"The Power of Personal Experiences": Post-Publication Experiences of Researchers Using Autobiographical Data

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Abstract

Although much has been written about the challenging writing process associated with autobiographical research, little is known about the post-publications consequences of using personal experience as a primary source of data. This psychology honour's project used an online survey to investigate the question: What are researchers' experiences and perspectives after publishing research that used autobiographical materials as the primary source of data? The participants were 13 individuals who had published at least two autobiographical peer-reviewed articles and the method was qualitative description using content analysis. Primarily positive findings were identified (e.g., career advancement, professional and personal validation, perceived strengthened relationships with others) although some participants continued to wonder about decisions related to their autobiographical publications (e.g., privacy of third parties, what content to include or exclude) and about the reactions of others (e.g., readers, loved ones). Findings underscore how using personal experience as data blurs the borders of scholarship and personal growth, and directly impacts audiences. Implications include tips for those interesting in doing autobiographical research.

Keywords

Autobiographical Data, Post-Publication Consequences, Qualitative Description, Content Analysis

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Although much has been written about the challenging writing process associated with autobiographical research, little is known about the post-publications consequences of using personal experience as a primary source of data. This psychology honour's project used an online survey to investigate the question: What are researchers' experiences and perspectives after publishing research that used autobiographical materials as the primary source of data? The participants were 13 individuals who had published at least two autobiographical peer-reviewed articles and the method was qualitative description using content analysis. Primarily positive findings were identified (e.g., career advancement, professional and personal validation, perceived strengthened relationships with others) although some participants continued to wonder about decisions related to their autobiographical publications (e.g., privacy of third parties, what content to include or exclude) and about the reactions of others (e.g., readers, loved ones). Findings underscore how using personal experience as data blurs the borders of scholarship and personal growth, and directly impacts audiences. Implications include tips for those interesting in doing autobiographical research. Keywords: Autobiographical Data, Post-Publication Consequences, Qualitative Description, Content Analysis

Autobiographical Data

Autobiographical research is a branch of qualitative research that mines a researcher's personal life history and uses first person voice to present narrative that "can give unique insights into the social and cultural forces shaping his/her own practice" (Taylor & Settlemaier, 2003, p. 233). Personal narrative and auto-ethnographic research are two research methods that exemplify autobiographical research. Auto-ethnography comes from anthropology and was developed as a type of ethnography that encouraged researchers to study a group to which they belonged, and place that experience at the study's centre (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Personal narrative has interdisciplinary roots and emerged from story-research as well as literary and cultural theory associated with sociology, anthropology, and psychology (Squire, 2008). Yet despite their different evolutions, both methods involve understanding social and cultural issues through personal experiences of said issues (Dashper, 2015; Gergen & Gergen, 1988), typically personal experiences representing perspectives not represented in the scholarly literature (Hyater-Adams, 2012; Wall, 2008).

Disciplines such as sociology and anthropology have used these research approaches for many years (Reed-Danahay, 2017); however, they are relatively new to psychology. As psychologists ourselves (Nicol and Martin are professors of counselling psychology; Harder was an undergraduate honours psychology student at the time of this study) we are pleased to see increased acceptance of autobiographical research in psychology. For example, although a Spring 2019 literature search identified more autobiographical publication in sociology compared to psychology, the frequency of autobiographical publications in psychology has increased over the past decade. When we used the key terms personal narrative and auto-

ethnographic to search PsycINFO and SocINDEX, approximately 3,108 personal narratives and 912 auto-ethnographic research articles were identified in sociology (SocINDEX), whereas only 1405 personal narratives and 871 auto-ethnographies were identified in psychology (PsycINFO). However more than half of the psychology papers were published in the last 5 years, between 2014 and 2019. There has been an influx of personal narrative and auto-ethnographic research within the last 5 years on topics like mental illness (Anonymous, 2015), being women with multiply-marginalized identities who are counselling psychology student leaders (Hargons, Lantz, Marks, & Voelkel, 2017) and negotiating sexuality and post-secondary education in Iran (Taghavian, 2019). This positive trend of increased numbers of autobiographical publications underscores the timeliness of learning more about the possible consequences, private and professional, of using personal experience as data.

It is reasonable to wonder about repercussions for researchers because authors of autobiographical research are often sharing personal feelings and hardships in a public forum. Yet there is limited research on the consequences of publishing such work. The current literature has focused on the challenges and ethical dilemmas associated with the writing process of autobiographical research (Dashper, 2015; Medford, 2006; Wall, 2008), without exploring the other side of the experience, the aftermath. Scholars such as Dashper (2015) and Chatham-Carpenter (2010) have recommended further research to investigate the possible post-publication consequences of auto-ethnographic and personal narrative articles. Thus, we sought to address this gap in the literature and investigated the perspectives of researchers who had published autobiographical research. The project was an ideal honours psychology project—carried out by the first author, Rachelle Harder, supervised by second author, Jennifer Nicol, in consultation with the third author, Stephanie Martin.

Writing and Publishing Autobiographical Research

Autobiographical research is a challenging form of scholarship that uses personal experiences to enhance knowledge of a social or cultural occurrence. Obstacles such as self-presentation, introspection, objectivity, and ethics are uniquely experienced in autobiographical research.

Self-presentation. Researchers do not typically expose personal doubts, fears, and vulnerabilities in their scholarly publications (Humphreys, 2005). Yet this is the nature of autobiographical research in which researchers share a range of experiences, from positive to negative, publicly. Their experiences are read and critiqued by informed audiences who are both known and unknown to the researcher, as well as perhaps those who have a personal relationship with the researcher. Unsurprisingly, researchers have reported feeling anxious about the idea of others critiquing their experiences and potentially disputing or judging them. For example, one participant who published about adoption wrote, "I wanted to present an authentic self, but I was also aware that brutal honesty might reinforce misconceptions and stigma about adoption, and I was afraid that my readers would think less of me if they knew what I really thought" (Wall, 2008, p. 41). Other examples of sensitive topics reported in the literature include struggles with anorexia (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010), self-appearance (Dashper, 2015), and sexism (Klinker & Todd, 2007), all vulnerable experiences that might prompt professional and personal self-consciousness, discomfort or embarrassment.

There are varied challenges for first-time researchers using autobiographical data, and researchers try various solutions (Laureau & Shultz, 1996). For example, Dashper (2015) reported that her first efforts adopted conventional scientific writing styles (e.g., third-person, declarative), Chatham-Carpenter (2010) experimented with what she termed "fairy-tale writing" as a way to avoid acknowledging the personal real-life nature of her paper; and Wall (2008) observed researchers' inclinations to apologize for their opinions. These strategies

served to introduce subject-author distance, disconnecting writers from the written account and offering protection, which speaks to the vulnerability experienced when using auto-biographical data (Wall, 2008). Since a written experience has the potential to alter personal and professional relationships, researchers must consider how their experience will portray them to an audience while still remaining true to their experience. This is a complex negotiation that involves two perspectives: seeing ourselves as others see us (e.g., Cooley's looking glass self, 1902/2012; Giddens, 1991) whilst also having others see us as we do. Autobiographical researchers must engage in significant introspection in order to write personally truthful accounts of private experience.

Introspection. Self-presentation involves analyzing the self through introspection, or reflecting on one's self and experience. This is challenging because it is a process of inwardly searching the self (Dashper, 2015) and reliving experiences (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010). Reliving experiences in one's mind can be painful and uncomfortable (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010), especially when topics involve hardship, such as abuse (Muncey, 2005), anorexia (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010), physical injury (Dashper, 2015), or being men in therapy (Buitenbos, 2012).

Although emotional pain can arise from the reflective process of introspection, introspection can also be healing or therapeutic, and elicit beneficial outcomes (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010; Dashper, 2015). For example, after dental reconstruction following a sporting accident, Dashper (2015) decided not she could not bear to have anyone touch her teeth again. But, due to the introspection process associated with her auto-ethnographic study of this experience, she gained the courage to return to the dentist. Dashper's (2015) writing experience demonstrates how personal, emotional, and transformative the introspection process can be, but something the objective research community may view as opinion rather than evidence.

Objectivity. The legitimacy of autobiographical research is disputed because as a post-modern research method, subjectivity is inherent, assumed, and not devalued when contrasted with objectivity in the research process—an assumption that varies based on subject matter. Anthropology, sociology, psychology specializations like counselling psychology, and professional disciplines like nursing rely on qualitative methods and accept subjectivity in the research process. However, in many disciplines, science is often founded on the belief that for research to generate useful knowledge, objectivity must be present (Wall, 2008). Authors, such as Wall (2008), reported that it was challenging to publish their papers because not all journals/editors valued autobiographical research. Stronger data were requested such as proof of the experience from newspaper articles and medical reports (Wall, 2008), or snapshots and artifacts (Muncey, 2005), not data recalled from memory (Dashper, 2015). Human memory is imperfect and has plasticity (Loftus, 1997). Memories will never exactly replicate experience because memory is altered by time, and by other experiences before and after the memory (Muncey, 2005). These variables can cause the omission and addition of aspects of the experience in its reproduction, which may then be judged as untruthful. Nevertheless, Wall (2008) argued that memories are strong data. When someone conducts an interview, the interviewee's memories are treated as real data, even though the interviewee's memories will be prone to the same variable of selective recall. Memories exist on a continuum. When reflecting on the past, the current self will shape the understanding of those experiences (Muncey, 2005). So, if the memories change or parts are omitted from the reproduction, the alteration does not make it untruthful or less credible; the changed recollection invites a deeper understanding of the experience (Muncey, 2005).

Although autobiographical informed poetry and fiction can also invite deeper understanding, autobiographical research is different because the primary purpose is not to record past personal experiences (Wall, 2008), but to extract meaning from such experiences in order to contribute to useful knowledge (Medford, 2006). Personal stories are presented in

the context of the current research literature and analyzed based on the current issues and troubles of the time and place (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). For example, Brown (1997), a nurse and mother who wrote about the loss of her first baby shortly after birth, explained that her auto-ethnographic work will help nurses better understand their professional roles. Similarly, personal narratives, such as the 23-year-old woman with schizophrenia (Anonymous, 2015), contribute phenomenological knowledge about schizophrenia-as-lived.

Nevertheless, debate continues about how to establish the rigour and credibility of autobiographical research (Le Roux, 2017). Autobiographical researchers may grapple with self-doubt, wondering about the accuracy of their account, and if it would be better to present data in a traditional objective research style to gain acceptance from editors and reviewers (Wall, 2008).

Ethical considerations. Scientific research involving humans requires ethics approval from an Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Research Ethics Board (REB) to protect participants from physical, emotional, or psychological harm during a study (Hernandez & Wambura Ngunjiri, 2013). Some IRBs and researchers naively believed that autobiographical researchers did not need ethics approval because they were investigating their own experiences (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010; Wall, 2008). However, stories of the self intertwine with other people's lives (Tolich, 2010). Writing about the self involves writing parts of other people's accounts (Hernandez & Wambura Ngunjiri, 2013). Not only must ethical approval be sought, consent to write about other people's lives is also required.

Ethical approval of autobiographical genres requires informed consent, whether prospectively or retrospectively. Researchers may not know whom they will include before writing, thus the decision is made during the writing process, which involves acquiring retrospective consent from those individuals (Hernandez & Wambura Ngunjiri, 2013). However, retrospective consent could be considered unethical, because of its potential coercive dynamic. Individuals may feel obliged to allow the researcher to publish the already written material, which undermines the consent process (Tolich, 2010). Tolich (2010) for example believes that consent should be received before writing autobiographical research. If obtaining consent is not possible, those sections should not be included in the written product. Deciding what and who is appropriate to include and how to do so ethically makes the processes of writing autobiographical research uniquely challenging.

Post-Publication Experiences of Autobiographical Researchers

The current autobiographical research literature focuses on the challenges researchers encounter while writing and publishing their experiences; but few researchers have commented on their post-publication experiences. An exception is Dashper (2015). Her original publication (Dashper, 2013) focused on her experiences of dental reconstruction. Subsequently, she wrote another paper (Dashper, 2015) about how her behavior changed post-publication. Post-publication, she began hiding her teeth, or changing the conversation when people discussed her article but other possible impacts (e.g., relationships) were not mentioned. Researchers, such as Chatham-Carpenter (2010), speculated about the potential consequences of publication or summed up their experiences in a single word (e.g., "self-conscious," "vulnerable"), but did not elaborate. Further information about the post-publication consequences of autobiographical research is important for researchers interested in this genre. Therefore, we investigated the question: What are researchers' experiences and perspectives after publishing research that used autobiographical material as the primary source of data?

Methodology

We undertook a qualitative descriptive study (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015), which is an approach based in a pragmatic epistemology. Qualitative description is appropriate for a study that "investigates people's reports of their subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or reflections on their experiences" (Percy et al., 2015, p. 78), and that emphasizes staying close to the original data with minimal interpretation (Sandelowski, 2000). The goal is to gain direct knowledge of a range of people's experiences with a topic or issue (Percy et al., 2015), which aligned with our purpose of gaining preliminary insight into post-publication experiences of autobiographical researchers.

Procedures

Recruitment. Following university ethics approval, participants were recruited using purposeful and snowball sampling. Criteria for inclusion included (a) having written and published at least one peer-reviewed paper that used their personal experiences as the primary source of data (e.g., personal narrative or auto-ethnography); (b) reading and writing English fluently; (c) having access to the Internet to complete an online survey; and (d) being willing to reflect on and share their experiences and perspectives. There was no restriction on discipline, expertise with the research method, or time elapsed since the publication of their most recent autobiographical research article.

Invitations explaining the study were emailed to 38 potential participants identified through a search of PsycINFO for articles described as personal narrative or auto-ethnographies and that included author contact information. As well, we emailed the invitation to potential participants known to us, and we posted the invitation on the university's online message board. The invitation also asked potential participants to forward the information to people they knew who might meet the criteria for participation (Passer, 2014).

Participants. Thirteen individuals, four males and nine females completed and submitted the survey. All participants were scholars. They were highly educated and held academic appointments: 11 had PhDs, one had a master's degree, and one had a professional graduate degree. Each participant had published at least two autobiographical peer-reviewed articles, with one participant reporting more than five such publications. Ages ranged from younger than 46 years to older than 65 years with the majority reporting they were between 45 to 65 years old. Two scholars were older than 65 years; eight were between the ages of 46 to 65 years; and three were younger than 46 years.

Materials. Participants completed an online survey (see Appendix A) developed for the study. We decided upon online data collection because of the few autobiographical researchers in our geographic area as well as a desire for breadth rather than depth as an appropriate starting point of inquiry. Survey questions (see Appendix A) were formatted using Fluid Surveys, then piloted to ensure usability. Subsequently, minor modifications were made to the order and wording of 33 open- and closed- questions about the consequences of publishing autobiographical research. Demographic information was also collected (e.g., gender, age group, number of publications, education). The survey was designed using skip logic (also known as conditional branching) so that participants' answers to questions determined whether or not they saw sub-questions. For example, if the main question, "Did you experience any ethical dilemmas once the paper was published," was answered "no," the sub-question did not appear whereas if the participant answered "yes," the sub-question asking for explanation appeared. Sub-questions were open-ended to allow participants freedom of response as well as allow for more detailed responses. Participants took 10-30 minutes to complete the study. Data were analyzed using content analysis (Neergaard, Olesen, Andersen,

& Sondergaard, 2009).

Data Analysis

Content analysis is appropriate when there is limited knowledge about a phenomenon and it is considered ideal for open-ended survey data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The intent of content analysis is to (a) gain direct knowledge from research participants that is uninfluenced by previous researcher knowledge and (b) sort data into categories based on similar patterns and important features (Neergaard et al., 2009). Importantly, categories emerge from the data rather than pre-determined based on literature (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), and are identified by shared characteristics and frequency of occurrence. Unlike thematic analysis, integration amongst categories and sub-categories does not occur.

We followed the steps recommended by Neergaard et al. (2009). First, the student researcher immersed herself in the data, reading the full surveys several times, and then discussing general trends observed in the data with her supervisor. Our immediate response was one of surprise. We were taken aback by the amount of positive content; we expected more data related to challenges. Next, we transferred the data into a word document to create one large data base freed from the survey question/answer formatting, and started organizing and re-organizing data, creating categories based on similar patterns and importance. As mentioned, categories were identified inductively and anchored in the data rather than decided in advance based on theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). For example, we identified broad categories of consequences that were positive (being promoted, being nominated for a prize) versus consequences that were negative (feeling guilty, feeling regret). These broad categories were elaborated with sub-categories (e.g., identifying different types of positive consequences such as work-related, personal, relational). Then we named the categories based on our understanding of the data. For example, the word "validation" struck us as capturing a key feature of the post-publication events and interactions described by participants, experiences that were professional and personally affirming. We also considered the data in terms of existing knowledge, using the literature to provide context and increase confidence in analysis. For example, because the existing literature reported on difficulties publishing and editor criticism (Dashper, 2015; Muncey, 2005; Wall, 2008), data related to career advancement in this study were important. Similarly, knowing that introspection is part of autobiographical research (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010; Dashper, 2015) suggests that continued reflection post-publication may not be a negative consequence but an attitude and skill associated with this type of research. The last step was preparing a straightforward and direct presentation of the findings that minimized interpretation from researchers and was accessible, logical, and recognizable to readers (Kim, Sefcik, & Bradway, 2016). We represented findings descriptively, staying as close to the original data as possible (e.g., use of quotations and minimal interpretation), and organizing by topic.

Rigour and Trustworthiness

Rigour and trustworthiness were strengthened by using guidelines recommended for descriptive qualitative research (Milne & Oberle, 2005). In addition to the aforementioned actions (e.g., immersion in data, researcher reflection, and review of coding, staying close to the data, using quotations, minimizing interpretation, peer review) that align with the purpose of descriptive qualitative research—to provide a "rich, straight description of an experience or an event" (Neergaard et al., 2009, p. 5), participants were free to report, transcription was accurate, coding was data driven, and the perspective was insider/emic (Milne & Oberle, 2005). For example, participants responded freely (writing answers to open-ended questions without

time constraints), participant perceptions were accurately represented (no transcription errors as participants entered their own data), coding was not superimposed by theory (we let the data speak for themselves), and the findings exemplified an insider perspective (participants had experience with the phenomenon under study).

Results

The scholars reported a range of positive post-publication experiences as well as some regrets and uncertainty about aspects of their work.

Positive Post-Publication Experiences

All participants reported that publishing autobiographical research was a rewarding experience: "it was a positive experience" and "I have not experienced any downside." Three categories of positive outcomes were identified using content analysis: career advancement, professional and personal validation, and strengthened relationships.

Career advancement. Eleven scholars described academic career advancements associated with their published autobiographical works. Benefits were noted in statements like "I got published," "continued publications," "further research in the area," as well as "research contacts/partnerships." Another scholar wrote of a potential opportunity to be a "co-investigator on upcoming grants," and another commented that, "I found a narrative voice that works well for me post-tenure." One scholar was "promoted to full professor" and others noted larger-scale recognitions: "It resulted in a publication in a top-tier journal in my field, as well as a prestigious national award," "National/international acknowledgement," "also garnered me a national award."

National and international acknowledgements, awards, promotions, and contracts advanced the scholars' careers and strengthened their curriculum vitae. Although Wall (2008) suggested that publishing could be difficult and there was uncertainty about reactions to personal material in scholarship, this sample of researchers had reaped many professional rewards.

Professional and personal validation. Many responses exemplified experiences of validation, that is, participants described post-publication events and interactions that affirmed their scholarship (content and method) as well as implicitly (and in some cases explicitly) confirmed the legitimacy of their personal disclosures. The entwined personal and professional in autobiographical research explains this rich circular experience of validation. For example, participants were motivated by the pressure "to write and publish to fulfill the expectations of my job" and because "I needed to say what is in the paper; I wanted to help other who might go through a similar experience;" and "having my child remember and known through writing this paper was also important."

Scholars described readers who reached out to them through email: "I received personal reactions from readers expressing how much the publication has helped them understand their own situation," "many have emailed and expressed how much the article has helped them better understand their own experience." Some of these readers wanted more interaction and were seeking more dialogue. Five scholars wrote about readers who "wanted to participate in the conversation" by "discussing" and "sharing their own personal experiences." The personal nature of autobiographical research publications initiated a dialogue with readers that some wanted to continue. Readers felt touched by the scholars' experiences and brought into relationship with the author. These reader responses were welcomed. As one participant wrote, "Personally I hoped my story/experience would resonate with others."

Four participants indicated that readers "connected to my story," and that the personal vulnerability shared by scholars in their publications, elicited responses that changed its audience members: "I have heard from others that they were moved by it and thought differently about something as a result," and "presenting such research at conferences, I have seen such physical responses. People will cry and laugh and never forget what you have shared." This phenomenon of reader resonance corroborated the legitimacy of the scholars' findings and conclusions (scholarship and knowledge generation), the method (its value), and their personal experience (identity).

Scholars engaged in autoethnographic and personal narrative research operate simultaneously at academic/professional and personal/private/intimate levels. This was extremely rewarding as scholars received accolades from their academic as well as personal communities. Example comments related to recognition and gratitude and included comments such as "Congratulating me on my work. Feedback from friends has been very positive and supportive," "offered appreciation of our sharing," "all have been pretty complimentary. I think my wife is very proud of it and me. My mother too," "people were very supportive personally. I received positive feedback when presenting an earlier draft of the study at a conference," and "I have gotten a lot of positive feedback from people all over the world, from all walks of life."

As well as advancing the literature (content), scholars were pleased to learn that they were also generating interest in the research method. Three scholars heard from colleagues who, after reading the participants' work, were motivated to use an autobiographical approach to their own research: "found inspiration to share their own stories," "my co-author went on to write a more in-depth autoethnography which I helped edit," and "I have been able to inspire others to use the method."

Use of and interest in the method also occurred because participants' published articles were used to teach, either by themselves (e.g., "I use it as an example when I teach," "easier to share with undergraduate students") or by others. Six scholars had colleagues write or tell them that they were using their article to teach: "a number of colleagues have told me that they use the article in their graduate courses," "thank me for writing the paper and to tell me they are using the paper," and "some wanted me to know they'd taught it in a class or that they'd been assigned it."

Furthermore, students have written scholars to tell them that they have read their paper as assigned in one of their classes: "some students have addressed me in person about the article." As a teaching tool, the scholars' articles are advancing autobiographical research methods because professors are able to use them to introduce students to this work. In turn, students may become passionate about such research and become interested in advancing the literature with their own experiences in the future.

One scholar wrote that inspiring others to conduct autobiographical research was part of their hopes for publishing the article. Inspired readers will further the literature because they add knowledge to the current body of literature with their future publications. Further, inspired readers advance the research method because they share the publication with colleagues, and students, thus inspiring future potential autobiographical scholars. The audiences' positive reaction of resonating with scholars' experiences validated the challenges of writing the piece, and acknowledged the experiences as more than just research, but also a tool that can change people's perspectives on a variety of issues and inspire future research.

Strengthened relationships. Several scholars cited perceived strengthened relationships, in both professional and personal spheres, as a positive consequence of publishing autobiographical research. For example, one participant wrote that "professional relationships [changed] for the better." There were more comments however on personal relationships, which were judged as being closer post-publication. Examples include "closer to people affected," "I feel closer to one of my family members who I included in the narrative,"

and "I co-authored the study and the auto-ethnographic work deepened and helped maintain our friendship."

Five participants noted that a positive consequence was changed relationships, however they did not provide details. Another six did not believe their relationships had changed, and two participants were unsure if their relationships had changed. Importantly, none of the participants mentioned any negative impact on their relationships; they only discussed positive consequences such as being closer to those affected by the experience.

Post Publication Complications and Continued Wondering

Eight participants identified post-publication consequences that ranged in degree of challenge and impact. One scholar expressed regret because the paper was published using a pseudonym. The decision to seek anonymity subsequently caused complications when the publication received awards. Eventually the researcher's identity was revealed, and the author regretted using a pseudonym. Several scholars reported continued post-publication wondering and introspection. Three participants continued to experience uncertainty about their publications, and another five specifically wondered about the impact on readers – readers' reactions, thoughts, and possible judgements. For example, authors said: "have only had feedback from people I know, would love to know what others think. The book writing has begun" and "maybe someone didn't like it or think it's 'bullshit,' what I've published!" Four responses were elaborated more fully:

> Interestingly, myself and my co-publishers have not followed-up on the consequences of our writing. I sense that they are satisfied with our 'product.' Since this writing, each of us have moved on to experience even more challenges, and relative success, in our work environment. I wonder if they re-visit our writing in the same way I do.
>
> I also included a lot about my wife in the piece. I had her read it and talk about her portrayal with me, but I do wonder if others think of her differently because of the article, and perhaps in ways that I can't envision or predict.
> For those who might have read it and been upset or disappointed, they either lied or said nothing to me. If they walked away from a relationship with me, I didn't have any clue it was due to that article.
>
> I also don't know the extent of its impact . . . . who read it/who reads it now/who still has to discover and read it? Or how it might come back into my life and be used to frame future writing and research?

More distressed were those who remained uncertain about decisions associated with the publication. For example, two scholars reported remorse and guilt. One shared, "I felt a lingering sense of guilt." The other wrote:

> Although I had permission from my family to use real names, I immediately regretted it after the publication. It seemed too real. I only concealed the identity of one person in my narrative (plus I did not ask permission from him), for reasons of safety. I feel strongly that he in no way had access to the publication, nor knew of its existence. However, when he died suddenly a year or so after publication, I felt extremely guilty and remorseful. I still haven't dealt with this in my head—nor on the page.

Lastly, one scholar wrote, "I experience wondering if I had shared too much—I realized that we make the best decisions we can at the time; we can never fully appreciate where these decisions will take us."

Advice for Researchers Considering Writing and Publishing Autoethnographic Genres

Given the newness of this research method and its challenge to conventional understandings and approaches to research, we asked these scholars if they had any advice for aspiring autobiographical researchers. Their replies were enthusiastic and encouraging but tempered with caution. Participants urged experimentation while also advising care. Table 1 presents a list of their suggestions verbatim.

Table 1: Advice for those considering autobiographical research

1	For those who like to write creatively, autoethnography provides a means to use some of those skills. It's not for everyone and every subject, but for a select range of studies, autoethnography can be absolutely brilliant.
2	Do not be afraid to experiment.
3	Be mindful of the characters in your stories and try not to be destructive to them while holding on to your truth.
4	For the right subjects, autoethnography can be massively insightful, opening up avenues of understanding that simply aren't possible with other methods. For those who have important insights to share, they can do so and not simply hide behind other participants.
5	Be brutally honest with yourself. Telling the truth is difficult and risky but rewarding.
6	Very carefully consider your vulnerability, arrange appropriate supports, and ensure the work is well done in a scholarly sense. Imagine your work being published and seeing your future... Can you imagine any damaging negative consequences? Are these consequences to you or others worth publication?
7	Be very reflective and get friends to review your paper to see whether you're not disclosing things that you shouldn't be.
8	Weigh the costs and rewards of writing about difficult topics.
9	Read more than academic personal narrative. Read memoir. Read poetry. Read about ethics of storytelling. Have a post-storytelling plan: maybe a therapy session, meditation, something that works for you to be able to sit with the silence after you tell the story.
10	Be acutely aware of all the repercussions and do it anyway.

Although autobiographical researchers experience many benefits post-publication, there were also post-publication detriments as well as advice warning researchers about the potential internal struggle they may face while writing and during post-publication experiences. The scholars acknowledged that this form of research is not for everyone and those who embark on the journey must be prepared to consider the consequences, both positive and negative.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to gain preliminary understanding into the post-publication experiences of researchers who have published personal narrative and/or auto-ethnographic research. Given the complexity associated with writing autobiographic research (Dashper, 2015; Medford, 2006; Wall, 2008), we wondered if there were post-publication experiences that were unique to publishing this kind of research. There were unique positive aftereffects as well as some cautionary tales.

Unexpected Results

Although career advancement is an obvious motivation for academics, the current literature has focused on autobiographical research as a challenging form of research to conduct and to publish (Wall, 2008). Thus, it was an important finding that participants were able to publish autobiographical research and advance their careers. Similarly, authors such as Dashper (2015) have commented on challenging post-publication relationships, for example, feeling embarrassed and exposed when she encountered individuals who had read her article. However, contrary to Dashper's (2015) experience, participants involved in this study perceived strengthened relationships with people. These findings suggest that negative relationship outcomes are not a consistent consequence of publishing autobiographical research, and that further research is needed to better understand autobiographical researchers' post-publication relationships.

Autobiographical research as a teaching tool in university classes is a positive consequence for scholars because it validates their research. Using such articles to teach validates the scholars' research because it demonstrates to the scholars that their personal experiences shared in the article have value beyond the borders of literature. Equally, or more importantly, their article can be used to reach and personally affect other people's lives.

Positive Post-Publication Experiences

Since successful autobiographical writing is evocative and vulnerable, it was a reasonable assumption that participants would write about impacting readers on some level with their scholarly works (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013). For example, before Davis (2005) deliberated on his life changing experience, he communicated his desire for readers to internalize his experience and be altered by it. His goal was for readers to resonate with his experience. Furthermore, Ellis and Bochner (2000) wrote that the goal of autoethnographic research was to provoke readers to engage in conversation with the research. Consistent with the existing literature, the findings of the present study suggested that one of the primary objectives of many autobiographical researchers was a wish to resonate and begin a dialogue with readers. However, the literature does not report on whether the researchers' goals are realized. The study extends the current literature because findings suggest that readers do internalize the scholars' experiences, they engage in conversations with the scholars, and likely converse with others as well. Although the scholars did not write in great detail about their perceptions of how their article affected their readers, this study reveal that personal experiences (a) change the way people think, (b) help them better understand their experiences, and (c) give comfort to readers as they learn they are not alone.

Regrets

Chatham-Carpenter (2010) evaluated the need to protect the researcher in autobiographical research. In her preliminary drafts of writing about her experience with anorexia, she was concerned that if she published she would risk her reputation (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010). Other researchers, such as Wall (2008), were also concerned with self-representation. But researchers have not followed up and nor have they provided examples of others thinking negatively about them post-publication. We anticipated that concerns with self-representation would be reflected in negative post-publication experiences; however, the scholars in this study did not emphasize negative publishing consequences. The negative consequences reported related to the logistical matter of authorship being anonymous or not, which may be less pertinent as this type of research proliferates and is increasingly recognized as legitimate scholarship. Furthermore, many of the scholars do not know what other people think of their writing, or what others think about them after publication. Therefore, self-representation concerns do not necessarily manifest after publication, probably because of the sensitive content, but ethical writing dilemmas do appear after publication.

Tolich (2010) evaluated multiple autobiographical articles and analyzed their ethics. He identified potential problems for individuals who are unaware that their identities and experiences have been published in an autobiographical article (Tolich, 2010); but he did not indicate how these individuals interpreted their experience as they were unaware of the publications. Wall (2008) chose not to publish her autobiographical article on adoption because of ethical concerns related to her son. She was concerned about disclosing things that he might consider private. Chatham-Carpenter (2010) discussed ethical considerations for the researcher in the sense that the process of reflecting and revealing more detailed information can be harmful to the researcher. The results from the current study are aligned with the literature because researchers were concerned about ethics but took precautions to try and avoid ethical dilemmas. Further, the results of the current study illuminated the ethical considerations for researchers wondering about seeking consent. That is, we found that researchers could be negatively affected when they did not receive consent from individuals named in their publications.

Limitations, Implications, and Future Research

There were several limitations to the present study. Key limitations were the dependence on survey data and time constraints. Although the survey reached more participants and therefore more post-publication experiences than if we had chosen to interview, the clarity and depth of the responses were constrained. We could not probe and ask for further detail or explanation. Time constraints prevented us from leaving the survey open for a long period of time. If the survey had been posted longer, there possibly would have been more participants. Another limitation was identifying potential participants. We obtained autobiographical researchers' emails from their contact information on PsychInfo. The recent publications had emails, but the older publications either did not have an email contact, or the email contact had been discontinued. Therefore, many of the present study's participants likely published their articles within the last 5 years, which prevented us from learning about senior researchers' post-publication experiences. Their experiences might be different from junior researchers because autobiographical research has only recently begun to be accepted as a legitimate form of research. Senior researchers might have reported more discrimination and negative consequences after publishing.

Future research could include conducting more in-depth interviews that focus primarily on researchers in psychology. Secondly, we had assumed that post-publication experiences of

traditional research methods are different from post-publication experiences of autobiographical researchers because of the personal quality of the content, but perhaps their experiences are similar. Future research could investigate traditional researchers' post-publication experiences as contrasted with the post-publication experiences of autobiographical researchers. This could narrow future research to identify specific post-publication areas that are unique to autobiographical research. Future research is also recommended to look at the post-publication experiences of individuals implicated in autobiographical studies. These individuals could also be asked if they believed anything about the scholar changed post-publication. Lastly, it would be of interest to find out in more detail the impact of autobiographical research on readers' lives. These suggestions for future research can advance understanding of autobiographical research and further demonstrate the power and consequences of sharing personal experiences.

Conclusion

Autobiographical research methods like personal narrative and auto-ethnography are becoming more common. Although there are unique challenges associated with research centered on research personal life-stories, those drawn to this type of scholarship will be reassured. The barrier between professional and professional spheres can be eliminated as autobiographical researchers experience professional and personal benefits. The self-validation experienced as a result of affecting others intertwines with professional benefits and is a powerful motivator for scholars engaged in autobiographical research. In conclusion, findings indicated that autobiographical researchers write to advance knowledge and practice, to reveal and reconcile personal issues, and to impact others**.** When autobiographical research is published, it extends beyond the borders of scholarship and personal growth, and directly impacts its audience.

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Appendix

Online Survey

Please think of a particular paper you have published in a peer-reviewed journal that used your personal experience as primary source of data (e.g., personal narrative, auto-ethnography) and answer the following questions based on that publication.

THE PUBLICATION

1. What was the topic of your publication?

2. How long ago was the article published?
       Less than 5 years
       5 years or more

AFTERMATH

 We are interested in learning about the aftermath of publishing this kind of research.

1. Have there been positive outcomes? Yes, No, I don't know
    a. If yes, please explain.

2. Have there been detrimental outcomes? Yes, No, I don't know
    a. If yes, please explain

3. Have there been any unexpected repercussions/consequences? Yes, No, I don't know
    a. If yes, please explain

DOING RESEARCH THAT USES PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AS A PRIMARY DATA SOURCE

1. What led you to write and publish the paper?

2. Why did you decide to use personal experience as <u>primary source of data</u> rather than another source of data?

3. Did you have particular hopes associated with publishing the paper? Yes, No, I don't know
    a. If so, what were your hopes? Personal and/or professional
    b. Were your hopes realized? Please explain.

4. Did you experience any ethical dilemmas once the paper was published? Yes, No, I don't know
    a. If yes please explain.

OTHERS

1. Were other people included or referenced in your published paper? Yes, No
    a. Are they aware of the publication? Yes, No, I don't know
        i- How did they become aware of the publication?
    b. To your knowledge, have they ever read your publication? Yes, No, I don't know
    c. How did they respond to the publication?

2. Have any relationships in your life changed and been affected because of the publication? Yes, No, I don't Know
    a. Please explain.

3. Has anybody contacted you after reading your article? Yes, No, I don't know
    a. How have others contacted?– email? In person? Writing? Other, please specify
    b. And for what purpose?

POSTPUBLICATION THOUGHTS

1. With hindsight, knowing what you know now, would you still write and publish the paper? Yes, No, I don't know
    a. Please explain

2. Do you have any post-publication regrets? Yes, No, I don't know.
    a. Please explain

ADVICE

1. Would you recommend others to consider this approach to research?
    a. Why or why not?

2. Do you have tips for others who would like to do this kind of research?

3. Are there any last post-publication thoughts or experiences you would like to include?

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please be aware that any information that you provide is voluntary and increases the potential for identification.

Gender
- Male
- Female
- Other

Age
- 18-45 years old
- 46-65 years old
- 66 or older
  Education: What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, highest degree received.
- High school
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Professional degree
- Doctorate degree
  How many autobiographical articles have you published?
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- More than 5

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