

Dr Jess Moriarty  
College of Arts and Humanities  
University of Brighton  
Checkland  
Village Way  
Brighton  
BN1 9PH  
UK  
Tel: 01273 64 3359  
Email: [jsm@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:jsm@brighton.ac.uk)

#### **Title**

**Writing to resist: How storying the self can foster awareness and understanding of autobiographical experiences with the audit culture in higher education**

#### **Abstract**

This chapter builds on earlier work where the author wrote an autoethnodrama based on their autobiographical and researched experiences with academic life, specifically completing an autoethnographic doctorate whilst pregnant. The author identifies autoethnography as an empirical methodology that synthesizes autobiography and social critique in order to resist, and also change, dominant academic discourse, which she identifies as being male, hierarchical and non-democratic. By storying her experiences of the pressures of academic and personal life via a screenplay, the author argues that they have been able to adopt a more objective stance from which to critique the possible and real effects of neo-liberalism on academic culture. Evidence from the author's lived experiences has been used to inform the production of a full length script but the characters and plot are not imbued with autobiographical evidence in the same way as traditional autoethnography. This process has enabled the author to better understand themselves and their lived experiences of academia and to use this understanding as a strategy for surviving sexism. This triangulation of research-autobiography-script seeks to legitimize and value the experiences of the academic involved and maintain the balance between rigorous academic research and experiential autobiographical reflection. The author identifies this process as offering the potential for a more democratic and inclusive way of working in qualitative research where a woman may explore a more expansive and empowered self in a way that promotes civil and spiritual freedom and resists dominant oppressive structures that are synonymous with traditional academic life.

Keywords: autoethnography; screenplay; higher education; writing; audit culture

## 1. Introduction

In 2015 I was asked to peer review an article for an academic journal where the author identified the ‘busyness’ of their individual office as a symptom of the neo-liberal management culture that has begun to dominate higher education (HE). The author of the article argued that sub-consciously, he wanted to be perceived as busy and hard-working and that even though he was under pressure and working hard, the mess and disruption of his workspace articulated to his colleagues and managers that this was indeed true. The impact of neo-liberal agenda had meant that the author felt this needed to be performed in order to be evidenced, in order for it to become tangible to those who might not otherwise see or believe it. His story was personal, it was honest, it was worrying. In this chapter I explore my own processes of using my autobiographical and researched experiences with academia as data that can inform a dramatic text. I suggest that in this way, performance can offer a strategy that resists rather than complies with male, neo-liberal discourses that continue to dominate HE and that this offers a potential tool for surviving sexism in academia, on an individual basis but also as a collective movement.

In earlier research<sup>1</sup> I identified principals of neoliberal **governance**, such as the introduction of fees and the Research Excellence Framework (which is the system for judging the quality of academic research in the UK as outlined by Sikes 2006<sup>2</sup>), as being potentially harmful because they give an illusion of self-management and freedom, maintaining an aspirational desire for academic autonomy whilst allying with business models and management structures that undermine this very notion<sup>3</sup>. Sparkes argues that the normalizing and naturalizing features of neoliberal discourses and practices need interrupting in order to ‘initiate the process of decomposing the neoliberal subjects we have become.’<sup>4</sup> Sparkes goes on to suggest that we must challenge those in positions of power and influence instead of complying with neo-liberal **culture** and accepting the damage to our professionalism and integrity<sup>5</sup>. By articulating their real experiences of the neo-liberal culture and how it had driven them to perform their ‘busyness’ via a messy and chaotic office environment, the

**Commented [1]:** It would be helpful to have a definition of this/the principles you plan to rely on here.

**Commented [JM2R1]:** Added detail

**Commented [3]:** I think this phrase will be unfamiliar to many readers--define.

**Commented [JM4R3]:** changed

<sup>1</sup> XXXX, J. (2014). Analytical Autoethnography: Autobiographical and Researched Experiences with Academic Writing. Rotterdam, Boston, Taipei: Sense.

<sup>2</sup> Sikes, P. (2006): Working in a ‘new’ university: in the shadow of the Research Assessment Exercise?, Studies in Higher Education, 31:5, 555-568

<sup>3</sup> (Gilles, 2011)

<sup>4</sup> (Sparkes, 2013, p.13).

<sup>5</sup> (Loughlin, 2004).

author of the article under review had moved me to consider my own experiences, my own ‘busyness’. As well as eliciting a personal and empathetic response, I was also inspired to explore and document my own lived and imagined experiences with the political shift in HE, a shift that I had found to be harmful.

Tedlock (2000) argues that “women’s ethnographic and autobiographical intentions are often powered by the motive to convince readers of the author’s self-worth, to clarify and authenticate their self-images”<sup>6</sup> and identifies this as a feminist issue. I suggest that storying oneself can offer the necessary detachment that is needed when seeking a viewpoint from which to examine one’s lived experiences. This distance can provide a space for reflection that can trigger meaning-making and offer powerful insight into one’s own identity. My experience is that this process can offer women a method for authenticating self-image and recovering feelings of self-worth, allowing for a more expansive and liberated self that is able to critique and also resist oppressive cultures. I explore the process of developing a screenplay where I drew on my own emotional material and filtered it through a character with no connection to my autobiographical experiences and argue that this process provided me with the radical subjectivity and objectivity required to perform cultural and social critique. I agree with Hunt (2000) that for some women, ‘where the imagination sets to work on the raw material of the unconscious and turns it into art... engaging with their inner world has a strong self-developmental or therapeutic dimension.’<sup>7</sup> and suggest that the process has been transformational, positive, liberating. I will argue that this process has been enabling, helping me to recover from experiences of sexism in academia and move past feelings of victimization in order to evolve as a survivor.

## 2. Background – the emergence of a neoliberal agenda in HE

Davies and Bansell (2010) maintain that the most prominent feature of neoliberal government is that “it systematically dismantles the will to critique, thus potentially shifting the very nature of what a university is”<sup>8</sup> They further argue that the impact of neo-liberalism on HE is not just evident here in the UK but also internationally. Whilst in this chapter I detail my own

<sup>6</sup> Tedlock, B. (2000). Ethnography and ethnographic representation. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 455-486). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. P.468

<sup>7</sup> (Hunt, 2000 p.40)

<sup>8</sup> (Davies and Bansel 2010 p.5).

**Commented [5]:** I think you'll need to emphasize the gendered dimensions here--how will you be engaging in feminist critique and feminist meaningmaking?

**Commented [JM6R5]:** Have added details to this para that respond to the comment.

experiences of capturing and storying autobiographical experiences with academic life that have been effected by neo-liberalism and the audit culture it has fostered (the emergence of fees, the Research Excellence Framework and the emphasis on universities as businesses first and places of research and learning second) , this work is situated in a broader global context of neoliberal forms of governmentality which have been emerging in France and Germany since the mid-seventies, the US from the late seventies and in Australia and New Zealand at the beginning of the eighties.<sup>9</sup>

I am a positivist, humanist, feminist qualitative researcher in the humanities, seeking to engage readers in dialogues exploring the effects of the audit culture on academic(s) life and to use those discussions to imagine and facilitate ways of evolving beyond it. I identify autoethnography, and specifically autoethnodrama, as a methodology that can trigger such conversations and contribute to a strategy that critiques and also resists the neo-liberal agenda. My approach is to use my research to inform my creative texts and to use a study of my writing process and the texts themselves to help audiences and readers consider how life potentially is and how it might also be. The effect of the audit culture had a damaging effect on my professional and personal life and this has motivated me to explore and discuss the impact of neo-liberalism via the production of evocative texts.

Holligan identifies writers of fiction who ‘frequently create dystopian perspectives in order to highlight disturbing trends affecting our society.’<sup>10</sup> Whilst my stories of my own experiences do not seek to depict or project a dystopian state, it is hoped that this chapter, and works like it, might offer a lens by which to examine potentially negative features and trends in HE and that this will be relevant to readers in and outside the UK. The assumption of this relevance is based on previous research outlining the anxiety and insecurity generated when working in a rapidly changing environment, in this case HE<sup>11 12 13 14 15 16</sup>). Sikes (2006) suggests that while there are shared experiences of the audit culture, its impact is also unique to every

<sup>9</sup> (Davies and Bansel 2010 p.7).

<sup>10</sup> (Holligan, 2011. P.55).

<sup>11</sup> Banks, M. (2007) *The Politics of Cultural Work*, Basingstoke/ New York, Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>12</sup> McRobbie, A. (2003) Club to Company. *Cultural Studies*, 16, 516-531.

<sup>13</sup> Gill, R. (2002) Cool, creative and egalitarian? Exploring gender in project-based new media work in Europe. *Information, Communication & Society*, 5, 70-89.

<sup>14</sup> Ursell, G. (2000). Television production: issues of exploitation, commodification and subjectivity in UK television markets. *Media, Culture & Society*, 22, 805-825.

<sup>15</sup> Ross, A. (2003). *No Collar: The Humane Workplace and its Hidden Costs*, New York, Basic Books.

<sup>16</sup> Gill, R. & Pratt, A. (2008) In the social factory? Immaterial labour, precariousness and cultural work. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 25, 1-30.

**Commented [7]:** You may need to add some clarification for international audiences.

**Commented [JM8R7]:** Have added

university and to every member of staff and these generalizations are problematic. She identifies the systematic restructuring, introduction of fees (here in the UK) and the increased pressure to function as a business as disturbing for the majority of academic staff, making them feel anxious and unclear about their professional identities and 'leaving them feeling generally inadequate.'<sup>17</sup> Sikes's research also indicates that while there are shared themes and issues with the neoliberal structure that permeate HE in this country and also elsewhere, these tensions are also unique and personal, generated by constructs of gender, conditions specific to each institution/school/staff member and a shift in emphasis on administration/teaching/research.

In the 1963 Robbins Report, academic freedom in the UK is described as the freedom to publish, to teach according to a teacher's own concept of fact and truth and to 'pursue what personal studies and researches are congenial'<sup>18</sup>). In the 1988 Education Reform Act, the term was redefined to suggest that academic freedom enabled us to 'question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs'<sup>19</sup>. Seismic economic cuts that have resulted in an almost business-like efficiency emerging as the driving force behind the management agenda in HE. This agenda has resulted in the creation of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) which measures the impact of an individual academic's work and allocates funding to the university to which they are affiliated on the basis of this assessment leading to an increased pressure and busyness on some academic's lives. Whilst my previous research and this chapter and focused on my own experiences, it is hoped that the ideas put forward here will have relevance elsewhere in the UK but also further afield where the impact of fiscal austerity and market forces on HE culture has also been noted (Davies and Bansell, 2010).<sup>20</sup>

Cuts to funding across HE but most specifically in the arts and humanities, means that academic research in these disciplines is increasingly restricted and yet we are still under immense pressure to seem relevant in terms of the REF and produce research that is deemed

**Commented [9]:** Is this unique to the UK? Are there implications for readers from other places?

**Commented [JM10R9]:** Added to emphasize relevance

<sup>17</sup> Sikes, P. (2000). 'Truth and Lies Revisited' *British Educational Research Journal* 26, 2, p.563.

<sup>18</sup> Robbins, L. (1963). *The Robbins Report, Higher Education Report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Downloaded 10th January 2013 from <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/robbins/> p.229.

<sup>19</sup> Docherty, T. (2012). Research by Numbers. *Index on Censorship*, 41 (46), p.47.

<sup>20</sup> (Davies and Bansell 2010).

as having impact by a government hell bent on cuts and developing a Higher Education Academy (HEA) that is motivated by wealth-creation, rather than academic integrity. The Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) has been managed by the state since it replaced the UK University Grants Committee in 1992 and the effects of this change have gradually spread through HE. In keeping with Foucault's analysis of neoliberal governance<sup>21</sup> (many academics have consciously or unconsciously had to silently comply with pressure to do more for less and in the meantime, funding has all but evaporated, meaning that often 'We no longer teach as we wish, but according to the logic of cuts and its attendant economics.'<sup>22</sup> Docherty issues a call to arms: 'Academic freedom is at the core of democratic intellect and a free culture. It must be fought for.'<sup>23</sup>

In 2013 I was asked to write a chapter for an edited book entitled 'British Contemporary Autoethnography' where I talked about the process of completing an autoethnographic doctorate and simultaneously becoming a mother. I detail experiences of being undermined that were traumatic and led to feelings of anxiety and of not being good enough.

Autoethnography "requires that we observe ourselves observing, that we interrogate what we think and believe" (Ellis 2013 p.10)<sup>24</sup> in order to help us make sense of experience and offer insights into a particular culture or way of being<sup>25</sup>. This process seeks to democratise academic writing and resist dominant white, male, oppressive narratives that are synonymous with academic writing and academic life<sup>26</sup>. I argue that autoethnography can therefore engage academics in a process of self-study and storying the self that can help them to resist oppressive male discourses and that this can lead to a more enhanced sense of self. In the conclusion of this chapter I wrote: 'Like Laurel Richardson in *Fields of Play* (1997), I hope "that by hearing about my intellectual and emotional struggles with "authority" and with "my place" in my texts, academic department, discipline – my life – will be of value to others who are struggling with their "place".'<sup>27</sup> I hope it furthers the resistance. I hope it changes where

---

<sup>21</sup> Foucault, 1991a),

<sup>22</sup> Docherty, 'Research by Numbers', p.52.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p.54.

<sup>24</sup> Ellis C (2013) Carrying the torch for autoethnography. In: Holman Jones S, Adams TE and Ellis C (eds) *Handbook of Autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, pp. 9–12.

<sup>25</sup> Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, Arthur P. (2010). Autoethnography: An Overview [40 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1), Art. 10, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1101108>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> (Richardson, 1997, p. 2)

HE is at and where I fear we might be heading.<sup>28</sup> Now in 2016, I am still anxious about the direction HE is moving in but I have been able to use my writing as a way of reflecting on why those fears are legitimate and trigger discussion with colleagues who are experiencing similar anxieties that are reductive and oppressive. The result is that I feel less isolated. Many of us are responding to Doherty's call.

### 3. Autoethnodrama

Ellis and Bochner (2000) identify autoethnography as a methodological turn capable of producing "meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience, research that would sensitize readers to issues of identity politics, to experiences shrouded in silence, and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us"<sup>29</sup>. In earlier research<sup>30</sup> I identified autoethnographic work and specifically autoethnodramas that encouraged an enlightened reading as being potentially more democratic and inclusive, promoting civil and spiritual freedom and a resistance to dominant and anti-feminist structures, sometimes seen as synonymous with traditional academic work (Canagarajah, 2002)<sup>31</sup>. I devised an autoethnodrama entitled 'Impact' that centered on a fictional university on the south coast and explored the effects of the audit culture on individual academics but particularly on one woman academic who was pregnant and completing a thesis, who experiences feelings of inadequacy and anxiety, engendered by the traditional male, oppressive environment that HE can generate. I identified autoethnodrama as a methodology which allows the voices of the researcher and the researched to come alive. It is a methodology that brings data to life but also offers a critical knowing.<sup>32</sup> Performance and ethnography when brought together in this way can resist linear concepts of time and space and allow the fragments of meaning-making that occur during interviews or whilst writing field notes to be reconstructed in a way that can effectively

**Commented [11]:** Can you connect this to a feminist or gender-studies critique?

**Commented [JM12R11]:** Have extended this section to cover

**Commented [13]:** As above, articulate more clearly how this fits with or reflects a gendered methodology.

**Commented [JM14R13]:** I have extended this section to respond to comments

**Commented [15]:** For example, is this connected to work on Standpoint Theory or other research that addresses positionality?

<sup>28</sup> XXXX, J. (2014). *Analytical Autoethnodrama: Autobiographed and Researched Experiences with Academic Writing*. Rotterdam, Boston, Taipei: Sense.

<sup>29</sup> Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, Arthur P. (2010). Autoethnography: An Overview [40 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1), Art. 10, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1101108>.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Canagarajah, A. S. (2002). *Geopolitics of Academic Writing* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press

<sup>32</sup> Bagley, C. (2008). Educational ethnography as performance art: towards a sensuous feeling and knowing. *Qualitative Research* 8(1).

represent and recreate the stories that were shared<sup>33</sup>. Saldana adopts the term ethnotheatre<sup>34</sup> as a methodology that draws on interview data and journal entries in order to imbue performance texts with a personal story that is also social and cultural. For the purposes of my doctoral work I adopted the term analytical autoethnodrama as the process by which the script was created, using a structure proposed by Anderson<sup>35</sup> for analytical autoethnography for which he advocates the following criteria:

1. (The writer must be) A full member in the research group or setting,
2. Visible as such a member in published texts, and
3. Committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena. (Anderson, 2006, p.373)

Autoethnodrama can encourage an empathetic reading of the research story that would be lost in traditional research analysis. As with other forms of experimental ethnography, the aim is to trigger meaning-making on the part of the reader<sup>36</sup> by juxtaposing social theory and dramatized accounts to recreate and create events that say something about the social world under study. In this way, autoethnodrama and performance texts become “a way of knowing, a method of revealing and generating meaning”<sup>37</sup>.

---

<sup>33</sup> Spry, T. (2006). A "performative-I" copresence: Embodying the ethnographic turn in performance and performance turn in ethnography. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 26, 339-346.

<sup>34</sup> Saldana, J. (2011). *Ethnotheatre: Research from Page to Stage (Qualitative Inquiry & Social Justice)*. Left Coast Press.

<sup>35</sup> Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic Autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35, 373-395.

<sup>36</sup> Grant, A. (2010). Writing the reflexive self: an autoethnography of alcoholism and the 'Impact' of psychotherapy culture. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 17(7), 577-582.

<sup>37</sup> Bagley, C. (2008). Educational ethnography as performance art: towards a sensuous feeling and knowing. *Qualitative Research* 8(1).

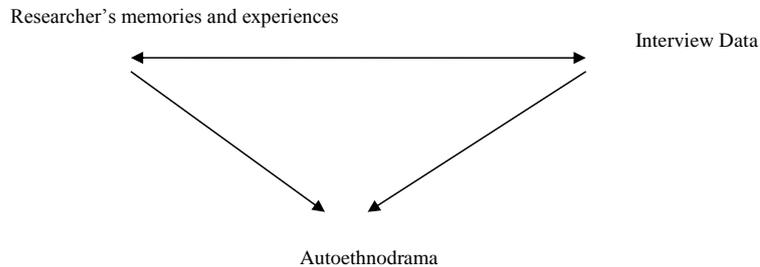


Figure 1 – Triangulation of Research

In writing the autoethnodrama *'Impact'* my intention was to offer an insight into my autobiographical experiences as a pregnant woman whilst carrying out the research. I also interviewed colleagues from across the University of Brighton at varying stages of their careers (early career researcher to professor) and used my analysis of the data to further inform the writing process. The autoethnodrama explores the contention between the historic and romantic view of academia and the realities of the existing culture and suggests that our personal and professional lives overspill, overlap, and that this process is messy and has potentially negative, but also positive, effects. The processes of interviewing colleagues and using my own autobiographical experiences was ultimately transformative and when I completed the doctorate I felt as if I had a better sense of myself and of academic life. Producing *'Impact'* was not a minor or secondary aspect of the research process, instead it provided a method of understanding the social world under study that is supported by Richardson who reasons that “Writing is also a way of knowing – a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable.”<sup>38</sup> When I began the research and writing processes for *'Impact'* I felt isolated, outside the HEA and as if I would have to change in order to fit in. By the end of the doctorate and after my viva, I felt as if I were contributing to a body of academic work and a strategy that encourages conversations about the audit culture and this is indicative of how the process of production was transformative and ultimately empowering. I felt able to contribute to and also take on the academy as a

<sup>38</sup> Richardson, L. (2000). ‘Writing: A Method of Inquiry’ in Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds) *The Handbook of Qualitative Research 2<sup>nd</sup> Edn* Thousand Oaks, Sage., p. 923

lecturer and also as a mother, a role that had been used to undermine and reduce my professional identity during my pregnancy. The autoethnodrama documents that whilst I was carrying out the research I felt a massive tension and inability to perform as either and this was partly due to the impact of the emerging neo-liberal culture in my institution. Once the high of completion was over however, I was left wondering: what now? Maintaining the resistance to conventional academic discourse by engaging in further autoethnographic work whilst contributing to discussions about the neo-liberal agenda was stimulating and transformational but by continuing to write scripts about my life at university, I seemed to be fulfilling criticism of the methodology that suggests it is inward facing and narcissistic<sup>39</sup>. Working in this way would have also, quite frankly, been remarkably dull. Instead I wanted to further my contribution to the field whilst also identifying new and inclusive ways of working. I was further aware that whilst autoethnography seeks to trigger research that resists male-oppressive discourses, there remains a limited amount of autoethnographic work that is explicitly feminist and I sought to remedy this by outlining a process that had enabled me to recover from experiences of sexism in academia but also resist them in the future.

#### 4. The Practice of Storying the Self

In 2014 I was approached by a film production company and asked if I would read a novel with a view to adapting it into a screenplay. The previous writer had dropped out and whilst they were still keen to adapt the novel, they recognized that the story needed serious reworking. I enthusiastically agreed having not read the book. When I finally did read it, (as I am still under contract and the film has not been completed I am unable to reveal the name of the book/film here) I was genuinely surprised that knowing me as they did, the film company had still thought I might be able to undertake the project with any success. Firmly based in the chick-lit genre and with a gratingly hetero-normative, non-feminist, conventional narrative, I was utterly despondent and daunted: what could I possibly bring to the story that would make it engaging to audiences anywhere? My first strategy was to completely overhaul the central character so that she went from being a chocaholic who was pre-occupied with fashion and celebrity culture and desperate to get a husband, to a cocaine-snorting, iron willed fashion journalist, seeking to conquer the world on her own terms. Not surprisingly

**Commented [16]:** Here as well I'd like to see more clearly how this takes a feminist approach.

**Commented [JM17R16]:** Earlier in the chapter I discuss Hunt's work on storying the self and how this can help, particularly women, to feel differently about traumatic events and I do mention it again at the end of this section?

<sup>39</sup> Delamont, S. (2006). Arguments against Autoethnography. *Qualitative Researcher* (4), 2-4.

perhaps, the film company sent it back saying they were not sure it would meet the criteria for a Parental Guidance certificate that they were keen to establish.

The problem was that I did not know the woman in the book. I know women trying to juggle a professional and personal life and I respect and admire them. This was not how I felt about the protagonist and I did not feel comfortable depicting a woman I could not respect and further perpetuating a view of women as dizzy, unprofessional and only able to achieve happiness once they are married. What I did know something about was pressure at work (as detailed in my thesis), successfully and unsuccessfully balancing work and personal life (as I explored in *'Impact'*) and a desire to be viewed as something I actually was not (a conventional academic practicing traditional academic research), before accepting that who I really am was going to have to be good enough (at least some of the time). I also understood what it was like to be too busy to stop, stand back and reflect on what the pressures of work were doing to me and if it was holistic and beneficial to my well-being. While the character and I were in many ways opposite, I began to see how our experiences might be aligned and this helped me to come to know her and see why her story might matter.

‘One of the most important elements of good mimetic fiction writing is that it enables the reader not only to get into the minds of the characters portrayed, but also to experience the emotions of the characters, as if they were real people, this implies that the author, when creating the work, was able to do so as well.’<sup>40</sup>

In ‘Therapeutic Dimensions of Autobiography in Creative Writing’, Hunt explores the potential of devising fictional characters that are imbued with the writer’s own understanding of their emotions and experiences. She argues that whilst this process offers the writer the objectivity and distance needed in order to critique and develop the work, it also fosters an emotional engagement between subject and author. This connection can enrich the writing and is potentially transformational for the writer, ‘the imagination sets to work on the raw material of the unconscious and turns it into art... For some people, engaging with their inner world in this way has a strong self-developmental or therapeutic dimension.’<sup>41</sup> Hunt argues that by fictionalizing elements of one’s autobiographical experiences, the writer can develop an enhanced knowledge of self and refine their position in relation to past events that have been troubling or traumatic and that this process has

**Commented [18]:** Make the connection between your screenplay writing experience and the definitions of auto-ethnodrama more transparent.

**Commented [JM19R18]:** Do you think it is clear that I am saying that the process I detail here is more liberating than autoethnodrama as the self is storied and not factual and that is potentially liberating and empowering?

<sup>40</sup> Hunt, C. (2000) *Therapeutic Dimensions of Autobiography in Creative Writing*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers: London, Philadelphia pp.16-17.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39-40

potentially therapeutic properties. By developing the character in the screenplay to foster elements of my own experience whilst maintaining characteristics and storylines that were distinct to her, I was able to connect with her, like her, respect her. Unlike the process of creating the autoethnodrama *'Impact'* however, I did not feel a responsibility to my interviewees or motivated to create a text that I recognized as authentic to my own life. Instead, Darcy (name of the central character) is struggling to succeed in male-dominated, audit culture where she feels under pressure to project an image of an emotionless professional. The resolution of the story is that she realizes she is able to succeed on her own terms and stops pretending to be something she feels she has to be and instead is content to be who she is. There are elements of Darcy's journey that strongly mirror my own experience of academic life as detailed in my earlier research.<sup>42</sup> As I was writing the script I began willing her on, championing her to believe in herself, being kind to her when she had moments of doubt or fell back into earlier patterns of dealing with stress using alcohol or shutting out her friends and those who loved her.

Hunt argues that by fictionalizing our own autobiography, the writer is able 'to move beyond entrapment in a single image of herself and to expand the possibilities for self.'<sup>43</sup> In my earlier work, whilst the research process was transformational, the character I created to represent myself in *'Impact'* ultimately conformed to the pressures of the audit culture and their desire to be seen as 'professional'. By trapping myself in a narrative where I became a victim of neo-liberalism and sexism, I was unable to explore a more expansive version of myself and this restricted my desire to move past my self-imposed status as victim. Alexandra Symonds suggests that 'Helping a woman resolve her...fear of self-assertion, helping her to emerge with a more authentic identity to handle her hostility and the hostility of others, involves an additional layer of anxiety since she will differ from the expectations of the culture.'<sup>44</sup> and Hunt argues that by storying the self, women are able to express themselves in a way that gives them permission to be different.<sup>45</sup> Creating Darcy helped to resolve my fear of asserting myself as an empowered academic with something critical and personal to say about the audit culture. I identify this process as offering the potential for a more democratic and inclusive way of working in qualitative research where a woman may explore a more expansive and

---

<sup>42</sup> Moriarty, *Analytical Autoethnodrama*, 2014.

<sup>43</sup> Hunt, *Therapeutic Dimensions of Autobiography in Creative Writing*, p.75.

<sup>44</sup> Symonds, A. (1991). 'Gender issues and Horney theory'. *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 51, 3, p. 305.

<sup>45</sup> Hunt, *Therapeutic Dimensions of Autobiography in Creative Writing*

less anxious self in a way that promotes civil and spiritual freedom and resists dominant oppressive structures that are sometimes seen as synonymous with traditional academic work.

Autoethnography offers a platform by which to share stories of trauma with lived experiences and for these to provide a form of cultural critique that can offer the writer a pathway to recovery.<sup>46</sup> As a methodology, autoethnography enabled me to explore my own messy, lived experiences of academic life and culture that was ultimately transformative but which trapped me as a victim in my own narrative where I had experienced sexism as a pregnant woman completing her doctorate. The process of fictionalizing my experiences via a character in a screenplay has meant that while my own emotional trauma has fueled the writing and specifically the development of the central character, it has also given me the necessary detachment required to view my inner turmoil and move past it. This process allows for the internal to become external and for some, myself included, this can be therapeutic<sup>47</sup> and form part of a strategy for surviving sexism in academia. In this way storying the self can offer a variety of autoethnography that resists criticism of being naval gazing and narcissistic, and instead allows the writer to develop a self-knowledge and social critique that can be liberating and empowering. I suggest that fictionalizing the self can provide a viable contribution to work seeking to explore and also resist the effects of neo-liberalism and male-hierarchical environments that are synonymous with HE, on individual lives and on academic culture. The process has been enabling and healing, and this has offered a direct contrast with earlier narratives where the central character was painted as a victim with suggestions of an inevitable dystopic future for HE. Instead, I now have a rejuvenated and more confident sense of self who is less fearful of what is to come. This optimism is perhaps necessary in order to contribute to the resistance to the non-inclusive male dominated culture that continues to prevail in HE in a spirit of social justice and fairness that is motivated and robust.

**Commented [20]:** I was waiting for something like this. In a way, it feels like the chapter starts here. I need a much clearer articulation of how this fits within the feminist framework that the volume is themed around.

**Commented [JM21R20]:** Hopefully this is threaded through the chapter with more emphasis now

**Commented [22]:** Nice. I love this link. Can you highlight more specifically how this becomes a feminist strategy, per the volume collection title?

**Commented [JM23R22]:** Added detail

<sup>46</sup> Grant A. (2013) Writing teaching and survival in mental health: a discordant quintet for one. In: Contemporary British Autoethnography (eds Short, N., Turner, L., & Grant, A.), pp. 33–48. Sense Publishers, Rotterdam.

<sup>47</sup> Hunt, *Therapeutic Dimensions of Autobiography in Creative Writing*

## 5. Conclusion

The relationship between creative and personal writing and academic work is evolving and strengthening within qualitative research and this practice can be used to critique and explore the emerging audit culture in HE. Creative writing, and specifically analytical autoethnodrama, can potentially detail human experiences and locate them within a definite time and place whilst simultaneously providing the analysis and rigor to make this meaningful in academic work. The process of storying the self offers autoethnographers the potential distance and objectivity that is needed in order to critique the culture in which they are working. Whilst I identify autoethnographies and specifically autoethnodramas as offering a potential lens by which to view and critique individual lives and lived experiences with the audit culture, I also argue that these stories can potentially trap women in repressed narratives. Using autobiographical experiences to imbue creative texts can provide a more expansive way of working that is more synonymous with more inclusive and democratic ways of being in academic work and academic life. The busy and anxious academic I detailed in the autoethnodrama *'Impact'* still exists but by identifying existing and emerging work that seeks to provoke and engage with discussions seeking to resist the audit culture and offer other ways of being in academic work and academic life, she has started to feel less isolated, more empowered, less afraid. The realization of this transforming self has been discovered and documented through the creation of a film script where the central character resists the pressure to conform to the male dominated hierarchical culture in which they operate and instead emerge with a surer sense of their expansive self. This story acts as a distorted mirror that is ultimately persuasive when held against my own life and experiences of working in HE.

‘We find ourselves at a pivotal moment. The landscape of HE is caught up in immense ideological change and how things will look when the political dust finally settles is still uncertain. Cuts to public funding and the blending of private and public sector to provide courses and evolve education is potentially exciting but, as with all moments of significant change, not without severe and challenging pitfalls. The pressure on academics to perform and publish outside the confines of their contracts is not set to dissipate, and for many less established academics the additional pressure is seen as unwelcome but inevitable.’<sup>48</sup>

**Commented [24]:** This emphasis on connections between creative writing and autoethnodrama is very interesting and points to the strategy piece of the volume's focus.

<sup>48</sup> Moriarty, *Analytical Autoethnodrama*, 2014.

A year later and the landscape of HE is perhaps no less uncertain, the introduction of fees and shift to neo-liberal governance in HE has done little to stem the culture of compliance. We need to be mindful of the voices in HE, the staff and their experiences that can help to inform and enrich the next chapter in HE history. I suggest that individual academics, institutions and the HE academy as a whole must challenge traditional forms of academic writing and publishing in order to empower peripheral individuals and communities and democratize power and knowledge so that it is no longer only controlled by dominant forms of discourse and that this process may have particular relevance for women working in HE and who struggle with traditional, male hierarchical dominance that is synonymous with many prevailing academic discourses.

The process of storying my own experiences through the creation of Darcy has been ultimately uplifting. While she finds resisting dominant discourses traumatic, she resists the pressure to conform and emerges with a more holistic and expansive sense of self. Perhaps if a grass-roots response to the audit culture continues to evolve, we might hope to see a similar effect on HE culture and individual academic lives. In a post-general election light that is overwhelmingly blue, this shift is now no longer merely desirable, it is urgent. Doherty's call grows even louder and we as academics have a responsibility to respond.

With higher student numbers than ever before, increased teaching and the pressure to produce four star rated research, alongside deadlines for a film script and trying to maintain a positive family life, the busyness of my own academic life continues to intensify and this is evident elsewhere in HE, both nationally and also internationally. Giving ourselves permission to step back and consider the real and possible effects of this emerging culture on our individual lives becomes even more important. Storying the self offers one possible way of distance and reflection and it is my hope that reading about the process might facilitate similar spaces for the readers of this research and contribute to a more holistic and expansive academic culture that is democratic, inclusive, motivated, pleasurable. A culture that will promote and support women and allow them to prevail in academia on their own terms.

## Bibliography

- Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic Autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35, 373-395.
- Bagley, C. (2008). Educational ethnography as performance art: towards a sensuous feeling and knowing. *Qualitative Research* 8(1).
- Banks, M. (2007) *The Politics of Cultural Work*, Basingstoke/ New York, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Canagarajah, A.S. (2002) *Geopolitics of academic writing*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Carless, D., & Sparkes, A. (2007). The physical activity experiences of men with serious mental illness: Three short stories. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 9(2), 191-210.
- Delamont, S. (2006). Arguments against Autoethnography. *Qualitative Researcher* (4), 2-4.
- Docherty, T. (2012). Research by Numbers. *Index on Censorship*, 41 (46), 46-54.
- Ellis C (2013) Carrying the torch for autoethnography. In: Holman Jones S, Adams TE and Ellis C (eds) *Handbook of Autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, pp. 9–12.
- Evans, M. (2005) *Killing Thinking: The Death of the University*, London, Continuum.
- Foucault, M. (1991a). Governmentality. In G. Burchell, C. Gordon, & P. Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality* (pp. 87-104). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gill, R. (2002) Cool, creative and egalitarian? Exploring gender in project-based new media work in Europe. *Information, Communication & Society*, 5, 70-89.
- Gill, R. & Pratt, A. (2008) In the social factory? Immaterial labour, precariousness and cultural work. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 25, 1-30.
- Gillies, D., 2011. Agile bodies: a new perspective on neoliberal governance. *Journal of education policy*, 26 (2), 207–223.
- Graham, G. (2002) *Universities: The Recovery of an Idea*, Exeter, Imprint Academic.
- Grant A. (2013) Writing teaching and survival in mental health: a discordant quintet for one. In: *Contemporary British Autoethnography* (eds Short, N., Turner, L., & Grant, A.), pp. 33–48. Sense Publishers, Rotterdam.
- Grant, A. (2011). Getting to know you: performance articles and the peer review process. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 18, 833-836.

- Grant, A. (2010). Writing the reflexive self: an autoethnography of alcoholism and the 'Impact' of psychotherapy culture. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 17(7), 577-582.
- Hunt, C. (2000) *Therapeutic Dimensions of Autobiography in Creative Writing*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers: London, Philadelphia.
- Holligan, C., 2011. Feudalism and academia: UK academics' accounts of research culture. *International journal of qualitative studies in education*, 24 (1), 55-75.
- Loughlin, M., 2004. Quality, control and complicity: the effortless conquest of the academy by bureaucrats. *International journal of humanities*, 2 (1), 717-724.
- McRobbie, A. (2003) Club to Company. *Cultural Studies*, 16, 516-531.
- XXXX, J. (2014). *Analytical Autoethnodrama: Autobiographed and Researched Experiences with Academic Writing*. Rotterdam, Boston, Taipei: Sense.
- XXXX, J. (2013). Leaving the blood in: Experiences with an autoethnographic doctoral thesis. In: *Contemporary British Autoethnography* (eds Short, N., Turner, L., & Grant, A.), pp.63-78. Sense Publishers, Rotterdam.
- Muncey, T. (2005). Doing autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 4(3), Article 5. Retrieved 16th April 2008 from [http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/4\\_1/html/muncey.htm](http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/4_1/html/muncey.htm)
- Pelias, R. (2004). *A Methodology of the Heart: Evoking academic and daily life*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta-Mira Press.
- Porter, P. (2003). *Stealing Sweets And Punching People*. London: Oberon.
- Porter, P. (2007). *Starseeker*. London Oberon.
- Porter, P. (2008). *The Cracks In My Skin* London: Oberon
- Porter, P. (2008). *Smashed Eggs*. London: Oberon.
- Richardson, L. (1997) *Fields of Play*. New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press.
- Richardson, L. (2000). 'Writing: A Method of Inquiry' in Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds) *The Handbook of Qualitative Research 2<sup>nd</sup> Edn* Thousand Oaks, Sage, pp. 923 - 948.
- Robbins, L. (1963). *The Robbins Report, Higher Education Report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Downloaded 10th January 2013 from <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/robbins/>
- Ross, A. (2003). *No Collar: The Humane Workplace and its Hidden Costs*, New York, Basic Books.
- Saldana, J. (2003). Dramatizing Data: A Primer. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9, 218-236.

- Saldana, J. (2011). *Ethnotheatre: Research from Page to Stage (Qualitative Inquiry & Social Justice)*. Left Coast Press.
- Pat Sikes (2006): Working in a 'new' university: in the shadow of the Research Assessment Exercise?, *Studies in Higher Education*, 31:5, 555-568
- Sikes, P. (2000). 'Truth and Lies Revisited' *British Educational Research Journal* 26, 2, pp. 257 – 270.
- Sparkes, A.C. (2013): Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health in the era of neoliberalism, audit and New Public Management: understanding the conditions for the (im)possibilities of a new paradigm dialogue, *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, DOI:10.1080/2159676X.2013.796493
- Sparkes, A. C. (2002). *Telling Tales in Sport and Physical Activity: A Qualitative Journey*. Leeds: Human Kinetics.
- Spry, T. (2006). A "performative-I" copresence: Embodying the ethnographic turn in performance and performance turn in ethnography. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 26, 339-346.
- Symonds, A. (1991). 'Gender issues and Horney theory'. *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 51, 3, pp.301-312
- Ursell, G. (2000). Television production: issues of exploitation, commodification and subjectivity in UK television markets. *Media, Culture & Society*, 22, 805-825.
- Washburn, J. (2003). *University, Inc. The Corporate Corruption of Higher Education*, New York, Basic Books.