Chapter eighteen

Publishing Autoethnography
A Thrice-Told Tale

Alec Grant, Nigel Patrick Short, and Lydia Turner

INTRODUCTION

This chapter showcases and celebrates diversity around the topic of publishing. Although we have written autoethnography together over several years, we have differing views about the research approach and about related publishing issues. This difference is inevitable given our respective personal and academic histories, writing styles, and publishing concerns and experiences. So, after working independently on this chapter, we decided that our respective contributions should be presented in the chapter as three separate sections.

Lydia Turner’s “Publishing Autoethnography” section comes first. She begins by posing and answering this series of questions from her perspective: What is publishing? How do we make autoethnography accessible? Who is your audience? She then addresses the issues of autoethnographic style and the use of handbooks, ending her section with a brief look at writing to deadlines and to order. Throughout, Lydia provides useful “pointer” tips for readers for each question and issue posed.

In the next section, Alec Grant presents a series of discrete but sequentially linked small autoethnographies, or what he previously coined “autoethnographettes” (Douglas & Carless, 2013, p. 100). All speaking to the topic of publishing, these range over philosophical and political issues; writerly and reader-response ethics; poststructural considerations; creativity and its neoliberal cultural constraints; and targeting work to publishing houses and journals. Alec completes his section with a call to trouble the cultural basis of current, inappropriate autoethnographic publishing conventions and practices.

Nigel Patrick Short’s section ends our chapter. His focus is contextualized in his lived experiential engagement with publishing. He reflexively looks back at his publishing trajectory and the issues and concerns this raised over his academic and mental health professional careers. Nigel’s text is grounded in the context of his life and serendipitous events along its course.

In order to convey the dialogic nature of our chapter, each section includes in-text commentary boxes. For example, Nigel and Alec separately comment on particular points that Lydia raises. We agreed to limit comments to two per commentator, in order not to overly interrupt the flow of the section author’s narrative. We invite you to be part of and critically extend this conversation.

LYDIA TURNER: PUBLISHING AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

What Is Publishing?

As suggested by Bochner and Ellis (1996), autoethnographic research requires people to read it. Although I am writing about myself, the goal of the research is to touch a ‘world beyond the self of the writer’ (cited in Turner, 2012, p. 11).

My understanding of the term “publishing autoethnography” is that we undertake a process of studying/reflecting on/being with/examining our personal experience(s) within the context of our chosen culture (autoethnography), collecting together the “stuff” we come out with, and then putting it out there for others.
to see/hear/witness. Publishing within this context means using the written word to contribute opinion to ongoing discussions so as to further the knowledge base in a particular subject.

The purpose of publishing autoethnography might depend on our job role or level of study. When I undertook my doctorate using evocative autoethnography as a research methodology (Turner, 2012), I argued that the purpose of undertaking autoethnographic research was to provide an opportunity for people, in this case fellow mental health nurses, to “think with the story and see where it takes them” (Sparkes, 2007, p. 21). Thus, for me autoethnographic research was designed to do what I would suggest all research should do: shift thinking and possibly have an impact on what we might do as a result of the shift.

**Why Do We Publish?**

We publish because we want to contribute to a conversation. We know about the discussion because we have read and thought about what others might have written. We have opinions/experiences that are valuable because of their unique contribution to that ongoing discussion. Publishing autoethnography is part of that iterative cycle of reading, experiencing, thinking, reflecting, reading, writing, experiencing, thinking, and so on. We might need to be selective about what we publish and think about where it fits within the discussion and how we can add rather than repeat what has been written. Adding to the conversation also provides an opportunity for us to critique what others have written and indeed provides opportunities for others to critique our work.

**Alec:** I think there’s a tension, Lydia, between the idea of publishing autoethnography to contribute to knowledge (positivist, accumulation assumption) and doing so to extend a narrative assumption. Repetition is eschewed from the knowledge accumulation perspective as surplus to “more research needed” requirements. Yet what may be perceived by some as “repetition” is valuable from the conversational perspective when it serves to nuance existing knowledge, strengthen critical standpoints, and build on community narratives. Although both have their place, I think the conversational assumption is the more epistemologically appropriate one for autoethnography.

**How Do We Make Autoethnography Accessible**

I have found that the difference in style between published autoethnographies and books about how to write or do autoethnography can be quite extreme. Textbooks often have dense paragraphs of complex discussion pitted sporadically with references and words that I might need to look up. An autoethnography written by the same author might be lighter, be interspersed with poetry or prose, and be written in less academic and more common parlance. Unfortunately, the use of exclusive academic words and dense text can be held up as a marker of credibility or gravitas. It can be a sign of academic snobbery to suggest that if you don’t have an understanding of this style of writing at your fingertips, then you are somehow intellectually inferior, a discussion I have had on several occasions with academic colleagues. I think, however, some of the greatest academics and most influential people of our time have the ability to explain the most complex issues in a way that is accessible to the greatest number of people. The point of publishing our work is to share our thinking and experience and provide opportunities for others to think and experience with us. If our language is too exclusive, there is a danger we may exclude rather than include our readers. Although, arguably, scholarly pursuit would require the reader to seek to enhance their language and understanding within the field of their chosen study, we might need to meet the reader halfway and encourage further reading and exploration, through ensuring our language is accessible.

**Alec:** I think there’s a tension, Lydia, between the idea of publishing autoethnography to contribute to knowledge (positivist, accumulation assumption) and doing so to extend a narrative assumption. Repetition is eschewed from the knowledge accumulation perspective as surplus to “more research needed” requirements. Yet what may be perceived by some as “repetition” is valuable from the conversational perspective when it serves to nuance existing knowledge, strengthen critical standpoints, and build on community narratives. Although both have their place, I think the conversational assumption is the more epistemologically appropriate one for autoethnography.

**Nigel:** One of the challenges for me when writing is knowing what to leave in and what to leave out. I like autoethnographies that show me how the author’s work develops, errors, and all. In a similar way to the “think with the story and see where it takes them” (Sparkes, 2007, p. 21; Frank, 1995), I employ this approach when writing. See where it takes me. I find editing always helpful. I find that I often prefer organic work in progress. This offers me more spontaneity.

**Nigel:** I find it difficult to read some academic tomes now, Lydia. As someone who has avoided novels most of his life, I get much more enjoyment and pleasure from a good novel now, and...
I am a lecturer. It’s my 9–5 (or 8–6) job. I work in a university, but I am employed by the British National Health Service (NHS) as a psychotherapist. My role is to oversee and manage a number of postgraduate courses which aim to teach students the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to help people with mental health difficulties, effectively, and safely. Some of our courses teach students to work with children and some teach them how to work with adults. Others teach students simple evidence-based interventions or train professionals to become psychotherapists. The trick is to enable all these students to understand how to provide effective help by undertaking the strategies, and how to deliver this information, in a delicately bespoke fashion while moving within the model. We teach them to help effectively; we don’t teach them to learn to “do” interventions by rote. These students, if they are to be effective, need to develop depth of understanding, a broad view of the function of what they are being taught, an understanding of context and nuance, and an ongoing curiosity. Although we can assume a broad baseline ability to learn and conceptualize (evidenced through the ability to have gained a degree at a higher level), we cannot assume that everyone learns in the same way or at the same rate.

What has all this got to do with publishing autoethnography? Good question. I suppose it is about thinking about the reader or audience. It is about holding them in mind when you write. Our audience or readers are each going to come to your writing in their own unique way. People may pay attention to different aspects of what you write at different times. It is not prescriptive; you can’t ensure that they will see things the way you do, so you need to employ some theory of mind. When I stand in the classroom, I am delivering information on a subject while reflecting on the way I deliver that information and the reaction of the audience (or students) at the time, while reflexively tailoring my delivery depending on energy levels and audience response. When writing autoethnography, I try to imagine how it might be to read what I have written or indeed what I am writing, which might then influence how and what I might write. I appreciate I can’t actually “see the audience” or fully anticipate how readers of my writing might react, but I can try to take an empathic position with the readers and write reflectively and reflexively with them in mind.

Making Autoethnography Accessible: Some Pointers

- Think of your audience when writing: Who are they? What structure might best suit the point or story you are trying to get across? Which words might best access your target audience?
- Employ theory of mind; understand that the reader may have a different perspective on what you write than you do.
- Write through a process of reflection and reflexivity.

Who Is Your Audience?

Perhaps you can start by asking yourself what you want to say, and to whom and possibly why? I often ask myself a supplementary question: What makes you think that discussion around your experiences within your culture will resonate with your target audience? If you have undertaken some autoethnographic research as part of your degree studies, then you would have had to give a rationale and justification for your choice of topic; but if you want to undertake some autoethnographic writing/study, you might ask yourself what your justification is for undertaking the work and then publishing it. We could argue that everyone has something worth saying, and worth reading, but who are you aiming your thoughts at and why?

I have read some ineffective autoethnographies when reviewing for journals and have (constructively) critiqued the work. These autoethnographies might lack “verisimilitude . . . a feeling that the experience described is lifelike . . . believable and possible” (Ellis, 1999, p. 674). The work may be more autobiographical than autoethnographical, by which I mean that it...
might be an account of something in someone’s life, but it reads like a narrated story rather than being interwoven with, and contextualized within, the person’s culture; it lacks reflection and reflexivity, so it might be a one-dimensional story that doesn’t describe how the reader feels or what they think when they are recounting their experience. When people ask for my feedback on their work, I often ask them why they want to put “their story” out there. They often assume that others would be interested in reading it, because they have an interesting story to tell. Now it might be okay to make that assumption—others might well be interested in an intriguing story—but it also might be important to be able to justify the usefulness of your contribution to the world. After all, you might need to give a publisher (as a proxy audience) a good reason as to why they should invest in your work.

### Making Autoethnography Publishable: Some Pointers

- Your contribution should make a substantive/significant contribution (Richardson, 2000; Tracy, 2010).
- It should have aesthetic merit (Richardson, 2000).
- It should have verisimilitude, sincerity, credibility (Ellis, 1999; Tracy, 2010).
- Your account should be autoethnographical rather than autobiographical: It should be steeped within your culture and should explicitly show reflection and reflexivity.
- The writing should have social significance (Barone & Eisner, 2012).
- The writing should show a good academic standard.

### Autoethnographic Style and Handbooks

I’ve written this section in the way that I have because it suits my style. My style is informal. I don’t tend to use words that aren’t part of common language.

**Alec:** Lydia, I think the issue of autoethnographers making judgments about which words are or are not “part of common language” is problematic. The obvious question is begged: Common to whom? Such judgments may be made on the basis of parochial culture-centrism, on the faulty assumption of cross-cultural familiarity and resonance around language use. I point out this issue in my section, also arguing the poststructural point that levels of conceptual sophistication—meaningful engagement with words-in-context—depend on the discourses available to people to make sense of their cultural worlds. My view is that it is important for readers and writers of autoethnography to conceptually “stretch themselves.” Otherwise, people may simply tweak the cultural status quo in an unadventurous way, as opposed to opening themselves up to new cultures and cultural understandings.

I like different fonts, putting words in bold to accentuate them, using italics to show movement through time. I also like to analogize my points through storytelling. I’ve used poetry and prose, pictures, short dramas, and diagrams as vehicles for autoethnographic writing. I’ve developed this style mostly because it appeals to me; I think it represents my voice, and it draws me in when I see it. Handbooks like this one often have little summary boxes or top tips to take away.

**As a student, I loved a good handbook, and even farther back, one of my most fondly remembered books was the Brownie Guide Handbook (Brambleby, 1968). It contained pictures and diagrams, little snippets of useful information about lighting fires and packing a suitcase. It was engaging and informative, and it fit with my needs at the time. Handbooks are there to educate and inform, but they have a practical slant to them. A handbook should teach you new ways of doing things.**

Given the subject matter and the culture in which I operate, a handbook is a go-to book when I am looking for guidance or inspiration. I might have strayed off the beaten path and need to get back on track or I might feel I have moved so far away from the theoretical underpinning that I need to reconnect with what it is all about. My imagined target audience for this section is the person who might not have published before and is thinking of doing so. They might be relatively new to autoethnography, and/or they might be a student looking to publish from their master’s or doctoral research. They might also be someone similar to myself, a relatively seasoned scholar open to the possibility of reading something new, willing to be reminded of what they may have forgotten, and open to discovering new angles on something they thought they had a good grasp on.
Deadlines and Writing to Order

Deadlines are the bane and structural framework of my working life. I have accountability deadlines, progress reports, actions from meetings, assignment marking, timeframes in which to write bids and deal with complaints, troubleshoot, and problem-solve on a daily basis. Alongside and interspersed with these day-to-day tasks are the “scholarly” deadlines, research deadlines, and chapters and books to be completed. Days, full to the brim with the collective daily fragments of my work role, pass. Weeks and then months pass; while deadlines draw nearer, windows of opportunity for drafts and re-drafts, editing, and tweaking diminish, and I am forced to clear space, make time, and write to order.

The editors of this book twice extended my deadline for submission. They can wait no longer given their contractual arrangements. I worry, not wanting to let them down. Significantly, I get increasingly annoyed at the story that I know is there waiting to be told but which will not reveal itself to me on time and on schedule. But, then I think: Why should it? . . . Then I ask myself what can be learned from this refusal of a story (or stories) to be told by me, in me, and through me, in relation to the autoethnographic enterprise as an embodied process rather than just a textual product with a predictable publication date.

(Sparkes, 2013, p. 204)

The deadline is fast approaching. I need to sit and write about my thoughts, my feelings, my reflections on my experiences, my reflections on undertaking the process of reflecting on my experiences . . . and I don’t want to, I really don’t want to. I sit at home and stare at a blank screen, tapping out a few letters and then make a cup of tea, eat a biscuit, stare out of the window, wash the windows, tidy . . . . all because I don’t feel like writing. Earlier at work there were emails to be answered, and a host of other activities on my to do list which took priority over my writing. And still the deadline looms.

I compose emails in my head to the publishers, my colleagues, asking for more time, telling them I’ve decided to withdraw from the process, regretting agreeing to the process in the first place. It’s very exciting and seductive, to begin with, the idea of seeing your writing in print, it’s easy to commit to a process, only to find out that enthusiasm for a project can come and go. When I agreed to write this months ago, it seemed like I had all the time in the world. Suddenly I have only a few days . . . I sit, and I write, I start with a word which I grow into a sentence, the sentence I grow into a paragraph, I add some musings on the process I am

undertaking and I’m off, like an old steam train puffing out of the station and building up a head of steam. Instead of waiting for writing to follow inspiration, inspiration often follows writing.

Deadlines and Writing to Order: Some Pointers

• Make notes, keep a journal. You never know when these recorded experiences, thoughts, and feelings might become good grist for the autoethnographic mill.
• Be prepared to write and re-write.
• Ask others to read your writing as you go along.
• Be organized and find time in your day to write.
• Try not to procrastinate!
• Try just writing and see what flows

ALEC GRANT: PUBLISHING

What is meant by the word “publishing”? Its etymological root, stemming from Latin through Old French and Middle English, is to “make generally known; make public.” But we need to think more about this. Understanding the meaning of a particular word depends on its contextual place in fields of word connections-in-use (Hagberg, 2015; Wittgenstein, 2009). Wittgenstein reminds us that words only have meaning in the stream of life, and I write my section of this chapter on the basis of my own evolving, ongoing relationship with the meaning of “publishing.”

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The field in which a word, a concept, is embedded is thus never free of political tensions. In my reading of the first edition of this Handbook (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013), publishing is discussed in terms of: celebrating the growing publishing opportunities afforded to autoethnography, including the emergence of exemplar handbooks, and multimodal and art modality publishing formats; the existence of current autoethnographically-friendly journals and the likely emergence of a new Journal of Autoethnography; the threats posed by time-, place- and assumption-bound anonymous peer reviewers who might prevent good, novel work being published in journals; the promotion
of personal and relational growth; disrupting conventional norms of research practice; and, finally, the personal, relational and procedural ethical challenges of publishing.

In summary, the politics of publishing in the autoethnographic scholarship imaginary, as represented in the first handbook, is spread across enlarging community voice (thus giving this voice more power); celebrating individual and community therapeutic (thus providing an antidote for the power-imbedded ravages of life); challenging normative research and peer-reviewing editorial practices (thus troubling and changing these practices); and highlighting a range of ethical difficulties (thus raising the ethical consciousness of autoethnographic stakeholders).

Lydia: I’m interested by some of the words you use here, Alec. I wonder if all autoethnographers’ lives are ravaged by power. I also wonder if we are fighting a redundant battle around challenging “normative research.” I would argue that power can be exerted and manipulated but that people also allow themselves to be controlled and disempowered. Furthermore, I wonder if editors of autoethnography are really free from their own power dynamics? Of course, they aren’t. Many universities in the UK are still biased toward positivist research as their major contributor to the published research base, but many embrace many different forms of research method and methodology, both instead of and alongside the gold standard randomized controlled trial.

I connect with all these issues and will address some of them here. At this point, however, I’ll speak to my interest in the overlap between the assumed benefits of the approach and two contextual uses of the word “publishing”: “personal and relational growth” and “disrupting norms of research practice.” I see a gap: Holman Jones and her colleagues fail to identify a crucial publishing benefit, politically philosophical in nature. This is the promotion of cosmopolitan knowledge, transcultural thinking, sensibilities, and appreciation (Nussbaum, 2008). Nussbaum argues that the educational preparation of citizens as they grow up may—at tacit levels—be local, culture-centric, and nationalistic-informed. As a result of this, student-citizens fail to learn sufficiently about the histories and cultures of other parts of the world. Although Nussbaum specifically refers to education in the United States as an exemplar of this tendency, her argument has clear universal relevance.

In terms of my own striving for a cosmopolitan reading of the autoethnographies I engage with, I appreciate some published work for getting me out of the intersecting, but delimited, culture-centric boxes that come together as “Alec Grant.” I read work that is culturally unfamiliar to me, to an extent that I have to work hard to personally connect with it. Making some headway after several readings of a particular text hopefully indicates that this has paid off in contributing to my advancing levels of cosmopolitan cultural appreciation. Climbing out of our cultural boxes requires a refusal to stay entrapped within them, reader perseverance, and leaps in empathy and imagination (Grant, 2020). This issue also speaks to the ethics of writing and reader response.

Nigel: There is a tension here for me, Alec. I have some sympathy with your position. However, in an effort to climb out of our cultural boxes, who is representing the different cultures we read about? The cultures that are unfamiliar to us? Our International Perspectives book made a contribution to this. In addition to enjoying traveling, I have “climbed into different cultures,” in order to try and achieve a wider cultural appreciation. Sadly, even this approach is fraught with difficulties. Language differences being one obvious one. However, “climbing into different cultures” can begin a conversation and promote engagement.

Writerly ethics and reader-response ethics are important issues to consider in publishing autoethnography. If, as an autoethnographer, you write (or perform the art modality equivalent) with a view to publishing work that you uncritically assume will have cross-cultural familiarity and appeal, you may already have started to culturally colonize your anticipated readership in your head. I think this is a problem; clearly not all audiences of a specific autoethnographic text will recognize their own experiences in it or emotionally, culturally, and intellectually connect with it.

Emerging from the context of Western canonical literary scholarship in the 1970s, reader-response theory speaks directly to this issue (Tyson, 2015). According to Tyson, reader-response theorists hold that readers actively work to make sense of texts rather than passively consume them in line with authors’ intended meanings. This principle was given credence by Barthes (1977), who famously asserted in his 1968 essay, “The Death of the Author”, that “it is language
which speaks, not the author” (p. 143). The idea of the meaning of a text, unshackled from its author’s intent, and free-floating and differentially understood across a range of readers, is fundamental to poststructural understandings of the relationship between writers and readers. In this poststructural context, Laurel Richardson (2001) argues that we use the discourses available to us to make sense of our engagement with life. This helps us better understand the tendency of many readers—including those lacking sufficiently developed cosmopolitan sensibilities—to frequently look for the culturally and intellectually reassuringly familiar in published texts, while dismissing or traducing work that doesn’t do that trick for them (Grant, 2018).

The onttological power and centripetal pull of the Dogmatic Image of Thought are to keep things conceptually the same and neatly partitioned within cultural normativity. Deleuze (1994) contends that as a result of this, instead of being conceptually creative and inventive, many of us play safe and conservative in our culturally contingent, unadventurous use of words, phrases, and narrative tropes. In my view, this has clear implications for neophyte autoethnographers, who would do well to aspire to conceptual invention and creativity in what I describe as “new-worldmaking.” There is a clear distinction between creating new worlds to trouble cultural master narratives and replicating, thus reifying such narratives in the guise of cultural critique.

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**Nigel:** I would suggest, from a poststructural position, all texts have a multiplicity of readings/writing positions on the part of the writer and reader. These multi-readings open up opportunities for endless possibilities for inclusion and equity. It seems to me, then, that deconstruction of texts provides for an endless journey of openings. Scary perhaps, but also liberating.

The biggest mistake we make is to pretend that we can categorize and compartmentalize . . . according to pre-established criteria. (Manning, in Massumi, 2015, p. 145)

In our efforts to publish, we need to resist conceptual (and, by implication, political) narrative entrapment. In this context, Manning clearly makes a distinction between “thought in the making” (p. 145) and the replication of existing thought. This distinction links Manning’s assertion with the philosophical work of Gilles Deleuze. Deleuze (1994) argues that “the Dogmatic Image of Thought” captures such replication as the default way of conceiving and representing the world (pp. 172–181, 206–210, 216–217). In Deleuzian terms, the Dogmatic Image of Thought amounts to doxa, or common opinion, which is socially and materially conditioned by where we live and with whom, and by what we’re taught (Colebrook, 2002; May, 2005).

Genuinely culturally critical published autoethnography constitutes “micropolitical resistance” against advanced capitalist culture (Massumi, 2015, 2017). Single autoethnographies—and this Handbook and our chapter within it, for example—amount to small but accruing acts of resistance against mainstream methodologies, hegemonic master narratives, and taken-for-granted features of this culture. I thus find it ironic that the neoliberal micropolitics of publishing directly affect the production, and editorial shape and presentation, of autoethnographic work. The micropolitics of publishing subsume impact factors, the emergence of ranked publishers and publishing houses, and the links between all of this and research funding and academic promotion. In my experience, some of the publishing houses hosting autoethnographic work, and even some series editors of autoethnographic collections, understandably seem to have markets rather than newworldmaking uppermost in their minds. “If it ain’t going to sell (be consumed), we don’t want it” is illustrative of a strange, ironic, and paradoxical state of affairs: powerful stakeholders in autoethnography’s multivoiced critique of oppressive (neoliberal) cultures kowtowing to the oppressive (neoliberal) macroculture that determines which voices get heard in the world.

**Lydia:** I take some of the points you are making here, Alec; however, unfortunately, we live in a world where we must make a living. It is sad that something needs to be sold to be published, but if it isn’t sold, who is going to cover the costs of publishing it in the first place? I would argue that it is naive to imagine that the world is free to consume. Ironically, now, we are reminded daily just
how much we have “cost” the planet. There are politics involved in publishing, always. There is power also involved in publishing (we, as editors of both the Contemporary British Autoethnography and International Perspectives on Autoethnographic Research and Practice books, decided what would and wouldn’t go into our books) that goes with the territory. We can go into battle against it all or we can become familiar with the lay of the land and choose with whom, where, and how we wish to publish and go in with eyes open.

In related ways, I palpably feel the existence of all sorts of “best to worst” hierarchies pertaining to publishing in our autoethnographic worlds: the best publishing houses, the best journals, the best people, the best conferences—from which new publications emerge for preexisting and new markets. I read this as cultural normativity always trying to pull autoethnography back into its fold; tidying it up; and keeping it on the straight and narrow, and sufficiently tame and manageable, within the Dogmatic Image of Thought.

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Accepting that these are the cultures we have to live and work within, aspiring autoethnographers would do well to think carefully about the pros and cons of the publishing houses and journals they choose to submit their work to. Routledge and Sense Publishers, for example, stand out as having proven track records in hosting impactful and influential autoethnography books. With regard to journals, there is good information available—for example, in the first and current editions of this Handbook—on those that are both autoethnography-friendly and welcoming of novel conceptual representational and article-structuring styles. The growing list of these includes the new online quarterly Journal of Autoethnography, which was launched by the University of California Press in 2020. In contrast, the inflexible positivist article-structuring conventions of some professional and academic journals can result in creative pieces being compromised and dulled down to fit those conventions, with authors feeling forced to shoehorn their own and others’ autoethnographic writing into pre-given representational frames and categories. This can obviously have a deadening effect on the conceptual creativity and emotional impact of published autoethnography (Grant, 2016, 2018, 2019).

However, this issue needs to be set against the importance of introducing autoethnography to professional and academic audiences socialized to decades of conventional qualitative inquiry. In this context, target journal choice is difficult for those autoethnographic scholars who are sympathetic to two mutually contradictory beliefs about autoethnography: the approach should breach “strict methodological boundaries in moving towards storied creativity, in terms of experimentalism and new onto-epistemological practices” (Grant, 2018, p. 107) and established professional communities and their academic infrastructures need to be exposed very gently, tactfully, and gradually, to autoethnography in all its creative glory, in order to mature.

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All that said, from a broader meta-reflexive perspective, where the existing normal and normative social order is problematized rather than simply accepted, I believe that our community needs more published autoethnographic work that implicitly or explicitly calls out and troubles the cultural basis of inappropriate publishing conventions and practices. Those in our autoethnographic communities who are able and willing to produce and publish such work are noble indeed.

NIGEL PATRICK SHORT: THE MURKY MYSTERIOUS WORLD OF PUBLISHING

I listen to the Sons of Kemet new album Your Queen is a Reptile. Winter rain is smashing against the window behind me. The house is warm. A cup of hot tea sits nearby. At long last I’m in the writing groove. Finding or being attentive to my “writing groove” is not always readily accessible. I wait till it feels “right.” My writing usually happens when something has “disturbed” me.

Here, I present my humble publishing trajectory. I present some of the difficulties I had as well as some of the highlights. Autoethnographic writing, as I have discovered, requires care, attention to detail, and a desire to constantly develop and improve our writing skills. An opportunity to capture our multiple interior monologues. My writing consists of fragments, ghosts, and memories. What follows provides some of my history associated with publishing and some experiences associated with my work, including successes and rejections. Some of the referenced work is not necessarily autoethnographic but hopefully will provide an opportunity to see its contribution toward my
selected published autoethnography. The course may appear linear, but it’s been like tumbleweed, regularly being blown around and taken in different directions.

I do? I decided to write about the situation and offer alternatives (Short, Kitchiner, & Curran, 2004).

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I was anxious about the submission. What reaction would it get? What would the reviewers think? I thought the paper provided a novel way to divert my anger and give a voice for the person’s misery. In addition, the article provided an opportunity to suggest other ways of seeing people’s difficulties. An opportunity to help ease the, often unvoiced, struggle of people using mental health services. This publication was my first academic paper. Whilst I was excited about seeing my name in a journal, the most important idea was to interrogate an aspect of the culture I inhabited. I also wanted to share alternatives. My ambitions were helped by my co-authors. I was not ready or confident enough to publish on my own. The article was submitted to a peer-reviewed journal that we thought would be sympathetic and was discipline-specific.

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I submitted the work. The reviews were favorable. Phew. I was pleased. Perhaps I did have something to say? The reviewers were unsure about my first-person dialogue though. They wanted third-person writing; for example, they wanted me to change “I had found” to “The author has found.” At the time, I did not know anything about autoethnography, although the piece could be arguably seen as a multi-voiced autoethnography. I was keen to get what I thought was an important contribution into the public domain, and I agreed to their request. I was disappointed and frustrated. But I thought my feelings were becoming useful experiences for me to write about at a later date.

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### Alec: Nigel, I think you make a good point about the need for autoethnographers to want to develop and improve their writing skills. This needs to be matched by action to counter two unfortunate tendencies: neglecting writing practice through constant deferral, including leaving writing until “the last minute”; and holding the tacit anachronistic assumption of “writing up” knowledge, where language is regarded as having no other importance than that of post hoc representation of lived experience. We write to create knowledge in our postmodern worlds, and, to murder a metaphor, the proof of the autoethnographic pudding is evidenced by assiduous writing practice.

### Brief Resume

I left secondary school at the age of 16 with no useful qualifications. Education left me wanting. After years of traveling, I needed a career. I qualify as a nurse: general and mental health nursing. After a variety of mental health nursing jobs, I qualified and practiced cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) for 18 years. In addition, I have a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) teaching qualification and a couple of BSc degrees and an MSc. In 2010, I was awarded a professional doctorate: An Evocative Autoethnography: A Mental Health Professional’s Development.

### April 2003

I attended a consultation with a consultant psychiatrist. I accompanied a person I was working with therapeutically. They experienced repetitive thinking and repetitive behaviors. The psychiatrist said: “Put a rubber band on your left wrist. When you get your thoughts ‘flick’ the rubber band. It will distract you.” I asked the psychiatrist what evidence they had for their suggestion. “It works,” he said. The conversation ended. I thought they were peddling an idea like a quack (Porter, 2000). Their suggestion was temporary at best and offensive and ineffective at worst. I felt angry (heart rate increased, breathing increased, mouth became dry). I was dissatisfied. What could
Note for self.
Reviews can be very helpful. Try not to be defensive.
The reviews prompted me to make amendments and consider their comments.

Lydia: I like your last sentence here, Nigel. When reviewers critique our autoethnographies, it can feel painful. After all, the things we write about are very personal. Indeed, if you claim to “not feel” in relation to critique of your work, then you may be receiving the critique from a head-only position, when your writing comes from the heart. Re-writes need to continue to come from the reflective/reflexive position.

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The year 2007 was an important, productive publishing year for me. First, I had been invited to write a couple of pieces for a book about in-patient experiences (see Short, 2007a, 2007b). Second, I wrote a co-authored piece, using an autoethnographic approach, “Living in the Borderlands” (Short, Grant, & Clarke, 2007).

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I was having difficulties at university. I was the first person within the faculty to use an autoethnographic approach. How could I seek validation for the approach? I was regularly defending my corner, often without success. I wanted to give my approach authority and to secure recognition for me and the approach. I thought the publication would promote my reputation and promote the approach. I believed my work was worth publishing and I had something important to offer.

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Funny looking back on this piece now. It was a significant moment. Enjoyable, testing the boundaries of my writing and beginning to question what was I prepared to put in the public domain?

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Interestingly, since the “Vocal Heroes” submission (aforementioned), there had been a change of editor at the journal. I wondered at the time if this had made a difference to the article being accepted for publication. Perhaps the new editorial board was sympathetic to alternative approaches and presentations. Was the journal taking a new editorial direction? For whatever reason, this change was welcoming. In the same issue there was another autoethnographic article by Phil Burnard: Burnard, P. 2007. Seeing the psychiatrist: an autoethnographic account. Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, 14 (8), 808–813.

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I approached Alec (Grant). We decided to write a rejoinder (Short & Grant, 2009). We both thought that Burnard seemed to be trying autoethnography on for size. What he wrote was very different to our understandings of autoethnography, at that time.

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Much to my surprise, and delight for me, Phil Burnard wrote a commentary about our paper (Burnard, 2009).

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Whilst I welcomed Phil’s comments, I was initially disappointed and upset. After some reflection, I appreciated his remarks. Many of my college experiences associated with autoethnography had been uncomfortable, confrontational, and defensive from some colleagues and academic representatives. “But where’s the data?” “You can’t just write a story.” Here, though, was an academic prepared to discuss an approach that was new to the three of us. I was reassured that some in academia can debate, argue, and stimulate discussion. I learnt from Burnard’s comments; he helped me muster my arguments—how to defend my chosen qualitative approach, encouraging constructive criticism.

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I began receiving invites to review articles and books. Becoming a reviewer was instrumental in improving my own academic work and developing my
writing skills. An opportunity to provide an honest critical analysis of someone else’s work encouraged me to think about how another might critique my own submissions.

**Lydia:** Another really good point here, Nigel. Reading and reviewing (either formally or informally) helps to develop our “reading” and “writing” skills. I’ve found that even reading and reviewing things I’ve written before provides new opportunities for thinking and critiquing my own work. If you find a good source of autoethnographic material, both journals and books, it’s worth regularly keeping up to date with what is being written.

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My reviews have hopefully provided authors with constructive criticisms that are clearly explained. Like adventure walking, autoethnographic publishing can take us across rocky ground, springy forest floors, wet marshland, bogs, rough tracks, heathery moorland, long grass, avoiding sheep droppings. Colourful forest carpets. Biting insects, rain drenched clothes, frosty air that freezes body parts. Walking has the potential for disruption and fragmentation.

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January 2010, I read a piece about Albania in the National Geographic magazine. Beautiful photos of the countryside. I pay a visit. I knew very little about Albania. On my last day I travel to Shkoder. I make my way, on foot, to catch a bus. I’m at the bus stop. A mini-bus arrives. I get on. The fun begins. On some buses there is an expectation that you barter your fare. A comical conversation develops between me and the driver. He doesn’t speak any English and my Albanian is limited. I hear a voice behind me, “Can I help you?” The enquirer has seen my situation. I spend the journey to Shkoder with my new acquaintance. He is a teacher of English at a college in Tirana.

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As Franklin and Crang (2001) suggest, tourism, or as I call it, “traveling,” is no longer identified as a series of linear practices. Rather, it emerges as a combination of fluid dynamic encounters. Traveling becomes a series of cadences in between points and stages.

I think autoethnography presentations and publishing can be like this. Taking serendipitous moments as a possible stimulus for presentations.

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On the bus I discover that my companion is a journal editor: Linguistic and Communicative Performance Journal. Since our serendipitous meeting I’ve written several articles for the journal (Short, 2010, 2014, 2018a; Short & Kola, 2018). I was also invited and accepted the invitation to be the journal’s co-editor. Me a co-editor of a journal! This chance encounter represents, for me, life’s serendipity and is an example of how moments can encourage a reaction to the smoothness and linear qualities often associated with qualitative research. Opportunities to gain in-depth understandings of selves and our inhabited cultures. Promoting and inspiring critical reflections on another’s world. In our edited book (Short, Turner, & Grant, 2013), I wrote a chapter that spoke about some of my experiences in Albania. In 2018, I wrote a piece with my Albanian friend about our chance meeting (Short & Kola, 2018).

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The demands made upon nurse therapists to be clinically, educationally, and research-active seemed limited to me. I think my aims of publication are to create a public record (even if you don’t know if it is read, or by whom, unless people tell you) of original contributions; gain access to researchers different worlds; and encourage people to “speak” directly to one another.

***

The notion that an autoethnographic presentation might stimulate reflection in the reader, as well as the presenter, encourages me to refine and develop and present more work. Similarly, to Butler (2005), who says that “articulation of all kinds have their necessary limits, given the structuring effects of what remains persistently inarticulate” (p. 42), one of the reasons I write autoethnographic pieces is to keep trying to articulate the inarticulate. A challenge to represent the different worlds I inhabit. Life in its simplicity and complexity.

**Alec:** Nigel, in your attempts to “articulate the inarticulate,” are you implying the creation of
new worlds in addition to “represent(ing)” the different worlds (you) inhabit? If so, I think that this begs the question: What then are the demands on language use in autoethnography for the creation of new cultural concepts?

When I first read The Ethnographic I (Ellis, 2004), I remember being frustrated with the index of the book. I often couldn’t find what I was looking for. It slowly began to occur to me that the way to find out what I wanted to know was by reading the book. Getting to know her and her style. It was helpful when she included details, that often seemed digressive, notes about her house or her dogs, where she was sitting. In this way, by using similar narrative tropes, I hope the reader gets to know a little about me and why I chose to write about some ideas and not others.

To bring this section to a close I have added articles that bring my publications up to date (Klevan, Karlsson, Turner, Short, & Grant, 2018; Turner, Short, Grant, & Adams, 2018; Short, 2018b). This section has been an interesting exercise. Recalling memories and fragments from my blurry, sometimes haunting non-foundational past(s). I hope it offers some help and possible encouragement to novice publishers. I’ve continued to write, either as a single author or as a co-author, autoethnographic pieces. For example, in a co-authored piece Alec and I used poetry to challenge long-held assumptions about knowledge production and representation (Short & Grant, 2016). We were influenced by Richardson (2000), who suggests that “settling words together in new configurations let us see and feel the world in new dimensions” (p. 933).

REFERENCES


