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Evaluative Criteria for Autoethnographic Research: Who's to Judge? (Chapter 15)

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Chapter 15[*]

Evaluative Criteria for Autoethnographic Research

Who's to Judge?

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> *Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. It helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside and between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. Part of finding is getting lost, and when you are lost you start to open up and listen.*
>
> *—Terry Tayofa[1]*

It's September 2014, and I'm sitting in my office at my computer, finishing the second of two articles about Indigenous and critical research methods and their potential for librarians and librarianship.[2] Synchronisitically, I receive an e-mail from a colleague, Anne-Marie Deitering, looking for feedback regarding an idea she has for a journal issue showcasing the autoethnographic research method. I have no idea what autoethnography (AE) is—glad no one is watching as I google a-u-t-o-e-t-h-n-o-g-r-a-p-h-y. I'm flabbergasted! It's what I've been seeing, in many ways, in the Indigenous research I've been reading, and in the narrative method I began to use as I wrote up my

recent research! People starting their research with themselves and their own lived experience, using their lives as their research questions, never losing sight of their center, their selves, and really reflecting and digging deep, while at the same time moving their questions and interrogations out into their culture. What's not to like about that? Little did I know that my new research question was forming, underground, at that very moment, and I was going to find out, at least for others, what there was not to like.

Anne-Marie, in her e-mail to me, was looking to co-curate, with her research partner Rick Stoddart, a special issue of a journal filled with autoethnographies. As I knew some well-respected journal editors, I told her that I'd help out by inquiring if some of them might consider a special issue on library-themed autoethnographies. The journal we were looking at was somewhat traditional and conservative, and I suspected we'd probably get some resistance, and I thought it would definitely be a learning experience.

And wow, what a learning experience! We submitted a prospectus to the editors, and the following is the feedback we received from the editors that show their initial concerns with autoethnography:

- What is autoethnography?

- How would autoethnographies be reviewed?

- How is autoethnography different from storytelling or narrative? Is autoethnography just narrative or autobiography dressed up in a suit?

- Should we treat autoethnographies as opinion pieces and not review them?

- Is there any particular rigor to this field? If analytics don't play a role, and the final product is intended to be self-reflective and subjective, then the final product is not research.

- Articles about self-reflection in the face of personal crisis or adversity that lead to someone becoming a better person, and therefore a better librarian, would not be acceptable.

- Editors already have our hands full trying to create valuable, rigorous contributions to the literature without rewriting the rules about what constitutes research.

These comments hit me like ice water on my face—they began to galvanize me. Part of the shock is, not so much what they said, but rather seeing it in print in an e-mail. I suspect that many LIS editors hold these same opinions, perhaps unconsciously, but I had never really heard them say it. As a journal editor myself, I often feel uneasy with the gatekeeper role I play—constantly having to check myself and my reasons for accepting or declining manuscripts. So part of the shock at seeing these comments is also realizing that, to some extent and somewhat unconsciously, I hold some of these opinions myself. There's a difference—I've recently been doing research on research methods and their underlying epistemological and ontological implications.[3] I am beginning to see and value different ways of knowing, ways beyond or complementary to the positivist search for universal and objectifiable truths that exist outside of ourselves. I can see potential value in arriving at understanding of a certain situation from a particular point of view, or the making of meaning or transformation, as goals for research and scholarship. I can see that methods that require the researcher to erase themselves from their research, while appearing objective, might just be lying about their ultimate subjectivity.[4] While I was skeptical of the radical notion raised by autoethnography, that the self becomes to some extent the subject of the research, I was willing to suspend judgement and entertain this idea. I feel that I was being a scientist of sorts, being willing to perform this research experiment of learning and writing autoethnographies with colleagues, and then, with our readers, being able to sit back and see if we considered these to be research, or found them useful, or both.

I wrote back and thanked the editors for their clear and honest comments, and I tried to address them as best I could—without really having good answers myself. But damn, I sure had some good questions now! Taking this challenge as a new direction for my research, I volunteered to join with Anne-Marie and Rick to try to find this autoethnography project a home.

The questions I now have, and what I think I might be able to contribute to our research project, are

- What *is* autoethnography?

- How might it be relevant and applied to LIS?

- What is it about quantitative, positivist research that had such a hold on LIS?

- Why are numbers, data, and rigor held up over all else?

- Why is subjectivity so unworthy?

- *And especially, how might autoethnographies be reviewed by peers or editors and accepted by them as valid ways of knowing?*

I felt most drawn by that last question. In the Indigenous research I read, there was an underlying and recurring theme of working toward legitimizing Indigenous research methods and often, by extension, raising respect for the very Indigenous cultures themselves.[5] I intuited a resonance between Indigenous research's relation to the academy and that of autoethnography.[6] The resonances I felt between the two methods are more about the potential for personal and societal transformation, understanding, and meaning making that both methods offer us.

As an author of LIS research, and also as a journal editor, I have reasons to see how we, as a discipline, might see a way to accept autoethnographic research into our praxis and the corpus of our literature—What are the barriers? Mine was not to be a clear, clean, and straightforward research project. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner state, "Autoethnography, as method, attempts to disrupt the binary of science and art. Autoethnographers believe research can be rigorous, theoretical, and analytical **and** emotional, therapeutic, and inclusive of personal and social phenomena."[7] What criteria might exist that could ensnare such a chimera?

I looked in the LIS literature and found only five references to autoethnographies.[8] In many ways this is not surprising, as our discipline is called library and information *science*.[9] Thinking back on my LIS studies to my research methods class with Ronald Powell, I

remember that we used the second edition of his work, *Basic Research Methods for Librarians*. I wondered what other similar preparatory texts there might be, and found five under the term "Library science research methodology." The most general was the updated version of Ronald Powell's text by Lynn Silipigni Connaway and Ronald Powell, which discussed eighteen quantitative and qualitative research methods for librarians.[10] All of five of the texts I found focus on librarianship as a social science, and even the two that move into the interpretivist paradigms do not entertain autoethnography as a potential method.[11]

Looking at how librarians are taught to do research in the texts above, it was beginning to make sense that LIS research methods historically and currently conformed to positivist and post-positivist paradigms. It was also becoming obvious that I wouldn't find potential criteria for the evaluation of autoethnographies in LIS literature. For other social sciences involved in qualitative research, N. K. Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln have imagined an evolution in terms of methodological "moments" (here summarized by Nicholas L. Holt):

> The first moment was the traditional period (early 1900's), when qualitative researchers aspired to "objective" accounts of field experiences. The second moment was the modernist phase (postwar years to 1970s), which was concerned with making qualitative research as rigorous as its quantitative counterpart. The third moment (1970–1986) was concerned with the blurring of genres. The fourth moment (mid-1980s) is characterized by crises of representation and legitimation. The fifth moment concerns experimental writing and participatory research. Additional stages include the sixth (postexperimental) and seventh (future) moments, whereby fictional ethnographies and ethnographic poetry become taken for granted.[12]

While there are some critiques of LIS as a scientific discipline with scientific research by Archie L. Dick, Birger Hjørland, and Gary P. Radford, it would seem from Denzin's and Lincoln's schema above that LIS is still listening to the Beatles and wearing bell-bottoms.[13]

Twenty years ago Thomas Schwandt wrote an insightful article noting the death of criteriology, or unchanging criteria, in the social sciences. He states, "The firm conviction that the social-political world was simply 'out there' waiting to be discovered and described has been exposed as a convenient fiction. The belief that social science would achieve paradigm takeoff by imitating the aims and methods of the natural sciences has been shown to be wishful thinking at best."[14] Not so for LIS. I was excited to begin to find patches of clarity and insight in regard to my questions about LIS research. When I read the following quote from Bochner, it felt very comfortable to substitute *LIS* for *social sciences* (emphasis is my own):

> In social sciences, we have never overcome our insecurities about our scientific stature. In our hearts, if not in our minds, we know that the phenomena we study are messy, complicated, uncertain, and soft. Somewhere along the line, we became convinced that these qualities were signs of inferiority, which we should not expose. It appeared safer to keep the untidiness of our work to ourselves, rather than run the risk of having our work belittled as "unscientific" or "unscholarly." We seem uncommonly neurotic in our fear of having our little secret discovered, so we hide behind the terminology of the academic language games we've learned to play, gaining some advantage by knowing when and how to say "validity," "reliability," "grounded," and the like. Traditionally, we have worried much more about how we are judged as "scientists" by other scientists than about whether our work is useful, insightful, or meaningful—and to whom. *We get preoccupied with rigor, but are neglectful of imagination.*[15]

I widened my search to more general social science databases and began to find literature on autoethnographies and potential criteria for their evaluation. Writing autoethnographies about the vicissitudes of writing autoethnographies seems to be quite a cottage industry![16] With this book chapter, I seem to be entering their ranks. Many of these writers focus on the conundrum of evaluative criteria for their works. In "Autoethnography and Narratives of Self: Reflections on Criteria in Action," Andrew Sparkes uses the writing and subsequent reviews of his autoethnography "The Fatal Flaw: A Narrative of the

Fragile Body-Self" to investigate the impact of mismatched para-
digms and methodological expectations on the review and acceptance
of autoethnographic works. He, like many other authors of autoeth-
nographies, calls for the development of criteria but with a caution
against the foundationalism and inflexibility found in traditional
positivist and empirically based research.[17]

So far in my research, I found twelve sources that set out or
imply possible criteria that might be used when reviewing or evalu-
ating AEs.[18] None of the literature I reviewed is from LIS, but rather
education, ethnography, and general social science publications.
Some works I discovered also tried to define what the goals of an AE
might be. Thinking that what we *value* in a work might be one way of
evaluating it, I am using these goals that I found as possible evalua-
tive criteria as well. After looking at all of the criteria that I found, six
general categories came to mind. These general categories are

- Revealing the Self (*auto*)

- Exploring Culture/Society (*ethno*)

- Storycraft (*graphy*)

- Ethics

- Social Justice and Transformation

- Unclassified Criteria

I caution that these categories are only one way to look at these
criteria—just a way to get a handle on them. Some of the criteria I
found fit in multiple categories, but I just slipped them in where it
seemed right, as categorization is not a goal in itself, but rather a way
to talk about the disparate criteria that I found. (For a full list of all of
the criteria, see the appendix to this chapter). I am not claiming that
this checklist is something permanent or useful in other contexts, but
I agree with Craig Gingrich-Philbrook that "such a checklist makes so
much more sense as something developed over time and experience,
something that changes and grows, adapts to different writers, writing
different projects, for different purposes, at different times."[19]

The first three categories listed above flow directly from the method's name. They reflect back to the definition of AE by Ellis, Adams and Bochner: "Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)."[20] While the *auto* and *ethno* considerations are germane to all autoethnographies, the manner in which it is written (graphy) and the criteria used to evaluate the various genres of autoethnography differ radically. All autoethnographies need to start with personal experience and reflection and somehow use the personal to illuminate the larger culture. However, when writing *evocative* (creative) forms of autoethnography like poetry, drama, short stories, and so on, the aesthetics of the genre need to be considered in evaluation. With *analytical* autoethnographies, where academic prose and style play more of a role, the qualities and structure of academic prose are naturally a consideration.

As with any relational research method, in autoethnography ethical concerns rise to a high level. While the author is writing their own story from their own perspective, stories inevitably involve other people. Care must be taken when using real people in our stories; we need to ask questions like How much anonymity is needed for each "character"? Should we ask for permission to include a character? Perhaps we should allow the characters in our stories to review what we write, and even voice their own viewpoints in our work (it may even end up more of a collaboratively authored piece)?

A personal example of ethics in autoethnography is where I quote the journal editors' response to our request to do a special issue on autoethnography (above). I felt compelled, because of my relationship to the editors, to contact them and let them know that I wanted to include their comments in my narrative, as they had such a catalyzing effect on my research. I gave them different options on how I might both include their comments (direct quotes, with or without attribution, paraphrasing, etc.) while at the same time respecting their wishes regarding their needs and desires around anonymity, if they had any. With relationship comes responsibility, and some responsibilities also ask that the author is as honest as possible and interrogates their own position and privileges as well as others'.

As well as being reflexive and critical, autoethnographies need to move us to action. Autoethnographies are unabashedly tied to social justice aims, and many authors hope, by their research, to change themselves and their cultures. The author of an autoethnography also hopes for empathy, understanding, motivation, and transformation in the reader.

While the authors of autoethnographies have many goals for their individual works, the idea of evaluative criteria for such subjective works has met with resistance. The main critique of this idea is that "evaluative criteria," especially supposed objective criteria, are really just a by-product of the positivist research paradigm. In discussing the dilemma of evaluation in current social research Dean Garratt and Phil Hodkinson note that

> as academics we would strive to increase the extent to which the reasons for the judgment are made discursively explicit. What this means is that the selection of criteria for making an interpretive judgement about research will partly depend on the standpoint from which the person making the judgement views the work. There is no external reference point from which to make the selection about which criteria to adopt, and any attempt to universalize preagreed criteria is therefore bound to fail.[21]

In a world of scientific research and quantitative data, with objective standards for validity and rigor, and with the desire for wide applicability and generalizability, such criteria can seem to make sense. However, the new interpretivist, critical, feminist, and Indigenous researchers (including autoethnographers) are not looking for objective knowledge that exists outside of themselves, their community, and their readers. The goal of autoethnography rather, is understanding and transformation—so what role can evaluative criteria play in the assessment and review of such individualistic and subjective works? In regard to criteria for the evaluation of research, the goals of autoethnographic researchers would seem to be at odds with the needs of the editors of journals and the reviewers of their articles.

One idea that Kenneth Gergen floats is that local communities of qualitative researchers can create their own criteria that help them

review, evaluate, and create better research.[22] Might not a "local community" be a discipline, an academic journal, or research community? I would suggest that the dozen and a half authors of AEs for this book, plus the three editors, comprise such a community. Each of the chapters in this book has been reviewed by one other author plus one of the editors. We used the list of criteria I gleaned from my readings (the appendix) as a starting point. Each author picked criteria from the list, ones that resonated with the goals they had for their own chapter. They were encouraged to change any of the criteria and to invent new ones as needed. The list they individually created was the criteria that the reviewers used to help make sure they met their goals.

Once we reviewed as least the first draft of each chapter of this book, I surveyed each of the author-reviewers with questions about how the review went. Hoping to get feedback of the efficacy of criteria from my local community, I asked the following questions:

- Was the list of evaluative criteria provided helpful in determining useful criteria for your individual AE? In what ways was it helpful? If it wasn't helpful, why?

- How did you feel about developing and using the criteria for your AE's evaluation?

- Which criteria did you use from the list?

- Did you modify any of the criteria from the list to better match your individual AE?

- Did you independently create any criteria? What were they?

- Were the reviews by your peer and an editor, using the criteria you chose, helpful to you in creating a stronger work?

- You also used criteria to review another author's work. Did the criteria you were given with which to evaluate their work help or hinder your review? How?

- What other thoughts do you have about using evaluative criteria and AEs?

Six of the chapter authors responded to my survey. Because this was the first foray into autoethnographic writing for almost all of us, all six of the reviewers responded that having the criteria to choose from helped them focus more precisely on their task. After using their criteria, they also *felt* good. One author, who is used to sharing their writing drafts a lot, thought formalizing their chosen criteria was helpful, and two others said, "It was comforting to be able to communicate directly to my reviewers what I hope to achieve with my writing" and "The criteria provided comfort that I had in fact actually written an AE." None of the authors modified any of the existing criteria, but they did add some questions or concerns of their own to the list. One author noted that they thought that "using criteria, instead of questions, likely encourages a more robust and critical response from a reviewer/evaluator/reader." One author felt that during the revision process the criteria felt "aspirational" and helped them keep focused on their revision. Another author pointed out how the criteria, especially with respect to AEs, made the reviews feel less of a critique:

> The process was less about evaluation, in the end, and more about creating a conversation about perceptions of the draft. I think this is particularly useful for AE writing, where at times the subject matter might be rather personal and a reader/reviewer may hesitate to critique or question the subject matter of the author's approach. The evaluative criteria create a sort of formal layer of mediation—it gives both the reader and the writer a comfortable space where critique can happen without concerns related to sensitivity about the subject of the AE.

The survey respondents also found the criteria to be equally as useful in reviewing another author's work. One respondent wrote, "I was able to focus not just on a review of the overall piece but also on what the author herself indicated she hoped to accomplish in her work," reiterating the comment above that talked about how the criteria helped make the peer review more of a supportive conversation than a traditional critique. One respondent noted that the timing of the use of the criteria, during the review process and not prior to beginning writing, might be key. In this way the virtue of the criteria

moved beyond evaluation to "also a way of reseeing the text. Since our AE texts are often so personal, I think that can be difficult—re-drafting is writing again, re-vising is seeing again—and if you're dealing with a very personal topic that may be challenging to tackle a writer." Another comment echoed my motivations in embarking on this research project: "I think using criteria for AE makes the peer review process stronger and lets the readers know that AEs are reputable work in academia." Taking the idea of self-developed or applied criteria out of this smaller AE sphere, one person noted: "Writing this feedback now makes me wonder whether asking authors for some evaluative criteria (or some kind of statement of intent) with every article submitted to a journal/book might not be useful; something in addition to the journal's own policies?"

After I created my list of potential evaluative criteria, I glanced over to a pile of articles I had labeled "not used." In my usual research mode I would have probably never returned to them, but heeding AE's call for reflection, I felt I wanted to interrogate my summary rejection of them a bit further. As I reread some of these initially rejected sources, I felt a bit uneasy and unsettled, and I began to reflect on the source of my discomfort. When I first read Hughes, Pennington, and Makris's article "Translating Autoethnography across the AERA Standards," I had recoiled.[23] In their article they looked at the American Education Research Association's (AERA's) *Standards for Reporting on Empirical Social Science Research in AERA Publications* and attempted to "translate" autoethnography to them.[24] These *Standards* were made for the use of educational researchers and manuscript reviews and were meant to support the creation of high-quality empirical education research through the use of transparent standards.[25] However, by doing this translation, the authors seemed to be trying to colonize autoethnography—making it pass for "real" scientific research. And the positive and ringing conclusion to their article made me feel questioning, queasy, and less than satisfied. This feeling was what I had reacted to in my initial assessment of this article and the reason I had initially chosen to not use it in this chapter. I think part of my unease at rereading it is thinking that I am trying to do the same thing in constructing my list of evaluative criteria. When I reread the article I noticed the authors' motivation for their translation is very similar to mine:

> Indeed, our epistemological agenda is not to push *our* thoughts about autoethnography as *the* correct and *authentic* methodological musings. Instead, we intend to translate autoethnographic research across the standards en route to opening the method to a broader audience of AERA's empirical researchers and to open readers to a deeper understanding of and widened respect for autoethnography as an empirical endeavor.… In this way our discussion is accordingly limited to what autoethnography *can do* rather that what autoethnography *must do*.[26]

Knowing that their intentions were as "noble" as mine somehow did not make me feel any better.

The list that Hughes, Pennington, and Makris created clashes with a list from another of my initial pool of rejected resources. It was created by Patti Lather in her article "Fertile Obsession: Validity after Poststructuralism."[27] While her list was initially shocking, I laughed when I read it. Her Transgressive Validity Checklist contains "scandalous categories" such as "Ironic Validity," "Rhizomatic Validity," and "Voluptuous Validity."[28] Lather uses key concepts from postmodern philosophers to explore the concept of validity. True confession time—I am by no means a philosopher, and at any of the rare times I seem to "get" postmodernists I'm immediately skeptical of my own abilities and next wonder if this unsettling feeling is just what these pranksters set out to elicit. Zen-like, I move rapidly from "I got it" to "I got that there is nothing to get" to then HA HA HA! But it's laughter that mixes with a simultaneous feeling of vertigo. This laughter peels away deceptions, yes, but the realization of my actual predicament leaves me sweaty. The uncertainty with regard to absolutes in terms of research and quality makes me feel at once giddy with freedom, yet overcome by nausea. Lather's scandalous categories contain many funny and foreign ideas, yet their humorous presentation invites me to deeper analysis and realizations about the (seemingly endless and ever-changing) possibilities they hold. Perhaps because of my lack of understanding of postmodernism, while I don't need the feeling of a continent beneath me, at least a raft would be of some comfort.

Looking at the choice between the empirical translation of autoethnography suggested by Hughes, Pennington, and Makris and the unsettling nihilism (because of my ignorance?) of Lather's postmodernism, I'm finding myself, tentatively, in a middle place. In his exploration of potential evaluative criteria for developing qualitative research in psychology, Kenneth Gergen argues for "reflective pragmatism."[29] He states, "In asking whether the research practice matches the goals of inquiry, the question of excellence in practice per se is diminished, and the assumptive background of the practice becomes muted. We move, then to a fully pragmatic orientation to inquiry. The chief question becomes, 'what do you want to accomplish?'"[30] Eschewing researcher-based criteria for the evaluation of new quantitative works such as autoethnography, Dean Garratt and Phil Hodkinson suggest the readers themselves are the judges, and the readers should ask questions such as "Does this account work for us? Do we find it to be believable and evocative on the basis of our own experiences?"[31] They go on to say that any attempt to fall back on predetermined criteria supports "the false belief that it is possible to use criteria as a means of removing our values from the evaluation of the research, so that if we can say that a piece of research has satisfied preordained standards, then we can comfort ourselves in the knowledge that this judgment was made on the basis of fact and rigorous method, unpolluted by subjective opinion."[32] It seems to me that the usefulness or value to the reader of any research is one useful criterion, so I may be somewhat of a pragmatist myself. Lincoln critiques the development and use of standards in qualitative research by describing a discussion by John Smith, noting that "the issue of criteria does indeed determine what will be presented and what will be published. And those things, as Smith points out, have very clear implications not only for the social status of research knowledge, but also for the careers of social science researchers. Criteria viewed from this vantage point, particularly these criteria, which are aimed at publication, serve a strong exclusionary legitimation function."[33] In my role as an author, at times seeking to publish X number of peer-reviewed articles in order to get promoted and tenured, and in my role as a journal editor, desiring to bring "the best" scholarship to my readers, I stand accused, tried, and sentenced by this quote. In the

also pragmatic feeling of rendering unto editorial review boards and promotion and tenure committees what is their due, I feel that having locally produced criteria for evaluation of autoethnographies could, in this real academic world we live in, also be political and helpful— political in that the criteria would show more rigor to the autoethnographic method and help to gain recognition for it, and helpful in the sense that this rigor would support librarians' individual bids for promotion and tenure by legitimizing this form and lending more weight to its creation in the promotion and tenure process.

Thinking back to Ellis, Adams, and Bochner's definition of autoethnography as a combination of both art and science, I still wonder if this marriage of disciplines will work. In "Evaluating Ethnography," Richardson says, "Creative art is one lens through which to view the world: analytical/science is another. We see better with two lenses. We see best with both lenses focused and magnified."[34] By wedding art and science in one work, we are asking a lot of authors, journal editors, and readers. We are asking them to see the usefulness, value, and validity in forms and explorations once reserved to artists, fiction writers, and storytellers. Many librarians can quickly parse out the logical flaws in quantitative research: results that don't show hypotheses, faulty data collection, or overgeneralized claims—it's what we've been trained to do. With this new mash-up of genres, and indeed with varied goals for inquiry and research, and with no training or external criteria to confirm our personal understandings of autoethnographies, we may all be feeling a bit adrift without a compass. Yet one of the cruxes of my dilemma with formulating these criteria goes back to my nervousness around the idea of power. Bocher says, "Criteria always have a restrictive, limiting, regressive, thwarting, halting quality to them, and they can never be completely separated from the structures of power in which they are situated."[35] As a journal editor and reviewer of manuscripts, I grapple with this uneasy proposition constantly. On one hand I want to facilitate the publication of worthy, useful, and provocative research, yet on the other hand I feel compelled to bring quality to our readers.

Since the middle of the twentieth century, in the United States at least, with the offering of the GI Bill many nontraditional students

have been attending college and university. People from lower socio-economic groups, as well as a more limited number of minorities, were allowed to take advantage of this entrée into academe. Beginning in the 60s and 70s, nontraditional faculty, along with students and community groups, helped to establish new programs in women's studies; African American and black studies; Chicano studies; gay, lesbian, and queer studies; and Native American and Indigenous studies. With these new programs have come new ways of being and knowing into the academy. New research methods based on critical race theory, feminist theory, queer theory, critical theory, or ableism now exist in many disciplines, research that necessarily aims not at finding universal and objective truths that exist outside of researchers, but rather seeks to create socially constructed understandings and meanings, bound by historical times and places, that acknowledge, include, and often relish the subjectivity and lived experiences of the authors.

For myself, as a first-generation college student, much of what I've been researching for the past few years has been motivated by a desire to understand my own path through the American education system, starting with kindergarten in 1958 all the way through my MLIS in 1995. Many theories and theorists from these "new departments" on campus, which were just forming as I graduated as an undergrad in 1976, ring true to me—people like Paolo Freire, bell hooks, Shawn Wilson, and Pierre Bourdieu. The many nontraditional students that I've been teaching and learning from, in programs like the McNair Scholars and Summer Bridge, have inspired me as well. Doing research with them I join in their struggles to tell their stories and make meaning for themselves as they navigate and negotiate these academic spaces, staking claims to the university of their future, of *our* future. In reflecting on the struggle of these nontraditional students and myself, I see us wrestling with issues of identity, validity, and legitimacy in the academy, issues that have been echoed on a more macrocosmic level by departments such as black studies, women's studies, and LBGT studies. In many ways this resonance makes perfect sense as many of these nontraditional students are members of groups who initially created these departments. I am also struck by how the theme of this chapter, on the relationship of autoethnog-

raphy to LIS, echoes this struggle for academic identity, validity, and legitimacy.

In this chapter I've tried to embrace, as well I can, this new (to me) form of analytical autoethnography. It has allowed me to grapple with my research in ways I've never done before, like by creating my first-ever zine for a conference presentation that I did as this project developed.[36] This method and the learning community we created to write this book has also allowed me to find a supportive and thoughtful group of co-researchers that I only dreamed about in my first article on Indigenous research methods—perhaps by researching our dreams in public, our dreams can come true?[37] In the learning community for this book, not only were we intellectually engaged with the ideas of autoethnography, but also the personal nature of this research and our stories allowed us to connect more quickly and on levels not afforded by usual research projects. For me this chapter, this autoethnography of a librarian-researcher, has made me reflect on my own experiences with research and to connect them in ways to my academic library community. I'm hopeful that it might help you, as you read this, to also connect to your own experiences as librarian-researchers and perhaps help you to make sense of your own research journeys as well. This autoethnographic experiment is working for me, but only you, the readers, will know if it works for you.

I would like to thank Anne-Marie Deitering and Rick Stoddart for allowing me to insinuate myself into their adventure into autoethnography. I would also like to thank our whole learning community, those who wrote chapters in the end and those who didn't, for wholeheartedly embracing this adventure too. Their earnestness, intellect, and spirit made this the most amazing learning experience of my life. For me, they have opened up new ways of seeing and researching that will keep me questioning for years to come. To quote the Grateful Dead, "What a long, strange trip it's been!"

Notes

1. Terry Tafoya, "Finding Harmony: Balancing Traditional Values with Western Science in Therapy," *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 21 suppl (1995): 12.

2. Robert Schroeder, "Exploring Critical and Indigenous Research Methods with a Research Community: Part I—The Leap," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe,* June 18, 2014, http://www.inthelibrary-withtheleadpipe.org/2014/exploring-the-leap; Robert Schroeder, "Exploring Critical and Indigenous Research Methods with a Research Community: Part II—The Landing," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe,* December 3, 2014, http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2014/exploring-the-landing.

3. For more discussion of research methods and their implications see my article "Exploring Critical and Indigenous Research Methods with a Research Community: Part II."

4. Marion Namenwirth is more forgiving when she says, "Scientists firmly believe that as long as they are not conscious of any bias or political agenda, they are neutral and objective, when in fact they are only unconscious." Marion Namenwirth, "Science through a Feminist Prism," in *Feminist Approaches to Science*, ed. Ruth Blier (New York: Pergamon Press, 1986), 29.

5. For examples of writing about Indigenous research methods and arguments in support of their inclusion in the academy, see Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony*. (Black Point, Nova Scotia: Fernwood, 2008); Cora Weber-Pillwax, "Indigenous Research Methodology: Exploratory Discussion of an Elusive Subject," *Journal of Educational Thought/Revue de la pensée educative* 33 no. 1, (1999): 31–45; Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies.* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Mary Hermes, "Research Methods as a Situated Response: Towards a First Nations' Methodology," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 11, no. 1 (1998): 155–68.

6. Michele Santamaría, one of the coauthors of this book, read an early version of this chapter and cautioned me regarding the prior sentences where I imply some relation between Indigenous and autoethnographic writing: "The parallel is there, but I would caution against drawing it too quickly. Aside from methodologies, there are the very real power imbalances of traditional fieldwork, years and years of 'othering' indigenous subjects and not letting them speak for themselves… power imbalances between indigenous research and librarian autoethnogra-

phy are nowhere near analogous." I'm thankful that Michele pointed that out, and I agree with her assessment.

7. Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview," Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social research 12, no. 1 (January 2011): article 10. http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095%3Cbr.

8. Chronologically: David Michels, "The Place of the Person in LIS Research: An Exploration in Methodology and Representation/La place de la personne dans la recherche en bibliothéconomie et en sciences de l'information: Exploration des méthodologies et des représentations," *Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science* 34, no. 2 (2010): 161–83; Sarah Polkinghorne, "Caught in the Act: An Autoethnographic Analysis of the Performance of Information Literacy Instruction," in *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of CAIS/Actes du congrès annuel de l'ACSI,* ed. Anabel Quan-Hease, Victoria L. Rubin, and Debbie Chaves (Waterloo, ON: ACSI/CAIS, 2012). https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/ojs.cais-acsi.ca/index.php/cais-asci/article/view/656; Elysia Guzik, "Representing Ourselves in Information Science Research: A Methodological Essay on Autoethnography/La représentation de nous-mêmes dans la recherche en sciences de l'information: Essai méthodologique sur l'auto-ethnographie," *Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science* 37, no. 4 (2013): 267–83; C. Sean Burns, "The Scholarly Journal and Disciplinary Identity: An Autoethnographic Reading of *The Library Quarterly*" (presentation, Association for Library and Information Science [ALISE] Annual Conference, Philadelphia, PA, January 21–24, 2014); Sarah Polkinghorne, "Come Sail Away with Me: Harnessing Auto-ethnographic Observations to Inform a Multi-method Study of Librarians' Reflections on Teaching," (presentation, Annual Conference of ACSI/CAIS, Victoria, BC, Canada, June 2013).

9. After I had done my research and wrote this chapter, I came across a presentation by Erin and Dave Hudson from 2011, which in many ways paralleled my journey in this chapter. In their presentation, they used an autoethnographic method to interrogate research methods in LIS, although they didn't name it as such. Erin Fields and Dave Hudson, "Beyond Library 'Science'" (presentation, Annual Conference of the British Columbia Library Association, Victoria, BC, Canada, April 9, 2011). Part 1 is available at https://vimeo.com/22185716, part 2 at https://vimeo.com/22490223.

10. Lynn Silipigni Connaway and Ronald R. Powell, *Basic Research Methods for Librarians*, 5th ed., Library and Information Science Text Series (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2010).

11. Barbara Wildemuth discusses about fourteen research methods, Beck and Manuel discuss eight, Cook and Farmer use six, and Mellon discusses five: Barbara Wildemuth, *Applications of Social Research Methods to Questions in Information and Library Science* (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2009); Susan E. Beck and Kate Manuel, *Practical Research Methods for Librarians and Information Professionals* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 2008); Douglas Cook and Lesley Farmer, *Using Qualitative Methods in Action Research* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2011); Constance A. Mellon, *Naturalistic Inquiry for Library Science*, Contributions in Librarianship and Information Science, No. 64 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990).

12. Nicholas L. Holt, "Representation, Legitimation, and Autoethnography: An Autoethnographic Writing Story," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 2, no. 1 (2003): 19.

13. Archie L. Dick, "Library and Information Science as a Social Science: Neutral and Normative Conceptions," *Library Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (1995): 216–35; Birger Hjørland, "Empiricism, Rationalism and Positivism in Library and Information Science," *Journal of Documentation* 61, no. 1 (2005): 130–55; Gary P. Radford, "Trapped in Our Own Discursive Formations: Toward an Archaeology of Library and Information Science," *Library Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (2003): 1–18.

14. Thomas A. Schwandt, "Farewell to Criteriology," *Qualitative Inquiry* 2, no. 1 (1996): 58.

15. Arthur P. Bochner, "Criteria against Ourselves," *Qualitative Inquiry* 6, no. 2 (2000): 267. When reading my first draft of this chapter, Michele Santamaría offered up this sage observation: "On a conceptual level, I would argue that it isn't just a social sciences insecurity thing but that library science researchers have felt especially insecure even within the hierarchy of social sciences for a number of reasons, including and not least of which, that the profession has been and continues to be female-dominated. Being the 'girliest girl of them all' in a group of disciplines that wants desperately to prove that it isn't 'soft/girly' but actually 'hard/male/rigorous' places librarianship in an interesting position in terms of trying to prove its 'credibility.'" Michele also offers up two resources that discuss the gendered nature of our profession: Jessica Olin and Michelle Millet, "Gendered Expectations for Leader-

ship in Libraries," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe,* November 4, 2015, http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/libleadgender; and Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

16. Delia D. Dumitrica, "Choosing Methods, Negotiating Legitimacy. A Metalogue on Autoethnography," *Graduate Journal of Social Science* 7, no. 1 (2010): 18–38; Holt, "Representation, Legitimation, and Autoethnography"; Eric Mykhalovskiy, "Reconsidering Table Talk: Critical Thoughts on the Relationship between Sociology, Autobiography and Self-indulgence," *Qualitative Sociology* 19, no. 1 (1996): 131–51; Clair Doloriert and Sally Sambrook, "Accommodating an Autoethnographic PhD: The Tale of the Thesis, the Viva Voce, and the Traditional Business School," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 40, no. 5 (2011): 582–615; Andrew C. Sparkes, "Autoethnography and Narratives of Self: Reflections on Criteria in Action," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 17, no. 1 (2000): 21–43; and Andrew C. Sparkes, "Autoethnography: Self-indulgence or Something More," in *Ethnographically Speaking: Autoethnography, Literature, and Aesthetics*, ed. Arthur P. Bochner and Carolyn Ellis, Ethnographic Alternatives Book Series (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002, 209-232.

17. Sparkes, "Autoethnography and Narratives of Self," 37–38.

18. These twelve sources are listed at the end of the appendix to this chapter.

19. Craig Gingrich-Philbrook, "Evaluating (Evaluations of) Autoethnography," in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, ed. Stacy Linn Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, 2013), 619.

20. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, "Autoethnography."

21. Dean Garratt and Phil Hodkinson, "Can There Be Criteria for Selecting Research Criteria?—A Hermeneutical Analysis of an Inescapable Dilemma," *Qualitative Inquiry*, 4 no. 4 (1998): 522.

22. Kenneth J. Gergen, "Pursuing Excellence in Qualitative Inquiry," *Qualitative Psychology* 1, no. 1 (2014): 58.

23. Sherik Hughes, Julie L. Pennington, and Sara Makris, "Translating Autoethnography across the AERA Standards: Toward Understanding Autoethnographic Scholarship as Empirical Research," *Educational Researcher* 41, no. 6 (2012): 209–19.

24. American Educational Research Association, *Standards for Reporting on Empirical Social Science Research in AERA Publications* (Washing-

ton, DC: American Educational Research Association, 2006), http://
www.aera.net/Portals/38/docs/12ERv35n6_Standard4Report%20.pdf.

25. Hughes, Pennington, and Makris, "Translating Autoethnography," 212.

26. Ibid., 211.

27. Patti Lather, "Fertile Obsession: Validity after Poststructuralism,"
Sociological Quarterly 34 no. 4 (November 1993): 673–93.

28. Ibid., 686.

29. Gergen, "Pursuing Excellence in Qualitative Inquiry," 58.

30. Ibid.

31. Garratt and Hodkinson, "Can There Be Criteria," 526.

32. Ibid., 535.

33. Yvonna S. Lincoln, "Emerging Criteria for Quality in Qualitative and
Interpretive Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 1, no. 3 (1995): 279.

34. Laurel Richardson, "Evaluating Ethnography," *Qualitative Inquiry* 6,
no. 2 (2000): 254.

35. Bochner, "Criteria against Ourselves," 269.

36. See "BiblioBob and the Empiricists of Doom" in Robert Schroeder,
"Who's to Judge? The Conundrum of Evaluative Criteria for Autoeth-
nographic Research" (panel presentation, Northeast Modern Language
Association Conference, Hartford, CT, March 2016), http://pdxschol-
ar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1197&context=ulib_fac.

37. See Schroeder, "Exploring Critical and Indigenous Research Methods
with a Research Community: Part I."

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Appendix—Possible Criteria for Review and Evaluation of AEs

The number after each criterion below indicates the work from which it came. The works are cited at the end of the appendix. I tried to quote the authors directly, so these criteria will not necessarily all make sense when looked at as a whole.

Revealing the Self (auto)

"Uses a researcher's personal experience to describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences."[1]

"Shows people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles."[2]

"Values personal and experiential."[3]

Fidelity—"fidelity to what happened for that person."[4]

"A narrative of the self" that, through stories, "give[s] a measure of coherence and continuity that was not available at the original moment of experience."[5]

"Reflexivity."[6]

"A self-narrative that extracts meaning from experience rather than depicting exactly as it was lived."[7]

The author is a member of the group being studied—has complete member status.[8]

"Expresses a reality: Does this text embody a fleshed out, embodied sense of lived-experience?"[9]

Critically reflects and represents how one's material body (color, gender, size, shape, etc.) interacts with and reacts to the people and sociocultural contexts of the experience.[10]

Exploring Culture/Society (ethno)

"Uses deep and careful self-reflection (reflexivity) to name and interrogate the intersections between self and society, the particular

and the general, the personal and the political."[11]

Focus on others as well as self.[12]

"Sociocultural context—Identif[ies] and describe[s] the socio-logical norms and expectation of the cultural context in which your story/experience takes places." This includes norms about gender, religion, class, race, and so on, and the values illustrated through these norms. Extant power systems are identified and critiqued.[13]

"Critical self-reflection involves examining one's social/cultural/political standpoint with the context."[14]

"Self-other interaction… shows that the self is constructed through interactions with others," and "Our engagement with others [can] make or break normalized social exceptions and/or dominant cultural norms."[15]

Storycraft (graphy)

Balances narration with analysis and cultural interpretation.[16]

Relies on more than just personal memory and recalling as a data source.[17]

"Balances intellectual and methodological rigor, emotion, and creativity."[18]

"Demonstrates the power, craft, and responsibilities of stories and storytelling."[19]

"Researcher is visible, active, and reflexively engaged in the text."[20]

"Use[s] conventions of storytelling such as character, scene, and plot." Shows as well as tells.[21]

"The reader is helped to 'understand and feel with a story.'" Help can be offered via concrete detail: not just facts, but feelings; complex narratives that reflect the nonlinearity of time; author is shown to be emotionally credible, vulnerable, and honest; the author shows struggling with self-awareness and transformation; the story is moving and shows what life can mean.[22]

Verisimilitude—"[the writing] evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable and possible."[23]

"A good story is decidedly more metonymic that augmentative. In other words, good stories strive to use relational language and narrative styles to create a purposeful dialogue between the readers and the authors."[24]

"A good story is a good read."[25]

"Aesthetic merit."[26]

Ethics

"Acknowledges and values a researcher's relationships with others."[27]

"Takes a relationally responsible approach to research practice and representation."[28]

Is ethical in regard to others in self-narratives.[29]

"Text displays honesty or authenticity 'comes clean' about its own stance and about the position of the author."[30]

Communitarian—research "serve[s] the purposes of the community in which it was carried out."[31]

Voice—"who speaks, for whom, to whom, [and] for what purpose."[32]

Shares the perquisites of privilege with those being studied. Also is honest about the privileges enjoyed by the author.[33]

Social Justice/ Transformation

"Strives for social justice and to make life better."[34]

"It affects and influences us."[35]

We should identify with the author, but "such relational inducements [should] serve the greater purpose of getting us to read in ways that challenge or further what we know. The author needs to write about the self in ways that lead to readers' personal reflection."[36]

"Helps readers communicate with others different from themselves or offer[s] a way to improve the lives of participants and readers or the author's own."[37]

Sacredness—"emerges from a profound concern for human dignity, justice, and interpersonal respect" as well as a "concern for the physical environment and its resources."[38]

"Motivate[s] cultural criticism and experimental writing to be open to the future."[39]

Unclassified Criteria

Critical subjectivity—"understanding with great discrimination subtle differences in the personal and psychological states of others" as well as "one's psychological and emotional states before, during, and after the research experience."[40]

"Formulates social scientific problems."[41]

"Facilitates critical, careful and thoughtful discussion of methodological choices and claims."[42]

"Offers multiple levels of critical analysis, including self-critique, naming privilege and penalty, and selection classification schemes and units of analysis while being critically self-reflective about the selection criteria."[43]

"Provides opportunities for credible analysis and interpretation of evidence from narratives and connects them to researching the self via triangulation, member-checks, and related ethical issues."[44]

"Makes contributions to knowledge."[45]

"Substantial contribution."[46]

"Shows commitment to theoretical analysis."[47]

"Good scholarly new ethnography usually produces scholarly talk and editorial controversy."[48]

"Impact: Does this affect me? emotionally? intellectually? generate new questions? move me to write? move me to try new research practices? move me to action?"[49]

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9. Richardson, "Evaluating Ethnography," 254.

10. Tami Spry, *Body, Paper, Stage: Writing and Performing Autoethnography*, Qualitative Inquiry and Social Justice (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2011), 126–34.

11. Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis, *Autoethnography*, 1–2.

12. Heewon Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, Developing Qualitative Inquiry, vol. 1 (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2008), 54.

13. Spry, *Body, Paper, Stage*, 126–34.

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25. Ibid.

26. Richardson, "Evaluating Ethnography," 254.

27. Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis, *Autoethnography*, 1–2.

28. Ibid., 102.

29. Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, 54.

30. Yvonna S. Lincoln, "Emerging Criteria for Quality in Qualitative and Interpretive Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 1, no. 3 (1995): 275–89.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis, *Autoethnography*, 1–2.

35. Goodall, *Writing the New Ethnography*, 195–96.

36. Ibid.

37. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview".

38. Lincoln, "Emerging Criteria for Quality," 275–89.

39. Patricia Ticineto Clough, "Comments on Setting Criteria for Experimental Writing," Qualitative Inquiry 6, no. 2 (2000): 278–91.

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42. Ibid.

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