AUTOETHNOGRAPHY
A methodology on the edge

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AIM: TO EXPLORE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

- briefly outline research project
- describe autoethnography
- place on research continuum
- acknowledge challenges
- justify as methodology
OUTLINE

Working title: “The experience of childhood emotional neglect”

Context:

• long term effects of childhood physical neglect/abuse and childhood sexual abuse well-documented (Mullen, et al, 1996; Howe, 2005),

• childhood *emotional* neglect and abuse less visible (Mullen, et al, 1996; Wright, et al, 2009) and less clearly defined (Music, 2009).
Research aim:

- bridge the gap between subjective, autobiographical account, (‘misery lit;’ Muncey, 2010), and objective, third person account
- add participants’ voices to a rigorous study (Faulkner, 2012)

Research design:

- bracketing interviews, 8 unstructured individual interviews, focus group(s); thematic analysis
AUTOETHNOGRAPHY – WHAT IS IT?

• combination of autobiography (me, telling my own story) and ethnography (telling the story of a group of people or a culture) (Reed-Danahay, 1997)

• origins in anthropology and ethnography

• can an outsider ever gain a true, authentic picture of a group that is ‘other’?
PLACING AUTOETHNOGRAPHY ON THE CONTINUUM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative research</th>
<th>Qualitative research</th>
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<tr>
<td>• modernist</td>
<td>• post-modern,</td>
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<td>• positivist</td>
<td>• constructivist,</td>
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<td>• objective</td>
<td>• subjective</td>
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<td>• “one truth”</td>
<td>• “multiple truths”</td>
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<td>• RCT</td>
<td>• ‘personal experience’ methods</td>
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Characteristics

- boundary-crossing – the researcher as researched, both ‘insider and outsider’ (Reed-Danahay, 1997)
- researcher’s willingness to embrace subjectivity, rather than deny it (Ellis, 2004) and the ‘judicious use of our vulnerable selves’ (Etherington, 2004)
- high level of researcher reflexivity (Grant, Short & Turner, 2013)
- blurring boundaries between research and creative writing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005)
• ‘the self within a social context’ (Reed-Danahay, 1997)
• challenge prevailing discourse; give voice to marginalized discourses (Harper & Thompson, 2012; Reed-Danahay, 1997)
• ‘feminist’ methodology (Reed-Danahay, 1997)
• aims to provoke action (McLeod, 2011)

an axe to grind?

• evokes the ‘lived experience’ (Etherington, 2004)
MY VULNERABLE SELF

‘...it is work we must do in anguish' (Josselson, 1996)
CHALLENGES

• ‘memories are tricksters and shape-shifters’ (Sparkes, 2013)
• danger of imposing my views on my audience (Wall, 2008)
• balancing scientific rigour with purpose of autoethnography (Wall, 2008)
• ethical tensions around self-care and care of participants (Kottler, 2015; Etherington, 2009; Bond, 2004)
REFLEXIVITY

‘The outcome of reflexive research is usually uncomfortable for the reader,’
(McLeod, 2011)
JUSTIFICATION

- humanist vision of the (social) world (McLeod, 2011)
- person-centred approach to counselling (Rogers, 1957; Price, 1999)
- ‘privileges the individual’ (Muncey, 2010)
- challenging prevailing discourse
- ‘enrich and empower participants’ (Price, 1999)
- social justice/social action (McLeod, 2011)
SUMMARY

Autoethnography is...

- post-modern, feminist qualitative research method
- elements of autobiography and ethnography
- blurs boundaries between research and creative writing
- high level of reflexivity
- challenges prevailing discourse
- uncomfortable to conduct, uncomfortable to read
- a good fit for the research project
References


Faulkner, A (2012) Qualitative data collection: asking the right questions. In D Harper & R Thompson (Eds) Qualitative research methods in mental health and psychotherapy; a guide for students and practitioners. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons


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McLeod, J (2011) Qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy (2nd edn). London: Sage


