

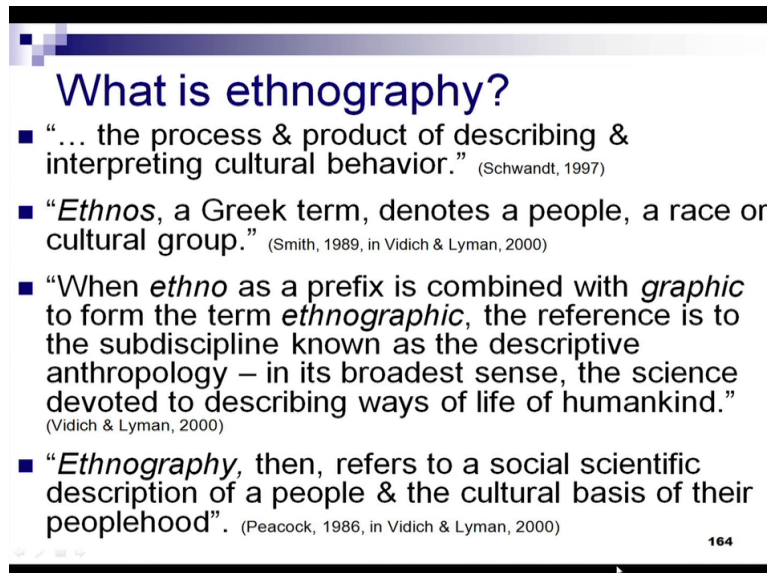
**Qualitative Research Methods**  
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**Lecture 20**  
**Autoethnography**

Welcome back to the NOC course title qualitative research methods, my name is Aradhna Malik and I'm helping you with this course, we have discussed some strategies of inquiry or we have started an introduction into the strategies of inquiry in qualitative research methods. We discussed ethnography last time, today we will discuss a special form of ethnography and that is called autoethnography.

In the previous class we discussed some genres of ethnography, autoethnography is a specialized form of ethnography, we talked about ethnography, what ethnography was, we talked about ethnography being a process and product of describing and interpreting cultural behavior and I am revisiting this for the benefit of those who may have you know who may need some revision because this is slightly more difficult, but it's a very, very interesting field of study, so we will go back to the slide and then we will move on.

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**What is ethnography?**

- "... the process & product of describing & interpreting cultural behavior." (Schwandt, 1997)
- "*Ethnos*, a Greek term, denotes a people, a race or cultural group." (Smith, 1989, in Vidich & Lyman, 2000)
- "When *ethno* as a prefix is combined with *graphic* to form the term *ethnographic*, the reference is to the subdiscipline known as the descriptive anthropology – in its broadest sense, the science devoted to describing ways of life of humankind." (Vidich & Lyman, 2000)
- "*Ethnography*, then, refers to a social scientific description of a people & the cultural basis of their peoplehood". (Peacock, 1986, in Vidich & Lyman, 2000)

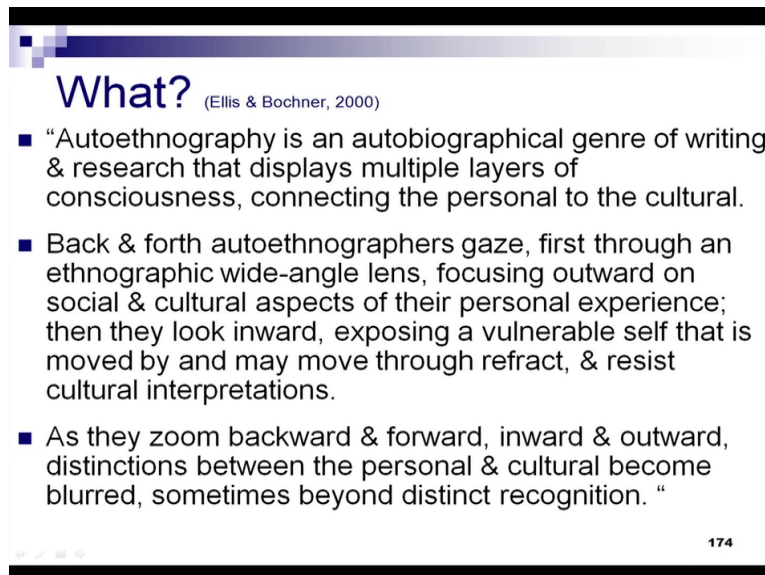
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Ethnos, we talked about what you know how that the term ethnography comes into being, we talked about you know ethnography being or ethnographic been composed of two different terms, Ethnos and graphic, Ethnos denotes a people, a race or a cultural group, so it is a social

scientific description of a people and the cultural basis of their peoplehood, which means how they really are, who they are? What do they do? What comes out?

What happens? How they live? How they behave? How they are? You know that the essence of being as expressed in their behaviour and that is captured in the form of ethnography.

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**What?** (Ellis & Bochner, 2000)

- “Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing & research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural.
- Back & forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social & cultural aspects of their personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through refract, & resist cultural interpretations.
- As they zoom backward & forward, inward & outward, distinctions between the personal & cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition. “

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Today we are going to talk about autoethnography. What is autoethnography? And this is from paper by Elis and Bochner, were in the same book, handbook of qualitative research that have been telling you about in that's the book I am referring to that is one book that you can actually keep as you know real having a very fat handbook, so it's not really handy for a handbook.

I think this way about probably you know more than a kilo, but this is the one, if you want one good book for qualitative research, this is one good book that you can have. So handbook of qualitative research and there is a paper by Elis and Bochner, in which they describe autoethnography and that is what you are going to talk about in this lectures. “Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing.

And research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, then focusing outward on the social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move to refract and resist cultural interpretations.

So they go back and forth, they go back into the memoirs, try and find out what is it that their current life was affected by, they may discuss what they experienced and they time what they experienced? What they went through? What happened to its impact in the current scenario in light of their knowledge as researchers? So it is a way of describing one's own life as it applies to the current situation.

And how things in one's life are interconnected and how this interconnectedness of 'a life' represents the interconnectedness of experiences in the lives of a specific set of people. So you become a representative, the researcher becomes a representative of a larger population and goes back and forth, you revisit something then you say this is how it has impacted me and then in going back and forth between what one may have experienced.

And that evokes a whole lot of emotions which will talk about it, in a minute or so and then you know you connected, you bring in your knowledge of a researcher. You try and understand your experiences in light of what you know about research of what you know about culture and you try and connected to whatever you are experiencing today. So it's interconnectedness of different events that a researcher tries to understand and analyze.

As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, say you look at things from the perspective of a person who is experiencing things and then you move out of your being and you try and see things objectively, then you go in and you tap into something you have experienced, then you move out and then you say okay this is how it make sense in the largest things.

So you zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition." because we must understand that every single person is contributing to the cultural experience of a race, of a community, of a people. So how you have interpreted as a participant, within a situation, as a member of a particular culture, of a particular community.

How you have interpreted? it's not only what you are experienced, it's also your interpretation, so how one has interpreted one's own experiences will contribute or will impact how one reacts to those experiences, right, so when we experience something, we react to that experience. We form opinions, we interpret something then our actions, our

reaction to what we experience, feed into the overall experience of this community, of this collective of which we are a part.

And our reactions, our responses, to the stimuli we receive which are in turn based on our interpretations of the responses we receive, then act as stimuli for the others in that community. So our biased opinion has a very strong place in how the community experience is a particular phenomenon, a particular event, how they 'do their life' because whatever I am doing, is affecting you as a person.

And whatever I am doing is a result of how I have interpreted whatever I have experienced, so my biased is an integral part of the stimuli I send into the environment. So we cannot dissociate ourselves completely, but when we do autoethnography, we recognise this week try and understand the reasons for our response to stimuli, we try and understand why we experienced, what we experienced it's not just physical experience.

The experience also you know is rounded off or is enriched by how we interpret the physical experiences we are going through, so we talked about you know something called as our emotions are heightened, we see something. If my health is not okay I am likely to either overreact or under react to certain situations, I may see a friend and if I am not feeling well, I may not feel that happy about seeing a friend.

There may be a, you know there was a Tsunami in Japan recently, there was actually an earthquake that caused the series of tsunamis in Japan, now imagine the reactions of different people to this particular event, if you were to capture as an anthropologist, if you were or as a behavioral scientist or a social scientist, if we went around trying to assess the cumulative trauma that people experience, that collective trauma would be influenced by the stage of life we were in.

If you were vacationing in Japan and you experienced a Tsunami and you lost all your belongings and you had to struggle to get back home to whichever country you had come from and you had never experience the tsunami in your life, the way you would experience, the way you would express your experience of the same Tsunami, would be very different from the experience of another person living in Japan.

Who had lost the same amount of physical things, who had been exactly, who had been hurt in exactly the same manner as you had been hurt, but who was not there on a vacation, maybe somebody was there for some sad event, maybe somebody was there for a Funeral, maybe somebody was there for something else, so they may have lost all their belongings and you know God forbid I hope this hasn't happened to anyone.

But if you were one of those who were affected, the way you would describe these experiences would be very different and that would add to the collective trauma. If you are already in pain and some more pain comes we don't really recognize the incoming pain as that much or some of us may say I am already hurting, this vulnerability heightens my senses and we become over sensitive or we become, I won't be saying over so sensitive.

We become even more sensitive to stimuli we may have considered normal in the past and that's why I'm saying that. When we talk about autoethnography, we zoom in and zoom out, zoom in and zoom out, we say this is what I experience, this is why I experienced, this is what happened to me, I feel the pain, I go through the same emotions, distance myself and save this is what happened to me.

And this is why it happened to me, this is why I was experiencing X, maybe if the circumstances had been different, the same physical experience would have been interpreted in a different manner. So the ability to critically analyze is critical to an autoethnographers work and that is exactly what this is telling us and that enriches researcher experience, because we become representatives of a set of people, when we do autoethnography.

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## Forms of autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000)

- “Short stories
- Poetry
- Fiction
- Novels
- Photographic essays
- Personal essays
- Journals
- Fragmented & layered writing
- Social science prose.”

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Forms of autoethnography, we have “short stories, we have poetry, we have fiction, we have novels, we have photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, social science prose.” So different ways in which we do autoethnography, we write about our only lived experience and you find a lot of examples of this and I told you last time also when we were discussing ethnography, when people write about events that have that have affected their lives.

And then people collect these stories and enrich and contribute to the historical experience of an event for example the Indo Pak partition, for example the Punjab riots, for example the train accident that happened a few days ago, so how different people experience the same train accident would be very different and stories would be collected by journalists and somebody would explain that, somebody would explain.

Somebody would describe what happened to people, when they were travelling in a train, when the train derailed, more than hundred people or Hundred and Fifty people probably died. So you know, so different stories are collected at certain times, so these are some forms of autoethnography okay.

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## Focus of autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000)

- “Concrete action
- Dialogue
- Emotion
- Embodiment
- Spirituality
- Self-consciousness”

“... appearing as relational & institutional stories affected by history, social structure, & culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, feeling, thought, & language.”<sup>176</sup>

The focus of autoethnography is on “concrete action, its on dialogue, emotion, one embodiment, its on spirituality, it could be on self consciousness” also so we try these things through autoethnography “appearing as a relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure and culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, feeling, thought and language.”

What is history? When we talk about history, I have a friend who the history professor, with due respect to what she does, she is brilliant, she is world renowned and you know she is she does European history, now history is expressions of people, what are historical reports, expressions of people, stories written by people, journalists reporter, reporting is the understanding and interpretation of the facts available to us.

So these are in, when we talk about autoethnography, autoethnography is different from historical reporting, historical reporting is seeing things as a non-participant, here you are a participant, observer, sometimes a person who has been deeply affected by the situation. It appears is relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure and culture which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, feeling thought and language.

So history as experienced by people who have gone through that historical event, now that and more value, let's not call it value, that has more eat, it enriches the whole expression of the historical event. It is which is the whole recording of the historical event, okay.

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## Challenges faced by autoethnographers

(Ellis & Bochner, 2000)

- Narration of one's own experiences
- Ability to understand, acknowledge, introspect and reveal one's own emotions, "feelings, motives, or contradictions"
- "Confronting things about [oneself] that are less than flattering"
- "... honest autoethnography generates a lot of fears & doubts – and emotional pain."
- "... [not] having any control over how readers interpret [what you have written about what you experienced]"
- Feeling of humiliation regarding oneself and one's family members & loved ones

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Challenges faced by autoethnographers to first challenges narration of one's own experiences, one may not be very good at writing, you may have experience something very traumatic, very different, very, very exciting but you may lack the words so its if it how good you are at expressing your own lived experiences. Ability to understand, acknowledge introspect and reveal one's own emotions, "feelings", motives or contradictions."

Not being able to express is one thing but being able to honestly put it out in the public domain is a whole different ball game and we just come down to some more challenges. So "confronting things about oneself that are less than flattering," when we talk about, when we do real honest good autoethnography, we reveal things about ourselves, firstly confront them except that this happened to me I behaved in XYZ manner, so we are also exposing our vulnerabilities in a difficult situation.

So we first confront things about oneself that are less than flattering, that may not be the ideal ways of behaving, so we say I did this, somebody else may say they could have been a better way yes but then historically this is what I did, okay. "Honest ethnography generates, a honest autoethnography generates a lot of fears and doubts and emotional pain."

I had a discussion with somebody collecting stories about the Indo Pak partition and you know people go and collect stories when people talk about what happened to their families, how their family is migrated, they were picked up from their homes, they were uprooted from the town, they were forced to give their belongings behind, sometimes they were travelling in groups together and they would rest midway.



And so when all those thoughts come to you, you don't know where you're going, you don't know if you survive the journey, you see people getting killed, you are in the middle of riot or maybe if somebody tried to talk to these people who have been affected by earthquake in Japan or the train accident in back of flood of emotions, because you're gone through that experience it hurts you inside to even talk about it.

Anyone who has gone through a traumatic experience knows, that yes on the one hand it is relaxing one can vent when one talks about it, but it also somehow scratches the scabs that have formed over or in the healing process. Once revisits the incident and pain comes up emotional pain is there, when we discuss these thing when you do autoethnography, when we are revisiting incidents, when we are gazing into the past, the emotions that we experienced.

The sense of loss, the sense of betrayal, the day the difficult experience, the emotions associated with the difficult experience that we went through are highlighted. And they are they come back to us, so that it is another challenge here. "Not having any control over how your readers interpret what you have written about what you experienced"

Ad you know one can't blame someone, I will just give you a very personal example unless one loses a member of one's family one doesn't know what it means to lose a member of one's immediate family, we can try as hard as we want, but unless one has really gone through that experience you don't know what it means, unless you are in the middle of an earthquake, you see the building that you were standing, in fall, you fall down along with it you don't know what it means to have that happened to you.

We can be a sympathetic and sensitive as we want so we don't know how the readers are going to interpret it, readers may be very sensitive, but the same aim, the same perspective cannot be expected from somebody, who has not gone through similar experience, now and we talked about objective research, we are talking about replication of information, we are talking about the same interpretation coming out of similar experiences, then you're talking about something different.

But when you're talking about something as rich as an autoethnographical account, we are concerned about how people will view our interpretations, their interpretations of the same

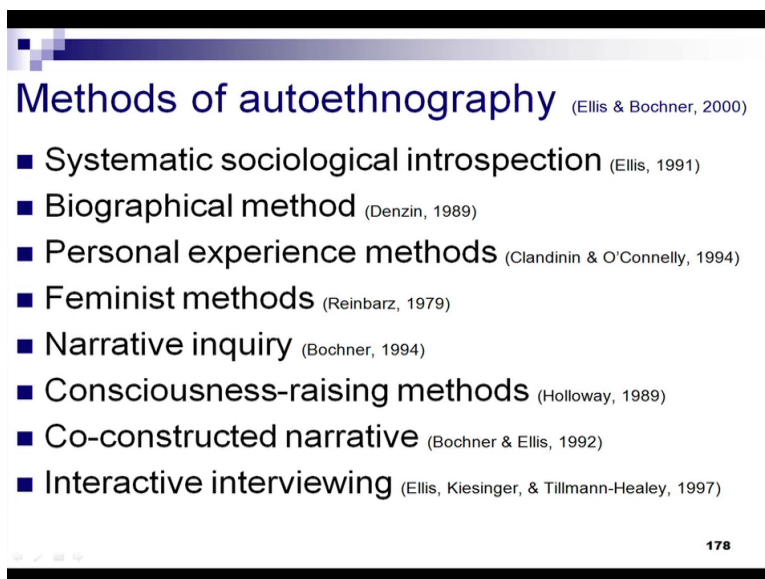
situation may be different, but our interpretations are laced, and laced is a very mild word, our interpretations are thickly layered with our emotions and those emotions haven't and contributed to our experience of those emotions.

And that has intern contributed to our responses to the environment in which we experience something and that intern has affected the way the environment experienced that particular event. So everything we experienced, and everything we felt has contributed to the cumulative experience of the community that we were a part of, when we were experiencing that particular event.

Bcause whatever I felt at that time was affecting the way I behave with my years, with my family, with my friend, with others I did not know and that intern affected their experience that became a part of their experience, with in the environment and what they felt as a result of my behavior affected the way they responded to me and to the others in the environment.

So everybody is responses laced with their emotions, was became a part of the cumulative experience of the or the collective experience of the community that they were a part of, an intern influenced the experience of the community itself okay. So that's one big challenge, you don't know how people are going to interpret things, feeling of humiliation regarding oneself and one's family members and loved ones, especially it experiences negative that is another challenge. And by then some of us really take the plunge and do autoethnography.

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## Methods of autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000)

- Systematic sociological introspection (Ellis, 1991)
- Biographical method (Denzin, 1989)
- Personal experience methods (Clandinin & O'Connelly, 1994)
- Feminist methods (Reinbarz, 1979)
- Narrative inquiry (Bochner, 1994)
- Consciousness-raising methods (Holloway, 1989)
- Co-constructed narrative (Bochner & Ellis, 1992)
- Interactive interviewing (Ellis, Kiesinger, & Tillmann-Healey, 1997)

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Method of autoethnography, we have systematic sociological introspection one of the methods, then we have biographical method, we have personal experience methods, we have feminists methods which are based on critical theory, narrative inquiry, consciousness raising methods, co-constructed narrative, because we are talking about us in relation to others within a particular experience, my experience has viewed by somebody and close to.

Somebody was gone through that experience with me, that becomes co-constructed narrative. What I see myself as and what people who were close to, who were experiencing the same phenomenon along with me, saw my experience has can become a part of the co-constructed narrative. Interactive interviewing various ways in which we can do autoethnography.

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## Approaches to autoethnography

(Ellis & Bochner, 2000)

### ■ Reflexive ethnographies:

- “Authors use their own experiences in the culture reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions.”
- “... the researcher’s personal experience becomes important primarily in how it illuminates the culture under study.”
- *Radical empiricism*: “... a process that includes the ethnographer’s experiences & interaction with other participants as vital parts of what is being studied.”

Now some approaches to autoethnography, reflexive ethnographies: “Authors use their own experiences in the culture reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self other interactions.” And explain their interactions with others in light of the information they have now and say maybe I did this, I could have done, I had these other options available to me even at that time that I missed, so being able to critically evaluate once lived experiences.

And may be changed the way one feels about them or at least question the way one felt about those situations when one was in that situation. “The researcher’s personal experience becomes important primarily in how it illuminates the culture and study.” So your personal experience like I have been telling you right from the beginning of this class, that whatever you experience is going to ultimately feed into the cumulative experience of the community.

So one becomes you know we recognize, how our experience, how our interpretations fed into the overall experience, into the overall cultural flow of the community that we are part of. Then Radical empiricism: is “a process that includes the ethnographer’s experiences and interaction with other participants and vital parts of what is being studied.” So we try and see how our experiences and our interactions with other participants have affected or are connected to whatever we are studying.

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## Approaches to autoethnography (Contd.)

(Ellis & Bochner, 2000)

- **Native ethnographies:** “Researchers who are natives of cultures that have been marginalized or exoticized by others write about & interpret their own cultures for others.”
  - *Complete-member researchers:* “Researchers explore groups of which they already are members or in which, during the research process, they have become full members with complete identification & acceptance.”
  - *Personal narratives:* “Social scientists take on the dual identities of academic & personal selves to tell autobiographical stories about some aspect of their experience in daily life.”
  - *Literary autoethnographies:* “An author’s primary identification is as an autobiographical writer rather than a social scientist, & the text focuses as much on examining a self autobiographically as on interpreting a culture for a nonnative audience.”

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Native ethnographies, related to ethnographies by “researchers who are natives of cultures that have been marginalized or exoticized, either they been elated, elevated, so exoticized is related to the word exotic, so cultures that either have been marginalized or exoticized by others write about and interpret their own cultures for others.” People from within the community said this is who I am, this is what I experience, this is what others say about my experience, about my community, that is native ethnography.

Now in this we have three different ways of approaching native ethnographies, we have complete member researchers, who write from the perspective of complete member researchers, “researchers explore groups of which they are already members or in which, during the research process, they have become full members with complete identification and acceptance.” So it’s me as a representative of a particular culture, knowing fully well that I embodied most of the characteristics of that particular culture or community that I am describing.

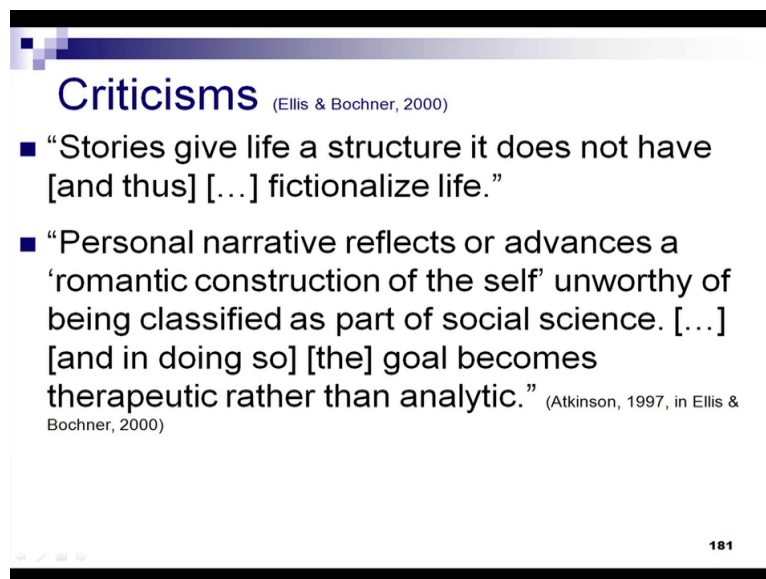
Personal narratives: “Social scientists taken the dual identities of academic and personal selves to tell autobiographical stories about some aspect of their experience in their daily life.” So this is a zooming in zooming out part personal narratives, I see it, I experience it, I describe it, the way I have experienced it, then I distance myself and take on an identity of a social researcher, okay, so me as a participant, me as a researcher.

And I explain the same event from the perspective of these two hats that I am wearing, has a person who experienced it and as a person studying what was experienced at that time. Then

literary autoethnography: is “An author’s primary identification is as an autobiographical writer rather than as a social scientists and so this is at the other end of the spectrum, so I describing my life, I am not really bringing my role as a social scientist into the picture.

And text focuses as much on examining a self autobiographical as on interpreting a culture for non native audience.” To be described that you know this is what happened to me but then we also describe things that may have been obvious to people who are from the same culture that becomes a literary autoethnography.

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### Criticisms (Ellis & Bochner, 2000)

- “Stories give life a structure it does not have [and thus] [...] fictionalize life.”
- “Personal narrative reflects or advances a ‘romantic construction of the self’ unworthy of being classified as part of social science. [...] [and in doing so] [the] goal becomes therapeutic rather than analytic.” (Atkinson, 1997, in Ellis & Bochner, 2000)

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Some criticisms to autoethnography, critiques say the “stories give life a structure it does not have and thus fictionalized life.” So we critiques say that we add elements to live that may not really have been present in describing something from our own perspective as people who experienced life or a slices life at that point.

The Other criticism is that the “personal narrative reflects on advances ‘romantic construction of the self’ unworthy of been classified as part of social science and in doing so the goal becomes therapeutic rather than analytic.” So it’s just a way of venting, it's just a way of telling people about ourselves, it's just a way of you're not taking to take one's own horn for want of a more diplomatic phrase here, but we just tell the world what we experienced to get on with that it's not analytic.

It is telling people me, me, me this is what I experience this, this is what happened to me, this is this is how I did things, so it becomes more therapeutic, it gives us a chance to vent to

express our lived experiences, with to share our lived experiences with others who may not necessarily be connected with it or who may not even be you know, who may not want to see it in that light, who may want uh see this from an objective perspective.

So where is when we talk about an analytic focus, we are talking about, you know pulling things apart and saying that anyone in the situation would have experienced it like this, when we do autoethnography, we say I experienced it, somebody else will say I experience it differently, somebody else will say I experienced differently, different researchers say that.

But then people who are more keen on or who talk about, who prefer the analytic method will say well, when you put all of the I's together then, some common theme must emerge, otherwise this interpretation based on I experienced, I experienced, I experienced is meaningless. So that is what this criticism is all about, now I will take one or two extra minutes.

I know we don't have them but I want to show you a book that you know, a renowned researcher has written, I am I will see if I can get her to give us if 5 minute video clip, but maybe we can have that as a part of this now, I will just see if I can get this her otherwise I will share the details of that book with you in the reference section and this is an autoethnographic account of the Rwandan Genocide written by Doctor Hadidja Nyiransekuye.

Who is very dear friend, who was within, you know who went through the Rwandan genocide and then wrote about her experience, for her as a PhD thesis. And then the thesis was converted into a book and the book is called 'The Lances Were Looking Down,' and this is I'm not saying this because she is my friend and saying this because this book has been reviewed and has been accepted, acknowledged as a very good book.

On auto of that uses autoethnography as an approach to research, sorry the Lances were looking down, one woman's pass through the Rwandan genocide, to life in the states.

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So she was out of this she was affected by the genocide and then he fled and then she went to the United States picked up the threads of her life again and started, so this is the book, so anyway so I will see if I can here, Hadidja Nyirasekuye was born in Gisenyi, Rwanda, and lived in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide. She immigrated to the United States in 1998 and graduated from the University of Denver with a MSW and a Ph.D.

And that's where I met her during my PhD days and she's a very dear friend if I can get her own video I will, but thank you very much for listening I think we are be out of time and will continue with some more strategies of inquiry into qualitative research in the next class, thank you.