

12-2017

The Story of Them: Outcomes of Practicing Autoethnography in Undergraduate Writing Courses

Justin B. Hopkins

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THE STORY OF THEM:
OUTCOMES OF PRACTICING AUTOETHNOGRAPHY
IN UNDERGRADUATE WRITING COURSES

A Dissertation
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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December 2017

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This study is an examination of the outcomes of practicing autoethnography, specifically in the context of first-year undergraduate, writing-intensive courses. The researcher recounts his initial, inspiring encounter with autoethnography and explores the possibility of its pedagogical application in composition instruction.

Autoethnography is a form of qualitative inquiry that combines personal reflection, aesthetic representation, and academic research and analysis to study the self in relation to social/cultural context (see the work of Ellis and Bochner, among others: e.g., Ellis & Bochner, 2000, 2016; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Hanauer, 2012a; Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013; Denzin, 2014; Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015).

Using classroom research methodology (Dana and Yendol-Hoppey, 2014), the following questions are addressed: What are the outcomes of practicing autoethnography in a first-year undergraduate, writing-intensive course? More specifically, what are the benefits and the drawbacks, especially any that are unusual or unique, of practicing autoethnography in that context? That is, what do students gain, especially that they might not in another context, from the experience, and what does that experience risk and/or cost? Can practicing autoethnography be an appropriate and useful activity for first-year undergraduate students? Should compositionists consider pedagogically adopting autoethnography as an addition or alternative to traditional research writing assignments?

A review of the relevant literature suggested a list of nine potential outcomes of practicing autoethnography:

1. Increased understanding of self
2. Increased understanding of social/cultural context
3. Increased understanding of connections between self and social/cultural context
4. Confrontation of difficult experiences with therapeutic results
5. Critical empowerment through challenging status quo
6. Consideration of ethical issues
7. Improved research skills
8. Improved writing skills
9. Improved critical thinking skills

Following the teaching of two sections of a first-year undergraduate, writing-intensive course, 11 student interviews and essays were analyzed, as well as 26 student surveys. Evidence was found of all nine outcomes and several others, including enjoyment of and the development of a sense of community through the process of practicing autoethnography. Critiques of and concerns about practicing autoethnography in the context of a first-year course were also expressed, chiefly the possible pressure and emotional vulnerability felt by some students in producing personal writing for assessment purposes.

However, overall the evidence supports the researcher's belief that compositionists should consider pedagogically adopting this genre because of the unusual, if not unique outcomes of practicing, even and maybe especially at the undergraduate level.

“Many now argue that we can study only our own experiences.”

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 636; 2005, p. 645; 2011, p. 417)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

3:53 pm. Sunday, February 26, 2017. I just finished the first full, albeit rough, draft of my dissertation.

Sitting on the train at Penn Station, I'm trying not to sob as I start to draft this final section. Surely I'm not the only person ever to cry while drafting the thank yous due decades of others' investment in a project like this one?

Shakespeare wrote: "Ingratitude is monstrous" (*Coriolanus* 2.3.9). My gratitude is great, and I express it humbly and happily to my friends and family, fellow artists and academics:

- To Dr. David Hanauer, who introduced me to autoethnography, something that seemed both strangely familiar and radically and wonderfully different from anything I had ever encountered, and without which it is hard for me to imagine my life for the last few years, or for more ahead.
- To my other committee members, Dr. Gian Pagnucci and Dr. Curtis Porter, whose contributions to my work have been invaluable.
- To Dr. Tony Adams, who agreed to be on my committee—I am sad that did not work out after all, but I hope we can work together sometime in the future.
- To my many former teachers, from those of Ecole d'Enfants de la Croix Rouge, whose aggressive style introduced me to cross-cultural learning, all the way to Dr. Gloria Park, who was far gentler, but who still pushed me to push myself.

- To all in my summer session cohort, who survived and thrived under many difficult circumstances, and who made three Junes and Julys in Indiana more fun than could have been. Especially to Summer, for supporting and surprising me in many ways.
- To my many former students, from whom I have probably learned as much as, if not more than I taught, and especially to those students who participated in this study: Edward, Betty, Kaitlyn, Kim, Spencer, Taylor, Christa, Elizabeth, Lydia, Cooper, and Tania. You have made this work possible, and I owe you more than I can repay.
- To the F&M community, for years of investment in my growth, and especially to Tamara and Dan—you have made me a better writer, and many times a better person, at every stage of my education and employment since I started at F&M, almost half my life ago.
- To my many mates, from many places, with whom I have studied and lived, laughed and wept: Jesse, Alex, Ryan, Matt, Maria, Lu—you are all a part of this.
- To the Wismers—there really are no words.
- To Tonton Soly and to Aida—*kasumaay*. I will never forget you.
- To my grandparents, who loved me all ways and always.
- To my brother, who is as good a man and as fine a mind as any I know—Sean, you really should write more, and I hope you will.
- To my parents, who were the first to make me want to know more about the world, myself and others, who taught me to read and to write, and to love.
- To the ones who were there at the beginning and in the middle, but mostly to Hayley, who I am happy is here at the end and the new beginning. I love you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
ONE	INTRODUCTION	1
	About the Beginning	1
	Research Purpose and Questions	4
	Methodological Approach	6
	Significance of Study	8
TWO	LITERATURE REVIEW	13
	Definition(s) and Development of Autoethnography	14
	Examples of Autoethnography	19
	Criticism of Autoethnography	22
	Autoethnography in Composition	32
	Claims About Outcomes of Practicing Autoethnography	41
	Summary	42
THREE	METHODOLOGY	43
	Justification for Qualitative Research and Classroom Research	45
	Researcher Positionality	46
	Study Context, Site, and Participants	47
	Data Sources and Collection	53
	Data Analysis	56
	Ethical Consideration	57
	Summary	60
FOUR	RESULTS	62
	Interviews and Essays	63
	Surveys	94
	Summary	97
FIVE	DISCUSSION	98
	Summary of Results	99
	Connecting Composition and Autoethnography	101
	Pedagogical Implications	107
	Limitations and Further Research	118
	Last Words	123

Chapter	Page
REFERENCES	126
APPENDICES	151
Appendix A: F&M and IUP IRB Approval Letters.....	151
Appendix B: CNX2 Syllabus: The Story of You: Autoethnography in Action.....	153
Appendix C: Autoethnography Assignment.....	158
Appendix D: Invitation to Participate in Study.....	161
Appendix E: Informed Consent Document.....	165
Appendix F: Some Suggestions for Teaching Autoethnography	168

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

If the course had been titled “Autoethnography,” I might not have taken it.

I’d never heard of autoethnography before. It sounded kind of silly, frankly—oxymoronic. A professor I admired said as much, scoffing, waving a dismissive hand, and calling it a contradiction in terms.

Yet as I glanced over the offerings for the second summer of my Ph.D. coursework, the subtitle of the last class on the list intrigued me: “Life Writing.”

I’d liked writing about my own life ever since I’d started keeping a (more or less) daily journal in a blue, wide-lined, Mead notebook in sixth grade. I still have that notebook. I remember writing, and I can read about building Lego castles, playing capture the flag, and getting a letter from a girl that had heart-dotted i’s and smelled of perfume. I wonder whatever happened to her...

But that kind of writing, that free-form, reflexive, recursive, cursive scribbling was completely different from the kind of formal, sturdily structured composition I’d been practicing for more than half of my life since: academic prose, trying to join the academic pros.

I didn’t know that these two kinds of writing could be practiced at the same time. I couldn’t know that an elective course in “Arts-based Qualitative Inquiry Methodology” called “Life Writing”—or autoethnography—would change my life.

About the Beginning

Dr. David Hanauer introduced me to the genre of autoethnography, the combination of personal reflection, aesthetic representation, and academic research and analysis to study the self in relation to social/cultural context (Ellis & Bochner 2000, 2016). In his “Life Writing” course,

we read Hanauer's own (2012a) autoethnography, in which he asserts, "Writing and the act of witnessing one's own life offers the option of exploring the complexities of personal experience and presenting it for observation by another" (pp. 845-846). We read Norman Denzin's (2014) *Interpretive Autoethnography*, in which he asserts, "The use and value of the autoethnographic method lies in its user's ability to capture, probe, and render understandable problematic experience" (p. 36). I was intrigued.

We read many examples of autoethnography, including Nora Murad's (2005) on being an American Jewish/Palestinian Muslim mother; Yuri Han's (2012) on losing an ex-lover and colleague to cancer; Maria Daskalaki's (2012) on being an academic crossing geographic borders; Miriam Sobre-Denton's (2012) on workplace bullying; Benny LeMaster's (2014) on coming out as gay to his family. We each presented someone else's autoethnography. I presented Kristen Blinne's (2012) stunning reflection on masturbation, in which she combines a vivid, erotic description of her personal experience with social, cultural, historical, biological, and linguistic, context. It blew my mind that such an intimate piece of writing could be published in an academic journal.

As required, I wrote an autoethnography for the course. I decided to examine my experience of leaving Senegal, West Africa, where I grew up as the child of missionary linguists, to return to my passport country, the United States. Concentrating specifically on what is called Third Culture Kid (TCK) "re-entry" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009), and following the example of Hanauer (2010, 2012a), I wrote poetry about the time of transition and framed those poems with analysis of scholarship on the TCK phenomenon (e.g., Lyttle, Barker, & Cornwell, 2011; Ittel & Sisler, 2012; Melles & Schwartz, 2013; Lijadi & van Schalkwyk, 2014). Researching and writing my autoethnography was without doubt the most meaningful academic assignment I had ever

completed. I learned a lot about myself and my social/cultural context, discovering that I was both similar to and different from other TCKs, and realizing after thirteen years how 9-11 had, oddly and awfully, actually made me feel, for the first time, wholly at home in the US: “Sharing the fear of a nation has a powerful acculturative effect” (p. 15). It was a painful, but a profound insight.

After the course, I submitted my autoethnography to Denzin’s journal *Qualitative Inquiry*, expecting a rejection but hoping for some useful feedback to rewrite and resubmit somewhere less competitive. I was astonished and elated when it was accepted, conditionally, on minor revision. It needed an ending, according to reviewer Tony Adams, who wrote, “The topic is important, the writing and poetry are engaging, and I like the analysis.” Incidentally, Denzin wrote, “I am very impressed by your piece.” That may be—probably—his standard line to contributors, but I nearly squealed with delight, anyway.

I wrote the ending, using the poetry of Senegal’s first president and prominent academic Léopold Sédar Senghor (1991) to evoke my own journey from “Paradis mon enfance africaine” (“Paradise my African childhood”). Returning from abroad, Senghor wrote how his home continent “reçoit l’enfant toujours enfant,/que douze ans d’errances n’ont pas vielli” (p. 291) (“Receives the eternally childlike child who has not aged/In twelve years of wandering” [p. 24]). I wrote, “I never considered my African childhood Paradise, and when I returned after not quite a dozen years away, I felt comfortable, but not at home” (Hopkins, 2015, p. 8), and I celebrated the publication.

I presented the piece at an autoethnography conference in San Angelo, Texas, where Adams co-key-noted during a snowstorm bad enough to close the local airport. To get home, I had to rent a van with several fellow autoethnographers and drive to Dallas overnight in hopes of

catching an early morning flight. That trip would normally take four hours, but the roads were so slick, it took nine. Inching down that icy highway at 1:30a.m., trying not to be dismayed by the tractor trailers that had skidded off the side of the highway, and thinking about everything I had encountered regarding this genre in the past days and months, I knew I wanted to work with autoethnography for my dissertation, but how, specifically?

Research Purpose and Questions

At first, I wanted to follow Ellis' (2004) example, writing an autoethnography about teaching a class on autoethnography—but to undergraduate students. Autoethnography has predominantly, though not exclusively, been the practice of professional or at least post-graduate scholars, but I believed the genre could and maybe should be practiced by less advanced writers as well. My reason: autoethnography might provide an ideal bridge between the kind of personal writing often done in high-school and the more academic writing required in college, as well as an introduction to research methods through a subject that students find genuinely interesting—hence, possibly more motivating than an assigned topic. John Bean (2011) emphasizes the challenges faced by teachers of undergraduate research: “The question we face, then, is how to transform students from writers of uninspired, pseudo-academic research papers into engaged undergraduate researchers” (p. 225). I suspected that autoethnography could be an answer to that question of transformation, and I wanted to try to incorporate the genre into my own pedagogy.

However, there were...obstacles. Permission to teach a course on autoethnography at my institution was not granted. More on that later.

I decided to turn my attention to the composition studies community. As an early-career compositionist, I wondered whether my colleagues were aware of autoethnography. I conducted an extensive review of the literature on autoethnography from composition studies and

discovered that though there is some considerable awareness and even appreciation of the genre, compositionists do not use it much in their teaching. (More on that later, too.) I wanted to know why, and I considered surveying and interviewing compositionists to find out.

But about a year after taking his course, I corresponded with Dr. Hanauer again, and he helped me realize that my first impulse was best. While it is interesting and important what compositionists think about autoethnography—and I still hope to conduct that study, eventually—it would be far more useful to learn what students themselves think about autoethnography after actually practicing it.

So I resubmitted my proposal to teach a course on autoethnography at my institution, adding an improved justification with the information from my literature review. I finally received permission—though still not without some bumps along the way—and went ahead with preparations for the course and the study.

Also along the way, I discovered the dissertation of Elizabeth Burke (2014), who had phenomenographically examined the experience of practicing autoethnography—though her subjects were Ph.D. candidates—identifying several categories of outcomes: personal growth, emotional process, social connectedness, and transpersonal experience. She concludes that practicing autoethnography “made for an overall more meaningful educational experience for participants” (p. 116). I later met Liz at a conference, sharing a presentation panel and a few drinks with her, and her work helped shape my study.

The crucial difference between our approaches was that my curiosity, of course, comes from a desire to learn whether or not practicing autoethnography can be an appropriate and useful activity for undergraduate students, especially at the first-year level, and whether or not

compositionists should consider pedagogically adopting autoethnography as an addition or alternative to traditional research writing assignments.

Though I cannot expect to conclusively answer such big and broad questions through this study, I will provide evidence of outcomes of practicing autoethnography in a first-year undergraduate, writing-intensive course, which should give a stronger understanding of its pedagogical potential for compositionists. These, then, are the specific questions that have guided my study:

- What are the outcomes of practicing autoethnography in a first-year undergraduate, writing-intensive course?
- More specifically, what are the benefits and the drawbacks, especially any that are unusual or unique, of practicing autoethnography in that context? That is, what do students gain, especially that they might not in another context, from the experience, and what does that experience risk and/or cost?
- Can practicing autoethnography be an appropriate and useful activity for first-year undergraduate students? Should compositionists consider pedagogically adopting autoethnography as an addition or alternative to traditional research writing assignments?

Methodological Approach

This study provides qualitative data as evidence of the outcomes of practicing autoethnography in a first-year undergraduate, writing-intensive course. I chose to use qualitative research because of its interpretive, contextualized approach to the construction of knowledge and representation of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), an approach that suits a study of autoethnography, itself a form of qualitative research.

More specifically, I used classroom research, which Nancy Dana and Diane Yendol-Hoppey (2014) define as “systematic, intentional study of one’s own professional practice” (p. 12) for the purpose of pedagogical improvement.

I began the study in the spring semester of 2016, during which I taught two sections of a first-year, writing-intensive course on autoethnography at my undergraduate institution. In that course, students learned the meaning(s) of autoethnography, analyzed examples of autoethnography, and wrote their own autoethnographic essays.

My triangulated data collection process drew from three sources: (1) student interviews, (2) student writing, and (3) student surveys. I present my results in Chapter Four and discuss them in Chapter Five. To protect the students from the possibility of coercive pressure, participation in the study was completely voluntary and invited only after completion of the course and posting of grades.

Many (Doloriert & Sambrook, 2011; Harris, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Burke, 2014; Forber-Pratt, 2015) have demonstrated that autoethnography is appropriate and useful for dissertation research and writing, and, as I indicated above, I initially considered conducting and composing the entire study as an autoethnography. However, the form doesn’t fit my research questions, since my interest is in information provided primarily by others. Still, it seems somehow unfitting to write about autoethnography without adopting any of its methodological approaches, so while this study is structured fairly conventionally (Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Results, Discussion), I will begin each chapter with sections of narrative, and, as readers may have already noticed, I will frequently employ a more casual, conversational, tone than is traditional for dissertation writing. Also, contrary to APA’s dictates, and in an attempt to

humanize scholarship, I have chosen to use first names when referring to published research, at least in the first reference to a scholar's work.

I will expand upon my methodological approach in Chapter Three.

Significance of Study

This study contributes to the body of knowledge about autoethnography by providing evidence of outcomes of practicing autoethnography at the first-year undergraduate level.

Drawing from the literature on autoethnography, I identified claims already made about nine potential outcomes of practicing autoethnography:

1. Increased understanding of self
2. Increased understanding of social/cultural context
3. Increased understanding of connections between self and social/cultural context
4. Confrontation of difficult experiences with therapeutic results
5. Critical empowerment through challenging status quo
6. Consideration of ethical issues
7. Improved research skills
8. Improved writing skills
9. Improved critical thinking skills

I ended the study with a similar but distinct list, having collapsed the first three and the ninth into a single outcome of increased reflexivity, and added the following four:

- Development of a sense of community
- Enjoyment
- Critique/Concern
- Miscellaneous

Implications of the study include support for or against the pedagogical adoption of autoethnography by compositionists as an addition or alternative to traditional research writing assignments in first-year undergraduate courses.

I will expand on definition(s) of the genre and its potential outcomes more in Chapter Two, but to demonstrate this study's significance, it is necessary here to highlight several of autoethnography's core features.

Perhaps the most striking of those features is its accessibility. It is no secret that academic writing often discourages readers, sometimes seemingly deliberately so, as if scholarly prose must serve as a guard of the ivory towers of intellectualism. As Gian Pagnucci (2004) puts it, "Academia celebrates not clarity but obfuscation" (p. 17). Or Art Bochner (1997), paraphrasing Laurel Richardson (1994): "Our work is underread, undergraduates find many of our publications boring, graduate students say our scholarship is dry and inaccessible, seasoned scholars confess they don't finish half of what they start reading, and the public hardly knows we exist" (p. 433). Autoethnographers reject the idea that academic writing must be dense, difficult, and dull to be successful, seeking instead to engage lay readers, as well as their scholarly colleagues. While it appears on academic platforms, the genre is intended to engage a wider audience. For example, I have shared my autoethnography with many individuals who would not otherwise be inclined to engage with traditional scholarship on the subject of TCK transition (or any other subject), but who have read and enjoyed my more accessible account.

Autoethnography's accessibility comes partly from its artistic, often narrative nature. While not every autoethnography is wholly story—and certainly not only communicated in prose, but also poetically (as was mine), performatively, visually, aurally, or orally—there must be some aesthetic component. Often that component is narrative, as autoethnographers reject the

idea of narrative as necessarily separate from scholarship. Howard Goodall (2008) proposes the power of stories: “we create alternative pathways to meaning that are imaginative *and* analytical” (p. 14). And again, Pagnucci (2004), arguing for narrative’s acceptance by the academy: “we are telling stories to figure who we are and where our place is in the world” (p. 68). For autoethnographers, the evocative and the aesthetic are also analytical and theoretical.

This kind of alternative and personal meaning-making makes autoethnography of little or no use in offering generalizable conclusions, solutions to problems, or predictions. Instead, autoethnographers seek to produce socially/culturally contextualized accounts of individual experiences that resonate with readers, offering them impressions of those circumstances and, hopefully, insight into their own. In an overview of narrative inquiry in composition, David Schaafsma, Gian Pagnucci, Robert Wallace, and Patricia Stock (2007) express it well: “Our stories of classrooms bore similarities to what people now call auto-ethnography.... We weren’t trying to *prove* anything. We were *exploring*” (p. 290). For example, in my autoethnography, I did not presume that my experience was representative of others with Third Culture Kid (TCK) backgrounds, nor did I make suggestions for ways to manage that experience. I simply shared my own circumstances, actions, thoughts, and feelings, framed by scholarship I found on TCKs, and let my readers find their own ways in which to engage my work.

Finally, in part because of its accessibility and its artistic as well as academic nature, practicing autoethnography can give a voice to those who might otherwise struggle to be heard. Denzin (2014) insists on the genre’s emancipatory, empowering essence: “autoethnographic work must always be interventionist, seeking to give notice to those who may otherwise not be allowed to tell their story” (p. 6). Stacy Holman Jones (2005) claims autoethnography is fundamentally and radically political and democratic, “committed to creating a space for

dialogue and debate that instigates and shapes social change” (p. 763). Not all practitioners of autoethnography emphasize this aspect—my article, for example, does not—but the potential is always there. Gloria Park (2013) points out, “by encouraging genres of writing such as...autoethnography...there is a collective push toward revealing how gendered, racial, linguistic, and classed arguments have further (dis)enfranchised individuals” (p. 9). Autoethnography’s critical capacity is among its most important characteristics.

Encompassing each of these individual aspects—advancing accessibility, artistry, and agency—I propose practicing autoethnography can produce what Hanauer (2012b) calls *meaningful literacy*: humanistic and holistic engagement with language in ways that “make meaning of the world we live in” (p. 107). I believe the concept of meaningful literacy aptly captures the overall potential outcome of practicing autoethnography. In fact, meaningful literacy shares its foundations with autoethnography: the social and cultural context of the individual, personal expression, and “an interaction with everything that makes up the experience and understanding of the learner, including issues of identity and self perception” (Hanauer, 2012b, p. 108). This is a lofty goal, for sure, but not, I hope and believe this study will demonstrate, beyond reach.

This is a timely study. Things have never been better for practitioners of autoethnography. In the last decade, the genre has attained establishment status in academia. In the index of the fourth edition of Denzin and Lincoln’s (2011) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, autoethnography has two headings and 26 subheadings, as compared to its appearance on a single page (101) of the first edition (1994) of the *Handbook*. Not only that, but autoethnography has its own handbook (Holman Jones et al., 2013), now in its paperback printing. Since 2011, autoethnographers have also held their own annual conference: “Doing

Autoethnography.” Autoethnographies are accepted in many scholarly journals, ranging from a regular presence in *Qualitative Inquiry* and *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* to occasional appearances in such wide-ranging periodicals as *The Professional Geographer* (Butz & Besio, 2004) and *The Yale Journal of Criticism* (Buzard, 2003). Given its multifaceted nature, Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis (2013) observe, “It’s no wonder that, after coming to autoethnography, authors feel an immediate connection, a desire to read and write and share personal stories in their research” (p. 669). I know did.

Yet I realize not every academic is as enthusiastic about autoethnography as I am. I will discuss the more formal criticisms of the genre—including ethical implications, issues of truth, accuracy, and analytic rigor, and the struggle to apply appropriate evaluative criteria—in Chapter Two. As aware of these criticisms as I am, and as seriously as I take them, I still have been and continue to be surprised by the ambivalent or negative, even angry reactions of some of my colleagues—even those familiar and comfortable with other forms of qualitative research—as I’ve shared my passion.

I do not want to counterattack critics or to insist autoethnography is the only way to research and write. It certainly is not, and anyway I prefer to follow Bochner’s (2001) example: “Our goal should not be to dominate those who choose a different path but to figure out how to live and work in harmony with each other, regardless of our diverse desires” (p. 154). Though there are certainly cases of irreconcilable disagreement over fundamental theoretical and practical assumptions, I believe that the majority of the non-positive reactions to autoethnography I’ve encountered come from a lack of thorough understanding of the genre. Hence my desire to increase that understanding.

Hence this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

It started with a single but big book, a hefty tome, the most expensive publication I had ever bought...just weeks before the paperback edition was released, for less than half the hardcover price. Groan.

In the months leading up to drafting my dissertation proposal and first three chapters, including this literature review, I devoured Stacy Holman Jones, Tony Adams, and Carolyn Ellis' (2013) Handbook of Autoethnography (hard)cover to (hard)cover, all 736 pages, underlining as much as every other sentence in some chapters (thus rendering it impossible to trade in for that cheaper softcover...)

But what started with a hunger for the Handbook grew. And grew. A single stack in the corner of the living room turned into two, then three, and finally four—at least two feet tall, each—with a few volumes scattered around on the couch, coffee table, and floor, for better measure. And my electronic file of “Texts” grew too, spawning several subfolders titled “ToRead,” “Composition,” and “Composition2.”

I was ambitious as well as voracious. I set a goal of 1000 sources, and I surged ravenously through the first few hundred, gorging myself on information and regurgitating it into my review.

But halfway through my pace slacked. My eyes and back and intellectual belly were sore and tired, my appetite satiated from the surfeit. My review had become bloated and beyond the scope of...well, of much of anything reasonable, really. I slowed my consumption, started trimming and cutting references, and returning the books to the library, moving the e-texts to the “ForLater” folder.

Here's what's left.

In this chapter, I review relevant literature on autoethnography. For readers who are already familiar with autoethnography, as well as for those who are not, this literature review should show how I understand the genre, and how I perceived the potential outcomes of its practice before gathering my own data.

I split the review into five sections: I begin with an overview of autoethnography, its definition(s), its theoretical roots and interdisciplinary development, and how it differs from some similar genres and methodologies. I then share some examples of autoethnography to illustrate its pedagogical applicability because of the breadth of potential topics. I recognize criticism of autoethnography, including the challenges posed by ethical implications, issues of truth and accuracy, the necessity for academic rigor, and the struggle to apply appropriate evaluative criteria. I continue with a survey of the existing scholarship on autoethnography in composition studies, concentrating especially on accounts of its pedagogical application. I conclude with an overview of nine potential outcomes of practicing autoethnography.

Throughout, I strive to follow Robert Yin's (2014) simple (but far from easy) guidelines for literature reviews: "do your best to identify the key citations and to treat them fairly" (p. 192).

Definition(s) and Development of Autoethnography

When people ask me what I'm writing my dissertation about, and I tell them *autoethnography*, they almost always follow up with "What's that?" And while I have a pat reply—"it's the combination of artistic and academic reflection, representation, research, and

analysis to study the self in relation to social/cultural context”—that tends just to prompt more questions.

Really, there is no perfect, precise answer. In her introduction to a collection of seminal works on autoethnography, Pat Sikes (2013) emphasizes the diversity of definitions of the genre: “as leading commentators and exponents of autoethnography generally note, there is no consensus on what the term means or what the approach involves” (p. xxii).

The Sage *Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry* suggests, “this term now commonly refers to a particular form of writing that seeks to unite ethnographic (looking outward at a world beyond one’s own) and autobiographical (gazing inward for a story of one’s self) intentions” (Schwandt, 2016, p. 14). Even this description, while eloquent, is a bit vague. But for all the difficulty and diversity of definition, the historical and theoretical development of autoethnography can at least be sketched, leading to a working understanding of the genre.

First, autoethnography is a form of qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) define qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (p. 3), emphasizing its perspective-based and contextualized approach to knowledge construction. Emerging during the fourth of Denzin and Lincoln’s seven historical phases of qualitative research, autoethnography manifests the spirit of the “crisis of representation” in which many qualitative researchers rejected realist positivism in favor of a postmodern, relativist paradigm, discarding what they now perceived as the pretence of objectivity and embracing subjectivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Ellis & Bochner, 2016). Feminist theory, especially its recognition of the importance of emotion, contributed to autoethnography (Ellis, 1991; Stanley,

1993), as did a growing emphasis on the value of narrative (Richardson, 1994; Clandinin & Connelly, 1994).

Second, autoethnography is interdisciplinary, with roots in the social sciences, humanities, and arts, combining aspects, as indicated above, of ethnography and autobiography. Autoethnographers often credit anthropologist Karl Heider (1975) with first using the term autoethnography in publication. Heider called his study of the (Indonesian) Dani people “auto-ethnography,” explaining, “‘auto’ for autochthonous [indigenous], since it is the Dani’s own account of ‘what people do’; and ‘auto’ for automatic, since it is the simplest routine-eliciting technique imaginable” (p. 3). Several years later, David Hayano, also an anthropologist (1979) recalled a 1966 lecture in which economist Sir Raymond Firth used the term. Hayano himself defines autoethnography as “how anthropologists conduct and write ethnographies of their ‘own people’” (p. 99). While both are important historical precedents, neither Heider nor Hayano’s articulations are quite what is now most commonly understood as autoethnography.

In the late 80s, and in the field of literature, Françoise Lionnet (1989) called Zora Neale Hurston’s work *autoethnography*, “the defining of one’s subjective ethnicity as mediated through language, history, and ethnographical analysis” (p. 99). Lionnet’s definition begins to approach the one I will use, emphasizing the connection between self and culture, and that definition would become popular amongst other literary and social/cultural scholars. For example, Julia Watson (1997) would use Lionnet to analyze Senegalese writer Nafissatou Diallo’s (1975) *De Tilene au Plateau: Un Enfance Dakaroise (A Dakar Childhood)*. Watson called Diallo’s work autoethnographic, “an ethnographic presentation of oneself by a subject usually considered to be the ‘object’ of the ethnographer’s interview” (p. 35).

1997 proved an important year for the development and definition of autoethnography. In, as far as I'm aware, the first book with the term in its title, anthropologist Deborah Reed-Danahay sought not to "represent a definitive statement of what autoethnography is or can be," but rather to "explore various intersections, various blendings of genres and voices" (1997, p. 3). Still, she managed to offer a simpler, more unified understanding of autoethnography: "a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context" (p. 9). Also in 1997, Norman Denzin offered a similar definition: "a turning of the ethnographic gaze inward on the self (auto), while maintaining the outward gaze of ethnography looking at the larger context wherein self experiences occur" (p. 227). So both Reed-Danahay and Denzin agreed on the core of autoethnography: the study of both self and social/cultural context.

That same year, having collaborated before (Ellis & Bochner, 1992), sociologist Carolyn Ellis and communications scholar Art Bochner published separate autoethnographies that exemplified Reed-Danahay and Denzin's definitions. Bochner wrote about his father's death and how it acted as a catalyst to change his professional life. He critiqued academia as "impersonal, not intimate" and asserted, "the academic self frequently is cut off from the ordinary, experiential self" (1997, p. 421). He pointed out that academics often hide their reasons for studying something and then publish work that no-one reads. He resolved to tell more stories, and to "bring [his] academic and personal worlds closer together" (p. 434). Ellis agreed. She used her previous autoethnographies about her brother and her former partner's deaths (1993, 1995b) to illustrate the insularity of the academy and emphasized how she wanted to break through the intellectual and emotional boundaries it erects. Attempting to connect analytic sociology with evocative literature, she described how she came to autoethnography, arguing it "connects the autobiographical impulse with the ethnographic impulse... fluently mov[ing] back and forth, first

looking inward, then outward, then backward, and forward...until the distinctions between the individual and social are blurred beyond recognition” (1997, pp. 132-133).

Ellis and Bochner would (and do) continue collaborating, professionally and personally, exploring and establishing the meaning(s) of autoethnography. In 2000, together, they published a chapter in the second edition of Denzin & Lincoln’s *Handbook of Qualitative Research* in which they interwove the story of a graduate student’s first encounter with autoethnography with the more formal, conventionally academic elements of a handbook chapter: “*Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural*” (p. 739). Similarly, and most recently, in 2016, they published *Evocative Autoethnography*, in which they combine description of the history, theory, and practice of autoethnography in an account that is part historical chronicle, part practical guide-book, part narrative memoir.

While there have been and are and likely will be other understandings of autoethnography, Ellis and Bochner have done much to define the genre as it is most commonly, currently understood, and it is their definition(s) I use throughout this dissertation.

Finally, it is important to distinguish autoethnography from other related forms of research and expression of personal experience such as narrative inquiry, autobiography, and memoir. Perhaps the most crucial difference between these and autoethnography is the latter’s requisite combination of the personal experience and the social/cultural context. While other genres and methodologies may incorporate both experience and context, the context is not necessary for their success. For autoethnography, it is. A second difference, though one that some autoethnographers might deny, is the necessity for autoethnography to incorporate references to outside research. Again, narrative inquirists, autobiographers, and memoirists often

do consult and communicate others' information and perspectives, but they need not. I believe autoethnographers must, though, again, not all autoethnographers agree. I will discuss this difference further later in the chapter.

Examples of Autoethnography

One of the reasons I believe in autoethnography's pedagogical potential for writing instruction is the breadth and resonance of possible topics for autoethnographic research. Compositionists often struggle to motivate students to do meaningful research, perhaps because of the difficulty of finding stimulating topics (Bean, 2011). Teaching autoethnography can address that challenge. Any aspect of life can be studied autoethnographically, as examples below will illustrate. First, however, it is necessary to note an indirect connection between composition studies and autoethnography.

While literary scholars and social scientists were experimenting with autoethnography in the late twentieth century, some compositionists were calling for what sounded an awful lot like the genre. Maxine Hairston (1992), criticizing the politicization of writing instruction (e.g., Berlin, 1988), proposed an alternative to heavily ideologically-inflected pedagogy (i.e., requiring students to write about issues that mattered more to the instructor than them): "we can create a culturally inclusive curriculum in our writing classes by focusing on the experiences of our students" (p. 31). This suggestion fits neatly with autoethnography's foundational practice of "foreground[ing] personal experience in research and writing" (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015, p. 26).

Additionally, the specific hypothetical examples Hairston provides of her "culturally inclusive" pedagogy contain characteristics of autoethnography, or at least the potential for autoethnography. The student from Malawi writing about his tribal traditions could frame his

personal experience with more formal anthropological research and analysis of those traditions. The Vietnamese-American man might include historical accounts of the Vietnam War alongside his own narrative. The Greek woman's reflection on sexism in religion could benefit from reference to sociological studies on similar issues. And so on.

Hairston wrote: "The strength of all the themes I've mentioned is that they're both individual and communal, giving the students the opportunity to write something unique to them as individuals yet something that will resonate with others in their writing community" (p. 33). Such blendings of individual and communal are, of course, core components of autoethnography, and one of the reasons I assert autoethnography would work well in the composition classroom is that many of the most common subjects of autoethnography—injury, illness, family, issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality—would probably resonate with many, if not most students. A brief overview of how autoethnographers have engaged those subjects follows.

From its earliest manifestations, autoethnography has often been used to explore difficult, even traumatic events or circumstances. For example, Andrew Sparkes (1996) presents an autoethnography about physical vulnerability in injury—specifically, a back injury which interrupted his athletic career and caused him long-term pain and frustration. Sadly, injury is an extremely common human experience, as is, unfortunately, illness, which Laura Ellingson (1998) explores in her autoethnography about surviving and studying the treatment of cancer. Anyone who has suffered an illness or an injury could follow Sparkes' and Ellingson's examples in writing about these challenges.

Family has been another major subject of autoethnographic study. Goodall (2005), Poulos (2008), and Davis (2009), for example, all chronicle cases of family secrets. Poulos recognizes the tension in revealing these secrets: "These stories cannot be told, but they cannot

not be told!” (2008, p. 62) Many autoethnographers examine relationships with parents. Ellis (2001) writes about her mother’s death, as do Hocker (2011) and Malthouse (2011). In 2012, Wyatt and Adams co-guest-edited a special issue of *Qualitative Inquiry* on the relationships between fathers and sons, including autoethnographies from Bochner, Denzin, Gale, Goodall, Pelias, Poulos, and Sparkes. Other autoethnographers focus on grandparents (Rambo, 2005; Rath, 2012; Chawla, 2013), siblings (Couser, 2005; Richards, 2008), or children (Muncey, 2005; Schneider, 2005; Spry, 2006; Chin, 2007; Wall, 2008; Lahman, 2009; Terry, 2012; Weaver-Hightower, 2012)—or on the decision to refrain from having children (Yang, 2012; Martinez & Andreatta, 2015). The many complexities of family dynamics provide topics on which anyone in a composition course could write.

Critical autoethnographers concentrate on imbalances of power and issues of identity such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. For example, Robin Boylorn (2006, 2013, 2014) uses poetry alongside prose to confront institutional racism and sexism: “The stories told about black women are often stories of stereotypes and contradictions disguised as truth” (2014, p. 130). Other examples of critical autoethnographic confrontations of issues of race and ethnicity include Carrington (2008) on sport, Spry (2010) on jazz, and Martinez and Merlino (2014) on violent confrontations. Tony Adams addresses sexuality and gender by describing his life in the closet (2006), his coming-out experiences (2011), and post-coming out complications (2014)—“those moments of distress and the unexpected disdain that can emerge in a relationship *after* the initial coming out act” (2014, p. 63). Other examples of critical autoethnographic confrontations of issues of gender and sexuality include Berry (2007) on body image, Crawley and Husakouskaya (2013) on cross-dressing, and Reger (2015) on the act of protest. Certainly,

critical autoethnography offers rich opportunities for students to engage with these difficult but important subjects.

Though the categories above are some currently common topics in autoethnographic study, they hardly exhaust the immense range of autoethnographic endeavors. Again, autoethnography can address any aspect of life experience, as Stewart (2013) writes: “The objects of autoethnography are tellingly diffuse yet precise” (p. 661). Autoethnographers have explored myriad topics: anorexia (Spry, 2001), sexual festish (Goode, 2002), academic fatigue (Pelias, 2003), media design (Duncan, 2004), stripping (Pinney, 2005), falsifying IDs (Medford, 2006), divorce (Goode, 2007), working in a hospital (Zaman, 2008), carnival in Trinidad and Tobago (Fournillier, 2009), swimming (Scott, 2010), an out-of-body experience in a Finnish ICU (Uotinen, 2011), waiting tables (Dowling, 2012), domestic abuse (Metta, 2013), retirement (Hocker, 2014), and sports fandom (Sturm, 2015). Of course, not all of these topics would be relevant to any given student, but hopefully the breadth of their diversity illustrates the vast potential for subjects of autoethnographic enquiry.

Criticism of Autoethnography

Autoethnography is not without its critics. Early attacks on the genre, such as Clinton Sanders’ (1999) and Herbert Gans’ (1999), came from some social scientists who considered autoethnography insufficiently social or scientific and overly sentimental. Their critiques are sharp, but not terribly compelling. Sanders’ comments about “artsy-craftsy literary exercises presented as ethnographies...often fairly mediocre theater pieces, poetry, or somewhat overwrought autobiographical sad stories about how hard things were or are for the writer” (1999, p. 672) are simply insulting, and Gans’, about “the latest of the fads and fashions to which intellectual life, like show business, has always been subject” (1999, p. 543), have been proven

wrong just by the passage of time and the surviving and thriving of autoethnography as an academic genre. Also in 1999, but more cautiously, Amanda Coffey expressed concern about autoethnography, wondering whether the genre might be too “self-indulgent” (p. 155), a question Sparkes (2002) gave serious consideration, as well as firm rebuttal.

Even some scholars devoted to the development of qualitative and narrative research, such as Paul Atkinson, on his own (1997, 2006) and alongside Sara Delamont (2006), do not appreciate what they perceive as autoethnography’s lack of academic rigor. On her own, Delamont (2007, 2009) goes several steps further, deriding autoethnography outright, calling it “essentially lazy—literally lazy and also intellectually lazy” (p. 2007, p. 2), “an intellectual *cul de sac*” (2009, p. 51). However, while she makes some accurate observations about autoethnography—“Autoethnography is, whatever else it may or may not be, about things that matter a great deal to the autoethnographer” (2009, p. 57)—much of her argument is simultaneously absolutely expressed yet extremely subjective: “Studying ourselves can never make anything anthropologically strange” (2009, p. 59) and “Autoethnography focusses on social scientists who are not usually interesting or worth researching” (2009, pp. 59-60). Here Delamont is both fundamentally wrong and deliberately ignoring the essential assumptions of autoethnographers, who express great interest in themselves and each other, and not so much interest in making anything anthropologically strange.

Responding to these and other assaults, Ellis (2009) refused to attack back, asserting that aggressive defensiveness is usually at least ineffectual, if not counterproductive. Instead, she attempted to understand and learn from the criticism, observing that she had already taken seriously critics’ “recommendation to make our personal stories more fluid and...to engage more

with social criticism and change” (p. 373). She pointed out that at least autoethnography “is not being ignored” (p. 373), which she considered a good thing.

I do not disagree, nor do I accept Delamont’s dismissal of autoethnography, since her argument is more passionate than rational. However, I do acknowledge that there are aspects of autoethnography that are potentially problematic. Indeed, practitioners of autoethnography do not shy from critiquing what they perceive as the genre’s shortcomings, for example, in addressing the complexity of poststructural identity (Gannon, 2006, 2013; Jackson & Mazzei, 2008; Reinertsen, 2009; Kaufmann, 2010), or representing the politics of postcolonialism (Pathak, 2010, 2013; Dutta & Basu, 2013; Tomaselli, Dyll-Myklebust, & van Grootheest, 2013), or just being sufficiently artistic (Gingrich-Philbrook, 2005).

In the next sections, I will discuss several such critiques: ethical implications; issues of truth, accuracy, and analytic rigor; and the struggle to apply appropriate evaluative criteria to the genre.

Ethics

Maybe the most important challenge to autoethnography comes from ethical concerns expressed by both its practitioners and its detractors. Jillian Tullis (2013) observes that since autoethnography concentrates on the personal experience of the researcher, autoethnography might appear largely exempt from ethical considerations, or at least from IRB jurisdiction. Not so.

In two separate 2007 publications, Ellis discusses the ethical implications involved in practicing autoethnography. After admitting to her own ethically problematic masters and doctoral research, she gives extensive advice on how to handle ethical issues in autoethnography. Among her suggestions are some rather abstract and subjective suggestions: “seek the good....Be

wise, but not cynical” (2007a, p. 213; 2007b, p. 23). But she also provides concrete, actionable steps, like letting subjects read anything written about themselves, though, she hedges, there are exceptions to every rule. She concludes, “autoethnography itself is an ethical practice” (2007a, p. 223; 2007b, p. 26), and while that claim may appear both absolute and arbitrary, she certainly supports it with substantial reflection, if not necessarily with empirical evidence.

However, not all scholars are impressed with autoethnographers’ ethical considerations. Martin Tolich (2010) indicts autoethnographers—specifically, Jago (2002), Ellis (2007b), Rambo (2007), and Richardson (2007)—for practices he considers indefensible, including assuming consent or obtaining only retrospective consent. He proposes 10 guidelines for ethical autoethnographic research, addressing issues of consent, consultation, and vulnerability of subjects, concluding: “Autoethnographers can easily demonstrate their respect for persons by anticipating the needs of both the other and the self before the research writing begins” (p. 1608).

“Easily” may be an exaggeration, but I do not disagree with certain points Tolich makes. Jago (2002) strikes me as extremely ethically problematic, and so too does Jago (2011a, 2011b), for that matter. In all three articles, Barbara Jago describes interactions with others (friends, family, colleagues, students) at length and in detail, and nowhere does she indicate having asked for consent to publish these interactions, or having offered those she represents the chance to comment on her often unflattering portrayals. In fact, in one (Jago, 2011b), she recalls being asked to seek consent by no less than Ellis, Bochner, and Denzin. She acknowledges the issue—“Autoethnography is riddled with these kinds of ethical challenges” (p. 216)—but rather than any satisfactory explanation, she seems to justify her decision against seeking consent with a weak excuse: “I am thankful that our journals are so underread” (p. 216). Such an attitude might be perfectly acceptable for non-research writing, but in an academic context, as far as I’m

concerned, Jago's work crosses ethical boundaries. She may own her own personal story, of which her friends and family are a part, but when she chooses to use them to provide the social/cultural context that makes her story a piece of autoethnographic research, without consultation or consent, she violates vital rules that exist to protect the vulnerable.

On the other hand, I agree too with Tullis' (2013) assertion that autoethnography is more ethically complicated than many more traditional types of research, and that taking that complication seriously requires more complex consideration. For example, she responds explicitly to one of Tolich's (2010) critiques: "While retrospective consent is less than ideal, I think calling this practice coercive lacks nuance" (p. 248). Sometimes, specific circumstances make upfront informed consent impossible, and the value of the research outweighs the potential for harm. For example, as I composed my own autoethnography, I wrote about more subjects along the way, so while I did request and receive their permission to publish representations of them, I would not have been able to do so before beginning writing, as Tolich insists.

Tullis offers seven suggestions for practicing autoethnography ethically, all of which, coincidentally, also correspond to points on Tolich's list. While neither Tolich's nor Tullis' lists are guarantees of ethical conduct, I appreciate the boundaries they establish. As well, I concur with Tullis' (2013) statement: "Doing autoethnography well means taking ethics seriously" (p. 257). After all, engaging in ethical research—or not—is a choice that must be made by every researcher.

Truth and Accuracy

The issues of truth and accuracy in autoethnographers' representation of reality are also quite contentious, to say the least. Geoffrey Walford (2004) began an autoethnography on his experience as an Oxford proctor but abandoned his project, complaining about

autoethnography's problematic relationship with reality: "To what extent can such autobiographically-based stories reflect anything other than a constructed fiction?" (p. 411). Brian Rappert (2010) reflects on the reasons for and consequences of omitting information in autoethnography—"some investigators have sought to acknowledge the stories told are not and should not be all out revelations" (p. 573)—and Kathy Charmaz (2006) more bluntly challenges the tendency of some autoethnographers to fictionalize their narratives for the sake of "shaping the story" (p. 397). How is this not lying? How is this in any way academic?

Jillian Tullis Owen, Chris McRae, Tony Adams, and Alisha Vitale (2009) take up that challenge. At first, they compare autoethnography to James Frey's (2003) (in)famous fictionalized memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*, acknowledging, "When writing qualitative research...we are guilty of the practices Frey describes" (p. 180), inasmuch as "We are taught to construct texts in an enjoyable way for readers" (p. 180). I cannot find this defense convincing, but they do go on to invoke postmodern theories of subjectivity and the necessity for flexibility of perspective in constructing texts. These are more compelling arguments. They seem to ask, since all memorial perception and representation distort reality anyway, why get hung up on details? Why not just confess the mess and tell the best story possible? (p. 194) They conclude, "Embracing truth contingencies makes responsible life writing possible" (p. 196).

But I am not completely comfortable with the idea of "truth contingencies." Although I certainly accept that any text is subjective and open to multiple interpretations, and that memorial reconstruction must be incomplete, I am not so ready to abandon the notion of factual accuracy. I know that when I prepared my own autoethnography, I worked very hard to recall and represent reality as accurately as I possibly could, asking other people who had been present

at certain events to confirm or correct my memory. While even then I realize reality is impossible to capture completely, I prefer devotion to rigor over denial of the problem.

Furthermore, the notion of such flexible truth is genuinely alarming, threatening not just scholarship, but also aspects of “real” life. As I revisited Tullis Owen et al. (2009) while revising this section, I found a sentence I had not highlighted in my original reading: “The moral of a story can trump its factual (in)accuracies, thus positioning truth as *a*—not *the*—rhetorical device we should use to experience life texts” (p. 195). Given the results of the recent US presidential election, and the propensity of the victorious candidate whose name coincidentally appears in that sentence to consistently and grotesquely misrepresent reality, often under the guise of moral rhetoric, I feel even less enthusiastic about any academic’s claim that “demanding truth is faulty and problematic” (p. 181).

Still, the argument is not wholly invalid, and if qualitative research is to occur, we must accept the reality of the impossibility of a single, set perception and representation of reality. But I will not, nor will I encourage others to go so far as to prioritize engaging readers over engaging actual as opposed to flexible—or even, say, alternative—facts, as Tullis Owen et al. (2009) seem to suggest (p. 187).

Analytic Rigor

A concern about autoethnography related to the issues of truth and accuracy is the extent to which the genre must balance both of its core components—personal reflection and social/cultural research—achieving real academic, analytic rigor. Around halfway through autoethnography’s evolution thus far, Leon Anderson (2006a) created controversy and conflict when he proposed a split between what he called “evocative” and “analytic” autoethnography. Basically, Anderson indicated, analytic autoethnography should be more intellectually rigorous

than the more emotionally-driven evocative autoethnography, and autoethnographers should consider adopting one or the other.

His proposal met with mixed response. Some said yes (Charmaz, 2006; Atkinson, 2006) or maybe (Burnier, 2006; Vryan, 2006). Some said no (Denzin, 2006; Ellis & Bochner, 2006). At first, Anderson (2006b) defended analytic autoethnography, but later he would backtrack a bit, calling analytic autoethnography “in part...a misstep” (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 58), (re)emphasizing instead autoethnography’s “open-endedness” (p. 78). Also later, Ellis and Bochner (2016) seem to try to put the debate to rest, reconciling the two aspects of autoethnography, though their book’s title obviously prioritizes the evocative over the analytic.

The reason I mention the tension between evocative and analytic autoethnography is that this tension informs one of the most frequent and difficult challenges to the genre: Is autoethnography really academic work? In particular, I want to address the question of the necessity of substantial scholarly research on the social/cultural context framing the reflection on the personal experience. Most autoethnographers include that academic framework, but some—and those, no flybys (Pelias, 2003; Sparkes, 2007; Poulos, 2010a; Richardson, 2013)—apparently, do not feel the need for much such (or any) intellectual intrusion into all of their stories. Boiled down, as Boylorn and Orbe (2014) observe, “some incorporate citations while others rely on the verisimilitude of the experience for confirmation” (p. 20). But is verisimilitude enough to merit academic status?

My own position in this much contested issue—however much I suspect Ellis, Bochner, Denzin, and other prominent autoethnographers might disagree—is that without some substantial elements of formal research and reference to an existing body of knowledge on the social/cultural context of a personal experience, supposedly autoethnographic stories are instead

actually autobiographies, or memoirs (Chang, 2008). Now, I find nothing wrong with and much compelling about autobiography and memoir, but if autoethnography is to distinguish itself from these popular and often profound, but definitely non-academic genres, I believe it must remain grounded in the rigorous analytic scholarship to which it aspires to contribute, as well as the poignantly evocative tradition it has helped to create.

Evaluation

Though there are other criticisms of autoethnography, the last I will address is the difficulty of applying appropriate evaluative criteria to the genre. Andrew Sparkes and Brett Smith (2009) review the debate about how to judge the quality of qualitative inquiry in general, comparing the opposite ends of the spectrum of criteriology and relativism, admitting their preference for the latter, though they recognize “this acknowledgement is no easy matter” (p. 496). Part of the challenge is that autoethnography is so personal, and evaluating a person’s personal work can seem like evaluating that person’s personal life. Dani Snyder-Young (2011), for example, in her reflection on how to evaluate others’ autoethnographic performances, observes that it’s different from analyzing *Hamlet*: it seems nearly a kind of violation, an almost violent passing of judgment on personal experience, rather than an assessment of aesthetics and information (pp. 945-946). But the solution cannot be an “anything goes” attitude, of which autoethnographers have been accused, unfortunately not always inaccurately. Sikes (2013) expresses concern for maintaining quality in autoethnographic discourse: “my view is that sometimes work does get through and get published on a ‘pity’ call, rather than on its stylistic or scholarly merit” (p. xxvi). Such a confession, frankly, does not inspire confidence in the genre.

Autoethnography can come across as relentlessly relativistic. Bochner (2000) argues against the value of any evaluative criteria: “Ultimately, all criteria serve a conservative and

destructive function” (p. 269). However, he reluctantly relates several qualities he specifically looks for: “abundant, concrete detail...structurally complex narratives...emotional credibility, vulnerability, and honesty...a tale of two selves [transformation]...ethical self-consciousness...[and] a story that moves me” (pp. 270-271). These are hardly criteria that can be applied objectively, though some would protest that assessment is never truly objective anyway.

Then there is Ellis’ (2000) description of her process of reviewing a manuscript. She begins with an optimistic attitude, “looking forward to being engaged” (p. 273), and while she asks critical questions throughout, she also concludes with positive reinforcement, regardless of her recommendations: “I go back through the review and try to rewrite it in a more encouraging manner” (p. 276). She admits at the end, “I did not want this proces to sound too subjective, unsystematic” (p. 277). I can understand her concern, but many scholars would shudder at such a relaxed approach to peer review, even while many writers would be thrilled with such a friendly reader.

However, not everyone rejects the notion of measurement against absolute criteria. Sarah Tracy (2010) offers eight “big-tent...*universal* hallmarks” (p. 837) for qualitative research, which would be applicable to autoethnography as well: worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence. Although all of these qualities are still subjective to some extent—Tracy troublingly reinforces the notion of assessment as taste by comparing the process of evaluating qualitative work to cheesemaking (p. 839)—the attempt to set standards is significant, and I appreciate and accept these eight criteria.

I must recongize that this final critique of autoethnography might make compositionists especially hesitatant to pedagogically adopt the genre, since assessing writing is already awfully hard (Elbow, 2000). Despite Tracy’s efforts, the predominant approach to evaluation of

autoethnography tends towards the abstract and the subjective over the precise and the objective. For example, Craig Gingrich-Philbrook (2013) asserts, “To evaluate autoethnography in a genuinely useful way, you have to open yourself to being changed by it” (p. 618). Such statements seem to me unlikely to impress writing instructors, who often already struggle enough to be taken seriously in their evaluative endeavors.

Autoethnography in Composition

Yet, I continue to contend, compositionists should indeed consider using autoethnography in their teaching. Some already have and do, and part of the purpose of this study is to provide evidence for or against more following suit. In this section, I review the literature on autoethnography from within composition studies, particularly relating to its pedagogical application.

Personal writing assignments have long been a part of compositionists’ pedagogical repertoire, and some of these assignments bear striking resemblances to autoethnography. Allen Carey-Webb (2001) notes, “Rather like the ‘I-Search’ paper that Ken Macrorie [1988] has written about, multigenre autoethnographies allow my students to reflect on the process of research as well as on the product” (p. 143). And as early as 1993, before even Ellis and Bochner had begun using the term *autoethnography* in earnest, David Bartholomae named the genre while imagining an approach to basic writing that would affirm students’ differing cultural backgrounds. He dismissed his own proposal as improbable if not impossible—“caricature” (p. 14)—because students would not be prepared for such a high level of discourse, but he indicated autoethnography was an appealing idea.

By five years later, autoethnography had become popular enough in composition studies for Krista Ratcliffe (1999) to comment on “the number of 1998 CCCC preconvention workshops

on the topic” (p. 213). The February 1998 issues of *CCC* and *College English* both feature announcements of autoethnography workshops at the 1998 CCCC: “Autoethnographies of Writers and Writing.” Participants are asked to prepare by reading select autoethnography and drafting “one-page anecdotes about themselves as writers.” However, while Ratcliffe acknowledges autoethnography is “valuable,” she also claims it is “limited in perspective” (p. 212), for it

risks lapsing into a narcissistic confessional solipsism—and a privileged one at that—unless we tie the personal to the cultural in ways that expose how our experiences speak metonymically for larger cultural issues and unless we make such storytelling a viable option for all academicians, not simply a select few. (p. 214)

Her warning, of course, is familiar from the critics of the genre (Coffey, 1999; Gans, 1999; Sanders, 1999; Atkinson, 1997, 2006; Atkinson & Delamont, 2006; Delamont, 2007, 2009), and advocates of autoethnography could, should, and probably would reply that when practiced properly, it already does everything after Ratcliffe’s “unless.”

Regardless of Ratcliffe’s reluctance to embrace the genre without reservation, autoethnography has undeniably accrued a substantial following in composition studies. I had no idea how substantial when I began my research. During the summer of 2015, I searched the online archives of the following 11 composition journals: *Across the Disciplines* (1994-present), *College Composition and Communication (CCC)* (1950-present), *College English* (1939-present), *Composition Forum* (2005-present), *Composition Studies* (2000-present), *English Education* (1969-present), *Journal of Advanced Composition (JAC)* (1997-2011), *Journal of Basic Writing* (1975-present), *Research in the Teaching of English* (1967-present), *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* (1997-present), and *Written Communication* (1984-present). I

used the following six terms: “autoethnography,” “autoethnographies,” “autoethnographic,” “autoethnographer,” “auto-ethnography,” and “auto/ethnography.” I produced 93 results. At the end of fall 2016, I refreshed the search, producing one additional result (Canagarajah, 2016).

Of those 93 results, 12 review books, all favorably, though only two refer to the authors’ use of autoethnography as a pedagogical tool. Carl Herndl (2001) comments on Jim Henry’s (2000) collection of 84 student autoethnographies: “the autoethnographies upon which the book draws are themselves models for the way teachers might collaborate with students to help them understand and intervene in the ideological representation of writing within which they work” (p. 168). Similarly complimentary of Hector Vila (2002), Suhail Islam (2002) asserts, “It shows...what autoethnography and critical self-reflective classroom practice can do to challenge and enlighten traditional composition theory and literary courses” (p. 149).

Of the other 81 results, two review conference presentations (Guy, 2005; Phegley, 2005), two announce conference workshops (Anonymous, 1998b, 1998c), two call for contributions to future issues (Anonymous, 1998a; Condon & Young 2011), five introduce issues (Cooper, 2001; Dressman, McCarthy, & Prior, 2009; Kinloch, Ball, & Franquiz, 2010; Young & Condon, 2013; Harris & Blackburn, 2014), and one is an NCTE Presidential address (Morell, 2015). The rest are peer-reviewed articles.

Of those articles, many only mention autoethnography in passing, and most of those that substantially discuss autoethnography do so in reference to compositionists using autoethnography in their own research, as encouraged by Julia Colyar (2013): “Perhaps composition theorists should write autoethnographies. Maybe they already have” (p. 374). Indeed they have, but these references are not especially germane to the specific focus of my study, though some do show strong enthusiasm for autoethnography, generally. Especially

poignant, perhaps, is Kathleen Dixon's (1995) early urging of self-reflection in research: "To study our 'selves' and our relations to one another will require patient attention to the processes of enculturation that have formed us" (p. 256). Also an advocate for autoethnography as a form of creative non-fiction, Candace Spigelman (1996) offers Mike Rose (1989), Victor Villanueva (1993), and Linda Brodkey (1994) as examples of autoethnographers in action in composition (though Spigelman notes Rose rejects the label). Five years later, Spigelman (2001) again argues for including the personal in academic writing, especially autoethnography, which "seek[s] to subvert traditional political and cultural associations relating to personal achievement...[by] insist[ing] that the narrative of an individual's life is both the product and process surrounding social and educational narratives" (p. 65).

Several compositionists do specifically describe using autoethnography in their pedagogy, and these references are far more relevant to my study. For example, Mary Soliday (1994) advocates the use of literacy narratives in composition courses and shares examples of her students' work: "through writing her own response to [Richard Rodriguez's, 1983] *Hunger for Memory* Alisha practices a sort of autoethnography" (p. 519). Soliday's perspective is worth highlighting especially because of its emphasis on reflexivity: "When they are able to evaluate their experiences from an interpretive perspective, authors achieve narrative agency by discovering that their experience is, in fact, interpretable" (p. 511-512).

Similarly, Daniel Mahala and Jody Swilky (1996) argue for the place of personal storytelling, including autoethnography, in academia, and specifically in the writing classroom. They trace the history of personal writing in composition studies, describing the conflict between its proponents (e.g., Elbow, Brodkey) and opponents (e.g., Bartholomae, Berlin), and laying the theoretical groundwork for their overall assertion: "When we advocate attention to the personal

in writing, we are talking about discursive strategies through which writers can present themselves as historically situated subjects exploring how their knowledge has been shaped by lived experience” (p. 364). About autoethnography specifically, Mahala and Swilky (1996) observe, “contemporary autoethnography integrates knowledge from different contexts that are never distinct, contesting the notion that the personal is ever outside of writing” (p. 375). They also share examples of autoethnography in action in the classroom, their students writing about their experiences with issues of gender and race in relation to popular culture.

Likewise, Linda Brodkey (1997) also advocates the use of autoethnography in the classroom, albeit at a more advanced level. Building on her earlier theoretical and practical work with autoethnography (1987, 1994, 1996), Brodkey recounts her experience assigning graduate students autoethnographic literacy narratives. Brodkey (1994) presented such a project herself, comparing her experience of writing to “finding and following the bias” (p. 546). By bias, she means the line of fabric one must use as an orientation point in stitching—though probably she puns too. She uses the bias as a metaphor for image-rich narrative inquiry, asserting, “I wish everyone were taught to write on the bias...it is as critical to writing as to sewing” (1994, p. 546). Later, she observes: “The intellectual labor of writing autoethnographic accounts of literacy entails locating and exploring the sites where people learn to think of themselves as readers and writers” (1997, p. 493).

Hannah Ashley (2001) cites Brodkey (1996) in her examination of autoethnography in the composition classroom. Ashley’s definition of the genre differs somewhat from mine. She follows the work of Mary Pratt (1991), concentrating on competition and conflict—“contact zones”—in cultural representation. According to Ashley, “Autoethnography is an effort to make conscious use of multiple voices and affiliations, but no singular identity is projected through

any piece of writing” (p. 496). Furthermore, Ashley’s students, while still undergraduates, are not first-years, but more advanced writers, preparing to become writing tutors. Still, her students practiced autoethnography effectively, leading her to conclude it could be a useful genre, especially because of its potential to address the challenge writing teachers face in exercising caution in culturally diverse classrooms: “Instructors might wish to consider ways to tread lightly in their classroom contexts, aware of their own roles as gatekeepers and guardians...Perhaps autoethnography is another method of treading lightly” (p. 518).

Jane Danielewicz (2008) discusses the use of personal genres, including autoethnography, in the undergraduate composition classroom. She echoes and advances the theoretical positions articulated by Brodkey and Mahala and Swilky, emphasizing the reflexivity of autoethnography, as well as the creative and critical capacity of personal writing in general, which “not only develops voice and cultivates identity but also enhances authority” (p. 421). Like Mahala and Swilky, she shares two life stories written by students about family, friendship, fashion, and religion. In an endnote, Danielewicz reemphasizes autoethnography’s pedagogical potential for promoting independent thought: “Writing an autoethnography...can be a form of radical critique as well as a way for the writer to escape the totality of cultural determinism” (p. 447).

Patrick Camangian (2010) concurs. Citing the work of Paulo Freire (1970, 1988), among others, he advocates a critical pedagogy of caring, asserting: “As cultural narratives that build toward critical social analysis, autoethnographies promote self and social reflection as well as establish compassionate classroom communities among youth with fractured collective identities” (p. 179). Here Camangian combines the ideas of critical empowerment and therapeutic confrontation of difficult situations in the writing of autoethnographies, “less as an

academic obligation and more as a strategy for healing” (p. 185). He continues the trend of sharing a pair of autoethnographies written by students on familiar topics, but with an emphasis on the urban setting. Camangian concludes: “For most students in the focal class, writing and performing autoethnographies was one of the first times they were deeply invested in meaningful social inquiry and intellectual interrogation of their own lives while producing academic work” (p. 200).

Steven Alvarez (2012) cites Freire too, but his main focus is on Pierre Bourdieu’s (1973) theory of cultural capital and how it fits into autoethnographic work. Alvarez presents the positive results of his teaching autoethnography in Basic Writing and First Year Composition courses as “a practical alternative to standardized writing assignments” (p. 36). Specifically, he assigned his students personal statements to be used in applications for school scholarships. Thus, their writing was immediately invested with material significance, as well as a Bourdieusian critique of academic merit as cultural capital. Once again, Alvarez shares a pair of examples of his students’ writing examining issues of age and language barriers to advanced education, and, once again, he notes their success: “Their writing about changes in life choices have produced qualitative inquiry for each, in addition to writing with purposes and for audiences” (p. 52).

Finally, Suresh Canagarajah (2013) expands on his briefer, earlier (1997) exploration of autoethnography. Now promoting a translingual orientation to language differences in writing courses, Canagarajah assigns his students a literacy autobiography, one option of which is autoethnography: “the genre can accommodate introspective research on one’s memory, archival research on one’s writing development, discourse analysis of one’s literate artifacts, and library

research to interpret the ramifications of one's literacy development" (2013, p. 48). Indeed, it can, and it does.

One wonders, perhaps, why it does not more often. Of the nearly 100 appearances of autoethnography I found in composition journals, almost all are completely complimentary. Exceptions include Ratcliffe's (1998) cautionary mentioned above, and some similar slight hesitations about the genre. For example, in Anne Herrington's (1997) review of Brodkey (1996), although she approves of the text overall as "a valuable object lesson in the limits of argument," Herrington warns about autoethnography: "such self-conscious awareness and detachment from an earlier self cannot come easily" (p. 582). And in Katrina Powell & Pamela Takayoshi's (2004) response to Ellen Cushman's (2004) challenge of their use of reflexivity in an earlier article, they note the similar "current debates in anthropology and sociology" about autoethnography as "self-indulgent or narcissistic" and acknowledge that autoethnography "has received much criticism" (p. 155). They call for more discussion on the issue.

Yet despite the overwhelmingly positive references to autoethnography in published composition studies, the genre remains a relatively rare presence on writing instructors' syllabi. In Stephen Brown and Sidney Dobrin's (2004) anthology on ethnography in composition studies, Susan Hanson, who has asserted the pedagogical value of autoethnography, nevertheless expresses frustration that still "the term is largely pejorative" (2004, p. 185), the genre underappreciated. Near the end of that same volume, Lance Massey observes, "Although there has been much talk of autoethnography as a more and more important mode of research and representation, there has never been a mad rush to turn composition ethnography into a form of autobiography" (2004, p. 271). More recently, Carra Hood (2010) presents results of a survey indicating, on the one hand, a dramatic drop in the number of traditional research assignments in

the composition classroom, which might mean there is more room for alternatives. And indeed, autoethnography is included as one such alternative, but at less than 1% usage. Given the nearly universal approval of autoethnography in published composition scholarship, it simply seems a shame that more writing instructors do not use the genre in their teaching.

A recently published textbook by Melissa Tombro's, *Teaching Autoethnography: Personal Writing in the Classroom*, may help to change that. Released in August 2016, as I was nearing the end of drafting this dissertation, Tombro advocates the teaching of autoethnography. As other compositionists I have referenced above, she asserts:

the melding of our traditional composition practices and new ideas from qualitative inquiry can help our field strike an ethical balance and critical awareness in teaching and utilization of personal writing in our classrooms and scholarship. We can combine writing intensive assignments with community engagement and analysis of positionality to create a holistic education model. (p. 15)

Tombro does not discount the difficulties of prioritizing personal writing; she recognizes the risks (e.g., emotional vulnerability, oversimplification of cultural identity, trying to do too much) and acknowledges teaching autoethnography requires significant preparation, flexibility, and fortitude. Yet it is worth it, she asserts: "Asking students to draw on visceral experiences as well as textual evidence complicates their analysis and keeps them constantly involved in what is being communicated....In this way the writing carries an impact that extends beyond the scope of the assignment" (pp. 44-45).

Tombro offers many practical suggestions for activities and assignments—some of which I had already used, some of which I have since used, and some of which I will undoubtedly use in the future—as well as examples of student writing from her courses. While I confess her book

initially...unsettled me—*That was my idea! What am I going to publish now?!—*her work should help raise autoethnography’s profile, and I look forward to building on it. Tombro concludes, “we have an obligation to prepare our students by devising courses that allow them to engage in personally relevant research and then share it with larger audiences” (p. 51). I might replace the word “obligation” with “opportunity,” but otherwise, I agree.

Claims About Outcomes of Practicing Autoethnography

In this final section, I summarize support for a list of nine potential outcomes of practicing autoethnography:

1. Increased understanding of self
2. Increased understanding of social/cultural context
3. Increased understanding of connections between self and social/cultural context
4. Confrontation of difficult experiences with therapeutic results
5. Critical empowerment through challenging status quo
6. Consideration of ethical issues
7. Improved research skills
8. Improved writing skills
9. Improved critical thinking skills

I have already covered much of this ground in detail, but, briefly, here are some relevant references.

The increased understanding of self (1), social context (2), and the connection between the two (3) is fundamental to autoethnography. Combining *autobiography* (writing about the self) and *ethnography* (writing about society/culture), the very name of the genre claims these

three outcomes as goals. (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis et al., 2011; Hanauer, 2012a; Holman Jones et al., 2013; Denzin, 2014; Adams et al., 2015; Ellis & Bochner, 2016).

Likewise, as indicated above, many have made the claim that practicing autoethnography can produce (4) therapeutic results through the confrontation of difficult experiences (Bochner, 2001; Ellis, 2001; Gale & Wyatt, 2006; Tedlock, 2008). Many have also made the claim that practicing autoethnography prompts (5) a consideration of ethical issues (Ellis 2007a, 2007b; Bochner, 2007; Adams, 2008; Tolich, 2010; Tullis, 2013) and (6) the critical empowerment that comes from challenging the status quo (Holman Jones, 2005; Adams & Holman Jones, 2008; Danielewicz, 2008; Camangian, 2010; Alvarez, 2012; Toyosaki & Pensoneau-Conway, 2013; Boylorn & Orbe, 2014).

Finally, with regards to improving skills, practitioners of autoethnography claim it can help develop one's ability to (7) conduct research (Ellis, 2004; Canagarajah, 2013; Pichon, 2013; Hoppes, 2014), to (8) write engaging and insightful texts (Richardson, 1994, 2000; Bochner, 1997; Ellis, 1997; Bochner, 2000; Ellis, 2000; Goodall, 2008), and to (9) critically analyze information (Danielewicz, 2008; Alvarez, 2012; Alexander, 2013).

Summary

Having reviewed the development of the definition(s) of autoethnography, described its interdisciplinary and theoretical roots, provided examples, commented on the criticism of the genre, and surveyed the relevant literature on autoethnography in composition studies, especially relating to its pedagogical application, hopefully I have shown how I understand this genre, as well as how its practitioners perceive its potential outcomes. In the next chapter I will present my methodological approach to examining those outcomes in the context of a first-year undergraduate, writing-intensive course.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Finally, I have my transcripts.

Nervous about the amount of time it could take to transcribe the interviews, I had commissioned a professional service. Unfortunately, the results were very spotty, with many inaccuracies—not infrequently the opposite of what was said—and supposedly inaudible passages. I had to spend a lot of time correcting and completing the transcripts.

(For what it's worth, when I informed them of the unsatisfactory results, the service apologized profusely, promised to audit the account, offered to make the adjustments themselves, and gave me a credit for a free hour of future transcription.

For whatever else it's worth, the second round of transcriptions was even worse. I should have just done it myself to begin with.)

Without any prior experience in interview analysis, I turn to Johnny Saldaña's (2016) Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers for help. I read the Manual with some relish, though I do encounter some suggestions that make me wish I had read it before starting the whole data collection process: "Start coding as you collect and format your data, not after all fieldwork has been completed" (p. 21).

Oops.

However, I savor other strategies, for formatting (p. 19), for keeping research questions handy (p. 22), for coding each participants' data before recoding (p. 23), for limiting the number of codes (p. 24), for threshold of significance (p. 25), for writing analytic memos (pp. 44-53).

I began the process of coding feeling, according to a memo, not "quite the overwhelming fear Saldaña warns about, but... nervous and curious." I decide to code by hand at first, feeling

that trying to learn software would prove too complicated. I also decide to code Holistically—I want to be a lumper, not a splitter, to start (p. 79).

Most importantly, though I choose to start with Provisional coding, to examine how my list of potential outcomes evidenced, I heed Saldaña's caution against imposing my own expectations on the data and instead strive to stay open to any possibility: "A willingness to tolerate ambiguity, flexibility, and the ability to remain honest with oneself are necessary personal attributes for researchers" (p. 170).

Having reviewed relevant literature on autoethnography, I turn now to describing my methodological approach to this study. As indicated earlier, my study is inspired by the work of Ellis (2004), who wrote about the experience of teaching autoethnography, and Burke (2014), who examined outcomes of practicing autoethnography. My study is different from theirs, however, in that they both worked with postgraduate students, while I worked with undergraduates. Also, Ellis' account is itself autoethnographic, more experiential and evocative than analytical, and Burke used phenomenography, whereas I approached my project using case study methodology.

This chapter contains an explanation of my reasons for using qualitative research and case study methodology, followed by an identification of my researcher positionality and my research context, site, and participants, as well as overviews of my data sources, collection procedures, and approach to analysis. I conclude by considering the ethical issues involved in the study. Throughout, I follow Yin's (2014) guidelines for reporting on methodology: "You should set high standards in describing your methods, as if you were describing the most important part of your report rather than a routine and necessarily dull one" (p. 192).

Justification for Qualitative Research and Classroom Research

As cited in Chapter Two, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) define qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (p. 3). Though there are many other characteristics of qualitative research, this definition emphasizes two elements essential to my research interests: interpretation and contextualization. First, qualitative researchers reject the idea of absolute, objective knowledge and instead embrace interpretive, subjective understanding. Second, qualitative researchers eschew experimental conditions, basing their interpretations on contextualized circumstances.

Classroom research, as defined by Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014), is well suited to an interpretive study of the outcomes of practicing autoethnography. According to Dana and Yendol-Hoppey, unlike some forms of research that focus on the generation and interpretation of abstract, theoretical information, interesting only to other academics, classroom researchers concentrate on the practical, pedagogical application of ideas: “Inquiring professionals seek out change by reflecting on their own practice” (p. 12). While I do not deny the value of the abstract, and certainly do not reject the importance of theoretical interpretation, the core of my research interest is practical and pedagogical in nature. My research questions, or, as Dana and Yendol-Hoppey would call them, “wonderings,” have to do with the impact of the implementation of a specific teaching strategy.

Of the eight “passions” Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014) identify as potentially motivating teacher inquiry, several resonate with me. Most important to this study is my “desire to improve or experiment with teaching strategies and teaching techniques” (p. 46). Also important, though to a lesser extent, is my “desire to explore the relationship between [my]

beliefs and [my] classroom practice” (p. 48), as well as “the intersection of [my] personal and professional identities” (p. 50). As well, I find the notion of “advocating social justice” (p. 56) compelling, and it is certainly central to many understandings and practices of autoethnography. For all these reasons, the methodology of classroom research fits my study nicely.

Finally, it is important to note that just as autoethnography is not appropriate for making claims of broad generalizability, neither is this study intended to. I have no desire to draw definitive conclusions, but rather to learn what can occur given a specific set of circumstances.

Researcher Positionality

The first of those circumstances I wish to identify is what Frances Giampapa (2011) calls researcher positionality, a result of “the production of discourse of knowledge and master narratives within the academy, and within my specific discipline in terms of the roles and responsibilities of the field” (p. 135). Recognizing researcher positionality is crucial to practicing autoethnography. Tami Spry (2011) observes, “The consideration of *researcher location* in relation to others seems tantamount in the present development of autoethnography” (p. 502). Spry goes on to offer “the performative-I” as a potential location: “The performative-I research location seeks to articulate with others the co-construction of culture, history, and power” (p. 503). Autoethnography does focus on the self, but in relation to others in the self’s context. My intellectual positionality, my academically performative-I, my scholarly self in relation to others, follows.

I am an autoethnographer and a compositionist, albeit early in my experience of both, and attempting to connect the two. As I prepared this positionality statement, I realized my researcher positionality as both autoethnographer and compositionist is similar to my identity as a Third Culture Kid (TCK). As I write in my autoethnography (Hopkins, 2015), a TCK is “a person who

has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture . . . build[ing] relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, p. 13). In other words, TCKs may not fit in or feel wholly at home anywhere, even while they occupy multiple spaces, playing multiple roles. Similarly, I don't yet feel fully comfortable as either a compositionist or an autoethnographer, but I am working to fit into both roles even as I also try to bring the spaces closer together.

This process could, and arguably should result in an evolution of my positionality, consistent with Giampapa's "continual process of evaluation and repositioning" (p. 140). I understand Giampapa to mean that positionality is never fixed or set, but always adapting to new circumstances, and I hope to share her attitude of constantly challenging my positionality.

Study Context, Site, and Participants

In an ongoing effort to explore my performative-I (Spry, 2006, 2011), I will now identify my professional context—which is also the context of this study—as well as the study site and participants.

In this study, I examine the experiences of undergraduate students practicing autoethnography in a first-year writing-intensive course at Franklin and Marshall College (F&M), where I teach and serve as the Assistant Director of the Writing Center.

F&M is a small (approx. 2400 students), residential, liberal arts college in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Established in 1787, F&M has long occupied a space in US News Report's top 50 undergraduate-only institutions (#47, 2017), and admission is categorized as "More Selective," with an acceptance rate of 32%. In the last several years, F&M administration has committed to diversifying the student demographics—which were previously predominantly white and upper-middle class—with some success. However, most F&M students still come from privileged

backgrounds, with significant resources and high ambitions for the future. The backgrounds of the students may have an impact on the suitability of autoethnography as pedagogy, especially at the first-year level, as I will discuss further, later.

I am myself an F&M graduate (2006), and I have taught at the college since 2011. In 2014-15, F&M introduced a new general education curriculum called Connections (CNX). This curriculum involves the completion of two consecutive, semester-long, first-year seminars (CNX1 and CNX2) designed to develop crucial academic skills, including speaking, reading, writing, and research. Regarding research and writing, CNX1 focuses on basic skills, such as description, grammatical correctness, and analysis and argumentation, while CNX2 introduces more advanced skills, such as synthesis, and requires a substantial research assignment.

All faculty members are able to teach CNX courses, which may be built around any topic, as long as the key skills are addressed and, in the case of CNX2, readings from multiple disciplines are incorporated into the syllabus. During course selection, students pick their preferences for CNX topics, and while they are not guaranteed their first choice, it is likely they will be placed in a course in which they indicated at least some interest, another important factor which I will discuss further, later.

I have taught in the CNX curriculum since its inception, beginning with a CNX1 course called “Why Shakespeare?” I also taught a CNX2 course called “In and Out of Africa” before I submitted a proposal for my CNX2 course on autoethnography, “The Story of You: Autoethnography in Action.” The review process was rocky: my proposal was at first denied, then postponed, before being finally accepted after two rounds of challenges. The major challenge seemed to relate to the difficulty Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014) observe about obtaining IRB approval for classroom research: “those who sit on review boards are not always

familiar with practitioner inquiry.... IRB members may reject a proposal outright under the assumption that studying one's own students is inherently unacceptable as it would be impossible for a teacher to avoid coercion" (pp. 153-154). Actually, my IRB applications were approved quickly by both institutions, IUP and F&M, but the curricular review committee was more reluctant to let me study my own students. They also expressed (expected) concerns about the nature of autoethnographic research—i.e., how is it actually research?

Once I convinced the committee that I would not coerce my students' participation, and that their work would be genuinely academic, I began teaching two sections of "The Story of You" in the Spring semester of 2016. The first section met from 8:30 to 9:50 on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Possibly because of the early hour, the class was not fully enrolled—only 11 students began, but all 11 also completed the course. The second section met from 12:45 to 2:05 on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. That section was fully enrolled, but one student eventually withdrew from the course, leaving 15 to complete it.

The syllabus for "The Story of You" is Appendix B, but because this is a classroom research inquiry intended to explore and improve pedagogical practice, it is important to provide a detailed description of my pedagogical practice here.

I began as I begin every course, with a freewriting exercise, since all my courses are writing-intensive. The prompt for this exercise was to write as vivid a description as possible about something done in the previous twenty-four hours—anything at all, though I warned students that they would be sharing their description, so they should pick something they felt comfortable sharing. After the freewrite, I talked about the value of identifying the social/cultural context and significance of everyday activity and asked the students to try to do so as they shared their descriptions. To provide an example, I led by sharing my description of petting my cat and

talked about how important pets are to our culture and how we can find social comfort in contact with them. The ensuing student sharing laid the foundation both for their ability to share their personal experiences and their ability to connect those experiences with social/cultural context.

Most of the rest of the first day was occupied with discussion of the syllabus.

On the second day of class, after the students had read an overview of autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2011) and their first example of autoethnography (Hanuaer, 2012a), we discussed their perceptions of the genre, identifying key features both from the theory and practice.

In the second week, we continued the discussion of autoethnographic theory and practice with readings from Adams et al. (2015) and another example of autoethnography (Sturm, 2015), and we began to brainstorm for the first formal essay, an analysis of the core aspects of the genre. The results of that first essay, as well as our class discussion, indicated that the majority of students had acquired a solid, if still simple understanding of autoethnography.

Also in the second week, we did exercises in class to prepare students for their own autoethnographic projects. Borrowing and adapting from Adams et. al (2015) and from Dr. Hanauer's instruction, I asked students to brainstorm a list of significant life events or moments. Then they spent several minutes writing a description of one of those events or moments, which they then read to a partner. Next, the partner retold the account as they understood it. As a group, we discussed how having someone else share their perception of your story has an impact on your own memory of the experience, and how this "othering" of the self is fundamental to autoethnographic practice.

Week three began with a visit from a campus librarian who talked about aspects of information literacy to lay groundwork for further research workshops. In class we also discussed more examples of autoethnography (Sparkes, 1996; Ellingson, 1998) with a focus on

vivid, evocative writing—“showing” rather than “telling.” We also discussed readings that critiqued the genre (Delamont, 2009) and that defended it (Ellis, 2009).

Originally, I had intended to spend more time in week four on critiques and defenses of autoethnography, but the discussions of the previous week seemed sufficient, and instead we spent time preparing research topic proposals. To do so, I gave the students more freewriting prompts, asking them to consider the following questions:

- How do you want to portray yourself?
- How objective do you want to try to be?
- On what data will you draw for your personal experience?
- What do you want to learn about yourself?

We also visited the library, where the librarian instructed students on how to search for sources—specifically, scholarly books—effectively.

In week five we spent most of class discussing readings on the ethical implications of practicing autoethnography (Tolich, 2010; Tullis, 2013; Medford, 2006; Jago 2011a & b), the topic of the students’ second formal essay assignment.

That discussion carried into the sixth week, when we also addressed the challenges of evaluating autoethnography (Ellis, 2000; Bochner, 2000; Tracy, 2010), the topic of the students’ third and final formal essay assignment. Also in week six, the students submitted their first research memo, with annotations and citations of three sources, and we visited the library a second time for instruction in how to search for scholarly journal articles.

Given the condition of the students’ first memos, we spent substantial (and somewhat tense) time on proper citation in week seven, when the students’ second memos were due. For the first time since I started teaching (2011), I received substantial vocal resistance to citing

sources correctly. I do not know if exposure to autoethnography had anything to do with this resistance—I cannot imagine how.

Weeks eight and nine were spent mostly in preparing the first full draft of the autoethnography, which was due at the end of week nine, just before Spring Break began. In-class exercises included further experiments with vivid, evocative writing, as well as partnered interviews to discover and demonstrate ways in which individuals are biased, and how their biases affected their interpretation and presentation of their experiences. We also discussed elements of structure (beginnings, middles, and endings) and how to craft an academic abstract.

I spent much of Spring Break reading and responding to the first drafts of the autoethnographies, finding them powerful, albeit rough, especially regarding the research component. When we returned, we used class time for several intensive peer feedback sessions, giving students opportunities to read and respond to each other's autoethnographies. We also discussed critical autoethnographies relating to gender and sexuality (Adams, 2014; Berry, 2007, Dowling, 2012) and race and ethnicity (Boylorn, 2014; Spry, 2010; Martinez & Merlino, 2014).

In the twelfth week, I presented my own autoethnography (Hopkins, 2015), both as an example of how to present autoethnography in general, and because I felt it was not fair for me to ask students to share aspects of their personal lives without me doing the same. Although it could have been interesting to hear students' reactions, I also felt it was not appropriate to ask them for feedback, since they might feel pressured to praise my work. I did give students an opportunity to ask questions, either about the content or format of the autoethnography and presentation. None did.

Students' presentations occupied most of the rest of the semester. Each student had ten minutes to present. Then I gave everyone several minutes to jot down reactions to the

presentation both at a personal and formal level. Students had the option to share these reactions aloud, if they wished, and then everyone passed their (anonymous) notes to the presenter. Thus everyone received peer feedback on their presentations.

While it would not be accurate to assert that every aspect of the course was wonderful, it would be equally untrue to indicate that, overall, I have had any better experiences teaching a course. Exposing my students to autoethnography, and guiding them through the practice of the genre was an unusually, if not uniquely rewarding experience, as I will discuss further later.

After the conclusion of the course, and the posting of final grades, I invited all the students in both sections of “The Story of You” to participate in this study. The email invitation is Appendix D, and as it indicates, I offered \$25 compensation for participation, involving an interview and granting permission for me to analyze the autoethnography completed for the course.

Given my sense of the students’ overall satisfaction with the course (further evidenced by the mostly positive teacher evaluation surveys, which I will present and discuss further, later), the response was not as high as I hoped, but 11 students did volunteer (42% of the students who completed the course).

Data Sources and Collection

Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014) identify 12 data sources for teachers practicing classroom research. Of the dozen, I used three: student interviews, essays, and surveys.

Interviews

According to Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014), “capturing talk can be an important form of data” (p. 101). Though their advice is insightful—“it is important not to get ‘hung up’ on the word *interview*....Asking students about their thinking and their learning is a natural part of

lessons” (p. 103), my process was slightly more formal than what they suggest. Most importantly, I conducted the interviews not during the course but after it was complete. Though in-the-moment reflections could certainly have been useful, it was more important to avoid the possibility of coercive pressure to participate, attached to assessment.

I included the interview questions in the email invitation (Appendix D), allowing (but not explicitly requesting) students to think about their responses before the actual interview. Before beginning the questions in the interview, I asked students to take a few moments to think about their experience of practicing autoethnography and to list specific moments in class and in their own process that struck them as meaningful. The interview questions follow:

- Could you describe each moment you listed for me?
(about each moment)
- What was so meaningful about this moment?
- Why do you think you remember this moment?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell me about this moment?
(after the last moment listed)
- How would you define autoethnography?
- What do you believe are the most important aspects of writing autoethnography?
- What did you enjoy (or not) about writing an autoethnography?
- What was the hardest part about writing an autoethnography?
- What do you believe you learned about yourself from writing an autoethnography?
- What do you believe you learned about the world from writing an autoethnography?
- What academic skills do you believe you learned from writing an autoethnography?

- Would you write another autoethnography? If so, why, and what would you write about?
If not, why not?
- Do you believe autoethnography should be included in undergraduate writing courses? If so, why, and what changes would you suggest making to the course you took? If not, why not?

In crafting this list, I attempted to allow for the most open-ended discussion possible, following guidelines suggested by Rubin and Rubin (2012). While I obviously had in mind the nine potential outcomes of practicing autoethnography I had identified in preparing the study, I tried not to direct students too forcefully towards commenting on those outcomes.

I conducted seven of the 11 interviews through telephone or Skype; the other four were in person. I recorded all the interviews using Audacity and commissioned a professional service to transcribe them, though, as indicated earlier, I reviewed the resulting transcripts, correcting and completing them where necessary, and removing such filler words as “like” and “you know.”

Essays

Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014) emphasize the value of examining student work: “papers become data and take on new meaning” (p. 101). In accepting the invitation to participate in the study, students agreed to allow me to refer to their autoethnographic essays, written as the course’s final assignment (Appendix C).

Surveys

As Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014) note, “surveys can give students a space to share their thoughts and opinions about a teaching technique or strategy” (p. 114). That sharing may be especially valuable when anonymous, since students then can express reservations, concerns, and critiques more comfortably.

The surveys I used were not designed specifically for the study but were an institutional assessment tool which I requested and received IRB permission to reference in the study. These surveys, called “Student Perceptions of Teaching: Course Questionnaires” (SPoTs) were completed in the final week of the course as part of F&M’s routine faculty evaluation. SPoTs are collected and processed by the institution and not released to the faculty until grades are recorded. Even then, the forms are anonymous.

SPoTs include 18 questions, plus demographic information. Thirteen of the questions are set by the school; individual instructors select the other five from a list of options. Most of the SPoT questions were not specifically relevant to the autoethnography portion of the course, but several were, and I present and discuss those questions and their answers further, later.

Data Analysis

Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014) distinguish two types of to approach data analysis: formative, taking place throughout the teaching and data collection process, and summative, taking place after the teaching and data collection process. My own approach was mostly summative, though there were certainly moments of analysis occurring during the data collection as well.

Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014) acknowledge the challenge of data analysis: “Figuring out what to do with the mounds of data that have been collected over the course of an inquiry may be quite similar to the feeling you had when you began your inquiry. Overwhelmed” (p. 166). They suggest the techniques of coding and memoing—both of which I used.

I chose to begin by analyzing the interview data, and I followed coding strategies offered by Saldaña (2016), including Provisional, Magnitude, Evaluation, and In Vivo coding. As I coded the interviews, I also began to analyze the autoethnographic essays, rereading each and

identifying passages that indicated evidence of the coded outcomes found in the interviews, making memos with these observations and insights.

Finally, I turned to the surveys, which I analyzed following guidelines suggested by Fowler (2014). First I processed the questions with quantitative answers, on their own and in comparison to both campus-wide average scores and the scores on my own SPoTs of previous years, but that data eventually proved of less value than anticipated. I also coded the answers to qualitative questions, using them to reinforce, or in some cases challenge, my interpretations of the interview and essay data. All this I cover further in Chapters 4 and 5.

Ethical Consideration

When it comes to ethics, Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014) assert that “engagement in teacher inquiry is different from engagement in the types of research done in higher education by academic researchers” (p. 149). While I do not disagree that there are differences, I would suggest that actually classroom research is, in ways, more ethically challenging than some other forms of research, not unlike autoethnography itself. And as Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014) acknowledge, “the role of ethics in any teaching endeavor ought to be considered...Keeping caring, fairness, openness, and truth at the forefront of your work as a teacher-inquirer is critical to ethical work” (p. 150).

As noted in Chapter Two, practicing autoethnography is an ethically complicated endeavor. While this study is not itself autoethnographic, I have attempted to follow the guidelines prescribed for autoethnography by Tolich (2010) and Tullis (2013). While neither begins their list with seeking IRB approval, both require that step, and I will shape my discussion of the ethical issues involved in this study according to the structure of IUP’s IRB. (I also completed an IRB for F&M, and both institutions’ approval letters are in Appendix A.)

Study Context, Site, and Participants

I have already described the study context, site, and participants: students in two sections of a first-year undergraduate writing-intensive seminar at Franklin and Marshall College.

Risks/Costs and Protection/Benefits

Both Tolich (2010) and Tullis (2013) insist that researchers should consider their own positions in the ethical implications of an autoethnographic study. As a part of the academic community, or any other community, for that matter, it is risky to present certain (especially personal) information or interpretation, and autoethnographers should think carefully about how to present themselves. For example, while autoethnography is an established academic genre, not all scholars recognize or respect it as such. To use it in one's own research, or to advocate using it pedagogically, even if only in a dissertation, could create professional barriers between me and colleagues or potential publishers and employers, as autoethnographers have acknowledged (Mykhalovskiy, 1996; Poulos, 2010b).

However, I have carefully considered both the overall topic and the specific information I share in support of my interpretation of it. Moreover, the potential benefits to myself as a result of the study are far greater than the risks. In addition to contributing to the body of knowledge about which I care deeply, I also hope to complete my terminal degree, the privileges of which will make me competitive for much professional advancement.

As for my students, there were risks and costs for them too, both in taking the course and in participating in the study. Practicing autoethnography requires revealing aspects of one's personal life. These revelations can prove uncomfortable and can affect others' perceptions of one, perhaps negatively. I attempted to cultivate a safe and supportive environment for students to share their experiences, and I explicitly stated that if, at any time, students felt uncomfortable,

they could leave a class discussion without penalty. Furthermore, because of the informed consent process, participation in the study was completely voluntary and had no effect on assessment—I did not even know who would be participating in the study until after the course was complete and grades posted.

Because the production of the autoethnographic essays and evaluative surveys were part of the course, the time taken to complete those tasks should not be counted as cost. However, those students who chose to participate in the interview process did sacrifice time, and they were presented with further questions that might have proved uncomfortable. Again, I attempted to prevent discomfort by providing the questions beforehand, and I explicitly stated that if, at any time, students felt uncomfortable, they could choose to skip a question, or to stop participating in the interview, and study, entirely. None did.

Attempting to follow Tolich (2010) and Tullis' (2013) exhortations to perform process and member checks, following completion of the first draft, I sent this text to the participants with the request to read and respond to the representations of their interviews and autoethnographies. If they disliked or disagreed with my representation, I asked them to suggest changes by a certain date. All participants responded. One asked to change the spelling of her name. One pointed out a typo in the spelling of his name on one page. One corrected one detail I had misremembered. One asked me to clarify one quote, providing more context. No other changes were suggested, and in almost all the emails, the participants indicated strong satisfaction: "I feel fortunate to have been a part of this study" and "I had a chance to reflect again on my experiences."

I hoped the benefits to participants would include the satisfaction of contributing to the body of knowledge about which they might care, and according to the emails mentioned above,

that was the case for most. The \$25 payment for their time was another benefit. I expect there to be no further benefits or compensation, except that I will thank each participant in the acknowledgements section of this dissertation and in any future publications.

Information Withheld/Debriefing

No information was withheld for the purposes of this study. No debriefing was necessary.

Privacy/Confidentiality

Given the revelatory nature of autoethnography, there was no way in this case study to guarantee either privacy or confidentiality. Because of the personal nature of the data, students who chose to participate are likely identifiable, though they were offered the option of being named with pseudonyms, either of their choice, if they wished, or of mine. Two asked to be given pseudonyms, one of her own choice, one of mine. Also, and, again, as indicated above and below, the informed consent process ensured that participation in the study was completely voluntary and that withdrawal from the study was possible at any time.

All data collected was kept safe in a password-protected laptop, to which only I had access.

Informed Consent

As Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014) emphasize, obtaining informed consent is a crucial component to conducting ethical research. The email invitation to participate in the study described the project in some detail, and that description was repeated in the informed consent document (see Appendix E), which students signed and submitted before beginning the interview

Summary

Having presented my reasons for using qualitative research, and specifically case study, identified my researcher positionality and the study context, site, and participants, and described

the data sources and collection and analysis processes, as well as my consideration of ethical implications, hopefully I have demonstrated a thorough methodological approach, though throughout I have also attempted to recognize that qualitative researchers must be ready to accommodate the unexpected (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I believe my design was flexible enough to allow for that adaptation.

In the next chapter I will present my results, the data collected.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

I never cried while reading students' essays before.

I may have ground my teeth and groaned a bit, but from frustration, nothing else.

Starting my teaching career assigning traditional research projects, I tried to give my students some choice in topics to motivate curiosity: in my course on African literature, they picked a country and an aspect of culture to study; in my course on heroes in literature, they picked a personal hero to examine. But still the results, while occasionally adequate, were never profound or passionate and often felt forced. I spent several Thanksgiving and Spring Breaks responding to drafts clearly cobbled together at the last possible moment (despite my best practice attempts at careful scaffolding) from unrelated sources with listless prose, little thought, and less feeling.

These were different.

Yes, there were still plenty of grammatical hiccups, and many organizational and expressive aspects to push further in revision.

But these were, almost without exception, engaging and informative texts, accounts of important personal experiences alongside meaningful research. Family conflicts and family celebrations. Grieving a grandmother, coping with cancer, witnessing a riot, surviving a car accident, and battling social stigma and peer pressure to conform to norms.

I laughed—and not woefully, wondering why and how they could possibly think these words and ideas made any sense, but with genuine enjoyment of the turns of phrase and the good (albeit sometimes morbid) humor. I learned—more than I ever had about the Tanzanian

economy or Wonder Woman. And I cried, really moved by the representations of the experiences and the insights into their significance.

In this chapter, I present the data collected during my study of the outcomes of practicing autoethnography in the context of a first-year undergraduate, writing-intensive course. The data come from three sources:

- *interviews* conducted with 11 former students,
- *autoethnographic essays* written by those students
- *surveys* completed anonymously by all students in the course at the end of the semester

I combine my presentation of the data from the interviews and the essays in a single section, then present the results of the surveys. Discussion of the data will follow in the next chapter.

Interviews and Essays

As described in the previous chapter, I went through several stages of coding the interview transcripts, looking for evidence of the nine potential outcomes I identified before beginning the data collection process. Using a variety of coding strategies (Saldaña, 2016), I both expanded and refined the categories and subcategories of outcomes evidenced in the interviews. I arrived at a final list that included eight of the original nine—evidence of critical thinking seemed to fit into other categories—though it collapsed the first three into one overall outcome of improved reflexivity, and added four more—development of a sense of community, enjoyment, critique/concern, and miscellaneous—for a total of ten:

1. Increased reflexivity
2. Confrontation of difficult experiences with therapeutic results
3. Critical empowerment through challenging status quo

4. Consideration of ethical issues
5. Improved research skills
6. Improved writing skills
7. Development of a sense of community
8. Enjoyment
9. Critique/Concern
10. Miscellaneous

As I reviewed the interviews, I avoided trying to quantify what is fundamentally qualitative data. Still, a rough count and comparison of mentions of each outcome indicated that that increased reflexivity was the most frequently evidenced outcome, followed closely by improvement in skills of writing and research. Most of the rest spread relatively evenly, though the development of community and expressions of critique/concern were the least frequently evidenced outcomes.

However, of course, more thorough scrutiny of these results is necessary. I will now present the data denoting each outcome in more detail, using references to individual interviews and to the autoethnographies. Before providing those references, I will comment briefly on how I understand each outcome.

It is important to note that the results of the interview are, for the most part, self-reported outcomes. That is, participants said they experienced the outcomes, whether directly or indirectly. In some cases, I was able to make what I considered safe and solid interpretations of what was said to infer an outcome, but I tended to reserve inferences of outcomes for reading the essays.

Increased Reflexivity

I understand reflexivity as a form of self-examination for greater self-understanding. As practiced by autoethnographers, reflexivity incorporates both an inward and an outward gaze, understanding the self in relation to the social/cultural context. Indeed, reflexivity seemed to encapsulate aspects of the first three outcomes in my original list, which, while they were frequently evidenced, were also frequently difficult to distinguish:

- Increased understanding of self
- Increased understanding of social context
- Increased understanding of the connection between self and social/cultural context

Hence the collapsing of these categories into a single outcome: increased reflexivity.

For this outcome alone I will present results from all the participants, since all the participants indicated experiencing some substantial increase in reflexivity. I will present the data in the chronological order of interviewing of the participants.

Edward.

Even Edward, who in his interview referred to increased reflexivity less frequently than most other participants, did recognize growth in this area. Edward's autoethnography, "Adolescence Separation-Individuation," examines issues surrounding familial tension, and through the process he found that his experience of adolescent conflict with his father manifested the specific social theory of *separation-individuation* (Xia, Xie, Zhou, Defrain, & Combs, 2004). When asked what he learned about himself, Edward commented on the value of realizing the reasons behind his and his father's behavior. Edward said practicing autoethnography helped him better understand—and appreciate—his own and his father's past actions, placing them in the context of a larger social/cultural phenomenon, as his essay evidences:

after years passed, when I asked my father why he did not make peace with me earlier, it turned out that he'd like to have me separated and individuated from the family. He believed the separation and individuation allowed me to change my lifestyle, no longer depending on them so much on everything, to realize without parents' help, which I should cherish, how different it would be for me to live my life, and to have my own thoughts and solutions when confronting any obstacles in my life. (p. 13)

Betty.

Betty indicated increased reflexivity frequently in her interview. When asked what she learned about herself, Betty said explicitly, "I can reflect on myself more, and also I can understand myself better." In Betty's autoethnography, "On the Meiktila Riot: A Story of Destructed Coexistence," she describes her experience during a religious riot in her home country, Myanmar, struggling to reconcile her own Buddhist beliefs with the violent acts of other Buddhists against their Muslim neighbors. By sharing her perspective, as well as a wealth of factual information about the event, she appears to comprehend if not condone those acts and to arrive at a statement of hope in the conclusion of her essay:

We have struggled through the harsh reality of the communal violence; the collapse of our once beautiful town as well as our long-built relationships: we are now struggling to fight against the apparent oddness of our re-existence: we will continue our struggle to liberate from unpleasant past memories and vengeance, and rebuild a peaceful coexistence. Our journey ahead is not easy, but I am optimistic that we will move on. (p. 17)

Kaitlyn.

Kaitlyn could not as explicitly acknowledge the outcome of increased reflexivity for herself: when asked what she learned about herself, she said, “I feel like I didn’t necessarily learn anything new about myself. If anything, it kind of just stayed the same...I think it was just cathartic.” Yet, in her interview, Kaitlyn’s definition of autoethnography included a direct reference to self-reflection, and self-reflection was the first and foremost aspect of autoethnography she identified as important.

That increased awareness of self and social/cultural context is also evident in her autoethnography, “Somewhere in Between,” an exploration of her Asian American identity, specifically in a suburban context in which athletic and academic performance were extremely important parts of that identity. Her autoethnography ends with what seems a powerful reflection on her complicated situation:

The answer is simply that I’ve gotten used to this because this is all that I’ve ever known. I am used to being around this privilege. I am used to the pressures to succeed. That is why I feel comfortable around my white teammates, even if I’m one of the few minorities on the team. That is exactly why I have chosen to attend such a predominately white college, because I’ve gotten used to the fact that my race will always be the first thing others notice. Or the fact that no matter how much I integrate and assimilate to the majority that surrounds me, I will never be whole heartedly accepted. I am comfortable with the alternating feelings of integration and ostracism. (p. 15)

Kim.

Like Kaitlyn, Kim did not directly recognize an increase in reflexivity. However, in her interview, while she found it difficult to define autoethnography at first, she used a striking

metaphor: “it’s like trying to connect the dots in our life.” This simile seemed to illustrate increased reflexivity, as does her actual autoethnography, “The Blame Game,” an account of Kim’s struggle with the issue of body-image and her exploration of that all-too common phenomenon on social media. Her autoethnography begins with a series of disturbing statistics on the problem of weight-shaming, then makes those numbers personal in a clear example of reflexivity, showing her awareness of her own situation and the similar situations of others:

I am a part of all of those statistics. I was that third grader who wanted to be thinner, who dieted regularly, and continuously compared my body to the girls I saw on TV and magazines. I am one of social media’s victims. (p. 3)

Spencer.

In his interview, when asked what he learned about himself, Spencer added an element of improved self-esteem to increased self-knowledge: “I think I came out with a better understanding of myself completely. And I came out a better person for it...I realized I have the resiliency and strength to stick with what I believe in.” Here Spencer referred to how his autoethnography, “Avoiding Temptations: My Journey Through Adolescence,” represents as well as reinforces his determination to remain abstinent from alcohol and drugs, a difficult decision to make and maintain in his social/cultural contexts of high school, then college. According to Spencer, however, the price paid is worth it, and as he concludes the essay, he congratulates himself:

Finding healthy passions to replace the urge to drink is vital for me. These can go a long way in allowing people to become individuals, giving them the confidence to make their own choices. I have followed my gut for the past six years, and, in doing so, achieved more than I could have ever dreamed. (p. 20)

Taylor.

In her interview, Taylor expressed enthusiasm for the opportunity to turn her attention on herself and her social/cultural context: “I found it really interesting to write about a culture that was so relevant to me and being able to evaluate that experience.” Though Taylor’s autoethnography, “How Socioeconomics Shapes a Life,” focuses on her father and mother more than on herself, she nevertheless reflects on how her parents’ circumstances (especially their educational opportunities) have had an impact on her own identity formation, as the last sentence of her abstract and first sentence of her introduction indicate:

I hope to connect with others who have been through the process of transitioning socioeconomic classes and are able to relate to my experiences.

I believe that by using the writing technique of autoethnography, I will be able to openly reflect on my experiences throughout my childhood, provide insight on these happenings, all while discovering a reasoning through cultural research. (p. 1)

Christa.

In her interview, Christa described a “light bulb” going off that marked her realization of the self-reflexive aspect of autoethnography: “a clicking moment for me [was] where I was like, wow, this is really cool that I can connect my personal thoughts and what I get from other people to my research.” In this moment, Christa connected her reflection on her experience beating cancer to her research on attitudes to treatment and to an article she read about a celebrity she admires, Demi Lovato, who also beat cancer. That moment of increased reflexivity is also powerfully portrayed in her actual autoethnography, “Coping with Cancer: An Autoethnography.”

Self-reports of adolescent cancer patients suggested that repressors, or patients with “decreased awareness of distress and increased self-restraint”, usually report high levels of psychological functioning (Erickson, Gerstle, & Montague, 2007, p. 255). However, this is deceiving, as their “high levels of physiological and behavioral assessments of stress reactivity” contradict their claims of coping well (Erickson, Gerstle, & Montague, 2007, p. 248). Demi Lovato indirectly helped inspire me to be a non-repressor, and deal with my disease and all the emotions that came with it, head on. (p. 12)

Elizabeth.

Elizabeth indicated increased reflexivity less frequently in her interview, yet through her account of her grandmother’s battle with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), “Dealing with Death: The Loss of a Grandmother, Mother and Friend to Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis,” Elizabeth did make important discoveries about herself and her social/cultural context. In addition to the information about COPD she found, Elizabeth described a realization of the motivation behind her intended career: “before I wrote [the autoethnography], I didn’t know [my grandmother] was part of the reason I wanted to be a doctor.” Elizabeth also wrote about the significance of her and her family’s religious beliefs during the difficult times of bereavement and grieving. This combination of clinical and spiritual research and reflection is evidenced in her autoethnography’s guiding research questions:

How would this disease affect us as a Christian family? Would we become stronger in our Christian faith or question all of our beliefs from this experience? Medically, how would we understand what was happening to such an important woman in our lives compared to what we saw? (pp. 3-4)

Cooper.

Cooper's autoethnography, "Autoethnography: My Eye-Opening Mishap Behind the Wheel," is an analysis of an automobile accident he experienced in high school. In his interview, when asked what he learned about himself, Cooper commented on the value of making sense of a complex situation:

I learned that it's important to be able to go back and analyze a situation, look back at something that happened in your life and connect it to actual research and everything as opposed to just looking at stuff and taking the blame for it and moving on with it right away. I think it's important to look at it from a broader perspective

Here Cooper emphasized the benefit of critical attention to context rather than a cursory processing of serious life events. That attention is evident in the autoethnography as well:

While my situation did not end up being something that hung around me forever ...it has stuck with me in a sense that I feel strongly about the fact that it has helped shape me into the more aware, much less reckless person I am today, a year and a half later. Not only on the road, but in general. I try and put more time and energy into thinking through and analyzing situations before making brisk decisions. (p. 14)

Tania.

In her account of her experience with domestic violence, "A Bengali-American Perspective: On Opposing Cultural Definitions of Patriarchy," Tania especially emphasized what she learned about her position in a problematic social/cultural context. Increased reflexivity was frequently and powerfully evidenced in her interview, in which she stated that practicing autoethnography had helped her better understand power relations between men and women in

Bangladesh. Also during her interview, Tania shared a series of questions that had framed her research:

in what ways do I respond to the social norms and what situations did previously existing social structures impinge on my individuality? And in what ways were my ideas shaped today by the people around me in my past?

Though there can be no simple answers to these questions, in her autoethnography Tania identifies the genre's potential to address these issues:

Autoethnographies have the power to bring stories that exist behind closed doors into light. It allows people to enter the most private and intimate moments of the author's life; this vulnerability is what allows for accurate analysis of culture and society. Through autoethnography, readers have access to first hand experiences from the writer to use as a direct resource for understanding the society they belong to. (p.1)

Lydia.

Finally, though references to reflexivity were less frequent in Lydia's interview, still when asked what she learned about herself, she did indicate an increase in this area: "I learned about the relationships around me...what was important in my life." In her autoethnography, "Life with Jenna," Lydia explores her relationship with her twin sister, and one of the remarkable aspects of the experience was recognizing similarities and differences between that relationship and the relationships described by other students in the course who also wrote about their families, even another on his twin: "the same relationship in a sense can never be the same for anyone. It's totally different. It's cool to realize that." Indeed, Lydia confronts that contrast directly in her autoethnography's abstract:

The purpose of this narrative is to share how I believe being a twin has helped me succeed and become a greater person while challenging the cultural phenomena of twins who fight for their own identity. (p. 1)

Therapeutic Confrontation

I understand the outcome of therapeutic confrontation to be the feeling of healing resulting from researching and writing about difficult experiences. This is perhaps the most problematic of the outcomes, since, because I am unequipped to evaluate any individual's health and must rely entirely on self-reporting of effects. I will discuss the problematic aspects of this outcome further in Chapter Five.

Unlike the unexcepted presence of evidence of increased reflexivity, not all participants mentioned autoethnography's reputedly therapeutic capacity, and no-one's interview had a high frequency of indicating feeling this sense of healing. However, for some, that outcome not only did occur, but occurred powerfully.

As mentioned above, in her interview Kaitlyn called practicing autoethnography "cathartic" and emphasized how it "explores one's emotional logic...and therefore it gives readers insight to the human experiences." Kaitlyn displays that emotional logic in a scene near the end of her autoethnography, in which she expresses the stress of performance expectations:

I walk back into the living room and see my brother, playing on his phone, completely unaware of the agony I feel inside. I wonder if he has started to feel the same pressures to achieve that I have. Even though [he] is just a freshman, I feel a pain in my chest knowing that in a few years, when he starts looking at colleges and universities, he will most likely experience the same pressures as I to be "successful." (p. 13)

Her use of the words “agony,” “pain,” and “pressure” capably convey Kaitlyn’s feelings, leading to the cathartic conclusion described above, accepting her identity.

Kim did not use the word “therapy” in her interview, but her description of the effects of practicing autoethnography showed emotional processing, nonetheless: “It kind of let me dwell on my feelings and...be more open.” Furthermore, near the end of her autoethnography, she shares an anecdote of a recent interaction with the child of a family member who was eating only peas for supper. When she asked him why he wasn’t eating more, he answered: “I am trying to lose weight, I’m too fat” (p. 10). Kim’s response:

My heart literally shattered into pieces. I looked at him straight into his eyes telling him that he was fine the way he was, but he did not believe me. (p. 10)

Here Kim demonstrates both her own progress in being open about her feelings and the ongoing challenges she, and we all, still face dealing with those feelings.

Others were more straightforward in acknowledging the therapeutic effects of the experience. In her interview, Christa did not hesitate to credit practicing autoethnography with such impact: “it’s therapeutic and helped me find closure of that part of my life.” That closure is especially strongly evidenced at the end of Christa’s essay:

as of now, March 2016, I am enjoying my first year of college, previously delayed by my cancer. I find myself appreciating every day just a little more. Every now and then, I walk a little slower and take it all in. What it means to be able to attend class every day. What it means to walk up a staircase without stopping to catch my breath. What it means to sleep in my own bed, and not a hospital bed. What it means to live. (p. 15)

While much of her autoethnography is written in the past tense, here Christa concludes with a reflection written purely in the present, showing her heightened awareness of health and happiness.

Elizabeth admitted that at first she doubted that writing an autoethnography could be therapeutic, and so she was surprised by the results: “I didn’t think that was going to happen, but then later on, you could actually feel the effects....I really liked just how it was so therapeutic.” The abstract of her autoethnography confirms those effects as well—“Retelling these memories has been therapeutic for me” (p. 1)—as does also her conclusion:

She is with me in my thoughts everyday, wondering what she would think of me now.

She is with me in her snoopy slippers that I now wear. She is with me when I wear her signature red nail polish, or when I drive by her old condo....She is with me in the gold ring with a single ruby and two small diamonds that she hoped I would one day grow into. I finally have. (p. 14)

The repetition is a reminder, an almost ritualistic reaffirmation of her grandmother’s ongoing presence, despite her death, in Elizabeth’s life.

In her autoethnography’s introduction, Tania refers, albeit indirectly, to the genre’s therapeutic potential: “For some authors, autoethnographies have been a way for them to make sense of their experiences” (p. 2). And while there may be no way to completely resolve the complicated feelings coming from such experiences, still Tania said in her interview she had indeed made some sense of her situation, realizing, “What I had made the norm in my head so long was actually not the norm.” Further, she arrived at a healthier assessment of her own value: “knowing what the social norms are and how being unsuccessful in fulfilling those norms

doesn't mean that you're unsuccessful as an individual." She also found herself able to let go of some of her negative feelings:

once I understood the culture, and I understood the limitations it had in terms of gender....I felt less angry, less confused. Because you can't offer me knowledge and care and nurture if you never had it yourself.

Tania was even able to replace the anger and confusion with more positive feelings: "I don't know if this is what you're looking for in this answer, but I kind of learned that I love my dad very much." It is hard for me to imagine much more powerful evidence of healing.

Critical Empowerment

I understand critical empowerment to mean a sense of having contributed to a common good, often because of an increased perception of the problematic aspects of some social/cultural phenomenon and an attempt to address that problem. This outcome can be more confidently assessed than therapeutic confrontation, since, arguably, simply feeling empowered is actually being empowered. Whether or not the problem addressed is solved—and most will not be—is not the point; awareness and action are.

While in the course we did cover the critical capacity of autoethnography to contribute to challenging and changing the status-quo, the in-depth discussions of that capacity came late in the semester, after the drafts of the final essays were well underway, so it should not be surprising that this outcome is not a dominant trend in the data. Yet neither is it absent.

In her interview, Kaitlyn indicated a sense of critical obligation in practicing autoethnography: "I felt like I was writing something that actually had purpose...that was bigger than myself....I felt like I needed to write this in order to do some good." Her purpose was to challenge a narrative of ethnic stereotyping, as her autoethnography states:

I want to reveal, analyze and explicate my inner conflict between wanting the “white experience” that my peers had and my inescapable Asian heritage. I hope to bring insight to the pressures to succeed and assimilate and the inner identity conflicts that may characterize many minorities’ experience living somewhere where they are the minority. (p. 3)

Kim, too, cared about contributing to a common good. Throughout her interview, she kept returning to the idea of her autoethnography being helpful: “I don’t want to write about something that’s not going to help anyone, or benefit anyone.” She explicitly expressed that goal in the abstract of the essay:

My purpose is to hopefully show people that they are not to blame for how they feel about themselves, they have been raised and nurtured to believe that they are not good enough or never will be good enough. (p. 2)

Kim’s conclusion also includes a direct exhortation to readers:

Everyone has had a battle with their worst critic, themselves. There will be days that will be hard to get through because people will always tell you to be a certain way, but your opinion matters the most.... You are your own person and you should do what makes **you** happy (pp. 10-11)

Similarly, Spencer does not balk from acknowledging his inspirational intentions in his abstract: “*My goal is to provide readers with assurance that they have the power and intelligence to follow their own path, and can avoid alcohol if it is in their best interest*” (p. 1). In his interview, Spencer defined autoethnography partially as “an instigator of social change.” Yet he also acknowledged that he could only go so far in promoting his perspective:

When you develop your piece, you want to keep in mind how does this relate to larger audience, how can I help or inspire the most amount of people. But it's up to the reader to interpret it and you have no control over that.

Tania took her responsibility as a representative of her culture very seriously, and while her priority was her personal portrayal, in her interview she commented on that portrayal's potential value to others like her:

Bengali-American youth specifically needs to understand the situation they're in. It's not a coincidence or just by chance. There are social structures sort of set up for them to face those limitations, specifically women....we need more Bengali writers. More Bengali narratives. And I think Bengali youth needs to read it.

Her abstract does not shy away from confrontation: "This autoethnography was written to encourage discussion related to South Asian family violence and allow victims to relate to a narrative that is often kept private" (p. 1).

Ethical Consideration

I understand the outcome of ethical consideration to be an increased awareness of the complexity and significance of the ethical implications involved in conducting research and writing, about the self and about others, as well as acting in an appropriate way to minimize the potential of harm. Similar to critical empowerment, the point is not in definitively solving a problem, or in necessarily making the "right" choices, but in paying serious attention to the challenge.

During the course, we spent substantial time discussing the ethical implications involved in practicing autoethnography. Much of two weeks of the semester was devoted to this aspect of the genre, and describing the ethical considerations of each individual project was a requirement

of the assignment. Many students omitted that description from the first draft, and so needed to be reminded of its necessity for subsequent drafts. By the final, all had met the expectation, and some had crafted detailed and eloquent discourses on their ethical deliberations.

Still, for only one participant was increased ethical awareness among the most frequently evidenced outcomes, though almost all acknowledged that ethical consideration was an important part of practicing autoethnography, and several indicated it was one of the more prominent outcomes.

In her interview, Betty asserted that practicing autoethnography “demands honesty and certain standards, especially ethical standards.” During our conversations while she was writing her autoethnography, we discussed specific concerns about identifying individuals from her community, and Betty chose not to name those individuals, and even some institutions, “due to the sensitiveness of the country’s current political transition” (p. 4).

In her interview, Kaitlyn commented on the applicability of ethical consideration, specifically the issue of consent, to more than autoethnography: “I think consent is a concept that society still struggles with and that the guidelines are really blurred, and I felt that it was really important to discuss it in class because the discussion directly transferred outside of the classroom.” For her, a major ethical concern was “to avoid harming the subjects” (p. 3), as she wrote in her essay, representing her friends and family fairly but without skirting the critique of some of their ideological positions she found problematic. Her caution led her to assign pseudonyms to those individuals, as well as obtaining their consent.

Taylor also emphasized the importance of ethical consideration in her interview: “I realized you need to be aware of who’s reading your work and...you have to be considerate of all the people involved.” Her autoethnography focuses on her parents, especially her father, and

in it she described her “constant checking with him” (p. 19), from first to final draft. She noted that his reaction to one section stood out: his surprise at being referred to as a “minority” in his predominantly non-Caucasian high school. She indicated he had not asked her to change anything and that he found it “interesting...to hear it from someone else’s point of view.”

For Elizabeth, the novelty of the idea of consent impressed her: “I didn’t even think about that, because it’s your own story, you should be able to write whatever you want, but at the same time, I wouldn’t want someone writing something about me that wasn’t true.” In her autoethnography about her deceased grandmother, Elizabeth confronted the challenging ethical implications of writing about individuals incapable of giving consent, a challenge she addressed directly in an endnote. Additionally, she shared how her exposure to the ethics of consent informed a discussion she had later with her mother, who was also writing an account of the family. She exhorted her mother to seek consent from the appropriate individuals, and her mother agreed.

Improved Research Skills

I understand improved research skills to mean that individuals have grown in their ability to conduct rigorous research. While research is a complex and recursive activity, it is important when evaluating the presence of this outcome to consider that growth in any part of the process constitutes improvement.

While, as indicated in Chapter Two, not all autoethnographers agree on the necessity of consulting outside sources, I believe it is a crucial element of the genre, and my course and the final assignment did require substantial research. It is unsurprising, then, that all participants’ interviews and essays evidenced this outcome, though some of the improvement was less than

pleasantly experienced. Several participants indicated the research was what they liked least about practicing autoethnography, though they all affirmed its value.

Edward used the word “suffering” to describe his experience and evoked exhaustion: “it’s so tiring!” Yet he also pointed to his progress as a researcher as one of the most useful outcomes of the course. Edward emphasized how he learned how to use keywords in the appropriate search engines to locate sources, as well as how to skim those sources to determine their relevance: “I learn how to search a topic and go through those academic essays quick and then decide if it’s helpful to my own autoethnography.”

Elizabeth also indicated she was not happy about the research component, at least initially: “at first, I was, like, I have to have all this research...” she said, in a derisive tone, but then she shifted that tone: “...but then I was, like, oh, it actually helps.” Elizabeth especially valued her learning about COPD, the cause of her grandmother’s death, and that research informed her discussions with her patients during a summer internship following the course.

Likewise, Lydia neither liked nor discredited the value of the research component: “the research process in itself was difficult, but it was so necessary.” Looking back on the process, Lydia recognized that maybe her approach was not as efficient as it might have been: “When I was writing my autoethnography, I realized I didn’t spend that long researching....but at the end I was looking way too hard....It could have been so straightforward.” For her, the realization that research didn’t need to be so stressful to be successful was crucial, and she also appreciated having this realization early in her college experience: “I’m so glad I did this second semester freshman year, so now I have that ability, and I know I can do that.”

For Cooper, too, the research was far from fun, especially the early stages: “My least favorite part of this probably was having to look for the sources and stuff to find the right type of

thing.” Yet he quickly pointed out that the process was “worth it.” Cooper highlighted the value of finding different kinds of sources, some “more scientific,” like encyclopedia and journal articles, some less, like news stories. The variety of sources and “how they all came together” impressed Cooper. Still, it was “a struggle.”

Not everyone experienced the research as a hardship, however. Betty embraced the research component with an enthusiasm she had not felt for such pursuits before:

Previously, I was mainly interested in fictions and I wasn’t interested in non-fictions, especially reference books. But then while I researched about my country and about Buddhism in the reference session, I found myself deeply engaged in it. And I spent a lot of time at the library.

She described one occasion on which she spent several hours in the library, immersed in finding background information for her topic, something she said she never would have expected to do before practicing autoethnography.

The reason for Betty’s enthusiasm was the poignancy of her research, its relevance to her personal experience; rather than merely trying to support an academic point, she was genuinely curious about her topic:

we are not just looking for something that will be useful for our argument, but we’re open to every resource. So I can actually look for every resource about Buddhism, about my country and also because I feel emotional connection to my country, and I’m particularly interested in it.

Betty also noted the priority of quality over quantity in practicing autoethnography: “it doesn’t necessarily include a lot of resources, but the resources that fit.” Betty brought both quality and quantity of research to her autoethnography. Beyond the minimum requirement of six sources,

Betty's bibliography included four more, and those sources ran the gamut from government reports on the riot to scholarly articles on religious violence. There were even sources she found and processed but did not include in the actual autoethnography, such as a documentary film she described in her interview as providing emotional context to her essay: "it made me feel closer to my hometown...to the residents of my hometown."

Improved Writing Skills

Similar to the previous outcome, I understand improved writing skills to mean simply that individuals have grown in their writing ability. Also like research, writing is a complex and recursive activity, and growth in any part of the process constitutes improvement.

Although autoethnography can be presented through a variety of media, the written word was the only option in this course, so the frequency of evidence of this outcome was not unexpected. Some of the claimed improvements were relatively general: stronger structure, voice, grammar, conciseness, citation. But the specificity of some of the claims was surprising. One recurring aspect of the improvement in writing skills was an indication of increased audience awareness. Writers, even experienced writers, often struggle to put themselves into their readers' positions, imagining how their words will be perceived. Apparently, writing autoethnography addressed this challenge for some participants.

Defining autoethnography in his interview, Edward said: "It's like a platform for both the writer and for the readers...it's like you have to connect—connect the readers and writers." This idea of connection is at the core of audience awareness, and Edward demonstrated his dedication to achieving that connection in his multiple conversations with me about how to shape the artistic portion of his autoethnography. At first nervous about his previously unexplored

storytelling skills, Edward quickly showed himself a natural at narrative through his use of vivid detail and sharp dialogue, the former evidenced in the first scene in his essay:

17th, May 2011: It's a mess on the floor: the wreckage of my cell phone, the broken broomstick, and bolsters fallen from the couch. The sound of our fights spreads from the living room to the whole building; I bet the old meddlesome women from the second floor is listening intently, curious about what is happening here. (p. 1)

Yet there were parts of Edward's story that we both felt needed special attention throughout the drafting and revision process. We spent considerable time discussing one moment in particular: the moment in which his father, angry at Edward, crushes the young man's cell phone underfoot. In the first draft, while far from ineffective, I felt the moment was not fully successful:

“老子!” He turns furious, gets up from the couch and fetches my cell phone.

HE SMASHES IT! (p. 5)

I suggested that the all-caps and the exclamation point overemphasized the action, actually undercutting its significance. I encouraged Edward to try something else, perhaps a simple empty space. He followed my advice, marking the moment with an absence:

“老子!” He turns furious, gets up from the couch and fetches my cell phone.

How could he! (p. 6)

While I preferred this draft to his first, I still wasn't totally satisfied, and while I told Edward he didn't need to make any changes to this moment to affect his grade, I said I would be happy to see another version, though I didn't make any specific suggestions this time. His third draft was different again:

“老子!” He turns furious, rises up from the couch and fetches my cell phone.

Before I have time to react, I hear the sound, the sound of my phone cracking. I lose it. In that moment, I lose the phone and the connection to Helen and to my friends, along with my head. (p. 6-7)

Throughout this series of interactions, I tried to emphasize that audience awareness is complicated when writing for a grade from one reader, and I attempted to remove as much of the pressure of assessment as I could. While that factor cannot be ignored, Edward’s effort in crafting and re-crafting this moment, even past the point where the grade was an issue, is also undeniable.

Edward was not alone in his willingness to revise. Many students surprised me by the extent of their efforts in revision, but none more than Betty. I do not exaggerate when I say I have known no undergraduate students (including myself) and not many graduate-level or professional writers who revise their work as thoroughly as she did. One small section of her conclusion serves as an apt example. Here is her first draft:

[Weaver-]Hightower (2012) refuses to conclude his autoethnography about Matilda, his stillbirth child because to him it is not a closure, it is not a “tragic story with happy resolution”. Even though he has had two living babies, they will not simply refill the loss of Matilda. He misses her. He mentions: “Grief may abate, but it does not end” (p.485).

Adopting Hightower’s reasoning, I wonder if mine has a conclusion. (p. 23)

After her first draft, I encouraged Betty to engage the Weaver-Hightower quote more directly, to explain her position more thoroughly. Here is her next effort:

[Weaver-]Hightower (2012) mentions in his autoethnography: “Grief may abate, but it does not end” (p.485). I would like to respectfully invert Hightower’s statement: to us, grief might not end but it will abate. (p. 17)

After her second draft, I said I missed just a bit of the context to the Hightower quote, and that though I appreciated her more direct interpretation of the quote, it was still not immediately apparent what she meant. Here is her most recent version:

Marcus B. Weaver-Hightower (2012) mentions in his autoethnographic account about his stillbirth child Matilda: “Grief may abate, but it does not end” (p.485)—the birth of other children could not heal the wound of losing Matilda; Matilda would always be in his heart. While I do empathize with Weaver-Hightower whom I highly admire for that autoethnography, I hope that his statement was not the case for us Meiktila residents.

As with the research component, quantity is no indication of quality, but the sheer volume of writing Betty produced is impressive: the assignment required a minimum of 2700 words; Betty’s first draft was 8000. The fact that even after the course was complete she continued (and continues) to revise the piece, preparing it for presentation and for (hopefully) eventual publication, is evidence not only of her dedication, but also of her enthusiasm, an enthusiasm she claims the course helped her regain after a first-semester CNX1 seminar eroded her confidence: “I discovered my passion about writing again.”

In some cases, the increased audience awareness was less aesthetic and more personal. For Taylor, it was important to be careful not to cause offense. In her interview, she described her consideration of her readers’ feelings: “you need to be aware of who’s reading your work and how... you have to be considerate of all the people involved...since I’m writing about social classes, [I] try not to offend anyone of another class by speaking down upon them.” For example,

following a depiction of one less-than-positive interaction with an upper-middle class woman, Taylor wrote,

to be clear the Main Line may consist of people that allow their affluence to consume them, but there are also genuine, humble people that have impacted my life in the most positive ways. I used an extreme example for the purpose of being able to fully contrast the kinds of people within the areas. I have met various personalities through my time spent on the Main Line and I am grateful for all those interactions. (pp. 8-9)

Christa expressed concern about shaping her readers' perceptions of her as a cancer survivor: "I didn't want to write in a way that made people pity me.... I needed to figure out how do I put myself by not making it, like, oh, poor me, or whatever." One way Christa addressed this concern was to emphasize her many privileges, even while battling cancer, and the ways in which she was supported by her community, from the presence of family throughout the treatment process, to her high school voting her Prom Queen. Additionally, Christa carefully considered the structure of autoethnography, beginning her story with the scene of receiving the diagnosis of her second remission: she presents herself as a survivor from the start, and does not even use the word "cancer" until her second section (p. 3). These were deliberate decisions in her composition process, conscious efforts to present herself in a particular way.

Development of Community

One of the unexpected outcomes of practicing autoethnography was the sense of community that developed amongst the students in the courses. I understand this outcome to be the growth of feelings of mutual trust, respect, support, and inspiration, all of which were especially evident in the interviews with participants from the first section of the course, the smaller, earlier section.

Betty emphasized the element of respect: “by writing autoethnography and by being exposed to others’ autoethnography as well, I think we can respect the other person really, really deep inside.” Taylor talked about trust: “writing about a personal experience...you need to be able to trust the people in your class.” Elizabeth described the developing dynamic in more detail: “through writing [autoethnography] we got a lot closer as a group.” For her, the relationships transcended the context of the course: “every single person in that class, if I see them, we say hi.” She even decided to share a room with one of her classmates, a person she didn’t know before taking the course, and that relationship continues to include conversations on writing the autoethnography: “we had a discussion the other day about our stuff and she mentioned something about it and I was like, oh yeah, you wrote about that, and she was like, yeah, yeah....and then she brought up something about mine....it’s kind of cool that it stuck with us.”

While from the interviews, and my own observations, the second, larger, later section of the course seemed to develop a less pronounced sense of community, still there were comments of that nature from those participants too. For example, Tania told me that though she felt vulnerable in sharing her experience with her peers, the results were positive:

it was really powerful when everybody else was sharing their autoethnographies. I think that we were all really respectful to each other and gave each other really warm feedback from the majority of the students. That was one of the concerns that I had too, that I would be judged personally, but that wasn’t the case.

Enjoyment

Another not unrelated outcome that was not explicitly included on the original list of nine, though perhaps it was implied and certainly was hoped for, was the simple element of

enjoyment: the experience of pleasure in practicing autoethnography. And the participants unanimously expressed their thorough enjoyment of the process, as the following quotes evidence.

Kaitlyn: “It was something huge that I really wanted to work on and I was excited about.”

Spencer: “I enjoyed the opportunity to tell my story and speak a lot of things that I’m very proud of.”

Taylor: “It was something that I really enjoyed writing...because I wanted to work on it and to make sure it was a really well-written piece...it was fun for me to do research on the culture and discover new things.”

Christa: “I enjoyed writing my autoethnography cause it gave me a chance to tell my story.”

Tania: “I really enjoyed confronting it and discussing it.”

In addition to these quotes, when asked in the interview “Would you write another autoethnography?” most indicated they would. Only two, Cooper and Lydia, said no, because neither considered themselves regular writers, though Cooper said he would be “totally open to doing it” in another course setting. Kim, who also did not consider herself a strong writer, did not say for sure, but that she would in a course, and expressed strong enthusiasm for taking such a course. Edward said maybe, because “it can always help” but that “it’s hard to come up with a topic, so I’m not sure what I would write about in my past.”

Betty said probably, and she indicated she had an idea for writing about her experience as an international student. Spencer enjoyed the prospect of another project: “This was actually pretty fun to consider—I was thinking about this a lot. And I would write about my discovery of my love of running...there is the aspect that I would center it around the pressure put on athletes

of all ages to perform.” Christa said yes, but she couldn’t identify a topic: “I think I’ll have to give this more thought.” Elizabeth already had an idea, but she preferred not to share it: “I had another autoethnography that was a lot more personal to me... and I thought about writing in the beginning. But it was too much information for me to expose to everyone....I think at some point I could definitely see myself writing about that.” Tania said she would too:

Because I think that, there, we need more Bengali writers. More Bengali narratives. And I think Bengali youth needs to read it. Bengali-American youth specifically needs to understand the situation they’re in. It’s not a coincidence or just by chance. There are social structures sort of set up for them to face those limitations, specifically women....And I think I would have to do a lot of reading. A lot of interviewing. That would be a long process, but yeah, I’d do it.

Critique/Concern

It is crucial to recognize not only the positive outcomes of practicing autoethnography, but also any critiques of the genre the participants might make, or any concerns it might cause. Though those were few—perhaps because the participants did not feel comfortable critiquing the course, even when directly asked—some did emerge.

I have already discussed several participants’ feelings about the difficulty of the research component and will not revisit those issues here. Other participants commented on the difficulty of recalling the events about which they wrote in sufficient detail. In her interview, Betty said, “trying to remember everything, that’s very challenging,” and in her autoethnography, Kaitlyn wrote, “I must disclose the fact that these scenes are grounded in my memory. My recollection is no where near perfect but I’ve tried to depict these experiences as accurately as I can remember” (p. 3).

Maybe more importantly, it is worth noting that not only does autoethnography require the practice of challenging writing and research skills, it also requires a commitment to introspection and a willingness to open oneself to others' scrutiny, a potentially daunting and difficult duty. In her interview, Kim noted that practicing autoethnography may not be realistic for everyone: "some people may not take it as seriously as they should...So it really depends on what kind of crowd you get."

Spencer, who articulated the most direct critique of the course, took this caveat a step further, suggesting that while he believed autoethnography was a useful genre for undergraduates to practice, courses should carry a caution about the potential for discomfort: "People with...shy personalities might not be...too in love with the idea of expressing themselves in that way." He pointed out the possibility of students feeling pressured to reveal personal information in the context of a heavily assessed assignment without prior warning:

They might have been kind of shocked—at the expectations of the course itself because...the autoethnography itself was a very large portion of our grade, and it asked you to kind of dig deeper than any high school or any type of undergraduate other essay would from a personal standpoint.

Spencer himself felt the pressure of making himself vulnerable, especially in crafting one scene, the scene he identified as the hardest to draft. In it, he describes a typical night in high school, at home alone while his peers partied. His mother, concerned, confronted him, gently, about his solitude. His response: "I appreciated her concern, but I had done this to myself" (p. 12), referring to his decision to stay sober. About writing and sharing this scene, Spencer said: "The hardest part for me was facing the truth that I did struggle mildly with accepting who I

am....Laying out that personal discomfort that I'd refrained from telling people beforehand was really tough."

Other participants also indicated they had felt nervous about this aspect of practicing autoethnography. Elizabeth said she struggled with the sharing: "sometimes it got really personal...not that I didn't like that. But it was just hard sometimes to write." Again, she affirms the value of the struggle, but that does not negate its difficulty.

Unsurprisingly, and as indicated above, Tania experienced that difficulty too. Because of the nature of her topic, she and I had had several conversations about how to handle the process, or even if she should pick another topic entirely. I did not want her to feel unnecessary stress in revisiting a difficult experience. But Tania decided to continue, and in her interview, she reaffirmed that decision: "I wanted to talk about it. I wanted to write it."

There was also the question of how to present Tania's project to the class. While I told her she could not completely avoid discussing her project with her peers—that was a course requirement—I urged her to choose what she shared carefully. As indicated above, in her interview, she said she had been concerned "that I would be judged personally." Her comments about the reception of her work showed "that wasn't the case," but, once more, the concern was there.

Miscellaneous

In reviewing the interviews, I observed evidence of several other outcomes, none frequent enough to warrant the creation of another whole category, but which are worth noting, nonetheless.

For example, some participants indicated *improvement in their public speaking skills*. Presenting the autoethnography was a substantial part of the course grade, and Edward said

preparing the presentation made him “figure out what’s the most important part,” what he wanted to focus on and communicate. Cooper echoed Edward, describing how that process made him think about “how to get my point across in the most interesting way,” challenging him to pare away unnecessary details and develop his delivery.

Others commented on how practicing autoethnography *increased their awareness of subjectivity*. Kaitlyn contrasted the element of subjectivity in autoethnography with the supposedly objective approach of much other academic work, asserting that something subjective is “just as important as something that’s objective.” Lydia spoke at length about how practicing autoethnography made her realize the existence of bias in research in general. That awareness carries into and is complimented by her other coursework: “Now, in my classes, I realize that’s so important. I’m taking a science class right now, and [the professor] said the best scientists are biased...they have to recognize that there is a perspective.”

And while it perhaps runs parallel to the outcome of the sense of community developed during the course, the several stories participants told about sharing their autoethnographies with others outside of the course seem distinct enough to merit their own mention. Kaitlyn and Taylor shared their work with their parents, and while the responses were not effusive, neither were they negative, and both students seemed to value the experience. Kim received an enthusiastic reaction from her friends: “[they said] it’s a really good piece, and we have a really full-on conversation about it.” Likewise Lydia: what she liked best about writing the autoethnography was sharing it with her sister and mother, who had strong, positive responses, including pleasure at recalling fond memories and some surprise at discovering new information: “that was really special. It was cool.”

Surveys

While the interviews and autoethnographic essays are my most substantial sources of data, the perspectives represented in the surveys completed by students offer a supplement especially useful because of their number—more than twice that of the interviewees—and anonymity, since students may have been more willing to be critical of their experience practicing autoethnography when unidentified.

These surveys, called “Student Perceptions of Teaching: Course Questionnaires” (SPoTs) were completed in the final week of the course as part of F&M’s routine faculty evaluation. The SPoTs are collected and processed by the administration and are not released to the instructor until grades are recorded. Even then, the forms remain anonymous.

The SPoTs include 18 questions, plus demographic information. Thirteen of the questions (1-11 and 17/18) are set by the school; individual instructors select the other five (12-16) from a list of options. Except for the final two, all questions are answered on a Likert Scale 1-5, and except for Questions 6-11, all questions require some qualitative response accompanying the quantitative score in order to be processed—even one word is acceptable, but without that, the number is not counted.

Analyzing the quantitative results of the SPoTs did not prove particularly useful, given the unreliability of teacher evaluations in general, as well as the lack of substantial contextualization of these specific surveys. (It is worth noting, however, that the numbers do compare favorably both with the college-wide results from that semester and with the results from a course with the same curricular designation—CNX2—but different subject matter from the previous year.) Instead, I have continued my qualitative focus, processing the textual portions

of the SPoT responses, looking for patterns of recurring themes, including any that might fit the outcomes identified in the interviews and essays, as well as any new material.

I begin with answers that provided further support for the outcome of critique/concern, since these answers may have been especially valuable, given the anonymity of the surveys. Dissatisfaction was not the predominant expression in these surveys, and much of what dissatisfaction was expressed was not directly related to practicing autoethnography. For example, in the past I have not infrequently been told on the SPoTs that I assign too much work and that I grade too hard, and this semester was no exception, except that there were actually fewer of these complaints than usual. Several students also suggested that I should lecture more and depend less on class discussion, and the word “repetitive” was used several times to describe the class and assignments, though never autoethnography itself. Also more generally, two students disagreed with the otherwise unanimous indication that research was an effective component of the course: “Research felt very forced into the course.”

However, there were some critical/concerned comments that related more directly to practicing autoethnography. These ranged from mild expressions of boredom—“readings could have been more interesting”—to strong assertions about the lack of value of the genre: “The field is not very intellectually significant” and “I learned about autoethnography but I don’t see that being helpful later in life.” Some students also indicated that practicing autoethnography was neither unusual nor unique: when asked “To what extent were writing assignments helpful,” they answered, “No more so than any other writing assignment” and “felt like writing for anything else.” More ambiguous was the response, “I excelled in this one particular field.” One wonders whether or not that student felt pleased with the excelling or frustrated that the excelling might not extend to other fields. Or both.

Worth noting, unlike in the interviews, no SPoT answers gave any indication of discomfort as a result of the personal and revelatory nature of practicing autoethnography.

The more positive SPoT responses provided evidence of most, though not all, of the outcomes indicated in the interviews and essays. Only the outcomes of critical empowerment and development of a sense of community were completely absent, though there were only single references each to the outcomes of consideration of ethical issues and confrontation of difficult experiences with therapeutic results. And while there were many comments generally approving of the research component of the course, few focused directly on the specific benefits of practicing autoethnography, though “solid evidence and citations” were mentioned as was, once, a growth in curiosity from “finding materials.”

Improved writing skills were much more frequently mentioned, and not only in the questions that asked directly about the writing component of the course, but also in a question about the overall results. Some of these comments were general—“I became a lot better writer”—but some were more specific, recognizing the creativity and emphasizing the novelty of practicing autoethnography: “I think I improved in my writing greatly and am able to think about material in new ways because autoethnography is a completely different way to view research and lived experience.”

Increased reflexivity was another frequently recurring theme. Several students indicated increased insight into the self: “This course helped me...to discover more about myself through retrospective analysis” and “I liked that we were encouraged to explore our own lives and write things from our POV.” Even more indicated increased insight into their social/cultural context: “Helped me grasp a better understanding of my culture” and “I became very reflexive involving my own culture.” Indeed, there were many variations on this theme, with students emphasizing

the value not only of embracing the subjectivity of one's own perspective, but of recognizing other perspectives as well: "I have gained a better understanding of what it means to put yourself in someone else's shoes" and "doing my own autoethnography let me see another side."

Finally, enjoyment was also evident throughout the SPoT responses, most of all in the final questions: "What did you like most about this course? What suggestions do you have for improving it?" Answering that question almost required an expression of enjoyment, but while many indicated a solid appreciation for practicing the genre—"I liked the autoethnography we were required to write"—the strength of that enjoyment stood out in several answers. Two used the word "loved" rather than "liked." One even suggested, "Instead of writing about autoethnography for the first essays, I think it would've been more interesting making multiple autoethnographies." And one wrote that the autoethnography was "one of the best assignments I have done ever."

Summary

Examination of the data found in interviews, essays, and surveys shows evidence of all of the potential outcomes of practicing autoethnography on the original list, as well as evidence of additional outcomes. Some outcomes were more frequently and strongly evidenced than others. In the next chapter, I will discuss these results in more depth and detail.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

At the end of each interview, I explicitly asked all participants whether or not they thought autoethnography should be taught at the undergraduate, especially first-year level. Most said yes without hesitation, many indicating that not only is practicing autoethnography useful, but it is an unusual, or even unique experience. I wish to share their answers instead of more of my own narrative, but rather than clumping them all together at the beginning, I will use them to punctuate individual sections throughout this last chapter.

In this last chapter, I discuss the data collected during this study, presenting an analysis of the evidence of outcomes of practicing autoethnography in a first-year undergraduate, writing-intensive course. I begin with a summary review of the results and then connect those results with current composition scholarship regarding the value of personal, political, and artistic writing. I follow with a reflection on the pedagogical implications of each of the outcomes of teaching autoethnography, including an acknowledgment of my reservations, as well as limitations of this study and suggestions of directions for further research. I conclude with my final (for now) thoughts and feelings about my overall experience thereof.

Betty said practicing autoethnography can have an impact beyond even just the development of academic skills, opening up first-year undergraduate students' perspectives to intellectual possibilities previously unconsidered: "we might be thinking about our majors and what our further directions will be. And by writing the autoethnography, and by reflecting about ourselves, maybe we can understand about ourselves more."

Summary of Results

Data consisted of interviews with 11 students, essays by the same 11 students, and 26 anonymous student surveys. A list of the students and the subjects of their essays follows:

- Edward wrote about his adolescent conflict with his father in “Adolescence Separation-Individuation.”
- Betty wrote about witnessing a religious riot in “On the Meiktila Riot: A Story of Destructed Coexistence.”
- Kaitlyn wrote about being an Asian American athlete and student in “Somewhere in Between.”
- Kim wrote about her struggles with body image in “The Blame Game.”
- Spencer wrote about his decision to stay sober in “Avoiding Temptations: My Journey Through Adolescence.”
- Taylor wrote about growing up in a different socioeconomic class than her parents had in “How Socioeconomics Shapes a Life.”
- Christa wrote about coping with cancer in “Coping with Cancer: An Autoethnography.”
- Elizabeth wrote about losing her grandmother in “Dealing with Death: The Loss of a Grandmother, Mother and Friend to Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis.”
- Cooper wrote about being in an automobile accident in “Autoethnography: My Eye-Opening Mishap Behind the Wheel.”
- Tania wrote about her experience with domestic violence in “A Bengali-American Perspective: On Opposing Cultural Definitions of Patriarchy.”
- Lydia wrote about her relationship with her twin sister in “Life with Jenna.”

I began the study with a list of 9 potential outcomes of practicing autoethnography.

Through coding the data produced in the interviews, I both expanded and refined that list, combining the first three, collapsing the ninth into several others, and adding four more for a total of 10 outcomes:

1. Increased reflexivity
2. Confrontation of difficult experiences with therapeutic results
3. Critical empowerment through challenging status quo
4. Consideration of ethical issues
5. Improved research skills
6. Improved writing skills
7. Development of a sense of community
8. Enjoyment
9. Critique/Concern
10. Miscellaneous

Most of the student interviews included evidence for most of these 10 outcomes. Increased reflexivity was the most frequently evidenced outcome, followed closely by improvement in writing and research skills. Other outcomes were evidenced less frequently, but several (including therapeutic confrontation, ethical consideration, and enjoyment) were still quite strongly evidenced by certain participants. There was less, but still not little or no evidence of critical empowerment, development of community, and critique/concern.

Student essays further evidenced most of these outcomes, with the exception of enjoyment, critique/concern, and development of community; none of those outcomes could be evidenced in the text of the essays.

Students' anonymous answers to the survey questions further evidenced the outcomes listed above. For example, many students indicated increased reflexivity, improved writing skills, and enjoyment of the course in general, and specifically the practicing of autoethnography. And some did not.

Christa commented on how surprisingly challenging it was to practice autoethnography, and how valuable:

I learned what I'm capable of. Because at first I felt like, oh, this might be an easy course...just write about yourself....But it was a lot more difficult to actually sit down and try to write it....I accomplished this piece, and I'm proud of it.

Connecting Composition and Autoethnography

In this section, I will connect my findings with current literature from composition studies. I have already reviewed compositionists who have written about autoethnography explicitly (Chapter Two), and I will not repeat myself. Rather, I will engage compositionists whose work relates to the principles behind autoethnographic practice. I hope to show how the outcomes of practicing autoethnography align with prominent pedagogical theories and practice in composition, thus demonstrating the genre's potential applicability to writing instruction. I will concentrate on two fundamental aspects of autoethnography—its personal and its artistic nature—as well as its political potential.

Personal (and Potentially Political)

While there are many important aspects of autoethnography, and thus many possible outcomes of practicing it, perhaps its most basic essence is its dual nature as both personal and academic work: "Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe

and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 1). This combination can produce increased reflexivity—insight into the self and social/cultural context, the outcome I identified most frequently and strongly in my students’ experiences.

Compositionists have long debated about whether or not and how to incorporate personal writing into their pedagogy, and that debate continues. As editor Jonathan Alexander writes in introducing the most recent (February 2017) issue of *CCC*, devoted to personal writing, “the ‘personal’ has proved a mobile, if at times vexing, concept for writing studies” (p. 436). In that issue, Eli Goldblatt reflects on the legacy of the expressivist tradition championed by such pioneers as Donald Murray, Peter Elbow, Kenneth Macrorie, and Wendy Bishop, but a tradition now considered by many “embarrassing and unworthy of academic attention, perhaps even a bit threatening” (2017, p. 439). However, Goldblatt asserts that the expressivist tradition remains present, albeit tacitly, in the field: “many demonstrate a preference for personal writing and narrative, for teaching keyed to individual development” (p. 440). Teaching autoethnography can manifest that preference, as my study demonstrates. All participants indicated increased reflexivity, providing many powerful examples of individual development, from Edward’s recognition of growth in his relationship with his father through adolescent conflict, to Christa’s realization of how she handled her battle with cancer. These essays were deeply personal examinations of experience and expressions of stronger understanding of those experiences in their social/cultural contexts.

Furthermore, personal writing need not be “only” personal, as Goldblatt observes, but can also be compatible with the focus on political ideology preferred by the proponents of the social turn in composition studies, such leaders as James Berlin and David Bartholomae. Indeed, the

personal can be vitally political, and denying the personal can be seen as an act of social suppression. Goldblatt grounds his argument in an awareness of current political trends in education, trends towards standardization and away from personalization. Those trends are problematic, he asserts: “we can forget the importance of two impulses that compel writers: the desire to speak out of your most intimate experiences and to connect with communities in need” (p. 442). Again, autoethnography, which “treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 1), offers the opportunity to address these impulses and satisfy these desires, connecting the personal with the communal need. For example, Tania’s wish for her work to inspire and inform other Bengali-American youths to not take their situations for granted and Kim’s similar motivation to help others struggling with unrealistic and unhealthy body image expectations created by social media both speak poignantly to Goldblatt’s conclusion:

In my view, students need a reason to write that comes from more intimate and compelling sources. Without an urgency that is felt as personal, a writer will always be looking to the teacher, the boss, the arbiter for both permission to begin and approval to desist. (p. 461)

Practicing autoethnography can thus be both personal and political, an act of expression and challenge against autocratic authority.

Artistic (and Still Political)

Another seemingly paradoxical but crucial combination in autoethnography is its artistic as well as analytical nature: “When researchers write autoethnographies, they seek to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience” (Ellis et al.,

2011, p. 13). As my study demonstrated, the blend of what appears binary can produce improved writing skills, especially regarding audience awareness.

As with personal writing, compositionists have had complicated and often conflicting perspectives on artistic, or so-called “creative” writing, as supposedly opposed to developing the kind of critical writing for which they are considered responsible. Yet many reject this binary. Alexander also edited an issue of *CCC* devoted to “celebrat[ing] the critical in the creative and creative in the critical” (2015, p. 4). In that issue, Patrick Sullivan exhorted his colleagues to prioritize creativity in their courses: “I would like to see us establish for creativity an even more ambitious and foundational role in our discipline and our teaching practice” (2015, p. 19). Providing an overview of scholarship on the value of creativity in general, Sullivan specifically urges compositionists “to desegregate creative writing in our curriculum and to actively expand our definition of academic writing” (p. 21). He offers one way to do so (the “UnEssay”), and practicing autoethnography would be another, as, again, my study demonstrates. All my students wrote both creatively and critically, mixing artistic with analytical prose, from Kaitlyn’s sharp dialogue in tense conversations with her class and teammates, to Elizabeth’s carefully crafted scenes memorializing her grandmother, to Cooper’s vivid description of the moment of collision during his automobile accident. The integration of these elements with the academic research and analysis both prompts awareness of the differences between these kinds of writing and also emphasizes that they need not be separate because distinct.

Once again, the artistic is also not incompatible with the political, as guest editor Andrea Parmegiani indicates in introducing an issue of *The Journal of Basic Writing* devoted to storytelling and its social significance:

In order to increase success among basic writers, scholars, instructors, and policy makers need to move away from narrow conceptions of academic discourse that do not reflect the sociolinguistic complexity of our student population...far from being incommensurable, storytelling and academic discourses are complementary for creating meaningful intellectual conversations (2014, p. 3).

In that issue, Rebecca Mlynarczyk describes her career-long exploration of the connections between academic and personal—and especially narrative—writing. Drawing on the work of theorist Jerome Bruner (1986), she recognizes the differences between the two but also the places where the two converge, and she pushes for more “taking advantage of these points of contact between storytelling and academic discourse” (2014, p. 15). Practicing autoethnography can do just that, as my students showed. For example, the power of Taylor’s commentary on socio-economic inequality, and Tania’s indictment of domestic violence, comes from the poignant vignettes they shared about their encounters with the phenomena, as much as from their more traditional research on and analysis of the subjects.

Finally, that same issue of *JBW* also connects personal, creative (narrative) writing with another popular trend in composition: translingualism, a growing perception of the interpenetration of languages: “blurring the boundaries between storytelling and academic discourse is consistent with a translingual approach to writing instruction” (Parmegiani, 2014, p. 2). The idea of the academic and the personal sharing value and space fits well with translingualists’ beliefs that different discourses should not be considered more or less valid and should be merged rather than isolated. Indeed, one of the most prominent proponents of translingualism, Suresh Canagarajah, has written repeatedly about autoethnography, including using it in his own teaching (1997, 2013, 2016). His discussion of his students’ strategies for

incorporating a translingual perspective into their work is not dissimilar to my experience in working with Betty to identify ways in which her written voice reflects her international identity. Both in terms of “accent” and, in places, of actual dialect, she had to decide how much she wanted to conform to a more linguistically traditional form—standardized, “proper” English—at the risk of losing her unique cultural position and perspective. And this situation is not exclusive to multilingual writers—even English-only writing can manifest translingual principles. My conversations with Lydia, for example, centered on the extent to which she wished to adopt a casual tone in her prose, a tone which would not fit in many academic assignments.

I will conclude this section by referring to one more text by compositionists: the third version of the Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition by the Council of Writing Program Administrators. Approved on July 17, 2014—coincidentally at just about the same time as I was beginning to draft my first autoethnography—the statement includes desired outcomes in four categories: Rhetorical Knowledge; Critical Thinking, Reading, and Composing; Processes; and Knowledge of Conventions. As I read through the statement, it is hard for me to find outcomes that are not covered in my experience of teaching autoethnography.

Regarding rhetorical knowledge, the fact that autoethnography is a hybrid genre requires students to practice “composing a variety of texts,” paying attention to such aspects as “voice, tone, level formality, design, medium, and/or structure” (Outcomes, 2014). Although practicing autoethnography does not require making an overall argument, it is nonetheless a critical endeavor, necessitating “the ability to analyze, synthesize, interpret, and evaluate ideas, information, situations, and texts” (Outcomes, 2014). The genre also lends itself to a process approach, with an emphasis on non-linear drafting and revising stages, and “the collaborative and social aspects” of giving, receiving, and acting on productive feedback (Outcomes, 2014).

Finally, while autoethnography is a flexible genre, knowledge of conventions is still necessary, and unlike with many other assignments, my students actually seemed quite motivated to get the mechanics right, not just for the grade, but for the effectiveness of their expression.

Taylor compared autoethnography with other academic work: “typically in formal essays when you’re writing...for a class you don’t get to reflect this personally...and I think it’s a really cool style.”

Kaitlyn said that practicing autoethnography made her feel like she was doing more than completing required exercises for the general education curriculum:

Instead of just being a college student, by practicing autoethnography, I feel like I became a student who is writing something bigger, or something that could contribute to something higher than just being a first-year at a small college.

Pedagogical Implications

This study is a classroom research project (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014), an inquiry into the pedagogical potential of practicing autoethnography at the undergraduate, especially first-year level. In this section I will share my perceptions of the pedagogical implications of practicing autoethnography, hoping to show how and why writing instructors might approach the teaching of autoethnography. I will refer to my own experience of teaching autoethnography, and I will structure this section according to the outcomes I identified.

Increased Reflexivity

In the context of practicing autoethnography, reflexivity refers to the insight individuals gain into their experiences by looking inward at themselves and outward at their social/cultural contexts. Students certainly became more reflexive, as demonstrated in Chapter Four. Most said

so frequently in their interviews, and though that does constitute self-reporting, reflexivity was also abundantly evident in their autoethnographies.

As one of the core components of autoethnography, we discussed reflexivity in class from the very beginning, through such texts as Ellis et al. (2011) and Adams et al. (2015). Most students seemed not to have encountered the concept of reflexivity much before the course, but their understanding necessarily grew as they read autoethnographic theory and examples, as well as crafting their own manifestation of the genre. Certain class activities were meant to prompt and push students' capacity for reflexivity. For example, the exercise in the second week in which students shared their descriptions of life events or moments with each other required students to look at their own experiences from their own perspectives, as well as their partners'.

While some might argue (and not necessarily wrongly) that a writing instructor's job is not to teach reflexivity, it seems to me that it fits well with the WPA targeted outcome of critical thinking: "the ability to analyze, synthesize, interpret, and evaluate ideas, information, situations, and texts" (Outcomes, 2014). Reflexivity, at least as practiced by autoethnographers, requires those abilities.

Confrontation of Difficult Experiences with Therapeutic Results

Practicing autoethnography can produce feelings of healing from resulting from researching and writing about past experiences. As I indicated in Chapter Four, because I have no requisite qualifications, I cannot judge if what my students reported as therapeutic was genuinely so, but they did report that, in both interviews and in their essays.

I recognize that this is a potentially problematic outcome. As a writing instructor, my job is to teach my students composition, not address their emotional or mental challenges. Furthermore, many students, while legally adults, are only just barely not children, and while it

may appear paternalistic, or patronizing, I must say I feel a responsibility to not put them in possibly painful positions, as can happen when practicing autoethnography.

For these reasons, I did not emphasize autoethnography's therapeutic potential in teaching my course. It emerged, necessarily, in discussions of core texts (Ellis et al., 2011; Adams et al., 2015), and I acknowledged it, but I disclaimed repeatedly that there was no guarantee of this outcome and that it would not be the focus of students' work. As I have indicated, I did have conversations with students who had chosen emotionally difficult topics, but in those conversations, I stressed that if they felt emotional distress, they should seek the support of the appropriate professionals.

For any writing instructors who are unwilling to engage with emotionally difficult material produced by students, I would have to discourage teaching autoethnography, since it is simply likely that some students will choose an emotionally difficult topic. However, like other compositionists who have considered similar challenges (Lucas, 2007; Burdick, 2009), I would encourage even wary teachers to consider the potential benefits of students confronting such topics, as I believe I have observed.

Critical Empowerment through Challenging Status Quo

Like the therapeutic potential, autoethnography's critical capacity to contribute to some common good is less crucial to me than to some autoethnographers. Hence it is not surprising that this outcome was less frequently mentioned than others in interviews, though it was not absent. Several students picked topics that had social/political components, and some chose to concentrate substantially on those components.

Other teachers would—in fact, do (Danielewicz, 2008; Camangian, 2010; Alvarez, 2012)—emphasize this aspect of autoethnography more than did I. Naturally, the subject came

up in discussions of core texts (Ellis et al., 2011; Adams et al., 2015) at the beginning of the course, and near the end, we spent much of two class periods discussing examples of critical autoethnographies relating to gender and sexuality and race and ethnicity. Especially, I think, since we had by that time established a sense of community in the classroom, these discussions were excellent, and students demonstrated their understanding of and appreciation for autoethnography's critical capacity.

Contrary to the frequent accusation of autoethnographers' being self-indulgent navel-gazers, practicing the genre requires both the inward examination of the self and the outward exploration of the self's social/cultural context, which can result in increased awareness of contextual problems, and a desire to affect change. If writing instructors prioritize social engagement in their courses, they could do far worse than to teach autoethnography.

Consideration of Ethical Issues

The ethical considerations involved in practicing autoethnography—being aware of how and why your research and writing affects yourself and others, and acting accordingly—received strong emphasis in my teaching. Many autoethnographers emphasize the ethical implications involved, so we spent substantial time throughout the course discussing those implications, both from a theoretical and practical perspective. Core texts in the first weeks (Ellis et al., 2011; Adams et al., 2015) prioritize ethical consideration as crucial, and week five was an in-depth exploration of ethics, followed by a formal writing assignment comparing the ethics of two autoethnographies (Jago, 2011a, b). Also, several exercises prompted students to consider the ethical implications of their own projects, and the final autoethnographic assignment required an explicit description of that consideration, with reference to sources supporting the students' positions. Hence the strength of some of the students' articulations about this outcome in

interviews—some said this was their first substantial encounter with the concept of ethics, and that they would bring the new awareness and action into other aspects of their lives.

Similar to the therapeutic capacity of autoethnography, the outcome of ethical consideration carries certain risks. Students may become oversensitive to ethical issues and feel paralyzed, unable to write about anyone or anything. Or they may feel that they have done due diligence in ethical consideration, when actually they are far from achieving an appropriate level of responsibility. The ethical questions of “who owns an account of an experience?” and “how does one protect those involved (including both subjects and researchers)?” are not easy. Indeed, they may not be answerable. However, the many class discussions and written descriptions of ethical consideration indicate to me that most of the students took these implications extremely seriously.

Barbara Schneider (2007) and John Duffy (2017) urge compositionists not to ignore the ethical implications involved in teaching research and writing, but rather to consider how such work can provoke important thoughts and articulations of ethics. Incorporating the practicing of autoethnography into one’s syllabus might be one extremely effective way of doing just that.

Improved Research Skills

There are those who would not require substantial outside research in practicing autoethnography, because they believe it is not a core component of the genre. I believe it is essential, and it certainly was in the context of my curriculum, which required the prioritization of research. Hence it was hardly surprising that students mentioned this outcome so frequently in interviews.

The students were exposed to the campus library several times, beginning in week three, and by week six, they were submitting the first of several research memos. The autoethnography

assignment required a minimum of two references each to six sources, of distinct kinds. This requirement was not an easy one for students to understand or to accomplish, but by the final drafts, all did, and while there was some frustration expressed in the interviews about the difficulty of the process, all indicated that the effort was worth it. Certainly, the WPA recognizes the importance of teaching students to “Locate and evaluate... primary and secondary research materials” (Outcomes, 2014).

Furthermore, and beyond the simple benefits that come from instruction and repetition of skills, I believe that students were more motivated to do autoethnographic research because of the personal nature of the topics they chose. Certainly some said so, and I suggest that writing instructors are more likely to instill genuine curiosity and enthusiasm regarding research through autoethnographic assignments than through traditional prompts that allow little or no choice or personal investment.

Improved Writing Skills

Compositionists are in the business of teaching writing, and practicing autoethnography can help students write better, as my students’ interviews, surveys, and essays evidenced. As with research the simple instruction and repetition of skills addresses the WPA’s targeted growth in “Processes” and “Knowledge of Conventions” (Outcomes, 2014). In targeting “Rhetorical Knowledge,” the WPA also emphasizes the value of learning to write “a variety of texts” and for “a range of audiences” (Outcomes, 2014). Practicing autoethnography may not help a student write an argumentative essay, though, as in my course, those kinds of assignments can complement the practice of autoethnography nicely.

Most remarkable, however, in my experience, was the keen attention students paid to audience awareness, which is not often an outcome of traditional writing assignments, at least in

my experience. Rarely will anyone read undergraduate writing, apart from the professor, so if anything, students tend to care only what their professor wants to read. Certainly, my students cared about my reaction, but they also showed they cared what others might want to read—even after I told them that further revision would not matter for their grade, or when I told them that they were welcome to disagree with my suggestions for revision, as long as they indicated why. The many peer feedback sessions conducted during the course likely contributed to that audience awareness, as did a simple desire to share their experiences in the most effective way possible.

Given the skepticism regarding transfer of writing ability from one context to another, it seems to me wiser (and more enjoyable, for all) to concentrate on stoking students' enthusiasm for communication rather than (supposedly) mastering more traditional genres, which they may never have occasion to use beyond their undergraduate experience. I suggest teaching autoethnography stokes that enthusiasm like little, if anything else.

Development of a Sense of Community

Any group of classmates has the capacity to develop a sense of community, but in my experience, even in small classes (maximums of sixteen), the strength of camaraderie, of trust and respect, that seemed evident in my students—both from explicit comments in interviews and in my impressions of class atmosphere—was unusual, if not unique. When individuals are required to share aspects of their personal lives, I suggest they tend to take seriously the respect and trust that they wish to be shown, and which they in turn show others.

There is no guarantee, of course, of this mutual respect and trust, and there will always be the risk of students adopting the opposite approach, but so far that has not been my experience. Actually, three pairs of my students presented autoethnographies that were, ideologically, diametrically opposed, two of them with the potential to be offensive to the opposing

perspective. In one case, especially, I was nervous, but though the two students presented on the same day, and back to back, I was impressed by the extent to which they and their classmates showed each other courtesy and care, despite their radical and passionate divergence of position.

I suspect that this attitude is simply less likely in a course in which students do not make themselves vulnerable and instead discuss texts or phenomena abstractly, rather than personally. As with certain other outcomes, I recognize that writing instructors' jobs are not to foster positive feelings in their classrooms, but it seems to me that such a sense of community can hardly be anything but beneficial.

Enjoyment

During my time as a teacher, I have been fortunate to have many students express (not infrequently, surprised) enjoyment of my courses, but both from explicit reports, in interviews and in surveys, as well as my impressions of class atmosphere, I have not experienced the strength of enthusiasm for a course as when my students practiced autoethnography. Students often do not care for composition courses, or writing-intensive seminar equivalents, which are often required and not unusually remedial in nature. Perhaps students see themselves as already sufficiently skilled, or maybe they feel especially inadequate as writers, or they do not have a choice of topic, or do not like the choices they have, or are eager to get on with their "real" studies, or extra-curricular activities.

Again, as with other outcomes, I believe the personal nature of practicing autoethnography just makes it more fun. Once more, as with other outcomes, I do not suggest that writing instructors should feel obligated to make their courses more fun, but I don't know why they wouldn't want to if they could. I am sure that all of my students did not love every

aspect and moment of practicing autoethnography—several said so—but the predominant feeling expressed was positive, and powerfully so.

Critique/Concern

As I indicated above, there were some critiques/concerns expressed in interviews and surveys about the difficulty of certain tasks (mostly research) and the relative dullness of certain readings. It seems unlikely to me that these kinds of reservations and frustrations can ever be completely eliminated from any course, and I certainly did not observe more than usual—quite the reverse.

However, the critiques/concerns expressed by some students about the potential and actual emotional vulnerability coming from producing personal work for assessment requires more serious consideration. Especially when that personal work addresses a topic of some sensitivity, requiring a considerable level of emotional vulnerability, the implications of practicing autoethnography are not insignificant, and compositionists have been critical of putting students in this position through genres other than autoethnography.

Early in Goldblatt's (2017) essay, he represents the sentiments of his colleagues about the personal and artistic genre of literacy autobiography: "[it] smacks of a cartoon version of early 1970s expressivism, when sharing your struggles with a group was not only going to raise your consciousness and alleviate your emotional suffering but also improve your prose style" (p. 439). While Goldblatt obviously does not share the sentiment himself, the scorn felt by his fellow compositionists is palpable. One such compositionist complained to me that we (teachers of writing) have no business in working with such emotionally charged material as might arise from practicing autoethnography—we are not therapists, and we should leave such terrain to them.

While I respect the point and recognize the risk, I disagree. The therapeutic benefit of writing in general has been well established (Pennebaker, 2004, 2010), and it seems unnecessarily chary to avoid a genre simply because it might prove emotionally challenging, especially when it might also prove emotionally beneficial, as was evidenced by my students' statements in interviews and essays.

Furthermore, practicing autoethnography does not necessarily involve confronting difficult experiences; Bochner (2013) calls for more examination and expression of joyful experiences, and there are examples of these (Blinne, 2012; Sturm, 2015). Some of my students wrote about less stressful experiences, such as involvement with sports (Spencer's running) and positive interactions with family members (Lydia's sister). However, the fact is that most autoethnographies are about experiences that are not particularly pleasant, and my students' work was no exception. I had conversations with students about how to handle emotionally challenging subjects, and I believe these conversation helped, but were they enough?

As indicated earlier, Spencer, especially, urged an upfront description about what would be expected in the course, allowing students to withdraw if they felt fundamentally uncomfortable with sharing aspects of their personal lives. Spencer is right, and, at the same time, his suggestion may not be enough, his ideal impossible to achieve. I did my best to inform students of the nature of the work at the beginning of the course, but while I know I could always improve that description, I suspect it still might never be possible for students to truly and fully understand what practicing autoethnography involves until they are in the midst of the process.

However, if students cannot be wholly adequately warned ahead of time, they can be accommodated and supported throughout the process as much as is possible. In my syllabus, in addition to the Title IX-required language informing students of my status as a mandated reporter

of sexual misconduct—should they consider examining such a subject in their autoethnographies, as others have done (Ronai, 1995)—I also included the following passage under “Course Procedures”:

Autoethnography sometimes results in individuals confronting difficult or even traumatic events or circumstances from their lives. **However, no-one in this class is required to share anything they do not wish to share**, and I hope everyone will respect the space of the class as safe and confidential. If at any time you feel uncomfortable for any reason, feel free to excuse yourself. Please feel free to come to me with anything you wish to discuss, but do not feel obliged to do so. **Counseling services are always available for further support** at #.

I read this passage aloud on the first day of class, and I returned to it periodically during the semester, reminding students to take care of themselves. Beyond this kind of caution, I am sure more could be done, but, finally, it must be the students’ responsibility to make choices to take care of themselves, as in any life situation. And I found no indication that mine did not, and plenty of evidence that they did.

Finally, quite apart from the student experience, I would also like to add my own concern that writing instructors who decide to teach autoethnography may make themselves professionally vulnerable. Although autoethnography is an established academic genre, respected and admired by many, others neither recognize nor appreciate its blend of personal and scholarly research and writing. Since writing instructors frequently occupy relatively unprotected (i.e., untenured, adjunct, and/or otherwise contingent) positions amongst fellow faculty—or professional staff, in my case—they may find themselves wondering whether teaching this fairly new and still experimental genre is wise, from an employment standpoint. From my perspective,

it is, but I could certainly understand others' hesitation, and I would encourage them to consider their contexts carefully before making a decision.

Even those who hesitated when asked whether or not autoethnography should be taught at the first-year level affirmed autoethnography's value. Edward said practicing autoethnography is less stressful than other academic work—he quickly indicated that it is “somewhat stressful, but not a lot.”

Kim, who was among the most effusive in her praise of the course, said, “it’s a sticky question” and reiterated the necessity of maturity in students for success in practicing autoethnography.

Similarly, Spencer said yes, “but only if students are made aware of the implications of autoethnographic writing beforehand.” He emphasized his own satisfaction with the experience: “I got to create and achieve a goal, which was, I thought, revolutionary for any sort of academic work.”

Elizabeth echoed Spencer's concerns about the implications of practicing autoethnography for assessment, especially as a part of the general education curriculum: “Maybe [it should] not necessarily [be] required because some people aren't interested in that sort of thing.” But she also affirmed her experience as positive and distinct: “It wasn't just like some class assignment.”

Limitations and Further Research

Any study has limitations, and while it is gratifying to present and discuss evidence supporting one's beliefs, it is important to identify ways in which that evidence may be in any way problematic, which may also indicate potential directions for further research. Limitations in

my study included the mutual influence of my research and pedagogical goals, the potentially skewing effect of self-selection of participants, and the backgrounds of my students.

One of the most serious limitations to this study is the fact that the course was designed and delivered with the potential outcomes to be examined by the study already in mind. Hence students' experiences in the course may have been—indeed, likely were—influenced by my goals for the research. So, for example, my students were probably likely to experience improvement in writing skills because the course was designed to push their writing skills.

I do not consider this an ethical shortcoming in the research design or my pedagogy, since the goals for the course and the research design were consistent with my understanding of the core purposes and potential outcomes of autoethnography, as I have indicated throughout this dissertation, but especially in Chapter Two. However, I would have been, and I would be happy for the opportunity to study students who have been exposed to autoethnography by other instructors, unfamiliar with my research design. Such a study could complicate my conclusions considerably.

Additionally, similarly, and as already acknowledged in Chapter Three, the questions asked during the interviews, and even some of the survey questions, were also prepared with the same potential outcomes already in mind. Again, I do not consider this an ethical shortcoming for the reasons indicated above, but I would have been, and I would be happy for the opportunity to ask students questions prepared by other researchers, and such a study could further complicate my conclusions.

Another limitation is the element of self-selection in the participant pool. It seems probable that the students who volunteered for the study had positive experiences during the course—actually, they all indicated so in the interviews. Hence, their contributions, specifically

in interviews, would be more likely to evidence positive outcomes of practicing autoethnography. There is also a possibility, or even a likelihood, that students who enjoyed the course might answer questions in ways they hoped would please me, though I tried to avoid that eventuality by emphasizing that I was interested in whatever they had to say, even and especially any less positive aspects of their experiences. Still, I would have been, and I would be happy for the opportunity to analyze data produced by students who did not enjoy the course, as well as data produced in interviews by someone other than myself.

Though it is possible, even likely, that those students who did not have positive experiences in the course did not participate in the study, the data from the anonymous surveys provides a valuable supplement to the interview and essay results. Not much of that data indicates strong negative experiences in the course, or negative outcomes from practicing autoethnography. Still, the aspect of self-selection could explain another limitation, a particular disappointment to me, that not as many students volunteered for the study as I hoped. Given the high levels of overall satisfaction indicated on the anonymous surveys taken by all the students, I suspect this is not such a strong reason for the limited participation. Instead, I believe students were simply not sufficiently motivated to volunteer their time, especially during the summer, which was when I sent the invitation. Even the \$25 compensation—I thought quite a solid offer for only an hour of time—was not enough to motivate more participation. To offer more money, as I did consider, would have started to seem too close to coercive purchasing of participation.

The level of compensation brings me to the last limitation I wish to acknowledge: the relatively high level of privilege of (at least many of) my participants. Most students at F&M come from privileged backgrounds, so it is possible, even likely, that even quite a bit more offered compensation would not have motivated more participation. Much more importantly,

since many of my students come from privilege, many of them have strong educational backgrounds, with considerable resources and encouragement (and/or pressure) from family, friends, and community to succeed. After a semester already spent at F&M, they also (should) have received a fairly high level of instruction in basic writing, research, and critical thinking skills from their Connections 1 courses. They also have the advantage of being able to choose, to some extent, my course from amongst many other options.

My point is that my students came to my course with a level of intellectual development and investment that many, if not most other students could not claim. It seems important to ask: Would practicing autoethnography be as successful in a less exclusive school, where students might not come from such a high level of privilege? Once more, I would have been, and I would be happy for the opportunity to study outcomes of students practicing autoethnography in a wide variety of other contexts.

Some possible directions for further research have already been stated. It would be good to study the outcomes of practicing autoethnography in many different educational contexts. It would also be good to examine the outcomes of someone else teaching autoethnography, and it would be good to examine the outcomes of practicing autoethnography using data collected by someone else and/or produced by someone else's research design.

Two other potentials for further research occur to me. I believe it would be good to study the outcomes of practicing autoethnography longitudinally. What would my students indicate about their experiences after a year, or four, or forty? Would they remember anything about the course? Would they remember more, or less than about other courses?

Finally, I believe it would be good to study the outcomes of practicing autoethnography using quantitative methodology. A rough research design might be as follows. Measure variables

such as writing and research ability, confidence, enthusiasm, and reflexivity in students before and after taking courses that involved practicing autoethnography for a semester compared against the same variables measured in students who took courses that did not involve autoethnographic practice. Such a study would be complex and challenging to prepare and execute, but not impossible, perhaps even in my own institution. I hope someday I can.

Tania talked about how practicing autoethnography was particularly appropriate for first-year undergraduate students:

And I also think that this is the time to reflect and understand yourself...you know, especially because this is a residential college, thinking about separating yourself physically and looking back at the community you're coming from and how that culture and society might have shaped you. And specifically recognizing how that sets you apart from the rest of the group. I think this is a good time to do it, so that we can grow from here.

Cooper, too, spoke about the timeliness of the practice:

I think was definitely a really good course to have as part of the curriculum.... It really touches on a lot of different aspects like research, writing, and, almost psychological aspects to it also. So, I think especially for freshman those are good to have under your belt just to get through the rest of the college experience.

Lastly, Lydia emphasized how well autoethnography fits in with the mission of a liberal arts education: "that's why we come here: that's why we learn things that we wouldn't have known going anywhere else."

Last Words

My purpose in this study was to understand the potential outcomes of practicing autoethnography in first-year undergraduate, writing-intensive courses, as well as to learn whether or not such practice might be an appropriate and useful activity for students in such a context. The overwhelming evidence from the study supports my initial belief that compositionists should consider that autoethnography can be a valuable additional or alternative to traditional research writing assignments.

In interviews, essays, and surveys, students indicated and demonstrated that practicing autoethnography can lead to increases in reflexivity, ethical awareness, and improvements in writing and research skills, as well as creating therapeutic experiences, opportunities for critical empowerment, and a strong sense of community. Plus fun. While they also pointed out some potential costs and risks involved in practicing autoethnography, students almost all indicated strong support for including the genre in undergraduate teaching.

Practicing autoethnography may seem simple and easy—it's "just" writing about yourself, right? Well, no, and even if it were, writing about yourself is neither simple nor easy. Incorporating the practice of autoethnography into writing-intensive courses is also a complex and difficult endeavor. I have identified some of the challenges involved—from ethical and emotional considerations to concerns about one's colleagues' perceptions—and I am sure there are others.

Actually, practicing autoethnography was one of the hardest things I've done as an academic, and teaching it was the hardest.

But, bluntly, for me, both were worth it.

I haven't been teaching too long—only six years. But in that six years I have rarely, if ever encountered writing as insightful, interesting, and in many if not most cases, moving as the autoethnographies my students produced. As I have shown, the theoretical foundations of autoethnography and its practical outcomes align nicely with current composition theory and practice. For these reasons, but much more for the effects I observed in my own students, I hope and plan to keep teaching autoethnography, and I encourage other writing instructors to consider doing the same.

I will end this dissertation with a quote from a student, against my own frequent advice to my students. But since this dissertation is built so much on others' words, it feels somehow appropriate. Anyway. In the last moments of the last interview in my study, Lydia, who was perhaps the least exuberantly enthusiastic of the participants about the overall experience, yet still predominantly positive, asked me why I created the course in the first place. My answer was long(-winded) and repeats much of what I've written here already, but I'll quote myself anyway because Lydia's response requires the set-up:

I took an autoethnography course myself as a graduate student a couple of years — few years ago now. I wrote my own [autoethnography], of course, and I found it very, very meaningful for me on a lot of different levels, and as I was thinking about it, it made a lot of sense that this sort of writing would be a kind of a perfect transition or bridge from high school writing into college writing. A kind of a really nice, comfortable, but challenging exposure to research skills. I think because, as you probably know, most research projects at this level... you'll get assigned a topic or maybe you'll get a slight choice in a topic, but it's probably not something that you're terribly that interested in, and you're just kind of going through the motions of the exercise. Not all. There are some that

don't, but I thought this was a chance for students to pick something that they are really interested in and they already know quite a bit about, at least from their own perspective, and complement that with research. I thought that would be a really nice sort of package, and it's been done, of course, a lot at the graduate level, but I wasn't sure how undergraduates would respond to it, especially students earlier in their experience—if they would find it just too weird or too uncomfortable. So, that was kind of the big question I had going into teaching the course, and while there were definitely moments that were difficult and challenging for everybody, it seems like for the most part that people enjoyed it and were motivated and enthusiastic about doing the writing and the research.

Lydia paused, and nodded, saying, “Yeah. 100%, I agree with that actually.”

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Appendix A

F&M and IUP IRB Approval Letters



Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Institutional Review Board for the
Protection of Human Subjects
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April 20, 2016

Justin B. Hopkins
433 West James Street #4
Lancaster, PA 17603

Dear Mr. Hopkins:

Your proposed research project, "Outcomes of Autoethnography in an Undergraduate Writing Course," (Log No. 16-135) has been reviewed by the IRB and is approved. In accordance with 45CFR46.101 and IUP Policy, your project is exempt from continuing review. This approval does not supersede or obviate compliance with any other University requirements, including, but not limited to, enrollment, degree completion deadlines, topic approval, and conduct of university-affiliated activities.

You should read all of this letter, as it contains important information about conducting your study.

Now that your project has been approved by the IRB, there are elements of the Federal Regulations to which you must attend. IUP adheres to these regulations strictly:

1. You must conduct your study exactly as it was approved by the IRB.
2. Any additions or changes in procedures must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented.
3. You must notify the IRB promptly of any events that affect the safety or well-being of subjects.
4. You must notify the IRB promptly of any modifications of your study or other responses that are necessitated by any events reported in items 2 or 3.

The IRB may review or audit your project at random *or* for cause. In accordance with IUP Policy and Federal Regulation (45CFR46.113), the Board may suspend or terminate your project if your project has not been conducted as approved or if other difficulties are detected.

Although your human subjects review process is complete, the School of Graduate Studies and Research requires submission and approval of a Research Topic Approval Form (RTAF) before you can begin your research. If you have not yet submitted your RTAF, the form can be found at <http://www.iup.edu/page.aspx?id=91683>.

3/1/2017

Franklin & Marshall College Mail - Fwd: Human Subject Study Application #R_3P4ZznQKrhsWrhc from Justin Hopkins



Justin Hopkins <jhopkins@fandm.edu>

Fwd: Human Subject Study Application #R_3P4ZznQKrhsWrhc from Justin Hopkins

Kathy Hertzler <kathy.hertzler@fandm.edu>
To: Justin Hopkins <justin.hopkins@fandm.edu>
Cc: Ken Krebs <kkrebs@fandm.edu>

Tue, Apr 5, 2016 at 4:31 PM

RE: Your Research Protocol entitled: "Outcomes of Autoethnography in an Undergraduate Writing Course" (Human Subject Study Application [#R_3P4ZznQKrhsWrhc])

Approval Date: 4/4/16

First Renewal Date (please renew by): 4/4/17

Project HSS Application Expiry Date: 4/4/19

Dear Justin,

I am writing on behalf of the Franklin & Marshall College Committee on Grants (COG), which functions as an Institutional Review Board, to tell you that your above-referenced research has been approved via the exempt review.

All protocols involving ongoing data collection or interaction with human participants must be renewed **annually** and are subject to a de novo review after **3 years**. Please ensure that you submit a Human Subject Study Amendment Application by using this link: https://fandm.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cSUyy2vNpwG5qnz at **least 2 weeks** prior to the renewal and expiry dates of your study.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events should be reported to Ken Krebs, Associate Dean of the Faculty, as soon as possible.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your project.

Ken Krebs, Associate Dean of the Faculty and IRB Chair, and Kathy Hertzler, Administrative Assistant for College Grants

Begin forwarded message:

From: HSSApplication <noreply@fandm.edu>
Date: March 29, 2016 at 11:25:00 AM EDT
To: <khertze@fandm.edu>
Subject: Human Subject Study Application #R_3P4ZznQKrhsWrhc from Justin Hopkins

The IRB (Internal Review Board) has received your Human Subject Study application for your project Outcomes of Autoethnography in an Undergraduate Writing Course .

Your application ID# is: #R_3P4ZznQKrhsWrhc. Please save this number for future reference.

Response Summary:

Please Enter Your NetID
JHopkins

Principal Investigator Information:
First Justin
Last Hopkins
Email JHopkins@fandm.edu
Department Writing Center

I am...

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=100f3163f6&view=pt&q=krebs&q=true&search=query&msg=153e81fe19451313&siml=153e81fe19451313>

1/5

Appendix B

CNX2 Syllabus: The Story of You: Autoethnography in Action

Course Texts

- Adams, T. E. (2014). Post-coming out complications.
- *Adams, T. E., Holman Jones, S., Ellis, C. (2015). *Autoethnography*. New York: Oxford UP.
- Berry, K. (2007). Embracing the catastrophe: Gay body seeks acceptance.
- Bochner, A. P. (1997). It's about time: Narrative and the divided self.
- Bochner, A. P. (2000). Narrative's virtues. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(2), 131–156.
- Boylorn, R. M. (2013). "Sit with your legs closed!"
- Chin, E. (2007). The consumer diaries, or, autoethnography in the inverted world.
- Delamont, S. (2009). The only honest thing.
- Dowling, E. (2012). The waitress: On affect, method, and (re)presentation.
- Ellis, C. (2000). Creating criteria: An ethnographic short story.
- Ellis, C. (2001). With mother/with child: A true story.
- Ellis, C. (2009). Fighting back or moving on: An autoethnographic response to critics.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview.
- Goodall, Jr., H. L. (2005). Narrative inheritance: A nuclear family with toxic secrets.
- *Goodall, Jr., H. L. (2008). *Writing Qualitative Inquiry*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- *Hacker, D, Sommers N. *Rules for Writers: 8th Edition*. (2016). Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Hanauer, D. I. (2012). Growing up in the unseen shadow of the Kindertransport.
- Hopkins, J. B. (2015). Coming "home": An autoethnographic exploration of TCK transition.
- Jago, B. J. (2011a). Chasing Laurie.
- Jago, B. J. (2011b). Shacking up: An autoethnographic tale of cohabitation.
- Martinez, A., & Andreatta, M. M. (2015). "It's my body and my life"
- Martinez, A., & Merlino, A. (2014). I don't want to die before visiting Graceland.
- Medford, K. (2006). Caught with a fake ID.
- Sparkes, A. C. (2002). Autoethnography: Self-indulgence or something more?
- Spry, T. (2010). Call it swing: A jazz blues autoethnography.
- Sturm, D. (2015). Playing with the autoethnographical.
- Tolich, M. (2010). A critique of current practice.
- Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality.
- Wall, S. (2006). An autoethnography on learning about autoethnography.
- Wall, S. (2008). Easier said than done: Writing an autoethnography.
- Weaver-Hightower, M. B. (2012). Waltzing Matilda.
- Yang, S. (2012). An autoethnography of a childless woman in Korea.

Course Goals

During this course, we will explore autoethnography both theoretically and practically. Autoethnography is a form of self-study that combines reflection and research to show how individuals relate to broader cultural phenomenon. According to Adams et al. (2015),

“Autoethnographic stories are artistic and analytic demonstrations of how we come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experience” (p. 1). The purpose of autoethnography is not to produce generalizable knowledge or to propose solutions to problems, but to share stories that should resonate with readers, offering insight into their own circumstances.

CNX2 is a writing workshop. As well as becoming familiar with the genre of autoethnography, you will discover and develop your own writing process through a series of intensive assignments intended to exercise your compositional capabilities. You will write a lot.

Course Schedule

Week 1

T	1/12	Introduction
R	1/14	Read: Ellis et al. (2011), Hanauer (2012)

Week 2

T	1/19	Read: Adams et al. (2015) Chapters 1&2 Workshop: Invention
R	1/21	Read: Adams et al. (2015) Chapter 3, Sturm (2015)
F	1/22	Due: Essay 1 Draft 1

Week 3

T	1/26	Read: Adams et al.(2015) Chapters 4&5, Sparkes (1996), Ellingson (1998) Librarian Visit
R	1/28	Read: Delamont (2009), Ellis (2009) Workshop: Paragraph Development

Week 4

T 2/2 Read: Sparkes (2002), Wall (2006, 2008)

Due: Research Project Proposal

R 2/4 Library Workshop 1

F 2/5 **Due:** Essay 1 Draft 2

Week 5

T 2/9 Read: Tolich (2010), Medford (2006)

R 2/11 Read: Jago (2011a, 2011b)

Workshop: Introductions and conclusions

F 2/12 **Due:** Essay 2 Draft 1

Week 6

T 2/16 Read: Ellis (2000), Bochner (2000), Tracy (2010)

Due: Memo 1

R 2/18 Library Workshop 2

Week 7

T 2/23 Read: Yang (2012), Martinez & Andreatta (2015)

Due: Memo 2

Workshop: Sources 1

R 2/25 Read: Chin (2007), Weaver-Hightower (2012)

F 2/26 **Due:** Essay 2 Draft 2

Week 8

T 3/1 Read: Bochner (1997), Ellis (2001), Goodall (2005)

Due: Memo 3

Workshop: Sources 2

R 3/3 Read: Goodall (2008)

F 3/4 **Due:** Essay 3 Draft 1

Week 9

T 3/8 Read: Goodall (2008)

Workshop: Invention

R 3/10 No Class

F 3/11 **Due:** Essay 4 Draft 1

Week 10

T 3/22 Read: Adams (2014), Berry (2007)

R 3/24 Read: Dowling (2012)

Workshop: Revision

F 3/25 **Due:** Essay 4 Draft 2

Week 11

T 3/29 Read: Boylorn (2013), Spry (2010)

R 3/31 Read: Martinez and Merlino (2014)

Workshop: Revision

F 4/1 **Due:** Essay 3 Draft 2

Week 12

T 4/5 Read: Hopkins (2015)

Workshop: Presentations

R 4/7 No Class

F 4/8 **Due:** Essay 4 Draft 3

Week 13

T 4/12 Presentations

R 4/14 Presentations

Week 14

T 4/19 Presentations

R 4/21 Conclusion

Course Assessment

Essay 1: 5% (Analysis)

Essay 2: 5% (Argument)

Essay 3: 15% (Comparative Synthesis)

Essay 4: 55% (Research: Autoethnography)

Proposal: 6%, Memos 1-3: 3% each, Draft 1: 5%, Draft 2: 10%, Draft 3: 15%, Presentation: 10%

Participation: 20%

Appendix C

Autoethnography Assignment

Prompt:

Write an autoethnography. In your autoethnography, answer the following question:

How does my personal experience connect with a larger cultural phenomenon?

In addition to writing an essay, you will prepare an oral presentation of your work.

I will direct your research process by a series of assignments throughout the semester. During two classes, we will meet in the library for instruction on how to find sources, and there will be an in-class workshop explaining how to use those sources. You will submit several memos describing your progress, which should help you shape your essay as you go along.

Tues., Feb. 2: **Proposal due in class**

Pick a topic for your autoethnography. Write a 300 word description of what you intend to research and why. Include some questions you plan to answer.

Research Report 1

Be prepared to deliver a 1-minute description of your proposal to the class.

Thurs., Feb 4.: Library Workshop 1

Tues. Feb. 16: **Research Memo 1 due in class**

Find and read two sources (one reference book and one other scholarly book). For each source, write a 150 word annotation. Include a summary of the source's content, an explanation of how you expect to use the source in your essay, and an APA-style citation of the source for your Works Cited page.

Research Report 2

Be prepared to deliver a 1-minute description of your findings to the class.

Thurs., Feb. 18: Library Workshop 2

Tues., Feb. 23: **Research Memo 2 due in class**

Find and read two more sources (scholarly articles). For each source, write another annotation according to the description above.

Research Report 3

Be prepared to deliver a 1-minute description of your findings to the class.

Tues., Mar. 1: **Research Memo 3 due in class**

Find and read two more sources (of any kind). For each source, write another annotation according to the description above.

Research Report 3

Be prepared to deliver a 1-minute description of your findings to the class.

Fri., Mar. 11: **Essay 4 Draft 1 due by 10 a.m.**

You must substantially use (quote/paraphrase more than once) at least the following number and kind of sources in your essay: 1 reference book, 1 scholarly book, 2 scholarly articles, and 2 other sources of any kind.

Fri., Mar. 25: **Essay 4 Draft 2 due by 10 a.m.**

Fri., Apr. 8 **Essay 4 Draft 3 due by 10 a.m.**

Apr. 12, 14, and 19: In-class Presentations

Length: Essay 4 must be at least 2700 words. Your In-Class Presentation must be 10 minutes (+/-10%).

Assessment: The Research Project is 55% of your final grade. Refer to the syllabus for what each part of the project is worth.

Because I believe writing is a holistic endeavor, I do not like to provide a piecemeal rubric breaking down the value of each part of the process/product. However, I do offer a checklist (below) of elements I expect you to include in your essay. Before submitting your essay, ask and answer each of these questions as honestly and thoughtfully as possible, or, better yet, get someone else to do so.

- Topic: Do you answer the prompt question?
- Research Analysis: Do you substantially analyze your sources?
- Aesthetic Representation: Do you represent your experience artfully?
- Ethical Consideration: Do you consider any ethical issues and resolve them appropriately?
- Grammar: Do you write without errors?
- Style: Do you write engagingly?

Appendix D

Invitation to Participate in Study

Greetings, Student Name. I hope you are enjoying your summer so far and that you get plenty of rest after such a busy semester. I am contacting you (and all of your classmates) to invite you to participate in a study I am conducting as a part of my dissertation research. The study examines the outcomes of practicing autoethnography in the context of an undergraduate writing course, which, of course, you have just completed. Specifically, I am looking for support for or against including autoethnography as an assignment in future writing courses.

Here is how I would like you to be involved. First, I would like to analyze your autoethnographic essay, Title, in my dissertation and present my perception of its outcomes. If you feel at all uncomfortable in having your personal information analyzed and presented in my research, I would be happy to identify you by a pseudonym (either of your choosing, if you prefer, or mine, if not). Second, I would like to interview you about your experiences in the course you completed this semester. I would ask you about what you feel you learned and whether or not you enjoyed and benefitted from the course. The specific questions I would ask are included below. I would interview you either in person, if you are still on campus, or, if you are not, by telephone, Skype, or via email, depending on your preference. The interview should not take longer than an hour.

I recognize that your time is valuable, so I would be happy to compensate you accordingly. If you agree to participate in the project, I will pay you \$25 US, to be delivered after the completion of the interview and upon giving me permission to use your autoethnography in my research. I can deliver the \$25 either in cash (if the interview is conducted in person), or by check or PayPal.

It is important when inviting someone to participate in research to identify the potential risks and benefits. Benefits could include contribution to a better understanding of autoethnography, especially as it might be practiced in future undergraduate writing courses. You might also benefit from reflecting on your experience in the course, gaining new insights into what you learned (or didn't). On the other hand, risks include, as indicated above, the possibility of feeling uncomfortable about having your personal information presented. As indicated, you will have the option to be identified by a pseudonym. However, as we discussed in class, even pseudonyms may not necessarily completely disguise individuals, especially given the personally revelatory nature of autoethnographic writing. As an added attempt to protect your privacy and comfort, after I analyze your autoethnography, I will share my representation with you and offer you the option to suggest further changes. In no way do I want you to feel uncomfortable by participating in this project.

It is also important to point out that because the course is complete, and your grade is recorded, I hope you will not feel undue pressure to participate in this research study. Participation would be completely voluntary, and because I teach only first-year courses, which you have now completed, there is no chance that your participation will have any impact on any future course performance.

One final but important note: for legal reasons, I cannot invite minors to participate in the study. If you are not 18 years of age at the time of receiving this email, I am afraid I cannot include you in the project.

I hope you will consider participating in this study. I believe your contribution would be extremely valuable, and I would very much enjoy hearing your reflections on the course. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to let me know. If you do choose to

participate, please send me an email indicating your decision and your preference for a method of interview (in person, by telephone, Skype, or via email).

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Justin B. Hopkins

Interview Questions

(Before beginning to ask interview questions, I will ask students to take a few moments to think about their experience of writing an autoethnography. I will prompt them to think of and to list specific moments in class and in their own writing that strike them as meaningful.)

- Could you describe each moment you listed for me?
(about each moment)
- What was so meaningful about this moment?
- Why do you think you remember this moment?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell me about this moment?

- How would you define autoethnography?
- What do you believe are the most important aspects of writing autoethnography?
- What did you enjoy (or not) about writing an autoethnography?
- What was the hardest part about writing an autoethnography?
- What do you believe you learned about yourself from writing an autoethnography?
- What do you believe you learned about the world from writing an autoethnography?
- What academic skills do you believe you learned from writing an autoethnography?

- Would you write another autoethnography? If so, why, and what would you write about? If not, why not?
- Do you believe autoethnography should be included in undergraduate writing courses? If so, why, and what changes would you suggest making to the course you took? If not, why not?

Appendix E

Informed Consent Document

You are invited to participate in this research study, “Outcomes of autoethnography in an undergraduate writing course.” The study will be used as a portion of the Researcher’s doctoral dissertation. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. You are eligible to participate because you were a student in CNX250: The Story of You: Autoethnography in Action, at Franklin and Marshall College during the 2016 spring semester.

The purpose of this study is to examine the outcomes of practicing autoethnography in an undergraduate writing course context. The information gained from this study may help us to better understand the effectiveness of writing autoethnography. Participation in the study includes being interviewed and allowing the researcher to analyze your autoethnographic essay, submitted for CNX250. Participation in this study will require approximately between 60 and 90 minutes of your time and is not considered a part of CNX250, as the course has already been completed and grades posted. Hence, participation or non-participation will not affect your grade in this or any other course. Potential risks include the possible discomfort of revealing personal information in interviews and/or the autoethnographic essay. However, you may choose to be identified by a pseudonym (of your choice, if you prefer, or mine, if not), and you will have the chance to review the representation of your information and to suggest changes before completion of the study. Potential benefits include contributing to a better understanding of the use of autoethnography in an undergraduate writing course context, as well as the insight that can come from reflecting on what you learned during that course. You will also be compensated for participation by being paid \$25 US, to be delivered after completion of the interview.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators or Franklin and Marshall College. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time by notifying the Researcher, whose information is provided below. Upon your request to withdraw, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence on a password-protected laptop, and will have no bearing on your academic standing or services you receive from the College. Your response will be considered only in combination with those from other participants. The information obtained in the study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but your identity will be kept strictly confidential, unless you choose to be identified by name.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the statement below. Take/keep the/a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact the Researcher:

Justin B. Hopkins

Writing Center Assistant Director

Franklin and Marshall College

Lancaster, PA 17603

Phone: 215-779-4853

Email address: JHopkins@fandm.edu

Or you may contact the Researcher's Faculty Sponsor:

Dr. David I. Hanauer

Professor of English/Applied Linguistics

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

334 Sutton Hall

Phone: 724-357-2274

Email address: Hanauer@iup.edu

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Franklin & Marshall College Institutional Review Board. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may also be addressed to Ken Krebs, Ph.D., Office of the Provost, 102C, Old Main, kkrebs@fandm.edu, (717) 291-4283.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received a copy of this informed consent document to keep in my possession.

Name (PLEASE PRINT):

Signature:

Date:

Phone number, email, and/or address where you can be reached:

Best days and times to reach you:

Note on Pseudonym: Would you like to be identified in the study by a pseudonym?

If you would like to be identified by a pseudonym of your choosing, provide that pseudonym here (if not, I will provide a pseudonym for you):

Appendix F

Some Suggestions for Teaching Autoethnography

Here I will share suggestions for writing instructors who may wish to try teaching autoethnography. These suggestions are based mostly on my own experience, and they should be taken with at least a large grain of salt, and with full consideration of the limits and the context of that experience.

Before teaching autoethnography

- *Practice autoethnography.* I generally wouldn't ask students to do anything I have not done, but especially in this case. Autoethnography is surprisingly hard, and without the personal experience of having practiced it, assigning it would be a poor choice, in my opinion.
- *Take the temperature of your department/institution's attitude towards autoethnography.* I did not talk to my colleagues much before teaching autoethnography, and I wish I had, especially to some in anthropology and sociology. Remember, not everyone accepts and respects this genre as a genuinely academic endeavor, and while I would not have changed my choice to teach it, I would have been better prepared.
- *Think about how you will assess autoethnography.* I have found no literature with concrete suggestions on how to assess student autoethnography, though Tracy (2008) offers excellent criteria for evaluation of qualitative inquiry in general, and these may be useful to incorporate into your own grading practices. In any case, consider carefully the implications of assessing work that is so personal in nature.

While teaching autoethnography

- *Be as explicit as possible about the expectations for practicing autoethnography.* Following from the last suggestion, make your expectations as crystal clear as you can—they will still not likely

be clear enough for first-time autoethnographers. For example, because the research component was a crucial curricular requirement, the prompt I distributed indicated the minimum number and kind of references to sources. Few students met that minimum in the first draft, and I had to decide whether or not to fail everyone, since technically they had not completed the assignment. I decided (rightly, I think) against, and instead restated the requirement in class and in writing (an email and a second assignment sheet) and emphasized that for the second draft that minimum must be met—no excuses. No-one failed the second draft. Both at the beginning and throughout the process of practicing autoethnography, students will likely have many questions and concerns about what is expected for success, and giving them explicit guidance is crucial for that success, as with any assignment, but especially with one so unusual.

- *Consciously cultivate an environment of trust and respect.* Again, I would try to do this for any course, but it is of such importance when students are expected to share aspects of their personal lives, at least with you, and most likely with others. Instructors will have their own approach to building a positive classroom dynamic, and I have described mine in Chapter 3.
- *Regularly check in with students as a group, and with individuals who have chosen topics that may be emotionally challenging.* Part of my approach to the previous suggestion was that at regular intervals, I set aside time during class to ask my students if they had any concerns or questions about the work they were doing. They usually had some, occasionally many. I also made a point to meet individually with student who chose topics that I thought might be emotionally difficult throughout their process. I made no attempts to counsel them emotionally—I do not have such training, and to do so would be inappropriate—but I did talk with them about their process with the project, and I reminded them of the professional counseling services that

were available should they feel the need. I also reminded them of the option of changing their topic if necessary.

- *Give plenty of feedback, and make sure a lot of it is affirmational.* Once more, I would encourage doing so for any kind of assignment, but especially with autoethnography. Since the students are unlikely to have practiced autoethnography before, and because the options for practicing autoethnography are so vast, it seems to me vital that students receive much positive commentary on their work. Of course, there will also be elements that require pushing. But consider that while all writing makes one vulnerable, this kind of writing may make one very vulnerable, and praising the impact of the words (which I suspect will not be difficult to do, sincerely) alongside insisting that sources be cited thoroughly and correctly is crucial, as well as kind.
- *Consider giving the students a chance to print their work.* I offered to print a collection of students' autoethnographies, simply, at Staples, and several wanted theirs included. I think it should be emphasized that it is not required, and that it should be expected that the collections will be shared only with friends and family (though that cannot, of course, be guaranteed). I caution any instructors offering this opportunity to indicate that students must cover printing costs. I did not, rather naively expecting those costs to be low, and ended up spending almost two hundred dollars, since it seemed bad form to ask for money after the fact. But had I done so up front, the split costs would have been less than \$10 per student.

After teaching autoethnography

- *Share your experience!* My only suggestion after teaching autoethnography—except, of course, and assuming it goes well, doing so again—is to share your experience. Presentation or

publication of your and/or your students' results could contribute greatly to the field. Or just email me: justinbhopkins@gmail.com. I would love to hear about how it went!