

Understanding Autoethnography

Leoncio P. Olobia*

leoncio.olobia@lnu.edu.ph

Leyte Normal University

Paterno Street, Tacloban City 6500 Philippines

Abstract

An autoethnography is a biographical narrative that the author believes to be true in all respects. It is based on the constructivist idea of experience-driven meanings. Like many constructivist undertakings, its interpretation is subjective where some elements may be hidden out of personal preference.

This paper cogitates around the nuances of autoethnography as a form of self-inquiry. At its core, reflexivity and vulnerability in using the self as data magnify autoethnographic sketch as a deep and meaningful understanding of the author's experience. Because of the vulnerability an authorial voice can develop, autoethnography allows the flow of memory recollection to have an uninterrupted degree of fluidness. However, this depends on the author's willingness to purge deeper into memory recollection. In some cases, the process can be difficult to manage, hence, a vulnerable person can guard his thoughts and emotions to his own delight.

Finally, philosophical assumptions of autoethnography constitute personal reality as an ontological dimension, constructivist and emergent knowledge as epistemology, and personal value as an axiological assumption in dwelling upon self-narratives.

Keywords: autoethnography; reflexivity; philosophy of autoethnography; the self as data; vulnerability.

1. Reflexivity

Reflexivity in autoethnography emphasizes the researcher's or participant's authentic introspections based on memory recollection of experiences. It is a process that allows us to work from aboriginal centres and ensure we work with relatedness of self and Entities (Martin and Mirraoopo, 2003 as cited by Nelson, 2021). The latter attests to autoethnography's expanse in self-cultural study where reflection pays homage to internalization of gathered data and information.

In the process, questions about truth as revealed in epiphanies are normally rendered based on reader's capacity to relate to the story or the degree to which the experience is similar to one's own experience determines the consensus of truth as an expression of the author's sincerity and honesty in conveying the story. For instance, the value of storytelling should reflect the reader's acceptance of truth as determined by their own research.

This point is amply made in evocative autoethnography, which largely depends on emotional pleasure to denote the stories' very unique nature. In a different light, subjectivity-based reflexivity places the authorial voice at the heart of storytelling, further indicating that dependability is defined by the reflexive strength based on consistency as predicted. However, it must be mentioned that due to the methodology's very subjective nature, autoethnography does not have any commonly accepted standards of dependability in accordance with scientific guidelines followed by other communication researches.

Further on, the author is able to comprehend more general societal issues through reflection, even when it is a self-directed activity. This relates to one's accounts of societal standards, social circumstances that define the interaction between the self and the culture as active, and underlining how autoethnography serves as both a social statement and a type of treatment. It is the practice of analyzing one's own personal experiences to understand cultural experiences; analyzing cultural phenomena using the researcher's self as a lens; or as a method for understanding the self and its connection to others and the social context (Starfield, 2020).

In some cases, debates will also serve to remind us that the development of autoethnography in history was a reaction to a crisis in representation. The popularity of ideas like power and centrality prepared the stage for postmodernist philosophy to emerge as self-disclosures and rejections of all forms of dogma. In a great deal, autoethnography was a means of escaping the complexities of oppression and dominance during that historical era, along with critical theory that criticized power structures in society.

Analytic autoethnography divides tales into discrete units to identify patterns of the self and culture in illuminating truth, advancing discourse in representation. In doing so, the technique employs the rigorous norms of social science research, including using reliability and validity criteria and undertaking quantitative methods, among other things. Additionally, analytical autoethnography is dedicated to providing theoretical justifications for and insights into social processes.

In some sense, the relationship between "universal truth" and "personal truth," which borders on positivist notions of objectivity and universality as something constant and recurring in the latter while instigating highly subjective truth that points to an individual as he sees and feels things. The conversation instigates one to pursue the theoretical connections needed to comprehend events through reflective activity. As a result, reflection in autoethnography is a thorough search for meanings that are centered on an authorial voice (the autoethnographer) in the context of the culture to which one belongs.

Last but not least, an interested individual indulgently explores reflexivity while promoting collaborative autoethnography, emphasizing how multi-vocal and democratic sharing of stories constitute a communal reflexivity that is most useful in addressing societal concerns. Collaborative autoethnography, a multi-vocal approach in which two researchers work together to share personal stories and interpret the pooled autoethnographic data, extends the reach of autoethnography and addresses some of its methodological issues (Lapadat, 2017). It is an emerging practice that combines group interaction with qualitative research (Hornsby, Davis & Reilly, 2021). In here, individual stories are transformed into collective expressions in this social learning process as the group listens, bargains, and creates social meanings through group reflections.

When promoting dependability, autoethnography focuses on the author's credibility in sharing personal accounts; this credibility creates truth, but how it is seen might change depending on the author's mood and willingness to engage in the creative process of memory. Reliability is defined from the reader's perspective as the story's relevance in light of their perceptions.

An autoethnography is a biographical narrative that the author believes to be true in all respects. It is based on the constructivist idea of experience-driven meanings. Like many constructivist projects, its interpretation is subjective; some elements may be hidden out of personal preference.

Autoethnography is less about imposing a concept on how genuine or fictional the narrative should be based on accepted standards of what constitutes truth or falsity. The author's interpretation of the truth at his disposal determines the methodology's legitimacy. The self connects and situates oneself within a social context in this way. Science doesn't spend much time on this. The author places value on the meanings, and readers are free to sympathize with or empathize with such subjective and numerous elements of reality.

2. Vulnerability

Vulnerability is often associated with risk, often identified as "vulnerable to" (Rose & Killiean, 1983 as cited by Havrilla, 2017). In understanding and writing autoethnography, vulnerability often relates to the autoethnographer's voice in exposing deep and emotional experience as evocative. In this process, complex issues may often arise which can lead to "uncontrollable" moments in storytelling. Guarding one's emotions becomes a pivotal quest to make narratives well-balanced. However, aesthetics of autoethnography is often revealed when innermost nuances of the self are unearthed. Doing so instigates reckoning of experience as indulgent, adventurous, and exciting for the reader in a broader sense.

In terms of risk, the concept is more identified with environmental occurrences where individuals run the risk of being prone to disaster impact. This slight differentiation purports the idea that risk is not the same with vulnerability. However, in autoethnography, an individual self may also run the risk of exposing vulnerability especially when the narratives have strong resonances. In the introspective reckoning through storytelling, for instance, the author ponders and analyzes. When reading about autoethnography, words like 'narcissistic' and 'self-indulgent' pop out from pages of text, just as uncomfortable is the notion of vulnerability (Frambach, 2015). The statement underscores vulnerability as inevitable in the light of one's self-interaction.

3. Philosophical Assumptions

The foundation of autoethnography is in philosophical paradigms. Autoethnography promotes "personal reality" as a psychosocial creation that borders on constructivism and social constructivism from an ontological point of

view. The participant's lived experience, as described as a conscious process, effectively articulates this personal reality. Epistemology is based on the idea that lived experience, which is typically emergent and has numerous levels of meaning as explained by vignettes and self-disclosures, is what knowledge is. Autoethnography can be used as a stress-relieving pastime, a way to discover one's inner passion, or just to have a better understanding of oneself, according to teleology. Finally, axiology refers to ideals and individual concerns in storytelling that are thought important throughout the process.

To proceed, indirect articulation of paradigms encompasses autoethnographic sketching. For instance, "personal reality" is stated in self-expression as an ontological presupposition, creating reflexivity and subjectivity, and making the self the subject of narrative. The personal knowledge that is most readily apparent in evocative autoethnography, prized by the author himself as expressing axiology, is then accounted for by lived experience as an expression of the participant's voice on their personal travels.

Next, vulnerability of the person in revealing the self in the topic of ethical responsibility implies a discourse in vulnerability as a postmodernist tendency that also grounds autoethnography. Autoethnography is defined in this philosophical discourse as relying on self-narratives that reject truth dogmas as external factors debating on the legitimacy of such frameworks. Postmodernist perspectives on autoethnography support critical theory in this regard by recognizing minority voices as the underprivileged voice that is emancipating itself from repressive institutions in an elitist society. So, in order to understand phenomena, analysis in autoethnography returns to the self as a "destiny." When someone is sharing their life story, they should not be chastised for this understanding of self-indulgence and freedom.

Autoethnography is an adventurous voyage in search of truth that negates truth in the surroundings as a postmodernist rejection of social order due to the aforementioned parallelism. How does the autoethnographic tenet, which discusses the self within a cultural context while rejecting outside influences, make sense? While postmodernism is a historical basis defined in the crisis of representation questioning centrality and dogmas of truth as episodic subtleties not embodying broad concepts of the methodology, such a query qualifies a realization of the fundamental characteristic of autoethnography.

In another light, morality as it should be defined such that the researcher or participant is not predisposed to the community he is discussing and that the crisis of representation is minimized to the greatest extent feasible. It is true that the authorial voice, aside from playing a crucial role in defining the parameters for the tales that do not implicate other people, can have preconceived biases that will impair the objectivity of reporting. The crisis of representation then asserts ideas about how a character is portrayed during the reflexive process, what changes the figure has undergone in the narrator's eyes, and how those changes explain the differences in how the character is viewed before and after the narrative. The boundaries are essential in understanding the magnitude of ethical dilemmas that arise when defining truth as highly interpretive and subjective.

Finally, the reader and the author are affected to varying degrees by the ethical aspects of autoethnography. When the reader recognizes the character as an actual, real person who connects with them, the latter takes the character's attentive listening and comprehension of the story as personal revelation of the author that must be honored as it is without bias like character defamation. In order to do this, autoethnography is based on actual challenges, with pain and suffering playing a part in the epic story the author wants to convey.

4. The Self as Data

The self is the primary data in autoethnography, which is the focus of all considerations about data collection. As recalled from memory and recorded in a journal, vignettes and epiphanies are sources of narrative information. However, such remembrance is limited by the depth of the author's memory recall and is therefore subject to limitations. Additionally, it should be noted that embedded thoughts can be sparked for a variety of reasons. For example, a sudden experience can prompt the recall of a memory of the same event, making it easier to retrieve, whereas hazy memories can be related to unrelated events or the insignificance of an experience.

Furthermore, the self serves as the data to denote the autoethnographic method's epistemology, which is comprised of emergent knowledge derived from the author's lived experience. As a result, when a tale is remembered and written, the nature of knowledge shifts in a similar way to how the author changes his or her sensitivities. In fact, autoethnography can be applied analytically and rigorously so that it can be used for theory testing and theory building (Livesey & Runeson, 2018).

Finally, on the idea of triangulation, the conversation takes a significant turn. Triangulating technique increases comprehension of phenomena by combining data from numerous sources, including interview transcripts, observation, field notes, journal articles, and self-narratives. Given that the self is the focus of autoethnographic study, the use of the triangulation approach can be questioned. Even when politics and culture are mentioned, they are still described in terms of how the individual sees himself in relation to the environment. At times, there can be disagreements regarding the validity of triangulation and if it is more useful in ethnography than in autoethnography. In many ways, triangulation makes more sense in ethnography since the self is positioned as an outsider, an observer rather than a participant. But when collaborative autoethnography is exposed as multi-perspective and social in nature such that data sources can be viewed, analysis deepens even more, making triangulation a plausible method to examine stories from several perspectives.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, talking to oneself is largely an internal activity when interpreting autoethnography. In the course of recounting stories, a person's perspective on his or her own life or bits and pieces of those stories will emerge. It opens up fresh perspectives on how to comprehend oneself and how it interacts with politics, culture, and society at large. This connection makes the process more than just a straightforward therapeutic activity. Analytic autoethnography actually examines theoretical, more expansive aspects of self-expression. It can be a very difficult undertaking as one produces questions pertaining to representation, balance, and ethics (Wall, 2008).

Because of the vulnerability an authorial voice can develop, autoethnography allows the flow of memory recollection to have an uninterrupted degree of fluidness. Of course, this depends on the author's willingness to purge deeper into memory recollection. In some cases, the process can be difficult to manage, hence, a vulnerable person can guard his thoughts and emotions to his own delight.

In the context of the pandemic, the purpose of autoethnographic reflection is to make the self conscious of current circumstances, especially for individuals who have elderly family members. By providing personal tales about overcoming loneliness as forecasted by elders, they offer proof of "displacement" that, in reality, serves as a compass for initiatives meant to address the growing isolation epidemic. The inner voice of experience can be revealed through autoethnography, casting light on some negative experiences in the hopes that reflection can lead to meaningful understanding.

References

- Frambach, J. (2015). Balancing vulnerability and narcissism: Who dares to be an autoethnographer? https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281896488_Balancing_vulnerability_and_narcissism_Who_dares_to_be_an_autoethnographer
- Havrilla, E. (2017). Defining vulnerability. *Madridge Journal*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331067164_Defining_Vulnerability
- Hornsby, E., Davis, A., & Reilly, J. (2021). Collaborative autoethnography: Best practices for developing group projects. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1320552.pdf>
- Lapadat, J. (2017). Collaborative autoethnography: ethical inquiry that makes a difference. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317145724_Collaborative_Autoethnography_Ethical_Inquiry_that_Makes_a_Difference
- Livesey, P., & Runeson, G. (2018). Autoethnography and theory testing. *Construction Economics and Building* 18(3):40-54. DOI: 10.5130/AJCEB.v18i3.6139. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328046882_Autoethnography_and_Theory_Testing
- Nelson, C. (2021). Unapologetically indigenous: understanding the doctoral process through reflexivity. *Genealogy* 5(1):7. DOI: 10.3390/genealogy5010007. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348653114_Unapologetically_Indigenous_Understanding_the_Doctoral_Process_through_Self-Reflexivity
- Starfield, S. (2020). Autoethnography and critical ethnography. *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338546292_Autoethnography_and_critical_ethnography
- Wall, S. (2008). Easier said than done: Writing an autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 2008, 7 (1). <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/160940690800700103>