

# Should I Share My Journal Entry With You? A Critical Exploration of Relational Ethics in Autoethnography

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## **Abstract**

Journal entries documenting hidden emotions about my dual role as law teacher and practicing lawyer provide powerful insight into an aspect of academic practice not yet considered by autoethnography. But my stories are a consequence of my interactions with students. How do I negotiate the desire to give voice to a hidden world, yet protect the bonds of trust? This essay critically explores relational ethics in autoethnography from the unique perspective of a law clinic supervisor. Drawing on lessons from memoirists, personal reflections, and an unexpected dialogue with Carolyn Ellis, I raise important questions about my own ethical dilemma.

## **Keywords**

Autoethnography; Ethics; Higher education; Clinical supervision

## **The Journal Entry**

On the morning of 27 October 2014, I walked into my office, a large room I share with two other academics. My colleagues' heads were down as they prepared for another day of lectures and seminars. We exchanged a polite "morning!" Then I took off my coat, sat down at my desk, and wrote 407 words in my reflective journal. My pen worked quickly. The words flowed. Thoughts that had circled my brain throughout the morning commute spilled onto the page; part fervent rage, part satisfied relief.

Highly subjective and full of passion, I wrote intensely and honestly about my emotions. My words unveiled frustration with my students, confusion about my academic role, and the negative effect those issues were having on my home life. Then I closed the journal and carried on with the rest of the day.

Should I share those words with you?

## **Introductory Thoughts**

At the start of my journey as an autoethnographer, I reveled in the vivid stories that emerged trance-like when I sat down with my reflective journal. Clifford Geertz said that "thick description" held the key to understanding cultures.<sup>1</sup> In the same vein, Kathryn Haynes argues that stories give us access to our own ontology.<sup>2</sup> I strongly felt that my journal entries brought these two ideas together. Through my rich personal narrative, I believed that I could open the door to a hidden world and examine my own sociocultural experience. My plan was to document both mundane and unusual moments, and gain an insight into myself and my culture.

The journal entries built in number, but so too did my sense of unease. I queried whether it was ethically appropriate to record, and ultimately communicate, my own views and feelings when they were facilitated through and driven by interactions with others. In my case, "others" include university students. I am an Associate Professor at a university based in the northeast of England. An experiential educator; I do not teach by way of lecture, seminar or workshop. Instead, I supervise students engaged in a clinical legal education program. My students are in the final year of their

undergraduate law degree. They work in a legal office situated at the heart of the law school and are assessed on the delivery of free legal advice to members of the public. The office runs just like any other lawyers' practice.<sup>3</sup> As a clinical supervisor, I am charged with guiding my students as they engage in real-life legal practice.

Clinical legal education scholarship has yet to discover autoethnography as a research method and methodology. However, there is also a surprising lack of autoethnography located in the university classroom generally. By applying autoethnography to the world of clinical supervision, my intention was (and continues to be) to address the gap and facilitate greater understanding of the culture of law clinic supervision. I was excited that my initial journal entries provided an intimate account of my role. However, those entries were entirely dependent on the supervisory relationship with my students. I was not just writing about myself. My students were also "visible participants" in my study.<sup>4</sup>

One day, my concerns became so strong that I stopped in my tracks whilst journaling. I said: "I stop writing because I'm worried about this journal. Is it okay to write about this stuff? What if someone reads it?"<sup>5</sup> As I wrote those words I finally realized that keeping a personal diary was entirely different from recording reflections as part of an autoethnographic study. I also knew that the "someone" referred to my students. My anxiety lay in the notion that my students would be adversely affected by what I had written. My thoughts at the time were:

*If I share my 407 word journal entry, how will my students react to my words? Will they query if and how my emotions affected my assessment of their work? Will they wonder at the efficacy of my supervision? Might they have cause to complain about my appraisal of their behaviour, skills, and commitment? But if I don't share the journal entry, then what is the point in pursuing autoethnography?*

In this essay, I present a critical exploration of relational ethics in autoethnography. I come to the debate with a perspective not yet considered in the literature. My dual role as a teacher and qualified lawyer allows for a new frame of reference, and a fresh consideration of the use of others in accounts of lived experience. Using my journal entry dilemma, and drawing lessons from life writing, experienced autoethnographers, and my own reflections, my aim is to engage in a challenging discussion about autoethnographic ethics.

### **For the love of autoethnography**

I knew that I loved autoethnography 15 minutes after pressing play on a YouTube video featuring Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner.<sup>6</sup> At the time, and rather shamefully now, I had no idea who the friendly faces on the screen were. In fact, it was merely by chance that I came across the video. I had heard the word "autoethnography" earlier in the day, so I decided to type it into a Google search. The video was fairly near the top of the list of results. I put it on in the background as I was tidying my house.<sup>7</sup>

I already leaned towards narrativity. But, like Clair Doloriert and Sally Sambrook, I felt I had to "settle rather incompletely and frustratingly" for terms such as "reflexive approach" or self-reflection.<sup>8</sup> Now, the voices of Ellis and Bochner informed me that, through autoethnography, I could explore my lived experience as a clinical supervisor. I wrote in my personal diary that I had "found my island." I am not alone in feeling this way. Ruth Wilkins "found home" in autoethnography, whilst Katharine Dashper was "drawn in," "shocked" and "moved" by its power.<sup>9</sup>

At the time, I did not fully appreciate the substantial number of “similarly situated terms” that could be used alongside or as alternatives to autoethnography.<sup>10</sup> I used autoethnography as a catch-all. Later, I delved further into the details behind the word by listing the common definitions I came across during my reading and highlighting words and phrases that appeared most often. They were: write or writing, experience or personal experience, culture or cultural, and story. Curious to see if my mind had “skipped” any other words, I placed the definitions in an online word cloud creator.<sup>11</sup> My word clouds looked like this:



Figures 1–2. Word clouds representing common words used in definitions of autoethnography. Images provided by author.

Autoethnographers employ different methods and styles. A non-exhaustive list includes performance, diary entries, fictional stories, personal narrative, story of stories, and novel.<sup>12</sup> Yet,

they all have one thing in common. And that is represented by the word I missed: Within. I missed within. I saw “culture” and I saw “story,” but within was superfluous, inconsequential, nothing. And indeed, as the word clouds show, within is not the most frequently used word in the definitions I listed. However, it is, I would argue, the glue that sticks all the pieces of autoethnography together. Our writing stories and our personal experience of culture come from inside ourselves. In this essay, I am going to continue to use autoethnography as a term of reference. However, I recognize that there is no one way of doing it, only that whatever “it” is, it comes from within.

Much like the metaphors about home, I am not the first person to use the word “love” when describing a relationship with autoethnography. Perhaps it is because autoethnography allows writing from deep within to surface that I feel such an emotional connection to it. Kristina Medford agrees with this, concluding that she loves autoethnographic writing because “no other form of academic writing” affects her “so deeply” or causes her “to think so critically.”<sup>13</sup> Traditionally, academic writing is full of

passive voice; absent narrator; long, inelegant, repetitive authorial statements and quotations; “cleaned up” quotations, each sounding like the author; hoards of references; sonorous prose rhythms, dead or dying metaphors; lack of concreteness or overly detailed accounts; tone deafness; and, most disheartening, the suppression of narrativity.<sup>14</sup>

The personal voice remains silent; wounds are hidden. In stark contrast, autoethnographic writing embraces emotion, relationships, humanity, and subjectivity. As Elizabeth Dauphinee declares:

I write out of love. I also sometimes write out of guilt. In all cases I write because I become aware that something is not the way I thought it was. Something has hurt me. Something has made me angry or sleepless or aggrieved in some way.<sup>15</sup>

There is the story within, again.

### **But, it is not an unconditional love**

“Jumping On and Off the Runaway Train of Success” was one of the first pieces of autoethnographic writing I read.<sup>16</sup> The article is a brilliantly evocative account of the daily toil of academia. From the start, we are on the runaway train with Ellis, clinging on to the inside of the unstable vehicle that takes us faster and faster down a track where “there is always one more article to revise, student to counsel, committee on which to serve, paper to grade, letter of recommendation to write, and book to read.”<sup>17</sup> A deeply personal story; Ellis lets us see her 3 a.m. nightmares, feel her increasing frustration with students, read emails from overworked colleagues, listen to conversations with senior colleagues about workload, and experience the voices in her head as they berate her as “the worst kind of whiner.”<sup>18</sup>

I found “Jumping On and Off the Runaway Train of Success” compelling. For the first time, a journal article spoke to me and my own experiences as an academic. I wanted to share it with all of my close colleagues—“Look! Look!! Here is someone who is feeling how we are feeling and has written about it in a journal. An actual academic journal!” In *The Ethnographic I*, Ellis says autoethnography allows others to enter your world and use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own life.<sup>19</sup> This happened to me when I read her academic autoethnography. Firstly, I reflected on my own workload and the difficulties I had attempting to “do it all.” Secondly, I began

to appreciate that elevation to Professor did not decrease these difficulties. Finally, I considered Ellis's methods of coping and analyzed whether what she did would help me going forward. Because of Ellis's words, I no longer felt abandoned and companionless as I bumped along the track in my own runaway train. I reveled in the strength of the emotion and the honest depiction of the stressed-out academic.

At the same time, I was plagued with concerns. As a starting point, I queried how Ellis could write about her students' "lack of preparation" and "poorly crafted" work.<sup>20</sup> I wondered how her former students would feel about this characterization of their performance. I was also apprehensive about the inclusion of staff members in the story. In one section, Ellis replicates her junior colleague's "stress-filled" email. The email beautifully describes how it feels to be slowly chipped away: "death by many small paper cuts."<sup>21</sup> Yet, I thought, "*When pressing 'send' did that colleague imagine it would end up in print? Had Ellis obtained her consent to do so?*"

Autoethnography appeared in my life in September 2014. A year later, I had read over 50 autoethnographic articles. The more I read, the more troubled I became. At best, I felt ethics was somewhat sidelined. At worst, I speculated whether autoethnography was being used to side step ethical issues. Kip Jones, for example, uses this language when he recalls that he "wondered about performing the stories of others. . . then sidestepped this issue by using [his] own story instead."<sup>22</sup> My concern is that autoethnographic work will always involve others. We may not name them and they may not be lead characters in our play, but our experience and history is shaped by our interactions with people. Take Ruth Ernst and Jocene Vallack's account of the detrimental effect of a new assessment-driven system on the children they taught. It is a chilling narrative, written by dedicated teachers who clearly want to do the best for their charges.<sup>23</sup> Originally, they say, the plan was to investigate the new curriculum through other means.<sup>24</sup> The ethics committee denied the request. So, instead they wrote an autoethnographic article that did not require ethical approval because it did not involve co-researchers. Their intent is clear—autoethnography gives them "license" to write their story.<sup>25</sup> However, it is not just their story. It also belongs to the students, parents, and co-workers whom they use to show the consequences of poor management and quashed creativity.

Laurel Richardson's reflections on the ethics of autoethnography crystallized my concern that autoethnography could be used as a tool to air personal grievances.<sup>26</sup> She notes that she self-censors some work for fear of damaging family relations.<sup>27</sup> However, she sees "no problem" in publishing stories that may reflect badly on administrators as she considers "the damage done by them far greater than any discomfort my stories might cause them."<sup>28</sup> I am not at all suggesting that Richardson (or anyone else for that matter) does this, but at the time I mused whether it was possible that writers *could* use autoethnography as a form of revenge.

### **Autoethnography and higher Education**

Higher education is an "increasingly popular" topic for autoethnographers.<sup>29</sup> Contributions include student and supervisor perspectives of doctoral supervision, being an academic workaholic, bullying in the workplace, post-PhD career change, and the emergence of an audit culture.<sup>30</sup> Another popular subject is the challenge of doing autoethnography in the academy.<sup>31</sup>

Despite these welcome additions to the literature, one is less likely to find autoethnographers exploring the day-to-day realities of teaching in higher education. Ellis's autoethnography of academic life is a clear exception to that rule. There are also interesting examples about supervising

music and teaching research.<sup>32</sup> However, there is certainly some way to go before the academic community fully embraces Ronald Pelias's request to "write from the heart," especially where teaching is concerned.<sup>33</sup>

University law lecturers have ignored autoethnography altogether. Thirteen years ago, Elizabeth Mytton employed the biographical method to inform our understanding of the lived experience of six law teachers in the United Kingdom.<sup>34</sup> In using this method, Mytton explicitly made "a deliberate departure from more traditional research methods in legal education"<sup>35</sup> so that readers could understand the "epistemological shifts in the academy" and "accentuate a new perspective on law teaching."<sup>36</sup> I have argued elsewhere that legal education lends itself well to autoethnography.<sup>37</sup> Sadly, other law lecturers have failed to follow Mytton's lead and make use of auto/biographical methodologies. My hope is that we will come to utilize autoethnography to provide a deep insight into our teaching function; how we build connections with our students, our responses to students of varying abilities and needs, our pastoral mentoring role, and the characters we adopt for different educational scenarios.

### **The problem with sharing: Revealing waves beneath still waters**

Given my desire to see autoethnography employed by other academics, it may seem odd (or even contrary) that I have so many doubts about sharing my journal entry with you. My reticence to disclose the words is shaped by my identity as an experiential educator. I supervise law students who work in a legal clinic, the Student Law Office, throughout the final year of their degree. The Student Law Office is a real solicitors' practice, not a simulation. It is the capstone of a university degree program that emphasizes learning through doing. As a supervisor I am required to continuously assess my students' performance as they provide free legal advice to the public. The assessment naturally includes legal skills such as research, letter writing, and interviewing. However, it also captures soft skills such as professionalism, commitment, teamwork, and autonomy.<sup>38</sup>

Clinical supervision is a world away from traditional teaching. In fact, I do not tend to think of it as teaching. The role of the clinical supervisor is a peculiar combination of mentor, colleague, and even friend.<sup>39</sup> Working together on a daily basis, with the common goal of advising a client, leads to something more complex than the usual teacher–student dynamic. For example, if a student does not attend a lecture, this primarily is their lookout. If a student does not attend the clinic, this affects a number of other people. It affects the student's partner (students are grouped into pairs), who may be burdened with an increased workload. It affects the client, who may not receive legal advice within the time expected. It affects the supervisor, who will need to find out why the student has not attended, speak to the student's partner, devise a strategy for dealing with the legal work going forward, take up some of the work herself if required, and plan for if the student does not return. The practical considerations are also accompanied by more emotive matters. The supervisor asks herself: How will this affect the student's assessment? What should I be doing to try to help this student overcome any difficulties? How can I support the student's partner, but also balance the fact that the legal work needs to be done? If the AWOL student comes back at a later date, should I give them another client? If I do, this means I have to take on more supervisory work too—do I have the time to do this? These questions do not occur if a student merely neglects to attend a lecture or two.

The clinical supervisor and her students must trust each other. The supervisor trusts her students to act in accordance with the professional standards of a lawyer. This includes carrying out their legal work with diligence and acting in the best interests of their clients. She trusts the students to keep within the confines of the policies and procedures of the clinic; to maintain confidentiality, keep files

and records in their proper place, check basic elements such as addresses lest a letter be sent to the wrong person, and refrain from providing advice to the client without checking the precise details with her first. Conversely, students must trust their supervisor to guide them throughout their time in the clinic. Students expect and need their supervisor to be available so they can ask questions. The supervisor also has a duty to check her students' work in good time, so matters can be progressed and feedback taken on board. Each memo, letter, telephone plan, research report, email, covering note, legal document, strategy meeting, and client conference can form another developmental milestone for the student. The supervisor continuously assesses the student; her feedback is fundamental to that student's development—professionally and personally—during their time in the clinic. The supervisor is not just a teacher. She is the students' gateway to an unfamiliar professional world beyond the university. Students use the supervisor to gain knowledge of the new world and seek advice, support, and encouragement on career-related issues.

Behind the scenes the supervisor is furiously working to catch up. She is fighting to get through the piles of documents that are being sent to her to check, whilst answering emails with queries about the case, concerns about partnerships, questions about job applications and interviews, and difficulties with personal matters that are affecting attendance and/or quality of work. To the students, she must appear the swan gliding on the smooth surface of the water, even though underneath tidal waves are constantly pushing and pulling her.

In my 407-word journal entry from 27 October 2014, I allow the reader to put on a pair of goggles and peer under the water to see my frantically kicking legs. They see my lived experience, so often brushed aside or sanitized in the literature. To me, the journal entry contains a visceral example of the practical and emotional intensity of being a clinical supervisor. Yet, I hesitate to share it because it is not just my story. When I wrote it, everything I was feeling was a consequence of the interactions with my students. The journal entry exposes my inner voice: complaining, frustrated, sad, and angry—not just with myself but with a situation that had come about because of my role as a clinical supervisor. I am concerned that by sharing the entry I will hurt those students. They trusted me to be their guide throughout the year. How would they feel if confronted with the realities behind my patient smile and my steady hand?

G. Thomas Couser draws on the professions, especially medicine (and in particular biomedicine), when he reflects on the ethics of life writing.<sup>40</sup> I am enticed by his characterization of the relationship between writer and source as being "fiduciary"; that is, based on trust.<sup>41</sup> While he uses the example of the connection between physicians and patients,<sup>42</sup> the word fiduciary is immediately recognizable to me as a lawyer. A fiduciary relationship is at the heart of the bond between lawyer and client, and, as a phrase, it appears in numerous legal principles.

A fiduciary takes care of matters for another person. There are clear parallels with my feelings about my students. I am compelled as a lawyer to act in others' best interests and to take care—the same applies to my role as a teacher. But Couser provides a caveat: collaborations may be thought of as fiduciary relationships "in life writing scenarios involving particularly *vulnerable subjects*." Examples include being a child, a member of a disadvantaged minority, ill, or disabled.<sup>43</sup> This begs the question: are my students vulnerable? Some do have illnesses, disabilities, or are part of a minority group, and I am naturally inclined to protect them. However, would a reasonable person when asked to list vulnerable groups go straight to university students? I am not convinced. Yet, all is not lost when it comes to the fiduciary argument. For Couser also notes that intimacy entails a "degree of vulnerability."<sup>44</sup> He is referring not to an amorous relationship but to one that involves "emotional

intimacy” or “relational proximity.”<sup>45</sup> When viewed in this way, the supervisor–student connection becomes one heavy with potential for vulnerability, and it is therefore in keeping with Couser’s fiduciary depiction.

Of course, the context of Couser’s book is life writing—the collaboration with another to tell their life story. Whilst this is not my intention with my autoethnographic writing, I cannot help but consider that my fiduciary duties as a dual-role lawyer and teacher underpin both my ethical concerns and my desire to keep the turbulent waves under the water.

### **Relational Ethics**

Ellis calls the relationship between the researcher and the community in which they exist “relational ethics.” It requires autoethnographers to “act from our hearts and minds, to acknowledge our interpersonal bonds to others, and initiate and maintain conversations.”<sup>46</sup> The question at the core of my inner turmoil is neatly summed up as: “How do we honor our relational responsibilities yet present our lives in a complex and truthful way for readers?”<sup>47</sup> Although I recognize that there are others, I would like to focus on two techniques that may assist: fictionalization and process consent.

### **Fictionalization**

When writing about her relationship with Gene Weinstein in *Final Negotiations*, Ellis considered issues of trust as I have done.<sup>48</sup> In order to cherish her “implicit relational trust provision,” she “omitted things, occasionally changed details of a scene, and invented composite characters to protect identities.”<sup>49</sup> Fictionalization—intentionally adding and excluding events and/or combining “characters”—is one technique autoethnographers can use to blur the lines and preserve the identity of others. An excellent example of this is Andrew C. Sparkes’s fictional account of life at an imagined university, the University of Wannabee Academic.<sup>50</sup> We follow Jim as he attends meetings with the Vice-Chancellor about staff publications, breaks bad news to colleague Paul whose outputs have been deemed derisory, tries to escape from research impact-factor-obsessed Steve (known as the Weasel), and confers with Dr. Marriot, consultant psychiatrist.<sup>51</sup> Although the people and scenarios portrayed are fictional constructs, Sparkes reveals that the constructive process was “inspired by partial happenings, fragmented memories, echoes of conversations, whispers in corridors, fleeting glimpses of myriad reflections seen through broken glass, and multiple layers of fiction and narrative imaginings.”<sup>52</sup>

A number of writers in Joy Castro’s edited collection, *Family Trouble*, discuss the cost of writing about identified others. “When publishing memoir,” Castro says, “writers pay the price of transparency.”<sup>53</sup> Ariel Gore also uses this language when she considers the benefits of fiction versus non-fiction: “In fiction, there are certain prices we do not have to pay.”<sup>54</sup> Certainly, the emotional cost of writing about identified others is clear in Ruth Behar’s account of being shunned by family members who were angered by her stories.<sup>55</sup> Hers is a cautionary tale indeed. However, when reading the text, I was struck with guilt as to how much I was enjoying Behar’s story. Why? Because in telling it she is still going against family members’ wishes never to write about deceased relations again.<sup>56</sup> Names have been changed, but does that mean I should assume I am not reading about “them” at all and that this is a fictional, composite account? Or that I am reading about them, but with a different name? And if the latter is the case, does that not mean they are still identifiable? I am struck by the complexity of writing about writing about relational ethics.

I would never use students’ names in my autoethnographic writing. Fictionalizing takes matters one step further, and has been a route that I have, until writing this, mostly ignored. Could I, like Sparkes,



tell my story through “Bruce” or “Savannah” or “Isabel”? That certainly is an option. Yet, it would be remiss of me not to examine my motivations for making it my story, even though that desire might be something I am ashamed of. In truth, I re-read my diary entries and think “*Wow! That’s powerful stuff.*” Within me is an ambition to lead the charge when it comes to writing about lived experiences of clinical supervision, and giving my voice to fictional composites feels as though I am letting something go. I also worry that what I write will be a pale imitation of the words in my journal. I am guilty of the charge of narcissism, and Giampietro Gobo’s playful depiction of autoethnography as self-serving “intellectual masturbation” rings in my ears.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps the trick is to ensure that the fiction is as powerful as the original text. For me, this presents a significant challenge for my own writing skills, but one that I may have to overcome.

### **Process Consent**

Martin Tolich’s account of the “endemic problems” with autoethnographic ethics centers on the contradictions he sees.<sup>58</sup> In particular, he notes that Ellis tells her students to practice process consent, the act of checking that participants in the story want to be part of it. Tolich agrees with this strategy, and lists process consent as one of his “Foundational Guidelines” for autoethnographers.<sup>59</sup> However, as an example of saying but not doing, he then points to Ellis’s own reluctance to show her mother a piece of writing that refers to her, for fear of her response.<sup>60</sup>

I think back to my first publication about autoethnography, in which I mention my partner and replicate what he said to me about my love of autoethnography.<sup>61</sup> Despite having concerns about the ethics of autoethnography, I did not ask his permission to do this. I think I mentioned in passing that I was using his words, but my chief memory is of him expressing delight at being included in my work and wanting to know if he was featured anywhere else. I did not practice process consent. Even if I had, I suspect he would have felt pressure—because of his desire to help me with my work, out of love for me, or just for a quiet life—to agree to be included in the text. Although I am “reticent,” “concerned,” and “plagued,” I am also contradictory.

Couser recounts the tale of Patricia Hampl and her mother.<sup>62</sup> Hampl wrote a poem that divulged her mother’s (secret) epilepsy. Her mother felt betrayed. Hampl responded with two arguments. Firstly, that her mother should not feel that epilepsy was something to be hidden away (“I had liberated my mother”<sup>63</sup>). Secondly, that the revelation would not cause any harm. Hampl later said she would not use the poem but, knowing that it was one of her daughter’s best works, her mother’s “maternal devotion” prevailed and she allowed it.<sup>64</sup> I am inclined to agree with Couser’s view that Hampl “violated her [mother’s] privacy [and] also exploited her pride in a talented daughter.”<sup>65</sup> Here, she had gained consent but (a) after the fact and (b) by playing on a complex maternal relationship. Given this, is the right course of action to insist that those writing about others obtain written consent prior to putting pen to paper and, afterwards, provide an opportunity to veto the work? I am not convinced. Ellis asserts that “all autoethnographers must resolve how and what to tell intimate others about how they have been included in [their] stories”<sup>66</sup> and I agree. We must wrestle with our worries and contradictions in order to come to a conclusion about what we are comfortable with when representing others. For when we do not worry about betrayal or exploitation, the potential for damage may be at its greatest.

### **An Unexpected Dialogue With Carolyn Ellis**

I was privileged to be contacted by Carolyn Ellis after my first article on autoethnography was published. Following her advice to “ask questions and talk about [our] research with others, constantly reflecting critically on ethical practices at every step,”<sup>67</sup> I took the opportunity to ask the

questions I posed at the beginning of this piece about her 2011 autoethnography on academic life.<sup>68</sup> Here (with her permission) I replicate her answers, followed by my reflection on our discussion:

ELAINE: Even though the students were not named, would those students be able to identify themselves and how would this characterization of their work make them feel?

CAROLYN: No they would not, though some may imagine it is they. I referred to undergraduates in general.

ELAINE: What impact might this piece have on your relations with current or future students—would they be worried that their work might end up in an autoethnographic article?

CAROLYN: Nobody's "work" or words ended up here unless I asked permission. Of course, that still doesn't stop students from worrying. I have written about students before, with permission, and I find that most students would really like to be in our stories, and assume, given my stance on ethics, that I would ask their permission before writing about them, especially if they were identifiable.

ELAINE: Did the colleague who describes "death by small paper cuts" ever imagine that it would end up in print?

CAROLYN: Don't know.

ELAINE: Did you obtain her consent to do so?

CAROLYN: Yes, in all cases in the story, contributors of responses and I emailed back and forth about including their words. I find most autoethnographers are fine being in our articles as long as they are consulted.

As I read Carolyn's responses it dawned on me that I had found another hidden world. Beneath the published work lay a river of consultation and discussion; a concealed stream where ethical issues had been considered, processed, and resolved. Ultimately, I realized, Carolyn had put forward the text with which she was ethically comfortable.

### **Moving Forward**

I was fortunate to be able to have a dialogue with Carolyn Ellis. Her responses have forced me to think about how I read other autoethnographers' work. However, outside of the literature I have already referenced, I am struck by the lack of open exploration and examination of ethical issues in autoethnography. Of the articles listed in my personal autoethnography literature review, 85% do not mention ethics whatsoever. For new autoethnographers, this creates three issues. Firstly, they may not consider ethical issues at all. Secondly, they may see autoethnography as a route by which ethical barriers can be avoided or skirted. Finally, they may be left with many questions and a sense of unease, which may lead them to abandon the methodology. I call for new autoethnographers to be bold and ask these questions. I have spoken to a number of skilled autoethnographers during the last three years. My experience is they want to talk about their work and are generous with their time. In making this call, I follow Couser, who sees the "relation between ethical approaches and cases. . . as a recursive and dialectical interaction" rather than a "deductive, one way application".<sup>69</sup> Open dialogue is the way forward. I have another similarity with Couser. He does not want to police life writing.<sup>70</sup> Equally, I do not want to be (or be seen to be) the "Autoethnography Police." I agree that "formal safeguards. . . while well intentioned. . . may be excessively burdensome."<sup>71</sup> Instead, our tools should be debate and critical exploration.

For my own part, I am not yet ready to share my journal entry. I have 12 students each year. Whilst I have not named the students in the entry, I suspect it would not be difficult for them to identify themselves. I would not be happy to email the entry to my entire faculty, to wear it as a sandwich

board or to see my participants sitting in the front row at a conference panel where I read it out.<sup>72</sup> In essence, my gut feeling is that it is not right to do so, at least not at this stage. In the future, when more time has passed, then perhaps my view will change.

Is my decision the right one? On the one hand, my gut tells me it is, so I am choosing to listen. On the other hand, a number of life writers warn that we might not be best placed to judge what might or might not cause offense. Castro was surprised her husband was hung up on, as she puts it, the “small details” rather than larger revelations about their marriage (“I never read *Fortune* magazine,” he said).<sup>73</sup> Likewise, Jill Christman’s brother’s solitary critique of her story of family trouble covering neglect, separation, and drugs was to dispute the number of times her father chewed a piece of gum. Reflecting on this, Christman makes the following impassioned proclamation:

Here’s the lesson: when you’re sitting at your desk, recreating the lives of your loved one on the page for all to see, you cannot anticipate what will rub someone wrong. You think you can, and this inner anticipatory critic will hang you up. She will hold you by the ear and squeeze. Shake her off. She doesn’t know. The things she thinks will offend will not offend. The things she can’t even imagine will offend, the things she lets you tap tap tap right over—the chew count, for heaven’s sake—she will let slide unnoticed. Shake her off. Write your story.<sup>74</sup>

Tempting as it is to throw caution to the wind and shake off my doubts, I remain convinced that now is not the right time to share the journal entry in its current form. I am comforted by Ruthellen Josselson’s note that “it is work we must do in anguish.”<sup>75</sup>

I have failed to share my journal entry. Does this mean my time with autoethnography is over? No, it does not. Indeed, the internal struggle with disclosure should be seen as an integral feature of the autoethnographer. I can still analyze my words, and I can still share my observations, fears, multiple selves, insecurities, guilt, and pride in print. The hidden voice of the clinical supervisor will be heard, but only in a form I deem to be ethically right. My task as an ethically minded autoethnographer is to consider how best to represent this voice in the literature. This is not an easy, or quick, task. It may take many years before the story of 27 October 2014 is realized in print. But when it is, I will know that I have considered and processed and resolved my ethical questions.

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## Notes

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