

ANTH 233 Ethnographic Studies
Winter 2019

I acknowledge that St FX is in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People.

Note re exam: There will be three parts. The first two will be similar in structure; the third will be a comprehensive essay question.

Mar. 28, Apr. 1: Autoethnography: The Researcher as Subject

READ: Wall, Sarah. 2012. "Ethics and the Socio-political Context of International Adoption: Speaking from the Eye of the Storm." *Ethics and Social Welfare* 6(4): 318-332.

- what is "autoethnography"?

- anything that takes the researcher's participation into account? (And therefore most participant observation?)

- "Autoethnography has been used variously as a way of telling a story that invites personal connection rather than analysis (Frank 2000), exploring meaning in and making sense of dire circumstances (Ellis & Bochner 2006), exploring issues of personal importance within an explicitly acknowledged social context (Sparkes 1996; Holt 2001), evaluating one's actions (Duncan 2004), or critiquing extant literature on a topic of personal significance (Muncey 2005). At present, there is a debate about the extent to which autoethnography should be narrative, emotional, therapeutic, and self-focused as opposed to theoretical, analytical, and scholarly, with a more traditional understanding of self as connected to a particular ethnographic context rather than the focus of it (Anderson 2006; Atkinson 1997, 2006; Denzin 2006; Ellis 1999; Ellis & Bochner 2006; Muncey 2010). I take a moderate approach. I am not attempting to evoke an emotional response but rather seeking to contribute to the discourse on international adoption through a personal but thematically organized and analytical narrative." (Wall 2012, 319-20)?

Here is another definition, one that would count what Wall is doing as truly autoethnographic. It is written in response to an article in which the researchers presented themselves as Muslim – wearing a veil, beard, etc. – to understand how Muslims in the UK experience Islamophobia (Zempi and Awan 2017):

"Using the term autoethnography [with respect to research in which] begs the question how this is different from engaging in participant observation, a way of working in which ethnography is grounded. My point is that how we learn to do anthropological fieldwork depends very much on the pre-existing relation between anthropologists and their interlocutors. When one is a relative outsider to the lifeworld of one's interlocutors, participant observation involves developing relations of trust, forms of closeness and empathy by participating in their lifeworlds (even if this always remains limited). But if one starts off as relatively close to, or part of, a particular lifeworld, and already has acquired forms of experiential, embodied knowledge, one has a different point of departure. Then one moves from participating to reflecting upon one's experiences. The latter is what I would consider autoethnography. Lumping together all research that

reflects on the researcher's experiences as autoethnographic fails to recognize how one's ability or inability to 'leave the field' structures one's experiences. Although there are, of course, grey areas, I agree with Crawley (2012), who argues for limiting the use of the term autoethnography to an analysis of those experiences that did not first occur as part of a fieldwork project. (Moors 2017, 387-8).

- these perspectives touch on issues such as:
 - whether the researcher has a prior identity as a member of a group they study, or whether the researcher has had a temporary, perhaps acted role as a member of the group
 - whether the work is a personal, emotionally-connected narrative, or an analysis at least in part based on personal experience as a member of the subject group
 - whether the focus is partly or wholly reflexive
- what other elements of ethnography, discussed at the beginning of the course, relate to this form of ethnography?
- what are the ethics of autoethnography, as compared to ethnographic work on a group of people distinct from that of the ethnographer?
- how does Wall go about her work? What does she use the autoethnographic method to argue?
- project for Monday: write a one page (150-200 word) autoethnographic essay analysing a personal experience

Moors, Annelise. 2017. On Autoethnography. *Ethnography* 18(3): 387-389.

Zempi, Irene and Imran Awan. 2017. Doing "Dangerous" Autoethnography on Islamophobic Victimization. *Ethnography* 18(3): 367-386.