

# 1

## Autoethnography Introduction and Overview



## Focus Your Reading

- What is the history of autoethnography as it relates to traditional qualitative research approaches?
- How does autoethnography function as a broad methodology as well as a specific method of data collection and analysis?
- How is autoethnography debated and critiqued because of its focus on the self?
- What are five key ideas to consider when applying autoethnography as critical social research?

## Histories of Autoethnography

Prior to discussing the functions and forms that define autoethnography as contemporary critical social research, we need to address the histories of autoethnography and how the genre has evolved. We begin this introductory chapter by delving into the historical evolution of the naming of autoethnography. **Autoethnography** in its most simplified definition is the study of the self (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 9). While related to autobiography, narrative, and ethnography, it is unique from a research perspective in that the researcher is the subject of study. We view autoethnography as part of the broader family of qualitative approaches that includes ethnography, self-study, and narrative inquiry. By using the phrases *histories of autoethnography* and *historical evolution*, we intend to highlight evidence from multiple published perspectives on the historical lineage of autoethnography. The histories of the genre detailed here are drawn primarily from five academic sources: Hayano (1979); Reed-Danahay (1997); Anderson (2006); Elder, Bremser, and Sheridan (2007); and Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011). One might think of each publication as adding a piece to a larger puzzle that provides a more complex historical picture of how autoethnography evolved to become what it is today.

When each of the histories is examined in isolation, it can appear to be unique, but the histories of autoethnography are connected. Various names and ideas may be used to describe the basic ideas behind autoethnography, but they are all related to autoethnographic work. Many research traditions inform autoethnography. Just as in the story about the seven blind men describing an elephant—one touching the trunk and saying the animal was like a snake, another touching a leg and saying it was like a tree, yet another touching the elephant's side and saying it was like a wall, until a passerby told them they were all touching an elephant—it is only when we stand back and see the big picture and understand the relationships between the research traditions that we can understand the breadth and scope of autoethnography. Therefore, it

is necessary to consider the histories of autoethnography in tandem in order to gain the most comprehensive view of its origins.

Autoethnography is similar to approaches such as ethnography, narrative inquiry, self-study, and hermeneutics. Each examines how people understand relationships between humans and their sociocultural contexts. The differences among them lie in the approaches' disciplinary roots, roots that shape their questions and their focus on specific research data collection and analysis methods. While **ethnography** rests on studying individuals within their communities, narrative inquiry also focuses on the stories of individuals in various contexts. Self-study highlights how tasks such as teaching are undertaken and examined, whereas hermeneutics focuses on the meanings of products and ideas from the past. All of these approaches, encased within their disciplines, target how we understand ourselves in relation to larger social structures and communities. Table 1.1 compares and contrasts traditional qualitative approaches with autoethnography.

While all of these approaches are related to autoethnography, we will focus on autoethnography's relationship to ethnography. Most of the histories of autoethnography

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### What Is Ethnography?

The term *ethnography* is derived from two Greek words: *graphein*, meaning "to write," and *ethnoi*, meaning "the nations" or "the others"

(Erickson, 2011, p. 45).

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describe the genre as a relatively new social science born in the discipline of anthropology a little more than 50 years ago (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Anthropology, which focuses on the study of people, has its roots in the 1800 founding of the Society of Observers of Man in Paris, and discussions between anthropology and ethnology date back to 1840 (Tax, 1964). Although written nearly 30 years afterward, the work of Anderson (2006) takes us back in time to view the social sciences before Hayano (1979), thereby providing additional context for the beginnings of autoethnography. There has always

been an autoethnographic element in qualitative sociological research (Anderson, 2006). Researchers often noted their role in the research process, attempted to explain, justify, or understand it, as evidenced by details from the early years of sociology in the United States after World War I:

Robert Park's interest in the biographical backgrounds of his University of Chicago graduate students encouraged many of his students to pursue sociological involvement in settings close to their personal lives, arenas with which they had a significant degree of self-identification. Nels Anderson's *The Hobo* (1923), for instance, drew heavily on his personal experience with the lifestyle of homeless men. . . . But while Park's students often had enduring personal connections with the social settings and groups that they studied, they seldom, if ever, took up the banner of explicit and reflexive self-observation. . . . The only examples of self-narrative from these scholars came in the form of occasional methodological notes and/or what Van Maanen (1988) has referred to as "confessional tales" of fieldwork experiences. (Anderson, 2006, pp. 375–376)

**TABLE 1.1 • Traditional Qualitative Approaches Compared/Contrasted with Autoethnography**

Approach	Disciplinary Roots	Possible Questions
Autoethnography	Literary arts	What am I learning by examining my identities, power, privileges, and penalties within one or more cultural contexts?
	Anthropology	
	Communication studies	
Ethnography	Anthropology	What are the cultural characteristics of "others"?
	Sociology	What can be learned from the cultural contexts of "others"?
Narrative inquiry: autobiography (life history)	Literary arts	What story or stories should I write about myself (or others) that can serve to document, justify, and/or atone for my (or their) experiences?
	Sociology	
	Theology	
	Anthropology	
	History	
Education		
Self-study	Sociology	How can a formal systematic approach to studying my teaching and learning inform my practice?
	Psychology	
Linguistics		
Hermeneutics	Literary criticism	What are the conditions under which a human action occurred or a human-made product was produced in the past that makes it possible to interpret its meaning in the present?
	Theology	

Focused as they were on observing and analyzing others in the settings studied, even the social scientists of the legendary Chicago School had no qualitative language that assigned particular merit to self-observation (Anderson, 2006). While ethnographers of both the first generation (1930s) and the second generation (1960s and 1970s) of the Chicago School often had autobiographical connections to their research, they were neither particularly self-observational in their method nor self-visible in their texts (Anderson, 2006). An anthropologist in the 1960s

at the University of Chicago stated, “We pursue scientific problems, not practical or political or social problems” (Tax, 1964, p. 249). Still, Anderson (2006) mentions some notable examples of social scientists experimenting more explicitly with self-observation and analysis in the 1960s and 1970s, including but not limited to anthropologist Anthony Wallace and sociologist David Sudnow. The self-observational study by Wallace (1965) of the cognitive “mazeway” he constructed and used for driving to work is one example. Sudnow’s (1978) description of the detailed processes and stages of skill acquisition he experienced as he learned to play improvisational piano jazz represents another.

Historical puzzle pieces shared by Anderson (2006) provide some insight into the context surrounding the coining of the term *autoethnography* by Raymond Firth in 1956. Firth was discussing an argument that took place between Jomo Kenyatta (first president of the independent Kenya) and Louis Leakey (acclaimed 20th-century archaeologist/anthropologist) during a public lecture in London in 1928 (Elder et al., 2007; Reed-Danahay, 1997). Both men claimed “insider” knowledge of Kikuyu customs. Born in Kenya and educated abroad, both Kenyatta (a Kikuyu tribal man) and Leakey (the son of Christian missionaries who worked with the Kikuyu) earned doctoral degrees in anthropology. Elder et al. (2007) aptly describe the center of their argument as “Who has the right to represent a society and through what methodological means?” Is it Leakey, with his traditional hypothesis-driven anthropology, or Kenyatta, whose work seemed to introduce to the West a combination of autobiography and anthropologic ethnography to represent the Kikuyu people? Fellow anthropologist David Hayano recognized Kenyatta’s book *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938/1965) as the first published autoethnography in his article “Auto-Ethnography: Paradigms, Problems, and Prospects,” which appeared in the high-impact factor journal *Human Organization* in 1979.

Related to the specific turn to autoethnography, some anthropologists began actively questioning their ways of knowing about others. Ruth Behar demonstrates a critical view of the historical rooting of social science research in relation to the representation and supposed understanding of the other. Schooled in the traditional approach to anthropology, she raises the question in ways similar to the Kenyatta and Leakey argument. In her collection of essays *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* (1996), she details her questioning of her role as an anthropologist:

In anthropology, which historically exists to “give voice” to others, there is no greater taboo than self-revelation. The impetus of our discipline, with its roots in Western fantasies about barbaric others, has been to focus primarily on “cultural” rather than “individual” realities. The irony is that anthropology has always been rooted in an “I”—understood as having a complex psychology and history—observing a “we” that, until recently, was viewed as plural, ahistorical, and nonindividuated. (p. 26)

Questioning and unveiling the self is at the heart of critical autoethnographic work. While Hayano (1979) credits Raymond Firth with coining the term *autoethnography*, Ellis (2008) links the two men by crediting Hayano with moving autoethnography beyond the debate in Firth's London seminar to the academic mainstream. Describing the potential of autoethnography, Hayano anticipated its capacity to create an alternative venue for marginalized voices. The significance of his contributions to the genre cannot be overstated. As Anderson (2006) notes:

Hayano argued that as anthropologists moved out of the colonial era of ethnography, they would come more and more to study the social worlds and subcultures of which they were a part. In contrast to the detached-outsider characteristic of colonial anthropologists, contemporary anthropologists would frequently be full of members of the cultures they studied. (p. 376)

By 1979, Hayano's questioning of who has the right to represent the lives of others was a foundational idea related to autoethnography. Once the question was asked and researchers begin to explore answers, there was a "crisis of confidence," not exclusively related to autoethnography but in relation to all types of research methods and areas of inquiry. This historical period has been described as "the fourth moment . . . crisis of representation" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008a, p. 24) in qualitative work in general. Adding another layer to the historical context, Ellis et al. (2011) describe this "crisis of confidence" (para. 2) in the research community as emerging from the 1980s and inspired by the movement away from **postpositivism** toward **postmodernism**.

Researchers questioned their ability to be completely objective when studying others, noting the tendency for researchers from powerful dominant groups to use oppressed groups for their own purposes, with little regard for the populations studied. The moral and ethical aspects of research were brought to light and critiqued. Scholars in the 1980s and 1990s began illustrating how the so-called facts and truths of social scientists' findings were inextricably tied to the very vocabularies and **paradigms** that were used to represent them (e.g., Kuhn, 1996; Rorty, 1982). Furthermore, many social scientists began recognizing that different kinds of people view the world through different lenses, and thereby make different assumptions about the world. Scholars like Anzaldúa (1987) and Valenzuela (1999) began rejecting conventional ways of thinking about research and ways of doing research. This movement of a critical mass of social scientists supported the recognition of the myriad ways that personal experience can influence the research process. It also opened the door for autoethnography as "one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's

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### What Is Autoethnography?

Autoethnography involves a critical study of yourself in relation to one or more cultural context(s).

(Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 9)

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influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist" (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 3).

During this time, Harold "Bud" Goodall became known as one of the pioneers of autoethnography, building on the work of Thomas Benson at Penn State University. In 1981, Benson is said to have authored the first published autoethnography in the field of communication studies, titled "Another Shootout in Cowtown." In 1988, Michael E. Pacanowski's publication "Slouching Towards Chicago" was the second published autoethnography in communication studies. Goodall's *Casing a Promised Land* (1989) was the third autoethnographic contribution to the field and the first book-length study that employed autoethnographic methods. The popularity of Carolyn Ellis's autoethnographic work in the field that followed in the 1990s and 2000s ultimately extended the genre within and beyond communication studies. While anthropologist Ruth Behar's *Translated Woman* (1993) included an autobiographical chapter she described as "the biography in the shadow" (p. xvi), Behar worried about including herself in her work, a strong indication of the field of anthropology's view of researcher placement in the 1990s. Scholars today tend to embrace how autoethnography enlists a rewriting of the subjective self and the cultural context replete with hidden and explicit rules and norms for sustained participation. Autoethnography appears to be gaining particular credibility and influence in top-tier research articles of the social sciences (e.g., Dalton, 2003; Laubscher & Powell, 2003; Romo, 2005; Sparkes, 2000; Winograd, 2002). Autoethnography has also expanded to educational contexts in the wake of high-stakes accountability testing in the United States, posing questions such as "How might my experiences of race, class, and/or gender and sexuality offer insights about my ability to address these issues in a given cultural event/situation?"

Rather than seeking to escape **subjectivity**, teachers and teacher education researchers of the new millennium are considering autoethnographic techniques precisely because of the qualitative genre's capacity to engage first-person voice and to embrace the conflict of writing against oneself as one finds oneself entrenched in the complications of one's positions (e.g., Pennington, 2004; Romo, 2005; Winograd, 2002). For example, as a teacher working in a school where high-stakes testing altered not only the teachers' methods of teaching but also their views of the students and their community, Pennington (2004) used autoethnography as a way to position herself within her research study. Writing in the first person throughout the book, Pennington reveals the history of the school and the teachers' experiences reflected in her own seeking to "contextualize the literacy views of the teachers through comparisons to the views of administrators in the school district and the policies of the state" (p. 1). The study illuminates the teachers' and the researcher's critiques of the ways in which high-stakes accountability testing limited the students' literacy. Autoethnography has become more than a response to researcher positioning in relation to those studied—it has developed into a specific methodology relying on distinct research methods.

## Defined Functions of Autoethnography Applied as Critical Social Research

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Research methodology is viewed as the overall combination of beliefs that ground a study. It involves recognizing the ontological, epistemological, and methodological aspects of research. It also involves paying attention to the “*paradigm* (Guba, 1990a, p. 17) or interpretive framework, a ‘basic set of beliefs that guides action’ (Guba, 1990a, p. 17)” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 13). The autoethnographic work described in this section exists within the complexity of the qualitative tradition; authors bring a variety of interpretive frameworks to their study of themselves in relation to particular cultural contexts and conditions.

### Autoethnography Defined as Methodology

When citing autoethnography as **empirical** research methodology, we refer to the larger notion of paradigmatic purposes and constructions of a study rather than simply the method of doing research, as in the type of data collected or a specific means of analysis. Autoethnography as a genre—or, as some prefer, a subgenre—“includes an array of descriptors (e.g., critical autobiography, ethnobiography, ethnographic poetics, emotionalism, evocative narratives, first-person accounts—to name a few)” (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 94). Still, the term *autoethnography* appears (at least for now) to be the descriptor of choice for this hybrid qualitative genre. In contrast to the term’s *auto* (which refers to the author’s presentation of critical reflections and interpretations of personal experience), *ethnography* is commonly used to refer to a key qualitative approach to studying the rules, norms, and acts of resistance associated with cultural groups. Consequently, the hybrid term *autoethnography* has come to be the favored name for a form of critical reflexive narrative inquiry, critical reflexive self-study, or critical reflexive action research in which the researcher takes an active, scientific, and systematic view of personal experience in relation to cultural groups identified by the researcher as similar to the self (i.e., us) or as others who differ from the self (i.e., them). It is precisely the hybridity of the genre that allows it to be applied as a stand-alone **methodology** as well as a complementary **method** for assembling data from the five traditional empirical approaches to **qualitative research**: phenomenology, ethnography, narrative inquiry, case study, and grounded theory.

Although connected to those five approaches because of the way it draws on personal narrative, autoethnography can be distinguished by how it affords authors the flexibility to position themselves in relation to the social, cultural, or political in ways that are otherwise off-limits to traditional empirical approaches to qualitative

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### Methodology and Methods

Methodology is the established and evolving approach to and foundation of a research study.

Methods are the actual techniques, tools, or means used for data collection and analysis.

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research. Our analysis of autoethnography as critical social research reveals various levels of explanation and usage of notions related to autoethnography. We begin by differentiating between the framing of autoethnography as a methodology and as a method. From a broad perspective, there is a clear delineation between researchers who utilize autoethnography as a larger ontological and epistemological foundation for their work and others who rely on autoethnography's focus on the self to bring themselves into research inquiries based on various qualitative methods. In other words, some autoethnographers conceptualize their studies in ways that align with our depiction of autoethnography as a methodology—that is, they understand that the foundation of their work is reliant on their studying themselves. For example, many authors who are seeking to bring previously silenced perspectives to the forefront consciously use their identities as epistemologies, or as ways of knowing. Hermann-Wilmarth and Bills (2010) demonstrated an in-depth use of autoethnography as a means to address the study they conducted with their students. Adapting to the ongoing data collection, they responded to their students' resistance to discussing their LGBT experiences by being "at once researchers, participants, informants, and subjects" (p. 260). Their autoethnographic study utilized queer theory, grounded theory, and comparative analysis and allowed them to study their students and their identities. This work illustrates how some scholars situate autoethnographic work in existing research strategies and contribute to the field under study. Teacher education typically addresses preservice and inservice teacher learning, and Hermann-Wilmarth and Bills (2010) transformed their teacher education focus to include the role of the teacher educator.

Autoethnography is also used both to study the self and to present alternative perspectives. DeLeon (2010) pressed autoethnography to the forefront in critically examining his own identity. His autoethnography was detailed and situated in research traditions of narrative inquiry with a message of "challenging privileged academic discourses" (p. 408) encased within personal narratives of DeLeon's experiences. Authors such as DeLeon have used autoethnography to counter colonizing voices by creating spaces for previously sequestered narratives. Houston (2007) also applied autoethnography to address the crisis of representation and situated autoethnography as a form of resistance. Due to the intimate nature of identity and contextualized experiences, autoethnography's centering of the author allows intimate aspects of understandings and experiences, often inaccessible to researchers, to become a part of narratives and contribute to the field. Several studies have brought autoethnography into the study of others. Camangian (2010) clearly explicates autoethnography in his study examining the use of autoethnography as a tool for high school students to understand their identities within larger social contexts. Building theoretically from a caring (Noddings, 1992) and critical literacy foundation (Freire, 1968/1972), Camangian constructed a conceptualization of autoethnography that was essential to his research query, stating, "To foster a critical literacy of caring, I taught autoethnography as a strategic pedagogical tool for students to

examine the ways they experience, exist, and explain their identities” (p. 183). Methodologically, Camangian sustains the use of autoethnography throughout the article, continually integrating its use into the research focus, analysis, and interpretation. Hughes (2008a) also has brought autoethnography into the classroom as a means for critical race pedagogy, noting, “Our narratives also speak to the internal and external pursuit of specific pedagogical help for overcoming the educational impediments of race, class, and gender oppression” (p. 88).

Overall, studies that concentrate on the ontological, epistemological, and methodological representation of autoethnography are characterized by the consistent portrayal of autoethnography’s relationship to the inquiry, paradigmatic affiliations, and how autoethnography contributes to the standing knowledge in educational research. Although we have attempted to detail the histories and definitions of autoethnography, this is still a very novel and sometimes impossible task as viewed by certain schools of thought, owing to the positioning of the researcher as the focus of study. Therefore, making clear connections to preexisting research perspectives is crucial, and many scholars situate autoethnography as methodology in relation to specific areas of critical social research. Table 1.2 illustrates how particular researchers have related their autoethnographic work to the larger research schools of thought or paradigms.

Other studies rely on autoethnography to center the self as subject and then move on to use a variety of established research methods to collect, analyze, and represent data. Representation of the self in most studies has utilized first-person narrative descriptions and rationales from introduction to conclusion, while Theoharis (2008) and Tsumagari (2010) demonstrate the use of third person. Autoethnography is also applied as a methodology to explicate the role of the researcher in relation to research participants, at times making the researcher a participant in the study as well. These uses of autoethnography, while deliberate, are unique in their adoption of autoethnography during the study to illuminate the researcher’s methodological and paradigmatic shift to include the self (e.g., McClellan, 2012; Spenceley, 2011). At the other end of the spectrum, autoethnographies are deliberately conceptualized before a study in order to examine a personal experience within a particular context (e.g., Tsumagari, 2010; Wright, 2006), to illuminate gaps in particular domains (e.g., Jones, 2009; Quicke, 2010), to demonstrate transformative experiences (e.g., Long, 2008; Tour, 2012), or to engage in self-critique (e.g., Preston, 2011; Schulz, 2007).

When autoethnography is the foundation for any type of published inquiry, the negative assumptions about situating such a critical form of self-guided inquiry must be addressed from conception to dissemination. The centering of the self as a research subject is clear and supported by rationales that address more than research methods; the researcher positions the self in ways that are epistemological. For example, Henning (2012) completed a study of her own learning in which autoethnography was epistemologically and methodologically the foundation for her inquiry into her

**TABLE 1.2 ● Authors Seeking/Making a Link from Autoethnography Methodology to Tradition**

Connections of Autoethnography Methodology to Traditional Tools	Authors Seeking/Making the Connection
Autoethnography and critical social theory	Camangian, 2010; Chavez, 2012; DeLeon, 2010; Garza, 2008; Houston, 2007; Hughes, 2008a; Kahl, 2010; Mayuzumi, 2009; Pennington, 2007; Quicke, 2010; Reta, 2010; Schulz, 2007; Woods, 2010, Wright, 2006
Autoethnography as self-study	Attard & Armour, 2005; Pennington, 2006; Pennington & Brock, 2012; Wright, 2006
Autoethnography as narrative inquiry	Camangian, 2010; Carless, 2012; Chavez, 2012; DeLeon, 2010; Garza, 2008; Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008; Jones, 2009; Long, 2008; Nutbrown, 2011; Pennington, 2007; Quicke, 2010; Smagorinsky, 2011
Autoethnography with counternarrative, <i>testimonios</i> , and identity	Camangian, 2010; Chavez, 2012; Correa & Lovegrove, 2012; DeLeon, 2010; Hughes, 2008c; Mayuzumi, 2009; Pearson, 2010; Quicke, 2010; Reta, 2010; Tour, 2012
Autoethnography and ethnography	Henning, 2012
Autoethnography and phenomenology	Rossmann & Rallis, 2012; Tsumagari, 2010
Autoethnography and grounded theory	Hermann-Wilmarth & Bills, 2010; Theoharis (2008)
Symbolic interactionism	Anderson (2006)

experiences, beginning with the research question, “What can a seasoned, face-to-face teacher and occasional online teacher learn by taking an online course?” (p. 13). She utilized “memories, self-observations and reflections and textual artifacts” (p. 14) and found that she sought to stay in control of her learning, had concerns about interacting with others, and also had emotional concerns. Her recommendations connect to her findings about her own learning and add to the field’s knowledge base.

Autoethnography can help us think about the researcher and the researched as equally open to change (Hermann-Wilmarth & Bills, 2010, p. 270). One example of such an in-depth use of autoethnography is Hermann-Wilmarth and Bills’s (2010) work noted above, in which they applied the genre as a means to address a study conducted with students. Autoethnography is also used to study the self and to present alternative perspectives precisely because of the way it involves “reflexively writing

the self into the ethnographic text; isolating that space where memory, history, performance, and meaning intersect” (Denzin, 2014, p. 22). Slattery (2001) uses Foucault and the artist Jackson Pollock to examine the regulation of the human body and sexuality as they relate to his experiences as a student in a Roman Catholic school in the 1960s. His work illuminates not only his experiences but also how they connect to notions of schooling in what he refers to as the “hidden curriculum of the body” (p. 394). Such insights and analysis would not be easily gathered through interviews and observations of research participants. It is Slattery’s voice and intimate representation that bring the findings to the surface and help us to understand the regulatory nature of schooling (see Appendix A for more detailed discussion of Slattery’s work).

Researchers who use autoethnography as a means to justify their inclusion in their studies vary in their depictions of autoethnography as either empirical research methodology or empirical research method. In the next section we detail how researchers use autoethnographic methods as a means of actually doing data collection and analysis.

### Autoethnography Defined as Method(s)

Autoethnography is frequently used as a research method, technique, tool, or means for self-examination and relied upon for specific techniques of data collection, data analysis, and representation. Autoethnographic methods of data collection and analysis are inclusive of many types of qualitative methods, such as reflective journaling, videotaping, interviewing, and fieldwork. The distinction between more common qualitative studies and autoethnographic studies that focus on the self lies in the subject under study. Data collection and analysis methods are unique to autoethnography in these types of studies. Researchers within the ethnographic tradition often use traditional ethnographic methods to focus on culture and fieldwork while highlighting the researcher as subject (Henning, 2012; Houston, 2007; Martin, 2011; Nutbrown, 2011; Pennington, 2007; Quicke, 2010). Others adopt a more evocative approach, relying on notions of autoethnography as critical reflections (Attard & Armour, 2005; Woods, 2010), performative presentations (Correa & Lovegrove, 2012), *testimonios* as counternarratives (see Camangian, 2010; Chavez, 2012; Correa & Lovegrove, 2012; DeLeon, 2010; Hughes & Berry, 2012; Mayuzumi, 2009; Pearson, 2010; Reta, 2010), emotional recall (McMahon & Dinan-Thompson, 2011; Nutbrown, 2011; Sander & Williamson, 2010), and narrative constructions (Carless, 2012).

Centering the story of the self and focusing exclusively on narrations and descriptions of personal experience are the hallmark of autoethnographic studies, yet the studies vary widely in their level of description of the methods used. Correa and Lovegrove (2012) present their *testimonio* as a performance (as a play); these researchers relied on their “meetings, as we discussed our childhood memories and a shared sense of dis/connection with our different Latina/o cultures” (p. 350). For example, Garza (2008) relies on autoethnography in using his personal journals from his first year as a school superintendent as his primary data sources. He defines autoethnography and then moves to presenting journal excerpts directly and chronologically.

Titled “autoethnographic moments,” these are dated but otherwise presented without categorization or analysis; they read like a peek into his personal journals organized by date. Garza constructs his conclusions as lessons learned from his journal entries. Long (2008) utilizes a continuous first-person description of her spiritual experiences, integrating theory and related scholarship to her illness. She describes her research methods as follows: “During [my illness] I kept a notebook, I scribbled on scraps of paper and I annotated novels. . . . I felt compelled to write” (p. 190). She then ties her writing to learning experiences in the classroom and makes clear recommendations based on her analysis. Preston (2011) combines personal reflections and transcripts of data interactions with participants. She relies on recordings of her work with her counseling clients. Her focus on herself is clearly articulated as she reflects on her data: “I have not yet understood the meaning of countertransference through my training. . . . I am preoccupied with my own problem, and have not fully understood the true meaning of the counselor’s role” (p. 118). Autoethnographic methods are integrated into all of the studies described above in unique ways, yet all of the methods used rely on data collected and analyzed in specific ways.

The application of autoethnography as method(s) in some of the most current scholarship illustrates various degrees and means of describing and defining autoethnography. Most of the observed studies mention the term *autoethnography*, while some of them use the term only in the abstract (Sander & Williamson, 2010; Tobin, 2011). Autoethnographic work is employed primarily as a method to study the self as an educator (Attard & Armour, 2005; Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008; Henning, 2012; Hermann-Wilmarth & Bills, 2010; Hughes, 2008a; Kahl, 2010; Woods, 2010). Within the field of teacher education, Hamilton et al. (2008) compare and contrast autoethnography with self-study and narrative inquiry, describing the value of centering the self within teacher education. In some cases, autoethnography has been used as a method along with notions of caring to bring students and self-reflection into the research and learning process (Camangian, 2010; Hughes, 2008a; Jones, 2009; Pennington, 2007). Autoethnography has also been used as a method to provide alternative viewpoints in particular disciplines (Carless, 2012; Fox, 2008; Jones, 2009; Martin, 2011) or contexts (Clough, 2009; Garza, 2008; Houston, 2007; Long, 2008). The permutations of autoethnography vary across disciplines and according to the depth and breadth of how autoethnography is described and used as a method.

### **Iterations and Examples of Autoethnography Applied as Critical Social Research**

Autoethnography takes more than 20 different forms, and that is only counting those that have appeared in the published social science forms of autoethnography. Remember, autoethnography outside the confines of social science can take on additional hybrid forms of poetry, performance, art, and audiovisual media beyond those listed here. As Ellis et al. (2011) note, “The forms of autoethnography differ in how much emphasis is placed on the study of others, the researcher’s self and interaction

with others, traditional analysis, and the interview context, as well as on power relationships” (para. 15). In this section we name and define those forms of autoethnography and offer illustrative examples and/or relevant references. The work of Ellis et al. (2011), Hughes and Willink (2015), and Denzin (2014) is particularly useful for locating and defining these various iterations and for providing examples of them in alphabetical order (see Table 1.3).

### Applying Autoethnography as Critical Social Research: Key Considerations

Autoethnography involves locating a meaningful phenomenon of interest and considering a *critical reflexive* approach to thinking and writing. These elements of autoethnography tend to be quite a bit more challenging to engage mentally than initially anticipated by most of our students, for several reasons. First, it is difficult to locate and focus on meaningful, personalized central questions and to engage productive diverse groups that challenge us to see and resist the matrix through those questions, all the while trying “not to separate [our] personal and professional philosophies” (Milner, 2003, p. 205). Reflection alone seems to take an author to one necessary, but insufficient, place. Conversely, a reflexive complicit lens challenges an author to question taken-for-granted knowledge and how the matrix can adversely influence one’s pedagogy, teaching, learning, policy, and practice. Milner (2003) challenges pre-service and inservice teachers, as well as teacher educators, to revisit whether they truly believe “oppression is wrong” and how they may or may not “display this belief at school” (p. 205).

Milner’s (2003) work is instructive here because it also challenges autoethnographers to pursue inquiry and writing that motivates them to reconsider how best to portray their anti-oppressive selves through “discourse and actions outside of school resulting in a form of social justice” (p. 205). Dropping the editorial “we” of the public transcript (Scott 1990) is a critical component of autoethnography, particularly in the U.S. context, where writers and speakers in public venues enlist unsolicited representation to articulate given points they are trying to make. Autoethnographers engage reflexivity during this element by confronting the reality of being critically conscious while considering how they might be complicit in problems of teaching, learning, and living that they perceive. On a practical note, although we and most of our students have engaged resistance (Giroux 1983) in the matrix of domination before, it has too often been not a transformative resistance or the form that people act out to begin “resisting domination in myriad ways” (Jennings & Lynn, 2005, p. 20).

By now you have seen that autoethnography is not a simple one-size-fits-all study of the self, because it can vary according to the broad methodology used, the actual methods of research

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#### What Is Critical Social Research?

Critical social research encompasses a broad range of social science studies that purposefully challenge existing understandings and foundations of knowledge, while also embracing various research approaches across multiple disciplines

[Jupp, 1993].

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**TABLE 1.3 • Types of Autoethnography: Descriptions and Citations**

Types of Autoethnography	Descriptions and Citations
Analytic autoethnography	Ethnographic work in which “the researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in the researcher’s published texts, and (3) committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena” (Anderson, 2006, p. 375).
Co-constructed narratives	Narratives that “illustrate the meanings of relational experiences, particularly how people collaboratively cope with the ambiguities, uncertainties, and contradictions of being friends, family, and/or intimate partners. Co-constructed narratives view relationships as jointly-authored, incomplete, and historically situated affairs. Joint activity structures co-constructed research projects. Often told about or around an epiphany, each person first writes her or his experience, and then shares and reacts to the story the other wrote at the same time [see Bochner & Ellis, 1995; Toyosaki & Pensoneau, 2005; Vande Berg & Trujillo, 2008]” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, para. 23).
Collaborative autoethnography	Autoethnography that involves “the coproduction of an autoethnographic (duoethnography) text by two or more writers, often separated by time and distance” (Denzin, 2014, p. 23; citing Diversi & Moreira, 2009; Gale & Wyatt, 2009; Wyatt, Gale, Gannon, & Davies, 2011).
Community autoethnographies	“Similar to interactive interviews, <i>community autoethnographies</i> use the personal experience of researchers-in-collaboration to illustrate how a community manifests particular social/cultural issues (e.g., whiteness; Toyosaki, Pensoneau-Conway, Wendt, & Leathers, 2009). Community autoethnographies thus not only facilitate ‘community-building’ research practices but also make opportunities for ‘cultural and social intervention’ possible” (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 22).
Critical co-constructed autoethnography	A relatively new method from Cann and DeMeulenaere (2012) that is informed by “critical theory, critical pedagogy and critical race theory” (p. 146). It is intended to provide “a way for collaborating activist researchers to reflect on the tempo, uncertainty and complexity of research relationships that cross boundaries into more personal spaces such as friendships” (p. 146). The method as a product was also developed to name and “create spaces for collaborating researchers to work across differences” (p. 146). Moreover, the method was developed as a defensible “process of collectively reflecting together about our work . . . as a means to avoid a false consciousness and examine the transformative work we attempt to do as researchers, authors, college teachers” (p. 153). One example of critical co-constructed autoethnography is the work of Hughes and Willink (2015), who applied the method as a systematic approach to learning from their co-reflexive critical dialogues in their ethnographic work on school desegregation in the coastal Albemarle area of North Carolina. The researchers sometimes participated in different interviews with the same informants—Hughes as a self-identified Black male doctoral student from the Albemarle area and Willink as a self-identified White female doctoral student from the North.

Types of Autoethnography	Descriptions and Citations
Critical performance autoethnography	Autoethnography that involves critical reflexive writing, rehearsal, and performance that engages “Conquergood’s triad of triads: (1) the I’s: imagination, inquiry, intervention; (2) the A’s: artistry, analysis, activism; (3) the C’s: creativity, citizenship, civic struggles for social justice” (Denzin, 2014, p. 25; citing Madison, 2005, p. 171; 2012, pp. 189–190; Pennington & Prater, 2014).
Deconstructive autoethnography	Autoethnography that “shifts attention from the narrative I to the performative I, contesting the meanings given to voice, presence, experience, and subjectivity” (Denzin, 2014, p. 25; citing Jackson & Mazzei, 2009, pp. 307–313).
Duoethnography	Collaborative research methodology in which two or more researchers juxtapose their life histories in order to provide multiple understandings of a social phenomenon (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, pp. 9–10). “Duoethnographers use their own biographies as sites of inquiry and engage in dialogic narrative, often realized in collaborative writing and collaborative autoethnography” (Denzin, 2014, p. 23; citing Gale, Pelias, Russell, Spry, & Wyatt, 2013; Norris & Sawyer, 2012).
Estrangement autoethnography	Autoethnography in which the researcher purposefully performs in countercultural ways, thinking and acting in ways that are counter to the status quo, the norms and rules of the dominant culture. In this way, the autoethnographic researcher can critically and reflexively examine responses of self and others while in an estranged state and respond to the theoretical body of knowledge on the area being studied (Keenan & Evans, 2014b). In short, estrangement autoethnography can reveal and thus lead to a challenge of taken-for-granted knowledge. For example, Keenan and Evans (2014a) contribute evidence of the effectiveness of estrangement autoethnography in enhancing university student learning and provide a model for undertaking the performance of estrangement. Their work explores the use of estrangement autoethnography as a means to encourage student autonomy, enhance learning to challenge student perspectives of normal environments, and problematize perspectives on consumer culture to support learners’ experiential knowledge on which to base their use of theory.
Indigenous/native ethnographies	Ethnographies developed “from colonized or economically subordinated people, and . . . used to address and disrupt power in research, particularly a (outside) researcher’s right and authority to study (exotic) others. Once at the service of the (White, masculine, heterosexual, middle/upper-classed, Christian, able-bodied) ethnographer, indigenous/native ethnographers now work to construct their own personal and cultural stories; they no longer find (forced) subjugation excusable [Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008]” (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 16).
Interactive interviews	Interviews that provide “an in-depth and intimate understanding of people’s experiences with emotionally charged and sensitive topics” (Ellis, Kiesinger, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997, p. 121). Interactive interviews are collaborative endeavors between researchers and participants, research activities in which researchers and participants—one and the same—probe together about issues that transpire, in

*(Continued)*



TABLE 1.3 ● (Continued)

Types of Autoethnography	Descriptions and Citations
	conversation, about particular topics (e.g., eating disorders). Interactive interviews usually consist of multiple interview sessions, and, unlike traditional one-on-one interviews with strangers, are situated within the context of emerging and well-established relationships among participants and interviewers (Adams, 2008). “The emphasis in these research contexts is on what can be learned from interaction within the interview setting as well as on the stories that each person brings to the research encounter” (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 21).
Interpretive autoethnography	“A critical performative practice, a practice that begins with the biography of the writer and moves outward to culture, discourse, history, and ideology” (Denzin, 2014, p. x).
Interpretive performance autoethnography	Autoethnography that “allows the researcher to take up each person’s life in its immediate particularity and to ground the life in its historical moment. . . . Interpretation works forward to the conclusion of a set of acts taken up by the subject while working back in time, interrogating the historical, cultural, and biographical conditions that moved the person to experience the events being studied (Denzin, 2001, p. 41). These events occur in those sites where structure, history, and autobiography intersect” (Denzin, 2014, p. x).
Layered accounts	Accounts that “focus on the author’s experience alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature. This form emphasizes the procedural nature of research. Similar to grounded theory, layered accounts illustrate how ‘data collection and analysis proceed simultaneously’ (Charmaz, 1983, p. 110) and frame existing research as a ‘source of <i>questions and comparisons</i> ’ rather than a ‘measure of truth’ (p.117). But unlike grounded theory, layered accounts use vignettes, reflexivity, multiple voices, and introspection (Ellis, 1991) to ‘invoke’ readers to enter into the ‘emergent experience’ of doing and writing research (Ronai, 1992, p. 123), conceive of identity as an ‘emergent process’ (Rambo, 2005, p. 583), and consider evocative, concrete texts to be as important as abstract analyses (Ronai, 1995, 1996)” (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 20).
Meta-autoethnography	Autoethnography that involves the researcher’s layering of new interpretations, reflections, and vignettes onto his or her older autoethnographic work. Developed by Carol Ellis (2008), who introduces as an example of meta-autoethnography a process in which she collects a dozen of her stories about loss in her family and her childhood and then translates across those stories in search of new epiphanies, revelations, and understandings. In short, Ellis (2008) describes meta-autoethnography as a systematic process of critical reflexive thinking and synthesis of one’s own previous autoethnography work in order to learn from it and through it.
Mini-autoethnography	A shortened version of autoethnography that sacrifices the breadth and depth of critical reflexive study for a clear and sustained focused on three salient experiences, episodes, moments, or events from one’s life. As represented in Appendixes B and C of this textbook, mini-autoethnography can be a useful assignment for learners who

Types of Autoethnography	Descriptions and Citations
	are undergraduate students or researchers new to the genre; it is also useful for learners in large groups and those under relatively short time constraints (Wallace, 2002). For example, Wallace [2002] conducted a mini-autoethnography of three institutional moments in which he saw a set of conditions that invited him to speak or write as a gay academic to make political interventions in dominant culture.
Narrative ethnographies	“Texts presented in the form of stories that incorporate the ethnographer’s experiences into the ethnographic descriptions and analysis of others. Here the emphasis is on the ethnographic study of others, which is accomplished partly by attending to encounters between the narrator and members of the groups being studied (Tedlock, 1991), and the narrative often intersects with analyses of patterns and processes” (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 17).
Performance autoethnography	“The merger of critical pedagogy, performance ethnography, and cultural politics; the creation of texts that move from epiphanies to the sting of memory, the personal to the political, the autobiographical to the cultural, the local to the historical. A response to the successive crises of democracy and capitalism that shape daily life; showing how these formations repressively enter into and shape the stories and performances persons share with one another. It shows how persons bring dignity and meaning to their lives in and through these performances; it offers kernels of utopian hope of how things might be different, better” (Denzin, 2014, p. 25; citing Denzin, 2003; Pelias, 2011).
Personal narratives	“Stories about authors who view themselves as the phenomenon and write evocative narratives specifically focused on their academic, research, and personal lives (e.g., Berry 2007; Goodall, 2006; Poulos, 2008; Tillmann, 2009). These often are the most controversial forms of autoethnography for traditional social scientists, especially if they are not accompanied by more traditional analysis and/or connections to scholarly literature. Personal narratives propose to understand a self or some aspect of a life as it intersects with a cultural context, connect to other participants as co-researchers, and invite readers to enter the author’s world and to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives (Ellis, 2004, p. 46)” (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 24).
Racial autoethnography	Autoethnography that combines racial autobiography, ethnography, and critical reflexive self-narratives to begin learning “about the idea of race, [as] . . . underutilized as a tool to familiarize and orient students in the process of critical inquiry for nursing research. The aims of racial autoethnography is to: (1) reposition students to effect an epistemological change, (2) challenge dominant ideology, and (3) function as a link between the student and critical theories for use in nursing research. Students [are encouraged to engage] in and share reflective narrative about a variety of instructional materials. . . . Reflective narratives are presented in a framework that addresses . . . racial identity development” (Taylor, Mackin, & Oldenberg, 2008, p. 342).

*(Continued)*

TABLE 1.3 • (Continued)

Types of Autoethnography	Descriptions and Citations
Reflexive, dyadic interviews	Interviews that “focus on the interactively produced meanings and emotional dynamics of the interview itself. Though the focus is on the participant and her or his story, the words, thoughts, and feelings of the researcher also are considered, e.g., personal motivation for doing a project, knowledge of the topics discussed, emotional responses to an interview, and ways in which the interviewer may have been changed by the process of interviewing. Although the researcher’s experience isn’t the main focus, personal reflection adds context and layers to the story being told about participants (Ellis, 2004)” (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 18).
Reflexive ethnographies	Ethnographies that “document ways a researcher changes as a result of doing fieldwork. Reflexive/narrative ethnographies exist on a continuum ranging from starting research from the ethnographer’s biography, to the ethnographer studying her or his life alongside cultural members’ lives, to ethnographic memoirs (Ellis, 2004, p. 50) or ‘confessional tales’ (Van Maanen, 1988) where the ethnographer’s backstage research endeavors become the focus of investigation (Ellis, 2004)” Ellis et al., 2011, para. 19).

used, and how it can be represented. We propose that despite all of these variations, some basic ideas can be used to delineate autoethnography. We have identified five of them: critical reflexivity, educative experiences, privilege-penalty experiences, ethical concerns, and salient experiences assembled and shared. Moreover, while working in qualitative research as a doctoral candidate, Hughes’s former doctoral advisee Nitasha Clark developed the acronym CREPES as a mnemonic tool for easier recall of these five key ideas: *critical reflexivity*, *educative experiences*, *privilege-penalty experiences*, *ethics*, and *supported-salient narratives*. Each idea is described below in more detail.

**Idea 1: Autoethnography considers *critical reflexivity*.**

In applying autoethnography as **critical social research**, it is key for autoethnographers to consider their own roles with critical reflexivity, whereby they come to view themselves as complicit (at least partially) in the problems they perceive. Discussing such complicity can place scholars in a quite vulnerable position. It is the crucial consideration of unveiling the vulnerable self that can free the mind of self-deception without self-deprecation. In addition, it is imperative for autoethnographers to anticipate a complicit and vulnerable self with regard to sharing sensitive information with others as they grapple with the complications of their educational positions. After engaging this process, autoethnographers may return to it as part of the lifelong journey of improving their craft. Hughes’s students often lamented when engaging this crucial element, as he initially did, stating, “Before I knew about how

all of this domination stuff creeps into my classroom, I didn't have to worry about what to do about it." Our blissful, naive selves in this way, without a reflexive, complicit lens on our perceptions of problems, ultimately limit our ability to optimize the potential of our educational research endeavors.

**Idea 2: Autoethnography considers *educative* experiences.**

A second key idea of autoethnography involves an in-depth view of one's educative experiences along the lifelong spectrum. Educative experiences inside and outside schools and classrooms are crucial for autoethnographers to consider as they engage in critical reflexive thought processes. Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) concur with the need to approach studies of the self from multiple levels of a lifelong educational experience and with a reflexive lens: "The connection between autobiography and history must be apparent, the issues attended to need to be central to teaching and teacher education" (p. 20). Patricia Hill Collins (1990) describes the matrix also as being experienced and resisted, taught and learned on three levels: "personal biography; group or community level of the cultural context created by race, class, and gender; and the systemic level of social institutions" (pp. 226–227). The group or community level of the cultural educational context is particularly important to consider as it seems to be a major social site for reproducing biased responses (including the *hits*, *misses*, and *false alarms* discussed by Swim & Stangor, 1998; see Appendix D for discussion of these concepts).

**Idea 3: Autoethnography considers *privilege-penalty* experiences.**

A third key idea of autoethnography concerns the deception, contradiction, ignorance, and denial of interlocking systems of oppression (including race, class, and gender as particularly dominant and oppressive). These constitute what Collins (1990) names "the matrix of domination" (i.e., the matrix). She criticizes any scholarly position that identifies as fundamental only the oppression with which it feels most comfortable while classifying all others as less important in the matrix. For her, the matrix presents "few pure victims or oppressors" because an "individual derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppression in which everyone lives" (p. 230). For example, from Collins's Black feminist standpoint, "white women are penalized by their gender, but privileged by their race," and "depending on the context, an individual may be an oppressor, a member of an oppressed group, or simultaneously oppressor and oppressed" (p. 224). It is crucial for autoethnographers to consider privilege and penalty alongside the social forces they perceive, identify, and study in relation to themselves.

Cleveland's (2005) work can be instructive here for autoethnography teachers and learners as he builds on Collins's (1990) work by having his students "unpack" or identify privileges on their own. As a self-identified Black male, often teaching as "other," in his teacher education classroom, Cleveland addresses ability privilege, class privilege, heterosexual privilege, male privilege, and White privilege. He links three

primary reasons to the success of this approach: avoiding “shame or blame”; identifying that everyone is privileged in one way or another and, as a result, some are more privileged than others; and informing students that, as a result of these privileges, we are all capable of oppressing others (p. 67).

**Idea 4: Autoethnography considers relational ethics.**

A fourth key idea that can be crucial to developing autoethnography involves the critical self-examination of relational ethics. Ellis et al. (2011) assert that autoethnographers “consider ‘relational concerns’ as a crucial dimension of inquiry . . . that must be kept uppermost in their minds throughout the research and writing process” (para. 31). Most of the time, it is a necessity for autoethnographers to be able to “continue to live in the world of relationships in which their research is embedded after the research is completed” (para. 31). In light of this necessity, at least three logical obligations for autoethnographers can be drawn from the evidence provided by the autoethnographies reviewed here: (a) autoethnographers must be cognizant of the promise and the potential problems of showing their work to others implicated in or by their texts, and must take extreme care in considering whether and how to encourage others to engage in *member checking* (i.e., the opportunity to “check” and respond to how they are represented in the autoethnographic text); (b) autoethnographers must protect the privacy and safety of others by altering identifying characteristics in their publications, such as “circumstance, topics discussed, or characteristics like race, gender name, place, or appearance”; and (c) autoethnographers must stay aware of how their work is interpreted and understood, because, as Ellis et al. (2011) explain, “the essence and meaningfulness of the research story is more important than the precise recounting of [socially constructed] detail” (para. 31).

Indeed, autoethnography presents particular ethics concerns due to the need for researchers not just to protect the identities of others mentioned in their studies but also to ensure that their own agendas and identities do not sacrifice the credibility of their studies. When the researcher includes a great deal of his or her own identity in an autoethnography, greater danger exists for that researcher stance to influence the questions and direction of interviews with participants. Yet, to date, relatively few peer-reviewed journal articles have discussed the role of ethics when autoethnography is applied as empirical educational research. Similar to other qualitative researchers, autoethnographers have an obligation to address ethical decisions shaping research design, methodology, and analysis and to report on consent and confidentiality agreements (Duran et al., 2006). In addition to these obligations, it is incumbent on all qualitative researchers in the academy, including autoethnographers, to determine the necessity and parameters of approval from an institutional review board (IRB) (Duran et al., 2006). Although autoethnography can be translated across the other standard obligations quite seamlessly, obtaining IRB approval is complex when this method is applied.

Conventional qualitative research methods require consent forms for each adult and child observed (during focused observation) and/or interviewed during the course of the research. However, if autoethnography is to continue offering a venue

for unveiling and critiquing underrepresentation, marginalization, and oppression, how might autoethnographers go about obtaining informed consent from individuals, groups, and institutions that subject the **subaltern** (i.e., the excluded, oppressed, or marginalized person) to underrepresentation, marginalization, and oppression? Would we be remiss to ignore the unique ethical dilemmas, risks, and social costs to be considered by subaltern autoethnographers, who may act to protect themselves and their families in ways that challenge ethical reporting as interpreted by some of the more powerful and privileged members of the academy? There are no simple responses to this line of inquiry; however, it may be sufficient to say here that autoethnographers have traditionally considered relational ethics concerns “as a crucial dimension of inquiry that must be kept uppermost in their minds throughout the research and writing process” (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 31).

There is some promise for addressing the ethics gap in autoethnographic educational research, as some autoethnographers have presented research and findings in ways that honor site access agreements and consent from participants in pursuit of ethical reporting. They have also been aware of potential conflicts of interest and researcher perspectives that may influence how the empirical research is reported. However, even with identifying information seemingly omitted by the researcher, direct and indirect disclosure of participant identities can occur. In response to this type of ethical threat, some autoethnography has evolved into a method(ology) that can allow participants “to talk back to how they have been represented in the text” (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 31). Autoethnographies highlighted by Hughes, Pennington, and Makris (2012) implemented one or more of the following processes that respond to Ellis et al.’s (2011) relational ethics concerns:

1. Application of pseudonyms for all proper nouns and pronouns (e.g., Berry, 2005)
2. Member checking (e.g., Hughes, 2008a, 2008c)
3. Coauthorship with key informant (e.g., Laubscher & Powell, 2003)

For example, Berry (2005) specifically illustrates the ethical care that autoethnographers can engage when reporting potentially volatile information about a student:

“School is like a jail, the students are like prisoners, the teachers are prison guards and the principal is the warden,” said one student I’ll call D. Students were assigned to read a chapter of the text entitled *Metaphors of Schooling* and I was in the midst of facilitating a discussion based on an in-class small group assignment to develop metaphors and similes of school. When D provided his response, the class responded in thunderous applause, some students standing while clapping. (p. 40)

Samples like Berry’s suggest that, similar to those of ethnography researchers, the methodological concern for ethical reporting obligates autoethnographers to protect the privacy of the people described in their self-study research.

Through verbal and written confidentiality agreements, the autoethnographic process can involve member checking, as mentioned previously. Such member checking led Hughes (2008a) to completely rewrite a manuscript after receiving feedback from the student centered in the piece, whom he identified by the pseudonym Maggie. She described his original draft essentially as inaccurate and self-aggrandizing. Moreover, the need to maintain the privacy of those in everything from autoethnographers' monographs to their photographs is paramount (Sieber & Tolich, 2013). Adherence to the ethics of autoethnography is demonstrated by the great care and self-critical discretion applied by the researchers highlighted above, and more research is needed that specifically speaks to ethics in educational research that applies autoethnography as method and methodology. One way autoethnographers can respond to confidentiality issues is to consider coauthorship with one or more others mentioned in their work. In another example, we learn from Laubscher and Powell (2003) about the promise and problems of co-teaching a diversity- and equity-based psychology course across color, class, and cultural lines.

**Idea 5: Autoethnography considers *supported-salient* narratives.**

A fifth and final key idea to consider when applying autoethnography as critical social research involves the selection of supported-salient narratives for exploration and in-depth critique. We interpret the idea of supported-salient life narratives as *memorable personal stories from one's life that can be supported by evidence from related critical social research literature*. This is an important idea that separates autoethnography from traditional storytelling. One anonymous reviewer of this text when it was in manuscript form reminded us that we should note here the distinction between thinking *about* a story and thinking *with* a story. As Frank (1995) explains, thinking "about a story is to reduce it to content and then analyze that content. Thinking with stories takes the story as already complete; there is no going beyond it" (p. 23). Moreover, one might surmise that "stories are a unified whole, and rather than dismantling and deconstructing them for the [sole] purposes of research or treating them as another set of data, we want to experience the stories *as stories* and the effect they have on the storyteller, the audience, and our own lives" (Herrmann & DiFate, 2014, p. 300). We find evidence in autoethnographic scholarship that autoethnographers exist somewhere along a continuum that ranges from leaning toward thinking about stories (e.g., Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008) to leaning toward thinking with stories (e.g., Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000), with some falling somewhere in between (e.g., Hughes, 2008c; Pennington, 2007). Whether thinking about a story, thinking with a story, or both, autoethnographers are expected to support the story with evidence to be garnered, so "readers will have no difficulty recognizing the authority of the scholarly voice, not just its authenticity" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 20).

Initially, autoethnographers supported the postpositivist goal of **triangulation** of narrative sources of evidence, which essentially involves gaining evidence from at least three sources addressing the same issue (Hughes, 2008c). For example, an autoethnographer may examine him- or herself critically after a salient cross-cultural

experience by providing narratives from his or her own experience and narratives from at least two other people who shared that experience. Through the supported-salient narrative idea, multiple “themes should be[come] evident and identifiable across the conversation represented or the narrative represented” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 20). Because autoethnography narratives (like all other narratives) are inherently flawed with subjectivity and implicit bias, supportive evidence from peer-reviewed publications can help readers become less concerned about whether autoethnographers are lying and more concerned about finding “gaps and inconsistencies and associations” (Luttrell, 2000, p. 512).

The advent of **assemblage** in autoethnography encourages autoethnographers to consider purposefully exposing the type of gaps, inconsistencies, and associations (Gurin & Nagda, 2006) that may emerge when they compare the stories of others to the stories they tell themselves. Assemblage, translated as a data collection strategy, involves the gathering of a collection of items, including relevant literature, that fit together to provide multiple perspectives and rich, multilayered accounts of a particular time, place, or moment in the life of the autoethnographer. Assemblage is steps beyond traditional qualitative triangulation; Denshire and Lee (2014) “liken it to the assembling of artifacts from an archaeological site . . . made up of different forms and modes of representation” (slide 7). The ultimate goal of assemblage is “to foreground, through juxtaposing multiple accounts, one against the other, an uneasy, unstable relationship between the writer and the self” (slide 7). For example, assembled audio and reading transcripts, coupled with aesthetically magnetic cultural artifacts and journaling notes, could force a sort of constant comparison that requires the autoethnographer to rethink and reconstruct his or her own autoethnography to share with interested audiences. Similarly, member checking may produce yet another piece of the assembled evidence, as the autoethnographer seeks feedback from others who are quoted or implicated in the research. The assemblage concept can also be added to member checking in order to challenge the autoethnographer to compare/contrast her or his interpretations and analyses against additional sources from assenting and/or dissonant narratives.

Irrespective of the data collection strategy chosen (i.e., triangulation or assemblage), at the end of the day the autoethnographer must decide what story components to share, as well as when and how to share them. Additional details about assemblage are provided in the Chapter 2, which focuses specifically on doing autoethnography.

### Debates and Critiques of Autoethnography

As noted earlier in the chapter, autoethnographic-type work was critiqued from the very beginning by Louis Leakey and other social scientists who essentially rejected Jomo Kenyatta’s hybrid autobiography/ethnography methodology as too subjective to meet the scrutiny of rigorous research. The growth of the multiple applications and iterations of autoethnography in the observed scholarship has not come without

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#### Assemblage

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Assemblage is a data collection method designed to represent a multilayered moment. It relies on literature, items, and accounts assembled in a unique form.

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scholarly criticism of the genre. One traditional ethnographer initially even called for the removal of autoethnography from the lexicons of empirical research (Delamont, 2009). Other scholars restrict the application of autoethnography as an empirical endeavor by endorsing its usage only on some occasions and under limited conditions (e.g., Anderson, 2006; Walford, 2009). For these scholars, autoethnography falls short of the rigorous academic standards applied to ethnography. Delamont (2009) argues that ethnographic research is “hard, physically tiring, intellectually taxing and demanding of a high level of engagement, where at every stage crises can arise” (p. 61). The obvious message and assumptions underlying these critiques of autoethnography are that the method lacks the substance to withstand the standard scrutiny of the academy and that autoethnographers simply devalue the academy’s standards. An appreciation of the “insights that can be drawn from reflexive writing about ethnography” should not then “retreat into autoethnography,” which Delamont describes as “an abrogation of the honourable trade of the scholar” (p. 61). Instead, opponents suggest that an alternative to the autoethnographic turn is “reflexive autobiographical writing” (Delamont, 2009, p. 61). Delamont proposes this alternative as a route to improve “the empirical research of others” because “it has analytic and pedagogic power” and the “potential to improve research,” unlike “the domestic guilt episode” that opponents equate with autoethnography (p. 61). These rejections of autoethnography are centered on the perceived weaknesses of the researcher as subject.

A relatively small group of established qualitative scholars in the United States and the United Kingdom are seeking to protect and preserve the integrity of ethnography by applying autoethnography through a traditional realist empirical lens that denies the deliberately evocative and performative applications of autoethnography toward change or social justice. Walford (2009) considers the nuances of autoethnographic applications and questions whether the usage of evocative autoethnography even “warrants the name ethnography as it has been traditionally understood” (p. 271). These ethnography-protection scholars contend that important divisions can and should be drawn between autoethnographers such as Denzin (2014) and Ellis and Bochner (2000), who are champions of a much more evocative, subjective, and emotionally engaging autoethnography, and those who challenge their position. Among the latter group of autoethnographers, Leon Anderson and Heewon Chang tend to be seen as champions, because they are read as defending a form of autoethnography more closely linked to traditional ethnography and to formal research practices (Walford, 2009, p. 276). Ethnographic reports should be distinguished by the need to be “logically constructed and be clear about what empirical claims (factual and explanatory) are being made and what empirical data have been generated that support those claims,” according to Walford (2009, p. 272). Tradition calls for attempts to reduce ambiguity and to exhibit precision in ways that analytic autoethnographers argue are absent from the autoethnographic work of their evocative counterparts. As previously noted, Chang’s (2008) work is often mentioned by the keepers of ethnographic tradition as a model for the type of autoethnography that might warrant an association with the terms *empirical* and *ethnography*. As Walford (2009) writes:

Chang (2008) restricts her consideration to a form of autoethnography that “shares the storytelling features with other genres of self-narrative but transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation” (p. 43). Chang sees autoethnography as being centrally focused on the concerns of anthropology and argues that it should not be seen as a form of therapy. Her recent book (Chang, 2008) has four chapters out of 10 devoted to generating autoethnographic data, starting with the importance of the research focus, then going through personal memory data, self-observation, self-reflective data and external data. (p. 279).

In support of the return of the “simple empiricist,” Walford concedes that storytelling (as applied in autoethnography) is “central to educational ethnography,” but he argues that autoethnographers often forget “that the traditional purpose has been to communicate something about others” (p. 280). Much to the chagrin of those who favor analytic autoethnography, Anderson (2006) asserts, “*autoethnography* has become almost exclusively identified with those advocating the descriptive literary approach of evocative autoethnography” (p. 377). Those in the analytic autoethnography camp interpret evocative or emotional autoethnography as moving too far away from traditional empirical scholarship. For example, Anderson states:

I am concerned that the impressive success of advocacy for what Ellis (1997, 2004) refers to as “evocative or emotional autoethnography” may have the unintended consequence of eclipsing other visions of what autoethnography can be and of obscuring the ways in which it may fit productively in other traditions of social inquiry. (p. 374)

Similar to Walford, Anderson seeks to legitimize autoethnography by embedding it in **realist ontology, symbolic interactionist** epistemology, and traditional ethnographic qualitative research. He complicates the notion that empirical evidence can be gathered from evocative autoethnography.

According to Anderson (2006), analytic autoethnography is “ethnographic work in which the researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in the researcher’s published texts, and (3) committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena” (p. 375). From this perspective, only analytic (not evocative) autoethnography can elicit the type of empirical evidence (or data) that will withstand the tradition of rigor and scrutiny in the academy. The goal and, indeed, the “hope” of the pioneer of analytic autoethnography is “that other scholars will join [him] in reclaiming and refining autoethnography as part of the analytic ethnographic tradition” (Anderson, 2006, p. 392).

In their scholarship, Delamont (2009), Walford (2009), Anderson (2006), and Chang (2008) provide arguments for either removing or beginning to reclaim autoethnography as an empirical endeavor because of what they perceive to be epistemological and/or methodological gaps. After more than a decade of deliberation,

we find neither more knowledge and more gaps nor more truth and more beauty when we compare and contrast evocative autoethnography and analytic autoethnography. We find them serving different purposes for different research audiences. We find weaker and stronger examples of them in the critical social research literature, but not in any disproportionate sense. One anonymous reviewer of the manuscript for this textbook even argued that the “evocative versus analytic” argument is now being downplayed, citing as evidence what he or she interprets as limited attention to the debate in the relatively recent *Handbook of Autoethnography* (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013a). Therefore, we posit that both analytic and evocative autoethnography are worth learning for the sake of having options for responding to the phenomenon of interest and the autoethnographic inquiry that drives the research.

## Summary

Autoethnography resides within the qualitative tradition and is interpretive and subject to wide ranges of expression and methods. It provides opportunities for close examination, understanding, and dissemination of the inner worlds of those engaged in critical self-reflexive inquiries. In this chapter we have introduced five key ideas for you to consider when applying autoethnography as critical social research. Researcher voices have long been absent from the educational field, where the study of teaching is often integrated into the profession of teaching. Understanding how educators comprehend and recognize themselves and their educational histories and contexts allows another perspective, the missing piece of the multifaceted existing standpoints in critical social research. The research discussed in this chapter illustrates both the promise and the potential perils of autoethnography, including some of the major critiques of the genre with regard to relational ethics, legitimacy, rigor, and utility. Moreover, this chapter has addressed the differences between using autoethnography as a methodology and using it as a method. While there are many applications and iterations of autoethnography, we do not advocate prescribing or constraining the presentations of it down to one privileged type.

## Group Activity

*Purpose:* Involve students in thinking about autoethnography and recording their ideas.

*Activity:* Journaling (see Table 1.4).

*Evaluation:* Determine whether students are thinking about autoethnography and how they may use journaling, with check-ins throughout the semester.

**TABLE 1.4 • Autoethnography Writing Prompt Worksheet**

This worksheet is structured to help you initiate the data collection for your autoethnography. An early step of the methodological process is to identify your past or present positions and the values of your background. Then you can analyze the complexity of patterns, establish theoretical frameworks, and compare/contrast your data with those of other ethnographies or autoethnographies.

<b>Background</b>	<b>Autoethnography Position (i.e., narrative represents your distant past, near past, present, or projected future)</b>	<b>Values of Your Background: How important was it to you (in the past), is it to you (in the present), and/or will it be to you (in the future)?</b>
Cultural/ethnic background		
Religious background		
Country background		
Family rituals or traditions		
Cultural or social group		
Political leanings		
Values in the community		
Your lifestyle		
Interests and hobbies		
Likes and dislikes		
<b>Special Topics (examples)</b>	<b>Write down words and phrases related to the special topic that immediately come to mind</b>	<b>Experience (including vicarious experiences as through media, movies, and books, and your own personal experience)</b>
Selected cultural group		
Selected country or nation		
Selected continent		

Source: Adapted from Nice [2007].

### Individual Activity

*Purpose:* Expose students to a viewpoint suggesting that we all have privileges and penalties in our society.

*Activity:* Think-pair-share in which students first work alone to “unpack” and identify relevant privileges and penalties in their lives and then meet in groups to share and extend what they have identified.

*Evaluation:* Determine whether students understands privilege and penalty.

### Sites for Students to Consider

Duncan, M. (2004). Autoethnography: Critical appreciation of an emerging art. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(4). [http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3\\_4/pdf/duncan.pdf](http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3_4/pdf/duncan.pdf)

Holt, N. L. (2003). Representation, legitimation, and autoethnography: An autoethnographic writing story. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2(1). [http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/2\\_1/html/holt.html](http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/2_1/html/holt.html)

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