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Armstrong-Gibbs, FD

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Armstrong-Gibbs, FD (2019) On becoming an organizational autoethnographer; considering the ethical perspectives of the research application process. Journal of Organizational Ethnography. ISSN 2046-6749

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On becoming an organizational autoethnographer; considering the ethical perspectives of the research application process.

Purpose: To explore the process and challenges of applying an autoethnographic research method to a professional doctoral thesis ethics application. It examines the traditional university ethical approval process and if it is appropriate for this evolving qualitative research method within an organizational context.

Design/methodology/approach: A short introduction to the literature on ethics prefaces an analytical autoethnographic account of my experience as Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) candidate tackling the application process for ethical approval of primary research. The account is a reflection of the review process and critiques with reference to the existing literature.

Findings: The majority of the literature relating to ethics has focussed on the private, personal and largely evocative accounts of autoethnography. This paper highlights some of the differences and potential for organizational autoethnography and ethical conduct. It highlights the ethical implications of obtaining consent from ones colleagues, developing and maintaining dependent relationships, risk and reward to one's own professional reputation and becoming equipped to create both personal and organizational change through a process of reflexivity.

Originality/value: This paper adds to the discussion about ethical conduct when undertaking new forms of organizational ethnographic research. For those interested or involved in the university institutional ethics review committees and for professional doctoral students who are developing an emancipatory insider research approach.

Paper Type: research paper

Keywords: autoethnography, ethics, ethical research, reflexivity, social enterprise

Introduction

When conducting primary research involving humans the postgraduate researcher is required to submit their proposal to a university research ethics committee which consists of experienced academic researchers within the institution where the research is being supervised, assessed and awarded. This paper offers the opportunity to move the ethical discussion on from the personal or life events of the autoethnographer towards the investigations into organizational life and culture from the perspective of the self. In light of this developing qualitative research method, this paper examines some of the existing ethical review processes and if they are equipped to support the early career researcher (ECR).

The following is an account of my experience as Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) candidate (rather than the established PhD route), tackling the application process for ethical approval of primary research. It seeks to highlight the ethical considerations of my autoethnography and provide some reflections at this mid-point in my research. This paper is not a criticism of the ethical approval application process at universities and is no way intended to infer that universities or the individuals involved are complicit in this process as it currently exists.

Organizational autoethnography as a tool for research has the potential to shed new light on the relationship between the individual and the organization they are in, developing the bridge from key conceptual and theoretical contributions to understanding the relationship between culture and organization (Boyle & Parry 2007). By writing about the self, ones role and experience within a group new knowledge is created. Within the organization it is not just about personal emotions or feelings – it must relate to the context they are recorded in and the application of reflexivity. It is the usually private professional self - the 'auto' or 'you' that is situated in the 'ethno' or 'group'. Critically, organizational autoethnography may allow the researcher to move away from what is too personal, private or vulnerable as recorded in many of the evocative autoethnographic accounts to date notably Adams et al. 2015; Ellis et al. 2010; Chatham-Carpenter 2010; Wall 2008 amongst many.

In 2009 I joined as one of the eight founder board members of a Community Interest Company (CIC) and am still an active and engaged member today. In this light, the research method I proposed for my DBA study is through insider research in the ethnographic tradition, with a specific focus on autoethnography. Doloriert and Sambrook (2012) suggest that autoethnography could be used as a form of primary data collection particularly suited to non-executive or voluntary board members in the third sector, or in my case, a social enterprise. As a founder director I am in a unique position to record its emerging culture and context in the community. Through this analytical autoethnographic

method I explore my motivations to join as a voluntary board member, my relationships with others in the CIC and my influence on the strategic direction that the CIC has taken over eight years. I chose to develop two research methods, the first is a more traditional ethnographic approach with interviews, observations, and recording experiences shared with fellow board members of the social enterprise. Sambrook et al. (2014) cite Watson (2011:205-6) who suggests that ethnography is a style of writing in social science research “which draws on the writer’s close observation of and involvement with people in a particular social setting and relates the words spoken and the practices observed or experienced to the overall cultural framework within which they occurred” (Pg 174), but go on to say that autoethnography develops this further and “includes the researcher’s own personal experiences of the cultural phenomenon being studied”. Considering this I also chose to conduct a more lengthy study through autoethnographic writing as the means for data generation and knowledge gathering which will give a deep, contextual understanding of our CIC. The latter will be discussed in this paper, I mention the ethnography part to give background and some explanation of my choices and perspective discussed later.

Having been drawn to qualitative research, particularly using insider perspectives for my MSc and Pg Cert in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, I see myself as an experiential and pragmatic learner and an instrument to seek information for a purpose. I have for my entire academic career combined real-world industry experience simultaneously with my teaching. So it was no different for my doctoral studies and on first hearing the term autoethnography it resonated immediately with my philosophical approach and I gave myself consent to continue.

Literature on ethics in organizational autoethnography

It is important to highlight the evolving forms and styles of autoethnographies, notably the difference between evocative and analytical accounts. The evocative style, primary developed by Ellis et al. (2010) tend towards personal experiences such as bereavement, sexuality and family relationships and are highly individual and biographical in nature. They focus on cultural behaviours and are often created to challenge traditional power relationships and give a voice to the usually marginalised. On the other hand, Anderson (2006) makes the distinction that an analytical autoethnography has five key features; the researcher has full member status in the group, the approach must be reflexive, he or she must be visible in the text, engage with the group’s discourse and finally use this position and experience to advance knowledge. Either style or a hybrid approach could be used within organizational research. Learmonth and Humphreys (2012) discuss the challenges of using evocative ethnography alongside an analytical approach and developed a combination of the two using the more evocative elements of personal involvement coupled with an analytical approach suggesting this could

yield a greater sociological understanding. However, much of what has been published about ethics to date, revolve around relationships and confidentiality when publishing autoethnographies and to a large extent have tended to scrutinise the evocative approach.

Doloriert and Sambrook (2012) note there are three areas that relate specifically to the ethics within organizational autoethnography; first is the protection of the participants to both the process and the examination of the study. Secondly the 'relational ethics' between people and the organization that the researcher is writing about and the affect this may have on the relationship with it or them. Finally the revealing and 'outing' nature of publishing ones work in the public domain and the effects of the review process.

For several authors (Wall 2008; Holt 2003; Muncey 2005) autoethnographic writing can result in two published outputs. The first is an autoethnographic account of the subject followed by a second one about their experience of publishing in an autoethnographic style. While both are helpful in addressing the challenges of the peer review process and publishing autoethnography, there is limited focus on the ethical guidance and impact on the researcher.

Tolich (2010) highlights several ethical issues to consider. Gaining retrospective consent and the fair and open recruitment of participants. He challenges leading scholars by suggesting there is a form of hypocrisy in this research practice which may lead to questioning the legitimacy of findings. These issues are not specific to the organizational researcher but do highlight some of the more unethical or perplexing areas of this research method. Once the writer has composed their autoethnography he suggests there may be questionable motives and challenges in gaining retrospective consent from the participants. Participants may have unknowingly been a part of the data collection but when or if they are asked to consent to publication there could be a conflict of interest weighted in favour of the author and potential for the abuse of power. Anteby (2013) discusses the varying levels of involvement a researcher will reveal to the other participants in order to generate enough data to tell the story. In other words how ethical is it to do the research in a covert style and then ask for forgiveness later when it is complete? Tolich's (2010) second point highlights that those conducting autoethnographies and giving guidelines for research techniques are not always conducting their own research in the most ethical manner. They behave differently in practicing the research - a case of do as I say not as I do. He points out that when asked for guidance, leading scholars often don't 'practice what they preach' and may say one thing to participants yet end up doing another in the field just to write the story. Thus making the point that there is an evolving understanding and challenges of this type of research method.

Hughes and Pennington (2017) and Lapadat (2017) highlight some of the procedural issues for the autoethnographer around the institutional reviewing of ethics applications and the challenges of obtaining informed consent, particularly from underrepresented, marginalised or oppressed participants. As a PhD student, Forber-Pratt (2015) records her extensive experience of negotiating university policies and procedures to gain ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Guillemin and Gillam (2004) explain the difference between 'procedural ethics' and 'ethics in practice' and their relevance to the reflexive researcher. Procedural ethics is the process a researcher goes through within their institution to gain approval to go into the field as noted above. However for an autoethnographer, this exercise becomes somewhat hypothetical as it is how they conduct themselves in the field (or group) that creates new data. The key underpinning of a DBA curriculum is a focus on leaning through reflexivity. Receiving ethical consent to proceed with research is one step but what happens in the field requires a more nuanced 'microethical' approach. Once approval is granted, the committee does not have responsibility for the researcher therefore it is the obligation of the researcher to reflect and amend their conduct within the organization.

Lapadat (2017) believes that autoethnography is fundamentally an ethical pursuit and one reason why it finds itself scrutinised as a method, "[it] rests on an understanding of the centrality of narrative in human moral decision making and behaviour" p593. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) connect reflexivity with the ethical practice of research particularly where procedural ethics fall short. Analytical autoethnographic accounts rely on a process of reflexivity to be validated as a legitimate form of research. So it seems that ethical conduct should be woven into the research process at every level.

Ethics application

On completion of my DBA proposal and initial literature review I submitted an *Application for Ethical Approval* in order to continue to the primary research phase. The application adhered to the guidelines for ¹proportionate review and was sent to the sub-committee of the University Research Ethics Committee. My initial reaction was to fill out the form as 'me' or 'auto' - the researched rather than the researcher. But I found it difficult to articulate properly and the pragmatist in me did not want to set back or complicate the application process. So I created a naïve attempt of ethnographic insider research. The application was rejected with a number of questions prefaced by an

¹ Proportionate review considers research that does not include very high areas of risk such as vulnerable participants, children / under 18, illegal and highly sensitive activity, mental or physical health and does consider the researcher who may be subject to high levels of risks such as lone working at night; interviewing in your own or participants homes, observation in potentially volatile or sensitive situations.

acknowledgement that the application form was not really designed for ethnographic research and expressed a hope to address this in the near future.

As someone relatively new to ethnographic research I found the comments and questions overwhelming but extremely useful. It helped to inform my ethical research approach towards my participants which was essential for the ethnographic data generation. A similar view is shared by Forber-Pratt (2015) who wrote about the experience from a PhD student perspective, citing the process as a true lesson in research methods rather than a box ticking exercise. Using an autoethnographic research method means understanding the ethics of your own research more deeply. By developing her voice as an autoethnographic writer it empowered her to navigate the hurdles of the IRB process.

Issues around consent, privacy and confidentiality, dependent relationships, covert / overt approaches and the potential of harm through analysis of results and potential publication – on behalf of the participants, were highlighted in my feedback. There was only one reference to insider research, and this was framed as potential to abuse my position. So I began to approach these questions myself, but found vocabulary such as ‘participants’ ‘number of procedures’ and ‘time spent per participant’ made it impossible to interpret from an autoethnographic perspective. Trying to write about myself as a ‘participant’ and my writing as ‘procedure’ was incredibly frustrating. What number of procedures would I do to myself and how long it would take? It is not only impossible to quantify, but starts to feel uncomfortable and towards a form of objectification. Traditionally the application form frames data collection as cold and clinical. It is not possible to consider writing about oneself as a procedure or interviewing oneself (although I have tried to ask myself the same questions as the participants). The review process can overlook the potential aesthetic, creative and expressive process of writing as a formative data gathering process (Ellis & Bochner 2006; Wall 2006; Muncey T. 2005) which is largely cited by evocative writers. I felt it demoted and devalued autoethnography as legitimate research and without a section on the form (or a box to tick) it meant it was possible to ignore - as I did at first. This also may add credibility to the criticisms the method has received (Holt 2003 and Learmonth & Humphreys 2012). No box to fill in means it does not exist.

Although I had mentioned autoethnography in my appended proposal, scientific justification and summary of the purpose, design and methodology of the planned research, the first and only reference I made to myself was as one of the ten board members who would be participants in the ethnographic interview process. I began to question the original consent I had given myself and if I should be doing autoethnography at all – would it just be easier to write this, and as Anteby (2013) discusses claim full disclosure later? How much does it really matter who I am anyway? Having

amended the application based on the key issues raised, I chose to overlook the core ethical autoethnographic issues of the research that I had started to consider and resubmitted. My ethical approval to conduct primary research was granted. The next section of this paper is a reflective discussion around the issues that have evolved during the autoethnographic writing process and highlights the importance of 'ethics in practice' (Guillemin & Gillam 2004).

Gatekeepers and obtaining consent

For the ethnographic aspect of the social enterprise study, most of my colleagues consented without question, a few have not responded, but no one declined outright. However asking for consent uncovered a rather 'cool' relationship with the traditional notion of outside researchers. As our organization's size and profile has grown over the years, we have been contacted by several outside academic researchers – both locally and nationally. Time spent welcoming outsiders often needs to be reciprocal and foster a collaborative culture. These requests have also coincided with an increased requirement from the Research Excellence Framework (REF) to assess the importance of 'Impact' by UK university researchers. In light of this, academic researchers are increasingly reaching out to socially orientated businesses and organizations to study, however this prompts an ethical discussion and debate for outside researchers' motivations about going into organizations.

New and start-up social enterprises are often small with limited resources and there is a need for researchers to consider reciprocal exchange for the knowledge they obtain, if and when they gain access to the organization. Traditional ethnographic practices from outsider researchers can create concerns around 'presuming to represent others... too often speaking for others...disrespecting, misrepresenting or erasing voices' (Lapadat 2017:519). This can be a reason- why organizational autoethnography has a legitimate place in qualitative research. I was aware of my unique access point and one to the exclusion of outsiders, so with agreement from my colleagues, consent to research the organization was agreed. My board colleagues are intelligent, successful individuals who are well educated and have worked with me for eight years, our professional relationship opened up a willingness to collaborate. The potential to advocate on their behalf was granted, I believe *because* I was an insider and have the opportunity to readdress the traditional notion of power imbalance between the researched and the researcher.

Personal privacy and confidentiality

Discussions around privacy and confidentiality of participants in ethnography is well documented, however the protecting of oneself as both the researcher and the researched in an organization is limited. On writing and publishing this autoethnography I will be identified, but I always knew I was

going to be identified and I want to be identified for this work. It is what parts I choose to discuss, write, submit for review and ultimately publish that are my means of controlling the privacy and confidentiality of myself and the organization.

“Younger researchers may consider [autoethnography as] a more acceptable form of social enquiry, especially in a world where there are myriad avenues to establish and create the public and reflexive self, such as personal blogs, MySpace, YouTube, and reality TV.” Boyle and Parry (2007:186)

As an early career researcher, this research is an ‘inked tattoo’ (Tolich 2010) of my experience and learning within a social enterprise and will be a permanent public record once published. Lapadat (2017) highlights the permanency of the autoethnographic account and although the writer will mature, develop and change as a person - the written word will not evolve. How can we anticipate and mediate the effects of this in the future? This begs questions around ethics of personal representation and professional identity. Is this just inflated self-importance and do we need to reveal so much of one’s self for the purposes of research? Or a shift in behaviour that gives an insight or a voice where it was not represented previously? We are living in an age of self-confession, self-revelation and self-expression which is an ever evolving arena for social research. As there is an increased interest in this method of enquiry should we build this consideration into the review process and what responsibility does the ‘watchdog’ (Tolich 2010), moderator or reviewer have to protect us from ourselves and the readers? Through the process of writing I have developed a number of different narratives or vignettes about ‘where it all begin’ in different words and versions depending on memories, context, mood and audience. This adds richness to the empirical data collected for analysis and I hope that with support from my colleagues, supervisors, reviewers, external examiners and peers the right decision to protect myself and those involved will be made.

Dependant relationships and advocating for others in the organization

Having established my position to research from, my fellow board members and I felt this research could make an impact on a larger scale in practical terms. This is one of the defining features of a professional doctorate (Anderson et al. 2015) as my research attempts to find out how we as a company have constructed and developed our social enterprise business model. It is my personal involvement in the field and how I interpret this that makes the study unique. The intention is to enhance academic knowledge and develop business practice. The knowledge is generated through my analysis, reflections and rewriting. But in order to be a reflexive researcher there emerges a process of co-dependency with the people in the organization. How do we manage that relationship? What

will happen to my research if the co-dependency breaks down? Transcript validation or revisiting transcripts with interviewees and sharing interpretations is a further process that includes the members in the research process. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) reference the Kantian maxim where people should never be used merely as a means to someone else's ends and believe that this tension can be resolved by inclusion of the participants – a point that is crucial to organizational research particularly in a social enterprise with a community focus. This may also address some of the points raised around reciprocity with outside researchers and gaining access.

There is much evidence in social enterprise literature to suggest that changing to sustainable business practice through collaboration is a way of doing business better. Collaboration is needed and a possible route to understanding others could be through collaborative autoethnography (Lapadat 2017), however my study is well underway and it is not appropriate to change methods now. Could an outside, objective observer be able to read the unspoken words, interpretations, culture and fluidity of ideas? Seeing, recording and writing is not a betrayal of confidence rather it could be summarising and advocating our collective voice. We have a duty as a (initially) public funded project to be transparent and knowledge generated from our organizational cultural could benefit others. I am telling my story as part of our story, it sits at the core of this research but it is scant without the other players.

Overt / covert research

The practice of hiding voices behind 'false objectivity' has been grappled with by scholars as ethnography has continued to evolve (Lapadat 2017). Overlooking it in my ethical application to the university just to get through the process is questionable ethics on my part (Anteby 2013). This I hope to learn from as I become a more experienced researcher. However an omission of involvement in researching our social enterprise for academic purposes would be unethical, covert research would have been extremely unscrupulous particularly as good governance in social enterprises requires transparency and declaration of conflict of interests. At every board meeting it is engrained in our culture to be transparent, so my research reflects the culture of the organization. Explaining my research motivations to non-academic colleagues is sometimes difficult and offers potential for vulnerability and questions, but by highlighting this we may uncover the potential for new knowledge.

Much of the existing scholarly discussion of ethical autoethnography revolves around abuse of power (Tolich 2010) in dependent relationships and covert access. If I was going to abuse my power as an autoethnographer I would have to declare it, thus exposing myself. As my self-awareness increases why would I decide to engage in this now when I have put myself under the spotlight? The abuse of

power in organizational research should be part of the ethical discussion. It is a potential weakness of evocative autoethnography in general highlighted by Tolich but there is an opportunity to address it through heightened self-awareness and use of reflexivity.

Distance and involvement

Traditional concerns also consider that an ethnographer may become consumed by the field of study - becoming native. How is this possible if you were within the organization before the study commenced? Consider instead that the study of the phenomena becomes cathartic and enlightening. For example Chatham-Carpenter (2010) who after many personal health battles used a process of autoethnographic writing coupled with her desire to publish as an academic. This combined experience enabled her to move on from those personal battles. Jenkins (2002) has studied and analysed Bourdieu's notion of 'participant objectivation' or the use of a two-steps back reflexive process which is also considered by Guillemin and Gillam (2004) . This means stepping back from the observation itself and then from the reflection of that observation. This helps to distance the researcher and could add the ethical check that is difficult for the institutional review process to embed.

This enlightened method could be the very opposite of the lapsed judgement and over involvement that traditional ethnographic styles see as a shortcoming. My approach seeks to uncover what we could do better in the organization as a 'native' and I'm concerned that this depth of study will alienate me and destroy my naïve opinions about our successful social enterprise. I feel to some extent it has already - I am changing, growing up and wanting to move out of the social and cultural organization that raised me into a professional person that cares about how business is done; fairly, equitably and with profit and purpose. What if I find compelling evidence that suggests I should move on or behave differently? If my research reveals that I should leave, should I ignore the evidence and stay? This is not about protecting others in the organization it is about protecting or preparing myself for harm, knowledge, and change or finding a different way of doing things. I may be socially close but am increasingly cognitively aware of what is evolving in my research (Anteby 2013). What are the ethical implications for distance and involvement and how prepared am I to find this out?

Current ethical questions about the lack of distance also relate to the emotional and evocative accounts of autoethnography. The process of writing about an intensely personal experience such as adoption (Wall 2008) or anorexia (Chatham-Carpenter 2010) and its relevance to the outside world. Is this an opportunity to define ethics in organizational autoethnography as different? Another point

to note is on research training and those researchers that have produced autoethnographic accounts are often students or employees situated within universities, this was one of the most compelling reasons for me not to write about my academic career. The pool of reliable and well trained autoethnographers could be relatively small (Lapadat 2017) and mostly have the experience of academic organizations, with some exceptions such as the edited accounts in Herrmann's (2017) book. I was not a trained researcher when I joined the social enterprise, but now I have developed these skills how will this affect what I do next? Can I go back? Or will this experience mean I will never be able to see things the same again. I am enlightened but will that lead to my frustration and will I learn to manage that?

Research, reflection and risk – harmful or noble in the process of research?

My study is ongoing and writing this paper, as empirical data, gives me the opportunity to reflect on the method both now and when the study is completed. The procedural review process was challenging but made me focus on the ethical implications of organizational autoethnography as opposed to 'ticking a box' and has made me a more rigorous researcher as a result.

I started to ask what harm I might do to myself and conversely how I might benefit from this method. Can you harm yourself with your own research? 'Anticipating....vulnerability to self is a foundational guideline for autoethnographers' (Tolich 2010:1606). I volunteer my time at the social enterprise and there have been times when this role has helped me to maintain my professional confidence. During times of career crisis (redundancy elsewhere) my membership of the group has kept me focused and assured me that I have a value to organizations. I have gained enormous satisfaction in seeing its continued success and future legacy grow. Contradictorily there has been times when I have been frustrated and disinterested but as an organization it has owned me. Herrmann's (2017) introductory chapter describes how integral organizations are to us from the moment we are born to the day we die and where we spend most of our waking hours. Yet they are rarely studied from the subjective insider perspective. My loyalty to this organization has been reciprocal and at this mid-point I believe we have much to learn from the way it has been created.

Evocative and analytical autoethnography can be emancipatory and change making (Adams et al. 2015) if done correctly. If it has that power, I believe it will come with risk to the researcher and the organization. It requires a high level of self-awareness and an understanding of the risk to oneself emotionally and professionally.

“an ethnography does not end at the personal, as there are constant reminders throughout the text of how the individual self-interacts with, resists, cajoles, and shapes the

organizational and institutional context in which he or she is situated” Boyle and Parry 2007:186

Being vulnerable and stepping out of one's comfort zone is part of this research process. Through a process of self-checking it creates both power and vulnerability at the same time – this creates change. I am in a professional position, I am qualified and experienced, but is the ethical issue really about revealing too much about myself *or* finding out information that will empower me to make a change? Discussion about autoethnography suggests that it has the power to be change making for the individual but can this be replicated in organizations?

As a board member I was there before the research started and I will still be there after it has finished but the risk is that I have changed and my perceptions and understandings of the organization have changed also. Through this research I will have revealed more of myself and others and it may prompt others in the organization to reflect also. This type of enquiry could have the power to stretch others sense of self, what they are and what they might become. Once the process of autoethnography has begun you cannot un-know something. How is this considered in the ethics research process?

Considering the two step process of reflexivity, autoethnography can be used to examine a practice or behaviour that you as the researcher does. Arts practice, teaching, business management etc; the initial focus is on *doing* (practice and behaviour) followed by observations and recordings of your practice or your behaviour. Findings emerge and we can use that knowledge for others to learn from. Doing autoethnography requires a clear and analytical mind and a critical thinking approach to develop this self-awareness. Writing about something that you feel confused, perplexed or passionate about is cathartic but the risk is that you may move on from the topic and the study will close that chapter of your life (Anteby 2013; Chatham-Carpenter 2010). No researcher is totally neutral but the traditional review process has an expectation that the researcher will be clinical and detached through the process, is this to protect the participants?

Autoethnography in an organizational context has the power to reveal and investigate new data. This may not always be positive. Protecting people and organizations that are doing wrong is unethical research. If you are going to do the research and then hide it, it is your responsibility as an autoethnographer to reframe or rewrite it and use it as knowledge that can make a difference. It is not for the fainthearted and I struggle at this point to see how it makes me vulnerable or less ethical it has the potential to be empowering. Every day more information is revealed about organizations in the UK that expose the gender pay gap, discrimination, lack of equality, diversity and sexual

harassment in the workplace. A veil of 'organizational protectionism' (Rollock 2017) has existed for a long time and organizational autoethnography may be a tool to investigate this phenomenon further.

Conclusion

There is scope to use autoethnographic methods to deepen our understanding of organizations particularly those with a dual business and social mission. Social enterprises are increasingly viewed as an alternative to the traditional capitalists, profit driven business model and very much lend themselves to studies using interpretivist and critical approaches from within the organization.

To date, the majority of scholarly literature relating to ethics has focussed on the private, personal and largely evocative accounts of autoethnography. There is a large and very relevant reference base that discusses relational ethics – the connection between the researched and the researcher and how this is interpreted and represented. Conjoined to this is the process of publishing an account that will reveal the identity of the writer and their situation, possibly others and the vulnerability this creates by being in the public domain.

The current literature may not be substantially addressing challenges, possibilities and differences of individuals in an organizational field. However the recent special issue in this journal, edited by Sambrook and Herrmann (2018) suggests, such characteristics in autoethnographic writing are being explored and published quickly, addressing a substantive, complex and important issue. Accounts of organizational life and the individual roles people play need to consider the relationships with advocacy, reciprocity and management of information that enters the public domain. This has huge potential to empower and emancipate those in organizations who are less often represented in scholarly work or academic research.

For the doctoral or early career researcher, navigating the ethics application form and the established processes can be overwhelming. As an emerging field this may also be a challenge for some universities and their review boards to process. My experience shows that there is no explicit directive to follow in order to conduct ethical autoethnographic research. A reflexive approach is necessary if we are to take care of ourselves, our participants and our organizations. Through the process of discovering and explaining how to do autoethnography, I now understand why I chose to do it and have developed a strong ability to defend my philosophical approach. Autoethnographic methods are not for the fainthearted and as a scholarly practitioner, I am more mindful of my behaviour and the impact on our organization as I conduct my research going forward.

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