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AUTOETHNOGRAPHY, PERSONAL NARRATIVE, REFLEXIVITY

Researcher as Subject

◆ **Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner**

◆ *Overview: Extending the Handbook Genre*

"Hi, glad it's you," I say, relieved to hear Art's voice on the other end of the line.

"You sound upset. What's the matter?" Art asks.

"Oh, it's been a zoo in the office today—long distance calls, forms to fill out, a barrage of e-mail, one student after another. I'm feeling that end-of-the-semester panic. I'd hoped to finish reading class papers and turn in semester grades, but I haven't gotten to them yet. How's everything at home? Are the dogs okay?"

"They're fine," Art replies quickly, "but I'm not. I started working on our chapter for the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. The more I think about it, the more frustrated I become."

"I thought you really wanted to do this."

"Well, the first edition of the *Handbook* didn't sufficiently highlight autoethnography and personal narrative. So I initially thought it would be a good opportunity to show how important it is to make the researcher's own experience a topic of investigation in its own right."

"Well, the timing is right now to do that," I respond. "When the first edition was published a lot of academics were trying to figure out how to write their way out of the crisis of representation, but there weren't many examples of au-

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thors who made themselves and their personal experience a central focus of their research. Over the past 5 years, however, that's changed significantly, what with the beginning of the Ethnographic Alternatives series, Denzin's emphasis on personal writing in *Interpretive Ethnography,* Behar's *The Vulnerable Observer. . .*"

"Granted, there's been a wave of interest in more personal, intimate, and embodied writing," Art assents.

"So what's the problem?"

"I think we've underestimated the constraints imposed by the genre of the handbook chapter as a form of writing," Art continues, apparently deep in thought.

"But you've written many handbook chapters before," I point out. "Why is this different?"

"Because those chapters conformed to the conventions of the handbook genre. They were essays, not stories. But in this piece we want to *show,* not just tell *about* autoethnography. Look at any handbook on your shelf and what you'll find is that most chapters are written in third-person, passive voice. It's as if they're written from nowhere by nobody. The conventions militate against personal and passionate writing. These books are filled with dry, distant, abstract, propositional essays."

"That's called academic writing, darling." When Art doesn't laugh, I continue in a more serious tone, "But some of the authors in the first edition of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* wrote in first person."

"Yes, but the 'I' usually disappeared after the introduction and then reappeared abruptly in the conclusion," Art replies.

"And the 'I' usually was a 'we,' and an ambiguous 'we' at best, which sometimes referred to the authors as writers of the chapters and sometimes included all of us, whoever we might be," I add.

"And the authors almost never became characters in the stories they wrote . . ."

"They couldn't," I interrupt, now immersed in the conversation, "because their chapters weren't really stories. They included little in the way of dialogue, dramatic tension, or plotline, for that matter."

"But, look, handbooks do provide a service," I continue, fearing that Art will decide not to collaborate on the chapter. "They provide citations and sources, a sense of history, and arguments others can use as justifications for their own work."

"I don't question that they serve an important purpose. Hundreds of students have been inspired to do qualitative research by the first edition of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* for example."

"That's true, and we can't criticize handbook writers for failing to do what they're not asked to do."

"But we can ask why authors aren't encouraged to write academic articles in the first person, " Art retorts. "Why should we take it for granted that an author's personal feelings and thoughts should be omitted in a handbook chapter? After all, who is the person collecting the evidence, drawing the inferences, and reaching the conclusions? By not insisting on some sort of personal accountability, our academic publications reinforce the third-person, passive voice as the standard, which gives more weight to abstract and categorical knowledge than to the direct testimony of personal narrative and the first-person voice. It doesn't even occur to most authors that writing in the first person is an option. They've been shaped by the prevailing norms of scholarly discourse within which they operate. Once the anonymous essay became the norm, then the personal, autobiographical story became a delinquent form of expression."

Just as I'm beginning to doubt that we can do this project, Art says, "This morning I wrote out some of my concerns in conventional social science prose. Maybe this will give us a place to start. If you have a minute, I'd like to read it to you."

Relieved, I say, "Sure, go ahead." I glance toward the large stack of term papers. They'll have to wait.

Art reads:

Like most social scientists educated in the 1960s and 1970s, I was socialized into the legacy of empiricism. I developed an appetite for generalizable abstractions and unified knowl-

edge. The first social science handbooks were published when I was in graduate school, and they fed this hunger for received knowledge. My professors pressed the point that scientific knowledge is cumulative and linear, so every once in a while scholars have to step back and assess the state of the field. Ironically, these assessments sometimes were referred to as "state-of-the-art" essays (an art that was supposedly science). That's what a handbook did—it gave an objective, neutral read on the evidence. The authors were the experts, but they wrote as if they were anonymous. Because it wasn't important who gathered the evidence or who judged and weighed it, handbook writers followed the conventions of using a passive voice that erases subjectivity and personal accountability.

After I earned my Ph.D., I became increasingly circumspect about the possibilities and limitations of the human sciences. In the mid-1970s, one of my colleagues, who was teaching a graduate seminar on "the rhetoric of science," suggested that I study the growing literature on "the crisis of confidence" in social science. I began by reading Kuhn (1962), who showed that the building-block model of science lacked foundations; then Rorty (1982), Toulmin (1969), and other philosophers who illustrated how the "facts" scientists see are inextricably connected to the vocabulary they use to express or represent them; Lyotard (1984) debunked the belief in a unified totality of knowledge, questioning whether master narratives were either possible or desirable; poststructuralist and deconstructionist writers, such as Barthes (1977), Derrida (1978, 1981), and Foucault (1970), effectively obliterated the modernist conception of the author, altering how we understand the connections among author, text, and readers; under the influence of Bakhtin (1981), the interpretive space available to the reader was broadened, encouraging multiple perspectives, unsettled meanings, plural voices, and local and illegitimate knowledges that transgress against the claims of a unitary body of theory; feminist critical theorists such as Clough (1994), Harding (1991), Hartsock (1983), and Smith (1990, 1992) promoted the unique and marginalized standpoints and particularities of women; and standpoint boundary-crossing textualists such as Trinh (1989, 1992), Anzaldúa (1987), and Behar (1993, 1996) opened our eyes and ears to the necessity of exposing how the complex contingencies of race, class, sexuality, disability, and ethnicity are woven into the fabric of concrete, personal lived experiences, championing the cause of reflexive, experimental, autobiographical, and vulnerable texts.

In the wake of these developments, I doubt whether a handbook chapter can help guide the work of those who have turned toward autoethnography and personal narrative if it holds to the voice and authority of a form of writing that this work seeks to transgress. How helpful would it be to list references, define terms, abstract from and critique exemplars, formulate criteria for evaluation, or theorize the perspective of the "I," so readers can make our knowledge theirs? No, we need a form that will allow readers to feel the moral dilemmas, think with our story instead of about it, join actively in the decision points that define an autoethnographic project, and consider how their own lives can be made a story worth telling.

When Art stops reading, I say, "Well, that's clever. Although you started with the 'I,' you quickly fell into using the handbook genre to argue against writing in the handbook genre." I can't stop laughing. "Reminds me of how so many of our texts argue in postmodern abstract jargon for greater accessibility and experimental forms."

"See how powerful the conventions are?" Art agrees, now chuckling as well. Then he adds more seriously, "Let's just write to Norman and Yvonna and bow out. Think of the time we could spend on the beach instead. Get some immediate gratification for a change."

"It's tempting, especially given how we've been feeling lately that our life is too dominated by our work—but no way. Not after I've already agonized over writing the section on 'what is autoethnography?' You know how I resist doing this kind of writing. At the same time, I know it's important," I reply, as I hear a knock at my door.

"I don't think I'll be satisfied, nor will you, unless we find a way to transgress the conventions. What if we were to create a story that would work within the handbook genre but also outside it, showing what we do as we tell about it? That could be fun," Art suggests playfully.

"How delightfully paradoxical," I add in a mischievous tone. "But we'd have to be careful not to give the impression that we're being oppositional and advocating that everyone should write the way we do," I warn, expressing something we hear often and try hard to dispel. Then I get back into the irony of Art's idea. "Won't our critics love it—you know, the ones who already accuse us of being irreverent, self-absorbed, sentimental, and romantic?"

Before Art can answer, I tell him I have to go. "Someone's at the door. Bye—Come in," I say in one breath, in response to the third knock.

◆ *Introduction to Autoethnography*

A woman in her mid-40s opens the door and hesitates in the entryway. A large-brimmed, floppy straw hat covered with purple bangles hides her face. A matching scarf hangs loosely around her neck. "Professor Ellis?" I nod. "My name is Sylvia Smith. I'm a Ph.D. student in the Psychology Department. I'm planning to do my dissertation on breast cancer, and your name was given to me as a social scientist interested in research on illness. I'd like you to be on my dissertation committee. Three members of my committee are from the Psychology Department and the fourth is a research oncologist."

"Hold it," I say, my hands extended in front of me to slow down her monologue. "Back up. Have a seat and let's talk about your project."

Sylvia removes her scarf and hat with a sweeping crisscross motion of both hands and continues speaking as rapidly as before. "I want to interview breast cancer survivors to understand how they're adjusting after cancer. I hope to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches. Send out a survey and then interview . . . oh, maybe 30 women and include African Americans and lesbians, older and young women, professional and working-class women. That way I can generalize . . ."

"How'd you get interested in this topic?" I interrupt.

"Well, uh," she says, now slowing down and looking at me quizzically, "I've had breast cancer." Then, going back to her rapid-fire, assertive style, "But I won't let that bias my research. You can count on that."

"Of course you will," I say, and she immediately assumes a downcast, defeated posture, before I add, "as you should."

"What do you mean?" she asks, looking straight at me with penetrating eyes. "I thought I had to keep my personal experience out of my research. If I want my study to be valid, I can't mention to my participants that I've had cancer, can I?"

"Hold that question," I say again, and move my chair closer to hers. "Would you be willing to tell me a little about your breast cancer first? It'll help me understand more about your academic interest in the topic. Are you okay talking about your own experience?"

"Of course," she responds, "but I didn't think anybody at the university would be interested in my personal experience." She breathes deeply and slowly begins her story about the lump she discovered 7 years before, her mastectomy, and follow-up chemotherapy. Then, "And it's had a big impact on my family, especially my relationship with my daughter, and how I see myself . . . ," she says, her voice trailing off.

"How has it impacted your relationship with your daughter?" I ask quietly.

"She has to worry about getting cancer as well now. You know, the genetic link, and we seem to have trouble talking openly about the risks and about our feelings."

Sylvia continues to talk about her daughter, and after a while, I ask, "And your self-image?"

"I could write a book about that," she says, shaking her head back and forth. "You know, I'm a therapist. I thought I could deal with it all. But it's hard to feel like a whole person. I don't mean because I lost a breast. Good riddance, I say to that. They were always too big anyway. I had breast reduction on the other one when I had reconstruction. It's just . . . well . . . my life has changed so drastically, except the day-to-day, well actually that's not all that different . . ."

She becomes animated as she tells her story. Sensing that she is comfortable and desires to keep going, I continue asking questions. Her story inspires thoughts about myself. How would I feel if I had a breast removed? As she talks, I glance at her small breasts, then casually glide my hands across my own large ones. I can't imagine their not being there. Wouldn't I feel incomplete, desexualized? Did she really feel "good riddance" or is that a cover?

". . . And the hair," I hear her say through my thoughts. "Just look at my fuzz. It never really grew back like before. Shaving it was the most difficult yet exhilarating thing I've ever done." The thin, inch-long brown and gray strands don't move as she casually tosses her head from side to side. My fingers reach for my fine-textured, shoulder-length brown hair—I'd feel naked without it. I even resist pulling my hair back from my face. I wonder why she cuts hers so short now, as if she's drawing attention to having had cancer. But what about the hat and scarf? Does she use them in case she wants to "pass"? I wonder.

Sylvia and I are about the same age. This could happen to me. No, it couldn't. I get an annual mammogram.

". . . I'd had a mammogram just a few months before I found the lump," her voice intrudes into my thoughts.

But I do self-examinations every month, I argue back from inside my head.

"I found it during my monthly self-exam," she continues, shaking the false predictability of my world. I listen intently, understanding that Sylvia has a lot to teach me.

"Anyway, I'm interested in other women's experience," she says, adding hesitantly, "you know, how it compares to mine. That's not something I've admitted before, the personal part, I mean."

I nod. What do I do now? I don't want to wean another student off the science model and deal with a science-oriented committee. And I'm wary of getting involved in another study that simplifies, categorizes, slices and dices the illness process. But Sylvia is a therapist and forthcoming about her feelings and what happened to her. Maybe her study could explore the feelings associated with breast cancer and be useful for other women. The pain on Sylvia's face, in spite of the casualness of her words, also makes me think that this study might be a useful exploration for her. And I know it could be a valuable experience for me as well. But what am I getting into?

Nice

"Do you have any idea what I do?" I ask.

"Just that you study illness and do qualitative work. Nobody does qualitative research in my department. But I've taken a qualitative course in education and I think I could get my committee to accept grounded theory for my dissertation research."

"I don't use grounded theory much anymore," I say. "Most of what I do is autoethnography."

"What's that?" she asks, writing the word *autoethnography* on her notepad as she looks at me.

"I start with my personal life. I pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions. I use what I call systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall to try to understand an experience I've lived through. Then I write my experience as a story. By exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life, as Reed-Danahay says."

Def.

"Who?" she asks, pen poised in the air.

"Reed-Danahay, an anthropologist who wrote a book on autoethnography."

"How do I get a copy?"

"Don't worry about that yet. There's plenty of time to read *about* autoethnography. I want you to *experience* autoethnography first."

I ignore Sylvia's confused look, as I dig through my file cabinet. "So if I understand you correctly, the goal is to use your life experience to generalize to a larger group or culture," Sylvia speaks to my back.

Def.

"Yes, but that's not all. The goal is also to enter and document the moment-to-moment, concrete details of a life. That's an important way of knowing as well."

"So, you just write about your life? That doesn't sound too difficult," Sylvia says casually.

I turn around, stare at her for a moment, as though I'll get a sign as to whether I should promote autoethnography to Sylvia. When no sign is forthcoming, I say, "Oh, it's amazingly difficult. It's certainly not something that most people can do well. Most social scientists don't write well enough to carry it off. Or they're not sufficiently introspective about their feelings or motives, or the contradictions they experience. Ironically, many aren't observant enough of the world around them. The self-questioning autoethnography demands is extremely difficult. So is confronting things about yourself that are less than flattering. Believe me, honest autoethnographic exploration generates a lot of fears and doubts—and emotional pain. Just when you think you can't stand the pain anymore, well, that's when the real work has only begun. Then there's the vulnerability of revealing yourself, not being able to take back what you've written or having any control over how readers interpret it. It's hard not to feel your life is being critiqued as well as your work. It can be humiliating. And the ethical issues," I warn, "just wait until you're writing about family members and loved ones who are part of your story."

Key

Sylvia holds on to her chair, her eyes wide. I smile and let out the breath I've been holding. "I'm sorry. I get really passionate about all this," I say more gently. "Of course, there are rewards too—for example, you come to understand yourself in deeper ways. And with understanding yourself comes understanding others. Autoethnography provides an avenue for doing something meaningful for yourself and the world . . ."

Nice

"Ah, here they are," I interrupt myself as I pull two stapled papers from my autoethnography file. "The one on top is 'Survivors,' a paper I wrote about my brother's death. The other one's a chapter from Butler and Rosenblum's book *Cancer in Two Voices*, a co-constructed narrative about a woman with breast cancer and her lesbian lover who takes care of her."

"Co-constructed?"

"We'll talk about that later. For now, just see how you respond to these stories. I think that after you've read them, what I've been saying will be clearer. If you're still interested then, leave me a note and I'll mail you some other materials."

"One more thing," I add, pointing to the syllabi on my desk. "I'll want to meet often and you'll have to read the assignments from my classes on 'illness narratives' and 'communicating emotion.' Also, I want you to meet with Art Bochner, my coauthor, who teaches courses on narrative and, by the way, also happens to be my husband." Her down-turned mouth changes to a smile for a brief moment, until I add, "These are minimum requirements if I'm going to be on your committee."

"Oh, my. I don't know if I'll have time, given my program," she says. "I still have to take 'Tests and Measurement' and 'Advanced Experimental Research Design.' I hope to finish my coursework during this coming fall, and then take my prelims in early spring and finish my proposal by the beginning of next summer."

I shrug my shoulders as I stand and open the door. My exuberance, the warnings, all the requirements—any of these could scare her off. Oh, well, better if it happens now than later. Suspecting this will be the last I see of her, I'm glad I've given her an easy way out. Sylvia winds her scarf around her neck, throws her hat along with the papers I've given her into her large open bag, says good-bye, and quickly scurries from view.

Two days later, I arrive at school and find a faxed message from Sylvia.

> *Dear Professor Ellis:*
>
> *This is some of the most powerful writing I've ever read. I identified with your grief over losing your brother so suddenly. You reminded me of how I felt when I found out I had cancer. So did Butler and Rosenblum. I recall experiencing that kind of turmoil, confusion, and meaninglessness. This work violates everything I've been taught about social science research, but I'm fascinated and want to know more. Will you mail some materials to help clarify the origins and practices of autoethnography? Maybe some kind of a literature review would suffice. While you're at it, do you mind including a few more autoethnographies?*

I smile and pull out articles from my autoethnography file. Jago, Kiesinger, Kolker,

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Ronai, Tillmann-Healy—that ought to do it—and a section on defining autoethnography I have just written as part of a chapter for Denzin and Lincoln's second edition of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. I pause to read the draft, which is titled "What Is Autoethnography?"

◆ What Is Autoethnography?

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations (see Deck, 1990; Neumann, 1996; Reed-Danahay, 1997). As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition. Usually written in first-person voice, autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms—short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose. In these texts, concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, feeling, thought, and language.

Nice

The term autoethnography has been in circulation for at least two decades. Although anthropologist Karl Heider referred in 1975 to the Dani's own account of what people do as auto-ethnography, David Hayano (1979) usually is credited as the originator of the term. Hayano limited the term to cultural-level studies by anthropologists of their "own people," in which the researcher is a full insider by virtue of being "native," acquiring an intimate familiarity with the group, or achieving full membership in the group being studied (p. 100).

Like many terms used by social scientists, the meanings and applications of autoethnography have evolved in a manner that makes precise definition and application difficult. It seems appropriate now to include under the broad rubric of autoethnography those studies that have been referred to by other similarly situated terms, such as personal narratives (Personal Narratives Group, 1989), narratives of the self (Richardson, 1994b), personal experience narratives (Denzin, 1989), self-stories (Denzin, 1989), first-person accounts (Ellis, 1998a), personal essays (Krieger, 1991), ethnographic short stories (Ellis, 1995d), writing-stories (Richardson, 1997); complete-member research (Adler & Adler, 1987), auto-observation (Adler & Adler, 1994), opportunistic research (Riemer, 1977), personal ethnography (Crawford, 1996), literary tales (Van Maanen, 1988), lived experience (Van Maanen, 1990), critical autobiography (Church, 1995), self-ethnography (Van Maanen, 1995), radical empiricism (Jackson, 1989), socioautobiography (Zola, 1982), autopathography (Hawkins, 1993), evocative narratives (Bochner, Ellis, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997), personal writing (DeVault, 1997), reflexive ethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 1996a), confessional tales (Van Maanen, 1988), ethnographic memoir (Tedlock, 1991), ethnobiography (Lejeune, 1989), autobiology (Payne, 1996), collaborative autobiography (Goldman, 1993), ethnographic autobiography (Brandes, 1982), emotionalism (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997), experiential texts (Denzin, 1997), narrative ethnography (Abu-Lughod, 1993), autobiographical ethnography (Reed-Danahay, 1997), ethnographic poetics (Marcus & Fischer, 1986), native ethnography (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1984), indigenous ethnography (Gonzalez & Krizek, 1994), and ethnic autobiography (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Nevertheless, social scientists often discuss autoethnography as a subtype of some other forms, such as impressionistic accounts (Van Maanen, 1988), narrative ethnography (Tedlock, 1991), interpretive biography (Denzin, 1989), new or experimental ethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 1996b), sociopoetics (Ellis

& Bochner, 1996a), or postmodern ethnography (Tyler, 1986).

*Various methodological strategies have been developed in connection with autoethnographic projects, although they may be applied to other forms of qualitative research as well. These include systematic sociological introspection (Ellis, 1991b), biographical method (Denzin, 1989), personal experience methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994), feminist methods (Reinharz, 1992), experiential analysis (Reinharz, 1979), narrative inquiry (Bochner, 1994), consciousness-raising methods (Hollway, 1989), co-constructed narrative (Bochner & Ellis, 1992), and interactive interviewing (Ellis, Kiesinger, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997). In some disciplines, terms endemic to a particular field have evolved, such as in sociology, personal sociology (Higgins & Johnson, 1988), autobiographical sociology (Friedman, 1990), sociological autobiography (Merton, 1972/1988), private sociology (Shostak, 1996), and emotional sociology (Ellis, 1991a); in anthropology, anthropological autobiography (Brandes, 1982), native anthropology (Narayan, 1993), indigenous anthropology (Tedlock, 1991), autoanthropology (Strathern, 1987), self-conscious anthropology (Cohen, 1992), anthropology of the self (Kondo, 1990), anthropology at home (Jackson, 1987), anthropological poetics (Brady, 1991), and autoethnology (Lejeune, 1989); and in communication, rhetorical autoethnography (French, 1998), performance autobiography (Miller & Taylor, 1997), and autoethnographic performance (Park-*Fuller, 1998). Increasingly, however, *autoethnography has become the term of choice in describing studies and procedures that connect the personal to the cultural, frequently appearing in titles of books, theses, sections of books, articles, special issues of journals, and book series (for example, Clough, 1997; Deck, 1990; Ellis, 1997, 1998a; Ellis & Bochner, 1996a; Gravel, 1997; Herndon, 1993; Lionnet, 1989; Pratt, 1994; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Trotter, 1992).*

Autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethnos), and on self (auto) (see Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 2). Different exemplars of autoethnography fall at different places along the continuum of each of these three axes. Researchers disagree on the boundaries of each category and on the precise definitions of the types of autoethnography. Indeed, many writers move back and forth among terms and meanings even in the same articles. Recognizing this limitation, I will mention, for heuristic purposes, a few widely used expressions that provide a sense of the range of approaches associated with autoethnography.

Although reflexive ethnographies primarily focus on a culture or subculture, authors use their own experiences in the culture reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions. In native ethnographies, *researchers who are natives of cultures that have been marginalized or exoticized by others write about and interpret their own cultures for others. In texts by "complete-member researchers," researchers explore groups of which they already are members or in which, during the research process, they have become full members with complete identification and acceptance. In personal narratives, social scientists take on the dual identities of academic and personal selves to tell autobiographical stories about some aspect of their experience in daily life. In literary autoethnographies, an author's primary identification is as an autobiographical writer rather than a social scientist, and the text focuses as much on examining a self autobiographically as on interpreting a culture for a nonnative audience (see Deck, 1990).*

In reflexive ethnographies, the researcher's personal experience becomes important primarily in how it illuminates the culture under study. Reflexive ethnographies range along a continuum from starting research from one's own experience to ethnographies where the researcher's experience is actually studied along with other participants, to confessional tales where the researcher's experiences of doing the study become the focus of investigation.

Feminism has contributed significantly to legitimating the autobiographical voice associated with reflexive ethnography (for example, Behar, 1996; Behar & Gordon, 1995; Krieger, 1991, 1996; Personal Narratives Group, 1989; Richardson, 1997). Many feminist writers have advo-

cated starting research from one's own experience (e.g., Smith, 1979). Thus, to a greater or lesser extent, researchers incorporate their personal experiences and standpoints in their research by starting with a story about themselves, explaining their personal connection to the project, or by using personal knowledge to help them in the research process (for examples, see Jones, 1998; Linden, 1992; for a summary of reflexive studies, see Reinharz, 1992, pp. 258-263).

Jackson (1989) uses the term radical empiricism *to refer to a process that includes the ethnographer's experiences and interaction with other participants as vital parts of what is being studied. Reflexive ethnographers ideally use all their senses, their bodies, movement, feeling, and their whole being—they use the "self" to learn about the other (Cohen, 1992; Jackson, 1989; Okely, 1992; Turner & Bruner, 1986). Particularly controversial is the notion of the role of sexuality in learning about the other (Kulick & Willson, 1995; Lewin & Leap, 1996).*

In summarizing reflexive ethnography and tracing its history thoroughly, Tedlock (1991) distinguishes between ethnographic memoir (also called confessional tales by Van Maanen, 1988), in which the ethnographer, who is the focus of the story, tells a personal tale of what went on in the backstage of doing research, and narrative ethnography, where the ethnographer's experiences are incorporated into the ethnographic description and analysis of others and the emphasis is on the "ethnographic dialogue or encounter" between the narrator and members of the group being studied (p. 78). The ethnographic memoir is rooted historically in the personal diaries and journals kept by Malinowski (1967). Standing on his shoulders, many ethnographers who followed wrote confessional tales about their research in volumes separate from their research documents (e.g., Dumont, 1976, 1978; Rabinow, 1975, 1977); some wrote under pen names in order to avoid losing academic credibility (e.g., Bowen, 1954). The development of this kind of reflexive writing is connected, according to Tedlock (1991), to a shift in the 1970s from an emphasis on participant observation to the "observation of participation" and to an emphasis on the process of writing. This shift was inspired by the epistemological doubt associated with the crisis of representation and the changing composition of those who become ethnographers, with more women, lower-class, ethnic and racial groups, and Third and Fourth World scholars now represented (Bochner & Ellis, 1999).

This changing composition also is associated with concerns about power and praxis and with more ethnographers writing about their own people. Native ethnography, for example, is written by researchers from the Third and Fourth Worlds who share a history of colonialism or economic subordination, including subjugation by ethnographers who have made them subjects of their work. Now as bicultural insiders/outsiders, native ethnographers construct their own cultural stories (often focusing on their own autobiographies; for example, see Kinkaid, 1988; Rodriguez, 1983), raise serious questions about the interpretations of others who write about them, and use their dual positionality to problematize the distinction between observer and observed, insider and outsider (see, for example, Motzafi-Haller, 1997; Trinh, 1989; for more detailed discussions, see Neumann, 1996; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Tedlock, 1991).

Complete-member researchers is a term coined by Adler and Adler (1987) to refer to researchers who are fully committed to and immersed in the groups they study. During the research process, the "convert" researcher identifies with the group and "becomes the phenomenon" (Mehan & Wood, 1975) being studied. For example, Jules-Rosette (1975) became a baptized true believer in the African Apostolic church she studied. The "opportunistic" researcher (Riemer, 1977; sometimes called an indigenous researcher in anthropology—see Tedlock, 1991) studies settings of which he or she is already a member (such as Hayano's 1982 study of poker or Krieger's 1983 study of a lesbian community).

In contrast to complete-member research, where the emphasis is on the research process and the group being studied, social scientists recently have begun to view themselves as the phenomenon and to write evocative personal narratives *specifically focused on their academic as well as their personal lives. Their primary purpose is to understand a self or some aspect of a life lived in a cultural context. In personal narrative texts, authors become "I," readers become "you," subjects become "us." Participants are encouraged to participate in a personal relationship with the author/researcher, to be treated as coresearchers, to share authority, and to author their own lives in their own voices. Readers, too, take a more active role as they are invited into the author's world, evoked to a feeling level about the events being described, and stimulated to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives. The goal is to write meaningfully and evocatively about topics that matter and may make a difference, to include sensory and emotional experience (Shelton, 1995), and to write from an ethic of care and concern (Denzin, 1997; Noddings, 1984; Richardson, 1997).*

Literary and cultural critics often join social scientists in employing the term autoethnography in reference to autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation (see Deck, 1990; Lionnet, 1989; Pratt, 1994). For example, Lionnet (1989) and Deck (1990) both label and explore Hurston's (1942/1991) memoirs as autoethnography, in which the traditional historical frame and specific dates and events associated with autobiography are minimized and the attempt to demonstrate the lived experience and humanity of authors and their peoples to outside audiences is maximized. As Hurston (1942/1991) explains about the folk songs she gathered in her own research, "The words do not count. . . . The tune is the unity of the thing" (p. 144). Deck compares literary autoethnographies to self-reflexive fieldwork accounts, such as Shostak's Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman *(1981) and Crapanzano's* Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan *(1980), in which the authors ground themselves in their field experiences, reference other social scientists who serve to validate the characters in their stories, keep the autobiographical components mainly in the introductions and epilogues, and focus personal revelations directly on the fieldwork at hand rather than on their own personal development.*

Social scientists also write literary and poetic ethnography. Dan Rose (1991), for example, distinguishes between his own personal poetry, which is not connected to his anthropology, and the poetry of other anthropologists such as Stanley Diamond (1982), which focuses on the ethnographic experience of anthropologists as observers. Many anthropologists, such as Edward Sapir and Ruth Benedict, have published realist ethnography in mainstream anthropology journals and personal poetry in literary outlets (Bruner, 1993). Now Anthropology and Humanism *publishes fiction and poetry by anthropologists. In sociology, Laurel Richardson, for example, has published essays in literary (1995) and social science journals (1996) and poetry as ethnography (1994a).*

Autoethnography, native ethnography, self-ethnography, memoir, autobiography, even fiction, have become blurred genres. In many cases, whether a social science work is called an autoethnography or an ethnography depends on the claims made by those who write and those who write about the work. Whether a work is called fiction or fact, autoethnography or memoir, is connected to writing practices—social science autoethnographies usually contain citations to other academics and use an academic, disciplinary vocabulary; publishing practices—who publishes the book, how it is promoted (for example, the field identified on the outside cover) and labeled (ISBN number), and who the targeted audience is; and reviewing practices—who endorses it, who reviews it, and who writes about it. Literary critics treat some autobiographies as autoethnographies and not others; Hurston, who sees herself as essayist, anthropologist, and fiction writer (Lionnet, 1989), provides a good example of the messiness and overlap. Mainstream social science tends to classify autoethnographies (for example, Ellis, 1995b) and life histories about academic careers (for example, Berger, 1990; Goetting & Fenstermaker, 1995; Riley, 1988) into the genre of memoir or autobiography (see Zussman, 1996). Perhaps the loose application of the term autoethnography only signifies a *greater tolerance now for the diverse goals of ethnography and a better understanding of the fallibility and indeterminacy of language and concepts.*

Smiling at the social science prose, I place the copy of the *Handbook* draft in the package with the stories I'm sending Sylvia. I try to imagine how she will take it in.

A week later, Sylvia again appears at my door. "Okay, I read everything you sent me. Wow, those personal narratives just blew me away. Your autoethnography piece was interesting, but hard to get through. It'll be more helpful later, I'm sure," she reassures, then continues quickly, "but now I'm very confused."

"Listen, I only have 5 minutes," I say. "I'm going to a department colloquium."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I'll come back another time," Sylvia responds, retreating through the doorway.

"No, wait. What confuses you?" I ask.

"Well, in my methods classes I was taught that I had to protect against my own biases interfering with my observations and that my research should produce general knowledge and theory. But the articles you gave me emphasize concrete expressions over abstractions. So, I'm confused about what my objectives would be if I do an autoethnography. Why would others be interested? How could I prove that what I have to say about my experience is true? Autoethnography isn't really social science, is it?"

"Your timing is perfect. Come with me," I say, grabbing my keys and walking down the hall. "I want you to hear somebody."

We enter a crowded room where a talk is about to begin. "That's Art, my partner, the good-looking guy sitting at the table," I whisper to Sylvia, as we take seats in the back.

"Welcome to another session of our Interdisciplinary Colloquium Series on Interpretive Research in the Social Sciences," says Jim Spiro, a departmental colleague who organizes the talks. "Today's speaker is Art Bochner, who teaches a Ph.D. seminar on 'narrative inquiry.' "

"We have these talks every week," I whisper to Sylvia. "They're pretty informal."

"Art will present his remarks for about 15 minutes and then turn to questions from the audience," Jim announces. "I've asked him to talk about what some writers have called 'the narrative turn in the human sciences' and to focus specifically on personal narratives. His talk is entitled 'Why Personal Narrative Matters.' Please welcome Art Bochner."

Art stands with his right foot hooked behind his left leg, runs his fingers through his hair, and begins.

◆ *Why Personal Narrative Matters*

It's my pleasure to be here today and to have this opportunity to speak on a topic about which I feel so passionately. As many of you know, I was educated as a traditional empiricist and spent most of the first decade of my academic life plying the trade I had learned as a graduate student. In the late 1970s I began to feel uneasy about the political, philosophical, ethical, and ideological foundations of social science research (Bochner, 1981). In my chosen field, communication research, empiricism rested largely on the premise that communication between humans could be described as an object. But human communication is not an object, or a discipline studying objects. Communication is a process consisting of sequences of interactions and the dynamic human activity of studying them. Moreover, as communicating-humans studying humans communicating, we are inside what we are studying. The reflexive qualities of human communication should not be bracketed "in the name of science." They should be accommodated and integrated into research and its products.

Like many other social scientists who took these matters seriously, my confidence in orthodox, social science methodology was shaken by the critiques of poststructuralist, postmodernist, and feminist writers. I turned to narrative as a mode of inquiry because I was persuaded that social science texts needed to construct a different relationship between researchers and subjects and *between authors and readers. I wanted a more personal, collaborative, and interactive relationship, one that centered on the question of how human experience is endowed with meaning and on the moral and ethical choices we face as human beings who live in an uncertain and changing world. I also wanted to understand the conventions that constrain which stories we can tell and how we can tell them, and to show how people can and do resist the forms of social control that marginalize or silence counternarratives, stories that deviate from or transgress the canonical ones. The texts produced under the rubric of what I call narrative inquiry would be stories that create the effect of reality, showing characters embedded in the complexities of lived moments of struggle, resisting the intrusions of chaos, disconnection, fragmentation, marginalization, and incoherence, trying to preserve or restore the continuity and coherence of life's unity in the face of unexpected blows of fate that call one's meanings and values into question.*

I refer to these personal stories as evocative narratives *(Bochner, Ellis, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997, 1998). The word* evocative *contrasts the expressive and dialogic goals of this work with the more traditional orientations of mainstream, representational social science. Usually the author of an evocative narrative writes in the first person, making herself the object of research and thus breaching the conventional separation of researcher and subjects (Jackson, 1989); the story often focuses on a single case and thus breaches the traditional concerns of research from generalization across cases to generalization within a case (Geertz, 1973); the mode of storytelling is akin to the novel or biography and thus fractures the boundaries that normally separate social science from literature; the accessibility and readability of the text repositions the reader as a coparticipant in dialogue and thus rejects the orthodox view of the reader as a passive receiver of knowledge; the disclosure of hidden details of private life highlights emotional experience and thus challenges the rational actor model of social performance; the narrative text refuses the impulse to abstract and explain, stressing the journey over the destination, and thus eclipses the scientific illusion of control and mastery; and the episodic portrayal of the ebb and flow of relationship experience dramatizes the motion of connected lives across the curve of time, and thus resists the standard practice of portraying social life and relationships as a snapshot. Evocative stories activate subjectivity and compel emotional response. They long to be used rather than analyzed; to be told and retold rather than theorized and settled; to offer lessons for further conversation rather than undebatable conclusions; and to substitute the companionship of intimate detail for the loneliness of abstracted facts.*

Personal writing akin to evocative narrative has recently proliferated in the mainstream press, in new journalism, in creative nonfiction, and in the genres of literary memoir, autobiography, and autopathography (Buford, 1996; Harrington, 1997; Hawkins, 1993; Parini, 1998; "True Confessions," 1996). All of the life writing genres (Tierney, 1998; see also Chapter 20, this volume) seem to have turned toward more intimate, personal, and self-conscious writing. I think the move in the social sciences toward less anonymous, more personal writing parallels the same trend in literature and journalism (Denzin, 1997; Neumann, 1996). Whatever the reasons, I see ample evidence of a burgeoning interest among diverse fields of social science in the genres of personal narrative and autoethnography. The examples I have in mind include the recent special issues of such journals as Journal of Contemporary Ethnography *(Ellis & Bochner, 1996b) and* Qualitative Sociology *(Glassner, 1997; Hertz, 1996); the book series Ethnographic Alternatives, published by AltaMira Press; the edited collections by anthropologists (Benson, 1993; Brady, 1991; Okely & Callaway, 1992), sociologists (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992; Hertz, 1997), and educators (Tierney & Lincoln, 1997); the many articles and monographs published in academic journals such as* American Anthropologist, Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly, Feminist Studies, Journal of Personal and Interpersonal Loss, Qualitative Inquiry, Sociological Quarterly, Symbolic Interaction, Text and Performance Quarterly, Western Journal of Communication, *and* Women's Studies International Forum.

By way of example, let me briefly mention three published evocative narratives. Each highlights the communicative practices through which the author's identity evolves, is displayed, and put to use (Bruner, 1990). In particular, these writers illustrate how certain metaphors and meanings are narrativized into their lives. Mukaia (1989) shows the lived experience of "anorexia from within," expressing the ways in which food and starvation are emplotted into her identity; Ronai (1992) presents a layered story in which she performs her situated, multiple selves, expressing her tortured ambivalence in assuming the dual identities of social science researcher and erotic dancer; and Ellis (1993) navigates the emotional maze of shock and grief as she copes with conflicting academic and family personas in the aftermath of her brother's sudden death in an airplane crash. Each is a first-person account, written as a story, that expresses vivid details about the author's own experience. The "research text" is the story, complete (but open) in itself, largely free of academic jargon and abstracted theory. The authors privilege stories over analysis, allowing and encouraging alternative readings and multiple interpretations. They ask their readers to feel the truth of their stories and to become coparticipants, engaging the story line morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually (Richardson, 1994b).

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The question that I'm usually asked is, "To what kind of truth do these stories aspire?" Often this question is asked in a tone that expresses skepticism, doubt, and even hostility. Some critics (e.g., Mink, 1969-1970; Shotter, 1987) argue that stories give life a structure it does not have and, thus, stories fictionalize life. Since the experiences on which narratives are based may be vague and uncertain, the stories they arouse can never be determinate or complete (e.g. Shotter, 1987). Given the distortions of memory and the mediation of language, narrative is always a story about the past and not the past itself.

A second criticism is that personal narrative reflects or advances a "romantic construction of the self" (Atkinson, 1997) unworthy of being classified as part of social science. If you are "a storyteller rather than a story analyst," argues Atkinson (1997, p. 335), then your goal becomes therapeutic rather than analytic. Atkinson believes that a text that acts as an agent of self-discovery or self-creation—precisely the narrative challenge one faces when an expected life story is interrupted by illness, violence, or accident—cannot be an academic text. Presumably, if you don't subject narrative to sociological, cultural, or some other form of analysis, treating stories as "social facts," then you are not doing social science. While passionately protesting the ways in which some writers want "to privilege certain kinds and occasions of narrative performance," Atkinson (1997) aims to redeem (and privilege) the standard version of representational social science by trivializing or dismissing any work that does not, in his words, "use narrative to achieve serious social analysis" (pp. 338-339).

Good point

Let me briefly address the reservations expressed by these critics. First, there is the question of narrative truth. What is the point of a storied life? Narrative truth seeks to keep the past alive in the present. Stories show us that the meanings and significance of the past are incomplete, tentative, and revisable according to contingencies of our present life circumstances, the present from which we narrate. Doesn't this mean that the stories we tell always run the risk of distorting the past? Of course, it does. After all, stories rearrange, redescribe, invent, omit, and revise. They can be wrong in numerous ways—tone, detail, substance, etc. Does this attribute of storytelling threaten the project of personal narrative? Not at all, because a story is not a neutral attempt to mirror the facts of one's life; it does not seek to recover already constituted meanings. Only within the memoropolitics surrounding the accuracy of recovered memories, which emerged within the context of positivist psychology, would such a criticism be threatening (Hacking, 1995).

The truth of narrative is not akin to correspondence with prior meanings assumed to be located in some sort of prenarrative experience. One narrative interpretation of events can be judged against another, but there is no standard by which to measure any narrative against the meaning of events themselves, because the meaning of prenarrative experience is constituted in its narrative expression. Life and narrative are inextricably *connected. Life both anticipates telling and draws meaning from it. Narrative is both about living and part of it.*

I titled this little talk "Why Personal Narrative Matters" to emphasize that we live within the tensions constituted by our memories of the past and anticipations of the future. Personal narrative, the project of telling a life, is a response to the human problem of authorship, the desire to make sense and preserve coherence over the course of our lives. Our personal identities seem largely contingent on how well we bridge the remembered past with the anticipated future to provide what Stephen Crites (1971) calls "a continuity of experience over time." The narrative challenge that we face as narrators is the desire for continuity, to make sense of our lives as a whole. "The present of things past and the present of things future," says Crites (1971), "are the tension of every moment of experience, both united in that present and qualitatively differentiated by it" (p. 302). The work of self-narration is to produce this sense of continuity: to make a life that sometimes seems to be falling apart come together again, by retelling and restorying the events of one's life. Thus, narrative matters to us because, as David Carr (1986) observes, "coherence seems to be a need imposed upon us whether we seek it or not" (p. 97). At stake in our narrative attempts to achieve a coherent sense of ourselves are the very integrity and intelligibility of our selfhood, which rest so tenderly and fallibly on the story we use to link birth to life to death (MacIntyre, 1981). In the final analysis, the self is indistinguishable from the life story it constructs for itself out of what is inherited, what is experienced, and what is desired (Freeman, 1993, 1998; Kerby, 1991).

So the question is not, "Does my story reflect my past accurately?" as if I were holding a mirror to my past. Rather I must ask, "What are the consequences my story produces? What kind of a person does it shape me into? What new possibilities does it introduce for living my life?" The crucial issues are what narratives do, what consequences they have, to what uses they can be put. These consequences often precede rather than follow the story because they are enmeshed in the act of telling. "The story of our lives becomes our lives," writes Adrienne Rich (1978, p. 34). Thus personal narrative is part of the human, existential struggle to move life forward. Through the narrative activity of self-creation we seek to become identical to the story we tell. Anaïs Nin underscores this desire for self-created, narrative meaning when she announces, "I could not live in any of the worlds offered to me. . . . I believe one writes because one has to create a world in which to live" (quoted in Oakley, 1984).

I get impatient with writers who belittle or diminish the therapeutic consequences of stories. They tend to draw a hard-and-fast distinction between therapy and social research, implying that narratives are useful only insofar as they advance sociological, anthropological, or psychological theory. For these critics, narrative threatens the whole project of science. They reply angrily, shouting the canonically given, professional response: "If you can't pitch a theory, then you can't play in the big leagues." The most important thing is to be smart, clever, analytical; that's what it means to be academic. What they oppose is what they equate with the therapeutic: the sentimental, the mushy, the popular. Thus they engage surreptitiously in what feminist critic Jane Tompkins (1989) calls "the trashing of emotion," a war waged ceaselessly by academic intellectuals "against feeling, against women, against what is personal" (p. 138).

A text that functions as an agent of self-discovery or self-creation, for the author as well as for those who read and engage the text, is only threatening under a narrow definition of social inquiry, one that eschews a social science with a moral center and a heart. Why should caring and empathy be secondary to controlling and knowing? Why must academics be conditioned to believe that a text is important only to the extent it moves beyond the merely personal? We need to question our assumptions, the metarules that govern the institutional workings of social science—arguments over feelings, theories over stories, abstractions over concrete events, sophisticated jargon over accessible prose. Why should we be ashamed if our work has therapeutic or personal value? Besides, haven't our personal stories *always been embedded in our research monographs? The question is whether we should express our vulnerability and subjectivity openly in the text or hide them behind "social analysis."*

Sometimes I think: Art, if only you could do a better job communicating the important differences between a representational and an evocative social science. Why is it so hard to grasp that personal narrative is moral work and ethical practice? When the narrator is the investigator, to a certain extent she is always asking what it is right to do and good to be. At its most extreme, those who want "to put narrative in its place" (Atkinson, 1997, p. 343) seem to think there is only one right place to put it. They seek to preserve what already has been lost (Gergen, 1994; Schwandt, 1996). They think that if these personal voices can be silenced, then perhaps they can return to business as usual in the social sciences, protected against the contingencies of human experience, restored in their traditional belief in a transcendent position from which to speak (and interpret) with authority, freed of moral choices and emotional dilemmas, and inspired to champion control over fate, facts over meanings, and rigor over peace of mind.

"Well, I guess this is a good place to stop and throw this session open for comments or questions," Art invites. People in the audience shuffle in their seats anxiously, then several hands go up. "Yes, Billy," Art says, pointing toward a philosophy professor I recognize.

"Art, you mentioned that your turn toward narrative was provoked by postmodernism. Could you elaborate on that?"

"I had read Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and was impressed by his argument that there was no way to distinguish unequivocally what's in our minds from what's out there in the world. About the same time, I was introduced to the writings of Wittgenstein (1953), Heidegger (1971), Gadamer (1989), and Derrida (1978), and to speech act theory. In quite diverse ways, all of this work stood in opposition to the view—that now seems incredibly naïve—that language could be a neutral or transparent medium of communication. Whether we apply language to ourselves or to the world there always is slippage, inexactness, indeterminacy. Then along came Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), which provided a powerful synthesis of the challenges to our most venerable notions about truth and knowledge. It was hard to read Rorty without feeling totally shaken. I came away convinced that the foundations of traditional epistemology were fallible. No strong case could be made that human knowledge was independent of the human mind. All truths were contingent on the describing activities of human beings. No sharp distinctions could be made between facts and values. If you couldn't eliminate the influence of the observer on the observed, then no theories or findings could ever be completely free of human values. The investigator would always be implicated in the product. So why not observe the observer, focus on turning our observations back on ourselves? And why not write more directly, from the source of your own experience? Narratively. Poetically. Evocatively. No longer was there any deep reason to believe that social science is closer to physics than to literature or poetry. Besides, I became a social scientist because I thought it was a way to address deep and troubling questions about how to live a meaningful, useful, and ethical life. Somewhere along the way these questions took a backseat to methodological rigor. Now I felt liberated to grapple with these questions again, more dialogically, through personal narrative."

A woman I don't recognize stands and shouts from the back of the room, "I've always found the postmodernists depressing and cynical. They seem to be saying you can't know anything. It all seems so destructive." Laughter circulates through the audience and I notice a number of people nodding in agreement.

Art responds, "Well there's an affirming strain of postmodernism too. At least I read it that way. In the writings of certain postmodernists and particularly within feminist and queer theory you see a renewed appreciation for emotion, intuition, personal experience, embodiment, and spirituality. They've helped us cross some of the boundaries separating the arts and the sciences and to

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focus attention on diversity and difference instead of unity and similarity. I don't regard these moves as negative or depressing. Perhaps, like you, I find them unsettling, even painful at times. But that's where the learning is. We lose our innocence and our lost innocence validates some good values. We gain tolerance and humility. Sometimes we're ashamed of how much we've excluded from our experience, tried not to see, hidden from. And we should be. We don't need to run from the fear or anxiety we feel. We need to learn from it. Racism, sexism, poverty, homophobia, disability—these issues touch all of us. We can't hide from them. We're all complicit in some way. No one's immune, invulnerable. So it's important to get exposed to local stories that bring us into worlds of experience that are unknown to us, show us the concrete daily details of people whose lives have been underrepresented or not represented at all, help us reduce their marginalization, show us how partial and situated our understanding of the world is. Maybe that's depressing to some of you, but I think it's enlightening and possibly transforming."

"I think you misunderstood her," a man in the front row interjects. I recognize the voice of a colleague wedded to mainstream social science methods. "The resistance and political dimensions are clear enough, but some of us still want to know how we can tell when we're right, when our representations are accurate and we can generalize."

Art sighs in frustration and continues, "We may have to agree to disagree. I take the crisis of representation more seriously than you do. For me, it necessitates a radical transformation in the goals of our work—from description to communication. That's the inspiration for the narrative turn. As I see it, the practices of human communication—the negotiation and performance of acts of meaning—should become our model for how we tell about the empirical world (Bochner & Waugh, 1995). Then, we would feel compelled to produce narrative, evocative, dialogic texts that show human beings, including ourselves, in the process of creating, negotiating, and performing meaning in a world of others, making our way through a world that poses obstacles, interruptions, contingencies, turning points, epiphanies, and moral choices."

"So what are the goals? I don't quite follow," the same man continues. "Could you be more precise?"

"The goal is to encourage compassion and promote dialogue. Actually, I would be pleased if we understood our whole endeavor as a search for better conversation in the face of all the barriers and boundaries that make conversation difficult. The stories we write put us into conversation with ourselves as well as with our readers. In conversation with ourselves, we expose our vulnerabilities, conflicts, choices, and values. We take measure of our uncertainties, our mixed emotions, and the multiple layers of our experience. Our accounts seek to express the complexities and difficulties of coping and feeling resolved, showing how we changed over time as we struggled to make sense of our experience. Often our accounts of ourselves are unflattering and imperfect, but human and believable. The text is used, then, as an agent of self-understanding and ethical discussion.

"In conversation with our readers, we use storytelling as a method for inviting them to put themselves in our place. Our dialogue centers on moral choices, questions having more to do, as Michael Jackson (1995) observes, with how to live than with how to know. The usefulness of these stories is their capacity to inspire conversation from the point of view of the readers, who enter from the perspective of their own lives. The narrative rises or falls on its capacity to provoke readers to broaden their horizons, reflect critically on their own experience, enter empathically into worlds of experience different from their own, and actively engage in dialogue regarding the social and moral implications of the different perspectives and standpoints encountered. Invited to take the story in and use it for themselves, readers become coperformers, examining themselves through the evocative power of the narrative text."

Art pauses to take a sip of water. Jim, the colloquium organizer, turns toward him and says, "I liked your attempt to enter into dialogue with the critics of narrative inquiry, but you left out one of my main reservations. How do you react to critics who say that personal narratives simulate reality TV? Aren't these narratives reflective of the culture of confession and victimization and don't they end up as spectacles that sentimentalize, humiliate, and take pleasure in revealing anguish and pain? Personal narratives remind me of victim art. They play on your sympathies and manipulate your emotions."

"I've heard that one before, Jim. My first response is to consider the source. That's a particular reading, by a particular person. So it's always the case, in my view, that the criticism speaks the critic's life too. The text's meanings are never transparent. There is always a connection being made between the reader's consciousness and what is being read. So I want to know something about the reader—her interests, desires, values, premises, and what she resists and why.

"So, Jim, where are you in this picture?" Art teases. He pauses and smiles gently as the audience chuckles and Jim looks around quizzically, shrugging his shoulders.

"Seriously, Jim," Art continues. "I didn't mean to put you on the spot. Well, maybe I did. But, as a critic, I don't think it's your job to condemn something categorically. I think you have to look at the merits of each case. It's hard for me to respond in terms of some general principle. If you take a genre of stories that might be called 'illness narratives,' for example, the sorts of stories that Arthur Frank (1995) has analyzed, well, I think the goal is to reduce the stigma and marginalization of illness and disability. Most of these stories are written by people who don't want to surrender to the victimization and marginal identities promoted by the canonical narrative of medicine. Many of them try to write themselves as survivors, displaying their embodiment as a source of knowledge. It's hard to understand how anyone could read Anatole Broyard (1992) or Nancy Mairs (1986, 1990, 1998) or Audre Lorde (1980)—and I could name dozens more—as victim confessionals. They aren't seeking pity and they don't portray themselves as pathetic, helpless, downtrodden characters. If anything, they use narrative as a source of empowerment and a form of resistance to counter the domination and authority of canonical discourses. I think that Couser (1997) thoroughly discredits the 'victim art' argument by showing that the vast majority of narratives focused on the 'recovering body' 'are much more likely to *de*victimize their subjects and others like them' (p. 291). Their main function is to confirm and humanize the experience of illness by bearing witness to what it means to live with bodily dysfunction and to gain agency through testimony. So, what are the choices, Jim? Erasure? Silence? Surrender? I think you have to understand some of the identity politics that are involved here too. Whose stories get told? By whom? And for what purpose? I know you're interested in cultural and political implications of narrative. Don't you think these stories help us understand how culture and politics are written on the body?"

"I see your point," Jim says, "but I still worry about voyeurism and the way these personal stories indulge our culture's perverse curiosity about the private, peeking in on damaged selves. How do we judge the merits of these stories? When do we know they're reliable and telling?"

"I think it's the same judgment we make about any author or any character. Is the work honest or dishonest? Does the author take the measure of herself, her limitations, her confusion, ambivalence, mixed feelings? Do you gain a sense of emotional reliability? Do you sense a passage through emotional epiphany to some communicated truth, not resolution per se, but some transformation from an old self to a new one (Rhett, 1997)? Does the story enable you to understand and feel the experience it seeks to convey? There is complexity, multiplicity, uncertainty, desire. Phillip Lopate (1994) refers to the personal essay as something akin to basic research on the self that ends up as 'a mode of being' (p. xliv). It's not science; it's not philosophy. The same can be said for the evocative, personal story. It's an existential struggle for honesty and expansion in an uncertain world."

I tap Sylvia's shoulder and whisper, "Notice how Art dodges questions that try to get him to stipulate categorical criteria. He always wants to balance rigor and imagination. He thinks if you're too bound up with rules, you probably won't do anything interesting. Anyway, I've got to meet another student in my office for a makeup exam. I'll meet you back here after the talk."

When I return, Sylvia is standing alone watching the students gathered around Art talking passionately about their writing projects. "The woman facing us is Lisa Tillmann-Healy," I tell Sylvia. "She's published a story about her own eating disorder, and she's recently finished her dissertation on straight couples' relationships with gay men, telling the story of her own friendships. The woman to her left is Deborah Austin, who writes lyrical poems and did her dissertation on African American marriages in the aftermath of the Million Man March. For her dissertation defense, she performed a script she wrote based on focus groups she studied. Christine Kiesinger, the woman talking to Art, has published several stories from her dissertation on women with eating disorders. You might be interested in looking at her dissertation to see how she weaves her story with the story of one of her participants. Over there, that's Laura Ellingson," I say, nodding just to the left of the group. "She published an article recently in *Qualitative Inquiry* on how her own illness affected her understanding of other cancer patients and the organizational environment at the cancer hospital she is studying, and how, in turn, this experience helped her reinterpret her own illness. I'll give you a reprint. Laura is talking with Leigh Berger, who published a story about her relationship with her hearing-impaired sister and another about her father who was institutionalized for mental illness. She's studying Messianic Judaism now, observing her own transformation as she participates in a religious group. Come, I'll introduce you to them."

"I read the articles by Lisa and Christine," Sylvia reminds me. "Interesting that they are all women," she says thoughtfully, and then exclaims, "Wow! This is exciting!" I smile, but before I can say anything, Sylvia blurts out, "I want to write my story. But I haven't been keeping notes or anything. How would I do it? Where would I start?"

◆ *Doing Autoethnography: Considerations*

"Answering your questions will take a while. Let's go get a cup of coffee. You can meet the other students later," I decide, waving to them over my shoulder. "There are a number of ways to go about writing autoethnography," I say as we walk. "It really depends on where along the continuum of art and science you want to locate yourself. What claims do you want to make? If you want to claim you're following traditional rules of ethnographic method, then it would be best if you had kept notes on the experience as it happened. The notes would serve as field notes and you'd write from those."

"If you didn't have notes, how would you remember what actually happened?" Sylvia asks.

"Do you think the notes would tell you what actually happened? Aren't they partial interpretations as well?"

"Well, yes, but then how would I make sure that what I said was truthful?"

"The truth is that we can never capture experience. As Art said, 'Narrative is always a story about the past,' and that's really all field notes are—one selective story about what happened written from a particular point of view for a particular purpose. But if representation is your goal, it's best to have as many sources and levels of story recorded at different times as possible. Even so, realize that every story is partial and situated."

I take four quarters from my pocket and insert them into the coffee machine. "I'm buying," I say. "Cream and sugar?"

"Oh, no. Let me pay," she insists, opening her purse.

"Next time. Okay?"

"Okay. Just black for me." We take our coffees outside and sit under a tree to enjoy the perfect Florida spring day. "Is there a way other than representation to think about personal narrative?" Sylvia asks.

"Well, yes, if you viewed your project as closer to art than science, then your goal would not be so much to portray the *facts* of what happened to you accurately, but instead to convey the *meanings* you attached to the experience. You'd want to tell a story that readers could enter and feel a part of. You'd write in a way to evoke readers to feel and think about your life, and their lives in relation to yours. You'd want them to experience the experience you're writing about—in your case, breast cancer."

"If these were your goals," I continue, "writing notes at the time the experience occurred would have been helpful, but not absolutely necessary. If you're writing about an epiphany, which you usually are in this kind of research, you may be too caught up in living it to write about it."

"But then how do you remember all the dialogue and details later?"

"When I wrote *Final Negotiations,* about the chronic illness and death of my first husband, I didn't actually remember everything I wrote about, certainly not the exact words we spoke, anyway. I had notes for much of what I described, but I still had to construct scenes and dialogue from the partial descriptions in my notes. And I hadn't kept immediate notes for everything I wrote about, though I constructed them later. But it's amazing what you can recall, and for how long, if the event was emotionally evocative. Another story I wrote, about race relations in a small town, was constructed without notes more than 25 years after the event occurred."

"But how can that be valid?"

"It depends on your definition of validity. I start from the position that language is not transparent and there's no single standard of truth. To me validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible. You might also judge validity by whether it helps readers communicate with others different from themselves, or offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers or even your own. Take a look at Lather's discussion of validity and counterpractices of authority in the *Sociological Quarterly,* 1993, I believe it is."

Sylvia looks up from her note taking and grimaces, "What about reliability?"

"Since we always create our personal narrative from a situated location, trying to make our present, imagined future, and remembered past cohere, there's no such thing as orthodox reliability in autoethnographic research. However, we can do reliability checks. When other people are involved, you might take your work back to them and give them a chance to comment, add materials, change their minds, and offer their interpretations."

"Generalizability? Is that a concern?"

"Of course, though again not in the usual sense. Our lives are particular, but they also are typical and generalizable, since we all participate in a limited number of cultures and institutions. We want to convey both in our stories. A story's generalizability is constantly being tested by readers as they determine if it speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know. Likewise, does it tell them about unfamiliar people or lives? Does a work have what Stake calls 'naturalistic generalization,' meaning that it brings 'felt' news from one world to another and provides opportunities for the reader to have vicarious experience of the things told?"

"That's sure different from what I've learned, but I think I understand. Still I don't know where to start my own project."

"Why don't you start by writing a draft of your story. Think of it as making retrospective field notes on your life. Include all the details you can recall. I find it helpful to organize my writing chronologically first, using the main events to structure the tale. I try to write daily, rereading what I wrote the day before, then filling in new memories. Remember, you are creating this story; it is not there waiting to be found. Your final story will be crafted from these notes."

"But how will I know when I'm writing from my perspective then and when my current perspective is clouding my memory of what happened?"

"Well, you won't really. Memory doesn't work in a linear way, nor does life, for that matter. As Denzin and also Ronai say in *Investigating Subjectivity,* the book I edited with Michael Flaherty, thoughts and feelings circle around us, flash back, then forward, the topical is interwoven with the chronological, thoughts and feelings merge, drop from our grasp, then reappear in another context. In real life, we don't always know when we know something. Remember Art's talk—events in the past are always interpreted from our current position. Yet that doesn't mean there's no value in trying to disentangle now from then, as long as you realize it's not a project you'll ever complete or get completely right; instead, you strive to get it 'differently contoured and nuanced' in a meaningful way, as Richardson says in her *Handbook* chapter."

"What do you mean? How do you do that?"

"I use a process of emotional recall in which I imagine being back in the scene emotionally and physically. If you can revisit the scene emotionally, then you remember other details. The advantage of writing close to the time of the event is that it doesn't take much effort to access lived emotions—they're often there whether you want them to be or not. The disadvantage is that being so involved in the scene emotionally means that it's difficult to get outside of it to analyze from a cultural perspective. Yet both of these processes, moving in and moving out, are necessary to produce an effective autoethnography. That's why it's good to write about an event while your feelings are still intense, and then to go back to it when you're emotionally distant. I've had students who were great at getting *inside* emotional experience, but they had tunnel vision. They couldn't move around in the experience. They were unable to see it as it might appear to others. They had trouble analyzing their thoughts and feelings as socially constructed processes. I'll give you my article on systematic sociological introspection, which talks more about introspection as a social process."

"I'd like that. But I'm not sure I'd want to feel all those emotions again. And some of the feelings I've had and still have about my cancer I wouldn't want to share. I'd feel so vulnerable."

"Well, that's your call. But if you're not willing to become a vulnerable observer, then maybe you ought to reconsider doing autoethnography. If you let yourself be vulnerable, then your readers are more likely to respond vulnerably, and that's what you want, vulnerable readers. I agree with Ruth Behar, who wrote in *The Vulnerable Observer* that social science 'that doesn't break your heart just isn't worth doing.' My goal is the same as Dorothy Allison's—'to take the reader by the throat, break her heart, and heal it again.' Vulnerability can be scary, but it also can be the source of growth and understanding."

"I've always assumed my task as a social scientist was to deliver knowledge and stay invulnerable," Sylvia responds. "I didn't know I had a choice.

"So, suppose I am willing to be vulnerable," she continues slowly. "How do I get from field notes to writing in a way that opens up myself and readers to being vulnerable?"

"Do you ever read fiction?" When she nods, I continue, "Well, think about how a good novel makes you feel. It does make you feel, right?" She nods again, waiting for what I will say next. "What provokes these feelings?"

"Sometimes I identify with the characters. I feel for them. Or I think about being in the situations they're in, doing what they're doing, or imagine what I'd do in the same situation. And sometimes I stop reading to think about how my life is different or similar."

"Exactly. Good fiction writers make you feel the feelings of the characters, smell the smells, see the sights, hear the sounds, as though you were there. They do this with devices of fictional writing such as internal monologue, dialogue among the characters, dramatic recall, strong imagery, things like scene setting, character development, flashbacks, suspense, and action. You enter the reality of the novel through a dramatic plotline, which is developed through the specific actions of specific characters with specific bodies doing specific things."

"Then how is what you do different from fiction writing?"

"A number of social scientists have addressed your question. Take a look at Denzin's discussion of the relationship of social science writers to the new journalists in *Interpretive Ethnography.* Susan Krieger's early piece on fiction and social science and Richardson and Lockridge's new work on fiction and ethnography also might be helpful."

"The two genres are more similar than different," I continue. "As Walt Harrington says about intimate journalism, in autoethnography you try to write from inside the heads of participants and evoke the tone of their felt lives."

"Of course, writing and publishing conventions are different," I add, now switching gears. "You're a social scientist, so that probably will affect what you look at and how you see. And, among social scientists, autoethnography often has more of an overt analytic purpose and an analytic frame. Remember how Carol Ronai in the piece I gave you layers analysis through her personal narrative? But in *Final Negotiations,* I emphasized that analysis can come through story and dialogue too. Arthur Frank says in *The Wounded Storyteller* that it is important to think *with* a story, not just about a story. Thinking with a story means allowing yourself to resonate with the story, reflect on it, become a part of it.

"I'd suggest you read some exemplars of this work and note the different ways authors intersect story and analytic frame. Look at some of the books in the AltaMira Ethnographic Alternatives series edited by Art and me. For example, Jones's *Kaleidoscope Notes* uses conversation, songs, poetry, stories, performance, and autoethnography to examine women's music, a folk music club, and ethnography; Angrosino's *Opportunity House* is made up of fictional stories of adults with mental illness that are based on his decade of participant observation work; and Markham's *Life Online* uses her own experiences to study life on the Internet. Our *Composing Ethnography* and *Fiction and Social Research* by Banks and Banks both showcase a multitude of creative forms of narrative writing."

"Aren't decisions social scientists make different from fiction writers?"

"Well, generally, autoethnographers limit themselves, unlike fiction writers, to what they remember actually happened. Or at least they don't tell something they know to be false. Well, even that's not so clear-cut. It depends . . ."

"On what?"

"Well, say you want to protect the privacy of a character in your story. Then you might use composites or change some identifying information. Or you might collapse events to write a more engaging story, which might be more truthful in a narrative sense though not in a historical one."

When Sylvia looks at me questioningly, I say, "You know—the story evokes in readers the feeling that the tale is true. The story is coherent. It connects readers to writers and provides continuity in their lives." When I see a look of recognition on Sylvia's face, I continue, "Even realist ethnographers, who claim to follow the rules for doing science, use devices such as composites or collapsing events to tell better stories and protect their participants. Yet they worship 'accuracy' in description. A friend of mine, Sherryl Kleinman, says, If it didn't happen, don't tell it. That's another version of 'Don't put words in participants' mouths if they didn't say them.' But, of course, ethnographers do put words in participants' mouths all the time."

"Really? How can they get away with that?"

"By relying on memory, editing, and selecting verbatim prose out of context and then surrounding it with their own constructed analytic contexts. When it comes to analysis, most traditional ethnographers have no problems reaching beyond description for all kinds of interpretation."

"Give me an example."

"Oh, from limited time and access in the field, they create the 'typical' person or day, the 'common' event. They use ambiguous and qualifying descriptors like *most, some, frequent,* and *few.* And, of course, they reify concepts such as social structure and organizational climate. I did this too in my first study of two fishing villages. Let me tell you, when community members read what I wrote—well, what I saw as typical was certainly not what they saw as typical. What I wrote told you more about how I organize my world than how they organized theirs."

"Don't believe the propaganda," Art says, suddenly walking toward us with a stack of books piled in his arms.

I laugh and ask, "Hi, where have you been?"

"In the library, retrieving some sources for our *Handbook* paper."

"They look pretty heavy to me," I say, smiling as I eye the titles on the spines of the books. "Art, this is my student Sylvia, the one who is studying breast cancer."

"Oh, yes, hi. I noticed you sitting next to Carolyn at my talk today."

"Yes, I found it very interesting," Sylvia replies.

"We were just talking about how autoethnography differs from fiction," I explain.

"Oh, was Carolyn giving you her rap on how you have to be systematic and stick to the facts?" Art asks, turning to Sylvia. "Just the facts, ma'am," he mimics.

"Ah . . . ," Sylvia stalls.

"Art, stop it," I say playfully. Then turning to Sylvia, I explain, "Art and I have this running commentary on writing autoethnography. I argue that you try to construct the story as close to the experience as you can remember it, especially in the initial version. That doing so helps you work through the meaning and purpose of the story. He likes to argue that what's important is the usefulness of the story. Of course, I agree that our stories should have therapeutic value . . ."

"Therapeutic value?" Sylvia stammers.

"Yes, I think of it as action research for the individual. Though therapy might not be the major objective in our research, it often is a useful result of good writing," I respond.

"That reminds me, Art . . . uh, may I call you Art?" Sylvia inquires. When Art nods, she continues, "What you said in your talk about the focus of stories, well, I thought therapy and research were separate entities. I mean, I'm a therapist, but I assumed I had to keep that role separate from my interviewer identity, because if I acted as a therapist it might bias the data. And wouldn't it be unethical?"

Art and I look at each other and try not to smile. Her questions and concerns help us realize how close together our positions are. I quickly interject, "But you told me you hoped your research would provide understanding of what happened to you and help others who face similar circumstances cope. So what will you do if an interviewee breaks down or if you see a place where you could be of help?"

She looks at me, waiting for the answer, then murmurs, "I'm not sure."

"What would you want someone in a similar situation to do for you if you were a research participant?"

"Well, I'd want them to care about me and try to understand where I was coming from, " she responds softly. "Otherwise I wouldn't want to share my life stories with them."

"And wouldn't it be unethical for a researcher not to help or empathize with you if you were in need?"

"I've never thought of it that way before, but I would want my subjects to feel that I care about them. What good would my research be if it doesn't help others who are going through this experience, especially my subjects?"

"Participants," I say quietly.

"Participants," she repeats, her face turning red. "But isn't it true that not everybody can do good therapy? I mean most academics aren't trained therapists."

"Being able to do therapy and being a trained therapist are not synonymous," I respond, and Sylvia nods in agreement. "In fact, ethnographic training might be just as important for a therapist as therapeutic training."

"And therapeutic training probably should be a prerequisite to being an ethnographer," Art adds, laughing.

I smile and continue, "But you're right, not everybody is comfortable or capable of dealing with emotionality. Those who aren't probably shouldn't be doing this kind of research in the first place, or directing students who are."

"Perhaps you should give her citations to articles on some of these issues, like the ethic of caring and personal accountability, maybe Collins," Art suggests, as several of his books fall to the ground.

"I will," I say, helping to retrieve the books. "Other feminist writers would be helpful too. Let's see, Lieblich, Miller, Cook and Fonow, and Oakley. They'd be a good start," I say, marking them off as I return each book to Art's stack.

"And there are good summaries in Reinharz and also in Denzin's *Interpretive Ethnography,*" Art adds. He then turns to Sylvia, "But enough literature, I want to know more about how you'd respond if you were an interviewee. What would make you comfortable enough to tell your story?"

"To know the other person was listening, really listening. I'd want someone I could cry in front of, actually who might cry with me. A person who might tell me some of her story if she had been through a similar experience."

"So are you going to share your story with your participants?" I ask.

"Ah . . . I think . . ."

"Go on."

"Well, I was going to say that my story would contaminate theirs, but I'm not so sure anymore."

Art and I smile. "This is probably enough for now," I say. "We've come a long way. Why don't you think about how this conversation provides clues for how you might want to do your own interviews and let's pick up this topic next time we meet."

We say our good-byes, and Art and I make our way to our car. "Are you sure this is the right move?" Art asks. "Is she ready to write her story?"

"Oh, I think she's ready. I sense she wants to tell her story."

"What if it opens up things for her that are just too painful?"

"I'll keep in close contact with her, just in case. But in my experience with personal narrative, people pretty quickly find their own comfort zone. They know when the time's right. But I'll make sure to provide opportunities for her to pull back or change gears in the project, if she needs to. She can always do that survey," I add, playfully tugging at his arm and then skipping ahead.

"I admire how much you're willing to risk with your students," Art says lovingly when I return to help him pick up the books that once again have toppled to the ground. "And how much you care about them."

"Same with you," I say.

"It's not easy being vulnerable, especially in the academy, where you're expected to be in control and keep your private life removed from your professional life. That's what I tried to say in 'It's About Time.' "

"It's scary, when you think about the professor at Colby who asked students to write personal narratives and ended up being charged with sexual harassment. Of course, we don't know what really happened there; we have only Ruth Shalit's report," I add. "Maybe his private and professional lives did become too entwined."

"That's certainly a possibility. But what about the article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that described how some of Jane Tompkins's colleagues attacked her for suggesting that the emotional and spiritual lives of university students are just as important as their intellects?"

"Maybe we should just write fiction," I offer.

"Now wait a minute," Art reprimands. "You know everything we write is fiction . . ."

◆ Doing Autoethnography: Method and Form

Two weeks later, Sylvia appears in my office. "Hi, I've written most of my story about my past now, and I waited until I was almost finished before I began reading other personal narratives of breast cancer. It's been very therapeutic," she says, "to write and to read. But I'm not sure I'm getting anywhere on my dissertation. I have so many questions."

"Like what?" I ask.

"Why would anybody want to read my story? How does my story differ from what's already published? And how will my story fit with the interviews I want to do of other women?"

"Slow down. Are you learning anything?"

"Oh, yes, at every turn."

"Tell me what you're learning."

"Well, that I have a lot in common with other women's breast cancer stories. For example, most women tell of their discovery of the lump—that's always a traumatic event—then the diagnosis and assessment of treatment options, then they describe waking up from the surgery, going through the follow-up treatment, and finally there's recovery and some kind of resolution at the end."

"Interesting, that's almost exactly how Couser summarized breast cancer narratives in his book on illness narratives," I respond, pleased with how much reading Sylvia has done.

"Most survivors describe making decisions about reconstructive surgery, shopping for a prosthesis—if they decide to wear one—their hair falling out, and seeking alternative treatment," she continues without skipping a beat. "I wrote about these things as well, and . . ."

"And have you learned anything new from writing *your* story? Sorry, I didn't mean to cut you off, but I'm curious."

"Yes, that cancer is more than a medical story, it's a feeling story. I learned how scared I am even though I've been a survivor now for 7 years. And that's the interesting thing—there's little about long-term survivors in stories or in social science research. Most survivors tell their stories soon after recovery from treatment and they're usually pretty optimistic about recovery and often claim to be better off at the end than the beginning.

"I felt that too, the optimism I mean, immediately after my treatment was over, that is," Sylvia continues passionately. "But I don't feel that way now. I try so hard to pretend that I'm an upbeat, optimistic person with no worries, a warrior who has learned from her experiences. But what I had to face as I wrote my story is that I'm scared all the time that the cancer will come back. I've had carpal tunnel syndrome and it's probably from the chemo. And now I have sweats at night, and I don't know if it's early menopause—another gift of chemo—or signs of the cancer returning. I'm sorry, but cancer has not improved my life and I can't make it into a gift. Holding in these feelings, all these years, has been difficult and I think it's had negative effects on my psychological and physical well-being and on my family."

Sylvia begins to cry. I touch her shoulder and hand her a Kleenex. We sit silently for a while, sadness connecting us. Needing to stay in the role of adviser, I hold back my tears. "Do you still want to continue this project?" I ask gently. "Or is it too painful?"

"Oh, no, I *have* to continue it," she responds forcefully, although her voice shakes. "What I'm experiencing is important to me. It was hard pretending; sometimes I thought I was going crazy. Now I realize I don't have to pretend. There are other stories to live and write. Maybe through writing and talking with other women about their experiences, I can figure out another story to live, one that might help me cope better and not take so much out of me. Maybe I can write myself as a survivor in a deeper, more meaningful way, like Art was talking about. You know, I can't help wondering how other women feel years after their treatment. That's what I want to know—how it feels to them, how they cope . . . or don't," she adds, the tears starting up again. "Does the experience continue to be as fresh and scary to them as it still is to me? Maybe I can both contribute to knowledge and help others—and myself—write a story we can live with. How I'm living now, denying my feelings—well, this is no way to live."

"Okay, we're getting somewhere now," I say softly. "I think you have your topic. I imagine that other women share your sense of vulnerability and loss of control over their lives. I think I would," I add, involuntarily shivering as I imagine how difficult it would be to have cancer hanging over me in such an intrusive way. "Now how do we find out how other long-term survivors experience cancer?"

"I'd like to do intensive interviews with survivors of more than 5 years," Sylvia responds energetically, "and include an African American woman—there's so little on their experience of breast cancer—and maybe even a lesbian woman, because I think their experiences might be different. How many participants would I need? Twenty-five?"

"Oh no," I laugh. "If you're going to do intensive interviews, you'd need only a few, maybe five or six including yourself. You'll want to interview each woman a number of times to build trust in the relationship, and also so they can read and respond to each transcript before you follow up with the next interview."

"How much will I participate?"

"Given that you share aspects of their experience, the interviews should be an interactive conversation, I would think. But you have to play that by ear. Rather than overlay method onto experience, you want to relate your approach to each woman's life and think about what would help her to tell her story. In some cases, participants will feel comfortable having a conversation, if you set it up that way. But as a society, we're so accustomed to the authoritative interview situation that some women still will expect you to be the authority and ask all the questions. Some might inquire about your story; others will be too glad for an opportunity to tell their own to pay attention to yours. They'll want you to be the researcher and therapist. Perhaps a few of the women will want to write their stories. Remind me next time to give you an article on interactive interviewing that I wrote with Christine Kiesinger and Lisa Tillmann-Healy, where we had conversations over dinner about eating disorders. It'll get you thinking about form and the problems of doing interactive interviews—the time involved and the emotional commitment and ethical issues of dealing in such a personal realm. I'll also give you a piece I wrote with Art on co-constructed narrative, which describes a two-part process of individually writing stories that are then shared and co-constructed by several participants."

"I guess there's no interview schedule then?" Sylvia asks, but since she's smiling, I don't respond. "How will the chapters look and where will my story be?" she asks, this time seriously.

"The form will evolve during the research process. You might start the dissertation with a short personal story, to position yourself for the reader, or tell your longer story as a chapter. Or you might integrate parts of your experience into each participant's story, each of which could form separate chapters. Or write your story in comparison to one of the participants who is similar to you, as Christine Kiesinger did in her study of eating disorders.

"Perhaps you will write each chapter in a unique form to reflect the different experiences you had in each interview," I continue, "or to reflect something about the character of each woman's story. For example, if a participant tells her story without much input or questioning from you, you might write in the thoughts you had as you listened to her and reflected on your life. If another interview is interactive, you might write dialogue to show the process of communication and interpretation that occurred between you. If you're successful, you should not only 'unmask' them and yourself for others, but, as Harold Rosen says, you should also discover the face under the mask.

"Or," I continue hesitantly, "you could write the dissertation, as Elliot Eisner suggests, in the form of a novel. The plot would consist of your research journey. You'd let readers experience with you your search for understanding, the questions you ask, how the women respond, what their answers open up for you, new questions that arise, and how you interpret their stories. In that case, you might end by showing how your stories compare and finally how your story changed as you took in and interacted with the other women's stories. You'd have to be careful, though, that your story didn't overshadow theirs."

"Yes, and it would probably be hard to get my committee to buy a novel."

I nod in agreement, and then remind her, "No matter how you tell the story, the writing has to be engaging and evocative. That's not how social scientists have been taught to write. You'll essentially have to learn how to write by reading novels, and by writing and rewriting and getting feedback. Of course, I'll provide response, but you might want to consider joining a writing group as well."

"That's a good idea," Sylvia responds, jotting down notes as she talks. "Won't I also have to do traditional writing? What about analysis, for example? Will I do grounded theory?"

"Well, your committee will demand an analytic chapter, you can bet on that. I also think you need one. The article I wrote on stigma convinced me of the benefits of moving between narrative and categorical knowledge, though I don't think that is necessary in every study."

I continue hesitantly, "You could do a straight grounded theory analysis. Then you'd divide chapters by concepts that emerge, or types, or some kind of category. Or each chapter might represent a stage in the illness process, like David Karp did in his study of depression. If you choose grounded theory, you'd need to pay a lot of attention to coding your materials and comparing and analyzing your data along the way, and you'd write in an authoritative voice about the patterns you saw. If you choose this strategy, I'd recommend you follow the procedures that Kathy Charmaz describes in the new *Handbook of Qualitative Research.*"

"What would happen then to the women's stories? And my story?"

"Well, you'd use snippets from all the stories where they applied in each chapter."

Sylvia pauses for a moment, jots down some notes, and then says thoughtfully, "I don't think so. It seems to me that would take away from the evocative nature of the stories as a whole, which is the value of my study. Besides, the women deserve to tell their own stories, though I know I'll influence how they get told . . ."

"I agree," I interrupt, relieved, "given the nature of your project and your goals. But just because we decide to do analysis doesn't mean we have to do it traditionally." Sylvia's eyes open wide. "What about inviting all your participants to read each other's stories and then meet together and tape-record the discussion? This could serve as the basis for your analysis—you'd 'ground' the analysis in your participants' understandings, as well as your own. You might provide your own interpretations for them to respond to."

"Okay," Sylvia says, leaning forward, speaking passionately. "I really like this idea. I'll invite my participants over for dinner one night. It'll be my way of doing something for them. Before they come, I'll send them the stories I wrote about each of the women. Then . . ."

"As long as you get permission," I caution.

"Oh, yes, I know that's important. Maybe I'll only send them their own stories." She pauses, then suddenly blurts, "What if somebody wants me to leave out something?"

"Then you might omit it, or ask your participant to help you rewrite it. Or you could fictionalize a detail in a way that camouflages the actual event but still conveys the meaning you want to get across. Or use pseudonyms or composite characters, if that helps."

"I'd also want them to listen and respond to my interpretations. But what if they disagree with my analysis?" she asks suddenly, frowning.

"That can happen, so you have to have some understanding up front about how you'll handle that. Perhaps you'll put alternative interpretations, yours and theirs, into the text. Or you could listen to their interpretations without giving them yours."

To provide an example, I say, "Susan Chase, a sociologist, chose not to give her analysis to participants to read before publication, though she asked for permission to use their words and gave them an opportunity to amend their narratives. She makes a distinction between what she wanted to communicate in her analysis—how culture shapes narrative process—and what her participants wanted to communicate in their narrations—their life experiences.

"In any case," I continue, "you'll need to explain in your dissertation the kinds of decisions you made and on what grounds you made them. You owe that to readers.

"It's a hard balance," I continue, suddenly reminded of readers, "giving readers the information they expect without betraying the trust of participants, I mean. As Ruth Josselson says, when we get to the writing stage, we tend to take ourselves out of relationship with our participants to form a relationship with readers. How can we help then but have feelings of betraying our participants?

"Oh, and it gets even more complicated," I say to Sylvia, whose hand covers her open mouth as she shakes her head in disbelief. "We haven't even talked about your family members yet. They may become central characters in your very personal story. Say your husband or daughter doesn't want you to reveal things about them or your relationship to them. What do you do then?"

"Oh, my, I hadn't thought of that," she says quietly. "But I'd *have* to talk about my family in order to penetrate the depths of my experience.

How could I ask my participants to do this, if I couldn't?"

"This is one of the most important ethical problems in this kind of research. Because now we're not just talking about faceless, nameless, unidentifiable subjects—if we ever were. Your intimates are identifiable individuals with names. Don't they deserve the same consideration as your participants who have given you permission to write about them?"

"Well, of course . . ."

"Are there any situations in which the 'greater good' outweighs individuals' rights to privacy, in which you have a right to tell your story even if other characters in it object?"

When I see the look of defeat on Sylvia's face, I realize that I am transferring too many of my own concerns to her too quickly. "Hey, these issues don't all have to be resolved today. I just wanted you to know that they will come up. We'll discuss each one as it arises and try to make good, ethical decisions."

Then, before Sylvia has a chance to be too relieved, I add, "But by the next time we talk, we do have to consider how to get your proposal past the IRB committee. You'll want to read Michael Angrosino and Kimberly Mays de Pérez's discussion of IRBs in the new *Handbook.* You'll have to be strategic in writing your proposal, because the first thing the committee will ask is about your independent and dependent variables. Then they'll want to see a copy of your interview schedule. All the talk of risk and ceding of responsibility by the university that they'll want you to put into your consent form, well, that will likely scare away some participants. But we have to go through the process to protect the university and ourselves, especially since you're dealing with an at-risk population. The board will be concerned with how you're protecting your participants—their identities and their well-being. At the least, you'll have to provide the name of a therapist your participants can see. I don't know how the board would respond to your telling them that you'll be the therapist," I laugh. Then I add more seriously, "But really protecting the participants and your family members—well, in the end that's left up to you and me." I pick up the book I was reading when Sylvia arrived to indicate our time is up.

"I think I'm ready for those syllabi now. You know, from the courses you've taught." I smile and hand Sylvia the syllabi waiting on my desk. In turn, she hands me a folded piece of paper. "It's a poem I wrote about losing my breast. I know it isn't research, but . . ."

"Of course it's research. Think about including it as part of your story. Have you read any of Laurel Richardson's ethnographic poetry?"

I'm about to get started again, when Sylvia says with a twinkle in her eye, "So will you be on my committee?"

"Only if you're still planning to do that survey," I say, both of us chuckling as we wave good-bye.

◆ *Defending and Expanding Autoethnography (One Year Later)*

"Hi, Art, I just had to call."

"Why? What's the matter?"

"I just got out of Sylvia's proposal defense. Actually it wasn't as bad as I expected. I think she held her ground. Hey, would you quiet the dogs? I can hardly hear you."

"Oh, yeah. I guess that antibark contraption you bought for Christmas isn't working any better than all the other ones we've purchased. Likker, Traf, Ande, Sunya—quiet, your mom's on the phone," Art yells, and I'm amazed when they actually stop barking. "So what happened?"

"Well, I started the questioning and at first it went very well. Committee members seemed to understand what we were proposing. But then when it was their turn to ask questions, suddenly we moved from talking about the experience of breast cancer to talking about bias, validity, eligibility criteria, operationalization, control variables, confounding factors, building models, replicability, and objectivity. In response, I found myself giving long speeches peppered with words like *literature, literary license, evocative, vulnerable, narrative truth, verisimilitude, interactive,* and *therapeutic.*"

"Nothing like these forays out into the other world to make you realize how fortunate we are to have created what we have in the Communication Department, where we take the significance of this work for granted," Art responds.

"That's for sure. The experience gave me a lot of empathy for what students and young faculty members in other universities may have to go through to do this kind of work.

"But," I continue, "something very interesting happened near the end of the defense. I was listening to the oncologist talk about prediction and control when I began thinking about how important these goals must seem in his daily work life. So instead of giving yet another speech, I asked the oncologist what it is like to have to tell women the bad news, to deal with illness and death all the time. Before I knew it, we were having a conversation about feelings, how emotionally difficult his job is, and how he'd like to do it better. He told the story of how upset he was yesterday, when he had to tell a 34-year-old women, a mother of two young children, that she probably has less than 6 months to live and how bad he felt when she apologized for taking up too much of his time. He had tears in his eyes when he was telling the story. I mentioned Robert Cole's work and he told me he had read *The Call of Stories* and admired the writings of William Carlos Williams. I tried to show him how the goals of Sylvia's work relate to what Coles was saying about how we use stories to try to figure out how to live our lives meaningfully. I felt I had reached him where he lived, at the site of his subjectivity and deep feelings. Unlike the first part of the meeting, it seemed both of us had let down our guards and were communicating with each other as human beings."

"Wow, that must have been some moment."

"It was. You know, I think this is the future of what we do. To figure out how to introduce personal ethnography into the practical contexts of everyday life, to people whose work would be enhanced by it, like doctors, nurses, social workers, administrators, and teachers."

"I've been giving that issue a great deal of thought lately," Art responds. "I think there's a lot to gain from extending all of ethnography beyond the academy so that we stop thinking of it as exclusively an academic practice. Couldn't the work of many people in the service and helping professions be thought of as ethnography? To do their work effectively, service workers have to gain intersubjective understanding in contexts that cross the boundaries of age, ability, race, class, and ethnicity. I mean any time the success of your work depends on developing some degree of intercultural understanding, then you have to use the social skills we associate with ethnographic empathy. Wouldn't you say that psychotherapists do this? Aren't they ethnographers of the self?"

"Of course. And good teaching involves ethnography too," I add. "Over time you try to work your way through the barriers of unfamiliarity, distance, and difference toward a spirit of collaboration, understanding, and openness to experience and participation. When we learn how to open ourselves to ourselves and to each other, we find it easier to drop some of our resistance to different ideas. I like to think of this as working toward an ethnographic consciousness in the classroom that is personal, intimate, and empathic."

"That's very close to how I see the private geriatric care managers I've been studying for the past 2 years," Art responds. "As they work between long-distanced families and their elderly relatives, they become ethnographers of aging. They aren't academics. They don't do academic research and they don't write articles. Yet in every other respect they think and act as ethnographers. In each case they manage, they function as a channel through which pass the emotional, economic, medical, and social crises that must be negotiated by families coping with the contingencies of aging. They occupy a unique, dynamic, holistic, and engaged perspective. They are participants and observers and their private lives are deeply affected by their public and professional services. As storytellers and autoethnographers, they have as much, if not more, to teach us about the concrete, everyday details associated with aging as do scholars of aging."

"We like to think we have a lot to teach people in the public sector, but they have a lot to teach us as well, if we just listen," I add. "Yet I know, as Elliot Eisner discusses, that it will be difficult to wean scholars and the American public from a view that measuring, comparison, and outcomes are all that matter."

"But I think we're slowly knocking down some of the walls," Arts says encouragingly. "We've opened a space to write between traditional social science prose and literature and to stimulate more discussion of working the spaces between subjectivity and objectivity, passion and intellect, and autobiography and culture. Look at all the book manuscripts we've received to review for our series. I take that as strong evidence that more and more academics think it's possible to write from the heart, to bring the first-person voice into their work, and to merge art and science. I don't think there's any danger of going back to the way it used to be, not in our lifetimes anyway."

"Yes, we've encouraged writers to make ethnography readable, evocative, engaging, and personally meaningful. And it's working. Autoethnography is being read widely by graduate and undergraduate students. Now it's time to show its usefulness in the public realm. It's interesting that this is the same argument being made in some of the mainstream sociology journals. Have you seen the symposium in *Contemporary Sociology* on 'engaging publics in social dialogue'?" I ask.

"Yes, I read it yesterday. Perhaps our purposes are coming together for a change. After all, that's what we are trying to do in the Ethnographic Alternatives series, to publish books that say something meaningful and attract a wide audience."

"Like Mike Angrosino's stories of adult mental illness. Now we just need to get the book into the hands of those who work with and make policies about mental illness."

"I don't know if this *Handbook* piece will help with that," Art says. "But it may encourage more people to do autoethnography and help legitimate this approach for those students and young faculty members you're worried about. Those are important goals we've tried to achieve in our chapter. I'm glad we've written it."

"Me, too," I say, smiling as I think of Art's initial resistance to writing for the *Handbook.*

"So, then, we're finished with this piece?" Art asks.

"Looks like it," I reply. "Let's reward ourselves and go to the beach for the weekend. We need to get out of our offices and engage in some other life experiences, or else the only thing we're going to be able to write about is writing."

"But what about the chapter for the *Handbook of Loss and Trauma* and the one for the *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication* we just committed to do? We really should get started," Art says.

"Art!" I yell, as I hear simultaneously his laughter and a knock on my office door.

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