

## **Representation, Legitimation, and Autoethnography: An Autoethnographic Writing Story**

**Nicholas L. Holt**

Nicholas L. Holt, PhD, Senior Lecturer, School of Leisure and Sport Studies, Leeds Metropolitan University, Leeds, England

**Abstract:** *The purpose of this article is to critique representation and legitimation as they relate to the peer review process for an autoethnographic manuscript. Using a conversation derived from seven reviewers' comments pertaining to one autoethnographic manuscript, issues relating to (a) the use of verification strategies in autoethnographic studies; and, (b) the use of self as the only data source are discussed. As such, this paper can be considered as an autoethnographic writing story. The problematic nature of autoethnography, which is located at the boundaries of scientific research, is examined by linking the author's experiences of the review process with dominant research perspectives. Suggestions for investigators wishing to produce autoethnographic accounts are outlined along with a call for the development of appropriate evaluative criteria for such work.*

**Keywords:** *realist representation; autoethnography; criteria.*

Author Notes: The author would like to extend his thanks to the editor and three anonymous reviewers for their carefully considered feedback on a previous draft of this manuscript. Thanks also to Professor Andrew Sparkes for his advice during the development of this paper.

### Citation Information:

Holt, Nicholas L. (2003). Representation, legitimation, and autoethnography: An autoethnographic writing story. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2(1). Article 2. Retrieved [INSERT DATE] from [http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/2\\_1final/html/holt.html](http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/2_1final/html/holt.html)

The postmodern research movement has raised doubts about the privilege of any one method for obtaining authoritative knowledge about the social world (Agger, 1990). In the wake of the postmodern, traditional writing practices for qualitative research have been critiqued (Richardson, 2000). In particular, the ethnographic genre has been subjected to extensive scrutiny, and several types of ethnographic writing practices have become available to researchers (van Manen, 1988). One emergent ethnographic writing practice involves highly personalized accounts where authors draw on their own experiences to extend understanding of a particular discipline or culture. Such evocative writing practices have been labelled 'autoethnography' (Reed-Danahay, 1997). The movement toward personalized research reflects calls to place greater emphasis on the ways in which the ethnographer interacts with the culture being researched.

Autoethnography is a genre of writing and research that connects the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context (Reed-Danahay, 1997). These texts are usually written in the first person and feature dialogue, emotion, and self-consciousness as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Reed-Danahay explained that autoethnographers may vary in their emphasis on *graphy* (i.e., the research process), *ethnos* (i.e., culture), or *auto* (i.e., self). Whatever the specific focus, authors use their own experiences in a culture reflexively to look more deeply at self-other interactions. By writing themselves into their own work as major characters, autoethnographers have challenged accepted views about silent authorship, where the researcher's voice is not included in the presentation of findings (e.g., Charmaz & Mitchell, 1997). This development may have liberated some researchers from the constraints of the dominant realist representations of

empirical ethnography because, as Richardson (1995) argued, how researchers are expected to write influences what they can write about.

The use of self as the only data source in autoethnography has been questioned (see, for example, Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Sparkes, 2000). Accordingly, autoethnographies have been criticized for being too self-indulgent and narcissistic (Coffey, 1999). Sparkes (2000) suggested that autoethnography is at the boundaries of academic research because such accounts do not sit comfortably with traditional criteria used to judge qualitative inquiries. Indeed, traditional criteria used to judge qualitative research in general may not be appropriate for autoethnography (Garratt & Hodkinson, 1999).

Denzin & Lincoln (1994, 2000) described key 'moments' in the history of qualitative research. The first moment was the traditional period (early 1900s), 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. Whereas Denzin and Lincoln's moments characterize the historical development of North American qualitative literature, they do not generalize well across disciplines. For example, Sparkes (2002a) reflected

that it is difficult to apply these moments to sport and physical activity research where qualitative research is a relatively new development.

This article is a writing story (i.e., a story about the process of conducting research [see Richardson, 1995]), concerned with publishing an autoethnographic account in the discipline of physical education pedagogy. Given that sport and physical activity research does not have well-developed qualitative research practices (Sparkes, 2002a), it may not be a surprise that the issues dealt with in this article are reflective of the fourth moment of qualitative research. Two crucial issues associated with the fourth moment of qualitative research are the dual crises of representation and legitimation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The crisis of representation refers to the writing practices (i.e., how researchers write and represent the social world). Additionally, verification issues relating to methods and representation are (re)considered as problematic (Marcus & Fischer, 1986). The crisis of legitimation questions traditional criteria used for evaluating and interpreting qualitative research, involving a rethinking of terms such as validity, reliability, and objectivity.

The present article can be considered as a writing story that is intended to provide guidance for others wishing to produce evocative writing accounts. As such, the overall objective of this writing story is to critique an aspect of research culture (the peer review process experienced for an autoethnographic manuscript) pertaining to forms of representation and legitimation. In other words, this paper is an autoethnographic writing story about the process of getting an autoethnographic manuscript published. Specifically, reviewers' comments are used to highlight

problematic issues relating to: (a) the use of verification strategies in autoethnographic studies; and (b) the use of self as the only data source.

### **The origins of the autoethnographic account**

Originally I developed an autoethnographic account depicting my experiences as a Ph.D. student trying to come to terms with teaching at the university level for the first time (Holt, 2001). The plot hinged on a series of clashes between my personal teaching history and the teaching ideology of the research institution I had recently joined. I drew guidance from an autoethnographic account produced by Sparkes (1996) and the associated discussion of the review process for his paper (Sparkes, 2000). Sparkes reported that he was criticized by the reviewers of his 1996 account for presenting a paper that was heavily theorized in the introduction and conclusion. With this in mind, I produced a manuscript in which I attempted to tell a story, rather than produce a heavily theoretical reflective piece, for, as Wolcott (1994) suggested, qualitative researchers need to be storytellers, and storytelling should be one of their distinguishing attributes.

The autoethnographic account produced by Sparkes (1996) that inspired my autoethnography concerned his experiences as a white, male, middle class, former elite athlete with a chronic back injury that ultimately curtailed his sporting career. Sparkes linked his personal experiences to social, sporting, medical, and academic discourses via a thorough sociological self-exploration. I was drawn to the manner in which he explored emotional dimensions and consequences of an interrupted body project, and attempted to bring the reader into his 'inner' world. Although the content and purposes of Sparkes' story differed from my own, I was attracted by the powerful

and emotive way in which his experiences were communicated. I especially liked the connections he made between his personal experiences and the wider (sub) cultural settings in which he was located (i.e., sport, the medics who ‘treated’ him, his family, and his academic career). I thought autoethnography could be a useful way for examining my teaching experiences in a self-reflexive manner.

Autoethnography seemed to be the optimal choice for my article because, as Tierney (1998) asserted, “autoethnography confronts dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim, through self-reflective response, representational spaces that have marginalized those of us at the borders” (p. 66). I tried to produce an account of a somewhat marginalized figure portraying the personal tensions I experienced integrating my pedagogical approach with the mandates of the university teaching program. The story seemed to develop into a discourse about the role of teaching in a research university, and the placelessness of a new graduate student in this subculture. In addition to these personal concerns, I wrote about how my actions and behaviours may have influenced the students in my classes. I drew on a reflective framework, pursued a methodological tradition (autoethnography) and linked my ‘findings’ back to relevant pedagogical research. Although I thought I had complied with the demands of rigorous science, three journal editors and their reviewers disagreed before the manuscript was finally accepted at the fourth attempt.

### **Deconstructing reviewer feedback: An autoethnographic writing story**

In the following section I have recreated the feedback provided by seven reviewers (and four editors) into one conversation between an author and two reviewers. I am the author, a Ph.D.

student who feels desperately in need of publications to get to the first step of the career ladder. Although my feelings of desperation underpinned this writing process, publication for the sake of garnering another line on one's vita may be interpreted as self-serving. As such, I went through this writing process faced with a tension between my desire to communicate my pedagogical experiences with others (and thus to contribute deeper understandings about teaching), against my 'need' to publish.

The process of rejection and resubmission I experienced may be a familiar one to some readers: select a seemingly appropriate journal, submit the manuscript, receive rejection, integrate reviewer's feedback, send to another journal, and so on. For the purposes of context, some information about the journals to which the manuscript was submitted is required. All four journals were similar in that they published research and practice pertaining to physical education pedagogy. One journal was aimed more at practitioners, one journal mixed theory and practice, and two journals were more research-oriented. (The manuscript was eventually published in one of the more research-oriented journals.) In terms of the editorial policies, I deliberately chose journals that had a broad scope. For example, one editorial policy stated *'Research methodologies may be quantitative or qualitative and may use data gathered through historical analysis, surveys, field work, action research, participant observation, content analysis, simulations, or experiments'*. The aims of another were to *'facilitate research that enriches (the discipline) and disseminate findings to professionals and the public'*.

More specifically, the journals required that manuscripts adhere to the ethical and content guidelines of the American Psychological Association publication manual (APA, 2001). The

APA criteria for evaluating the content of manuscripts are oriented toward quantitative research. For example, guidelines include: “Is the research question significant, and is the work original and important? Does the research design fully and unambiguously test the hypothesis? Is the research at an advanced enough stage to make the publication of results meaningful?” (APA, 2001, p. 6). However, because the journals I chose published both qualitative and quantitative research, there was also specific advice for judging qualitative manuscripts, such as assessments of the ‘*quality of analyses*’ and providing evidence of ‘*saturation of data*’ and ‘*trustworthiness*’.

In recreating the discourse presented below, I used the comments provided by journal reviewers as my ‘data’. Initially, I simply collected and saved these reviews (after I had used the feedback to ‘improve’ my manuscript). After ultimately receiving an acceptance from the fourth journal, I had noticed an emergent pattern in the content of the reviews. In general, there was a set of reviewers who valued autoethnography but had concerns over its rigor. There was another set of reviewers who clearly did not think that autoethnography constituted scientific research. I ‘analyzed’ this data by categorizing the reviewer’s comments into two main themes. The first theme included ‘sympathetic’ comments (i.e., the reviewers who thought that autoethnography was merited but were unsure of verification criteria). The second theme included ‘skeptical’ comments (i.e., the reviewers were unsure about the scientific merit of autoethnography). I then recreated these comments into a discourse that is intended to represent my personal experiences of the publication process. I created two reviewers to represent the two themes of comments. Reviewer A is presented as an amalgam of those who were sympathetic to autoethnography. In contrast, Reviewer B represents those who were more suspicious of the scientific merit of the genre. As far as possible, verbatim quotes from the reviewers’ written comments have been



crafted into a narrative dialogue to reflect on two central issues that arose from the review process: (a) The use of verification strategies in autoethnographic studies, and (b) the use of self as the only data source.

**Recreating a discourse I: The use of verification strategies in autoethnographic studies**

This first discourse is intended to convey a discussion of the verification strategies by which my autoethnographic manuscript was judged. The hypothetical setting is a university office, and the reviewers are settling down to discuss their perceptions of the manuscript with me.

Reviewer A: I believe that this methodology has great potential to contribute to our existing knowledge base. But, the problem is that this paper does not show the rigor that is necessary in a research-based article. Narrative research requires as much rigor as any other research design....

Author: This paper went through countless drafts and re-writes, and it was read and edited by several colleagues.

Reviewer B: Time does not equate to quality. There is no evidence of rigor in this narrative...

Author: [Defensively] And what do you mean by that? It was a rigorous process – in fact, this manuscript was subjected to more editing and critical appraisal from colleagues than anything else I've done.

Reviewer B: If I may interject. Qualitative investigators should address credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness of data. There must be some type of paper trail in which the results of the study can be supported with data.

- Author: But these traditional forms of criteria do not apply to autoethnographic texts. Ellis and Bochner (2000) said so...
- Reviewer B: Credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness are the cornerstones of qualitative rigor. Without these standards qualitative research becomes nothing more than journalism with a smattering of theory.
- Reviewer A: How would you suggest we review this scientific contribution?
- Author: I think the intrinsic interest and value of the story should not be dismissed. Laurel Richardson (1995, 2000) suggested that such work could be evaluated by questions like 'did the paper have an emotional or intellectual impact?'
- Reviewer B: No, no, no. Certain scientific tenets must be adhered to. The manuscript should be grounded within a theoretical framework. We cannot publish good stories in an academic journal. Methodological procedures and data analysis must be clearly explained and supported with references. You failed to comply with these demands in such a manner that your work could be replicated.
- Author: How could someone else replicate work based on my personal experiences?
- Reviewer B: That is exactly why this material is not of publishable quality!
- Reviewer A: Look, I am sympathetic to your plight, but your paper does not show clear relationships and patterns, does not have the completeness in the narrative, nor does it hold the phenomenon up to serious inspection. I am not able to find depth to your narrative. If you are interested in sharing your narrative, it is important that it have a clear focus, depth, and is believable to the reader. I would advise you to keep trying.

In analyzing this conversation, it is apparent that Reviewer B demanded the use of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) parallel perspective to establish the 'trustworthiness' of the investigation, which is understandable if one is not familiar with the criteria by which to judge an autoethnography. Reviewer A seemed more familiar with the appropriate criteria for this type of research, and echoed Ellis (1995), who argued a story could be considered valid if it evokes in the reader a feeling that the experience is authentic, believable, and possible. However, evaluation of autoethnographic research is problematic, as Josselson (1993) questioned: "What is a good story? Is just a good story enough? What must be added to a story to make it scholarship? How do we derive concepts from stories and then use these concepts to understand people?" (p. xi).

The reviewers called for several validity techniques that are normally associated with enhancing the rigor of qualitative investigations. However, some scholars have suggested that the criteria used to judge autoethnography should not necessarily be the same as traditional criteria used to judge other qualitative research investigations (Garratt & Hodkinson, 1999; Sparkes, 2000). Furthermore, the post-hoc use of techniques to ensure reliability and validity has been questioned recently (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). Morse et al suggested that more attention should be paid to constructive rather than evaluative (i.e., post-hoc) techniques. For example, describing investigator responsiveness during the research process would be a constructive approach to validity, as opposed to the inclusion of evaluative checks to establish the trustworthiness of completed research (e.g., an external audit). Both viewpoints question the application of 'traditional criteria' (i.e., post-hoc evaluative measures based largely on the parallel perspective) to judge contemporary qualitative investigations. There is common ground here because constructive approaches to validity and reliability would be more appropriate

criteria to judge autoethnography than the post-hoc imposition of evaluative techniques associated with the parallel perspective. For example, reflexive techniques that examine the sensitivity of the researcher to the particular subculture under investigation may provide constructive approaches to validity in autoethnography.

Richardson (2000, pp. 15-16) described five factors she uses when reviewing personal narrative papers that includes analysis of both evaluative and constructive validity techniques. The criteria are: (a) Substantive contribution. Does the piece contribute to our understanding of social life? (b) Aesthetic merit. Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfyingly complex, and not boring? (c) Reflexivity. How did the author come to write this text? How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text? (d) Impactfulness. Does this affect me emotionally and/or intellectually? Does it generate new questions or move me to action? (e) Expresses a reality. Does this text embody a fleshed out sense of lived experience? Autoethnographic manuscripts might include dramatic recall, unusual phrasing, and strong metaphors to invite the reader to 'relive' events with the author. These guidelines may provide a framework for directing investigators and reviewers alike.

The theoretical arguments outlined above seem to justify the use of different criteria to evaluate autoethnography. However, such theoretical arguments did little to alleviate my sense of helplessness as I continued to face reviewers who demanded 'traditional' verification criteria. I carefully addressed the reviewers' comments, and the next draft of my autoethnography complied with the traditional formula more readily as a result of the changes I had made. I did

not realize I was to confront another set of issues that struck to the very heart of the autoethnographic genre.

### **Recreating a Discourse II: The Use of Self as the Only Data Source**

The second dialogue of reviewer criticisms centers on demands for a more realist (and presumably acceptable) form of representation. Again, reviewer A represents those more credulous reviewers whereas reviewer B is representative of those with a skeptical view of autoethnography.

- Reviewer B: It is generally not wise to conduct a study of the ‘self.’ There are always exceptions to this rule, however, a strong case must be presented. It would be difficult to classify this manuscript as ‘true’ research even after a revision.
- Author: The genre of autoethnography is based on, and designed for, the use of self. Without the self there could be no autoethnography. You are dismissing the entire methodology rather than critiquing this particular investigation.
- Reviewer A: Well, I personally support narrative as a form of qualitative research, but I am not able to find depth to this narrative. For example, including extracts from a research diary would have been useful. This would have allowed the investigator to incorporate direct quotes into the body of the manuscript.
- Reviewer B: Yes, a good idea. But the manuscript is presented as a reflective synopsis of his teaching, and not a formal research investigation per se...
- Author: Have you stopped to think that this paper may not have been presented or intended as a ‘formal research investigation per se?’

Reviewer B: Well, why was a singular case the sole source of data and a narrative analysis used? I mean, you use 'I' ten times on page ten. This seems rather excessive. The final section of the manuscript seemed to be a revisit of personal experiences and emotions more so than substantial recommendations for teachers and administrators. These strategies are particularly contextual and unique, which makes applicability and transfer difficult.

Reviewer A: My comments are directed toward assisting the author in developing a manuscript that would fit the requirements of a research-oriented journal. The author does not convince me of the significance of the methodology for reflective purposes. In other words, elaboration concerning why this methodology is useful is needed, particularly for the reader naïve to this type of methodology.

These comments left me at a loss. After all, I thought that I had complied with advice provided by the autoethnography methodology experts (i.e., Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Reed-Danahay, 1997) and demonstrated necessary methodological rigor. It seemed to me that the reviewers were leveling criticisms of my work that were more a criticism of the entire genre of autoethnographic research, which appeared to be because of their unfamiliarity with this form of representation and the use of self as the source of data. Reviewer B was critical of my expression of personal experiences and emotions, which is the essence of autoethnographic writing (Reed-Danahay, 1997). These reviewers seemed to agree with Charmaz and Mitchell (1997), who argued that scholarly writers are expected to stay on the sidelines and keep their voices out of their articles ("the proper voice is no voice at all" p. 194). The mistrust of the self as a research vehicle was

evidenced by calls for ‘empirical’ data. Reviewer A wanted extracts from the research diary and direct quotes, which would require moving away from the tenets of autoethnography to produce a more realist version of the tale (Van Manen, 1988). Both reviewers questioned whether this type of manuscript constitutes proper research. I realized that establishing autoethnography as ‘proper research’ is problematic because such work is located “at the boundaries of disciplinary practices” (Sparkes, 2000, p. 21).

The problematic nature of self-as-the-only-data-source in autoethnography is further complicated because qualitative researchers have long been encouraged to consider how their personal subjectivity influences the investigative process. The investigator has been established as the research instrument *par excellence* in a range of qualitative research traditions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In ethnography, the subjectivity of the researcher is seen as a resource for understanding the problematic world they are investigating, as something to capitalize on rather than exorcise (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In the autoethnographic tradition the use of the investigator’s *self* as the focus of the research is problematic. But, as Sparkes (2002b) questioned, why are personal narratives so offensive?

It appears that criticisms of narcissism are common because autoethnographies are considered too self-indulgent, introspective, and individualized (Sparkes, 2000). Coffey (1999) suggested that those who preach autoethnography are “in danger of gross self-indulgence” (p. 132).

However, criticisms of narcissism and self-indulgence represent universal charges applied to all autoethnographies regardless of the qualities of the particular venture. Of course, autoethnographies can be self-indulgent, but the universal charge of self-indulgence labeled

against autoethnographies is a result of misapprehensions of the genre due to a mistrust of the work of self (Sparkes, 2002b).

Even if reviewers do not trust the use of self, a good autoethnography should not be dismissed. Autoethnography is not necessarily limited to the self because people do not accumulate their experiences in a social vacuum (Stanley, 1993). Mykhalovskiy (1996) challenged reductive, dualistic views (i.e., self-other distinctions) of autoethnography, and suggested that to write individual experience is to write social experience. It seems that charges of narcissism and related criticisms function to reinforce ethnographic orthodoxy and resist change (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Such criticisms, in turn, function to preserve the very types of dominant viewpoints that those using autoethnographic approaches may wish to question. If autoethnography is intended to confront dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim marginalized representational spaces (Tierny, 1998), it is quite ironic that the method itself becomes marginalized by the academic review process.

### **Conclusion**

The autoethnographic account featured here was eventually published after being examined by seven different reviewers and four journal editors. Much of the feedback provided a universal critique of autoethnography rather than a critique of the particular manuscript. The majority of the reviewers' comments were directed at making the autoethnography more realist, which would then enable them to evaluate it using more established, acceptable, and accessible criteria. Alternatively, feedback directed at improving the autoethnographic content was largely absent.



Autoethnography has been received with a significant degree of academic suspicion because it contravenes certain qualitative research traditions. The controversy surrounding autoethnography is in part related to the problematic exclusive use of the self to produce research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Additionally, it is apparent that traditional criteria used to pass judgement on qualitative research in general may not be suitable for autoethnography (Garratt & Hodkinson, 1999; Sparkes, 2000). These issues reflect the essence of the dual crises of representation and legitimation that characterize the fourth moment of qualitative inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

I could not help but wonder if the reviewers found themselves in a constrained and unenviable position. As a gatekeeper of research culture, the reviewer holds a powerful position. High quality reviews can provide valuable learning experiences, contribute to professional development, and even (indirectly) influence salary and promotion. Given that most reviewers take these responsibilities seriously, it must be a daunting experience to be confronted with an academic manuscript that veers so significantly with the tenets of a traditional review. Whereas I was frustrated by the peer-review process that I experienced for this particular manuscript, I had to acknowledge that the reviewers may have been frustrated by the lack of guidance from the wider research community concerning how to evaluate autoethnographic work. My experiences, and the sense of inadequacy I experienced as I was repeatedly unable to publish the account, left me pondering the worth of continuing in my attempts to get the article published. Eventually, I resolved to 'keep trying' because to admit defeat would be to accept the marginalization of *both* my pedagogical experiences *and* the method by which I chose to express them. To publish represented a small, but personally significant, victory over certain dominant perspectives.

In terms of considering the journals to which the manuscript was submitted, it must be noted that they were not 'pure' qualitative publications. However, I did select journals that published qualitative research and had a broad scope. Certainly the journals differed in terms of their focus on research versus practice, but the content of the reviews did not reflect research-practice concerns. Moreover, there was consistency in the reviews concerning the application of traditional criteria to judge autoethnographic research and the use of the self to produce research. Perhaps some of the problems reported upon here would not have been experienced if I had only submitted to purely qualitative journals. However, if autoethnographies are only submitted to purely qualitative journals then autoethnographic writers may be reinforcing the dominant practices of verification that emerged here. If autoethnography is to be justified as proper research then publication in broad 'mainstream' journals (i.e., that publish qualitative *and* quantitative research) is a necessary step.

Much like the autoethnographic texts themselves, the boundaries of research and their maintenance are socially constructed (Sparkes, 2000). In justifying autoethnography as proper research, it should be noted that ethnographers have acted autobiographically before, but in the past they may not have been aware of doing so, and taken their genre for granted (Coffey, 1999). Autoethnographies may leave reviewers in a perilous position. In the example examined here, the reviewers were not sure if the account was proper research (because of the style of representation), and the verification criteria they wished to judge this research by appeared to be inappropriate. Whereas the use of autoethnographic methods may be increasing, knowledge of how to evaluate and provide feedback to improve such accounts appears to be lagging. As reviewers begin to develop ways in which to judge autoethnography, they must resist the

temptation to “seek universal foundational criteria lest one form of dogma simply replaces another” (Sparkes, 2002b, p. 223). However, criteria for evaluating personal writing have barely begun to develop (DeVault, 1997).

There are potential implications of the writing story presented here for investigators and reviewers. Caution is warranted in over-generalizing from this account to the general review criteria of all journals. This paper only provides a personal negative experience of the peer review process for one manuscript. It must also be noted that qualitative research in sport and physical activity may not be as well advanced as in other disciplines (Sparkes, 2002a). However, it is intended that this account be thought provoking for other reviewers and researchers.

Researchers would be well advised to be persistent in their autoethnographic intentions, and be prepared to face rejection and critiques of their chosen genre. Resilience and conviction are required to pursue this methodology. Generally autoethnographic accounts have been limited to publication in qualitative journals or presentations at qualitative conferences. If autoethnography becomes more accepted as a form of scientific presentation, researchers must develop new avenues of criticism and support for such work.

Whereas those who produce autoethnography are at risk of being overly narcissistic and self-indulgent, there does seem to be a place for research that links the personal with the cultural. Autoethnography can encourage empathy and connection beyond the self of the author and contribute to sociological understandings (Sparkes, 2002b). In this article, I attempted to autoethnographically link personal experiences of a review process with pertinent issues reflective of research culture in order to contribute to understandings of the autoethnographic

approach (of course it is up to the reader to judge if this has been achieved). In postmodernity, it is surely incumbent on the gatekeepers of research to share perspectives on a variety of research methodologies, styles of representation, and evaluative criteria, rather than privilege the authority of dominant viewpoints. It is essential that such discussions take place to ensure the future (or confirm the demise) of autoethnographic methodology.

### References

- Agger, B. (1990). *The decline of discourse: Reading, writing, and resistance in post-modern capitalism*. Lewes, UK: Falmer.
- American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication manual* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington: American Psychological Association.
- Charmaz, K., & Mitchell, R. (1997). The myth of silent authorship: Self, substance, and style in ethnographic writing. In R. Hertz, (Ed.), *Reflexivity and voice* (pp. 193-215). London: Sage.
- Coffey, P. (1999). *The ethnographic self*. London: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 1-17). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). The policies and practices of interpretation. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 897-992). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- DeVault, M. (1997). Personal writing in social research. In R. Hertz (Ed.), *Reflexivity and voice* (pp. 216-228). London: Sage.
- Ellis, C. (1995). *Final negotiations*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 733-768). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Garrett, D., & Hodkinson, P. (1999). Can there be criteria for selecting research criteria? A hermeneutical analysis of an inescapable dilemma. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 4, 515-539.

- Glesne, C., & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming qualitative researchers*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Holt, N. L. (2001). Beyond technical reflection: Demonstrating the modification of teaching behaviors using three levels of reflection. *Avante*, 7(2), 66-76.
- Josselson, R. (1993). A narrative introduction. In R. Josselson & A. Leiblich (Eds.), *The narrative study of lives* (pp. ix-xv). London: Sage.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Marcus, G., & Fischer, M. (Eds., 1986). *Anthropology as cultural critique*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(2), Article 2. Retrieved July 4 2002 from <http://www.ualberta.ca/~ijqm/>
- Mykhalovskiy, E. (1996). Reconsidering table talk: Critical thoughts on the relationship between sociology, autobiography, and self-indulgence. *Qualitative Sociology*, 19, 131-151.
- Reed-Danahay, D. (1997). *Auto/Ethnography*. New York: Berg.
- Richardson, L. (1995). Writing-stories: Co-authoring 'The sea monster,' a writing story. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 1, 189-203.
- Richardson, L. (2000). New writing practices in qualitative research. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 17, 5-20.
- Sparkes, A. C. (1996). The fatal flaw: A narrative of the fragile body-self. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 2, 463-294.
- Sparkes, A. C. (2000). Autoethnography and narratives of self: Reflections on criteria in action. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 17, 21-41.
- Sparkes, A. C. (2002a). *Telling tales in sport and physical activity: A qualitative journey*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Sparkes, A. C. (2002b). Autoethnography: Self-indulgence or something more? In A. Bochner & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Ethnographically speaking: Autoethnography, literature, and aesthetics*. New York: AltaMira.
- Stanley, L. (1993). On auto/biography in sociology. *Sociology*, 27, 41-52.
- Tierny, W. G. (1998). Life history's history: Subjects foretold. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 4, 49-70.

Van Manen, J. (1988). *Tales of the field: On writing ethnography*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Wolcott, H. F. (1994). *Transforming qualitative data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.