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Writing the self into research: Using grounded theory analytic strategies in autoethnography

Abstract:

Autoethnography – a qualitative research method that combines characteristics of ethnography and autobiography – is gaining momentum within the creative and performing arts as a research tool, partly because of the opportunity it provides for writers, artists, performers and others to reflect critically upon their personal and professional creative experiences. In recent years, ‘analytic autoethnography’ has been proposed as an alternative to traditional ‘evocative autoethnography’ for researchers who want to practise autoethnography within a realist or analytic tradition. However, questions remain about how this alternative method should be applied in practice. This article takes some steps toward answering those questions by exploring how autoethnographers in the creative arts can employ analytic strategies from the grounded theory tradition in their work. This methodological discussion might benefit artist-researchers who identify themselves as autoethnographers, but who want to use analytic reflexivity to improve theoretical understandings of their creative practice.

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Keywords:

Autoethnography – Analytic autoethnography – Grounded theory – Qualitative research – Research methodology

Introduction

Many different research methods have been applied to the study of human creativity since the 1950s (Sternberg 1999). One research method that has been widely used for this purpose in recent years is autoethnography, a qualitative method that combines characteristics of ethnography and autobiography. Autoethnographers reflexively explore their personal experiences and their interactions with others as a way of achieving wider cultural, political or social understanding. The output of an autoethnographic study commonly takes the form of an evocative narrative written in the first-person style such as a short story or novel (Bartleet 2009, Ellis 2004). Less commonly, autoethnographers may include graphic, audio-visual or performative components in their work (Miller 2010, Scott-Hoy 2002, Saldana 2008).

Autoethnography is gaining momentum as a research method within the creative and performing arts, partly because of the opportunity it provides for writers, artists, performers and others to reflect critically upon their personal and professional creative experiences. In an Australian academic research environment where governmental and institutional imperatives are placing pressure on artist-researchers to identify the aspects of their creative practice that constitute research and that make an original contribution to knowledge, autoethnography has obvious attractions (Smith and Dean 2009). For example, Bartleet and Ellis talk of 'increasing numbers of musicians wanting to examine, understand and communicate the personal stories behind their creative experiences' (2009: 6-7). Similarly, Stewart has discussed the desire of artist-researchers to 'to uncover, record, interpret and position, from an insider's perspective and experience, the processes they use' (2003) within the context of their art practice.

Autoethnographic studies in the creative and performing arts have explored diverse fields such as poetry, singing, dance and creative writing, to mention just a few. Furman (2004), for example, has used autoethnographic poetry to explore the impact of his father's cancer on his own life. His poems are presented as narrative reflections of his personal experiences. Järviö (2006) has explored her experiences as a singer, performing music of the Italian Early Baroque era. Her foray into autoethnography was prompted by a realisation of 'how little has been revealed by research of the facts of performing practice' compared with how much more she knew from her own experience as a singer and teacher. Anttila (2007) has reflected on her experience of participating in a dance education project at an elementary school in Helsinki, Finland. Anttila employed autoethnography for her study because of the opportunity it provided to understand the dynamics of teaching and learning dance from an experiential point of view. Tay and Leung (2011) have used autoethnography to document the creative writing scenes in Singapore and Hong Kong. They claim that the method has enabled them to explore a web of relationships involving creative writing teachers, students, literary texts, authors and society at large.

Although autoethnography has gained a significant following as a useful research method, it has also been criticised for its rejection of traditional analytic goals such as abstraction and generalisation (Anderson 2006a; Atkinson 2006). Ellis and Bochner explain that in autoethnography 'the mode of storytelling is akin to the novel or biography and thus fractures the boundaries that normally separate social science from

literature ... the narrative text refuses the impulse to abstract and explain' (2000: 744). Ellis argues that autoethnographies do contain analytic elements in the sense that 'when people tell stories, they employ analytic techniques to interpret their worlds' (2004:195-196) . But this form of analysis does not sit comfortably with the realist or analytic tradition, as Ellis and Bochner recognise:

If you turn a story told into a story analyzed ... you sacrifice the story at the altar of traditional sociological rigor. You transform the story into another language, the language of generalization and analysis, and thus you lose the very qualities that make a story a story (2006: 440).

On the subject of generalisation, Ellis argues that it is possible to generalise from an autoethnography, but not in a traditional manner. The generalisability of an autoethnography is tested by readers 'as they determine if the story speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know' (Ellis 2004:194-195). The autoethnographer does not privilege traditional analysis and generalisation.

Anderson (2006a) has expressed concerns about certain aspects of the 'evocative or emotional' autoethnographic method championed by Ellis and Bochner (2000) and other symbolic interactionists with postmodern or poststructuralist sensitivities (Denzin 2006). To put these concerns into context, it is worth noting that Anderson describes himself as 'a friend of evocative ethnography' (2006b: 452). He has openly expressed appreciation for the valuable contributions that autoethnographers have made in bringing ethnographic sensibilities into the humanities and social sciences (Anderson 2006b: 452), and he has applauded their efforts in articulating and exemplifying this emergent research method (Anderson 2006a: 374). However, tempering that enthusiasm, Anderson has also expressed fear that

'evocative or emotional autoethnography' may have the unintended consequence of eclipsing other visions of what autoethnography can be and of obscuring the ways in which it may fit productively in other traditions of social inquiry (2006a: 374).

Dissatisfied with the limitations that evocative autoethnography places on researchers who want to practise autoethnography within a realist or analytic tradition, Anderson (2006a) has proposed an alternative research method that is committed to an analytic agenda. Anderson labels his method 'analytic autoethnography' to distinguish it from the 'evocative or emotional autoethnography' promoted by Ellis and Bochner (2000). Anderson writes:

The purpose of analytic ethnography is not simply to document personal experience, to provide an "insider's perspective," or to evoke emotional resonance with the reader. Rather, the defining characteristic of analytic social science is to use empirical data to gain insight into some broader set of social phenomena than those provided by the data themselves (386-87).

Ellis and Bochner (2006) and Denzin (2006) have opposed Anderson's proposal on the grounds that it could dilute the current meaning of the term 'autoethnography'; it could contain, limit or silence the researcher's self in the research context; and it could reduce publishing opportunities for those who seek to practice evocative autoethnography. In contrast, other researchers have welcomed and endorsed

Anderson's proposal. Charmaz, for example, describes Anderson's work as 'a rapprochement between contested definitions of social scientific work' (2006b: 396). She concurs with 'Anderson's agenda to bring autoethnographic studies back to their analytic roots' (397). Similarly, Atkinson applauds Anderson's discussion of analytic autoethnography as 'an important corrective to a number of tendencies' (Atkinson 2006: 400) such as losing sight of the goals of analysis and theorizing in subjective and ethnographic work. Vryan (2006) also writes positively about the term 'analytic autoethnography', suggesting ways of refining its meaning to avoid unnecessary constraints.

In response to the critiques of his proposal, Anderson (2006b: 462) states that the criticism he takes most seriously is that levelled by Charmaz who wrote:

Anderson's key features of analytic autoethnography do provide helpful guidelines and a set of criteria for conducting and evaluating it. What should stand as analytic autoethnography or the range of variation it can include is not so clear in actual practice (2006b: 398).

Ellis and Bochner likewise expressed disappointment that Anderson 'didn't show us what this new form of autoethnography would look like' (2006: 432). This article takes some steps toward rectifying that problem by discussing how an analytic autoethnography might employ analytic strategies from the grounded theory tradition while still preserving its essential characteristics. This methodological discussion might, therefore, benefit artist-researchers who identify themselves as autoethnographers, but who want to use analytic reflexivity to improve theoretical understandings of their creative practice.

Defining the research methods

Since this article deals with three different research methods – evocative autoethnography, analytic autoethnography and grounded theory – it is likely that some of the terms and concepts that appear in this discussion may be unfamiliar to some readers. This section will address that issue by providing an overview of the three research methods.

Evocative autoethnography

One of the earliest uses of the term 'autoethnography' can be found in an essay by cultural anthropologist Hayano (1979) which made a case for self-observation in traditional ethnographic research. Hayano used the term to refer to cultural studies of an ethnographer's 'own people'. Today the term is more commonly associated with the research method championed by Ellis and Bochner who define autoethnography as 'an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural' (2000: 739). For example, Holman Jones's account, 'The way we were, are and might be: Torch singing as autoethnography' (2002), weaves together her story of seeing an ex-boyfriend with her viewing of the movie *The Way We Were*, and the genre of torch singing. Another

example is ‘The visitor: Juggling life in the grip of the text’, a soliloquy by Scott-Hoy (2002) about her experiences as a health worker in Vanuatu. This soliloquy is designed to be read aloud to others by the artist-researcher in the presence of a collection of oil paintings that she created to portray her experiences and interpretations visually – evocative stories combined with evocative images.

Like other genres of self-narrative, such as memoir, autobiography and creative non-fiction, autoethnography involves storytelling, but it is marked by the way it ‘transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation’ (Chang 2008: 43). Ellis’s (2004: 30) important work on narrative autoethnography suggests that research projects in this field are distinguished by the following characteristics:

- the author usually writes in the first-person style, making himself or herself the object of research;
- the focus of any generalisation is usually within a single case over time rather than across multiple cases;
- the writing resembles a novel or biography in the sense that it is presented as a story with a narrator, characters and plot;
- the narrative text is evocative, often disclosing hidden details of private life and highlighting emotional experience;
- relationships are dramatized as connected episodes unfolding over time rather than as snapshots;
- the researcher’s life is studied along with the lives of other participants in a reflexive connection; and,
- the accessibility of the writing positions the reader as an involved participant in the dialogue, rather than as a passive receiver.

Although memoir, autobiography and creative non-fiction may share some of these characteristics, autoethnography is consciously planned, developed and described as research. Chang argues that autoethnography should be ‘ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation’ (2008: 48).

Analytic autoethnography

Anderson (2006a) describes analytic autoethnography as a sub-genre in the realist ethnographic tradition with five key features:

- the researcher is a complete member of the social world under study;
- the researcher engages in analytic reflexivity, demonstrating an awareness of the reciprocal influence between themselves, their setting and their informants;
- the researcher’s self is visible within the narrative;
- the researcher engages in dialogue with informants beyond the self; and,

- the researcher demonstrates a commitment to theoretical analysis, not just capturing what is going on in an individual life or socio-cultural environment.

Commenting further on the fifth key feature, Anderson writes: ‘The definitive feature of analytic autoethnography is this value-added quality of not only truthfully rendering the social world under investigation but also transcending that world through broader generalization’ (2006a: 388). Anderson points to cultural anthropologist Murphy’s book *The Body Silent* (1987) as an example of analytic autoethnography. After being diagnosed with a spinal tumour that led to quadriplegia, Murphy set out to interrogate his own experiences

as a way of understanding the social world of people with disabilities and analysing how their experiences also reveal much about broader social structures and processes. From this he is able to address numerous areas of theoretical interest such as the social nature of health and illness, the social world of hospitals and the feedback mechanisms operating to produce and affirm stigmatized identities (Davies 1999: 185).

Anderson (2006a) contrasts this approach with that of evocative autoethnographers who reject the possibility of trying to generalise from their experiences.

Vryan (2006) has offered some suggestions for expanding Anderson’s definition of analytic autoethnography to make it less restricted, more flexible and more inclusive, particularly while the method is in an early stage of development. The fourth of Anderson’s five key features—demanding data from people other than the researcher—is problematic in Vryan’s view. He suggests:

including data from and about others is not a necessary requirement of all analytic autoethnography; the necessity, value, and feasibility of such data will vary according to the specifics of a given project and the goals of its creator(s) (Vryan 2006: 406).

Vryan (2006) also cautions against framing an understanding of analytic autoethnography in terms of it not being evocative or emotional autoethnography. This is because he believes that distinguishing between traditional research writing styles and creative, emotional, first-person writing styles is unnecessary. Both kinds of text are capable of being analytic works. The distinction is, instead, between forms of autoethnographic practice that are oriented toward explicit analysis and those that are not.

Grounded theory

Autoethnographers who wish to take an analytic approach to their work may benefit from examining the analytic strategies that are used in the grounded theory research method. Grounded theory is an investigative process for building a theory about a phenomenon by systematically gathering and analysing relevant data (Charmaz 2006a, Creswell 2009, Dey 1999). The method was developed and established more than 40 years ago by Glaser and Strauss in their seminal work *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967). Thomas and James describe grounded theory as ‘a major –

perhaps *the* major – contributor to the acceptance of the legitimacy of qualitative methods in applied social research’ (2006: 767).

The aim of this primarily inductive research method is to build theory rather than test it. Grounded concepts, relationships and theories are suggested, not proven (Glaser 1978: 134; Glaser and Strauss 1967: 103). A grounded theory researcher does not commence a study with a preconceived theory that needs to be proven, as is common in deductive research methods. Instead, the researcher begins with a general field of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data. Grounded theory is formulated from data using a constant comparative method of analysis with four stages:

- open coding, which involves breaking the data down into significant concepts;
- theoretical coding, which involves reassembling the significant concepts with propositions about their relationships to each other;
- selective coding, which involves delimiting the analysis to only those concepts and relationships that are related to the core explanatory concept; and,
- sorting the theoretical memos into an outline and writing up the theory.

Each of these stages of data analysis will be discussed in more detail later in this article.

Storytelling and analysis

Under what circumstances would a researcher in creative writing or one of the other creative arts consider using grounded theory analytic strategies in an autoethnographic study? Autobiographical narratives of past experiences and critical self-reflection will undoubtedly be key elements of such a study. However, more than storytelling will be involved. The study may, for instance, present opportunities for analysis of the stories and for the formulation of a theory or general explanation about the researcher’s experiences. In this instance, the term ‘theory’ does not refer to theory that can be used to generate and test predictions. Rather, it refers to theory that explains how and why something happened – theory that yields conjectures and a potential basis for subsequent research (Fawcett and Downs: 1986).

Duncan (2004) describes one such study, in which she applied autoethnography to her experiences designing CD-based multimedia educational resources. In this study, the researcher used grounded theory strategies to analyse reflective journal entries that she had made about her design practice. The handwritten journal entries, averaging two A4 pages each, were made twice a week over a period of one year, and were sometimes supported by other documentary evidence such as e-mails, memos, sketches or computer screen images. Duncan reports that this form of analysis ‘stimulated deeper and more detailed reflections in which recurring problems, changes in attitudes, and significant concerns developed into meaningful units’ (2004: 33) or themes that became the foundation of the autoethnographic narrative and the resulting theory. Although Duncan does not refer to her study as an analytic autoethnography, it exhibits characteristics of the research method described by Anderson (2006a).

Despite her objections to the term ‘analytic autoethnography’ that were mentioned earlier in this article, Ellis has provided some suggestions for incorporating analysis into an autoethnographic study, referring to the process as ‘thematic analysis of narrative’ (2004: 196). She describes it this way:

The author might or might not decide to add another layer of analysis by stepping back from the text and theorizing about the story from a sociological, communicational, or other disciplinary perspective ... ‘Thematic analysis’ refers to treating stories as data and using analysis to arrive at themes that illuminate the content and hold within or across stories (196).

This comment does not mean that grounded theory analysis must dominate the narrative in an autoethnographic study. Ellis continues to illustrate how these two approaches – storytelling and analysis – can be successfully combined:

You may simply want to position yourself in your research by telling your story, then move to analyzing the stories of others, which you connect back to your story. Your focus would be on analysis of narrative. Alternatively, you might focus on telling your story, then frame it with an analysis of literature, and concentrate on raising questions about that literature or about accepted theoretical notions, or on generating new ideas (2004: 198).

This means that a researcher who wants to preserve the evocative nature and emotion of their narrative may choose to keep the story and the analysis completely separate. In contrast, another researcher might elect to integrate the story and the analysis because it better serves their subject matter, their target audience or their writing style. Different studies call for different approaches (Ellis 2004: 199), but the potential for using these approaches in a practice-led research project such as a creative arts research higher degree is immediately apparent (Brien and Williamson 2009).

Ellis and Bochner (2000: 758) warn that incorporating grounded theory analysis into an autoethnographic study may require the researcher to ‘write in an authoritative voice’ about the patterns that she or he discovers, which could detract from the stories being presented. However, Charmaz (2000: 523) contends that by adopting a constructivist approach to grounded theory, researchers can avoid the possible authoritative objectivist trappings of the method. This constructivist approach to grounded theory recognizes the following assumptions (Charmaz 2000):

- people create and maintain their own realities by seeking understanding of the world in which they live and by developing subjective meanings of their experiences;
- grounded theory researchers can only claim to have interpreted *a* reality, dependent on their own experience and the study participants’ portrayals of their experiences, rather than a uni-dimensional, external reality;
- grounded theory does not seek a single, universal and lasting truth, but remains realist because it addresses human realities and assumes the existence of real worlds;

- grounded theory is not free from bias, but reflects how the researcher thinks and what the researcher does about collecting and shaping the data;
- grounded theory tells a story about people, social processes and situations that has been composed by the researcher—it does not simply unfold before the eyes of an objective viewer; and,
- grounded theory does not approach some level of generalisable truth, but constitutes a set of concepts and hypotheses that other researchers can transport to similar research problems and to other substantive fields.

One of the obstacles to adopting a constructivist approach to grounded theory is, however, the collection of prescriptive, rigid strategies that have been introduced to the grounded theory method since its inception. These developments triggered a bitter public dispute between the original founders of the method in the 1990s. As was mentioned above, Glaser and Strauss first articulated their ideas about grounded theory in the 1967 book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Glaser furthered these ideas in his 1978 volume *Theoretical Sensitivity*, however, as Charmaz notes, ‘the abstract terms and dense writing Glaser employed rendered the book inaccessible to many readers’ (2000: 512). Grounded theory later gained a wider audience when Strauss and Corbin released their book *Basics of Qualitative Research* in 1990. Glaser repudiated this publication, claiming that it bore little resemblance to the original method that was expounded in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Glaser felt so strongly about the matter that he asked Strauss to withdraw the book from publication. When Strauss did not comply, Glaser wrote a scathing correctional rejoinder entitled *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis* in 1992.

Glaser’s chief concern with Strauss and Corbin’s version of the grounded theory method is that ‘it produces a forced, preconceived, full conceptual description’ (1992: 3), rather than allowing theory to emerge through the constant comparison of data. Using a technique called ‘axial coding’, Strauss and Corbin (1998: 127-128) suggest that grounded theory researchers should look for conditions, actions/interactions and consequences as a guide to establishing relationships between concepts. Glaser (1992: 61-7) argues that Strauss and Corbin’s ‘coding paradigm’ imposes a pet theory on the data rather than letting the theory emerge through the constant comparative method. Dey agrees that ‘as this paradigm seems to impose a conceptual framework in advance of data analysis, it does not sit easily with the inductive emphasis in grounded theory’ (1999: 14). Charmaz goes further to state that ‘as grounded theory methods become more articulated ... guidelines turn into procedures and are reified into immutable rules, unlike Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) original flexible strategies’ (2000: 524).

For the past twenty years, Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) book *Basics of Qualitative Research* and subsequent versions have been ‘the standard introduction to grounded theory in place of the original text’ by Glaser and Strauss (Dey 1999: 13-4). But by being aware of these issues, researchers can avoid the limitations of Strauss and Corbin’s prescriptive approach to generating grounded theory, and adapt the original flexible strategies to their needs. In this way, Charmaz suggests:

We can reclaim these tools from their positivist underpinnings to form a revised, more open-ended practice of grounded theory that stresses its emergent constructivist elements. We can use grounded theory methods as flexible, heuristic strategies rather than as formulaic procedures (2000: 510).

Although grounded theory had its roots in the methodological assumptions of the mid-twentieth century, researchers who view grounded theory methods as principles and practices rather than prescriptions, can successfully adapt them to suit diverse studies today.

Using grounded theory analytic strategies

If an artist-researcher chooses to employ grounded theory analytic strategies in an autoethnographic study of their creative practice, how does she or he do that in practical terms? The constant comparative method of analysis that was briefly introduced in the description of the grounded theory method above holds the key.

Open coding

The first phase of grounded theory analysis, known as open coding, involves identifying significant concepts in the data. For example, this might entail taking the written stories of the researcher or other study participants, and breaking these stories down into discrete incidents – objects, events, actions, ideas, and so on – which are then compared for similarities and differences. Significant incidents are assigned labels known as codes (Charmaz 2006a: 42-57, Glaser 1992: 38-40, Strauss and Corbin 1998: 101-5).

Codes identify concepts or abstractions of incidents in the data. They give the researcher a ‘condensed, abstract view ... of the data that includes otherwise seemingly disparate phenomena’ (Glaser 1978: 55). Incidents that share essential characteristics are given the same code to indicate their common link. A single incident may be assigned multiple codes. In fact, researchers are encouraged to assign each incident as many relevant codes as possible (Glaser 1978: 56).

Codes can be attached to data chunks of any size—for instance, phrases, sentences or whole paragraphs. Different researchers code their data in different ways. Some write directly on stories or transcripts, some write on cards, and some use qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo, or ATLAS.ti (Charmaz 2000: 520). The labels that are used for codes are arbitrary, but are generally suggested by the context of the incident being coded. Figure 1 illustrates how a passage from the self-narrative of a piano accompanist reflecting on her performance practice (Brown 2011: 88) could potentially be coded using grounded theory techniques.

Writing ‘theoretical memos’ about codes and their relationships is a vital part of the grounded theory method (Charmaz 2006a: 72-95, Glaser 1978: 83). These memos capture and record the emerging theory. They accumulate and mature until it is time for the researcher to sort the memos into an outline and write up the completed analysis. Theoretical memos capture the researcher’s fleeting ideas at the moment

they occur. During coding, researchers often struggle to deal with a proliferation of ideas simultaneously – theoretical notions, the current incident in the data, alternative ways it should be coded and compared, and so on. To relieve this conflict, the researcher must cease coding and write a theoretical memo about his or her ideas, taking as much time and space as is necessary to do so. If the researcher refuses to interrupt the coding process to write a memo, important current ideas may be lost as his or her mind moves on to new thoughts and more coding (Glaser 1978: 83, Glaser 1998: 182-3, Glaser and Strauss 1967: 107).

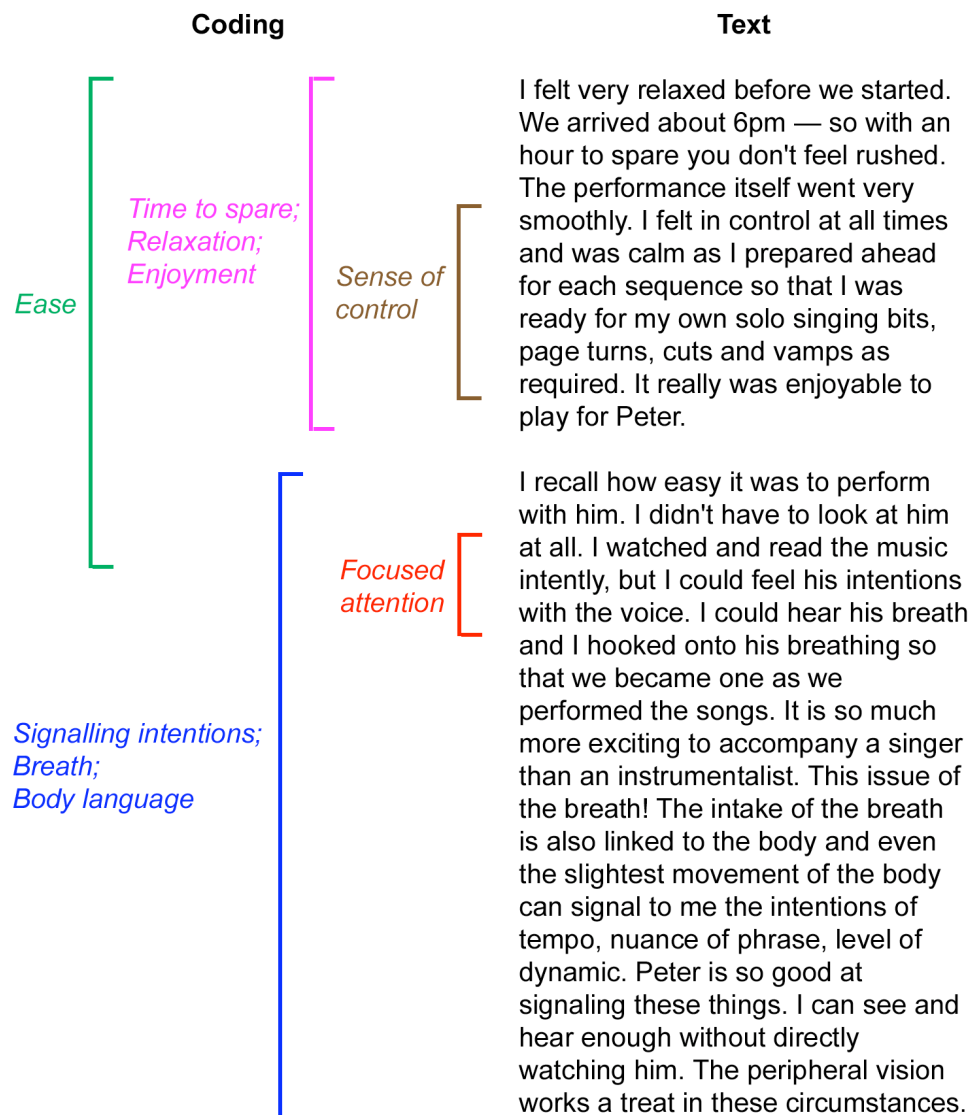


Figure 1. Example of coding a passage from a self-narrative using grounded theory techniques

Theoretical coding

The second phase of grounded theory analysis, known as theoretical coding, involves determining how the emergent concepts relate to each other (Charmaz 2006a: 63-6, Glaser 1978: 72-82, 116-9). The concepts that emerged during open coding are reassembled with propositions about the relationships between those concepts. For example, one concept may appear to have a causal influence on another concept, or one concept may be a necessary condition for a particular relationship. In the example shown in Figure 1, focused attention proved to be an important factor in the pianist's enjoyment of her performance, allowing no room in the mind for irrelevant thoughts or worries. Identifying the connection or relationship between the concepts of focused attention and enjoyment is an example of theoretical coding.

Relationships, like concepts, emerge from the data through a process of constant comparison. Neither the concepts nor the relationships should be preconceived or forced upon the data (Glaser 1992: 61-4, Glaser and Strauss 1967: 108-9). Although theoretical coding has been described here as the second phase in the grounded theory method, in practice this activity occurs in parallel with the initial open coding phase (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 43).

If theoretical coding is omitted from the grounded theory method, the researcher may still have a theory, but it will be 'linear, thin and less than fully integrated' (Glaser 1978: 116). Strauss and Corbin recommend that if theory building is the goal of a research project, 'then findings should be presented as a set of interrelated concepts, not just a listing of themes' (1998: 145).

Selective coding

The third phase of grounded theory analysis, known as selective coding, is the process of delimiting coding to only those concepts that relate to a core explanatory concept (Charmaz 2000: 516, Glaser 1978: 61-2). The core concept reflects the 'main theme' of the study. It 'sums up in a pattern of behavior the substance of what is going on in the data' (Glaser 1978: 94). Once the core concept has been identified, it becomes a guide to further data collection and analysis. Coding is delimited to only those ideas that relate to the core concept. Memo writing becomes more focused on integrating concepts to form an overall theoretical structure. Major modifications become fewer and fewer. In short, the theory begins to crystallize around the core concept (Glaser 1992: 75-6, Glaser and Strauss 1967: 109-11).

Sorting memos and writing theory

The final phase of grounded theory analysis involves sorting the theoretical memos into an outline and writing up the theory. Glaser (1978: 116) describes the sorting of memos as 'the key to formulating the theory for presentation to others'. The researcher begins the process by collating the memos on each concept and relationship, and sorting them as they relate to the core concept. Each memo is

compared with the others in a search for similarities, connections and conceptual orderings. The resulting structure provides an outline for writing, with the discussions in the memos becoming the major themes of the theory. The researcher may also return to the coded data when necessary to extract additional evidence or illustrations of key points (Glaser 1978: 116-20, Glaser and Strauss 1967: 113).

Conclusion

This article contributes to the debate about incorporating analysis into autoethnographic studies by discussing one form that an analytic autoethnography might take in practice. It points to how grounded theory analytic strategies can be used successfully within autoethnographic studies, that is, when researchers treat them as flexible strategies rather than as a set of prescriptive procedures and rules. This flexibility does not imply a lack of rigor or diligence. Rather it represents the freedom to modify research designs as required so that ‘the most insightful understanding of complex human experiences can be gained with few presumptions and an open mind’ (Chang 2008: 67). As Miles and Huberman (1994: 5) observe:

To us it seems clear that research is actually more a craft than a slavish adherence to methodological rules. No study conforms exactly to a standard methodology; each one calls for the researcher to bend the methodology to the peculiarities of the setting ...

A similar view is expressed by the character Laura Ellingson in Ellis’s (2004) landmark book *The Ethnographic I*. Ellingson laments the fact that ‘scholars always want to know which camp you are in’ when it comes to research methods (Ellis 2004: 312). Mixing research methods in the manner described by this article is sometimes viewed as a weak approach taken by researchers who can’t commit to a single strategy. Ellingson saw this prejudice in other researchers when she combined autoethnography and grounded theory approaches in a study that explored backstage communication among members of a health care team in an oncology unit. Despite these challenges, she arrived at a conclusion similar to the one expressed by Miles and Huberman:

I have no problem loving autoethnography and grounded theory at the same time. They aren’t contradictory to me; they’re different ways of making sense. Grounded theory in another kind of narrative. When I tried autoethnography, it was to add another tool to my tool chest, not to throw out the tools I already had (Ellis 2004: 312).

The thoughtful application of mixed research methods can provide new insights into challenging problems such as the study of human creativity. Indeed this ‘bowerbird’ approach—drawing together data and ideas from a range of disciplines and fields (Brady 2000)—harmonises well with current arguments about the need for flexible, intuitive, practice-led approaches to research in the creative and performing arts (Webb and Brien 2011). As research methods continue to evolve in different ways in response to the perspectives and experiences of their followers, there is a lot to be said for adding to our respective ‘tool chests’ rather than starting afresh.

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