

# Narrating the Deaf Self in Autoethnography

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# Presentation Overview

- **Auto ethnography – origins and definitions**
- **Methodological approach – my genre of choice (Ellis 2004)**
- **Doing auto ethnography – how it was developed and produced**
- **My auto ethnographic work – personal narratives of Deaf self**
- **Summary and conclusions**



# My Autoethnographic Project

- ▶ **Postdoctoral Researcher – post-PhD projects**
- ▶ **Project funded by Irish Research Council**
- ▶ **Book title: Belonging: An autoethnography of a life in sign language**
- ▶ **Book chapter – personal experiences in educational, social and cultural contexts**
- ▶ **Personal experience of ‘Deafhood’ (Ladd 2003)**



# What is Auto/ethnography?

- ▶ Variants in the way auto ethnography is defined
- ▶ “..a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context” (Reed-Danaghay 1997, p.6)
- ▶ “highly personalized accounts that draw upon the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding” (Sparkes 2000, p. 21)
- ▶ “self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts” (Ellis, et al 2011)



# Autoethnography

- **The one constant – emphasis on self and personal**
- **Writing and doing research (graphy) about Personal experience (auto) about being part of a culture (ethno)**
- **“research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” (Ellis 2004, p. xix).**
- **Self-observation and reflexive investigation (Maréchal 2010, p. 43)**



# Methodological Approaches

- ▶ **'layered accounts'** - personal stories, ethnographic narrative, analysis, reflexivity, theory, social history, vignettes etc.
- ▶ **two particular genres: 'evocative' and 'analytical'**
- ▶ **'evocative autoethnography'** – appreciates emotional contexts, engages readers' emotions (Ellis 2004; Ellis & Bochner 2006)
- ▶ **'Analytical autoethnography'** – committed to 'objective' writing and analysis of a social or cultural group (Anderson 2006)



# My Autoethnographic Project

- ▶ **My term of choice – evocative autoethnography**
- ▶ **Book chapter using evocative stories – present-tense narrative style**
- ▶ **Plot, characterisation, narrative, ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973), dialogue, scene-setting**
- ▶ **‘Showing’ rather than ‘telling’ (Ellis 2004)**
- ▶ **Deafhood experiences – Deaf self and relationship with deaf and hearing culture**



# My Autoethnographic Projects

- **Autobiographical stories: life in residential schools for deaf children & beyond**
- **Personal stories:**
  - 1. Prohibited from using sign language (Colonialism)**
  - 2. Punishment & discipline (Foucault 1980)**
  - 3. Passing as hearing/normal (Goffman 1959)**
  - 4. Living & coping with the stigma of deafness (Goffman 1963)**
  - 5. Experiencing discrimination – words and actions in everyday life (Audism)**





# Doing Autoethnography

- **Link personal stories (autobiography) with Theory**
- **Theories:**
  - 1. Trauma (Etherington 2005)**
  - 2. Stigma (Goffman 1963)**
  - 3. Presentation of self (Goffman 1959)**
  - 4. Power relations and institutions (Foucault 1980)**
  - 5. Regimes of discipline, punishment and control (Foucault 1980)**



# Doing Autoethnography

- **Reflexive analysis of evocative stories - standing back, using ethnographic lens**
- **Being self-questioning – asking questions**
- **Purpose:**
  1. *To elicit meaning from personal stories*
  2. *To make experience meaningful*
  3. *To engage the reader*
  4. *To enhance understanding of an experience*



# Doing Autoethnography

- **Publication- 'Passing as Normal': Living and Coping with Stigma of Deafness' (O'Connell 2016)**
- **Personal story of stigma – present tense narrative writing**
- **Analysis- standing back, asking questions:**
  1. *How did I feel at the time of the event?*
  2. *How do I feel about it now?*
  3. *What did I make of the choices I made? What other choices were possible for me?*
  4. *How has the experience shaped who I am today?*
- **Theory – stigma (Goffman 1963)**

# Summary & Conclusions

- ▶ This paper explores the use of personal narratives in autoethnography
- ▶ The genre of choice: 'evocative autoethnography' –emotional contexts
- ▶ The paper concludes that,
  1. evocative narratives engages the reader
  2. narrative is more engaging when using literary device of 'showing' rather than 'telling'
  3. reflexive analysis makes meaning-making possible- asking questions and seeking answers
  4. link narrative and stories with theory to illuminate an understanding of context

Thank You

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