SEAN D. HERNÁNDEZ ADKINS AND SHERICK HUGHES

Back to the Future of Autoethnography

INTRODUCTION

In the final chapter of the pioneering textbook *Autoethnography: Process, Product and Possibility for Critical Social Research*, Hughes and Pennington attempt to anticipate the future of autoethnography. That anticipated future was constructed from an exhaustive interdisciplinary review of literature on autoethnography from its historical beginnings through 2015. The textbook included autoethnographic processes and products continuing to take on multiple forms, including, but not limited to, empirical peer-reviewed research, memoirs, personal essays, short stories, journals, scripts, poetry, and performances. Hughes and Pennington anticipated the future of autoethnography as involving sustained questions of rigor coupled with sustained growth of its possibilities as critical social research. In addition to the over twenty established iterations of autoethnography described in Hughes and Pennington, the authors anticipated that lesser-known and less frequently published forms of autoethnography would continue to grow and inform researchers' work internationally.

The growth of three additional creative directions in autoethnography was also anticipated: (1) autoethnography and the arts, including arts education and music education; (2) autoethnography and mental and physical health/well-being, including nursing education; and (c) autoethnography in/as coursework. Although the future of autoethnography evolved mostly as Hughes and Pennington anticipated, it is logical to consider information that the textbook did not anticipate.[1]

For this article, I (Hughes) invited a new collaborator (Hernández Adkins) to return back to thinking about the future of autoethnography and to address the question: "What previously unanticipated areas of growth and possibility emerge from a renewed exploration of the evolution of autoethnography in/as educational research?" In this article, we address unanticipated areas of growth, including (a) the evolution of autoethnography as a decolonizing methodology with a particular focus on the growth of collaborative autoethnography, and (b) the multidisciplinary evolution of autoethnography as an

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educational research tool in two of the "25 most valuable college majors"[2] in U.S. higher education (i.e., pharmacy and medicine). We conclude by imagining a promising possibility for collaborative autoethnographers of educational research to consider.

DECOLONIZING AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Following growing movements across the disciplines and methodologies, autoethnographers have begun to explore what it might mean to decolonize autoethnography. The initial call toward decolonizing methodologies was made by Linda Tuhiwai Smith[3] in her influential book of the same name. At its most basic level, decolonizing methodologies opened conversations aimed at reversing the exploitative legacies of social science methods, particularly with Indigenous peoples. In the twenty years since, Indigenous scholars and their co-authors have both extended and refined the aims of decolonization. Perhaps most notably is Tuck and Yang's declaration that decolonization is not a metaphor.[4] The articles discussed below reflect both the breadth and specificity of the contemporary decolonization movement.

Of the articles in the past three years that identify themselves as decolonizing autoethnographies, the majority are found in a special issue of *Cultural Studies ←→ Critical Methodologies*, many of which depart from a postcolonial paradigm. For instance, both Dutta and Basu[5] and Presley and Presswood[6] work to unsettle the easy ascription to their positionalities toward a complex discussion of allyship across differentially marginalized and privileged groups. The articles by Atay,[7] Bhattachyarya,[8] Chandrashekar,[9] Fitzpatrick,[10] and Nziba Pindi[11] offer explorations not only of ontologies of "home" as place and (sometimes in opposition to) academia but also new visions of settlers in postcolonial contexts. Notably, two authors highlight the connections between autoethnography and Indigenous ways of knowing through storytelling.[12] Toyosaki[13] delivers an honest answer to the question of "can autoethnography decolonize" with a resounding "no." However, Toyosaki insists that autoethnographers "need to explicitly and collaboratively fail differently"[14] in the challenge to (post)colonial hegemonies.

One such possibility of failing differently (i.e., productively) is the co-theorized *concaminando* that emerged from the collaborative interpretation of the interactions of U.S. undergraduate students with Indigenous peoples, land, and language in what is currently known as Mexico.[15] This newly developed theory toward decolonizing U.S. minds was only made possible through an autoethnographic approach that melded the thoughts of four authors across borders into one voice.

This particular practice of singular voice employed by Delavan and colleagues is in line with one mode of decolonizing work in higher education: refusing individual claims to knowledge (i.e., authorship) as property. *Indígena* scholar Sandy Grande offers writing-as-a-collective as a method of refusing the settler colonial university.[16] Such a collective approach is readily available not only for future directions of decolonizing autoethnographies but also its various collaborative forms.

COLLABORATIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

According to Chang, Ngunjiri, and Hernandez[17] in their book *Collaborative Autoethnography*, this somewhat counterintuitively "collaborative, autobiographical, and ethnographic"[18] method affords connecting and textured analysis across and beyond individual subjectivities. The authors offer this helpful metaphor:

> Autoethnography is to a solo performance as collaborative autoethnography is to an ensemble. While the combination of instruments creates a unique musical piece, the success of the composition is dependent on the authentic and unique contribution of each instrument. In collaborative autoethnography, each participant contributes to the collective work in his or her distinct and independent voice. At the same time, the combination of multiple voices to interrogate a social phenomenon creates a unique synergy and harmony that autoethnographers cannot attain in isolation.[19]

Beyond the synergy and harmony afforded to collaborative approaches to autoethnography, the addition of other voices, subjectivities, and perspectives lends greater rigor to the method.[20] In order to maintain the legibility and rigor of collaborative autoethnography, Breault[21] and Pensoneau-Conway, Bolen, Toyosaki, Rudick, and Bolen[22] echo previous calls for clarity of method and procedure. However, there remains some critique for how collaborative autoethnography is asked to fit pre-existing categories and formats in the social sciences.[23] It is precisely the attention to legibility and rigor of collaborative autoethnography and other iterations of the method that seem to have attracted the attention of scholars from two unanticipated research areas outside the social sciences—pharmaceutical education and medical education. Top-tier, peer-reviewed journals published pioneering calls for autoethnography in pharmaceutical education (*American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*—The Journal of the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy) and medical education (*Medical Education*), as described in the next section.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY IN/AS PHARMACEUTICAL EDUCATION RESEARCH

Autoethnography is a burgeoning method[24] in Latin America[25] and Brazil.[26] Writing for a critical global audience, Brazilian scholar Ramalho-de-Oliveira makes the case for growing the nascent use of autoethnography in pharmaceutical education, particularly to aid the field's shift from prescription provider to centering patient care. The "patient-centered component of pharmacy practice asks for a professional who is more reflective, self-aware and attuned to the lived experiences of other people. The new pharmacist practitioner has to build therapeutic relationships with patients."[27] This shift to patient-practitioner relationships through autoethnography parallels the reflexive practices already under way in occupational therapy.

As Ramalho-de-Oliveira argues, autoethnography can enhance pharmacy education in at least three ways. Perhaps most intuitively, patient autoethnographies (i.e., illness autoethnographies) expose and counter the often impersonal and over-medicalized patient experience. Second, employing autoethnography in the pharmacy curriculum opens opportunities for honest and reflexive practice that helps students to center further the

patient experience. Doing so also lays the groundwork for lifelong reflexive practice beyond the curriculum. Third, consistent with other practice-based autoethnographies, autoethnographic research by practicing pharmacists and scholars is intended to deepen the knowledge of patient-centered practices and provide new questions for further research, including and beyond the autoethnographic.[28]

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY IN/AS MEDICAL EDUCATION RESEARCH

A team of faculty comprised of clinician-educators from the University of British Columbia (UBC) departments of internal medicine, surgery, general gynecology, and obstetrics and the University of Dundee (UK) Medical Education Institute introduced "the 'I' into medical education research." Led by UBC's Dr. Laura Farrell, the team provided data to support the argument for autoethnography by centering "three separate cultures: a student in an interprofessional course; an educator crossing the divide between Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and traditional medical schools; and [their] own feedback study."[29] Histories of reflexivity and "self-reflection for educators" have been advocated "in the broader education field" for quite some time.[30] A more comprehensive argument for bringing analytical-interpretive autoethnography into medical education was developed by Farrell et al.:

> . . . the methodology of autoethnography provides an effective means to actively engage in systematic reflection on their own teaching and educational innovations. Through reflective writing and ongoing literature review, as well as authentic discourse with learners, colleagues, supervisors and patients, researchers may be able to improve interactions with learners, strengthen their commitment to ongoing personal learning in medical education and ensure that they are role- modelling a humane and effective medical practice.[31]

Further, Farrell and colleagues linked autoethnography to the typical stories and cases shared in clinical medicine "to debrief, teach, learn and generally make sense" of the sociocultural context of their daily work:

> We recreate patients' cases in rounds presentations; we debrief in our offices about our interesting or difficult cases, and we frame teaching around our past experiences, both positive and negative.[32]

Autoethnography can build on the clinician-educator's "need to share and learn from [their] own experiences."[33] It is quite promising for the future of autoethnography to have Farrell and colleagues acknowledging how it departs from the traditional post-positivist research paradigm of medicine, while praising its utility as an interpretivist, subjective "tool for clinician-educators who wish to engage in research related to their own teaching" and patient care.[34]

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: IMAGINING MORE POSSIBILITIES FOR AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Given the expansion of autoethnography into educational research in disciplines outside the social sciences such as pharmacy and medicine, we might begin imagining a sound

possibility of autoethnography as coursework to support interprofessional practice and education at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Interprofessional practice and education happens when "individuals from two or more professions learn about, from and with each other to enable effective collaboration and improve . . . outcomes."[35] The undergraduate-level autoethnography course(s) could be designed for students to begin the practice of reading, discussing, and thinking via autoethnography across and within their respective professions. The course(s) could focus on both the theory and the practice of autoethnography, or "reading" significant patterns in everyday experience and connecting those patterns to the self and to broader social concerns. Moreover, the course(s) could introduce students to the methodological and theoretical roots of autoethnography.

The doctoral-level autoethnography course(s) could be designed to guide students and faculty toward becoming autoethnographic researchers in their respective fields and to apply autoethnography research in ways that can meet the scrutiny of the academy. The purpose of an interprofessional autoethnography course would be to support meaningful and innovative routes "to enhance student learning, build faculty scholarship and help departments meet accreditation goals."[36] Imagining autoethnography as decolonizing, collaborative, global, and interprofessional provides one promising road back to the future of the methodology. ■

Sean D. Hernández Adkins is a doctoral student in the school of education at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. email: adkinss@live.unc.edu

Sherick Hughes is a professor of education at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, who engages scholarship involving (a) social contexts of rural and urban education, (b) critical race studies and Black education, and (c) qualitative and mixed methodology. His scholarship has informed schools/colleges of education, school districts, nonprofit agencies, and arguments before the state Supreme Court. He was recognized by the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in 2013 (Division-G Early Career Award) and 2016 (Distinguished Scholar Award). email: shughes@email.unc.edu

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