
Learning to be Editors

Welcome to the first issue of the second volume of the *Journal of Autoethnography*. This short introductory essay will provide a look backward at where we went during the first year, and look forward to where we are going, as well as what we have learned and been surprised about along the way. It's been an amazing first year. When we proposed and founded the *Journal of Autoethnography*, we didn't know what the year would bring. We didn't know that much of Australia and then much of the west coast of the United States would be on fire. We didn't know that Brexit would actually happen. We did not know that Notre Dame Cathedral would burn down. Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as India and China, are in the midst of border tensions, conflicts, and skirmishes. We didn't know U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg would die. We didn't know we'd be putting together our first volume in the middle of a pandemic. #2020

When we proposed this journal, publishers often asked whether we would receive enough submissions, and moreover, enough quality submissions. New journals often find themselves in that predicament. We did not face that particular challenge. We weren't fully certain, but we thought there would be enough interest to warrant quality submissions. We know first-hand there is a large and growing community of autoethnographers and narrative writers looking for another outlet to publish their research. What surprised us was the *quantity of quality* manuscripts. Despite that we ourselves are qualitative researchers, in this case we're using numbers as proof. As of this writing (September 2020), in eighteen months of accepting manuscripts, we have received 166 unsolicited submissions. Needless to say, we were pleasantly surprised at this number. It not only meant that we were correct in our assessment regarding the need for the *Journal of Autoethnography*, but that you trusted us—two neophyte founding co-editors—with your submissions. We thank you for that.

In the past year we were reminded that autoethnography is being used in nearly every discipline in most regions of the globe. The intercultural and interdisciplinary nature of autoethnography as a method is one of its strengths. This nature also exposed one of our weaknesses. We learned—or were reminded again—that there are definitive gaps in our own knowledge. Over the past year, we recognized we had to expand our editorial board and needed assistance from ad hoc reviewers, not only because of the sheer number of submissions, but also because of our own lack of knowledge. We expect that as we go forward there will be even greater need to accommodate the diversity of submissions that we receive.

We also want to make five observations and offer some advice regarding submissions.

First, although there are various approaches to doing autoethnography, we continue to encourage authors to consider *all* of the auto-ethno-graphic components in their manuscripts. We have received manuscripts that use personal experience, but do not show or explain how such experience connects to larger cultural experiences and narratives, or demonstrate any care with the crafting of these experiences and narratives. Good autobiographies and good ethnographies—both of which comprise the core of autoethnography—demand authors to tell concrete and compelling stories of personal/social life, yet we have received several manuscripts where the writing is sterile or treated as secondary. The craft of writing a compelling story is necessary for good autoethnography. It is not only important to tell your story, but to tell your story *well*.

Second, for this journal, one that foregrounds and recognizes the importance of autoethnography, we continue to ask authors *not* to apologize for using autoethnography. As we wrote in our introduction to the first issue:

Manuscripts should not apologize for autoethnography or discuss why autoethnography isn't a useful method or approach. The essence of this journal is to recognize the vast presence and promote the usefulness of autoethnography. We are interested in learning what can autoethnography do, as a method, that other methods cannot accomplish. . . . Autoethnography isn't better than other research methods, only different; it has distinct purposes, goals, and issues than other forms of inquiry.¹

We also note that “constructive criticism about autoethnography is welcomed,” but only if such criticism “enhances autoethnographic practice.”

Third, manuscripts should not frame, understand, or treat autoethnography in ways similar to quantitative research. We have received manuscripts that have tried to adhere strictly to concepts such as “coding,” “replicability,” and “sample size” in order to justify the use of autoethnography. Yet, as has been pointed out numerous times during the last twenty years, these concepts are misused, inappropriate, and even contradictory to the purposes and practices of autoethnography.² We have rarely, if ever, read autobiographies and ethnographies—again, both of which comprise the core of autoethnography—that are concerned with these concepts. For us, should we ever encounter an autobiography or ethnography that tried to adhere to or advocate these concepts, we'd quit reading it.

Fourth, if you're going to submit a manuscript to the journal, you will receive feedback and may be asked to revise the manuscript. We have encountered a few instances where authors have argued that reviewers can't evaluate their experiences and it is the author's, not reviewers', story to tell. That's partially accurate, but personal experience *can* be critiqued, especially how it is used and framed, how others are implicated, the language used to describe an experience, and other underlying assumptions in the *representation* of such experience. Reviewers should not tell an author that they are silly or that their experiences don't matter, but reviewers can and will offer suggestions about the use of, and conclusions drawn, from these experiences.

Fifth, we are committed to identifying and remedying injustices, eliminating harmful values and practices, and recognizing and respecting social differences—that is, as long as

these differences aren't rooted in/justified by a hatred of others. Although we reference a few brief ways we live these commitments in our introduction in the first issue of the first volume, we'd like to conclude by sharing more about how these commitments actually inform our work with authors, manuscripts, and reviewers. We'd also like to share what we will not tolerate as editors.

We do not approach manuscripts neutrally—we do not tolerate hate speech or bullying tactics, nor will we support manuscripts that espouse racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, transphobic, ageist, heteronormative, or xenophobic beliefs and practices. As two tenured, White, able-bodied cismen, there will always be experiences with which we have never lived or may never understand. Yet we pledge to learn, listen, recognize, and remedy our limitations and biases—an impossible feat to ever fully accomplish, though we commit to never giving up. We do our best to support unfamiliar topics and experiences, as well as different approaches to autoethnography, but only as long as authors/manuscripts do not promote problematic values, ideas, and practices.

When we receive manuscripts about topics with which we have a limited understanding, we try to find knowledgeable and supportive reviewers. Sometimes this means reviewing who an author cites in the manuscript and then asking the cited folks to review the manuscript. Sometimes this means doing extensive research about authors who work in areas similar to the manuscript and then contacting these authors for reviews. Sometimes this means consulting with members of the journal's editorial board for advice, reviews, and potential reviewers. Although this has occasionally led to longer review times, we believe it is necessary and important that submissions are reviewed by subject experts as well as experts in autoethnography.

We also do our best to make sure that every manuscript uses accurate, inclusive, and empowering language. From an mundane editorial perspective, this means identifying and refusing disparaging language, challenging seemingly innocent but problematic colloquial expressions, finding alternate terms for terms with troublesome etymologies (e.g., “slave”/“master”; “seminal”), capitalizing proper identities (e.g., “Black” in reference to a person's race), using the inclusive singular “they” when possible, specifying regions (e.g., not allowing “America” to pass as synonymous with the “United States”), and being mindful of how authors describe their participants and/or persons implicated in their work. Authors may have a compelling reason to refuse such changes, but their reason must be grounded in respect, accuracy, and experience rather than tradition, ignorance, or hate.

We try to take great care with the review process. Although we do our best to find knowledgeable and supportive reviewers, we also do not want to overburden our reviewers, especially since they offer unpaid time and labor. For authors, we try to eliminate inappropriate, harsh, and hateful comments in reviews (and, simultaneously, pledge to never ask for that reviewer's assistance again!), and even when a manuscript is “rejected,” we try to offer helpful encouragement and suggestions for other publication outlets.

Finally, while most reviews are returned in a timely manner, we are all dealing with the ramifications of the ongoing COVID pandemic. The disruptions to the personal and professional lives of our fellow colleagues, including our reviewers, are often challenging. This is particularly true for those who care for at-risk family members, and those with

children. Be assured that your submission is under review. We are asking for your patience, recognizing that all our lives are in a constant state of heightened angst in these perilous times.

Although it is easy to express such commitments in writing, we do not want them to come across as empty promises or unfilled ideals. Given that we're now finished with the first volume of the journal, we invite you to review the scope and diversity of the manuscripts, including the many that foreground social justice. We invite you to ask authors about their experiences with the review process, and with us. That's where our commitments matter most. ■

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NOTES

1. Tony E. Adams and Andrew F. Herrmann, "Expanding our Autoethnographic Future," *Journal of Autoethnography*, 1 (2020): 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1525/joae.2020.1.1.1>
2. Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler, "The Ethnographer's Ball—Revisited." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 28, no. 5 (1999): 442–450; Arthur P. Bochner, "Narrative's virtues." *Qualitative inquiry* 7, no. 2 (2001): 131–157; doi:10.1177/107780040100700201; Carolyn Ellis, *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography* (Lanham, MD: Rowman Altamira, 2004).