autoethnographic scholarship is the self-reflexive writing component.

Patricia is also a health communication scholar and she shares an interesting practice she uses when teaching personal narrative:

I have my students create a sense of their analytic process in terms of how they would arrange those stories. I ask them what events would be first or last, and why. The writing does not have to be chronological---I just ask them how they would describe the heart of the mystery, or core of the story, and then ask them 'what's missing?' Once they make that determination of which is first,

second, third etc. they realize that “temporality” is something to be played with. It is very powerful.

Freeman (1993) declares that “if in fact human temporality, as a fundamental mode of being, is intrinsically linked to narrativity, as has been suggested, then the fabric of the self---by which I mean its constitutive and defining features---is inseparable from narrative” (p. 44). Similarly, Monk et al. (1997) assert that “A counselor using narrative ideas [with a client]is interested in *restorying* ...This form of interaction is a reauthoring process that promotes a person’s redescription of himself [or herself]” (p. 20). I immediately think of Christine Kiesinger’s piece (2002) where she writes about a therapeutic process that “restories” her relationship with her father. In a similar context, Patricia shared with me an experience that occurred recently with a student who grew up with an alcoholic father. She elaborates:

She interviewed her Mom and sister, then finally she interviewed her Dad.

Her understanding of herself became enhanced tenfold. She realized that she had been somewhat of a hypocrite with some of the things that she was accusing him of and that he was really one dimensional in her writing. One of the lines in her story was quite powerful when her father said, ‘I’m not a good Dad, but I’m not a monster.’ This only came because she included his voice and feels if she had not interviewed him that she wouldn’t be able to see what she’s been able to see.

Not only was the student able to see her father differently, but this type of writing gives voice to the writer and others in her life who until then remained unheard. Giving

“voice to self” and others is a point that Carol addresses. Carol made a correlative point in our interview when we discussed the unique attributes of autoethnography.

The Ethno Exemplar

Carol’s work represents some of the earliest autoethnographic accounts, especially ones that deal with “edgy” topics such as mental retardation and sexual abuse. She contends that unfortunately many people “don’t necessarily have the awareness that they can have a different story” and that is why autoethnography can be so enlightening to those who read it. She continues, a typical reader might conclude, “I read about a sex-abuse survivor, I am a sex-abuse survivor and even if all of it doesn’t match, I now have a bigger perspective and take on some of the story.” Carol’s work has influenced many aspiring autoethnographers to use their emotional or physical “pain” as a vehicle for aiding others.

As noted in many places in this dissertation, humans live in a storied world and understand themselves within a narrative construct. Autoethnography is particularly appealing as an instructive tool because it is designed to include self and others. In fact, it is uniquely positioned in the social sciences because of this bridge from the personal to the cultural.

As an example, after writing about her divorce in “Hurricanes” and “Storm Tracking,” Elissa focused on another autoethnographic project with the explicit hope that it would be therapeutic for her, but also that it might help others. Elissa explains the work’s focal point, a dramatic episode that occurred when she was a teenager in transition from high school to college.

Beyond Language

Three of us who were really close friends from high school, were sharing a flat together over Christmas to get ready to go off to college together. In Australia, you have to apply for specific programs to make the entrance requirements and my top choices were the acting program and the directing/playwriting program. It was an intense week and a half of auditions and getting cut down and cut down and cut down--- and we didn't find out until the day before Christmas whether or not we were accepted. We had all gone through these auditions together and it was so stressful, but one of my very close friends was having an extremely rough time.

She was auditioning for the acting program, and it was all she really wanted to do. It was one of the most elite programs, and there were very few other places for her to study. So during that period she attempted suicide while we were living together in the flat. It was a very dramatic episode in my history and had been for me---even ten years later. As a result, for this particular piece, I decided to interview her. We talked about her suicide attempt and I interviewed her, recorded her over the phone, and she sent me some of her writing. She went back and found writing that she had done at the time which was very dark, but she is also an artist so it was very amazing work. We talked about that time and what she went through, so I wrote the story as I remembered it and then I shared it with her.

I think it was very therapeutic for both of us to revisit that experience and its meanings, but I wrote the piece primarily with the intention of maybe speaking to other adolescents. At the time, Australia was facing a rapid increase in the number of teenage

suicides. My mother is a teacher and one of her former students, a senior in high school, committed suicide quite dramatically. Then there was a young girl, at one of the private schools, and another boy who had been in my theatre classes who committed suicide upon the school grounds. The question was, “What is going on here?”

In the case of the young girl, she actually had quite a serious mental illness that had not been managed, but with the boy it was a bit more of a mystery as to why this happened. My idea in writing the piece which when published was titled, “Reaching Out, Reaching In” was through this maybe we could find some insights to reframe the suicide attempt, or suicidal behavior as ‘communicative,’ not just psychological. There was a way in which my friend’s suicide attempt was very performative. The drama was not necessarily premeditated because I don’t think she intentionally set it up, but once she was in that mode, all the choices she made were very communicative about her state of mind in a way that language wasn’t. The setting, the stage, the act itself went beyond language, beyond her pain. So, I tried to see it from that respect rather than simply as a dysfunctional behavior or as a something to understand psychologically.

I claim no expertise related to the study of “embodiment” or “bodied performance,” but I can speak to pain that is “beyond language” as Elissa proffers. She views trauma in light of the connection between communication and performative acts. In the case above, however, I see the complete inadequacy of language when it comes to suffering.

Arthur Frank describes a reaction to trauma that is so severe that it is beyond articulation. He terms this reaction a “chaos narrative,” which is narrative wreckage so

severe that it defies words. In *The Wounded Storyteller* (1995), Frank discloses that one of the most horrifying features of “chaos” is that the experience defies narration: “The person living the chaos story has no distance from her life and no reflective grasp on it. Lived chaos makes reflection... impossible... The chaos narrative is always beyond speech, and thus it is always what is *lacking* in speech. Chaos is what can never be told; it is the hole in the telling” (pp. 101-102). Similar to a body’s response to trauma by going into shock, mental trauma or suffering often defies clear expression. Severe states may be so incomprehensible that they are unspeakable as in the example where Elissa describes her friend’s suicide attempt as “an act that went beyond language.” Correspondingly, Larry, a performance studies scholar, shares a similar phenomenon where acts of ritual are paramount and words are not center stage.

Initially, he planned to study a healing ritual in the form of a “pilgrimage” that occurs annually in New Mexico. His original intention was to interview some of the participants who engaged in this practice and then transpose their stories into the heart of his doctoral dissertation. He states, “At first I thought that my dissertation would be a series of narratives that people would tell me about their wonderful experiences when they went on pilgrimages there. But that didn’t happen because most people did not tell stories, which really shocked me, and what they would tell me weren’t things I could use in a dissertation.” Much to his dismay, after hours of interviews, even his major advisor agreed he did not have much data to work with for such an extensive project. When his advisor suggested that he participate in the New Mexico pilgrimage himself, Larry was appalled. He objected to his advisor’s proposal responding with, “I am in Illinois a couple

thousand miles away, I am a poor graduate student, I am an older man who sits at the computer all day, and you want me to walk *100 miles in the blazing sun*---I don't think so!" My adviser just laughed and by the end of the evening I was laughing and admitted to him, "You are right. Of course as a performance studies scholar I would have to *do it*. I don't just talk about someone else's experience because my basic access is through my own body, my own embodied experience." That first week in June, for the very first time, Larry joined thousands of others pilgrims in New Mexico to embark on a healing ritual with a thirty year history. What follows is an abbreviated version of his healing journey:

No Words Required

By joining this pilgrimage which I have done 6 times now, I was what you might call a 'practicing' Catholic for the period for that week of walking. The only way you could do it is to participate so I had to learn how to pray the rosary and learn the mass but I was willing to do this because the practices are a function of compassion there.

The most surprising thing in my research was to realize the basic question was not belief, which is what we usually position as the major question about religion. The most interesting thing in my experience of doing pilgrimages was it was not first and foremost a matter of belief, it was a matter of practice. So that's why it was so important to me in terms of performance studies because I was looking at religious practice, and I realized ritual is religious practice.

So when you go from village to village, these people feed you, give you water, and keep you for the night. Here are people whose lives are really difficult, who suffer and

live in a place that's obviously very poor, and they have been so generous. When you leave, they give you a little bag and it is full of these crumpled up pieces of paper that say, 'Pray for my Aunt Betty who has lung cancer,' 'Pray for Uncle Harry and his family because he's a drunk and his family is starving.' It is a very tough life there-- very tough---and it is just heartrending when you read these petitions.

I'm walking down the road and wondering 'Is the woman I just prayed for with breast cancer, is that the woman or her mother who just fed me that burrito back there? The one who just smiled and offered me food or water?' The pilgrimage itself is not life and death but you are so hungry, so tired, and hurting so much that when people give you these things you are incredibly grateful. And the practice is a very physical thing.

'Spiritual' doesn't seem easy or very new age. It doesn't seem theoretical, or abstract, because it is actually sweating, walking in the blazing sun, with raw feet that are maybe bleeding, knees that you're not sure are going to make it from mile 60 to mile 80 on the fourth day, or if you are really going to make it.

Suddenly you begin to understand something more about suffering. Before, I would easily have judged this kind of practice as masochistic and now I don't think that at all. I think it is a way of sharing, saying 'we will carry this for you, and we will show you that you are not alone in what you have to suffer, that you have someone who is willing to carry this to the shrine where we think there's a possibility of healing.'

Those people know that in that week you are carrying them, and their suffering then is not silent. And I think that perhaps the worst suffering of all is silence. I think one of the most terrible things about the Holocaust is that people denied it, that so much

suffering would go unnoticed, un-witnessed and un-talked about that it was silenced and that made it more unbearable.

And so, perhaps now you can understand how indebted I am to a tradition of autoethnography that made this kind of research possible. If this had happened to me maybe 15 years before or maybe even 10 years I could not have been able to express or talk in a meaningful way about that experience.

I concur with Larry that autoethnography is a research vehicle that allows for uniquely complex and creative forms of scholarship. In both Elissa's and Larry's case, the body or its actions were discussed as a somatic and transformative instrument. Just as Bohm (1996) astutely articulates:

There is a difference between thinking about the hurt, and thinking the hurt.

Thinking about the hurt is saying the hurt is 'out there,' ... The other way is to think the hurt, which is to go through the thought and let it produce whatever it's going to do, which means to let it stand in the body and in consciousness without being suppressed and without being carried out. (p. 77)

One of the other wonderful aspects of autoethnography is so much of it does discuss issues of embodiment, and particularly matters related to how the body processes illness, pain, or trauma.

However, when people undergo trauma, they need skills to cope with their emotional and or physical pain. Unfortunately, without adequate tools or resources, people often suppress their emotions and the result can become exponentially traumatic.

In "Language and Awareness," Langer (1997) maintains:

Because man [sic] has not only the ability but the constant need of conceiving what has happened to him, what surrounds him, what is demanded of him---in short, of symbolizing nature, himself and his hopes and fears---he has a constant and crying need of expression. What he cannot express, he cannot conceive; what he cannot conceive is chaos, and fills him with terror. (pp. 32-33)

While “terror” may seem like a strong word for what a person cannot “construe,” it makes sense that certain severe states may be incomprehensible, and worst of all unspeakable. This is the “lacking in speech” dilemma of which Frank writes.

Unfortunately, when emotions or traumatic memories are not articulated or expressed, they still constitute “energy” that must go somewhere. Unlike creatures who respond with a visceral “fight or flight” response, people often suppress their feelings in response to trauma. When discussing this phenomenon, Carol told me an interesting story that has stuck with me ever since our interview. She leans forward in her chair as she begins her instructive tale.

The Wise Gazelle Tale

Think of a place in the wild and a lion sees a gazelle and says, “Mmmmm, tasty gazelle...” Now the first thing that happens is the gazelle freezes. That’s normal because maybe it will blend in the background and the lion won’t see it. So, let’s say that doesn’t work and the lion comes charging after the gazelle, fangs bared. The next thing that happens is the gazelle runs like hell, and so that’s flight. So, there’s freezing, and then there’s flight, but let’s say the lion pursues and attacks that gazelle. There’s actually something in the brain of the gazelle where it will seemingly drop dead because

sometimes what happens is the lion's after the gazelle not because he's hungry but because he wants to play.

So in the gazelle there is kind of a merciful thing--- if you're getting ready to die, you just shut off, and then you don't feel the actual teeth ripping you to pieces, this is wired into everything that is mammal. They have actually filmed this in the wild and what you will find if the lion goes away and the gazelle didn't really die, the gazelle will get up, look around, make sure everything is okay and then shake like a motherfucker. It will shake and shake, and they've got it on tape, and then it stops and goes on its way.

Now, getting back to people. When they are traumatized they want to shake it off every bit as much as a gazelle, and if we can't process that trauma then it's stored in the body. So if we don't, and you know that we have a culture that doesn't encourage the processing of emotions, then it comes out in these weird little quirky ways whether it's what we would label perversions or fetishes or what have you. People medicate; they eat, drink alcohol, go to entertainment that takes them away from their bodies and they numb out because they are trying so hard to hold it in. And what we do to our young men is even worse-- at least women are allowed more freedom to be expressive.

After hearing Carol's story, I can't help but think of a recent phenomenon I read about regarding the theory of "soft addictions." Poet, author and activist Judith Wright describes the behavior "as seemingly harmless habits like over-shopping, overeating, watching too much TV, endlessly surfing the internet, procrastinating—that actually keep us from the life we want. They cost us money, rob us of time, numb us from our feelings, mute our consciousness, and drain our energy" (2008). I am not sure if I agree with all

aspects of her theory, but I do know from personal experience that when I stay busy just to avoid feeling my feelings, the result is usually a decline in my mental and/or physical health. Similar to Carol's gazelle tale, Langer (1997) contends:

When we are faced with a strange or difficult situation, we cannot react directly, as other creatures do, with flight or aggression, or any such simple instinctive pattern. Our whole reaction depends on how we manage to conceive the situation---whether we cast it in a definite dramatic form, whether we see it as a disaster, a challenge, a fulfillment of doom, or a fiat of Divine Will...[but no matter what] we must *construe* the events of life. (p. 33)

I can also think of instances where I or my sons act as if "everything is fine" when it is not. The most poignant memory I have which illustrates this type of emotional repression regards my stepson's actions right after he personally witnessed the fall of the second Twin Tower on September 11th 2001.

A New Yorker of few words and fewer phone conversations, he suddenly called us several times a day for weeks, leaving phone messages that said simply, "I'm fine, don't worry about me, I'm fine...really" and then his voice would trail off as he hung up the phone. Shakespeare might claim that he "protesteth" too much, but I think Frank's theory is even more enlightening: "...people are wounded not just in body but in voice. They need to become storytellers in order to recover the voices that illness and its treatment often take away (xii). Frank continues, "He must also affirm that *he is still there*, as an audience for himself" (p. 56). What happens though when we do not articulate our pain, to ourselves, others, or even to someone's answering machine?

Personal narratives and autoethnography can function as emotional conduits and therapeutic vehicles from at least two perspectives. In one respect, the writer can have a therapeutic experience because it is self-reflexive research and the process serves as a healing act. Additionally, the reader or audience of autoethnography can have a therapeutic experience or emotional catharsis as the story may elicit empathy toward others, possible self-reflection, and result in better understanding of self and other. Not all autoethnographic writing is therapeutic or emotionally transformative, but often it is a by-product. While the results are often positive, some caution should be exercised when undertaking autoethnographic research.

I recall the “human research” conducted during the Holocaust which exemplified the potential atrocities in the “name” of beneficial research. Even though the Nuremberg Code was created to protect research participants studies, such as Stanley Milgram’s in 1963, still indicated a need for more protection when it came to participants’ well-being (Neuman, 2003, pp. 116-136). In Milgram’s, and previously harmful experiments, I imagine the only therapeutic outcome was that stricter regulations were enforced to stop inhumane experiments. Although there are many codes of ethics in place to guide research, including IRB’s, it is quite possible that even current research or practices could adversely affect researchers and participants.

In the documentation that I have found regarding formal study of therapeutic writing, most participants did receive a benefit from the creative exercise (see Pennebaker’s work). Still, even when conducting seemingly benign writing experiments, the utmost sensitivity needs to be considered regarding participants’ well-being. Even if

most studies indicate that writing *is* therapeutic, any research should be conducted under the auspices that it could be harmful, not therapeutic, despite previous outcomes.

However, of even more importance to me is that as professional educators, we should be very careful when we *teach* autoethnography or personal narratives.

Professorial Perils

In the following section, I share some of my own and my interviewees' thoughts regarding the therapeutic facet of autoethnography. I am obviously a proponent of researching and teaching autoethnography, but I believe there are possible associated perils that will only increase as autoethnography continues its exponential gains in popularity. My intention is to examine some prospective problems and offer solutions that will "nip in the bud" any impending classroom calamities. All of these safeguards are easy to implement and would likely avert potential problems that could arise especially when teaching autoethnography or any other form of writing that includes emotional components.

The first time I realized that exploring emotional topics in a classroom setting could be problematic occurred in a class I taught two years ago. I was teaching in Eckerd College's "Program for Experienced Learners" (PEL) and was hired largely based on my background in English and also my expertise in autoethnography. The course I taught was "Life, Learning, and Vocation," which is the first course that all PEL students take and it is a mandatory requirement for them to proceed with their studies. Eckerd's PEL program is geared toward "adult learners" who return to complete their Bachelor's Degrees. The minimum age for acceptance into the program is 25 and the average age

range of the students is from 35-50 years old. In many ways, this constitutes the ideal population for any instructor!

The students were older, wiser and had fascinating tales of their prior lives in business, the military, as stay-at-home parents, former addicts, world travelers, artists, or full-time caretakers. As a result of their many rich and textured years of living, they also brought with them heart-breaking stories of loss including deaths of spouses and parents, physical and sexual abuse, addiction, suicides of teenage children, diagnoses of terminal illnesses including cancer and AIDS, and histories of mental illness, some mild, some not so placid. Aside from a re-introduction to an academic environment, the focal point of the class is an autobiographical paper students write that examines and discusses in detail their past, their present, and their desired future.

Fortunately, I was a seasoned teacher and also had taught the course several times so not much “ruffled my feathers” in the classroom. However, my view would change in this class when I realized how writing autobiographically had the potential to become a negative experience, not only for a student but for an entire class. In the first meeting of the term, I discussed the narrative assignment, and I noticed one student seemed uncomfortable and began to sniffle through my instructions. After the break, she returned to the room seemingly composed, but then began crying that escalated into sobbing. Before I could comfort her, she stood up and declared to the class that she was having a panic attack. She left the room for a few minutes, returned quietly, and managed somehow to make it through the evening until the class ended. Of course, I asked to talk to her afterward and then her story poured out, punctuated by sobs. She explained that

she had been hospitalized many times in the past several years due to childhood sexual abuse issues and other emotional problems. However, she lamented that she really wanted to try again in college and completing this class was really important to her. I listened as well as I could and then recognized that the autobiographical writing assignment was exacerbating her volatile mental state. The following day, I contacted my supervisor who suggested that I offer her an alternate assignment (not related to personal events). She also suggested that I tell the student that if she desired, she could take the class as a directed study or enroll at another time with no fee penalties.

I also alerted a fellow teacher of the problem so that I would have someone to assist me (classes were scheduled on Sunday evenings so the usual staff was not available). Not only was I concerned for the unstable student, I was equally as worried about the other class members who were repeatedly distracted by the student's eruptions. These students wait their entire lives to return to college, and I make every effort to make the experience as enjoyable, festive, rigorous but fun, and instructional as possible. In my classroom, emotions are always allowed and even celebrated but with the parameter that they are non-distracting. My professional ethic of "do no harm" extends to maintaining an atmosphere that fosters the educational mission. In my decades of teaching in higher education, this student's outbursts were beyond anything I had ever witnessed.

At the beginning of next class meeting, the student entered and I could tell the other students were already on edge waiting to see "what might happen." Unfortunately, the student was already tearing up, seemed very agitated, and unable to sit still. She left

in the middle of an early discussion, and I excused myself to find the back-up teacher and then the distraught student who I discovered in the bathroom sobbing. She kept repeating, “I can’t do it, I can’t do it,” and then the other teacher and I intervened and called her husband to come and pick her up (she had not driven herself to class, she admitted, because she was so upset that she had to take a tranquilizer). Meanwhile, I returned to my class explaining briefly what had occurred and gave them a short, early break. When the upset student was safely picked up, the class reconvened and we “processed” what had happened as a group. I was relieved when we were able to continue with no more incidents that evening or that semester. The student never returned to the class, or to the program, as far as I know.

Still, I was distressed about how this student with such a history of mental instability was even admitted to the program. I was told that this type of information is confidential unless students choose to share the details with their professors. I also questioned the wisdom of the autobiographical class assignment in a *mandatory* class. With my supervisor’s blessing, the following term when I taught the course, I made it abundantly clear that students could select one of three topics to write about: the original assignment which was autobiographical *or* two other less emotional topics that related to their thoughts on the educational system that could or could not include their personal experiences. An important element in my decision is that this course is not only mandatory, but it is the first class students in the program take, so I wanted their introduction to Eckerd to be as positive as possible.

Later, when I attended the Qualitative Inquiry Conference in May 2007, I was interested to learn that other instructors were legitimately concerned about students' safety after the recent Virginia Tech massacre the previous month. However, some of my interviewees were also disturbed by other potential problems that might occur when students write about deeply emotional topics. As noted earlier, I listened to these concerns regarding personal writing and its instruction, and at the end of this chapter, I include a list of easy to incorporate solutions as a counterbalance.

Nick had strong feelings about this issue and was the only interviewee who sounded "alarmed" to me when it came to discussion of this topic. The following is his assessment of potential dire consequences.

Counselors for Grief or Counselors of Law?

What concerns me is the whole 'sociology of emotion' frame that inspires and informs some of this work. I know that some people teach courses and have their students write about painful experiences that they have been through. But when you confront a very painful experience, there are implications, there are repercussions, and we are not trained therapists. If we ask somebody to open up their soul about what they may have suppressed, like child sexual abuse or something similar, and they write about it, now what do we do?

Emotions are very difficult things you know. I went through this experience with my wife [and her death]. I was into sports and a man used to being tough, but a really good friend of mine said, 'I want to tell you some things because I made a lot of mistakes.' So he told me about what he did wrong in a similar situation which was he

didn't look at his wife's picture for 6 months because he didn't want to cry. His kids were teenagers at the time, and he didn't talk about her because it was too emotional. He isolated himself, he didn't reach out to others, he didn't call people and he waited for them to call and then got upset when they didn't. Then two years later, he couldn't stop crying because he hadn't dealt with his loss. My friend is 50 years old and repressed his emotions, and then 2 years later had to go through months of therapy to deal with it.

So after his talk to me, the next day I went out and bought Bruce Springsteen's CD 'The Rising' which he did after 9/11 and it has some brutally sad songs on it, but ultimately it's uplifting, the rising, to rise above. But that experience taught me that when you suppress emotions, they have to come out.

So if I had a trauma that I didn't talk about at all, or much, and somebody says, 'Alright this is a class on autoethnography and I want you to write about a painful experience you've gone through' I would write about it, and then shit would happen and I would have to go to therapy. I understand the argument that writing is therapeutic, but if we are bringing out repressed emotions in people, we are not qualified to counsel them. And I think there's a lawsuit waiting to happen with some of these classes, I really do.

I think that it will happen, and we'll talk about it at conventions, and there will be panels about it. I predict that somebody at some point will commit suicide-- or at least an attempt at suicide-- after doing an autoethnography in some class. I do, I really believe that and then what? I would hate for that to happen because then IRB's and universities would say 'put a kibosh on this kind of work.' I just think that if people are going to allow for you to write about a very traumatic thing in your life that you may have

repressed, that we also have a counselor in the course you know sitting in or team teaching. Is that too much to ask? Somebody who's a paid professional who can deal with the mopping up of emotions?

When I first interviewed Nick, I felt his predictions about autoethnographic inspired suicides and lawsuits seemed a bit far-fetched and perhaps even overly dramatic. However, I remembered my own experience at Eckerd and felt grateful that I did not have to “mop up” more after my one pained and unstable student. One aspect that I did agree with was that I am a trained educator and scholar, *not* a counselor. I would much rather spend my time and energy in the classroom discussing writing techniques and social science influences, not personal crises.

Next, I looked forward to my interview with Patricia as she currently teaches an ethnography class and I wanted to hear her reaction to the concerns that Nick had raised with me. She has an upbeat personality and is an experienced educator, so I knew I would appreciate her perspective. Before I broach Nick's concerns, I ask her to tell me a little bit about her recent undergraduate ethnography class.

Question the Counselors

I love teaching this class! My undergraduates have flown this semester--I cannot believe the stories that they have written. One woman who is Brazilian wrote about the kidnapping of her Grandmother and they never found her. She writes theoretically about 'ambiguous loss' and found all this wonderful literature and includes interviews with her Mom and Dad. She also writes stories of her lack of appreciation for her Grandmother and makes herself vulnerable--- all those things become part of her story. And the list

just goes on and on. A young man found out that his Dad was gay this year, and he used to hate gays so he had to come to terms with that. Another one whose Mom was an alcoholic while growing up showed up at her graduation drunk, and another young woman was raped by her cousin at 4. You know, they're writing these stories, and they're telling these stories for the very first time in class. Here are these undergrads who have experienced so much!

After Patricia shares this with me, I see it is the perfect opportunity to raise the questions of emotions and vulnerability. When I do, she is very open and apparently has given the matter some thought. Patricia continues:

You know I've been fortunate that nothing's happened yet. But when I see my students dig really deep, be so willing to be vulnerable and talk very openly about how much they appreciate the sacred space of this classroom, to talk about things they've never been able to talk about before, that just this semester it has made me realize that in the future one of the things that I will do is talk to a counselor on campus. I want to go over there and interview some people, because you know what there are so many shitty counselors out there. I've been in counseling for this, that, and the other my whole life and there are so many crappy counselors.

When Patricia says this, I have to laugh and then agree. I too have been in counseling for "one thing or another" since the age of twenty-six, and I've seen brilliant and talented professionals but also some fairly ineffective practitioners.

Ironically, later when I interview Carol, she echoes the same sentiments about questionable counselors, but describes how she uniquely handles a student who is in distress.

Get Thee to a Professional

I have had them sitting in my office saying, 'I've never told anyone this before but my brother raped me repeatedly in my basement' and they are just kind of numb and stunned. So the way I handle it is to say, 'I am not a therapist, however, I am a fellow survivor and what I can do is speak to you about my own experience. My experience may not match yours and my experience may not be everything you need to hear, but I can listen.' Then what I will be careful to do though is to try to hook them up with some counseling services. I direct them to that, but that's the problem---in the free counseling they are training students. So, one of the things I tell them is you have to be an advocate for yourself. You may be in a position where you don't feel like you deserve it, or you don't feel like you can assert yourself, but you really must. You must be 'a customer' and you must understand that somebody who fits this person over here may not fit you, and that's okay. We want to find a good match for them rather than stay with someone who doesn't work or drop out of the process altogether because they think there is something wrong with them.

I feel my role is to direct them, so that's what I do. I've seen some good things happen though...and I've also seen some things where I don't know if they got the help that I wanted for them to get immediately.

Between what Patricia and Carol reveal, I begin to understand that Nick may have several relevant points. Clearly students are drawn to personal narrative classes because they probably want to write about themselves. However, a latent problem is that they may never have been to therapy (due to age or circumstance) and in these classes they are looking *primarily* for emotional healing, not a writing experience (word gets around about the topics covered in such classes). While I have a therapist and maturity as resources, these students may not even know they need professional help. Additionally, they could be intimidated by the idea of seeking counseling; whereas, I am of the mindset that having a therapist on standby is *always* useful for life's inevitable contingencies (I also acknowledge my privilege of always having had average, if not superior, health care insurance).

Carol speaks of students who confess their darkest secrets and say, "I never have told anyone this before," which leaves an educator in a highly vulnerable position in more ways than one. The welfare of the student is paramount, but how can a professor insure that the student obtains professional help to deal with the newly unsuppressed or just unconfessed trauma? Carol says she doesn't know for sure if the students receive the help they need because there is no way to track it. ADA regulations are stringent about privacy and even if a tracking system were available, another potential twist is possible.

Carol was an "early-adopter" of autoethnography as a vehicle for writing about trauma, especially the taboo of sexual abuse (1995). Readers and students often thank her for sharing her story and vicariously giving them voice by writing about similarly horrific experiences. Nevertheless, one of Carol's confessions stunned me.

Counseling Bodies

At first, writing was a way for me to open the door to my sexual abuse. I had to go research it, and I became obsessed for a while which was a good thing because that was part of my healing. Writing about it, getting that intellectual grasp on it, was healing because I'm doing what this brain does which is saying 'I can learn about this, I can master this, I can control this.' I even said to somebody 'Oh, I don't need therapy I've written up on this--- I know about this.' I wrote a few things without having gone to therapy and then what that did was put me up on a pedestal, the model thing. People came to me saying, 'Oh you know about this issue. Help us solve this.'

So I get some street credibility, but I don't have the goods because I didn't 'process' the abuse. Then I'm exposed as fraud to myself because I haven't gone through therapy and now I am forced to go to therapy. I had no idea that there's a somatic thing to trauma. It's just common knowledge that processing trauma has this physical component, so I had to process body memories for two years. I was a nut job--I was a fucking nut job-- for two whole years.

For some reason, Carol's revelation just astounded me. I just assumed...similar to the first time I saw my baby's pediatrician smoking a cigarette or found out that my current pastor was having an affair, I was simply shocked. Schemata schism! I did not think less of Carol at all; in fact, I admired her even more, as I am certain that I could never have presented at conferences or published my "secrets" without years of prior therapy.

I have written about my mother's punishing physical abuse toward me as a child and her lifelong struggle with alcoholism and schizophrenia. I have spoken at conferences about my battle with depression, a painful divorce from the father of my two sons, the trials of single-parenting, both my mother's and father's deaths, and how all of these situations dramatically impacted me. Yet, never, in a million years would I endeavor to write or speak so publicly about my intense pain if I did not feel as if I had processed the traumas both intellectually and somatically. I am glad that Carol got the help she needed--now I believe she can do further good and help more people. Yet, I also realize that her confession raises additional issues regarding the ethical care of the students we teach.

If someone as bright and vivacious as Carol understood her trauma "intellectually," but her body had not yet processed the pain, then I conclude that we need to be exceptionally careful when it comes to the potential vulnerability of our students about whose backgrounds we know little.

Students may have suppressed their traumatic memories until they are finally in a class where the hurt can rise to consciousness for the first time. They may or may not write about their pain, but what if they still are *feeling* it? What if they do not have the courage to go to you or a counselor to confess, "I've never told anyone this before but..." Instead, they may write about their pain as a cry for help--for your help. What if like Elissa's roommate, they are so devastated by life that they try to hurt themselves? Or, like the Virginia Tech perpetrator, hurt others and then commit suicide? Carol's story illustrates to me that *any* student is at risk for emotional fallout and dealing with even

mild trauma is not within an educator's repertoire of expertise. Nonetheless, as promised earlier, I vowed to explore these potential dilemmas but also to offer educators assistance in these matters. First, though, I had to contact a professional.

In-House Counsel

My husband, Jim, has been with me on my "autoethnographic" journey since 2001. He does not know as much about autoethnography as I do, but he is an attentive listener and research paper proofreader *par excellence*. He is also a talented litigation attorney. When I asked him about these particular dilemmas discussed above, he became unusually serious. He did not want me to tape record him, or include his responses verbatim, or even write one of my festive, "Kendall and Jim Eat Dinner While Discussing Autoethnography" vignettes. This time he was all business when I broached the topic of autoethnography as it could possibly correlate with words like "lawsuit, vulnerability, suicide, therapy, ethics, and liability."

I let him read this chapter first as an underpinning for our discussion. Then he asked me a few questions and had an additional dozen queries regarding the disturbed student at Eckerd. He then wanted to know if anyone had ever initiated a lawsuit related to writing personal narrative or autoethnography. To the best of my knowledge, I said "no" but reminded him of Nick's prediction that a lawsuit was probable, if not ultimately inevitable. Ironically, I was pleased to find that Jim's replies and suggestions were exactly the opposite of the "doom and gloom" comeback that I anticipated.

Jim's assessment (unprofessionally, off the record, and as a disinterested party) is that the issue of "protection" is simply a matter of "definition." In a "for instance"

situation, he said if I were teaching a class in autoethnography, this is what he would recommend to me to protect myself, students, and my institution (and by the way, after this discussion, he urged me to implement some of these simple, yet useful, safeguards the next time I teach).

First and foremost, he reminds me that despite whatever I *say* in class, I need the information also clearly stated in my syllabus. In addition, I should include a disclaimer that students read and sign. He quickly points out that the wording does not need to be intimidating, oppressive, or too legalese-ish. However, the language does need to obviously delineate the “definition, terms, and conditions of the class” as well as to “define the role of the instructor.” This disclaimer would be distributed on the first day of class and returned the following class period after students have had ample time to “process” *their decision* to stay enrolled in the course. They should sign the document, date it, and also sign or initial that they have received a copy *for their records* and future reference. As stated before, the most pertinent issue is “definition.”

In an upbeat manner, the first task is to “define” what the *course* is and is not. The initial opening could theoretically read something to the effect of: “This course in ‘Personal Narrative’ provides a wonderful opportunity for a student to engage in self-reflexive and expressive writing. It offers many occasions for you to improve your writing skills, to engage in complex academic writing exercises, to develop higher order research skills, to engage in critical and analytical inquiry, to learn more about social science/qualitative/ narrative inquiry/autoethnographic methods, to explore your own and diverse cultures, and to educate you about potential publishing outlets in both academic

and popular venues.” The main point is to keep the focus on the goals of the course which relate to creativity, analysis, culture, and writing improvement (or whatever the goals are that do not relate to therapy).

It is essential to clarify that in the course of the semester students may be asked to write about personal topics, yet alternate assignments are always available if these topics make them uncomfortable in any way. Lastly, it is important for students to understand that “self-knowledge” and personal growth may be a fortuitous by-product of the class, but the course is not meant as “a substitute for therapy or professional counseling.” However, if students find that they need to talk to a professional counselor at any time, make sure they know that USF/Your Institution offers free counseling. Then as part of the disclaimer, list an array of useful resources that students may access should they feel even the *slightest* need to talk to an expert. I believe that the disclaimer can be used as a helpful tool, not just a legal document. You will be performing a valuable service to students by advocating therapy if needed (and you may be the first person who has said this to them *ever*) and also providing them with a list of possible resources if they have emotional concerns.

Next Time

From now on, when I teach I plan to implement a disclaimer and use it as a tool that also includes a wealth of self-help resources. Not only will the document contain institutional resources, but local and national aids, including 12-step programs, women’s centers, recovery meetings, crisis hotlines, various national support groups, and useful mental health websites. I may also include relevant books about emotional well-being

that I can place on reserve in the library. For all I know, I may be one of the only people students know who may direct them to seek help. Nevertheless, I also want to protect myself, other students, and my institution.

This leads to the last part of Jim's input. He said that it is imperative that professors clearly "define" their roles as something like "caring, nurturing professional educators" trained in their areas of expertise including (for example) "narrative inquiry, creative writing, health communication, autoethnographic methods, qualitative research, etc." They should also include a line stating that they *are not* trained mental health counselors or licensed psychologists. However, as members of the shared academic community, they will help students as much as they can to assist with any emotional or personal crisis.

I see such "documentation" as the best of both worlds because it provides critical legal protection in the event of a classroom or institutional disaster, and it serves to open a conversation with students about topics such as "what *if* you feel these painful emotions or suddenly remember this horrific event?" While all of this may sound a bit dramatic, unnecessary, paranoid, or overly litigious, just since I interviewed Nick in May of 2007, two other disturbing killings in higher education have occurred.

At Louisiana Tech on February 8, 2008 a female nursing student fired six rounds of gunfire, killing two people and then committed suicide. Similarly, a male honors graduate student in social work at Northern Illinois University embarked on a killing spree February 14, 2008 killing five people, then turning his revolver to fatally shoot himself. These most recent shootings and the Virginia Tech massacre resulted in dozens

of wounded and a total of 42 people killed. My contemporary concern is that professors are “sitting ducks” for students who are unwittingly but emotionally wounded, and trying to process their pain but do not have adequate tools or resources. I think of Carol’s story to illustrate how such an emotional masquerade can go unnoticed.

I also am worried that an unstable student could be “normal” enough to stay in class, but disruptive enough to preclude optimal learning for other students. In an extreme worst case scenario, a student taps into deep emotional hurt and embarks on a violent rampage such as the three listed above. Certainly the reputation of *any* professors of the perpetrator, as well as the institution, will likely be scrutinized and jeopardized.

On a final note, I ask my husband, “what *would* happen if a student killed him/herself while enrolled in a course encouraging emotional writing and somehow that fueled self-mutilation?” Now Jim did appear like a picture of doom and gloom. He stared at me soberly and asked, “Have you ever seen the faces of the parents whose child commits suicide? Believe me, you don’t want to---it is *not* pretty.”

Before the Virginia Tech massacre and other institutional murders, before my interviews at the conference, my dissertation research, and the recent discussion with my lawyer/husband, I might have continued to console an upset student in my usual sympathetic way. However, my view has altered dramatically. I do not want *anyone* to get hurt because of my lack of precaution, not do I want any writing class that I teach to be scrutinized or, worst of all, completely removed as a course offering because of its “potential for danger.” I now believe that it is the *responsibility* of educators to protect students, themselves, and their disciplines in ways that have never before been

considered. Then we can all feel our feelings, but when necessary have adequate expertise to help us through the hard parts. While legal liabilities may need to be addressed in order to protect participants, these issues can be easily resolved with the implementation of a waiver. There is no reason why a tool as efficacious and economical as self-writing should not be employed if possible and appropriate.

Silver Linings

Meanwhile, I refuse to conclude this Chapter on a depressing note. If I have not made it abundantly clear, I believe deeply in the many attributes of autoethnography, personal narrative, narrative inquiry, and all of its variations. The pioneers in these fields have worked diligently to get these terms “on the map,” and I feel part of my calling is to make sure that they are not only secure but are fortified so they can continue to flourish. For dozens of reasons, some people will criticize autoethnography and related endeavors, but one of my aspirations is to ensure a future that not only includes, but promotes, all forms of therapeutic writing.

In the next chapter, I share a personal story that traces my development from a wounded child to an adult “wounded storyteller,” that shows the value of autoethnography from a healing perspective. As the autoethnographic pioneers have astutely determined, most researchers do not discover their academic path by mere “accident.” In the next section, I describe the many ways that writing was literally a “lifesaver” and conclude with an analysis of my healing process as it relates to therapeutic writing and health communication.

CHAPTER SIX

MY AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNEY

In the preceding chapter, I explored the promises and possible pitfalls of teaching personal narrative that were introduced by my interviewees. While it is true that some minor risks “could” occur as a result of autoethnographic writing, it is far too valuable of a practice to limit because of potential (and maybe nonexistent) problems, all of which can be offset easily in a few simple steps. As for me, I align with those who will continue to support and educate others about autoethnography and, when appropriate, I will employ the appropriate legal disclaimers as a safeguard. There is no reason to impede the proliferation of autoethnography in the classroom because it may elicit “too much” emotion. With a few preventive strategies, we can protect educators, students, and our institutions and go on about the business of enjoying the many benefits of personal writing. Personally, I would have been very grateful as a young adult if I had been fortunate enough to have had any acquaintance with autoethnography.

Like many budding autoethnographers, my appreciation of personal narrative and its benefits showed up early in my life. Only now do I have the luxury, distance, and privilege to investigate the power of this form of writing as part of my professional training. As a researcher and scholar, I am interested in autoethnography as an effective and unique social science method. Long ago, I fell in love with powerful stories and basked in their healing messages. As noted previously, as a young girl, I cherished

reading and began writing in diaries and journals to assuage the escalating emotional angst of my adolescence and imminent adulthood.

For the remainder of this section, I share select personal writing and poetry as recorded in my journals over several decades. In the first part, I write from a child's perspective in a quasi-fictional format. Later, I explore the mental turmoil that leads to my adult clinical depression, inevitable divorce, hard-won contentment, and penchant for the topic of therapeutic writing. Lastly, I discuss these tumultuous, yet revelatory, years from a narrative and therapeutic view, intertwining my own personal writing with academic analysis (references to Arthur Frank's theory of "narrative wreckage" are included again in this section as they are critical to understanding how I "framed" my extended crises).

My intent here is to illustrate one way that emotional states can be studied in the context of autoethnography. But instead of "telling" you about what brought me to autoethnography, why don't I show you?

The Perfect Life

As I charge into the kitchen, the slamming of the screen door startles Alma. As often is the case, I see her long brown arms are attached to an iron that is starching one of my father's long sleeve white work shirts.

"Sugar, what you doin' home from school so early?" she asks, frowning her brow.

I am eleven and do not remember life when Alma was not part of our family. She takes care of me and our home while Mama is in town volunteering or lunching, wearing her pretty pastel suits that look like Jackie Kennedy's.

Alma realizes that I am two hours early for our afternoon ritual of eating after school snacks and telling about our days.

I squeal, "You forgot?! Alma, remember...we got out early 'cause today is the *last* day of school and..." I pause with great drama and ten year old enthusiasm, "...and *now* it's *summer*! No more dresses or homework, just me and you and the beach. And on the weekends I'll go fishing with Daddy and Mama will cook the crabs."

I'm not very good at math but I understand the numerical beauty of summer: ninety days of boating, crabbing, fishing, biking, making forts, playing softball, blackberry picking, hermit crab racing, deep-sea fishing with Daddy, making pudding and pies with Alma, enrolling in the summer book club at the library with Mama, and making a few dollars with a new and improved lemonade stand.

As I have been talking, Alma listens but all the time she has been slowly gliding the hot iron over the collar of my father's shirt. The crisp white starched cotton contrasts with her soft and forgiving brown arms. I like her caramel-chocolate skin. Mostly, I like her because she is always there to talk to me, and she likes crabbing as much as I do. This will be our best summer ever.

"Alma, I know it's early but can we have our snack *now*, you know to celebrate and all?"

Alma turns off the iron and carefully adds Daddy's white shirt to the other half dozen hanging on the doorknob to the playroom. She goes to the refrigerator and pulls out a casserole dish.

She smiles a little, and I know we are in for a treat. "Sugar, I made this for you'ses to have tonight but it won't hurt to have a little now, I reckon."

She carefully places the ceramic bowl on our kitchen table and even though I'm not real hungry, my mouth waters when I peer into it. Dark chocolate pudding with whipped cream dollops and chocolate chip sprinkles get my attention. Neither one of us says a word. We just sit smiling at each other as well as you can with chipmunk cheeks filled with creamy chocolate.

Calm Waters

In less than a week, I have fully adjusted to the summer routine. Every morning I eschew school dresses for ratty red or blue shorts and head to my backyard which sits on the Choctahatchee Bay. The Bay is a large body of water in North Florida between Pensacola and Panama City. Fort Walton Beach is where we live and it's mostly full of retirees, military personnel, and aquatic wildlife. Every morning my personally designated job is to assess the Bay's activity. I always walk to the end of our dock for an overview. The survey begins: Is the tide high or low? Is the water calm or does it have a light chop? Do I spot any dolphins or see a school of fish? If so, are they trout, mackerel, or minnows? What is the water visibility? In general, are there more or fewer crabs than usual per square sandy inch? I have been watching Jacques Cousteau at night on the television and decide that I want to be a marine biologist. My parents nod but remind me

that I will have to live on a boat for a long time and learn a lot of science of math. These are minor obstacles to an ambitious eleven year-old who considers herself a mermaid trapped on land.

During that first week of summer, my father comes home in the middle of the day with my mother. She starts crying and says to me and my sister, “Girls sit down; we have something to tell you.” I just want them to hurry up with whatever it is they have to say, because I have just spotted a large pod of dolphins and need to get my row boat as close to them as possible.

My father says, “Your mother and I are getting a divorce,” and my mother says, “We’re moving to Tallahassee.” It’s 1969 and I don’t really know what a divorce entails but I feel sorry for my poor mother and sister who are going to have to live in Tallahassee. I couldn’t imagine that---poor things. My mother starts crying real hard now, and my Dad has to go back to work. One of them says, “We will talk about this later.” Good, I need to get back to my dolphins. And, Alma and I can always visit Tallahassee during the holidays. For now, my water pets are calling me.

Capsized

The move happens so quickly that I don’t remember the details. It feels like I just wake up one morning, and I am in a very bad dream. My mother, sister, and I are living in Tallahassee, Florida in a small apartment in my grandmother’s complex. The rundown tan concrete building is home to retirees and widows. The “story” is that grandma is going to help take care of me that summer while my mother “gets on her feet.” At first I try to be cheerful and see the move as an adventure, but when I find out that the nearest

beach is two hours away, I am inconsolable. No Alma, no Daddy, no beach, no boat, *no home*. My identity has been stripped from me like a dolphin scraped by a reckless speed boat.

My mother enrolls me in ballet lessons and tennis lessons, both of which I hate and quit after two weeks. Since Mama is going to real estate school for most of the day, I am told that I must find some way to occupy myself. I consider running away but I have no place to go. What I do is to begin a routine of daily walks. I hate Tallahassee on principle because it is not near the water, and I am living downtown with a bunch of old people. My hope is that if I walk around the neighborhood for long enough I will find something to fill the void in my days and heart.

Landlocked

After a few weeks of daily walking in Tallahassee, my route becomes broader, and I land in new terrain. I look up at a large building. It does not appear to be the state capitol which I have seen before. The mammoth structure has a dozen or more steps, thick white columns, and writing in stone that I cannot decode. Then I see a lady, a mom type person, coming out of the door with a little girl about my age. As they descend the giant stone steps and pass me, I see they each have a stack of books. This must be a library, but this one is huge compared to the little one I am used to back home. For once, Tallahassee impresses me. My legs wobble a little as I walk up 32 large stone steps and pass the looming columns that flank the front entryway. Taking a deep breath, I push open the large glass tinted front door and begin the long walk to the main desk.

Cathedral ceilings, a large clock with Roman numerals, and a dark circular wood

staircase watch as I shyly approach the desk made of mahogany and brass. It reminds me of courtrooms I have seen on television shows. There are several assistants, but one in particular seems nicer than the rest.

“What can I do for you today?” asks the smiling caramel-colored woman. She reminds me of Alma who I miss even more than my father, and I like it that she is a little chubby like someone who eats more chocolate than they probably should.

In a mock confident voice, I manage to voice my dilemma: “I just moved to Tallahassee and this is my first time here and I don’t know where books are for people my age and...” Before I have time to feel more embarrassed, the nice librarian wishes out from behind her mahogany arena and is magically right by my side.

She smiles and confidently says, “I will show you *exactly* where to go.” I like it that she knows her way around this big place, because I am already afraid of getting lost. My friendly guide has on large silver earrings that jingle when she talks. Her face is round and creamy brown. She seems delighted to help me, and I am buoyed by her cheerfulness. Since the divorce, no one in my home has been very happy about anything. Since my Mom is in real estate school she doesn’t drink as much during the day, but I have to work hard at not getting slapped because she gets so mad these days. I try not to think about that and concentrate on my new surroundings.

As we slowly climb the brass and dark wood stairwell that looks like it belongs in the White House, I look to my new fairy godmother for comfort. She doesn’t have on a name tag but right there I name her Mrs. Hershey, because she is dark and sweet and

makes me feel good just like a Hershey bar always does. When we get to the top of the stairwell I am overwhelmed by the size of the second floor.

Mrs. Hershey must see my trepidation or she's a mind-reader because she immediately assures, "This IS a big library but look here. This is the "Young Adult" section where *your books* are."

Right past the top of the stairs, we turn a corner and there it is: a cozy fortress of books----yes, there are hundreds of them but the size of the room is manageable. I also like how Mrs. Hershey said, *young adult* and *your books*.

Mrs. Hershey continues her welcoming chat. "The authors are arranged alphabetically with the A's beginning over here to the left." I note that the bookshelves form three sides of a square but one side is missing. Still, the shelves create a fort and within that area sits a small pine table and three chairs. I couldn't name it just then, but something felt right about being there.

Mrs. Hershey interrupts my room survey and asks, "So what kind of books do you like to read?"

I *know* the answer to this question. I do not hesitate at all. "I like mysteries----*a lot*. I've read almost all of the Nancy Drew stories. I could always start re-reading them I guess..." but before I finish Mrs. Hershey whisks over to the "D" section and pulls down a book that looks like the Nancy Drew books but this cover is blue, not yellow.

Mrs. Hershey's earrings jangle as she pats the books on the shelf behind her, "These are the Hardy Boys books. Try out this first one and see if you like it. They are like the Nancy Drew books but with a little more action. Next, I would just start with the

“A” authors and work your way around the room. Look at the books and read a little bit of them. You’ll find something that you like, I’m sure. And you just let me know if you need anything. I’ll be right down at the check-out desk.” As Mrs. Hershey jingle-jangles down the circular staircase, I feel a little panic as I watch her head bob out of sight.

I feel afraid, but she has left me with a tangible comfort: my first Hardy Boys book. I read the back of Volume One and discover that these detectives have a boat. Yes! Nancy Drew never had a boat. I want to jump ahead and look at the next Hardy Boy’s book but stop myself. I don’t want to miss anything. I’m going to take it real slow. Just start with the A’s just Mrs. Hershey had suggested. First I select...Alan...Alexander...then Anton, and soon the small pine table is filled with eight books.

If lunch could have been catered, I would have started perusing the “B” authors but hunger calls. As I carefully navigate down the circular staircase, I make sure that the Hardy Boys book is on the top of my stack. I want Mrs. Hershey to see that I have taken her advice. I want her to help me. Without Alma in my life, I need someone who can be my friend. Plus, I feel like maybe she knows something about me that I don’t know about myself; after all she does notice that I am a person who reads in the “Young Adult” section.

After lunch that day, I start reading the Hardy Boys book. Mrs. Hershey is right—I love these guys. Unlike Nancy Drew and her chums, these sleuths have a boat and are always exploring coves on islands. I eat my dinner while reading book two and wake up the next morning and read book three cover to cover. Even my usually

neglectful/angry mother is concerned because I have spent almost 24 hours quietly reading.

I begin a ritual that is to define the summer of my tenth year. I sleep in, have breakfast with my grandmother and then start off to the library. I stay there until early afternoon, check out a stack of books, come home, eat a late lunch, and read. By then it is time for dinner which I endure with my mother and sister, and finally I retreat to my small bedroom to the only relationships I trust right now: those with my books.

Dry Life Preservers

I knew I was looking for something that summer and I found a big part of it when I discovered the name: Louise Fitzhugh and the title: *Harriet the Spy*. My family was not religious, but if ever I had a “conversion” of any kind” it happened in that moment. I read the back of the book: *Harriet Welsh is an eleven year-old girl who lives in Manhattan. Harriet walks through her neighborhood spying on people and writing down everything in a notebook...she is preparing herself for a career as a writer...*

If ever there was a white-light epiphanic moment, or angels singing *acapella* or cherubs chortling with delight it happened right then in the Tallahassee library when I fell in love with the nascent idea of my future self.

I clutched the book like a life-preserver and sat down at my row-boat sized pine library table and began to read non-stop. I am startled and think I’m having another one of those “burning bush moments” when late afternoon sunbeams come through the old transom window above me. I look up at the light and try to focus my eyes. It must be

past lunch time, but I don't feel hungry at all. I hear the clinking of Mrs. Hershey coming up the stairs to check on me. This time she has her purse and an umbrella with her.

"I'm on way home now, but I wanted to see if you were alright before I left. It's getting a little late, you know." She doesn't call me "sugar" like Alma did but I feel her deep kindness and concern.

I proudly thrust out my new book treasure and start telling her about Harriet and this writing business and spying and *the notebook*...and Mrs. Hershey is beaming as much as I am. For the moment, I have been given a much needed anchor. The divorce, the move, no Alma, and no Dad, have shaken my fairytale mermaid life. My perfect story of living on the water and having little responsibility or trauma had suddenly been interrupted. I know I needed something to hold onto because I was learning that what looks solid can easily disappear, and often without warning.

Reading and Righting

That summer begins my lifelong affair with reading and writing. Because of the tumult in my life, I seek the wisdom of writers to help nurture me. Lack of parental guidance and deep questions evoked by recent losses and the onset of adolescence make me rely on authors for support. As time progresses, I move away from reading one-dimensional detective stories to seeking stories that explore the angst of the interior life. I read myself right through the "Z's" in the "Young Adult" area with the next stop ending at a graduation to the "Adult" section. Some of the most influential works that I remember were written by Austen, Chekov, Dickens, Faulkner, Hemingway, Oates,

Plath, Poe, Roth, and, of course, Salinger. I absorb the words of writers whose words are healing and guiding.

In *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination*, Coles (1989) articulates the role good literature can provide: “Novels and stories are renderings of life; they cannot only keep us company, but admonish us, point us in new directions, or give us courage to stay a given course. They can offer us kinsmen, kinswomen, comrades, advisers---offer us other eyes through which we might see, other ears with which we might make soundings” (p. 159-160). During my adolescent years, I desperately need direction and reading gives me a reliable compass.

After the divorce, my mother’s anguish and mental instability become evident. Without Alma and my father to shield me, I discover that my mother is prone to severe bouts of uncontrollable rage which manifest in verbal and physical abuse toward me and my sister. She is diagnosed with everything from schizophrenia to manic-depression. Simultaneously, Mama becomes reliant on hard liquor and Valium as an attempt to sedate her rage and numb her emotional pain. As my mother’s alcoholism escalates and my home life becomes more turbulent, I feel a need not only to read but to try and write. Intuitively, I must know that writing has therapeutic benefits and I need some kind of healing.

A Scholarly Aside

Since the early 1970’s, many academic disciplines have explored the topic of therapeutic writing and for those interested in a brief history of this exploration, I have included a literature review in Chapter One. For the remainder of this section, I am

particularly interested in examining my own journal writing and poetry as recorded through the decades and reflexively analyzing the ways in which I convey emotional states as well as ways in which scholarship informs my writing. It is the beginning of me becoming an “official” autoethnographer.

Sea-ing Differently

As my adolescent home life becomes more unpredictable, I seek to create meaning and order that is inviolate and permanent. The absence of my father, Alma, the water, and the only home I ever knew have left me aching for emotional connection. Journal writing seems to offer a stable construct and dependable other that cannot abandon me. Slowly, I am becoming aware of my interior self and begin constructing a story of my future. At the age of ten, I begin keeping a journal as a way to establish a self separate from others, but also with the mindset that eventually I will create a family and identity that will (hopefully) be more stable than the one in which I am growing up. My need is pressing to create a story that construes my future as meaningful and volitionally based. By the time I am thirteen, it is also clear that I want to benefit others, but in retrospect I believe that my writing was primarily a serious attempt to stabilize my own life.

As much as I would like to take credit for the infinite possibilities of my life’s initial trajectory, in theatrical terms, I was born *in media res* to parents and a sister who already had a designated “script” for my role in the family. Even as a baby, my obligation to the family troupe was to learn my lines as quickly as possible, without missing any cues or breaking out of character. Like most people in the world, I was born

into a family with a pre-existing narrative that shaped my identity. Of course my birth story is not unique; even “only” children are born into a family, a nation, and a global community that has a lengthy narrative history of which they must instantly become a part. Parry (1991) explains:

Families are a breeding ground for dramatic tales and traditions. Only the most disconnected families do not tell stories that define expectations concerning the behavior and achievements of its members...Such stories become constitutive of what systemic therapy calls ‘maps of the world.’ Every therapist knows how constraining these maps or myths are, because they consist of stories that virtually define the person. (p. 47)

Similarly, Monk et al. (1997) assert, “The newly born child is instantly bathed in a cultural ‘soup.’ From a narrative perspective, problems may be seen as floating in this soup. The problems we encounter are multisourced, they are developed over a long period of time, and they come together through the medium of human language to construct and produce our experience” (p. 27).

Even before children can speak, undoubtedly they are given indications of what their role is and even the most intelligent children do not understand that they are enacting a part from a family script. Macintyre (1981) observes, “We enter upon a stage which we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that was not of our making. Each of us being a main character in his own drama plays subordinate parts in the drama of others, and each drama constrains the others” (p. 213). Although I would like to think that I was born into a world of unlimited possibilities, my birth is merely an

incidental new plot line in an already complex and ritualized story. To be clear, I want to clarify that I was born with much privilege and I am not complaining about the overall circumstances of my birth and subsequent life. However, what I am interested in as an autoethnographer are stories: my story, your story, our story and especially the stories that are painful and traumatic because those are the tales with alchemical power to heal us all.

However, what happens when a family member, particularly a child, defies their role in the family story? It is likely that ruptures in children's roles will escalate in adolescence and burgeon during teenage years. In an effort to please my parents, for years I tried to be quiet and compliant but another part of me simply could not conform to being so subdued and complicit to others' designs on my life. What no one in my family factored into their storyline is that eventually the "baby" would demand a release from her contract as a dependent, cute, quiet entity. For the first decade of my life, I tried to "be me" while still conforming to the family narrative, but eventually I did not fit into the family story except as a poorly performing understudy. Eventually, I had to question the entire drama into which I was born and ask as Carr does: "...like a scientific theory, it may be the story itself which is called into question...The question then is not 'How does this or that action fit into the story?' but rather: 'What *is* the story?'" (1986, p. 91). The following journal demonstrates my attempts to create a new narrative construct for myself:

Journal Entry

No month, 1972

To my daughter(s): I'm 13 now, and I guess you probably will have a hard time picturing me as a young teenager. Actually I'm writing this on your behalf because it has (hopefully) helping hints and most anytime you can hold this information up to me. It should help a helluva lot...I hope to write a book(s) someday. I feel I have a lot and more interesting experiences to come.

Ong (2002) contends that, "The writer must set up a role in which absent and often unknown readers can cast themselves" (pp. 100-101). I find it interesting that initially I choose to write to my fictionalized future daughters as my audience (and I cannot claim any predictive power as my family is now complete and consists of two magnificent adult sons and two stepsons!). In reviewing my early journal entries, I think that as I experienced the deterioration of the nuclear family into which I was born, I began to believe that the only possibility for my "perfect family" would come from having my own children (however, soon we will see that this story too went awry and had to be revised, repeatedly).

Trying to Write the Wrongs

During these years my mother is as frustrated and sad as I, and probably much more so. Certainly, her story and identity were annihilated with my father's affair and ensuing request for a divorce. She was never trained to be anything other than a devoted housewife and kept mother. While my father attended law school, she taught preschool to support him and later decorated his first shoebox size law office. Because attorneys

were not allowed to advertise in the 1960's, she was in charge of hosting elaborate parties and volunteering in the community to help my father's practice grow. Then suddenly, after seventeen years of marriage, he asks for a divorce. Historically, it is a time when divorce is almost unheard of and as a result my mother (a former Sunday school teacher) is ex-communicated from the Episcopal church because my father divorced her. When I factor in all the terrible losses of identity which my mother experienced, I am not surprised at her inability to function well following the divorce. Although we tried to be optimistic, no one in our family was adjusting very well as evidenced by the following journal entries:

Journal Entry

No month, 1973

I'm planning for my life which isn't too soon---if I was put on this earth to live, then why shouldn't I do all in my power to make it a good life? That's fine except I'm only 14—without transportation, money, or a decent means of supporting myself. I am also on restrictions.

Journal Entry

October 21, 1973

This morning Mama freaked out. At least you can tell when she is hurting me when she screamed “you ungrateful little bitch, you can go live with your father!” That's pretty direct. I'm sitting in a bathroom stall writing this. You know I really love this old school (the building I mean). It's warm and comforting. Sometimes I wish I had a

dramatic life to write about--- but, no---unfortunately I'm just a child of a broken home. (At least I don't have diarrhea [sic] like the chick next to me!).

In analyzing the emotional content of the entries above, I see that I am attempting to describe that my mother's words were hurtful, yet I am not able to elaborate more about my feelings. Progoff (1975), one of the pioneers of therapeutic writing, developed a process known as "intensive journaling," and he writes that description is part of the process and an important first step but certainly not all that healing writing requires: "The first step is to acknowledge the problems of our life as we find them, to observe them and describe them as objectively as we can. That gives us a reference point...but we do not establish our position there. We draw back. We move away from the surface of things. We move inward in order to return with a greater resource to use in approaching the situation" (p. 9).

At this point I am not able to demonstrate any reflexivity about my situation, yet I do realize that my journal is becoming increasingly important to my well-being:

Journal Entry

October 27, 1973

Sometimes I wonder who might read this. If one day when I'm dead it will be read publicly or maybe just my children will read it. What kind of purpose does this journal serve? An outlet for my emotions---an account of parts of my life? I don't know.

Journal Entry

October 28, 1973

I feel like I want to be some type of person today and I don't like the person I want to be. I may never be who I want to be but then I'm not sure I would like to try to be anybody else...The thing is I am a united copycat of everything I've seen, done, and felt since I was born. I'm sure when I die I will know still that I could be a better person.

In this entry, I see a smoldering frustration as I try to create a unique identity, not one which is a "copycat" of others or even an identity created from my own repetitive actions. According to Vygotsky (1986) such intellectual and emotional endeavors are an ongoing process: "The connection between thought and word...is neither preformed nor constant. It emerges in the course of development, and it evolves..." (p. 255). I continue to write but in reviewing my journal entries, I note now that I seldom actually name my feelings, and unpleasant feelings are almost nonexistent. In the few cases when they are mentioned, I end such entries with an optimistic spin:

Journal Entry

December 25, 1974

Merry Christmas and I can't say it's felt like Christmas. I'm really homesick for our house...Places are important and I really don't have any certain place I can go around here--but I'll find one. Just wait.

Hometown Exit

My first major attempt at re-writing my role occurred in undergraduate school where I was, for the first time, geographically free of my family and had the opportunity

to forge a new self-identity. Unfettered by family constraints, instead of majoring in business as my father had hoped or art as my mother dreamed about, I took classes in English, Communication, and Theatre. Simultaneously, I had my first experience of a loved one dying, and suddenly I glimpsed my own mortality. My time left on this planet became a primary preoccupation. I needed to feel that I had tried to create an “authentic” story of my life that was not wholly dependent on the storyline into which I was born. As many college undergraduates do, I began to question the values promoted by my family of origin and culture. By this time, my father had an affair, divorced my mother, and abandoned me and my sister.

My mothers’ already fragile mental health markedly deteriorated. Her life spun out of control as she began her descent into alcoholism of which she died some years later. My sister abandoned her role as my caretaker and moved to Boston where her partying slowly morphed into full-blown addictions to cocaine, alcohol, Valium. Nothing about *any* of their lives encouraged me that they ever possessed any credible answers, so it was easier for me to ignore their expectations. In college, I sought new ways to construct a meaningful narrative of my life in the aftermath of my unraveling nuclear family.

This search for an authentic life story was aided by four years in undergraduate school where I read the work of great writers, philosophers, and dramatists. Instinctively, I looked to others’ stories to help fashion a new identity. Through writers’ valuable guidance and also my professors concern and encouragement, I discovered new stories and role models for how I might choose a meaningful and authentic life story. I decided

that I was capable of creating a unique identity that not only replaced my original family role, but which superseded it; and if indeed I could construct a new self-narrative, then mine was going to be just perfect (this unrealistic desire would later backfire as you will see in a few pages). Carr contends:

So it is with the events and actions of our lives; either they are already embedded in the stories provided by our plans and expectations or, if they are not, we look for and anticipate the stories to which they do, will, or may belong. Narrative coherence is what we find or effect in much of our experience and action, and to the extent that we do not, we aim for it, try to produce it, and try to restore it when it goes missing for whatever reason.” (1989, p. 90)

Carr views narrative-making as integral to making sense of our worlds and understanding ourselves in the contexts in which we exist. Similarly, Freeman (1993) declares that “if in fact human temporality, as a fundamental mode of being, is intrinsically linked to narrativity, as has been suggested, then the fabric of the self---by which I mean its constitutive and defining features---is inseparable from narrative” (p. 44). However, trying to live a congruent narrative can sometimes become a challenge.

Wherever You Go, There You Are

Even we are allowed full geographic freedom to move away from our family of origin and the family script, there are unconscious plots and subplots that may surprise us more than the discernible family storyline. Such is the case with the next stage of my life. In *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*, Frank (1995) credits Dworkin with first using the term “narrative wreck” (p. 54), yet it is Frank who has

developed the concept and elaborated on the experiences of “narrative wreckage.” I believe that I could confidently define the next phase of my life as a moderate, yet life-altering, narrative wreck.

In 1982, I am right on target with forging my new and perfect personal narrative. Two weeks after my graduation, I marry my college sweetheart and six months later am pregnant at the age of twenty-two. With naïve enthusiasm and the common sense of an amoeba, I plan to earn a Master’s Degree part-time at night, and during the day I will be the perfect wife and doting mother. My life goals are calculated and simple: (1) stay happily married and never get a divorce (2) create *my own* perfect family with 2.0 children so that I can forget about the dysfunctions of my family of origin and (3) manifest my own perfect career in academe that will quickly culminate with a Ph.D., a tenured professorship, and summers at the beach with my adoring Kodak-moment family.

When I am 26, I have earned a Master’s Degree with honors, have birthed two healthy sons, my husband is promoted, and we buy our first home. My life *looks* absolutely perfect, yet how I feel *inside* is another matter entirely. I did not realize that a narrative wreck could occur so quietly and creep into my life so insidiously. No, I did not suffer any of the atrocious horrors comparable to Holocaust survivors or victims of Stage IV cancer; my wreck was mild to moderate but it was enough of a life derailment that I still live with the dents and scars almost twenty years later.

Maybe the worst part was that I could not blame anyone or anything “out there” for the mess. I had not been physically harmed by others or invaded by unstoppable mutating cells, but still my wreck was aggressive and immobilizing: her name was

Depression and once she cast herself as a leading character in my personal narrative, she was reluctant to give up such a big role.

I can only guess that ever since I was born, Depression had been waiting for the most opportune moment to make her grand entrance into my life. I suspect that she licked her lips in anticipation when she reviewed my genetic make-up. No doubt she was beside herself with delight as my nuclear family deteriorated. She immediately called her Cousin Addiction to ensure that he became my mother's and sister's lovers. Then, when my second son was born, she recognized my mild post-partum depression and decided it was the perfect time to claim center stage. She arrived at my house with dozens of trunks and heavy baggage indicating she was not looking for a bit part, but a long running hit. I did not even hear her come in the door.

Before Depression's entrance, I felt energetic, purposeful, and competent. Time was neatly organized and household tasks were accomplished competently, if not exceptionally well. Life contained moments of minor frustration with two toddlers, but my days were never much of a struggle. I wore clean pressed tan khaki pants during the week and flowing floral dresses to church on Sunday. My two sons looked almost like twins, and I dressed them in matching Oshkosh overalls and coordinated tennis shoes. However, somewhere between Sunday school and the children' department, I realized I was in big trouble.

Kitchen Meltdown

I remember the *exact* moment when I know I am "not okay" anymore. It is a summer evening, and I am sitting at the kitchen table, too exhausted to do anything

except stare at an uncharacteristically large pile of dirty dishes. I know that I need to start dinner. I need to get up, but I cannot move. Only my eyes possess mobility. They scan the kitchen: why is it so messy? How did this happen? What is wrong? Somehow, that day or that week or that month, or that year (I really don't recall), the kitchen has become tainted: two high chairs are covered with Cheerio crumbs, sticky applesauce, and rumpled stained bibs; the dirty brown linoleum floor is covered in Fisher-Price toys and primary-color plastic building blocks; a pile of unopened mail sits by the mustard colored refrigerator that is missing a handle. My eyes return to the stack of dishes a foot tall in the sink. I must wash them.

Then I see the trigger: a plastic sippy cup and its lid that *has* to be washed for my youngest son's dinner tonight. He can't drink out of a regular cup or he spills his milk everywhere. If I don't wash the sippy cup, there will be more mess, more stains, more for me to clean-up and everything is already in such a jumble. I feel numb and lifeless except for pain in my eyes. The stinging abates as a few tears creep out. The stinging stops as my sobs increase in intensity. Finally, I hear a car in the driveway.

When my husband comes through the door, he is afraid the boys are hurt or there has been a death in the family. I can barely stop my crying for long enough to tell him what the problem is. He is an accountant and emotions in particular make him nervous. So do tears and conversations about anything that does not have an equation as a basis. However, in this moment he is kind and encourages me to breathe and tell him what is wrong. I manage to regain my composure for a few fleeting moments and stammer, "The

problem is...” I start crying again and wave my hands toward my face for air and hopefully composure... “the problem is *the yellow sippy cup*...”

I gesture to the crusty sink filled with dirty dishes and the lone yellow plastic sippy cup in the midst of the pile. I continue to try and explain the problem, “...the sippy cup is dirty and I have to wash it and... I don’t have dinner fixed... and I didn’t go to the grocery store... and I can’t stop crying... and I can’t breathe because I can’t stop crying... and the house is a mess.... and the boys need a bath... and I don’t have dinner ready... and there’s nothing to eat... and I forget when I last showered and... the *sippy cup needs to be washed*...” My monologue is drowned out by rousing applause from Depression’s fan club. She smilingly takes center stage and bows. Opening night of her show has finally arrived.

My kitchen is a microcosm of my narrative wreck: it is piled with debris and unattended past messes, is disorganized, it is littered with too many symbolic domestic props, the floor is covered with unidentifiable stains and residue, and I am the disheveled and disheartened protagonist. Unlike June Cleaver, I do not have a spotless home, nor am I am vacuuming in stiletto high-heels and a crisp starched dress (with a cinched waist). My hair is greasy and so is my stovetop, and though my children are not a disappointment *per se*, motherhood is far more emotionally and physically exhausting than I could have ever anticipated. I *am not* a sexy wife, my house and children *are not* clean, I am not pursuing my Ph.D., and my story *is not* on track. I have been derailed.

Somewhere between graduating *magna cum laude* and ensuing motherhood, I have become incapable of thinking straight, of managing my daily affairs, and of

controlling my or others' messes. The crux of this imperfect story is that all I can envision is a futile future that will only be a continuation of my incompetence and the unending demands of two toddlers, both still in diapers, and neither can even drink out of regular cups. Frank contends that "[t]he conventional expectation of any narrative, held alike by listeners and storytellers, is for a past that leads into a present that sets place in a foreseeable future" (1995, p. 55), yet my future looks so mangled that a future-less life looks far better than any possible tomorrow. Suicide begins to look like a highly attractive option.

At the time, I do not have the words or schemata that permits the construction of a better future. In *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Giddens (1991) describes this type of dilemma:

Where an individual feels overwhelmed by a sense of powerlessness in the major domains of his phenomenal world, we may speak of a process of *engulfment*. The individual feels dominated by encroaching forces from the outside, which he is unable to resist or transcend. He feels either haunted by implacable forces robbing him of all autonomy of action, or caught up in a maelstrom of events in which he swirls around in a helpless fashion. (p. 193-194)

I remember the kitchen event because it was so powerful; however, I admit that there are many months where I cannot remember anything except for my non-stop crying and a feeling of living in a dream where I manage to bathe and feed children in between fantasizing about the best way to kill myself. If I am such a failure at living, my logic

contends that dying is something I might be a success at---finally, something I can do well.

Almost Killing Myself, Softly

That summer, I experience a debilitating clinical depression which smacks of the angst experienced by Sylvia Plath. I am shocked by this turn of events and abrupt “complication” in my perfect story. I am afraid that I will kill myself. I certainly think about it enough. I am equally terrified of the emotional pain which has invaded my perfect home and made life unpalatable. With each day, I resist my pain and consequently am a captor to its insistences. My emotional agony is no longer intellectual but visceral. However, that summer I have obligations that are getting in the way of doing messy “deep psychological work.” I have to prepare for my first teaching position, I have to attend to the hourly needs of a one year old and a three year old, and I have to do all of this on a limited budget, without the emotional support of my husband. I recall the intense fragmentation I feel as I experience every day with grave disappointment and inertia. Perhaps the reason I have been able to hold on thus far is that I still believed that if I could just construct a “perfect family” then I would finally be (drum roll): Happy.

The real problem is that I have achieved everything that I ever *thought* I wanted and needed except now I am barely functioning:

Journal Entry

June 17, 1987

Do I hurt? Oh just a little
nothing too serious
just a little death as I die again and again with each split second
I spend in consciousness
trying to act normal at a perfect family dinner
Pass the potatoes oh yes, just a little for me
more tea? Only a little
without ice
NO ICE I SAID DAMMIT
my voices rises as tears fall into the glass
I'm sorry, so sorry
I don't know what's wrong
just nothing extreme
life is too much right now
just a little breath is all I can breathe
in between suicide dreams.

My depression coupled with inconceivable sadness fills me with despair and terror. Killing myself seems to be the only option as I do not have much confidence that I can live through feeling the emotions that will not be stayed for another moment. The hardest part is accepting the ambiguity and incoherence of my emotions. In "Language and

Awareness,” Langer (1997) claims, “Because man [sic] has not only the ability but the constant need of conceiving what has happened to him, what surrounds him, what is demanded of him---in short, of symbolizing nature, himself and his hopes and fears---he has a constant and crying need of expression. What he cannot express, he cannot conceive; what he cannot conceive is chaos, and fills him with terror” (pp. 32-33). I can barely manage to get out of bed each morning, much less dress and feed the children. Still I try to write.

Although in the last chapter I elaborated on Frank’s theory of “narrative wreckage,” I introduce it again here to show how the phenomenon operated in my life, especially in relation to communication. According to Frank, one of the most horrifying features of “chaos” is that it defies narration:

The person living the chaos story has no distance from her life and no reflective grasp on it. Lived chaos makes reflection... impossible... The chaos narrative is always beyond speech, and thus it is always what is *lacking* in speech. Chaos is what can never be told; it is the hole in the telling” (pp. 101-102).

I believe in most cases of moderate to extreme narrative wreckage, a period of chaos either precedes or follows the wreck. Similar to a body’s response to trauma by going into shock, or the emotional shock that augurs denial, severe narrative wreckage defies words.

In my case, when I acknowledged that something was “not okay” with me, I was hard-pressed to tell you what was wrong other than to gesture toward my messy kitchen (interesting to note that this is the one room in a home that is most closely associated with

a woman...). At the onset of my depression, I was in no position to construct a reflexive and sophisticated literary rendition of my condition.

Frank's description correlates with times of my deepest depression when I could not even make phrases that captured my sick inner state:

Journal Entry

June 21, 1987

Depressed again need healing sleep
edgy like a hangover without drink shaky edgy
inside wordless voids of the little girl
I am a failure
inadequate
afraid of my anger
the rage makes me crazy
or is it *silence* that makes me mad?

In the final analysis, I believe it is my willingness to view my depression as a mystery to solve which made it possible for me to stay alive. By this time, I am going to therapy twice a week and am repeatedly assured by professionals and friends that going through the pain *is* possible and will lead to personal growth and transformation. Ellis (2002) writes about the rewards of emotional excavation: "...engaging in the process of uncovering often for me is an activity that initiates recovery. Understanding offers the possibility of turning something chaotic into something potentially meaningful" (pp. 400-

401). Similarly, Kleinman (1995) contends it is our response to pain not the pain itself which is critical:

In the course of experience, people come up against resistance to their life plans...Loved ones die; others fall ill or are seriously incapacitated. Crops or businesses or marriages fail...loss, fear, menace derail life projects...To this dark side of experience we give the name suffering...the result of processes of resistance (routinized or catastrophic) to the flow of experience” (pp. 125-126).

At his point in my depression and attempt at recovery, I stop resisting the feelings and try and embrace them.

Grand Emotions

Because I have subverted my emotions for so long, I do not know how to organize the discomfort in my body into disparate parts. What needs to be acknowledged is not just my sadness, fear, and anxiety, but one emotion that women are really not supposed to feel: anger.

I am trying to be a perfect mother and wife while simultaneously forgetting my volatile and abusive adolescence; however, all of these endeavors elicit an anger that insists on acknowledgment:

Journal Entry

July 15, 1987

Finally in touch with it: anger

I've heard a lot about it

suppressed truckloads of it but now

I'm the angel gone bad that wants to throw a knife at the cat, children, husband
I thought about strangling the dog and then myself for being such a
bad, bad, bad, person
I've kept the pain in check
behind suburban blinds
perfectly ironed khaki pants and starched white tops
but now the pain is bleeding out of me and the anger is erupting in bloody spurts I
can't stop its messy but I can't stop it now
it takes too much energy to contain the pain
can I convert this pain to joy or is this a senseless life
like waiting copper to turn to gold?
I don't know.

This poem, while not literary quality, captures the state of imbalance in my psyche and my anger at the world and myself. The first time I hear the concept of “dis-ease” is that summer at a meeting for Adult Children of Alcoholics in the late 1980's. That time augurs not only the advent of my depression, but also the rise in popularity of numerous 12-Step groups aimed at healing bruised and battered hearts, bodies, and souls.

More recently, is a break through by biophysicist Pert (1997) who literally researches the molecules of emotions. Her professional conclusion is both intriguing and intuitive:

Anger, fear, sadness, the so-called negative emotions, are as healthy as peace, courage, and joy. To repress these emotions and not let them flow freely is a dis-

integrity [or dis-ease] in the system, causing it to act at cross-purposes rather than a unified whole. The stress this creates, which takes the form of blockages and insufficient flow of peptide signals to maintain function at the cellular level, is what sets up the weakened conditions that can lead to disease. All honest emotions are positive emotions. (p. 192)

Perhaps one of Pert's most salient points is her emphasis on the importance of feeling all of the emotions for mental and physical health. Although grief and anger are two of the most undesirable feelings, many therapists concur with Pert and also Greenspan (2003) who states: "Because the human organism wants to heal, dark emotional energy won't give up until it's gotten our attention" (p. 76). Furthermore, Greenspan contends that "Attending to emotional energy is a bodily-grounded awareness... [and] It also includes emotional literacy, the ability to find accurate words for emotional states" (p. 76). I am exceptionally grateful for the gift of my journal writing because it permits a space to try and place words on the page that connect my mind and heart.

As I excavate my interior life, I try to capture my emotions in my journal and reflect on the nuances of my words and attendant revelations. The following poem represents a huge breakthrough in identifying one of the primary sources of my depression, sadness, and anger.

Journal Entry

No date, 1987

Early morning quiet
my only chance at solitude and writing
interrupted by primitive grunts that beg for toddler basics: apple juice
in the yellow sippy cup and a muffin mom
the tears and anger of my unlived life are
becoming unstuffed from way down deep
somehow I'm just somebody's mom
always getting stuff for the boys
giving hugs and band aids and bedtime stories
there isn't much I've forgot except how to be
something besides somebody's mom.

The last sentence, once I write it, helps me to make meaning of my chaos. I concur with Vygotsky (1996) that "A word relates to consciousness as a living cell relates to a whole organism, as an atom relates to the universe. A word is a microcosm of human consciousness" (p. 256). With more writing which explores this theme, I am able to see that in the course of constructing the "perfect family story" I have forgotten to write myself in as a developed character. I am acting as a stereotypical slave to my husband and children and worst of all, I am the author of this depressing, poorly plotted, and unpublished story! Fortunately, with the help of skilled therapists, 12-step meetings, and supportive friends and family, I am able tentatively to begin revising my life story.

Like the mess in my kitchen, at first I lack the ability to create order in my internal world. Fortunately, my usually insensitive husband encourages me to start seeing a therapist and ironically (or “synchronistically” as Jung would contend) in the same month, my only sibling, Lisa, voluntarily (and unbeknownst to me) enters a drug rehabilitation center. She becomes “clean and sober” and has thankfully remained that way to this day. Whether it is coincidence or Divine design, my sister Lisa and I are simultaneously trying to make sense of our lives and are forced to go back to the beginning.

I find it fortuitous and useful that my sister and I were both in the beginning stages of therapy so that we can discuss our family of origin and many of the “secrets” that we had been unable to discuss previously. I worked hard in counseling and in twelve step meetings for Adult Children of Alcoholics to deconstruct the embedded expectations, values, and lies promoted by my family of origin. I also recognize that my sidekick “Depression” had been lurking for a long time and now simply insists on being heard. Instead of fighting her, I begin to try to see why she is so insistent and what she has to say. I am hoping that she is trying to teach me something.

A major part of my healing occurs as I am able to sit in meetings and in counselors’ offices and tell and retell and retell the truth about my pain, abuse, and abandonment as an adolescent. I articulate my chaos narrative until my sentences are whole and my story coheres. Pennebaker, a pioneer in the field of therapeutic writing, concludes (1990), “Just as we are drawn to good stories in literature or the movies, we need to construct coherent and meaningful stories for ourselves. Good narratives or

stories, then, organize seemingly infinite facets of overwhelming events. Once organized, the events are smaller and easier to deal with” (p. 103). Similarly, Monk et al. (1997) assert that “ A counselor using narrative ideas is interested in *restorying* [italics mine] a client’s early life...This form of interaction is a reauthoring process that promotes a person’s redescription of himself [or herself]” (p. 20).

During this time, I write volumes in my journal recounting my disappointing past and current state of dissatisfaction, but I also begin to seek spiritual guidance and change my imagined audience. Instead of my thirteen year-old journal entries, which address an audience of “fictionalized daughters” or later myself, I begin to address God as my audience in my journal entries. Previously, in my “perfect story,” being a mother and wife would supposedly fulfill me; however, I had to look beyond cultural expectations to define who I was and how I would live. When I finally realize that those prescribed roles might fail to deliver sublime satisfaction, I consider that an all-powerful Divine might make a better and less-biased audience:

Journal Entry

September 15, 1987

I feel happy today and it’s a miracle: I’ve had 4 days in a row and I haven’t cried. This is the first time in months that I can remember feeling all my feelings including anger AND still feeling hope, hopeful. Thank you God.

Journal Entry

December 29, 1988

Dear God/Higher Power/Divine Energy, I pray for guidance about what to do to make things better in all of our lives. I love you. I'll keep trying.

One of the reasons I resist asking "the Divine" to help me is that I have been trying to live the "good Christian" story which deems that my role in life is to be a devoted mother and wife. This does not include me pursuing a Ph.D., working full-time, or getting a divorce. However, I decide that God probably does not approve of or desire that I commit suicide, so I consider my options. It takes several months to even allude to a radically altered future, and I remember shaking as I write the following words.

Journal Entry

March 3, 1989

She thought in her mind that this was her internal dialogue: How do I feel? So much that I haven't been able to feel, I suppose. I've opened up mountains of fear and tears, and hope. I am willing to leave; I am willing to be alone, I think, at least for a while. What are the options? What ARE the options? I don't know. How does it start? Am I moving too quickly? I'm afraid, I don't want to know, I'm afraid I'm nobody without him, I'm afraid of being alone but that's what I want more than anything.

I think it is revealing that this journal entry is unusually prefaced with a reference to internal dialogue which I have never done in over thirty years of journaling. In addition, the words I use are much more abstract and the phrases disjointed as compared

to other entries. The words also reflect several of the qualities of a “chaos narrative” as elucidated by Frank, including no period at the end which is uncharacteristic in any of my writing. Bochner (2002) asserts that “[w]riting is a process of turning life into language...All of us rework and reshape the events we are representing or expressing when we render them as language” (p. 89) and I concur. Somehow I knew that that once this idea was written down, everything in my life would change. That is what terrified and concurrently enthralled me.

At the time, my fear is that divorcing my husband will make “God” mad, and I also realize that taking the boys away to live with me alone would hurt them and their dad. He is not a great husband, but he is a doting father. I also realize that economically I will suffer and will also have to work full-time while being a single parent. By now my mother is living alone, in poverty, dying of alcoholism, and I wonder if getting a divorce will also cause my premature demise. Maybe this is how you become a bag lady. Furthermore, I only have a part-time teaching job and no savings. I know that I will not be able to pursue a Ph.D. for years, I will have to live in an apartment, and finding a man who wants to date a woman with a three and six year-old does not bode well for a future remarriage. So, logically asking for a divorce does not seem like a prudent move. Intellectually, it does not compute to doing the “right” thing. However, the best part about rewriting life is that logic doesn’t have to rule. My heart wins this one, and I move out a month later.

The Ending and the Beginning

Journal Entry

April 3, 1989

This feels like the life I should have been living for the past 7 years. I am not lonely inside, I feel whole, complete, serene. Will I ever learn to trust the universe (and myself) wholly? Will I remarry? Will the boys adjust? Will I ever become a writer?

When I read the last line of this entry, I feel grateful. My first journal entry at the age of thirteen speaks of my hopes of being a writer; I assume I dreamed of publishing books or poetry. Ironically, the writing which means the most to me are my thirty-two journals, which recount the depths of my lived experience as an evolving woman. All of my journals and my narrative writing give voice to the emotional interior of my life: the worn pages, erasures, new editions, developments, deletions, insertions, and most of all the many revisions which I have embraced.

I used to think I was a mermaid trapped on land; now I realize that I have many future and possible selves. I can be a mermaid who sometimes lives on land *and* I can be a happy wife (with a new husband), a good mother (with grown sons) and pursue a Ph.D. (after the age of 40) but there is always one constant: wherever I am, I *always* carry a notebook!

In my case, I believe that my journal writing gave me a slate for sense-making, an outlet for expression, and a path toward mental equilibrium when I needed it the most.

Naturally, I am drawn to self-reflective personal writing and autoethnography because the

researcher's narrative is not only included in, but it is *essential* to, the story. In the final analysis, it is unreasonable for me to write a dissertation about the autoethnographic movement and act "objectively" about why I chose *this* as a dissertation topic. When people ask me why I study autoethnography, it is clear to me that everything in my past led to this particular moment, this particular place, this particular topic, and these six years of pursuing a doctorate in the field. When I am asked why I study autoethnography, I don't say all *that*. I simple answer with a smile, "Because it's right. Deep down right." Or I could just say, "It called."

Regardless of my answer or audience, I know that autoethnography is a unique personal tool as well as an effective research method. In the next, and final, chapter I reflect on several issues related to the current state of autoethnography and conclude with my visions for its expansion in the future. In particular, I focus on opportunities and challenges related to employment prospects for future autoethnographers as well as discuss several non-traditional venues for advancing autoethnography.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ASSESSING THE PRESENT AND LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

In this dissertation, I began with an overview of the etiology of the term “autoethnography” from its primarily anthropological use in the 1980’s to its present day application in a variety of disciplines. I also contextualized the movement in relation to the historical rise of personal and literary narratives in response to the crisis of representation and various socio-political shifts. One result was a proliferation of illness narratives, narrative therapy, therapeutic writing, and narrative medicine.

As result of my research, interviews, and participant observation, I expanded on three predominant topics that represent the heart of my project. These chapters explore what motivates scholars to write autoethnographically, how they define and evaluate autoethnography, and their views on issues related to its use as therapeutic practice. The latter topic I discuss at length in Chapter Five and address several ethical and legal concerns that instructors of autoethnography and personal narrative need to consider to protect themselves, their students/readers, and their home institutions. In this final chapter, I discuss opportunities for future advancement of autoethnography, as well as potential challenges and how these may be overcome.

In the sections ahead, I discuss opportunities for expansion in health related areas such as health communication, which are particularly promising for aspiring autoethnographers seeking employment. I also explore various differences between the

first and second generation autoethnographers and how these contrasts affect the latter's career options and the advancement of autoethnography. As I conclude the project, I advocate more cross-disciplinary alliances within the academy and also condone moving autoethnography into mainstream venues. Qualitative research methods are flourishing globally, and autoethnography is uniquely positioned to grow rapidly in the future.

Opportunities in Health Communication

Based on my research, I believe that one area where autoethnography is most likely to enjoy increased development is in the broadly defined field of health communication. One of the strengths of autoethnography is that literally at its center is the word “ethno” which means it is designed to reach out to others. As stated earlier and as shown throughout the dissertation, the majority of those who write autoethnography do so because they have been hurt (physically, mentally, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, or socially) and they have struggled to “heal” from that trauma. My first and third chapters reveal that the majority of my interviewees' wrote their first autoethnographies from trauma and/or a place of physical, mental, or emotional pain. Nevertheless, once they overcame their hurt, they had a desire to aid others in similar situations. Their sympathetic voices are encoded in their writing that affirms, “I was there, too at one time. I hurt then, and thus I can honor and validate your painful experience. Hopefully, my story will affirm your experience and help your suffering become more bearable.”

Because so much personal writing deals with issues of illness, trauma, and hurts of various types, I believe that the real power of autoethnography comes from authors

who have endured pain, who then capture that suffering in words, with the ultimate intention of assisting others. As a side result, writing is usually healing for the writer and most probably therapeutic for readers. The act of writing can be cathartic, but often it is the act of re-reading and revising one's writing that helps people make sense of their experiences. In addition, readers of illness or trauma narratives may become the vicarious benefactor of the author's experience, transformation, and wisdom. Writing and reading illness related stories is often a form of support or catharsis, yet in some instances, it becomes a moral act.

Frank concludes, "In wounded storytelling the physical act becomes the ethical act...In stories, the teller not only recovers her voice; she becomes a witness to the conditions that rob others of their voices. When any person recovers his [or her] voice, many people begin to speak through that story" (1995, xii-xiii). There other reasons, as well, why many people are drawn to both writing and reading about these conditions. Ellis (2006) in notes from her "Grief and Loss" course, proposes a tentative list of why people write and read narratives of illness, grief and loss:

- To frame the experience in alternative ways
- As a comparison to others' experiences
- To figure out how we want to live
- To delve into life's mysteries
- To prepare for death
- To help others cope, to help us cope
- To restore a sense of meaning and coherence

- Reconnect with those we've lost
- See how things connect
- To make wise decisions
- To connect with others in a humane way

Autoethnography will likely continue to advance in the areas of health communication because of the universality of death and illness.

It is clear that there is an explosion in personal writing related to health issues. Many may wonder why there is an intensification in interest in narrative medicine and therapeutic writing now, and I speak to this in some detail in Chapter One, but I also contend that several additional factors have converged to propel the therapeutic writing explosion:

(1) People spend millions of dollars out-of pocket on alternative and complementary health aids. As the word gets around about the healing properties of writing, it will be viewed as an inexpensive and convenient form of self-help therapy. Bolton explains the allure: "Writing is pretty nearly free; can be undertaken by anyone with ordinary writing skills, at any time of life, day or night; and...does not need a professional to dispense or administer it" (qtd. in Hunt and Sampson, 1998, p. 79).

(2) People are more literate than any other time in history and reading and writing are not (as) confined to a certain class; therefore, people's facility with language makes writing easier, especially in terms of using computers.

(3) Technology encourages people to write more than ever before. Communication exchanges that used to occur face-to-face, now often occur by phone, e-mail or text

message. People use writing more in their daily lives than at any other time in history. Similarly, people want to connect to others and writing provides a global and seamless form of communication that can be dispersed in a variety of modalities including via the Internet (via e-mails, blogs, websites, chat rooms, YouTube, MySpace etc.). Furthermore, print-on-demand technology has made it possible for anyone to produce a book at an affordable cost.

(4) New forms of first-person journalism and media vehicles, such as reality shows (and the technologies listed above), demonstrate that there is an audience who yearns to understand the intimate experiences of others.

(5) In a fast paced world of post-post-modernism, threats of terrorism, global economic and political upheaval, people have a desire for groundedness and writing is a way to concretize experience and make sense of a chaotic world.

For these and related reasons, the future of therapeutic writing has untapped potential. Lepore and Smyth (2002) discuss its possibilities:

More research...is needed to address ways in which the [therapeutic writing] intervention could be disseminated and implemented outside the context...of research studies. Public health frameworks and models such as ...social marketing, and communication theory may be valuable in the development of community level interventions. Appropriate points of intervention (e.g. work sites, schools) and effective modes of reaching people and delivering the intervention (e.g. through media programs, self-help materials, Web sites) must be identified. (pp. 211-212)

One application of therapeutic writing that has been explored outside of the United States uses a different approach than has thus far been mentioned. In England, at the Institute of Primary Care and General Practice, Sheffield University General Practitioners participated in a study employing writing exercises for their patients. Patients who presented with depression or anxiety were asked by their doctors to participate in expressive writing exercises. One of the General Practitioners in the study commented, “Dis-ease is when patients are not at ease with their bodies. Patients present with many psychological problems, which it is important not to medicalise. But *they* feel they need to present with medical symptoms, and feel embarrassed to show emotions. Writing is a way of opening this area out” (qtd. in Hunt and Sampson, 1998, p. 79).

Whether writing about illness or discussing sickness with a medical professional, certain narrative structures underpin both activities. While much of current health communication practices evolved from traditional social science traditions, ethnographers such as Patricia Geist-Martin and Laura Ellingson are making progress promoting personal narrative and autoethnography in health education and communication. Furthermore, health communication covers a broad spectrum of topics from social and cultural issues, to social marketing and health campaigns (du Pre', 2005; Wright, Sparks and O'Hair, 2008), and ample employment opportunities are currently available.

A recent visit to the *Chronicle of Higher Education's* website shows that health communication is one of the most promising fields in terms of number of advertised job openings. Many graduate students may want to consider positions at institutions such as hospices, hospitals, or non-profit organizations. The job prospects both in and out of the

academy should encourage current and potential autoethnographers who study health and related issues. As exemplars, Elissa Foster, one of my interviewees, and her partner Jay Baglia, are both graduates from the doctoral program in the Communication Department of the University of South Florida and now work at Lehigh Valley Hospital. Both were previously employed in academe but now are using their expertise in health communication in their roles as medical educators. Certainly health communication is a field that is growing quickly and offers a great deal in terms of future research, as well as employment opportunities for those interested in health and illness narratives.

While this is promising news, part of my research project was to study the future of autoethnography and discern its potential problems as well as its possible futures. Before I explore some of the challenges facing second-generation autoethnographers, it is necessary first to discuss further the first-generation's experience in the academic arena. Following that, I will compare and contrast the unique constraints and opportunities for second-generation autoethnographers.

First Generation Autoethnographers

In the months of writing this dissertation, one topic that continually required revision was my impression of the first-generation autoethnographers. As part of my research, I had read almost all their books and articles, but Carolyn pushed me to read more about what they said about their experiences in coming to the field. I knew I was not quite “nailing” it right especially when I concluded in an early draft that they did not deliberately intend to create a movement. I made it seem as if they had just “happened” upon qualitative research and magically their careers escalated. Originally, I attributed

much of their success to their young ages when they earned their doctorates (as opposed to many second generation autoethnographers who are considered “mature” students such as myself). While this was one factor in their achievements, it does not tell the whole story. My initial version read like a brief newspaper article:

The majority of first-generation autoethnographers earned their doctorates at a young age (most in their early to late twenties) and were ambitious. They devoted themselves to the academic life and advanced through the ranks via hard their hard work, substantial service, and numerous publications. These accomplishments earned them the highly coveted status of “full professor.” At this point, because they had attained the highest rank afforded in the academy, they had the freedom to study narrative inquiry, qualitative research, and autoethnography. In conjunction with peers who had similar goals and values, they generously applied decades of their talent and intellect to advance qualitative scholarship. Due to this think-tank’s shared motives, means, and opportunities, a blossoming occurred in qualitative research, interpretive ethnography, narrative, and autoethnography. I think of this period as a phenomenon whereby the time/place/people were perfectly synchronized to generate a quantum leap in qualitative writing and autoethnography.

My original explanation for the burgeoning of personal narratives was akin to the song lyrics that extol the virtues of a time “when the moon was in the seventh house and Jupiter aligned with Mars” which may or may not have been a factor. Nonetheless, Carolyn refused to let me rely on that as a primary explanation. She sent me away to read more because I was missing a crucial historical connection. Now, after digesting

tomes about post-modernism, the crisis of representation, poststructuralism, and paradigm shifts, I understand better the cultural climate that made their work possible. When I demonstrated my current understanding of this topic, Carolyn finally shared her version of their success in a telephone conversation from North Carolina.

After a lengthy discussion, I reiterated to Carolyn what I heard: “So you are saying that the reasons you think the first generation was successful when it was is because (1) you were all formally educated in traditional disciplines such as sociology and communication (2) it was a time when there were decent job options in academe (3) you all ended up teaching in Ph.D. programs and obtained reputations and positions prior to doing qualitative work (4) historically the crisis of representation and the paradigm shift that Kuhn (1996) talks about, made the times ripe for change and rebellion, especially for women and minorities and (5) you helped each other professionally by reviewing each other’s manuscripts and you also started journals and book series?” She said “Yes, now did you write that down?” I said, “I got it” but what I really meant was I *got* it—finally. I still thought my version had some merit but admittedly lacked the socio-cultural component necessary for this type of a research endeavor (for the formal review of these cultural movements as related to autoethnography, see Chapter One and also the first-generation panel section in Chapter Three).

However, one unexpected benefit from better understanding the first-generation’s success was that it better positioned me to examine the challenges and opportunities facing the second generation.

Potential Constraints of the Emerging Autoethnographers

Like many others, I came to study autoethnography as a “mature” student. I left a tenured, Assistant Professor position in English at a community college at the age of 40 to earn my Ph.D. Although I was committed to studying narrative and earning my doctorate, I soon realized that pursuing a Ph.D. requires a tremendous commitment of time, energy and finances. Berger (2007) notes that the “average student takes 8.2 years to get a Ph.D...Fifty percent of students drop out along the way, with dissertations being a major stumbling block” (para. 3). Many significant factors have to be considered by the mature student, such as whether to work full-time (which most say is close to impossible as a doctoral student) or to work part-time and/or as a teaching assistant which is almost full-time work, yet garners poverty-level wages (which is a bit embarrassing if you are not so young). Furthermore, older students may not want to leave their geographic area to study at one of the few universities specializing in interpretive/autoethnographic studies. As part of my mission, I went online and searched the National Communication Association [NCA] database and was able to make a few determinations. I wanted to see how many institutions of higher education in the United States offered a Ph.D. in Communication.

While the NCA database revealed that 77 institutions offer doctoral programs in Communication, many of these are focused on media, broadcast, or journalism studies. A concentration in “General Communication” yielded 23 institutions; “Other” concentrations yielded 15 universities. The highest number of institutions offering doctoral degrees numbered 36 institutions for “Organizational Communication” and 39

for “Interpersonal Communication.” There was no category related to narrative inquiry, qualitative research, autoethnography, or ethnography. Looking at these numbers is thought-provoking. No matter what the age of a doctoral student, many may not want to leave their community to pursue graduate work or future employment, or they have partners or children who do not want to be uprooted. Many of the second-generation autoethnographers and those following will have, or may want to have, children. The responsibilities of spousal or parental commitments may likely serve as constraining factors.

With the Ph.D. taking so many years to complete, the issues of geographic location, sacrifices of time and money are not to be taken lightly. I personally have spent almost \$50,000 to date in the process of pursuing my doctorate. Then there is always a question of finding a job. Despite the immense personal gain after graduation, most graduates have an interest in securing employment, particularly a coveted tenure-track position in academe. Unfortunately, “[b]ecause full-time, non-tenure track positions are also increasing...tenured and tenure-track positions have become decidedly in the minority” (Jaschik, 20007, para. 2). Similarly, according to the American Association of University Professors, adjuncts now “account for nearly 70 percent of professors at colleges and universities, both public and private” (*New York Times*, 2007, para. 8). It is also a distinct possibility that it will be more difficult for some of us who are more mature to secure a job due to age discrimination. Another less attractive scenario is that new Ph.D.s will need to take any reasonable academic position available even if it is not related to their academic specialty. While the first-generation certainly did not have it

easy, the second-generation faces incredible competition to simply secure tenure-track jobs, especially at institutions that embrace qualitative methods and/or autoethnography.

The World Now

For many of us, the events of September 11th occurred while we were still in graduate school or new hires (both Chris Poulos and Larry Russell were newly graduated Ph.D.'s just six weeks into their first tenure-track appointments). This tragic event was destabilizing for millions, but I wonder if the uncertainty and anxiety of the day is affecting the second-generation in untold ways? What I often sensed from my interviewees was a low-grade anxiety and sense of fear. Certainly much of this could be because they are not as professionally established as the first-generation, but I also feel that “the times” make many kinds of risk less attractive.

As I write this in 2008, the United States is still engaged in a war in Iraq and a “war on terrorism.” Almost everyone I know has been deeply affected by the signs of a troubled economy and the term “recession” is now a household word. The depressed housing market, high employment rate, educational budget cuts, mortgage crisis, plunging stock market, cost of health insurance, devaluation of the dollar, global outsourcing, price of gas, and tensions of an upcoming presidential election are creating a volatile and unpredictable environment.

The United States is experiencing sustained economic upheaval, and it is not clear when or how the circumstances will improve. Because of these uncertainties, I struggle to stay positive, avoid risks in general, and try not to obsess too much about my future, financial burdens, or the war. I certainly cannot speak for everyone in my position, but I

think some of the limitations of the second generation must be acknowledged in order to lead to creative solutions.

Recapping the Challenge

As discussed above, here are some issues that may constrain the advancement of autoethnography via Ph.D. Communication students: (1) undertaking a Ph.D. involves a 5-8 year time/energy commitment, in addition to a sacrifice of finances without an assurance that it will lead to gainful employment (2) tenure-track jobs are rapidly diminishing due to the historical and economic climate and competition for these jobs is fierce even among highly-qualified candidates and (3) in the United States of the dozens of institutions offering Ph.D.'s in Communication only a handful offer specialization in qualitative, narrative, or autoethnographic studies, and, finally (4) *as a result* of the limited number of Ph.D. programs, the geographic, time, financial commitments and unpredictability of secure employment upon graduation (especially for “mature” students who are often attracted to studying autoethnography) the proliferation of autoethnographic seeds via doctoral students is greatly hindered.

I remember hearing Carolyn’ voice in one of the ICQI panels saying, “I do not believe we’re getting enough of our students into universities where there are Ph.D. programs where they can teach other people to do this. And to me that has been a roadblock that I’ve never been able to figure out quite what to do about.” I knew that technically I could complete this dissertation without having any profound revelations about this conundrum, but the problem haunted me. I went over the issue again and

again: we needed more Ph.D. programs with autoethnographic studies and more Ph.D. students who studied it in order to secure the future of autoethnography.

While driving, sleeping, showering, reading, walking, waiting in line, cooking, I would ask myself the question over and over: “How do we get more Ph.D. students to study autoethnography so they can teach others autoethnography?” Then I would ask myself why I cared so much about this particular method of inquiry but that answer always came easily: *autoethnography is a unique combination of art and science with a focus on helping others.* When I remembered my purpose, I was reenergized.

Patterns

Nascent answers came tentatively as I read through my interviews and field notes. I slowly saw patterns emerge. Some concepts were obvious, others needed elaboration, and a few I dismissed repeatedly, but they refused to recede into my mind. All of the following ideas came to me as the combined result of: re-reading the autoethnographic work of first and second generation scholars as well as critiques of autoethnography; listening and attending numerous conferences over the years including SSSI, ICQI and NCA annual meetings; reading posts for the past two years on the international Autoethnography listserv; and conducting in-depth interviews and informal discussions with qualitative researchers. All of these endeavors are fueled by my passionate belief that autoethnography is a unique, artistic form of scholarship with an immense power to help others.

Professional Options

The following sections discuss numerous ways that autoethnography can be advanced more efficiently and diversely. Part of the problem all along was that I had focused too much attention on the narrow question of “how do we get more Ph.D. students to study autoethnography so they can teach others autoethnography?” Answers finally came to me when I broadened the inquiry to “how do we advance autoethnography?” In the simplest of terms, I contend that in order to advance autoethnography significantly, we need more *types of eggs*, in more *kinds of baskets* in more varied *places*. I offer a plan of action that will advance the autoethnographic movement and certainly includes still training Ph.D. students to become scholars and professors in the traditional sense. However, it does not rely on them as the *only* conduits to disseminate autoethnography.

The Dream

Originally I started with the precise question of “how can we advance autoethnography via doctoral students and within higher education, particularly Communication departments?” The problem with my question was revealed to me during a dream after weeks of reading and re-reading my research findings. In the dream, I was cheerfully giving away bumper stickers and very cool black t-shirts to anyone who wanted one. Both had the phrase printed on them: “Autoethnography: Out of the Tower and Into the Streets.” The dream was pleasant and when I woke up I was in a good mood but couldn’t figure out the symbolism---at least not at first. However, I am a firm believer in the power of the subconscious mind to instruct especially when I am

immersed in a writing project. I concluded that the message was to take autoethnography from the tower (academic audiences) to the streets (meaning common people?).

So then I asked myself, “what is the disconnect between the tower and the street?” Fortunately, I remembered something that Norman Denzin had said. In one of the panels at the 2007 ICQI, he discussed the problem of “insularity of discourses” and was referring to insularity of writing within our own discipline. I began to realize that not only are we in the tower, we may be in our own wing on the top floor. So my first thought is that we have to make autoethnography mobile...it could MOVE ...out of our wing, into other discourses in our own disciplines, into others’ disciplines, into politics, schools, medicine, popular magazines, global academic towers, global streets, and into pedestrian bookstores around the planet. Why not? Of the autoethnographic pioneers, we already had role models: Carolyn, Norman, and Laurel were trained in one discipline and then crossed-over to Communication. Autoethnography is a versatile approach and well-suited for travel within and without of academe.

The Atlantic Divide

I think back to Lesa Lockford’s comments in the “Let’s Get Personal Panel II” at the Qualitative Inquiry conference:

I really would like to see our work move outside of academic circles...autoethnography is uniquely situated as a scholarly endeavor to speak to people who don’t want to get bogged down in academic jargon...a lot of our work really can do that. You see journals in the Sunday *New York Times Magazine*, or

Mother Jones or various other publications... why aren't we writing in those venues?

Lesa and I discussed this topic in more detail in our private interview. When we were together she iterated, "I would love to see our work get a broader appeal, you know a broader audience," yet when I probed deeper she admitted that "those are hard placements to make."

She continued to relay her story of an article she wrote involving Pat Tillmann, a teenage football player who turned down a 3 million dollar contract to play with the Arizona Cardinals in order to join the war in Iraq. Soon after, he was killed by friendly fire and there was an elaborate governmental cover-up. Lesa goes on to explain that she wrote an evocative piece about these events, and when she presented it at a conference, someone enthusiastically said she should publish it in *Atlantic Monthly*. Lesa continues:

You know, I bought an *Atlantic Monthly* and I was thinking 'how do you try to place this thing?' [the Pat Tillmann story] and in the end I just couldn't figure out how. I didn't try that hard but I just sent it to Norman [Denzin] and he's publishing it. So here's the dilemma, on one hand I'm really glad that it's got a home and it's the perfect readership for it in lots of ways, but there's also a way in which I say, 'if there's ever a piece that is one that could have an audience outside of academe that I've written---that one's as close as it gets.'

During our interview I did not think too much about the goldmine inherent in her comments. However, as part of my ongoing research, I returned home and began rereading Lesa's book, *Performing Femininity: Rewriting Gender Identity* (2004).

I was struck once again at the scope of her work. Then I recalled that she had said in our interview that “I just couldn’t figure out how” to place the Pat Tillmann piece. Now, here is a woman who wrote a brilliant book with over 140 references, earned a Ph.D. but couldn’t “figure out” how to try and get this piece published in the *Atlantic Monthly*? Then it came to me: I think it is not that Lesa couldn’t figure out how (she is quite intelligent and resourceful enough), it’s that she was never *taught how* in the academy.

Scholars pride themselves on intelligence and mental rigor so it’s not that we are incapable of learning the ropes when it comes to publishing in the mainstream. We simply do not pursue this avenue because not only is it not rewarded, it is *discouraged*. In higher education, our intellectual writing is rewarded by “placing” our work in scholarly venues, not mainstream outlets. Lesa, a highly talented scholar and creative writer, also highlights two other critical points: while she knew the Tillmann piece was appropriate for a mainstream audience, she said (1) “these are hard placements to make” and (2) “I didn’t try that hard.” I am in no way being accusatory because many times I have felt exactly the same way. I myself have self-published two books that I will not include on my curriculum *vita* because I am embarrassed that it makes me look “inauthentic” as a scholar.

Carolyn Ellis describes a similar example of this schism that occurs *within* academe (2006), “Analysis and theorizing on the pages of social science journals is the preserve of an elite class of professionals who wittingly or unwittingly divide the world

into those who see the light and those kept in the dark” (p. 436). Yet, I feel this is also (and perhaps especially) a discrimination that carries to outside of the academy.

What I find potentially exciting is that autoethnography is uniquely positioned to bridge this divide and help to “... undercut conventions of writing that foster hierarchy and division” (Ellis, 2006. p. 436). Every now and then, autoethnography has been the target of criticism within the academy because it is evocative, therapeutic and “popular,” yet this is also its strength and makes it *ideally* suited to go to the mainstream.

One of the most interesting findings of my research was that several of the interviewees indicated a desire to succeed in the mainstream [Trujillo, Rambo, Lockford, and Foster] but I sensed they did not pursue it vigorously because popular writing is not “serious” enough or “credible” enough. It is also difficult, but not impossible, to publish in the mainstream. However, there is another problem that relates to the competition for tenure and academic promotion.

Lesla explains, “Another issue...is if you publish in *Atlantic Monthly* and you’re an untenured faculty member, it’s not going to count... [like] in an academic journal. And you have to have enough numbers of publications by the time you go up for tenure and you have to make the strongest case for tenure that you can.” Yet one of the most persuasive objections was articulated by Carol Rambo. When I asked her if she had any desire to publish mainstream writing, she summed up her objection, “It doesn’t count.” While several factors are considered for tenure and promotion such as student evaluations, service work, and professional development, publications also play a part. Carol continued, “It doesn’t count toward your tenure and it doesn’t count toward your

promotion.” She then shared, “When you’re being evaluated, it has to be scholarly journals...or the right press with the right kind of theory or whatever it is woven into your book. I’ve thought about it myself [mainstream publishing] and I have an article I can’t get published because my IRB shut it down. Everyone who reads it says it’s the best thing I’ve ever written in my life.”

I am intrigued with this and ask her to share the details of why her IRB [Institutional Review Board] objected. She then tells me something shocking: “Because they’re telling me if I publish it anywhere I’ll lose my job...because he said, I don’t care if it’s [published in] *Field and Stream*.” She continues:

When I got this rejection from the IRB, I walked to the bookstore and I bought a big chunky 2004, at the time it happened, *Writer’s Market* because I was devastated. It’s the best thing I’ve ever written. It wasn’t about their mandate, they felt all these different things, but basically it was just too risqué for them I think.

When I hear Carol’s story, I am horrified by this kind of policing. In an impractical, yet ideological, moment I suggest, “Well, if they said you would lose your job then maybe you should just lose your job.” She responds, “Well, you say that, but I’ve got a baby boy...” I admire Carol’s writing skills and am still looking for a way for her to get this story out and to the people. “What about a pseudonym...do you think it would come back to you anyway?” Resigned, she shrugs and says, “I just don’t know.”

I note that when they were inspired, Lesa bought and *Atlantic Monthly* and Carol bought a *Writer’s Market*--both very clear indicators of their interest in mainstream

publishing. Yet despite their curiosity and desire, neither followed through on their impulses. In the panel featuring first-generation autoethnographers, it was Bud Goodall who pushed for scholars to go more public with their valuable research and writing:

We have to demonstrate that we're capable of giving something both to the academy and to the more general publics that pay us university salaries to live this great life... But it's also going to take some practical things. *How well do we train generations of writers in the practicalities of being a writer? About getting a literary agent? Writing a literary inquiry? Putting together a blog? Putting together a website? These are things that should be part and parcel of the enterprise that we call academic preparation for a future. Because unless we give our students those tools, unless we cultivate that, it's like throwing someone into a very competitive, highly competitive market, without any skill. Other than that they can write and they can have a voice, and in this day and age that's just not quite enough* [italics mine].

Later, in an interview with Nick Trujillo, I mentioned Goodall's suggestion that academicians pursue parallel tracks that include training to get agents and publish in mainstream works. Nick agreed saying, "Well, if we're going to have our work in popular publications then, yes, we need to train people." However, he throws out a sobering thought: "Stephen King wrote a book about writing and he said he could paper his house with rejection letters. If you're a popular writer, you get hundreds of them. I don't think academics are writing for 50 rejection letters." Good point, however, I believe one of the most important findings of this research is that we should empower all

graduate students not only to write literature reviews, research questions, and methods chapters but the rudiments of publishing outside of academe.

Regarding getting published outside of the academy, Nick concludes: “The Ph.D. [alone] means nothing and plus we’re not taught how to pitch...to really publish in magazines, you have to call, you have to pitch, you have to be a go-getter and we’re not taught to do that.” What I found particularly interesting was that so many of those who I interviewed stated that they had looked into getting published in the mainstream, but there was also a recurring sense of fear about such endeavors.

Publishing’s Turn

So far I detected the following problems: (1) academicians need to support themselves and their families financially, which is traditionally secured by the promise of long-term employment via tenure and promotions (2) academicians must publish in peer-reviewed journals and academic presses to get tenure and to get promoted, all of which is becoming more and more competitive (3) if they publish only autoethnographic work they may encounter resistance such as in the contended tenure case of Chris Poulos (4) if for some reason they do write for mainstream audiences, the work will not count toward tenure or promotion and if they do it anyway, it may have a detrimental effect such as in the case of Carol Rambo (5) when they can finally achieve the rank of full Professor (which may take ten or more years) they “don’t need vitae lines” (Lockford) and they have the freedom to write whatever they want without fear of reprisal (7) however, some of us, due to advanced age, may be ready to retire by then.

So in short, there is no real incentive for academics to pursue publishing outside of the mainstream-- or so it *seemed*. I just kept getting the feeling that I was asking the wrong questions or looking for the wrong answers. Then something dawned on me: what if mainstream publishing WAS rewarded in academe?

In a spotlight panel related to tenure at the ICQI conference, Mitch Allen, editor of Left Coast Press, iterated that while publishing with a university press is considered the “golden rod” by tenure committees, that most university presses have become “different kind of publishers than they were a decade or two ago.” He continued to assert that:

More and more they are looking for trade books, books that will go to a general public audience that they can sell at bookstores...their standards for academic rigor have become intermixed with their standards for public sale. At this point it's much easier for a young scholar to get published by a university press if they have written a good narrative that has potential to be a more popular book so that's good news... [and] if you have a book that has 50,000 copies out there you're probably more likely to be able to get a tenure committee to think that's pretty good than if it's 300 copies.

As a life-long academician, I like our ivory tower, as it is often a very cozy to be especially with the right mix of colleagues. Plus, the view is great and it is nice and quiet so I can get my writing and researching done. However, I am beginning to realize that I am, and my scholarship is, lonely up here. In *A Methodology of the Heart* (2004) Ron Pelias confesses that this work is an example of “alternative methodological possibilities

for generating research” that “strive to connect heart to heart” (p. 12). A primary impetus for writing the book was deep dissatisfaction with academic treatises that were read by few, devoid of emotion, and did little good in the larger social arena (pp. 11-12). Ron’s sentiments echo an earlier lament from Laurel Richardson (2000):

Qualitative work could be reaching wide and diverse audiences, not just devotees of the topic or the author. It seems foolish at best, and narcissistic and wholly self-absorbed at worst, to spend months or years doing research that ends up not being read and not making a difference to anything but the author’s career.

(p. 517)

Laurel also speaks from experience about trying to reach a larger public. In her *Writing Strategies: Reaching Diverse Audiences* (1990) she discusses her trade book *The New Other Woman* (1985). However, that book was published over two decades ago and she confesses that if she were to write a trade book again, she would do it differently:

I would try even harder to get an agent, especially if I were interested in a large publishing houses...I might take a course in trade publishing, read books about the process...and talk with experienced colleagues. In any case, I would want the book to be sponsored and recommended to a specific editor by an agent, sales representative, acquisitions editor, or a colleague who had published with that editor or reviewed him/her. (1990, p. 31).

More recently, a scholar discusses her experience with mainstream publishing.

An article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Whisnant, 2008) features a story titled, “Notes From a Book Tour: A Ph.D. Hits the Road to Promote Her Crossover Book About

the Blue Ridge Parkway.” She recounts her adventures autographing her books in small and large bookstores as an overall positive experience but draws a similar conclusion as Laurel’s: “I [wish] I had sought a trade publisher. For an author, the economics of publishing with a university press are discouraging” (p. C3). I was also reminded that Carolyn had also considered publishing mainstream (Ellis, 2004, pp. 263-264) and *Final Negotiations* (Ellis, 1995) was in one instance called an autobiography (1996, Zussman) and listed as a trade book, showing up in some bookstores. Buddy Goodall actually had several mainstream publishing projects which he describes in his latest book (2008).

According to Mitch Allen and Bud Goodall times *are changing* and we can use that to our advantage. Goodall even goes so far as to assert that if we can make our narratives matter, we can effect “necessary moral recovery of our nation, the rebuilding of justice to guide human institutions, ensuring the health of all our citizens and sustainability of our beautiful blue but tortured planet, our work will attain a value ... far greater than gold” (2008, p. 283). At the very least, I feel strongly that a primary mission for second and third generation autoethnographers is to attempt to take their work “mainstream.” Another exciting prospect is that there is nothing keeping academics from publishing in the mainstream *and* scholarly journals if that is what it takes to get tenure or a promotion. In fact, the American Sociological Association (ASA) has already made strides in that direction in their promotion and support of public sociology.

Public Sociology

Of particular interest to me was how reading about “public sociology” enhanced my understanding of some of the promises and pitfalls of any extra-academic pursuit.

Publishing academic work for the public is a topic that is already being addressed and argued about by many sociologists. At the 2004 annual American Sociological Association (ASA) meeting, Michael Burawoy's presidential address called for a move toward a "public" sociology that would be "distinguished by its use of reflexive knowledge and its appeal beyond the university (Zussman and Misra, 2007, p. 3). What is intriguing is that I believe that we can "go to school" on the issues and enlightenment augured by this shift in sociology. After all, autoethnography is a social science and shares many qualities inherent in sociology. Furthermore, this topic is hotly debated and issues that are raised are equally as applicable if we want to "take autoethnography to the streets," yet maintain the intellectual rigor of the writing.

Burawoy reports that the ASA has already "established a task force for the institutionalization of public sociologies, which will include three key issues" (p. 57). These include (1) validation of existing public sociologies (2) introduction of incentives to reward its pursuit in academia and (3) determinations of what distinguishes "good from bad public sociology" because he underscores: it cannot be "second-rate" sociology (pp. 57-58). In fact, these issues are the very ones that unwittingly underpin my thematic chapters: I ask how do we define and evaluate autoethnography? How do we help others? How do we teach and how do we reward writing it in the academy? According to Zussman and Misra:

As both his sympathizers and critics acknowledge, taking Burawoy's plea for a public sociology seriously would require rethinking and remaking our relationship to the university, our relationship to other disciplines, the ways we train graduate

students, the ways we reward and honor colleagues, and last (not least) the way we practice politics. And these are no small matters” (2007, p. 7).

Change is inevitable but the latter point illustrates why it is slow. Once a part of any system is modified, then the entire infrastructure is disturbed. However messy or taxing the process might be, it is also to consider expanded publishing options.

A perfect example of “scholarship gone mainstream” is a riveting book I recently read entitled, *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* (2007). The author, Maryann Wolf, is an education professor at Tufts University with a Harvard doctorate but her “popular” book published by HarperCollins is a fascinating read. I anticipate (and frankly hope) that this type of writing is part of the academic future, especially autoethnography. Her conclusions are intellectual but accessible, and what I found most interesting was the way she incorporated her formal research. In a preface to the “Notes” section at the end of the book, Wolf writes:

...this book is based on hundreds of invisible sources. Because it is a trade book meant for general audiences, I have not given all these sources immediately in a reference or a footnote, as is my way in academic writing. Rather I have used this notes section with catch phrases rather than numbers for giving background information...All the reference materials are found here. (p.237)

This dual-approach to writing could serve at least two critical purposes: it could still help traditional academics secure tenure while simultaneously advancing scholarship to an exponentially larger audience: mainstream and global readers. Then I pondered the

question, “what if writing for the mainstream was not only “tolerated” but “celebrated” and could dramatically increase *academic* job prospects?

Creative Graphy

During this intense questioning phase, ideas came to me in unusual ways. At the time, I was employed at a liberal arts school, Eckerd College, teaching in a program for adult learners. I taught the course “Life learning and Vocation” (LLV), which was mandatory to pass before students proceeded with the remainder of their studies. One of the primary reasons I was hired was because I had a background in both English and autoethnography, and the heart of the LLV course was an assignment whereby students had to write an autobiographical paper. In this self-narrative, they were to reflect on the meaning of their lives until this point and then anticipate possible futures. It was a wonderful course to teach and the papers were not always refined, but always deeply interesting and evocative.

In the course of the semester, I met several other adjuncts as well as full-time professors of the college and was surprised at their reactions when I shared details of my autoethnographic research. Whether they taught history, literature, composition, or political science, they “got” the concept. What I had not counted on was the ways in which so many of them focused on the “graphy” aspect of autoethnography and seemed to assume that of course I would write about others (ethno) and use myself (auto) as the lens. No matter what, the staff and faculty continually referred to me as a writer or a writing teacher, even though I was in no way affiliated with the English Department. It was only in retrospect that I realized how useful their “perceptions” might be.

During this same term, I conducted my dissertation interviews with second-generation autoethnographers, and noted how many of them had degrees in fields other than communication including: sociology, theatre, counseling, playwriting, religion and philosophy. Of particular interest to me were those who were trained in fields related to “creative writing” (Foster, Lockford, Russell) and especially Laura Ellingson who has two master’s Degrees: one is in Communication and the other is in Creative Non-Fiction.

My background is similar; in undergraduate school, I double-majored in English and Communication, with minors in Theatre and Psychology. I then earned a Master’s Degree in English and later studied creative writing formally as part of a Master’s in Fine Arts program, as well as avocationally. Finally, my Ph.D. studies in Communication culminated in an investigation of personal writing, health communication, and narrative inquiry with a focus on autoethnographic writing. I also realized that several of my fellow Ph.D. students had training in creative writing and/or English. As I pondered the larger question of “how do we advance autoethnography?” a “novel” idea came to me.

Autoethnography has sometimes fallen under the rubric of “creative non-fiction” and I recall a line from the 1996 *Composing Ethnography* (Ellis and Bochner). In a dialogue with Art, Carolyn states the purpose of the book (the first in the “Ethnographic Alternatives” series): “What we’re trying to do is enlarge the space to practice ethnographic writing as a form of creative non-fiction, to take certain expressive liberties associated with the arts, but to feel the ethical pull of converting data into experiences readers can use” (p. 28). Similarly, Ruth Behar (1999) concludes, “I have come to believe strongly that...we must learn to produce ethnographic work that is more

accessible than it has been in the past” and she continues to assert “If we can get our stories out there...I believe we can make a significant contribution to public knowledge and public debate” (p. 540). Behar even asks, “Is ethnography a form of creative nonfiction?” (p. 540). Although the term “creative non-fiction” does not imply a guaranteed connection to scholarship, I decided to explore if this might be a potential vehicle for “advancing” autoethnography.

Could autoethnographers stay in academe and join the ranks of “popular writers” without compromising our standards of including theory and scholarship? If so, could the discipline of “creative writing” serve as an additional conduit for promulgating autoethnography? I wondered if budding autoethnographers who wrote “creative dissertations” (like I and so many of my colleagues have) would then qualify to teach creative writing (including autoethnography or similar variations) in colleges and universities? If so, were there promising job openings? Did the field of Creative Writing have more tenure-track positions, especially in creative non-fiction? Then I realized that many of my interviewees also had skills in playwriting and poetry writing---I would look into that as well.

I began with research. As a critical point of clarification, a doctorate is *not* necessary to teach Creative Writing at colleges or universities. An M.A. is required, but the Master of Fine Arts in Writing (MFA) *is* regarded as a terminal degree and puts the recipient in a position to apply for tenure-track positions. The MFA usually takes 2 years to complete and graduates exit the program with a book-length manuscript in their genre. Sometimes a teaching practicum is required, sometimes it is not. Furthermore, from 2006

to 2007, the Associated Writer's and Writing Program Association (AWWP) database reports that there were 916 full-time academic job openings in creative writing and 484 of those were tenure-track creative writing positions in higher education. Now this was indeed interesting news, but I wondered if people with Ph.D.s in Communication, particular with a narrative or autoethnographic focus, would be attractive candidates for any of these coveted 484+ tenure-track jobs? All I could think of was autoethnographers like Lesa Lockford and Carol Rambo finally being rewarded for mainstream writing while still having the prestige and options afforded by having a Ph.D.

The most direct answers came from responses to e-mails from two program directors of Creative Writing Departments. Rita Ciresi is the program director of the brand new (beginning in the Fall of 2008) MFA in Creative Writing at the University of South Florida. Regarding securing a tenure-track job, she candidly explained that degrees were largely irrelevant unless applicants had publications. She said that for one recently advertised tenure-track position, more than two hundred of candidates applied for the job and at least twenty "were stars." Ciresi herself has an MFA in Creative Writing and has several published novels to her credit. I accepted her news graciously and then sent an e-mail to Sterling Watson, who has an M.A. in English, is also the author of several novels, and is the head of the Creative Writing Department at Eckerd College.

Sterling wrote back that he (like Ciresi) didn't care so much about applicants' degrees (as long as they had at least a Master's in something vaguely humanities related). Conversely, he did care about how much they had published. He relayed that he had interviewed some potential new hires, all had Master's degrees but only a few of the

candidates had book-length manuscripts to show him. He implied that this was *very bad news*. Apparently at least one book was a necessity. I thanked him graciously and began to type up my findings.

In the midst of writing, it occurred to me that many autoethnographers I interviewed *had* book-length manuscripts in the form of their dissertations and the majority had their work published as books (Foster, Ellingson, Lockford, Geist-Martin, Etherington, Trujillo, Poulos--in press). The first-generation autoethnographers had several published books as well. Nonetheless, all of these books were published in academic venues only, not in mainstream outlets. Most read like novels or “creative non-fiction” so if autoethnographers could learn the ropes of mainstream publishing then their academic job options would expand dramatically.

Potential Employment Options

As cited earlier in this chapter, one of the problems that Ph.D. students in Communication face is finding jobs teaching primarily narrative, qualitative or autoethnographic studies. Similarly, if there are jobs in sociology, education, or health, the institutions want applicants with doctorates specific to their field (according to 2007 *Chronicle* and HigherEd.com jobs list). However, if we acknowledge that autoethnography is “writing” based, then we can expand the number of institutions where we could teach autoethnography exclusively and, in many cases, to graduate students. For instance, according to the Associated Writers and Writing Programs database (AWWP), there are currently 135 Master of Fine Arts (MFA) programs in Creative Writing in the United States. Of those 135 programs offering specialties in poetry,

fiction, playwriting, screenwriting, etc., 71 of them also offer concentrations in “creative non-fiction.” Certainly autoethnography could be viewed as creative non-fiction as noted by Ellis (Ellis and Bochner, 1996) and Behar (1999). Also, as discussed at length in my literature review in Chapter One, the two genres share many of the same roots and concerns.

Of particular significance for future job opportunities and advancement of autoethnography is the sheer number of graduate students interested in creative writing. According to a recent *Atlantic Monthly* article, each year 20,000 people apply for admission to MFA programs (Delaney 2007, para. 4) and where there are students, there have to be teachers (thus the 484+ tenure-track jobs previously mentioned). Of the most interest to me, however, is a very recent phenomenon that bodes exceptionally well for our Ph.D. students. “With more universities demanding doctorates for all tenure-track teaching positions...the Ph.D. is the new MFA” (Delaney 2007, para. 6). What is exciting is to think that the years and money spent toward a Ph.D. now also qualifies you as a *top* candidate of those vying for jobs in creative writing because you have a coveted advanced degree.

Creative Writing Component

With a Ph.D. (as the ultimate terminal degree) there is no need for an MFA. As Ciresi and Watson concurred, it is publications that are most critical. I assume that when job candidates’ credentials are equal, a Ph.D. trumps all when it comes to employment in colleges or universities. One caveat is that currently most professors (and Directors) of MFA programs, such as Ciresi and Watson, do not have Ph.D.s although this will likely

change. According to the AWWP website, currently there are 34 institutions offering Ph.D.'s in Creative Writing ---almost all having been established in the last few years as the interest in arts-based academic programs have increased. The Creative Writing programs are housed in English Departments and the curriculum includes theoretical and historical underpinnings, and the final product is a "creative dissertation." Of the 34 institutions offering creative writing Ph.D.s, only 15 offer specialties in "creative non-fiction" which leads me to believe that a Ph.D. in Communication with a focus on autoethnography would make for a very attractive candidate on the creative writing job market.

Ph.D. programs in Creative Writing are growing but not that quickly. As a result, one of the perks of having a Ph.D. now is that it would be hard to see an institution hiring non-Ph.D.s to teach in a doctoral program. I suspect that the need for qualified professors with creative writing skills and Ph.D.s will increase dramatically in the future. To take my proposal a bit further, I suggest that all autoethnographers study creative writing as part of their coursework. These courses could count as an elective or even a methodology. In fact, the reason that I knew Rita Cirese is that I was enrolled in a Creative Non-Fiction class with her at the University of South Florida, early in my doctoral studies. She was a superb and dedicated teacher with unique insights about writing that I had not thought to consider.

Moreover, the top four schools known for autoethnographic studies also have Creative Writing MFA programs: Arizona State University, Southern Illinois University, University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, and University of South Florida (beginning

in Fall 2008). All offer graduate creative writing courses and Communication students may very want to avail themselves to this potential career enhancer.

As a perk, if autoethnographers took courses in creative writing, they might also polish their writing and learn more about literary standards for creative non-fiction. Also, a brief mention needs to be made that another area of possible jobs would be teaching in “interdisciplinary” fields, especially those labeled as in the “Humanities” which by some strange fortune not only welcomes, but demands, a mix of academic and artistic modalities. Autoethnographers looking for future employment may want to also check for humanities-based and interdisciplinary positions in and out of academe.

I also want to credit Buddy Goodall for planting this seed when he shared that in his Communication Department, he teaches a course entitled “Creative Non-Fiction as a Method of Inquiry” which helped me to generate the idea that there are far fewer boundaries between creative non-fiction and autoethnography. In the “Let’s Get Personal II” panel at the 2007 ICQI, Goodall concludes:

I have always thought that when I write personal narrative... autoethnography is a fancier term than I am used to but I can carry it as well... I believe firmly in the power of personal narrative I think that it gives us a wonderful opportunity to use creative nonfiction as an outlet for our work to reach broader public audiences and when we get to the end of the session today I’m going to say that’s the future I envision for us.

As I was following up on this topic, I e-mailed Buddy, and he was kind enough to share with me a chapter from his newest book *Writing Qualitative Inquiry: Self, Stories, and Academic Life* (2008).

In the final chapter, “Success Beyond the Academy: Becoming a Public Scholar,” Goodall opens with a story about an assistant professor in the Department of Speech at Wayne State University. In 1966, Phillip K. Tompkins published a piece in *Esquire* magazine but quickly returned to “publishing his work in traditional academic outlets” because “public scholarship was not valued by people in a position to evaluate my performance. I thought then and now that they were wearing academic blinders” (p. 239). However, Tompkins makes an interesting point which is that as Communication scholars, we should remember that “Audience adaptation is...still a cardinal communicative canon” (p. 239). Similarly, Goodall recounts the words of another colleague, Gerald Phillips, who wrote for both academic and popular markets: “...before scholars turned inward and created journals as the primary vehicles for the dissemination of knowledge, before we divided up the study of communication into narrow specializations, we had to cultivate a public audience to drum up interest in our subjects and to pay the bills. I’m talking Plato, Aristotle, the Sophists, all the way up to the early 20th century” (p. 245). When I read this chapter, it dawned on me how well-suited we are as communication scholars to *reach* people in ways that many other academics do not. For this reason, I believe that we should attempt to make cross-disciplinary connections with others who are having similar discussions in the academy, particularly those in sociology, creative writing, and journalism.

Sociologist Judith Stacy wants to “[m]ount a major campaign to revamp writing standards...to encourage scholars to compose more engaging, accessible prose” (p. 99). She says, “I seek to combat the deadening, hermetic, humorless, impersonal rhetorical style that pervades our academic journals...I wish to see our journal publications become literally and unapologetically more ‘journalistic’” (2007, p. 99). Similarly, Burawoy calls for “cultivating a collaborative relation between sociology and journalism” (2007, p. 57) a sentiment echoed by journalist Barbara Ehrenrich, author of the best-selling ethnography *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (2002). She advocates “...a question-driven discipline, as opposed to a mere chunk of academic turf, [that] must reach out to other disciplines...I am not talking about being merely “interdisciplinary”; I am talking about a complete disregard for the disciplinary boundaries laid out in the twentieth century...” (2007, p. 236). Already we have *Communication Currents* that attempts to make communication more accessible to those outside of the discipline. But Goodall proposes that one of the most important next steps for reaching out in the future involves technology.

In his latest work, he recounts his three experiences throughout the years of publishing mainstream and concludes the book with tips about how to get an agent, but also how to create an author website, podcast and literary blog (2008, 258-280). In a similar fashion, in *The Social Scientist as Public Intellectual* (2006), Charles Gattone states that in today “[t]he challenge of social scientists...is to seek out ways to communicate with a greater number of people, without compromising the integrity of their work” (p. 144). In particular, Gattone advocates using the Internet, as its sources of

dispersement are not limited and it also allows for users “to participate with others outside their immediate milieu” (p. 144) such as via chat rooms and asynchronous posts. Goodall concludes that “[t]he future of scholarly publishing is where the public sphere and the entrepreneurial business model of academic culture meet... Good narrative writing that reaches across disciplines and into the world is the new gold standard, and creative nonfiction is the preferred style of this brave new genre. Democracy and the academy are finally well met” (242-243).

Last of all, I just read an article in *Spectra* (2008), whereby Art Bochner speaks as the Vice President of NCA and addresses the topic of “institutional depression.” This column was based on an earlier publication (Bochner, 1997) but he is more emphatic in this contemporary version. He concludes the article with this call to action: “No matter how much change may threaten us, we need to consider alternatives---different goals, different styles of research and writing, different ways of bringing the academic and the personal into conversation with each other” (p. 4). Times are changing.

Conclusion

Inspired by True Events

When I phone Jim’s office, a familiar voice answers, “Hinshaw and Culbertson Law Firm, how may I direct your call?”

I respond quickly, “Happy Friday, Serena, this is Kendall Smith-Sullivan. Is Jim in, or should I leave a message?”

She replies warmly, “You’re in luck---he just came out of a meeting. I’ll put you right through. Have a good weekend!”

“You too,” I reply, thinking ahead to the unusual freedom this particular weekend offers. I have finally given all my committee members my dissertation and my defense date is set. While I am still mulling over this pivotal accomplishment, I am transported to my husband’s “work mode” voice and hear his matter-of-fact greeting: “Jim Sullivan.” But I quickly bridge the gap, with, “Hi honey—is this a bad time?” Before I even finish my question, I am clicked off his speaker phone and am talking to him one-on-one.

“Hi Hon!” Jim replies in his cheery husband voice. “Is everything okay?” I assure him that all is well and remind him of our dinner plans.

“I just want to make sure you get home in time for us to get to Ciccio and Tony’s. I made reservations for seven tonight --will that be okay or do you have to work late?”

“Actually, I was planning on knocking off a little early so we could start our evening sooner. I’ve waited six years to celebrate your post-dissertation days. Besides I’ve been craving their linguine, and it just doesn’t taste the same when we do it carry out.”

“I agree and can’t wait to go out. I’m tired of wearing pajamas all day and I’m about over carry-out and frozen dinners.”

“You and me both. Okay, I’ve got to run, but I’ll see you soon and we’ll toast to the end of this chapter of your life and to the next one--- whatever that is. Speaking of, any news on the career front?”

“Yes, in fact, but I’ll wait until dinner. I have a few ideas I want to run by you, but we’ll talk tonight, okay?”

We hang up, and I head toward my closet looking for something besides my usual flannel pajama ensembles---my dissertation writing uniforms. As I browse through ‘real’ clothes, I suddenly feel exhausted by having to decide what I might wear when I leave the house. The intense months of revising the dissertation have made me chronically tired and much less creative in the fashion department.

Although I’m relieved to have a dissertation defense date finally, I am hit with the magnitude of the question “what next?” Six years of waiting for this moment and now what? I have ignored friends, family, and my garden, as well as gained twenty pounds. I put away my easel and paints—one of the few hobbies I cared about before I began pursuing my Ph.D. How do I begin a new life that I already live in, but that doesn’t require homework assignments or dissertation rewrites? While most graduating doctoral students segue directly into academic jobs, I am not sure if I will be able to find a tenure-track position in the Tampa area, and I can’t imagine moving. Jim definitely does not want to leave Florida. I could never work a regular nine-to-five job, but I could possibly work freelance.

Right now I’m just aware of my sudden sleepiness and as I blink away drowsiness, I wonder if I will have a definitive answer today from Dr. S. [abbreviated last name to protect her anonymity]. It’s just too hard to concentrate. Maybe I should just rest my eyes for a few minutes before Jim comes home. Just a few minutes. I stretch out on the couch and the room fades to black.

In the dream, the phone rings and Dr. S. leaves a muffled message on the answering machine. I wonder if the news will be good or bad. If I have to have a partner

when it comes to health issues, she seems like a solid choice. As the dream continues, I am on the way to listen to my voicemail, but the doorbell's chimes interrupt my mission so I head toward the front door. No matter how hard I try, I can't get it unlocked but the doorbell continues to ring, and then the doorknocker begins banging. Finally, when I pry open the door, no one is there, but on the stoop is the package I have been waiting for: a delivery from Amazon.com.

When I open the box, there are three books inside: Buddy Goodall's new book *Writing Qualitative Inquiry*, as well as *How to Get a Literary Agent*, and *Writing the Break-Out Novel*. Instead of being happy as I normally am when I receive any Amazon delivery, I feel confused. I cannot decide which book to read *first*. Should I choose the scholarly book, or the guide to literary agents, or the book about novel writing? I feel paralyzed with indecision about my *priorities*. Which one is really the most important? The doorbell rings again and the doorknocker bangs loudly.

Then outside, I hear several voices, chanting, "Open, Open Up, Open Up Now!" I peek out the front window and see a van with blue and red sirens flashing, then hear the door chorus begin to shout, "Decide, Decide Now, Decide Now or Else----then a loud speaker barks, "This is the Decision Police and you must make a choice about which book to read first or we are coming in, we repeat, we are coming in..." but their voices fade as the phone rings again. It is Dr. S. and this time I can hear her voice clearly: "Kendall I have *wonderful* news. Call me at the office or on my cell when you get a chance...I heard back from the lab and the news is *excellent*." As the machine clicks off, I realize that all the outside cacophony has disappeared.

No more voices. No more Decision Police lurking. I look down, and I'm not clad in pajamas, but a silk green skirt and real shoes, not just socks. I feel relieved, pick up one of the Amazon books, and snuggle deeper into the sofa as I begin the first chapter. "What a catchy opening line," I think, but my reverie is ended as I hear Jim's voice as he comes through the door...

"Hi Honey, I'm home. Where are you? Oh, you must have been exhausted. I didn't mean to wake you...."

Slowly I shift consciousness. Out of my dream or still in it? Reading or not reading? Which outfit? I look down and am surprised to see I'm wearing a green skirt and street shoes. Then I remember: I did change clothes but decided to lay down for just a minute.

"Kendall, you still look sleepy from your nap---do you still want to go to dinner? If not, I could get us carry-out again."

Then I think about dinner: Ciccio and Tony's. A romantic outing for a change, and Chicken Marsala, and good wine, and toasts to celebrate. Now I'm awake!

I get up and give Jim a hug and say, "No I want to go out---it will be fun and a nice change. I just need to check something real quick on the answering machine before we go."

I push play and there is only one message: "This is Dr. S. I have *wonderful* news. Call me at the office or on my cell when you get a chance...I heard back from the lab and the news is *excellent*." So part of the dream *was* real. Amazing how dreams and

reality can merge when the conditions are right.

As I am musing about this, Jim walks in and asks, “Is everything okay? Who is that Doctor that called? Is there something you aren’t telling me?”

I smile, then grin. “Well, there is, but I was waiting to hear back before I told you the good news. Dr. S. is a psychiatrist who got my name from a woman at the...”

Jim interrupt and asks, “Wait—*she* got *your* name?”

I crack a bigger smile. “Yes, *she* wanted *my* help. She wants to write a book about depression but needs a writer to help her out, but not like a ghost writer. I told her that I would collaborate with her, do the research and the creative writing aspect, maybe even conduct some interviews, but I insisted on being a co-author. So on the front of the book, it would say Mary S., M.D. with Kendall Smith-Sullivan, Ph.D. Just like that.”

Jim’s grin is bigger than mine now. “I didn’t know you were thinking about doing this, but it sounds like a great job. But what was all that about the Lab?”

“Because she conducts clinical trials, she said that the pharmaceutical company, or one of the labs, would fund the project and she said there would be *plenty* of money for the project. “

Jim’s eyes open wide “*Plenty?*”

I nod yes and say, “And, after this project is over, I have a few other options related to work that I want to run by you, but it’s almost seven, so we better go or we’ll lose our reservation. I’ll tell you over dinner...”

As we quickly head out the front door, I almost trip. When I look down, I see the

familiar Amazon.com logo on a large box. So dreams *do* become reality, or maybe it is the other way around. In any case, now I know exactly what I will read next: *all* of the books---and in no particular order. Just for today, it is time to celebrate.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Qualitative Inquiry Panelists' Questions

The following questions are taken from the preliminary Qualitative Inquiry Conference Program and will be asked of the panelists of “Let’s Get Personal I.: First Generation Autoethnographers Reflect on Writing Personal Narratives” and “Let’s Get Personal II: Second-Generation Autoethnographers Reflect On Writing Personal Narratives”: questions:

(1). *Personal history*: Discuss your experience with writing personal narratives or autoethnographies. For example, what was the first personal narrative you wrote, when and why did you write it? What was your experience with publishing it? Discuss other personal narratives that followed this one.

(2). *Presentation of Selves*: What selves do you allow to become present in your work and what selves do you leave out? What selves do you become by virtue of having written autoethnographically?

(3). *Evidence and Truth*: What counts as “evidence” in personal narratives? What counts as “truth”? How do you know when you have gotten it “right”?

(4). *Evaluation*: How should we evaluate personal narratives? What is good autoethnography? What is the role of writing? Fiction? Creative non-fiction?

(5). *Ethics*: How do you make decisions about what to write, what to leave out, who to ask for consent, and whose voices to include? Discuss a particular case.

(6). *Current state of Autoethnography*: How would you characterize the current state of

autoethnography? For example, what are its strengths and tensions? What have we done right? What have we done wrong? Why do you think autoethnography grew in popularity in the last two decades? Do you think there is a “backlash” against autoethnography? If so, describe it and discuss why it might be happening.

(7). *Challenges and Goals*: What are the major challenges autoethnographers face in the next decade? What work needs to be done? In what new directions do we need to go? What would you most like to see happen in autoethnography politically, practically, and/or academically and intellectually? Where do you see your work heading?

Appendix B.

Interview Questions

One of the interesting aspects of my dissertation is that the interviewees are educated and employed in a variety of disciplines. Each participant was asked a set of core questions and then given the opportunity to respond at the end of the interviewing with any closing thoughts or comments. Right before I asked for closing comments, I asked questions “particular” to the interviewee as seemed appropriate.

Core Questions

- How did you begin writing autoethnographically?
- How would you define and evaluate autoethnography?
- What are your views on autoethnography as therapeutic writing?
- In what ways do you predict the field of autoethnography may change in the future?

Other Potential Questions

- If you studied in an academic field prior to the one you are currently affiliated with, why did you choose that one then and this one now?
- Who were your mentors or writers who influenced your autoethnographic writing?
- What ethical issues do you think are raised in autoethnographic or narrative writing?

- How do you define “truth” when it comes to autoethnography?
- If asked “How is autoethnography research?” what is your response?
- If you teach classes that incorporate autoethnography, how does teaching it differ than actually writing it?
- Do you have anything you would like to add or a story you would like to share?

Appendix C.

Literature Review Charts by Discipline

DISCIPLINE	MULTI-DISCIPLINARY
GENRE	Personal Essay, also known as Informal Essay, Familiar Essay
Author's Stance	First person voice is used; writer often begins with "I" and later generalizes to "we/us/you"; personal bias or feelings are included; writer often tells and does not show; vulnerability of writer essential for success; writer often poses as inferior to gain trust of audience
Writing Characteristics	Conversational and casual writing; everyday language is used; not usually scholarly although may include literary and historical allusions; often is ironic, humorous, exaggerated, comedic, and satiric in tone
Temporal Aspects of the Writing	Intuitive and non-linear (unlike autobiography); smaller chunks of time or frames are examined; often includes fragments and digressions; smaller climaxes rather than traditional literary arc
Methodology	Structure is writer's choice; self-reflexive
Ethical Concerns	No formal protocol is followed; writer bears responsibility for bias; writer expected to be a "reliable narrator"
Analysis and Evaluation	Success is achieved when writer is vulnerable and topic resonates with reader
Audience	Average reader of human interest popular publications
Purpose	To entertain, inform, educate; to present the complexities of human experience; some writers call for political and social reform
Additional Distinctions	Topics include: ruminating about the past, emphasis on local rather than national history, middle-aged experience, human frailty, inner life, nature
Influential Authors	Baldwin, Benjamin, Borges, Didion, Dillard, Emerson, Hazlit, Johnson, Lamb, Lopate, Montaigne, Orwell, Rich, Seneca, Thoreau, Vidal, Woolf

DISCIPLINE	JOURNALISM STUDIES
GENRE	Literary Journalism, also known as First-Person Journalism, Intimate Journalism, New Journalism, Parajournalism, Personal Reporting, Creative Nonfiction
Author's Stance	Point of view may be first-person or third-person; writer acts as an objective observer; stance is mobile as they tell stories and also address readers directly
Writing Characteristics	Style and economy of words is important; structure is the writer's choice: stories are often human interest describing routine and everyday events; accuracy of events essential; ordinary people become main characters in real-life dramas; there are no composite characters; pseudonyms are often used but may still identify people, places, and events; emphasis on dialogue, storyline and accuracy
Temporal Aspects of Writing	May be chronological or punctuated with digressions to emphasize events; writing may utilize literary devices such as suspense, foreshadowing and flashbacks; background research is often interwoven into stories
Methodology	Writers immerse themselves in subjects' world to become part of the community (often for years); they observe, conduct interviews, and engage in historical research
Ethical Concerns	Writers build participants' trust through becoming immersed in their worlds; reporters and their sources need to be legally protected; participants often sign releases freeing the writer and publisher; writers must live with potential repercussions of what they have written
Analysis and Evaluation	Success is based on accuracy of details and events; literary quality emphasized
Audience	Readers of mainstream publications
Purpose	To capture real-life drama and cultural values while using a personal voice and entertaining readers; address social and national issues that need reform or more attention
Additional Distinctions	Note the similarities between writers who are considered personal essayists and also literary journalists
Influential Authors	Capote, Didion, Harrington, Hoagland, Kidder, Kramer, Mailer, McPhee, Newman, Rhodes, Sims, Singer, Wolfe

DISCIPLINE	PSYCHOLOGY AND MENTAL HEALTH
GENRE:	Therapeutic Writing Research and Practice
Author's Stance	Writer acts only as researcher; personal bias or feelings are rarely mentioned; hard-core positivist stance; author is objective and distanced from subjects
Writing Characteristics	Third person or passive voice is used; scholarly and formal; uses academic verbiage; employs statistics, graphs, and case studies
Temporal Aspects of the Writing	Almost always chronological with the exception of the conclusions that reflects on various aspects of the experiment
Methodology	Usually quantitative research; typical assessment tools include inventory tests, scales, and the Linguistic and Word Count Inquiry computer assessment program. Physiological tests used include resting blood pressure levels, enzyme counts, heart rate levels, perspiration rates and blood count levels and number of visits to the doctor
Ethical Concerns	Particular concern is taken to (1) screen out applicants with mental instability (2) thorough explanations are given and participants sign release forms (3) An Institutional Review Board (IRB) approves projects (4) presumably a disciplinary code of ethic is followed; author is distanced from experiments and case studies and is protected by formal institutional or organizational protocols
Analysis and Evaluation	Results are derived and presented in quantitative terms; validity, generalizability, replication, and reliability are primary concerns
Audience	Research conducted for publication or presentation in academic circles; possibly conducted to help mental health professionals working in the field
Purpose	To enlighten other academicians or professionals; could assist researcher in obtaining tenure, grants, or promotions; possible unspecified altruistic purposes; the role of cultural, political, and communities are not a relevant concern or determining factor in the research design or outcome
Additional Distinctions	n/a
Influential Authors	Hunt and Sampson, Mattingly, Monk et al. , Parry and Doan, Pennebaker, Polkinghorne, White and Epston

DISCIPLINE	MULTI-DISCIPLINARY includes Sociology, Anthropology, Communication, Cultural Studies, Race and Gender Studies, Aging, Education, Medicine
GENRE:	Autoethnography, also known as personal narrative, narratives of the self, reflexive ethnographies, narrative inquiry, self-stories, interpretive ethnography, emotional sociology, autobiographical sociology, etc.
Author's Stance	First-person voice always used; researcher is part of data; authors open themselves up to deep self-introspection and vulnerability; self-reflexivity is essential
Writing Characteristics	Includes literary conventions such as dialogue, characterization, and plot; encased in a variety of forms including (but not limited to): poetry, short stories, fiction, layered and multi-voiced accounts, co-constructed narratives, documentaries, and dramatic performances; emphasis on concrete details and rich (thick) description; may or may not contain academic citations
Temporal Aspects of the Writing	Writing employs temporal flexibility including foreshadowing, flashbacks, and non-linear chronology
Methodology	Includes field notes, interviews, interactive interviews, life histories, focus groups, grounded theory, documentaries; conversational analysis research, introspection, research, participant observation, layered and multi-voiced accounts, and emotional recall; self-reflexivity is essential; autoethnography is both a process and a method
Ethical Concerns	(1) Fundamental is to write from an ethic of care and concern and do no harm (2) thorough explanations of the study are given to participants (3) consent forms are signed (4) if appropriate, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approves projects
Analysis and Evaluation	Goal is to evoke emotional experience in readers, give voice to marginalized groups, improve both the writer's and readers' lives through deep introspection; validity of work is judged on verisimilitude, not facts;
Audience	Multi-disciplinary academic audience as well as mainstream
Purpose	Connect the personal to the cultural, social, and political; help self and others make meaning of the universal complexities of life that challenge humans; attempt to create narrative meaning in order to make better sense of the contingencies of human existence
Additional Distinctions	Merger of art and science; blurred genres; transdisciplinary
Influential Authors	Bochner, Charmaz, Conquergood, Denzin, Ellis, Geertz, Goodall, Lincoln, Pelias, Reed-Danahay, Richardson, Riessman, Tedlock

DISCIPLINE	MULTI-DISCIPLINARY
GENRE	AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ILLNESS AND TRAUMA NARRATIVES
Author's Stance	Always includes (but is not limited to) first-person accounts of one's own illness or coping with a loved one's illness; writer is part of the story and demonstrates self-reflexivity
Writing Characteristics	Flexible forms; may include journal entries, poetry, co-constructed narratives, composite characters, dialogue, and literary or scholarly references
Temporal Aspects of Writing	Writers use a wide range of temporal frameworks; work may be chronological or employ typical literary devices such as foreshadowing and flashbacks; unlike personal essays , digressions or irrelevant scenes are not included; focus is on making sense of the crisis perpetuated by the illness
Methodology	Recall, field notes, journal entries, self and other observation
Ethical Concerns	No formal protocol is usual followed although writer must bear the consequences of the work once it is in the public domain
Analysis and Evaluation	A "good" illness narrative is one that is primarily therapeutic for the writer both emotionally and psychologically but often the writer intends to help others who have experienced similar devastation
Audience	Self primarily (for sense-making) then others who may resonate or be aided by the narrative
Purpose	To capture the chaos of one's' own or another's illness and use narrative to make sense of the disruption; altruistic purposes include helping others deal with similar crises
Additional Distinctions	The study of illness narratives is complex and includes "studying the study" of illness narratives, teaching others to write therapeutic illness narratives, and educating health care practitioners to be aware of patients' need to articulate illness through story
Major Authors	Butler, Ellis, Greenspan, Knapp, Lorde, Schneider, Stone, Vergheze

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kendall Smith-Sullivan has been teaching in higher education for over twenty years. She received her bachelor's degree from Huntingdon College, majoring in English and Speech Communication. Her master's degree was in English from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and after graduating, she taught English and Literature for seven years at Kennesaw State University in Atlanta. In 1994, she moved to Florida to become Chair of the English Department at Manatee Community College's Venice campus. She taught there for six years until she moved to Tampa to pursue her doctorate with a focus on autoethnography and health communication. In the past several years, she has taught at the University of South Florida and Eckerd College and has published in a variety of mainstream and academic venues. Currently, she is a freelance writer and has been the president of Quantum Wave Media Corporation since 2005.