

SELF+CULTURE+WRITING

Autoethnography for/as Writing Studies

EDITED BY
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CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

Rebecca L. Jackson and Jackie Grutsch McKinney

Toni Morrison once said in an interview, “If there’s a book you really want to read, but it hasn’t been written yet, then you must write it” (Brown, *Cincinnati Inquirer*, September 27, 1981). For us, this collection is one of those books. We’d both looked unsuccessfully for years for books on autoethnography we could use in our undergraduate and graduate writing studies courses. Books and articles on autoethnography existed, of course, but they were written primarily by qualitative researchers in the social sciences. There were some isolated exceptions—Linda Brodkey’s “Writing on the Bias” (1994) and A. Suresh Canagarajah’s “Autoethnography in the Study of Multilingual Writers” (2012a) come to mind—but there was no robust or sustained discussion of autoethnography in the field of writing studies. And while we could (and did) use texts representing our field’s long engagement with personal narratives and critical personal narratives, we both viewed these genres as more autoethnographic than autoethnography.

Eventually, we realized we needed to craft the book we’d been searching for. Because it would be the first of its kind in writing studies, we knew the book needed to cover significant ground. It needed to define and explain autoethnography (translated literally as self + culture + writing) as both a method of inquiry and a genre of writing. It needed to include writing *about* autoethnography—unique approaches to and forms of autoethnography particularly suited to writing studies—and ideas about teaching autoethnography in different courses and contexts. Finally, the book needed to showcase actual autoethnographies written by practitioners and scholars in the field. These goals led us to shape the text as an edited collection. We have not regretted that decision; as you’ll see, the authors included here offer compelling and competing ways for those of us in writing studies to think and rethink autoethnography as both a research process and product.

We imagine many readers will come to this book with some understanding of and affection for autoethnography. Perhaps readers are

curious about how the personal narrative in writing studies is similar to and/or different from autoethnography. Perhaps these same readers have encountered autoethnography in other disciplines (communication studies, sociology, and medicine, for example) and wonder how those of us in writing studies conceptualize and practice it. For them, we hope this collection will inspire new thinking and new questions about teaching, doing, and reading autoethnographies in writing studies. Other readers may be coming to autoethnography for the first time. For them, the collection will offer solid grounding in autoethnography as a process and product and introduce them to emerging conversations about autoethnography in our field.

In the remaining sections of this introduction, we trace the origins of autoethnography, offer definitions of autoethnography as a qualitative research method and genre of writing, and briefly note common critiques of autoethnography. We then turn to autoethnography in writing studies, staking out a definition for writing studies autoethnography, reviewing existing literature, and drawing a fine but important distinction between what is autoethnographic and what is autoethnography.

WHAT IS AUTOETHNOGRAPHY?

By some accounts, autoethnography began as a research method and genre in the social sciences as a response to the “crisis of representation” in the second half of the twentieth century (Bochner 2012). The idea that researchers could write objectively, as they were traditionally trained to do, began to be seen as impossible and even unethical as it hid from readers the researcher’s biases and effects of the researcher on the culture. Those doing qualitative research had to come to terms with the shift in thinking that an ethnographic account was not a simple recording of a culture. The crisis of representation meant the researcher could no longer be an omniscient narrator; the researcher was, in fact, very much present, even though positivist research conventions had required a researcher to be absent from (written out of) the report. The new perspective that emerged after this crisis was a subjective, emotional, and embodied view from the ground—one recognizing, in Arthur Bochner’s (2017) words:

Autoethnographers insist that the ideal of disinterested research and impartial analysis is an illusion. The “field” of our fieldwork necessarily includes the observer; it is a context of interactions and intersubjectivities. When the lived experiences, beliefs, and other subjectivities of the observer are excluded (or bracketed) to reach a more accurate, dispassionate

depiction of “reality,” the product may have the aura but it will not have the authority of science. Adopting the cold, mathematical, and distant jargon of science does not make an account scientific. (69)

Simultaneously and relatedly, the traditional, colonial ways (mostly white) researchers entered into another culture to study its (nonwhite) people and report back to other (mostly white) researchers came under increased criticism.

As a result, some ethnographers worked to evolve the practice of ethnography to address its shortcomings. For example, some began to do “critical ethnography,” which, according to Stephen May (1997), “adopts a perspective of social and cultural relations which highlights the role of ideology in sustaining and perpetuating inequality within particular settings” and “is not simply to describe these settings as they appear to be—as in conventional ethnography—but to change them for the better” (197). That is, critical ethnography pays attention to social forces and conventions that affect studying and writing about a culture, and critical ethnographers make a point to recognize those social forces in their relationships with participants and final research accounts. Feminist ethnography arose as another instantiation of critical ethnography, with careful attention paid to issues of gender, sex, sexuality, and power.

Other ethnographers moved further away from ethnography to something they called *autoethnography*. Writing in 2000, Bud Goodall suggested a “new ethnography” in which the researcher pays attention to personal experiences during and after time in the field as important to the study. His focus on writing, in *Writing the New Ethnography*, is a departure from early ethnographies in which the report of time in the field (the ethnography) was seen as a simple transmission of information—objective and therefore authorless. Thus, when Goodall writes that “the new ethnographers are not researchers who learn to ‘write it up’ but *writers* who learn how to use their research and ‘get it down,’” he signals a major shift in ethnography (10; emphasis in original). Goodall says his approach might be called “autoethnographic,” as it aims to tell the story of a culture through the eyes of the researcher. It may be impossible to report objectively and omnisciently on a culture, but it may be, Goodall suggests, possible, even desirable, to report on one’s own experiences within a culture.

Despite the traction this version of the history of autoethnography has gained, an equally compelling, perhaps more “true” and just account of autoethnography’s origins in the United States, can be traced, in part, to Black women writers and speakers in the nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries (Maraj 2018). We take as one example Zora Neale Hurston, an African American anthropologist and writer who conducted (auto)ethnographic studies of her own community in the 1930s. While Hurston's (white) anthropology colleagues sought out "foreign" cultures to study, Hurston turned toward her hometown, because, as Layla D. Brown-Vincent (2019) writes,

Hurston's familiarity with the subject matter and the producers of said subject matter, made the prospect of recording the tales of her youth not only seem possible but worthy of documentation as well as critical inquiry because she did not hold the racial biases many of her classmates and teachers held about southern Blacks. (111)

Hurston thus used her training in ethnography alongside her own experience and history in this culture to craft what is now understood as autoethnography. Equally important, Hurston actively and purposefully used her new version of ethnography (again, what we now call *autoethnography*) as a genre and method to disrupt dominant narratives and dominant interpretations, a tradition that remains strong today. For example, communications scholar Rachel Alicia (2012) calls for a Black feminist autoethnography that works as "an act of resistance" (also see Maraj [2018] and chapter 12 in this collection).

Carolyn Ellis, Tony Adams, and Arthur Bochner's (2011) definition of autoethnography reflects this latter tradition in which autoethnography is a "socially-just and socially-conscious act." They write,

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience. This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product. (273)

Marcelo Diversi and Claudio Moreira (2017) put an even finer point on autoethnography's social justice imperative, claiming that autoethnography is about decolonizing the way knowledge is made (and privileged) in the academy.

We see autoethnography as a way of being and writing ourselves into the history of resistance against oppression, injustice, and exclusion happening every day around each of us, around the globe. We imagine autoethnography as a way to start from our common humanity in experiences between identities, as a way to defy the academic preference for sophisticated Foucauldian analysis of power over pedestrian narratives of blood and profanity. (41–42).

Autoethnography has emerged then as a “process and product,” a method and a genre, in which, as Robin M. Boylorn and Mark P. Orbe (2014) note, “one could shift the ethnographic gaze from others and unto self” (14). This shift allows the autoethnographer to “write as an Other, and for an Other,” which “invite(s) readers into the lived experience of a presumed ‘Other’ and to experience it viscerally” (15).

Much has been written about the contours, elements, and parameters of autoethnography: all try to articulate what it is and what it is not. In “Living Autoethnography,” Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, Kathy-Ann C. Hernandez, and Heewon Chang (2010) assert three central components to autoethnography:

1. **Autoethnography is a qualitative research method.** Autoethnography demands “a systematic approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation about self and social phenomena involving self” (2). This systematic approach to the “sociocultural understanding of self” is what distinguishes autoethnography from memoir and autobiography.
2. **Autoethnography is self-focused.** The researcher is at the “center” of the research inquiry as both “a ‘subject’ (the researcher who performs the investigation) and an ‘object’ (a/the participant who is investigated)” (2).
3. **Autoethnography is context conscious.** “Rooted in ethnography (the study of culture),” the researcher collects data about self while simultaneously exploring “how the context surrounding self has influenced and shaped the make-up of self and how the self has responded to, reacted to, or resisted forces innate to the context.” Simply put, “ethnographic attention to the socio-cultural context is the foundation of this research method” (3).

In general, qualitative researchers endeavor to study complex phenomena in context to render a narrative of the person, phenomena, culture, or place under study. Autoethnography, as a qualitative research method, shares many of the same methods for collecting and analyzing data as ethnography; for example, an autoethnographer might collect interviews, artifacts, fieldnotes, photographs, or videos and might analyze these through reflection or coding and triangulation to discover and assert patterns and themes in order to make an interpretation. Less typical in ethnography, autoethnographers may also use memories, diaries, self-interviews, and systematic introspection on any or all of these as data points (Adams, Jones, and Ellis 2015; Crawley 2012). Perhaps the most well-known methods book on autoethnography, cited by several of the authors in this collection, is Heewon Chang’s (2016) *Autoethnography as Method*. Chang walks readers through collecting and analyzing data for an autoethnography, as well as how to shape the writing of the final text.

A scholar might come to autoethnography as method when they realize they are a particularly good “case” for a specific area of inquiry. The scholar can “volunteer” as the subject of the study, which gives them (1) unlimited access: an ethnographer might have hours of interviews and months of fieldnotes, but an autoethnographer, potentially, has access to a lifetime of time “in the field,” memories, artifacts, and potential interviewees, (2) the ability to ask the hard questions: autoethnographers can press themselves to think, feel, and remember things they might not press others to remember or process, (3) a dual role: the autoethnographer as both subject and researcher means they both produce and analyze the data, thus closing the gap in interpretation between a subject’s and researcher’s perspective.

The write-up of autoethnographic research can take different forms. Early on, two types emerged: analytic and evocative autoethnographies. Analytic (also called *interpretive autoethnography*) is typically characterized by the genre conventions we associate with social science writing; it likely includes specific and expected sections (literature review, methodology/methods, findings, and discussion) and directly engages other scholarship through citation, paraphrasing, or footnotes.

Evocative autoethnography, also called “heartful” autoethnography (Ellis 1999), typically takes the form of “stories that fuse ethnography with literary art” (Bochner 2017, 74). As Bochner explains further, evocative autoethnography is a

blended, bended genre that blurs boundaries between nonfiction and fiction, research and reflection, memory and desire, poetry/literature/performance art and science and thereby shifts, expands, and transgresses traditional conventions and categories of expressing or “representing events that really occurred.” (74)

Evocative autoethnographies require autoethnographers to engage in various forms of systematic reflection on experiences and memories to craft richly reflexive personal accounts that map onto or interrogate cultural attitudes, ideologies, practices, or times. Ellis, writing about her own approach to autoethnography, says she “starts with [her] personal life,” paying careful attention to her “physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions.” In a reflexive move, she then uses “systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall to try to understand an experience [she’s] lived through” (Ellis and Bochner 2000, 737). Ronald J. Pelias (2019) explains that he “nudges” his memory about past events: asking others to help him remember details, interviewing people, and using such things as journals, letters, and photographs to spark memories

and insights (23). Bochner (2017), speaking directly to the reader/autoethnographer, explains that

you must listen closely to yourself talking; you talk back to yourself, commenting directly on what you hear yourself saying; you don't stop there but rather insist on keeping the conversation going, interpreting and reinterpreting, to discover something strange about the self you started with as you try to transform yourself into a new being. (71)

For all of these reasons, evocative autoethnographies often read more like creative nonfiction because they draw upon literary conventions—concrete detail, characters, dialogue, and emotion—and because explicit discussions of research methodology and method are (typically) noticeably absent in this type. Thus, while evocative autoethnography arises from systematic research, the autoethnographer doesn't necessarily elaborate this process in the autoethnography itself, although autoethnographers may provide headnotes or footnotes that explain the methods used to gather and analyze data. Likewise, evocative autoethnographies may or may not explicitly reference secondary sources, although the cultural and disciplinary conversations the autoethnography engages are made clear through document features like headings, for example, and/or keen awareness of audience and the issues with which the audience would be familiar. (We'll have more to say on this later.)

Much of the writing about autoethnography in the social sciences thus far seems to be on evocative autoethnography, perhaps because it is such a departure from conventional social science research. Conventions that once dictated social science research writing—avoiding first person, for example—are flipped in evocative autoethnography, which demands rich, brave, vulnerable, creative first-person accounts (and even permits multi-genre work with poetry or plays). Scholars trained in the IMRAD tradition likely would need methods and models for evocative autoethnography because it differs so wildly from established social science conventions. However, we don't think it is easy or necessary to slice autoethnographies into an evocative versus analytic binary. Beyond evocative and analytic autoethnographies, in fact, dozens of other types of autoethnographies have emerged that are alike and different from each other in ideological orientations, methods, and genre conventions. These types include

- betweener (Diversi and Moreira 2018);
- Black feminist (Brown-Vincent 2019; Griffin 2012); feminist (Ettorre 2016);
- collaborative (Canagarajah and Lee 2013; Chang, Ngunjiri, and Hernandez 2016; Lapadat 2017);

- community (Toyosaki et al. 2009);
- critical (Boylorn and Orbe 2014); critical coconstructed (Cann and DeMeulenaere 2012);
- duoethnography (Breault 2017; Norris, Sawyer, and Lund 2012);
- exoautoethnography (Denejkina 2017);
- institutional (Taber 2010);
- Indigenous (Whitinui 2014);
- moderate (Stahlke Wall 2016);
- multispecies (Sheriff 2017);
- organizational (Herrmann 2017);
- performative (Spry 2016);
- postcolonial (Chawla and Atay 2018; Toyosaki 2018);
- rhetorical (Broad 2017; Lunceford 2015).

As Chang (2016) observes, the range of what is called or counts as autoethnography simply reflects the “diverging evolution of the genre” (48).

The practice of autoethnography of any type is not without critics and cautionary tales. For one, autoethnography can be less contained than other types of qualitative research. It may be difficult or impossible to plan in advance the data that will be collected, the timeframe for data collection, and even the sites of research—all of which raises questions about the methodological rigor of autoethnography and ethics (see Le Roux 2017). For instance, if an autoethnographer uses memories as a data point, those remembered experiences likely were not part of a sanctioned study; IRB was not consulted, and consent forms were not signed (Delamont 2009 offers a scathing critique of this practice). Moreover, autoethnography is by definition “backyard research,” as the researcher is looking at a site or culture to which they belong (Creswell 2014). Thus, autoethnography is open to the same critiques that have plagued teacher research: as the researcher and the subject of the research simultaneously, can the researcher pay attention well enough? Will the researcher control the scene and unfairly shape the story that emerges? None of these limitations can be solved, only acknowledged and mitigated. Cheryl Le Roux (2017), for example, advocates doing member checks or interviews with persons who show up in memories or diaries, when possible, as a way to obtain their consent.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY IN WRITING STUDIES

Given the multiplicity of types and approaches to autoethnography, what is writing studies autoethnography? Of what use is it and what

forms ought it take? Adapting Ngunjiri, Hernandez, and Chang (2010), we define writing studies autoethnography as studies/texts in which

1. **the author writes from personal experiences within writing/writing studies.** What makes an autoethnography a *writing studies* autoethnography is that the writer has personal experiences with(in) the discipline or practices related to language and representation, literacy, writing, teaching writing, studying writing/writers, being a writer, and/or other related experiences at the heart of the study.
2. **the author uses an inductive, qualitative approach for project design, data collection, and analysis.** Autoethnography is an inductive approach to research that should start with inquiry and employ qualitative research methods in construction of the study; collection, analysis, and interpretation of data; and the resulting text. Autoethnographers are not using personal experiences to make an argument a priori; rather, autoethnographers pose a question, collect relevant data, and listen to the data to see what findings emerge. As Bochner (2017) puts it, “The shape of autoethnography is not the exclamation point but the question mark” (77).
3. **the author writes in conversation with other texts** (such as interviews, artifacts, or existing scholarship). Like Tony Adams, Stacy Holman Jones, and Carolyn Ellis (2015), we do not believe autoethnographers must cite specific secondary sources within the text in order to demonstrate engagement with important disciplinary conversations. In an evocative autoethnography, for example, we might find clear gestures to and analysis of disciplinary conversations those in the field are meant to recognize. Linda Brodkey’s (1994) “Writing on the Bias” is an excellent example.
4. **the author writes back or intervenes in a cultural narrative or conversation.** Drawing on the tradition sparked by Zora Neale Hurston and others, autoethnographers in writing studies should attempt an interruption of dominant cultural narratives and interpretations through documentation and sharing of their “little narratives,” as Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) calls them.

We forward that all autoethnography is first-person scholarship, but not all first-person scholarship is autoethnography. We’ve seen in our discipline (and more outside our discipline) some haziness around this distinction: some scholarship calling itself “autoethnography” based solely on the disclosure of personal experiences within the scholarship. However, we worry if writing studies scholars were to use *autoethnography* to mean any first-person scholarship, nearly all our scholarship could be called *autoethnography*, making the term redundant and useless. The problem of defining an autoethnography for writing studies strikes us as not dissimilar to the problem scholars have faced in writing studies

in defining multimodal texts over the last decade or two. Sure, it can be conceded that all texts are already multimodal (typeface, medium, size, binding, and so forth all help make the meaning of a text), but for the term to be useful we must be generous readers and consider intentionality. In that spirit, we don't think autoethnography should mean just anything and then, as a result, mean absolutely nothing. So, we have endeavored to bracket off what texts we see as being of a similar purpose and kind *and* texts that aren't something else already. If it's a literacy narrative, it's a literacy narrative. Autoethnography should not be used to rebrand an existing genre.

In addition, we want to underscore how autoethnography as a genre (product) complicates notions of what qualitative research ought to look like. Autoethnographies in the evocative tradition often do not have a methods discussion in which the researcher neatly lays out the research question, data-collection and analysis procedures, and the like within the text. This can make it difficult for readers to know whether a text is an autoethnography or not by looking at it. We think it's helpful for autoethnographers to find paratextual ways to communicate their methods for transparency and, potentially, replicability. For example, Tony Adams (2017) recommends using headnotes, footnotes, endnotes, or other forms to define autoethnography, articulate perspectives and methodology, and explain how personal experience is used. Doing so, autoethnographers preserve the coherence and impact of the autoethnographic narrative and discourage readers from "evaluating [the] work in unfortunate and untenable ways" (63). Following Adams's lead, we've asked contributors in this collection to use headnotes if they haven't discussed their methods within the texts of their autoethnographies.

Further, we concede there is a long history of personal critical scholarship within writing studies, of using first person, of respecting the lived experience of scholars as a way to theorize; we call some texts that result from that vein *autoethnographic* when the personal is used as a vantage point to understand/rewrite cultural narratives. What we're suggesting, however, is that autoethnography not only engages *self* and *culture* but is situated firmly within the qualitative tradition (and thus demands a systematic approach to gathering and interpreting data); an autoethnography is a research study. Though we think this distinction is relevant, this collection contains both autoethnographic pieces and autoethnographies (and discussions of autoethnographic writing/teaching and autoethnographies), as both do important work. (See also appendix 0.A: "Evaluating Autoethnography.")

We think it's important to stake out the territory of autoethnography for writing studies, as this collection endeavors to do, because when we look to existing writing studies scholarship to see how autoethnography is defined by others in writing studies, we don't find consensus. In fact, we don't find much at all about autoethnography. A genre/method that combines a focus on self + culture + writing seems as if it would find wide appeal in writing studies, a discipline in which so-called personal writing, cultural studies, and qualitative research have all taken root. However, at this point in time, it wouldn't be accurate to say autoethnography has been widely adapted. As of late 2020, when we last searched CompPile, the database for scholarship in writing studies (comppile.org), we found just over twenty sources with the keyword *autoethnography*, yet only a few of these engage autoethnography deeply within a writing studies journal or edited collection (Leack 2019; Maraj 2018; Passwater 2019; Rumsey 2009). One dissertation writer claims he found nearly one hundred instances of the term "autoethnography," "autoethnographer," or "autoethnographic" in peer-reviewed writing studies journals (doing a full-text word search not a keyword search), though he admits many of those instances were not in articles but in ads, announcements, and letters from the editors (Hopkins 2017). A search of recent CCCC programs (2014–18) reveals only eighteen presentations with *autoethnography* or *autoethnographic* in the title or one-sentence abstract. Fewer than a dozen writing studies dissertations using *autoethnography* have been completed.

It's possible that autoethnography isn't compelling to those in our discipline because we have existing scholarly conventions in which using personal perspective is the norm; writing studies scholarship is often written in first person and includes examples from personal experience to critique dominant cultural narratives. Said another way, writing studies scholars didn't need the turn toward autoethnography to encourage or justify writing the personal/critical into scholarship because we were already doing it in our work and teaching students to do the same.

Too, autoethnography might only now be rising in popularity because it raises questions about status and privilege—about who is "allowed" to write autoethnography and who is not. Though it is true autoethnography has long been employed by those on the margins to write back to those in the center, in the academic-publishing grind, autoethnography demands a vulnerability that may only be (safely) enacted by scholars who are tenured and established. Certainly, the chapters in this collection suggest one must lay bare quite a bit of the self in order to write a good autoethnography. As Deborah Holdstein (2002) notes, "I still

believe, more often than not, that being ‘too’ personal is a luxury, the privilege of those who have somehow arrived” (9). It’s commonly accepted that academics must commodify their scholarship to earn jobs, tenure, and promotion, but it’s something else to ask academics to commodify their experiences and lives for the consumption of hiring and tenuring committees.

Nonetheless, some scholars in writing studies call their work *autoethnography* and use it as a method of inquiry. These scholars are often influenced by Mary Louise Pratt’s (1991) “Arts of the Contact Zone.” In this much-cited article, Pratt defines autoethnography as any text “in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them” (7). One scholar influenced by Pratt is A. Suresh Canagarajah (1997, 2012a, 2012b, 2016), who has emerged as the foremost voice on autoethnography within writing studies/second language acquisition. For Canagarajah, the point of autoethnography is to inspire social change, and he sees autoethnography as a viable contact-zone methodology for studying and teaching multilingual writers in particular (2012a).

Though there are not currently many published works that call themselves *autoethnographies* in writing studies, we suggest there’s a longer history of similar work in the field that was written under different names; a keyword search would obviously not suss out sources that used (near) synonymous terms. For example, Keith Gilyard calls his sociolinguistic work in *Voices of the Self* “autobiographical narrative” (1991, 11). Victor Villanueva (in Brandt et al. 2001) calls the approach he uses in *Bootstraps* and elsewhere “critical autobiography,” and his description is similar to the moves a writer makes in autoethnography:

There must be room for elements of autobiography, not as confession and errant self-indulgence, not as the measure on which to assess theory, not as a replacement for rigor, but as a way of knowing our predispositions to see things certain ways, of understanding what it is that guides our intuition in certain ways. That is the autobiographical as critique. (Brandt et al. 2001, 51)

Likewise, Daniel Mahala and Jody Swilky (1996) use the term “academic storytelling” to describe a hybrid genre that, much like autoethnography, “neither mimics the sentimental persona of the personal essay nor the impersonal personal of authoritative knowledge” (373). Instead, academic storytelling merges the personal and the social and asks that we “write the self reflexively as an historical subject who tells stories from lived experience yet also draws on ways of reasoning, arguing, and writing that empower [the academic storyteller] as a professional” (73).

Krista Ratcliffe (2004) theorizes “cultural autobiographics” as that which “interweaves the personal with the textual and the cultural, and exposes the material dimensions of language and written texts” (212), while Vershawn Young (2007) uses the term “narrative performance” to describe his purposeful mix of “creative” with “academic” in his arguments about the intersections of language and race (10). Finally, although there is certainly additional scholarship we could mention, Malea Powell (2012) promotes a self-reflexive move characteristic of autoethnography when she encourages writers to examine critically the stories they tell, to do the courageous yet difficult work of “stepping back” from their own narratives.

In the writing classes that I teach, I often ask my students: “What is this story about?” and “What is this story doing?” I ask these questions to get my students to step back from the rush of events in their narratives, to reflect upon the action, to think through the effect their stories might have on their readers. As a writer and a scholar, I often have to do the same. This stepping back is hard; it takes a great deal of courage to stand outside our own narratives for a moment and ask, “What is this story about? What is it doing to those who may read it?” Stories have an effect. They are real. They matter. (390)

While some, including Louis Maraj (2018), have argued that the kinds of scholarship we cite here are indeed examples of autoethnography, we think it’s tricky work to label others’ scholarship after the fact with a name they didn’t choose and a name that, perhaps until now, was overly malleable. Nonetheless, it’s clear all autoethnographers in writing studies ought to be familiar with all these scholars, who have contributed to a tradition of scholarship that is, at minimum, very closely related to autoethnographic inquiry.

All that said, we see some evidence (and the projects proposed to this collection confirm this hunch to some degree) that autoethnography is taught more in writing classrooms than it is used by scholars in their research. So while writing studies folks talk about, define, and to some degree enact and theorize autoethnography, they mostly discuss its value in/as a genre for writing assignments. Perhaps this is because most in writing studies come to autoethnography by way Brodkey’s (1994) “Writing on the Bias,” which discusses the power of autoethnography for (student) writers. Deborah Mutnick (1998), for example, argues that for “students on the social margins,” autoethnography creates a “bridge between their communities and the academy” (84). Mahala and Swilky (1996), Hannah Ashley (2001), Susan Hanson (2004), Jane Danielewicz (2008), Patrick Camangian (2010), Justin Hopkins (2017), and Ryan

David Leack (2019) each propose autoethnography for the writing classroom as a way, in Hanson's words, to merge the "autobiographical *Here*" with the "ethnographic *There*" (2004, 184). Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs's (2017) popular textbook *Writing about Writing* offers an autoethnography as a writing assignment, and Melissa Tombro's *Teaching Autoethnography* (2016) is a book-length guide to teaching autoethnography in writing studies.

OVERVIEW OF SELF+CULTURE+WRITING

We've divided the chapters in this collection into three sections. We begin with writing studies autoethnographies in part 1. These chapters are written by faculty, graduate students, and, in one case, a writing studies researcher in collaboration with her father who used writing extensively in his workplace. The topics range from teaching writing, which we might expect, to entering and navigating the profession and to exposing and resisting disciplinary, professional, and institutional narratives and practices that disenfranchise some, but not all. As autoethnographers do, the authors in this section reveal the multiple identities and related tensions that come to bear in their professional lives. For this reason, we find Pelias's (2019) taxonomy of available autoethnographic "selves" useful when reading chapters in this section. These "selves" include

- the disrupted or traumatized self,
- the diminished or marginalized/voiceless self,
- the confessional self who speaks what is culturally forbidden,
- the joyful self,
- the critical or activist self,
- the complicit self,
- the testifying or truth-telling self.

Last, the autoethnographies here are a bit different from each other in method and form; for this reason, we asked each author to include in or as a preface to their chapter a brief section discussing how they conducted their autoethnography and what they see as defining characteristics of autoethnography in writing studies. We organized the chapters in this section on a continuum from primarily evocative to primarily analytical, although we recognize each autoethnography in this section contains both evocative and analytical elements.

In chapter 1, "Her Own Voice," Tiffany Rainey writes an evocative autoethnography about her experience as a budding academic recently

diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Drawing upon journal entries, medical forms, conversations, and reflective notes, Rainey examines what it might take to attain “rhetoricability” in the discipline and the culture at large. Related in spirit and form to Rainey’s autoethnography, chapters 2 and 3 center the body as a site of knowledge production (Inayatulla) and means of interrogating constraints to identity and exploitative labor practices (Hallman Martini). In chapter 2, “Literate Vixens and Shameless Hijabis,” Shereen Inayatulla employs what she calls “vulnerable automythnography” to address the power of gender, patriarchy, religion, sexuality, and family on literacy. In chapter 3, “When Things Fall Apart,” Rebecca Hallman Martini deploys evocative autoethnography as disciplinary critique, narrating her experiences as a PhD student, exploited laborer in the academy, and burgeoning labor activist as catalysts of her emotional and physical breakdown. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 move incrementally toward the analytical autoethnography end of the spectrum. In chapter 4, “The Space Between: Searching for a Middle Ground between Epistemological Despair and Radical Hope,” Leslie Akst offers an autoethnography of teaching and teaching autoethnography to examine the ways shame can occlude what is (supposed to be) hopeful about autoethnographic research and writing. Chapter 5, Elena C. Garcia and Guadalupe Garcia’s collaborative autoethnography, titled “A Window into the Complex World of Factory-Floor Writing,” shares with Akst’s chapter features of analytic autoethnography while turning our attention away from the academy to the factory floor. Merging Elena G. Garcia’s expertise in ethnography with Guadalupe Garcia’s experiences as a factory machine operator, this autoethnography narrates factory-floor workers’ refusal to write instruction manuals for their jobs on the floor as resistance to sharing workers’ knowledge with others who could then easily take away their jobs. The last chapter in this section—Soyeon Lee’s “Constructing a Transnational-Multilingual Teacher Subjectivity in a First-Year Writing Class”—takes us back to the academy and the classroom. In this piece, a clear example of analytic autoethnography, Lee positions her autoethnographic account of teaching first-year writing as a transnational, nonnative English speaker and graduate student in opposition to the numerous quantitative studies of NNES teachers’ self-perceptions. Drawing upon “thick narratives” of her teaching read through transnational social field and translanguaging perspectives, Lee demonstrates her translanguaging teaching practices are “contingent on the material conditions that constitute the context of [her] migration experiences.”

The chapters in part 2 offer arguments for and around teaching autoethnography within writing studies; contributors explore autoethnography as the locus of instruction in contexts ranging from the first-year writing classroom to the graduate-level seminar in writing studies to working with teachers in the National Writing Project. Each is concerned with autoethnography's effect on the writing student, asking, What do writers gain from this type of inquiry? To that end, and to greater and lesser degrees, each chapter shares what the authors' approaches look like on paper or screen—required course texts, required writing, project sequences, for example. Still, none of the chapters is a simple how-to on teaching autoethnography; rather, the writers merge course specifics with analysis of how autoethnography works and is taken up by student writers in vastly different contexts.

The first two chapters in this section address using autoethnography in first-year writing. In chapter 7, "Empowering Autoethnography in Two-Year College Reform," Kirsten Higgins, Anthony Warnke, and Marcie Sims discuss the use of autoethnography with community college writing students as a way to reform the reform movement allowing students to bridge their personal and academic lives, and in chapter 8, "Say What You Want to Say!": Teaching Literacy Autoethnography to Resist Linguistic Prejudice," Amanda Sladek discusses the literacy autoethnographies of four multilingual writing students enrolled in a first-year writing course. Both these chapters argue that autoethnography, as a genre that intersects personal and academic writing, allows students a soft entry into college-level writing. In a similar way, chapters 9 and 10, "What the Students Taught the Teacher in a Graduate Autoethnography Course" by Sue Doe, Kira Marshall-McKelvey, Ross Atkinson, Caleb Gonzalez, Lilly Halboth, and Jennifer Owen, and "Agentic Discord in Writing Studies" by William Duffy, make the case for teaching autoethnography to graduate students as a way to help them understand and interrogate their complex, often contradictory, positions as newcomers to the discipline. Finally, in the last chapter in this section, chapter 11, "Collaging the Classroom, the Personal, and the Critical," Trixie Smith uses a multigenre collage essay to argue the connectedness of the method of autoethnography and the National Writing Project. Taken as a whole, the chapters in this section make the case that entry points into disciplines are ripe moments for autoethnographic study by establishing what students and teachers learn from assigning autoethnographic projects.

Finally, part 3 contains chapters whose authors extend, and at times challenge, conventional histories of and methodological approaches

to autoethnography and propose ways of thinking about and doing autoethnography that are more inclusive, nuanced, and media rich. Collectively, these chapters push us to interrogate what we think we know about autoethnography—to ask important questions about who is allowed to author and police histories of autoethnography; how particular theoretical frames and attendant metaphors invite us to see autoethnography from new vantage points; how autoethnography contributes to and bolsters dominant cultural narratives rather than, as our disciplinary narrative suggests, how autoethnography resists and subverts them; and how particular autoethnographic tools engender insights other tools may not.

In chapter 12, “You Can’t Do That Here: Black/Feminist Autoethnography and Histories of Intellectual Exclusion,” Louis Maraj traces the roots of Black feminist autoethnography to nineteenth-century Black women writers and speakers whose work “squares the personal with the political” but has been (and continues to be) devalued or ignored altogether. Such “intellectual exclusion,” Maraj argues, is grounded in “white respectability politics and hegemonic ideologies” that determine who gets to produce knowledge in the field (and who doesn’t). Chapters 13 and 14 echo the call to revision Maraj advances in chapter 12. In chapter 13, John Gagnon proposes “constellational autoethnography” (adapted from Indigenous research traditions and methods) as a methodological approach “centered in making an effort to understand the shared reality that participants and researchers inhabit by being brought together to create knowledge and make meaning.” Merging “the cultural rhetorics idea of constellational practice with that of critical autoethnography,” constellational autoethnography replaces traditional (often reified) notions of autoethnography as “interpersonal” with an invigorated understanding of “shared realities.” Autumn Laws, in chapter 14, “Chaotic Construction: Disabling the Autoethnography,” argues that autoethnography proper, as a primarily academic practice and genre, is inaccessible to the disabled because “the academy has always been a space that reifies ableism.” Laws proposes disability life writing, the “chaos narrative” in particular, as a useful substitute for disability autoethnography, arguing chaos narratives “resist the nondisabled expectations that other autoethnographic methods might presume.” In chapter 15, Alison Cardinal, Melissa Atienza, and Aliyah Jones turn to our attention to participatory video as a media-rich qualitative tool for gathering autoethnographic data on literacy. They suggest participatory video offers researchers and participants “the opportunity to discover different aspects of literacy that

composing a written autoethnographic text alone does not,” including the “embodied, visual and affective nature of literacy.” Yet they also warn against uncritical acceptance of participatory video as a tool, noting that successful participatory video experiences require student investment, motivation, and trust.

Certainly, readers will notice several chapters could fit in more than one of the parts and see ideas and themes that carry throughout the collection. As we arranged the chapters, we noticed issues of identity and (not) belonging, trauma, and labor running through the collection, particularly in part 1. We argue that other methods of study likely would not have rendered these issues as well as the autoethnographic approach does, and the discipline needs to acknowledge and own these issues. Many in our discipline, particularly adjunct faculty and graduate students, are laboring in unfair, unsustainable positions. Many (still) hold a precariously thin strand of connection to the discipline that still operates as if members are all white, American, English speaking, straight, cis, neurologically typical, and from the academic/professional class. The authors in this collection reveal how far the line of connection is stretched, almost to the point of breaking, as they try to fit into and try to resist a discipline and a vocation not built for them.

At the same time, we see in this collection the dogged, perhaps unreasonable, hopefulness of educators and their desire to enact Paolo Freire’s call for education to be the practice of freedom. Teachers of writing want students to believe the future can be different from the present, and autoethnography becomes an almost therapeutic tool for students to take control of their stories and to correct dominant narratives that misrepresent or omit them entirely.

We believe this collection will change readers and change writing studies. We believe this collection shows the possibility of autoethnography to open up space for writers and how autoethnography can be utterly persuasive to readers. We began soliciting chapters for this collection with curiosity and end this process with a much clearer sense of purpose and commitment. Autoethnography as a way of making meaning, as a method of inquiry, as a teachable genre, has much to offer writing studies. Bochner (2012) has written, “If our research is to mean something to our readers—to be acts of meaning—our writing needs to attract, awaken, and arouse them, inviting readers into conversation with the incidents, feelings, contingencies, contradictions, memories, and desires that our research stories depict” (158). We hope by the end of this collection that writing studies readers will recognize the power of autoethnography to be an act of meaning.

APPENDIX 0.A

EVALUATING AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Subjectivity

- The self is primarily visible in the research. That is, the researcher reenacts or retells a noteworthy or critical personal relational or institutional experience—generally in search of self-understanding (Le Roux 2017).
- The researcher is self-consciously involved in the construction of the narrative that constitutes the research (Le Roux 2017).
- The text embodies a fleshed-out, embodied sense of lived experience (Richardson 2000).
- The text reveals the self (Schroeder 2017).
- The text enables the reader to enter the subjective world of the teller—to see the world from their point of view (Adams, Jones, and Ellis 2015).

Credibility

- The experiences the narrator describes are believable; they could have happened (Adams, Jones, and Ellis 2015).
- The text seems “true”—a credible account of cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the “real” (Richardson 2000).
- There is evidence of verisimilitude, plausibility, and trustworthiness in the research (Le Roux 2017).
- The research process and reporting are permeated by honesty (Le Roux 2017).

Reflexivity

- There is evidence of the researcher’s intense awareness of their role in and relationship to the research, which is situated within a historical and cultural context (Le Roux 2017).
- There is evidence of self-awareness, self-exposure, and self-conscious introspection (Le Roux 2017).
- The author is committed to ethical practices in research and representation (Richardson 2000).

Resonance or Impact

- The text affects the reader emotionally and/or intellectually (Richardson 2000).

- The text generates new questions (Richardson 2000).
- The text moves the reader to write, try new research practices, act (Richardson 2000).
- Readers are able to enter into and engage with the writer's experience or connect with the writer's story on an intellectual and emotional level (Le Roux 2017).
- There is a sense of commonality between the researcher and the audience—an intertwining of lives (Le Roux 2017).
- Readers are encouraged to think about how and why lives are similar and different (Adams, Jones, and Ellis 2015).

Contribution

- The piece contributes to our understanding of social life (Richardson 2000).
- The writer demonstrates a deeply grounded human-world understanding and perspective (Richardson 2000).
- The piece extends knowledge, generates ongoing research, liberates, empowers, improves practices, and/or makes a contribution to social change (Le Roux 2017).
- The piece is useful (Adams, Jones, and Ellis 2015).

Aesthetic Merit

- The piece (or relevant sections of the piece) succeeds aesthetically (Richardson 2000).
- The use of creative analytical practices opens up the text and invites interpretive responses (Richardson 2000).
- The text is artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring (Richardson 2000).
- The text reflects storycraft (Schroeder 2017).

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