# Ethics, autoethnography, the academy and the world of writers

## Dr Martin Andrew[1]

*[1](Capable NZ, Otago Polytechinc, New Zealand)*

***ABSTRACT****: This Australian-based paper offers a subjective academic narrative on the methodology of autoethnography as it is used and understood by both learners enrolled in creative writing higher education degrees and by novelists who draw on real-life experience and personages in their work in the quest for verisimilitude. Closely considering cases of writing in both ivory tower and real-world contexts, the qualitative and reflection-based study reveals that once writers move from the academy to the world of publishing, they are better able to write from experience, and can do so as long as they adhere to ethics of care that characterise their profession. Trained as autoethnographers to draw fictions from life experiences through methodological autoethnography, real world writers continue to follow the ethical tenets of consent, consultation and present and future vulnerability.*

***KEYWORDS: Autoethnography, Ethics, Life Writing, Pedagogy of Creative Writing***

## I.   INTRODUCTION: CAPTURING AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

In this paper, I consider the question: "How are the ethics of writing involving autoethnography different for writers in the real world and in the academy?" and consider what this means for writers from this real world entering the academy as doctoral candidates in Writing. It is clear that while arguments exist for placing journalistic writing outside formal procedures for ethical reviews are accepted, autoethnography, despite detractors, can, and needs to, be situated as research (Tolich, 2010), qualitative research. If it is, then qualitative researchers must "resolve conflicts of interest, document research plans in advance, respect participants' voluntary participation, and document the informed consent process that is foundational to qualitative inquiry" (The Position Statement [Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, 2007] in Tolich, 2010, p.1602).

During this consideration, I also turn the telescope on my own data. During the past three years, I have taken three doctoral students using methodologies involving autoethnography through the ethics approval writing and rewriting stages. Although I base this discussion on my own experience, I include within this the awareness that their stories and dilemmas are part of my own story. My retelling is itself also already dialogic and echoes the voices of others. This self-reflective observation, points to an issue at the heart of many forms of narrative research: *Who's story is it anyway?* This cliché has been used in the titles of several academic articles on the topic (Carey, 2008). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) challenged self-narrative writers thus: Do you own a story simply because you tell it? Tolich (2010), nuancing it further, asks "do others mentioned in the text have rights?" (p. 1159). For Carey (2008), this evokes bell hookes's (1990) question: whose voice is *allowed* to speak in the final text. This article wonders what role ethics committees have in this question for autoethnography writers in the academy compared with autoethnographic writers in the real world.

I begin with considering some of the key facets of autoethnography as it pertains to writing, collecting along the way associations from its parent disciplines such as Anthropology and Social Science. It consists in the

researching and writing (the *–graphy)* of observations about others in the sociocultural world (the *ethno)* from a unique insider's perspective (the *auto).* Veering between viewing autoethnography as narcissism and therapy, Wolff-Michael Roth (2009) examined the ethical issue of the Othering of the 'ethno' as a necessary correlative of Self-considering auto/ethnographic enquiry. The Others in autoethnography are always visible or invisible "participants" in our stories (Chang, 2008, p. 69) and they have rights of consent and deserve protection.

Being in Writing, encompassing Creative Writing and the flexible methodologies of practice-led research, and most likely underpinned by postmodern, poststructuralist and feminist insights about the natures of truth and subjectivity, claims to truth in any absolutist and scientific sense are neither made nor desired. "If postmodernism has taught us anything", writes autoethnographer Tessa Muncey (2010), "it's that there's a thin line between fact and fiction" (p. 48). In autoethnography in writing, it's the individual's spin on the world, their unique ways of seeing, being, expressing, telling, that lead to a knowledge claim. Autoethnography can play into counter-discursive spaces and validate the stories of the silenced, the imprisoned, the marginalized and the deviant (Muncey, 2010) as sites of knowledge and research. There is no necessary scientific claim about applicability to other cultural members or to generalizability of fieldwork observations as there might be in straight autoethnography. There is no objective outsider, as Norman Denzin observed in 1989. It's about feeling real rather than being truthful, and much of its authenticity is imagined, but what is imagined often begins with what is experienced, observed in natural life not set up in advance, overheard, overseen. Autoethnography, as Reed-Danahay wrote in 1997, is both "a method and a text" (p. 9).

The self-narrative in autoethnography leads to and involves analysing storytelling and enquiry into self and others as data rather than mere presentation of story. Autoethnography takes self-narrative from the arena of storytelling into that of the production of data leading to new understandings of knowledge. Heewon Chang argues autoethnography "transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation" (Chang, 2008, p. 43). Autoethnographers can investigate themselves as the main character; include others as "co-participant or co-informants" or, more scientifically, study others as the primary focus (Chang, 2008, p. 65). In writing the first is the commonest choice. Unfurling the self and the ways in which it produces data through interactions, observations, analyses and interpretations provides us with insights into the modes of thought, action and interaction that underpin and/or evolve from enacting the self and others as data (Arnold, 2011). For Ellis and Bochner (2000), this provides "autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history and ethnographic explanation" (p.742). This 'interplay' needs careful description in the academy. This connection between the personal and the social makes it impossible for even the most ethically aware of autoethnographers to speak of themselves without speaking of others (Wall, 2008).

The next section suggests, the same degree of ethical care may not be valorized among practicing writers beyond it.

## II. WRITERS IN THE REAL WORLD

Writers come to the academy with imaginations brimming about creative ways to incorporate these experiences into broad fictional and fictionalised frameworks in potentially multi-generic PhD texts. They want to retell the narratives of forebears, imagine stories set in places they know well and among people they have known, recreate personages from history as ethically unidentifiable composites. Favouring autoethnography as a seeming more robust methodology for performing life stories, they aim to put themselves and their experiences to the fore: the self and the Other as partial data. And they want to do this with a twist; and this twist is part of what makes it fresh and new. And they all have an ethical sense that might be described by Mark Freeman's term "narrative integrity": "before we act we consider what we are writing ourselves into" (Ellis, Bochner, Denzin, Goodall, Jr, Pelias and Richardson, 2008, p. 319).

At the point of presentation as potential candidates to potential supervisors they may already have (and be) 'data', and arguably anyone would (and is). At the centre of this paper is the notion that creative practices autoethnography looks backwards ethically as well as forward (Tolich, 2010). And Chang (2008), offering a tidier, more linear reading of autoethnography than what often happens in practice in Writing, warns: "Given

that autoethnography is more than casually recalled and accounted memories, you research plan needs to delineate why and how you want to explore your own life" (p. 61). Ideally, in practice supervisors only accept ethically non-contentious projects in the first place; but at this early stage the picture has not emerged. That Solomon-wisdom of any university ethics committee, 'Since no life is lived in isolation, information about other people can never be completely excluded from autoethnography' becomes important and needs consideration before the student writes a PhD proposal. The team will mull over the ethical issues: *What about informed consent? What about willing participation? What about indirect participation? What about the politics of representation? What about the subjectivities of those Others?*

While this study touches on such issues, which might be voices of ghosts from Ethics Committees past, I want to turn the glass on writers in the community, in society, in what in moments of epistemological blindness we call the real world. I want to try to understand how writers entering the academy respond to institutional ethics after apprenticeships in the professional real world. Here, writers might follow Joan Didion's code (for writers of creative nonfiction): "live - and die - by a single ethical standard, to render faithfully' (Carey, 2008).

Let us begin with novels in Australia, although this method would work for the writings of any natiin. Let's open with Tim Winton, whose titles are popular and include *Cloudstreet, The Turning, Breath.* Winton repeatedly locates his stories in patches of Western Australia renamed Angelus or Sawyer or White Point, but recognisably Albany and the little cray-fishing town of Lancelin. He is close to home and writes and shares with what the anthropologist Ruth Behar (1996) would regard as "empathy". The ethical issue of the identifiability of place is understood as writerly license, and whether anyone is harmed is a matter of professional ethics; but this would not be not the case in an academic context.

Further, as writers in this real world are wont to do, Winton also draws on memories and eavesdropped conversations, calling on personal resources of experience and real incidents and creating evocations of the decaying meatworks, the end-game cannery and the depleted fishing industry that resonate with denizens of small-town Western Australia. His 1991 *Cloudstreet* commandeered his own family stories and gained verisimilitude through its historical references: World War II, the Korean War, the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Specifically, he wrote of the grandmother who lived in a tent in her backyard, the farmers forced to leave their land, the grandfather who worked at the Mint, the fundamentalist Christianity, the wharfies and marksmen, the gamblers and drinkers. In a review in *The Guardian,* Aida Edemariam, wrote that Winton: "made of them a baggy, unashamedly poetic and non-naturalistic but also hyper-real and absorbing saga of two poor families rubbing along in a big house in Perth."

Edemariam continues, finger-pointing the grainy authenticity Winton might share with James Joyce:

> *Cloudstreet* gets you inside the very skin of post-war working-class Australians the way
> Joyce makes you feel like a turn-of-the-century Dubliner," wrote one Australian reviewer,
> who also hailed it as a future classic.

Despite the non-explicit use of autoethnographic methods and the production of a text that is part autoethnography, in Winton's case, as in Joyce's, the end justifies the means as the outcome is a classic, albeit a classic of estrangement.

Drawing on extensive travels, Arnold Zable is another writer who is also part autoethnographer, evoking the 'moments of being' Virginia Woolf spoke of rather than Joycean epiphanies as the pivots of his stories in the collection *Violin Lessons.* In an interview, Zable (2011, online) says:

The stories in *Violin Lessons* emerged out of encounters with people in railway carriages, fellow workers in Swiss orchards and vineyards, on the mountain paths of the Greek island of Ithaca, in ancestral villages on the Polish–Russian border, and the living rooms of homes throughout the city. In

war-torn Saigon, in 1970, I immersed myself in the streets and came upon 'The Dust of Life' – the term the Vietnamese applied to the displaced boys that roamed the city.

A reader might be thinking that this is what writers do and have always done, and this may be true. Sarah Quigley is a writer who has done this too, producing both a biography of New Zealand writer Charles Brash and a fictional work about the driven nature of the composer Dmitri Shostakovich, *The Conductor* (2011). Research is both in archives and in the worlds we experience:As you walk around Berlin, says Quigley, the war feels close. There are bullet holes in the buildings, there are stories recounted by East Berliners and Russians. There is a shared knowledge of the siege and the Leningrad concert. "Even with the young Russians, they actually know of that, they care about that." (Blundell, 2011).

In her book for creative writers, *Write*(2006), also drawing an analogy with Joyce, unpacks this process of 'stealing' from real life (p. 109): "A writer of fiction is in the best position to hold a mirror to life and give back a true reflection". (p. 79)

Writers are like magpies, picking up by nature and instinct any glittering items that appeal to them. This appropriation can be seen as a kind of stealing; but then all art steals from the world in which it is based. In other words, it's a necessary theft that usually does no harm (unless it's intentional, in which case the writer is likely to end up in court with a libel suit slapped on them) (p. 107): "A fictional character may be composed of thirty parts – physical, emotional, spiritual – of thirty different people, known by the writer, throughout many different phases of life".(p. 107).

Quigley's language here is clearly aware of the ethical undercurrents here. The idea of stealing recalls Janet Malcolm's (1995) charge in her Sylvia Plath biography that biographers peep through keyholes, rifle through drawers, and plunder the loot of dark family secrets and anecdotes not yet retold.

This anecdote, aside from introducing my story, gestures to two things: recognisability and coincidence. It is possible for readers to recognize, or think they recognize, someone or something in a work by a writer they know. Quigley offers remedies for that: invent composite names ('pseudonyms' if the work was controlled by a formal ethics review); bestow additional characteristics on any character who might be recognized and go for 'composite', and invent fictional pasts, presents and futures (pp. 110-111). It is also possible for things to be merest coincidence, or to reflect shared understandings of our culture, as in my own magpie-ing of the magpie image, which I confer with due deference to Rossini *(The Stealing Magpie)* and Herge*(The Castafiore Emerald)* and other users of the *topos*. It is also possible for references to be recognizable and known without recourse to a libel suit, as such singers as Carly Simon and Taylor Swift would appear to know in their ditties about self-obsessed lovers.

### III. WRITERS IN THE ACADEMY

If this appears to be moving into popular literature, it is time to return to the university, where writers produce autoethnographic narratives of the illness and death of a spouse (Ellis, 1995), international adoption (Wall, 2008), spousal abuse (the work of Tamas), suicidal ideaton (Eales, 2011), home-based palliative caregiving (Carey, 2008) and teenage pregnancy (Muncey, 2010) amongst other serious issues. Currently, PhD writers create fictions drawing autoethnographically on their experiences of rest homes, cyberbullying, growing up in a mixed culture world, working with the disabled, and memories of the Holocaust, to cite a few.

Student-researchers should be encouraged to examine their ethical stance but this pre-supposes supervisors being well-versed and able to issue the general caution to be aware of the vulnerability their topics might generate personally and for others thatTolich (2010) recommends.Most universities have ethics advisors for this, but such advisors are unlikely to be autoethnographers. A mapping out of ethical terrain is, then, a must for all supervisor-student dyads. Three studies illustrate student analysis. First, Sophie Tamas (2011) analyseddifficult questions of harm versus benefit and intent versus impact in the context of a doctorate in autoethnographic

writing focusing on spousal abuse, leading to a book (2011), described as a bold, personal, performative, creative, and theoretically-rich story. Next, Jessica Rose (2011) interrogating her right as an outsider to produce a narrative of Sri Lankan migrants based on her close friendship with one family, concludes "we should always be aware of our responsibilities to the voices we represent in our fiction: to question the impact of our decisions and actions" (p.7). Thirdly, Janene Carey (2011) foregrounds writers' responsibilities for what – and who – they write within narrative methodologies, methodologies more closely aligned with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (National Health and Medical Research Council 2007) than those of creative industries.

Arguably all cases using observation-based methodologies – especially if they *a priori* seem non-contentious – need the scrutiny of any IRB (International Review Board) or HREC (Human Research Ethics Committee). Chang (2008) says:"if your study engages others as interviewees or the observed, you should treat your study in the same was as other social science research requiring an IRB approval" (p.68). It's worth noting that sub-IRBs might operate at discipline or faculty level, while HRECs are university-wide and are unlikely to involve researchers with expertise in creative disciplines and methodologies.

IRBs and HRECS can see a further ethical dimension often invisible to the researcher-writer: the researchers themselves. In autoethnography ethics involves the representation of the self (Wall,2008) as well as ensuring the welfare of the writer-researcher recounting often-traumatic stories while doing these stories justice. The work of Gannon (1996) emphasizes autoethnography can simultaneously both write and destabilise the self (p.477) partly by making conscious "the limits and fragilities of self-knowledge" (p.492). Are institutions ethically responsible to uphold a duty of care for such researchers? Such contexts of production as those Wall and Gannon speak of, Denzin (2003a) writes, promote an "ethic of care" and of "personal and communal responsibility" (p.249).

The following cases – reflective of those of three candidates – illustrate this as each involved *the observed:*

- I've been a resident in a rest home, and I'm writing stories about the tensions between residents and staff, residents and family members, like those I've experienced.
- As a high school teacher with a social justice agenda, I'm writing a fictional book for young adults where I investigate the impacts of cyberbullying and binge drinking.
- My magic realism novel places people with disabilities into heroic positions and draws on my experience as a social worker to add verisimilitude to their characterisations.

The portrayal of others in controversial themes in autoethnography is contentious for reasons beyond the well-known matter of representation in autoethnography (Wall, 2008). In social sciences research involving subject voices, it is ethical to allow subjects the chance to correct and embellish what they said. In ethical research of any kind, subjects have the right to veto how a writer may have represented them (Borland, 2006) or decide their story is now not to be used at all (Tolich, 2010). Mis/under/over representation in autoethnography is also a topic of contestation because they are neither subjects nor participants but people we may have lived our lives with reimagined and reconstructed. The interplay between the personal and the social is, once again, tricky territory. Carey (2008) concludes co-negotiating textual representation with subjects absorbs many ethical dilemmas, particularly that of the interpretive authority of the writer. In so doing, she instantiates Ellis's (2007) notion of 'relational ethics', requiring researchers to "act from our hearts and minds, to acknowledge our interpersonal bonds to others, and to initiate and maintain conversations" (p. 4). The concept resounds through the work of the first generation autoethnographers: Denzin's ethic of care "presumes a moral community that is ontologically prior to the person" (2003a, p.249).

For real-world writers of fiction using autoethnography, as with journalists writing creative nonfiction, there are professionally ethical ways to deal with needs for the imperatives for non-identifiability, confidentiality,

authentic representation and minimizing harm. These solutions might be "ontologically prior" and in practical terms might involve diluting identifying details and practicing 'relational ethics' outside the structures of any HREC.

## IV. ETHICAL ISSUES IN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY IN THE ACADEMY

Within universities and particularly in the light of the Australian *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* the ethical thumbscrews have tightened. We have moved on from Denzin's (2003b) belief that "many forms of participatory action research, reflexive ethnography, and qualitative research involving testimonies, life stories, life-history inquiry, personal narrative inquiry, performance autobiography, conversation analysis, and ethnodrama" (p.249) should fall outside HREC jurisdiction (p.249) and have a kind of generic process consent (Ellis, 2007), meaning voluntary involvement is rechecked throughout the project and the researchers' understanding of ethical processes earns the trust of the HREC/ IRB.

Chang (2008) and Tolich (2010) are clear that ethics is proactive not retroactive. "The Position Statement on Qualitative Research and IRBs" (Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, 2007; Tolich 2010) is also clear. Yet the nature of being a writer means that your perceptions and impressions are formed throughout life, not merely once your ethics approval is passed. This dilemma is down in part to unresolvable past and future issues that are characteristics of autoethnography using practice-led methodologies:

- Past – we may already have collected what HREC/ IRBs would term 'data' and it is now part of our ontological being, our performance of self, as well as shaped us epistemologically;
- Future - the fluid and emergent nature of autoethnographic practice-led research makes it hard to project who and where we are writing about until we write it so we're forced to 'best guess';
- Future – In autoethnography, "research steps often overlap and mix"(Chang, 2008, p. 61) so it is challenging to describe research in terms accessible to the norms of likely members of an HREC/ IRB.

Clearly, if underpinned by "The Position Statement on Qualitative Research and IRBs" described in the introduction and in Tolich(2010); and any HREC's reasoning that published textual representation may threaten any subject's privacy and reputation (not to mention those of the supervisor and the university), the real world writers' apparatus comprising such tools as Behar's 'empathy', Freeman's 'narrative integrity', Denzin's 'ethic of care', Didion's principle and Quigley's tips are not going to cut the mustard.

However, for autoethnographers in writing in the academy, there are praxical problems stemming from positions expressed in HREC documents that would not exist in the real world. Unpacking the bullet points about the past and future, I will detail those briefly, drawing on my own dialogic 'data':

- *Impossible to know who 'Others' might be:* Writers in autoethnography express frustration with HREC insistence on the nomination of the number, sex and ages of 'participants' or the identification of specific (i.e., 'vulnerable', 'Other') groups (rest home patients, cyberbullied kids, people with disabilities).
- *Hard to predict how our best 'data' will come to us:* Students who have created an *Information Statement for* Participants based on their position at the time of applying for ethics, sometimes find in the process of their practice-led research that they are gathering data in other, unforeseen ways.
- *The write to veto versus creative representation:* Then there is the requirement of offering Others a chance to see how they have been represented – clearly an issue of greater anxiety for writers who have an investment in art of representation, the how was well as the what. Also necessary is a permission to publish form, potentially turning natural writerly observation into a studied artifice or at worst a false hagiography (Carey, 2008, Ellis, 2011).
- *Informed consent and experiences that are already part of us:* Also contentious is that the ideal of

'informed consent' that is technically difficult if the experiences motivating your practice-led research are ongoing. Clearly, "Seeking informed consent after writing an article is problematic and potentially coercive, placing undue obligation on research "subjects" to volunteer" (Tolich, 2010), but does that also apply to writing creatively (or writing about writing creatively) in the academy?

- *Autoethnography and the familiar subject:* Autoethnographers are often close –emotionally, familiarly – to those whose stories they represent, and the HREC model of ethics assumes the consent process to be between strangers (Ellis, 2007, 2011)

- *Informed consent and the 'incompetent':* Also contentious are occasions when Others in autoethnographies are actually or borderline legally incompetent: children (Wall, 2008) or the dying (Ellis, 2005; Carey, 2008), particularly when the person with the second-best authority for granting consent (that is, the representative) is the researcher-writer herself. There are conflicts of interest, but could the notion of process consent validate the autoethnographer's practices?

- *Informed consent and casual observation*: Another example from students' practice is when the observed are a generic group (e.g. the kids at school where I work; the old folks in Mum's twilight home; people with disabilities I've observed) as they might be in the real world where our writer-researchers earned their spurs. Clearly, such general observation is neither coercive nor deprives individuals of rights to be voluntary or to withdrawand might also be covered by the ethical notion of process consent.

- *Writers' data is often co-experienced:* Another is that much of this lived experience, this 'data', is shared, with a partner for instance, or friends: Again, there is no coercion, but are they participants, retrospective and ongoing? Is internal confidentiality an issue? Is any speculation about what might happen in the relationship in the future relevant to the research now?

- *Writers don't have 'participants':* Terminology is another issue for autoethnographers in Writing.While they understand the term 'data', the terms 'subject' and 'participant' are epistemologically jarring because autoethnographic time does not stop and start like that of positivist research but flows with the rhythms of lived experience. Throughout this article, considering Roth (2009), I've used the term 'Others'. Methodologically autoethnographic knowledge in practice-led research just does not unravel that way in actuality. Its methodologies allow for reflective discovery, creative serendipity, the unexpected, the as-yet-unknown.

- *The issue of money:* Ethical processes demand to know what monies might be generated from the research output. With the publishing industry in a state of uncertainty, no writer can predict financial gain at the point of applying for an ethics application. However, ethical issues about the disposal of any possible incomes from stories involving Others do need pre-consideration.

## V. THE STATE OF ETHICS FOR AUTOETHNOGRAPHERS INCLUDING WRITERS

Ethical approval processes are part of an increasingly complex and instrumentalist system of dilemmas for such qualitative researchers as autoethnographers. As Richard and Schwartz (2002) and Carey (2008) noted, the guidelines HRECs enforce originate in health and medical research and are oriented towards quantitative scientific methods like experiments and surveys. The Australian *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (National Health and Medical Research Council 2007) was revised in 2007 to more roundly discuss qualitative paradigms; yet is still does not accommodate practice-based creative methodologies, stymying and delaying research (Romano, 2008). Romano states the problem in relation to practitioners of creative industries, and the same is true for autoethnographers in these and related disciplines:

While creative practitioners clearly benefit from forethought about the implications of the different territories their research may traverse, they may be unable to provide the very precise identification of human research participants and potential risks expected from researchers in other disciplines (pp. 6-7).

In 2008, Julianne Cheek spoke of the paradox of the recent political climate where the universities' certainty in wanting cutting-edge qualitative research with robust methodologies coexists uneasily with researchers' uncertainties due to "evidence-based movements, with their colonization, prescription and determination of what constitutes rigor, evidence, and even research" (p. 120). Within this context, she describes receiving an email from a researcher in Canada seeking suggestions about tip-toeing ethics' committees' definitions of 'research' (p. 125). This led her to the discovery that although articles about getting round ethics committees are being published, they are not being written by qualitative researchers (p. 125).

Wall (2008) exploring the ethical issues around creating an autoethnography about adopting her son, commented that questions of ethics in autoethnography have "hardly been raised" (p. 49). Tolich (2010), further, found there was "little consistent ethical guidance for novice autoethnographers" (p. 1600). Inclusive of autoethnography, Romano (2008) critiqued the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research,* and recommended a fast-tracking of non-contentious creative research, perhaps run by discipline-specific or faculty-focused sub-IRBs. While this represents a bottom-up compromise and allows for peers to assess peers' research ethics, Romano also recommends the inevitable top-down solution: more awareness for creative practitioners from industry entering the university (p. 20). Clearly, more training for supervisors must, as usual, be part of the solution.

A decade ago, it seemed that Denzianian autonomy for 'performative' researchers including autoethnographers might escape such top-down scrutiny.Now Universities as Sheffield University are starting to rise to the challenge by including resources for autoethnographers in its research ethics policy (http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/policy-notes/consent/autoethnographic-research) largely due to the influence of Tolich (2010). However, due to the dominance of the politics of evidence in current managerial practices Cheek (2008) critiqued, it's for the researcher to adapt not the HREC. It's a victory for the top down and a defeat for the first generation of autoethnographers' autonomy, agency and 'ethics of care'. The need to protect personal and institutional reputations has been the main driving factor.

Tolich's ten principles for autoethnographers (2010) are instrumental and influential here. Moving into the zone of 'interplay' with which I began this discussion, Tolich writes: "If autoethnography is to advance its ethical considerations, its leading exponents must provide insight into the ethical boundaries between the self and the other that anticipates ethical dilemmas" (p. 1605).

Ensuring autoethnographies are proactive is ideal, but there is still scope for exercising best practice when observations have been retrospective. Any writer, for instance, should not publish anything they would not show to the other persons mentioned in the text (Medford, 2006). No writer should write self-disclosively without thinking through possible impacts on their health or how they might end being regarded. No writer should rely on pseudonyms or even composite characters if it is possible for some potential readers to deduce the concealed identities. As Quigley (2006) suggested, imaginative techniques can go some way to overriding this without sacrifice of authenticity, but the writer-researcher still needs recourse to the ethos of minimizing harm. Tolich's ten guidelines revolve around three core ethical considerations: consent, consultation and vulnerability and are grounded in a solid reading of ethics literature.

- **Consent**: First, respect participants' autonomy and the voluntary nature of participation and document the informed consent processes that are foundational to qualitative inquiry (Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, 2007). Second, practice 'process consent'. Ensure participants still want to be part of the project at all stages (Ellis, 2007). Third, recognise the conflict of interest or coercive influence when seeking informed consent after writing the manuscript.
- **Consultation**: Fourth, consult with others, such as your IRB or HREC or institutionally delegated experts. Fifth, don't publish anything you would not show people/ subjects/Others mentioned in the text (Medford, 2006).

- **Vulnerability:** Sixth,Internal confidentiality is a real issue in autoethnography since it is hard to ensure confidences will not be exposed to family members, friends, colleagues or acquaintances. Seventh, regard any autoethnography as permanent and anticipate your own, your co-observers' and Others', future vulnerabilities. Eighth, just as no photograph is worth harming others for, so should no story. If harm is unavoidable, minimize it. Ninth, if minimizing risk to self, co-observers or Others is impossible, use a *nom de plume*. Finally, assume all people with an investment in the text will indeed read it.

These guidelines brings the study inevitably towards conclusions.

## VI CONCLUSION

Regard for ethics in writing involving autoethnography is qualitatively different for writers in the real world and in the academy. Writers in the real world like Tim Winton, Arnold Zable and Sarah Quigley, professionally immune from HRECs and IRBs, still have their own codes and practices, and I have mentioned Ellis's 'relational ethics', Behar's 'empathy', Freeman's 'narrative integrity', Denzin's 'ethic of care', Didion's principle and Quigley's tips for disguising identities, although these are merest examples. The commonsense notion that no writer should publish anything they would not show to the other persons mentioned in the text (Medford, 2006) applies equally to the real world and the ivory tower.

The research practices of writers in the academy are, however, necessarily subject to closer scrutiny due to legalistic, evidentiary policies and principles that have at heart a protectionist orientation. In any research, the reputations of many – researchers, students, subjects, Others, supervisors, disciplines, institutions and their figureheads - are at stake. Because of this, institutional HRECs and IRBs, informed by the *Position Statement on Qualitative Research* developed by successive Congresses of Qualitative Inquiry and in Australia guided by the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* are mandated to evaluate, report on and ensure the ethical practices of all researchers. While institutions expect researchers creating left-of-centre texts like autoethnographies to dance to their tune and advise more training in ethics for higher degree supervisors, there remain spaces of contestation where how such texts are researched and created in practice differ from the more positivist prescriptions of HEDCs and IRCs grounded in the N/a concepts of reliability, generalizability, and validity. How this flexible space might play out in practice requires further research but the employment of sub-IRCs of peers who understand the methodologies and practices of the discipline could go some way towards ameliorating this issue and preventing the roadblocks to research Romano (2008) describes.

This paper does not argue an alternative case and I won't go as far as Muncey (2010) in maintaining "ethical committees take it upon themselves to create a protection where it isn't always warranted" (p. 106) because, as I have suggested, writers also need to be protected from themselves, from self-absorption and palsied self-representation. Rather, this study demonstrates a range of exacerbating issues for writers embarking on autoethnographic higher degrees in universities after working as professional writers and for writers of autoethnography in practice-led researchand sees partial help in the possible application of Ellis's (2007) "process consent" and "relational ethics". Ultimately, along with Ellis herself did in 2011, we have to say simply put, autoethnographers 'take a different point of view' toward the subject matter of social science. These are differences to be lived with.

Firstly, emergent and unfixed epistemologies such as those that characterize practice-led research reveal apparent discords with expectations about how research unravels embodied in institutional ethics procedures. For instance, researchers in creative arts may be unable to provide precise identification of human research participants and hence be able to anticipate the most effective ways of learning about subjects and Others and risks associated with those methods and the treatment of the data. For researchers to have a Denzinian 'ethics of care' embodied within them and to write with Freeman's 'narrative integrity' is utopian and cannot be assured; but there is certainly scope for professional development in research to accommodate training in ethical being

for all researchers using creative methodologies.The current default position is to apply Tolich's (2010) principles, and this brings me to the second and third points.

Second, the practices of professional writers regarding the use of others as what becomes 'data' in an academic context, need to reflect a closer understanding of voluntary consent. Where real-world writers advocate freedom of expression as an ethical principle, they need to go beyond viewing consent as implied or tacit into explicit and non-coercive articulations of consent and what it means in the short and long term. The concept of consent extends beyond ethical understanding expressed prior to conducting research into negotiations into the representations of subjects/Others in published outputs.

Thirdly, such notions as not writing anything you would not be prepared to show to anyone are commonsensical, but also reflect an ethical understanding of the importance of consultation. Because autoethnographies often involve people close to the writer as well as observed Others, researchers are humanely invested in ensuring the latter come to no or little harm but need to realize that all Others have rights over how they are represented too regardless of any apparent consents they may have given at the outset. Photographers need to have all Others in images they own sign release forms; writers too need to protect the identities of persons represented, particularly from links of internal confidentiality. Even though we think wecan trust a person now it doesn't mean we can trust them infinitely.

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