

12-4-2022

## Understanding and Encountering the Ethics of Self and Others in Autoethnography: Challenging the Extant and Exploring Possibilities

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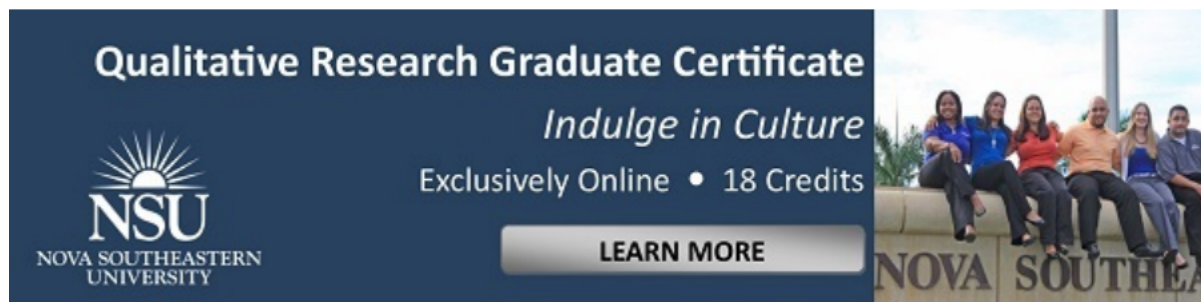
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### Recommended APA Citation

Dahal, N., & Luitel, B. (2022). Understanding and Encountering the Ethics of Self and Others in Autoethnography: Challenging the Extant and Exploring Possibilities. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(12), 2671-2685. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5572>

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### Abstract

In cultural and institutional contexts, autoethnography examines personal and professional experiences. While conducting and representing autoethnography, these considerations raise ethical challenges for self and others. This expository paper examines and explores the various forms of the ethics of self and others in autoethnography in South Asian contexts. Furthermore, ethical positions in an autoethnographic inquiry are presented and explored by challenging the extant and exploring the possibilities. Moreover, ethical standards are maintained based on the first author's experiences. We also realized that the emerging challenges of the ethics of self and others in autoethnography are ongoing and real. Likewise, we brought the first author's lived experiences of conducting autoethnographic inquiry in his personal, professional, and cultural contexts (i.e., South Asian contexts) as a guiding principle. Above all, following the foundational understanding of ethics in autoethnography, one may engage with others in the account of self-experiences. The paper concludes by highlighting possible procedural and situational ethics pertaining to *Dharma* and *Karma* in autoethnography as a transformative educational research methodology (Luitel & Dahal, 2020) that might be demonstrated while conducting an autoethnographic inquiry.

### Keywords

personal and professional, autoethnography, ethical, self and others, Dharma and Karma, transformative educational research

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### Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks go out to everyone who helped us edit and improve our article on behalf of the authors. We are thankful to Bruce Lilyea, PhD, senior editor TQR, for invaluable assistance in revising our article. We are indebted to the Kathmandu University School of Education for providing a research-based environment, direction, and ongoing support. Likewise, we thank the University Grants Commission, Nepal (<https://www.ugcnepal.edu.np>), for a PhD Fellowship and research support [Grants Number: PhD-77/78-Edu-05] to Niroj Dahal. Funding: This work is funded by University Grants Commission (UGC) Nepal with UGC Grants Number PhD-77/78-Edu-05.

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In cultural and institutional contexts, autoethnography examines personal and professional experiences. While conducting and representing autoethnography, these considerations raise ethical challenges for self and others. This expository paper examines and explores the various forms of the ethics of self and others in autoethnography in South Asian contexts. Furthermore, ethical positions in an autoethnographic inquiry are presented and explored by challenging the extant and exploring the possibilities. Moreover, ethical standards are maintained based on the first author's experiences. We also realized that the emerging challenges of the ethics of self and others in autoethnography are ongoing and real. Likewise, we brought the first author's lived experiences of conducting autoethnographic inquiry in his personal, professional, and cultural contexts (i.e., South Asian contexts) as a guiding principle. Above all, following the foundational understanding of ethics in autoethnography, one may engage with others in the account of self-experiences. The paper concludes by highlighting possible procedural and situational ethics pertaining to *Dharma* and *Karma* in autoethnography as a transformative educational research methodology (Luitel & Dahal, 2020) that might be demonstrated while conducting an autoethnographic inquiry.

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## Ethics of Autoethnography in the Context

I reflect on my first encounter with this emergent and ethically challenging autoethnographic methodology. In 2013, I graduated with an MEd in Mathematics Education from Kathmandu University School of Education (KUSOED). This degree offered me some pedagogical visions of empowering mathematics teachers by creating a room for professional improvement. I reflected on professional experiences using autoethnography as a research methodology through my master's dissertation entitled, "*Teacher-students relationship and its potential impact on mathematics learning*" (Dahal, 2013). The inquiry offered me an opportunity to critically look into my positions as a learner, teacher, and teacher educator. These positions and "life experiences pertaining to various roles, ideologies, perceptions, beliefs, knowledge, and teaching practices helped me to critique self and others" (Dahal et al., 2019, p. 1). Similarly, Liu (2020) stated that "the reflexive nature of autoethnography felt like a comfortable fit in my early development as a critical management scholar. I was instantly arrested by what seemed like the most sensible and natural way to write about my work" (p. 420). Further, Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2021) pointed out that "autoethnography as a complex and potentially transformative methodology for understanding and enacting higher education by arguing that creating and teaching autoethnography can open spaces to experience higher education as a social, ethical, and collective endeavor" (p. 215).

Further, within the inquiry, I positioned myself in the South Asian contexts to explore my *Dharma* (duty) and *Karma* (action) about the problems and challenges experienced in teaching and learning mathematics. In this path, *Dharma* is associated with possible duties that produce knowledge and service in a non-violent way and *Karma* is associated with concepts of actions that includes moral ideals and virtues (e.g., non-cheating, non-stealing, forgiveness, and truthfulness, among others; Dahal, 2020). The framework of *Karma* can be used to "promote the existing practice to be more meaningful, and learner-centered by offering students active participation in learning" (Dahal et al., 2019, p. 35). These practices might be aligned with social and cultural enactment and transformative pedagogy – an activist pedagogy that allows students to examine their ways of being, doing, and becoming (Barjesteh, 2019; Ukpokodu, 2009). This pedagogy combines constructivist and critical theories and abides by the ethics of solidarity and civic responsibility. These combinations enable the learners to critically examine their values, beliefs, and knowledge. "The intended goal behind it is all about developing a sense of critical consciousness, reflective knowledge and agency" (Heberle et al., 2020, p. 526). To this end, the ethic of self and others is all about the set of moral principles that govern the overall process of the autoethnographers' behaviour.

Conversely, in those days I was not fully conscious of the ethical process of my inquiry and I was guided by some of the conventional ethical guidelines while conducting the research. I was implicitly aware of some ethical principles of *Dharma* (duty of caring to others) and *Karma* (performing actions) to be considered as a researcher in South Asian contexts. However, ethics of care is a philosophical perspective that uses relational and context-bound processes. Further, Herrmann (2021) examines "the concept of love as a verb, love as action, and explore the connections between doing autoethnography and the philosophy of love" (p. 67). These processes refer to the approach aligned with morality and decision making (Burton & Dunn, 2013). So, I thought of being ethical in the inquiry while representing my action, reaction, and interaction, where ethics of caring is the foundation of morality (Noddings, 1984). Perhaps, the conventional ethical notion limited overall processes of doing autoethnography. Then, arriving here, I realized that the overall process of inquiry was guided by the conventional ethical notion of the autoethnographic inquiry process without grounding ethical principles where I could address the minimal issues of the ethic of self and others in autoethnographic inquiry. In the next section, I discuss our understanding of ethics of self and others in autoethnography.

### **Positioning Myself to Understand Ethics of Autoethnography**

In the process of connecting the personal and professional experiences of self and others, the autobiographical genre of writing within autoethnography is helpful in exploring various layers of consciousness about cultural others and self (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). These layers of consciousness in autoethnography have thrived in many academic contexts such as education and anthropology as it allows individual experiences to be a source of knowledge. In this way, an interesting scenario is that various search engines (Google, Bing, and Yahoo, to name a few) show over 100,000 results in the name of "autoethnography." It demonstrates how autoethnography is being used in the field of educational research. In the late 1970s, autoethnography became popular in the field of educational research. It has been established as a critical research method that demands somewhat contested ethical standpoints.

Likewise, Maric (2011) states, "I come to understand 'auto' as self or individual, and 'ethnography' as culture or practices where my responsibility and obligation to respond to and acknowledge every other (ethno) with my whole subjectivity, my thinking, my writing (graphy), my body, my embodied personal and professional" (p. 33) practices (e.g., Dahal, 2013; Luitel, 2009; Pant, 2015; Qutoshi, 2015; Shrestha, 2018). Further, my understanding of autoethnographic inquiry is to open up a deeper, more complex discussion that might lead to

emotionally and intellectually impactful texts (Chang, 2007). These texts can further extend beyond the page or the stage to affect audiences and communities. Therefore, when conducting autoethnographic research, autoethnographers must adhere to ethical principles. Ethical issues arise from the positionality of the researchers, which is to offer acknowledgments and locate the values, views, and beliefs of self and others associated with the emergent research design. In this regard, primary sources of research data comprise the personal, professional, social, and political experiences – how they act, react, and interact by addressing the ethical issues of representing, speaking for, or appropriating the voice of others (Chen, 2021). Nevertheless, researchers need to consider the ethical consequences of using their experiences in the contexts. In order to understand the ethics of self and others in autoethnography, as autoethnographers face ethical challenges, we attempted to review some of the studies to conceptualize further about the ethic of self and others in autoethnography.

From both the Eastern and Western worldviews, ethical questions are arising in the form of debate in autoethnographic research. Eastern worldview and wisdom traditions are abided by the notion of the relation between humans and nature. These "traditions of humans and nature connect the autoethnographers' aesthetic, intuitive, and spiritual associations to self and others, giving rise to moral and ethical values that govern" (Luitel & Taylor, 2019, p. 5) autoethnographic inquiry. The Western worldview is, to some extent, at odds with the Eastern worldview and aligned with "the basic premises of unemotional objectivity, material reality, and value-neutral facts" (Luitel & Taylor, 2019, p. 5). These limitations might suggest some proof as a basis of a belief for autoethnographers considering that reality and knowledge are the beginning and even ending from the self in the views of others.

These debatable issues arise from the self as it is also an outcome of retrospective reflection of the self to others. Retrospective reflection allows autoethnographers to re-examine consciously and/or collaboratively to understand the self and others. In this regard, Tullis (2013, as cited in Schmid, 2019) warns that:

the ethical issues faced in autoethnography may be quite complex: they must go beyond the traditional expectations of ensuring that participants provide informed and voluntary consent, knowing how, where, with whom, and when their data are being shared, and expecting that the information is shared in an accurate, trustworthy representation. (p. 272)

More so, the complexity of information shared and/or generated in autoethnographic inquiry offers the autoethnographers conscious reflection going beyond traditional expectations. In this line, Ellis et al. 2011 (as cited in Schmid, 2019) shared that:

in autoethnographic research, the researcher must consciously reflect on, first, their own participation in the story; second, which persons' voices other than that of the author are intentionally or unintentionally reflected in the story; and third, who else may be impacted by the presented narrative. These issues must be considered throughout the data collection, analysis, and formal production of the autoethnography. (p. 273)

Contradicting the above views of Ellis et al. (2011) and Tullis (2013), Lapadat (2017) explored, "autoethnography as an approach to inquiry that has gained a widespread following in part because it addresses the ethical issue of representing, speaking for, or appropriating the voice of others" (p. 1). Likewise, Edwards (2021) presented and explored that

the ethical challenges arising in conducting and presenting autoethnographic research might be explored first through reflection on personal experience of being described and identified in an autoethnographic presentation without my permission then through the challenges of my own experiences undertaking autoethnographic work. (p. 1)

Similarly, Adams et al. (2017) further explored that "ethical issues surrounding the engagement and representation of self-concerning others, and a body of work addressing autoethnographic ethics has begun to emerge" (p. 283), and these moral concerns are ongoing and genuine. Next, in the Eastern worldview (e.g., South Asia), ethics is considered a private affair but has some possibilities to link with others. These possibilities give rise to ethical issues as a principle in autoethnographic research, not as generic but as emergent in nature, by considering layers of various forms of ethical behaviour (Dahal, 2020) which might determine the context of the research and the ethical issues to be considered.

On top of that, the Eastern and Western worldviews of the ethics in autoethnographic inquiry, for example, Adams (2006), Adams et al. (2017, 2021), Dahal (2020), Edwards (2021), Ellis (2009), Ellis et al. (2011), Lapadat (2017), Tolich (2010), Tullis (2013), and Wall (2008) offer me some forms of the exploration of the ethical issues to some extent. Likewise, in this paper, I further address these ethical issues in the scholarship by challenging and offering a possible ethical position of autoethnographers.

Using autoethnography as transformative research which connects life and research (Dahal et al., 2022; Ngunjiri et al., 2010), I have challenged the extant and explored possibilities of autoethnography by positioning myself in the South Asian context. The guiding questions of this expository paper are: how have we been understanding and encountering the ethics of self and others in autoethnography? How can the ethic of autoethnography be located to others in the account of self-experiences? How are ethical issues handled in practices when they are in the process of the inquiry? How is ethics constructed and practiced in autoethnographic inquiry in a particular context? And, how ethical issues are handled in practices when they are in the process of the inquiry?

In addition to the abovementioned questions, the paper discusses the ethics of self and others in autoethnography associated with the South Asian contexts, largely aligning with the notion of *Dharma* and *Karma* within Eastern and Western worldviews. In doing so, I discuss the ethics of writing about personal (academic and non-academic), professional, social, and political experiences and relate how they act, react, and interact with those experiences.

Next, I discuss the limitation of ethical issues in the conventional ways of doing autoethnography considering the Western worldview by offering the several ethical principles of doing autoethnography and the meaning-making process of autoethnographic inquiry in the South Asian context. In doing so, I explore the question: what are the processes required to create autoethnographic inquiry to explore the autoethnographers' *Dharma* and *Karma*? But foremost, I offer the foundational understanding of the context of ethics of self and others in autoethnography and scholarship from the Eastern and Western worldviews.

### **Eastern and Western Notions of Ethics in Autoethnography**

Some of the well-known ethical considerations in educational research include informed consent, prohibition of deception, privacy and confidentiality, accuracy, voluntary participation, and protection of participants' identities and personal information drawn from the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence. Likewise, beneficence, avoiding fabrication, doing no harm, autonomy, justice, protecting confidentiality and identity, protecting the self, and omitting or converting data are some other forms of ethical guidelines to be considered

while conducting educational research (Christians, 2005; Tullis, 2013). However, the proposed ethical considerations while conducting autoethnography might not be enough. These considerations for autoethnographers may raise several unanswered questions during the inquiry process. Likewise, while crafting autoethnography, the autoethnographer is at the centre of the source of evidential text and meaning making. No doubt, as autoethnographers, we write about self rather than writing the experiences of others. In contrast, ethics in the South Asian context might be viewed from the perspective of the Eastern philosophies which are based on ethical values and faiths. These ethical values and faiths are based on Vedic and Buddhist philosophies. Vedic philosophy is said to be originated from ancient ethics. These ancient ethics are associated with the performance of the peoples' social life termed as *Dharma* (duty) and *Karma* (action). *Dharma* and *Karma* in Vedic philosophy transform the autoethnographers' life experiences of self and others. Buddhist philosophy is also a faith system and ethics are related to moral virtues. These moral virtues offer the autoethnographers a moral character for not cheating, not stealing, and for forgiveness, and truthfulness. To this end, Vedic and Buddhist philosophies are rooted in the daily lives of the people in South Asia, especially in Nepal. Vedic and Buddhist philosophical positions, principles and practices are essential while understanding the ethics of self and others, as is the case in autoethnographic inquiry.

Next, by considering experiences of self and others, the inquiry is aligned with those present during the occurrence of lived experiences. This consideration reflected the value of respectful relationships and careful use of words (Wood & Liebenberg, 2019). In this line, autoethnographers might be responsible enough for the communities of practices, their culture, and influence of self-experiences. These self-experiences are recounted lively and richly. In general, "to ensure the rigour, accountability and integrity of the research work" (Edwards, 2021, p. 5) in autoethnography, we need to be vigilant. In contrast, the emerging challenges in autoethnography are the ethics of self and others which are real and ongoing. These challenges may find a range of acceptable ways to ensure some forms of satisfactory ethical principles. More so, "there might need a balance for getting this right in one situation and might not be appropriate in another" (Edwards, 2021, p. 4), but ultimately, autoethnography allows the voice of the author to be heard. This situation, along with ethical dilemmas, emerges while doing autoethnography. In the following subheadings, we discuss common dilemmas of the ethics of others and ethics of self in autoethnography.

### **Ethics of Others in Autoethnography**

During the first author's MEd and ongoing Ph.D. study, his concerns on the autoethnographic report do not guarantee that the others' experiences of action, reactions, and interactions get the chance to be included holistically. These tensions require an ethnographer to make vivid descriptions of role and event, as an ethnographer does have less power to influence or change. We wonder, and raise the questions: how do these influences or changes minimize the burden of ethical dimensions, as writing about the self always involves writing about the others (Ellis, 2009)? How can the ethics of autoethnography be located to others in the account of self-experiences? And, how is consent negotiated? In this regard, Edwards (2021) uses two well-known ethical dimensions; namely, procedural ethics and situational ethics, which were suggested by Ellis (2007) and further improvised by Tolich (2010). In general, in the Eastern worldview, procedural ethics refers to the ethics governance as *Dharma*. The ethics of governance might include approval processes and guidelines of ethical research by upholding the ethical principles of respect, beneficence, and justice by keeping the self and others safe. In particular, situational ethics in autoethnography as *Karma* is a response to the question, "how is ethics constructed and practiced in autoethnographic inquiry in a particular

context?" Further, in the process of understanding and developing the notion of situated ethics (Simons & Usher, 2000), the autoethnographers might examine how ethical issues are handled in practices when they are in the process of the inquiry. In our case, procedural and situational ethics are bound by our overall process of inquiry within the ethos of *Dharma* and *Karma*.

The above questions, ethical dimensions, and principles challenge the conventional guidelines for ethical conduction of autoethnography. More so, autoethnography requires self-interrogations, deep reflection, and integrity (Bishop, 2020). However, while exploring and understanding self-experiences in the context, it seems like a messy, fluid, and highly contextual approach to the requirements of some forms of ethics. These forms of research ethics might be institutional or national. Likewise, there is a debate on some forms of ethical guidance required for autoethnographers. This guidance helps while writing about others situating in their contexts. The proper way to incorporate someone else's gainful and painful experiences must be understood by autoethnographers.

The issue of the concern reflected that in autoethnography, "it is almost impossible to know how someone's work will be received" (Edwards, 2021, p. 3) or recognized in the forms of the genres of writing and/or performing (e.g., dialectical, poetic, narrative, metaphorical, and visual logic). Elaborating further, the dialectical logic will allow autoethnographers to create new spaces by promoting synergetic complementary world views – integrative, holistic, and inclusive (Bakhurst, 2008) by balancing the contradictory perspectives and values through continuous practices by critiquing others and self (Luitel, 2009). Likewise, the narrative genre will be a significant means of imagination via various dimensions of lifeworlds (Luitel, 2019).

The "narrative genre will help autoethnographers to promote mythos-centric thinking that integrates place, people, action and time in generating research texts" (Luitel & Taylor, 2019, p. 1) rich in cultural-contextual knowing, being, and valuing that make the events understandable in the process of the inquiry (Forchtner, 2020; Taylor et al., 2012). Similarly, by capturing the complexity of the phenomenon, metaphorical logic will help autoethnographers explore the meaning of concepts and ideas. As an outcome, this logic offers a platform for thinking and acting (Luitel, 2019) that makes autoethnographers' writing meaningful and understandable.

In addition to this, poetic expressions shall offer autoethnographers room for imaginative aspects. This room of imaginative aspects is fundamental for "exploring nonreal, felt, mythical, perceptual, imagistic and atypical realities" (Luitel & Taylor, 2019, p. 6). Likewise, "Visual genres will help autoethnographers to capture nonlinguistic genres to represent the phenomenon under the study by incorporating photographs, paintings, cartoons, collage, and creative models. Autoethnographers employ these genres to demonstrate the multi-vocal, embodied, and nonlinear nature of knowledge claims" (Luitel & Taylor, 2019, p. 12).

Using this multi-layered and perspectival exploitation technique, thereby writing as/for the process of inquiry will shape autoethnographers' quality of the meaning-making process. As suggested by Luitel (2009) and Lapadat (2017), these limitations on genres of writing and performing are referred to as publishing autoethnographic reports that take control out of the author's hands. While viewing the ethics of self and others, this is always a challenge and ongoing issue. Positioning myself in the South Asian context, the slogan of "*be kind to your participants, and you will eventually receive an award*" would be helpful to understand the basic tenets of ethics and the role of autoethnographers for others.

## **Ethics of Self in Autoethnography**

While describing and/or investigating their experiences, autoethnographers have to face the blame of adhering to narcissism, solipsism, and aestheticism. First, it appears that among the accusations in autoethnographic inquiry, narcissism is a common threat. In some cases,



autoethnographies might be too self-indulgent, introspective, and individualized in the inquiry process. This position allows autoethnographers to be aware of minimizing the ethical issue of narcissism, which might promote self-admiration and self as a lone hero. Secondly, solipsism is another major challenge in autoethnographic inquiry, as considering the ethics of the self as autoethnographers might be too self-centric in making claims and representing them (Panta & Luitel, 2022). These challenges and critiques in autoethnographers are not able to establish a clear theoretical standpoint. More so, the autobiographic texts may lack convincing arguments and scholarly rigour. However, "it is not pragmatic to undermine the intent of autoethnographic inquiry which provides space for culturally and politically relevant experiences" (Panta & Luitel, 2022, p. 1058) and embodiments that are essential for radical action for change. Finally, aestheticism is an ongoing threat in autoethnographic inquiry, as it emphasizes the aesthetic values of the self-compared to others more than the research agenda. Likewise, Strawson (2005) stated that:

It is very natural for us to think that there is such a thing as the 'self'-an inner subject of experience, a mental presence or locus of consciousness that is not the same thing as the human being considered as a whole. (p. 1)

On the contrary, it can be difficult to recall and reflect on painful and/or gainful past events; doing so is likely to cause harm "with reference to an ethics of the self by in-depth personal revelation" (Edwards, 2021, p. 4). Revealing the past experiences in autoethnographic inquiry, in some cases, may place the autoethnographers in a danger due to the revelation of their past. Next, as an autoethnographer, the risk of danger might also be considered. These considerations might be helpful while describing points of career and reputational risk from in-depth introspection about the experiences. However, there is no guarantee that the events narrated via autoethnography that happened in our daily lives may not happen to others in the moment of real-time and experiences (Edwards, 2021). To this end, being vulnerable in autoethnography is always an ethical challenge to self. Inherently, vulnerability is a basic tenet of autoethnography to connect the heart and soul of the self and others.

During the first author's inquiry in MEd in mathematics education (Dahal, 2013), he described his autoethnographic account of experiences as a mathematics teacher, teacher trainer, and educational researcher. Above all, presenting some of his vulnerabilities by blaming the mathematics teachers during his schooling shall "unintentionally cause reputational harm to him or in some case loss of confidence while working in future" (Edwards, 2021, p. 4).

On the other side, while describing and reflecting "on my own experiences allowed me to position my life experiences, my role and teaching practices as various situations in my personal and professional career" (Dahal et al., 2019, p. 2). Further, this process might be awkward in some circumstances, and we may risk our reputations as professionals if we interpret the outcome as constructing a misstep. More so, overcoming these issues considering the tenets of Eastern and Western worldviews, autoethnographers are urged to choose the fictionalized account using various logics and genres linked to the actions that could be seen as a lifelong task in comparison to others to complete the task. Logics and genres such as dialectical, narrative, metaphorical, poetic, and visual in the forms of story, play, fiction, and poem (to name a few) might be embraced. While doing so, in some cases, there is a chance of losing personal accounts.

### Ethical Lenses of Self and Others in Autoethnography

In the Eastern worldview, as autoethnographers, the self might be seen as the self's lifelong task of personal and professional lifeworlds, and others are the ones who support the completion of those tasks. These indicate that self refers to one's duty and others refer to the action to accomplish the assigned duty. Likewise, Western worldviews are to some extent associated with an Eastern worldview where stories, vignettes, poems, and other forms of the representations in autoethnography written by autoethnographers may claim their own, but there are possible chances of matching others in their ways of representations. Others who appear in the autoethnographies might be friends, family, students, or neighbours (Tullis, 2013). In this regard, as others appear in the autoethnographies, the autoethnographers need to take the informed consent to appear in the ways of representation. In particular, the decision on "how to approach to others autoethnographers choose to include their ways of representations are not easy" (Tullis, 2013, p. 249) by employing a single or universal process.

Further, the aim of getting informed consent in this way of representation is to confirm and/or ensure that participants are informed of the voluntary and autonomous decision. However, there are specific guidelines for when and how autoethnographers should ask others for their consent to be included in their research or even for publication. With the debate on ethics of self and others in autoethnography in Eastern and Western worldviews, there are high demands to reinterpret and redefine the ethical guidelines and/or principles for autoethnographers. While reinterpreting and redefining the ethical responsibilities of autoethnographers, they need to be visible in the overall processes of the inquiry, not as an afterthought but need to be illustrated throughout the research process.

#### Autoethnographers' Ethical Principles: Some Possibilities of Autoethnographic Inquiry to Explore *Dharma* and *Karma*

In the Eastern worldview, especially in South Asia, ethics of self and others in autoethnographic inquiry as transformative education research are bound by the ethical principles of *Dharma* and *Karma*. These powerful principles offer the autoethnographers moral law that shall combine the spiritual wellbeing that guides the overall process of one's lifelong actions in relation to others. Thus, *Dharma* and *Karma* in South Asia can be the organizing principles for autoethnographers. These guidelines make it possible for autoethnographers to be knowledgeable of their procedural ethics as *Dharma* and situational ethics as *Karma* in depth. *Dharma* as procedural ethics refers to the ethics governance that might include approval processes and guidelines of ethical research. *Karma* as situational ethics is constructed and practiced in autoethnographic inquiry in a particular context. The principle of non-maleficence within the notion of *Dharma* and *Karma* alerts the autoethnographers uttering that "harm should not come to research participants as a result of their participation" (Gelling, 2015, p. 1) in the inquiry.

In some circumstances, autoethnographers may be aware that the concept of non-maleficence may be complicated and that research participants may suffer harm if they are not made aware of the autoethnographers. Secondly, the principle of beneficence allows autoethnographers to reflect their *Karma* by preventing the exploitation of research participants' information throughout and/or after the inquiry. Considering all of the above arguments, autoethnographers might examine how ethical issues are handled in practices when they are in the process of the inquiry. More so, Tamas (2011) reflected that:

How do we evaluate and justify the effect of our autoethnographic work on others? She uses the story of her daughters' responses to her doctoral research

on spousal abuse to open up difficult questions of harm versus benefit and intent versus impact. Although an ethic of care seems morally appealing, it may not adequately manage the risks and demands of writing from and about abuse. (p. 258)

To this end, Adams (2008), Ellis (2009), Tolich (2010), Tullis (2013), and Edwards (2021) have also suggested some ethical guidelines for conducting autoethnography. However, their suggestions are not enough for contextual ethical considerations for autoethnographers. With possible ethical principles/guidelines and their limitations, we have attempted to recount many of them in one way and some strategies in other ways to accomplish ethical autoethnographic inquiry as transformative educational research. Autoethnography as transformative educational research might adhere to solidarity and civic responsibility under the ethics of *Dharma* and *Karma*.

### **Ethics of *Dharma* and *Karma***

*Dharma* and *Karma* in an autoethnographic inquiry as transformative educational research might be taken as the foundation of humans and natural practices as principles in South Asia; these practices and/or principles of *Dharma* and *Karma* allow autoethnographers to be dutiful to their actions considering the principles of non-maleficence and beneficence. Likewise, procedural ethics of *Dharma* in autoethnographic inquiry include the ongoing practice of duties and disciplines, such as honesty and non-violence, whereas situational ethics as *Karma* in autoethnographic inquiry include autoethnographers' responsibilities for their actions.

On the contrary, the world of actions is full of chaos and complexity. Those actions shall be challenging the status quo, injustices, and inequalities. In addition to the above actions, others might be physical, mental, or emotional. With the above ethos and complexity within the principle of non-maleficence and beneficence, it is essential that to do no harm for self and others in any form needs to be considered by autoethnographers. While considering do-no-harm to self and others, autoethnographers need to be aware of the *Dharma* and *Karma* of their personal and professional careers.

The ultimate goal of being aware of this is to minimize the risk of self and maximize benefits to others. For instance, within the principles *Dharma* and *Karma*, adhering to the principle of non-maleficence and beneficence, many universities in Nepal have developed ethical guidelines/principles while conducting research; the same is true for autoethnographers. However, autoethnographers in the South Asian context need to be aware of the principles of *Dharma* and *Karma* as well as the ethical guidelines developed in the West like the principles of non-maleficence and beneficence. In general, these principles and guidelines might offer helpful suggestions for how to proceed while conducting research. This process, in some cases, might help autoethnographers to be well aware of the ethical principles and/or guidelines.

In the Eastern worldview and to some extent in the Western worldview, to explore the *Dharma* and *Karma* of the overall process of the inquiry, autoethnographers' commitment to "respect participants' autonomy, honours the voluntary nature of the participation and ensures documentation of the informed consent" (Tullis, 2013, p. 258). This process ultimately avoids conflicts of interest by considering from whom, how, and when to obtain consent before starting the research project (Tullis, 2013) within the principles of non-maleficence and beneficence. Likewise, this process minimizes the conflicts of interest and grants informed consent while in the field during the writing process and even after accomplishing the autoethnographic inquiry. In this regard, while representing the chaos and complexity of the autoethnographers' *Karma*, they provide sufficient space for others to comment on and correct

their interpretations and observations by challenging the status quo, inequalities, and injustices as *Dharma*.

### Representing Ethics of *Dharma* and *Karma*

Representing self and others in autoethnographic inquiry with their *Dharma* and *Karma* offers the autoethnographers new epistemologies of practice (i.e., ways of knowing, being, valuing, acting, and representing) for thick descriptions and deep understanding of the phenomenon by considering the principles of non-maleficence and beneficence that "enhanced the rigor and reflexivity of autoethnographic research" (Dull, 2021, p. 3307). Similarly, the first author, a Ph.D. student, chose autoethnography as a transformative educational research methodology in his ongoing study to investigate his responsibility to reflect on his own and others' professional and personal practices through a variety of actions as an educational practitioner (Luitel & Taylor, 2019).

In this line, "autoethnography as a research methodology shall enable me to develop a better understanding of the issue under the phenomenon via my lived experiences" (Luitel, 2019, p. 37) considering procedural and situational ethical issues (which was discussed in earlier sections) of *Dharma* and *Karma*. In addition, the term *autoethnography* infers a dialectical relationship between autobiography (self as *Dharma*) and ethnography – culture and/or others as *Karma* (Roth, 2005, as cited in Luitel, 2019). This dialectical relationship allows autoethnographers to describe their *Dharma* to examine their feelings, emotions, thoughts, and practices to make a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study. This process further allows autoethnographers to be aware of their *Karma* while reflecting on their duties and actions through writing as a process of inquiry for meaning making. In contrast, writing is a method of expressing *Karma* (Luitel & Dahal, 2021) and a means of meaning-making in the contexts associated with the ethics of self and others.

The meaning-making process in autoethnography as a transformative educational research inquiry considering the autoethnographers' *Dharma* and *Karma* is somehow complex and challenging to the conventional research meaning-making process. In the process of challenging the ethos of the conventional research meaning-making process, the motto of autoethnographic inquiry is to explore anecdotal and personal experience of self (insider) and others (culture). While exploring, autoethnographers might connect their *Dharma* and *Karma* to wider cultural and social meanings and understandings to enrich the meaning-making process, considering ethics at the center of the writing.

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In the Western worldview, the ethics of self and others do have various layers of suggestions. Among the suggestions, the key issue is the generated text from different logics and genres: "do not present publicly or publish anything you would not show the persons mentioned in the text" (Tullis, 2013, p. 257). These suggestions are important and thoughtful considerations of how others might be portrayed, even if they never get the chance to see, read, or hear what was written. Next, Adams (2004) and Ellis (1995) offer the possibilities of not underestimating published narratives' afterlives. These possibilities further offer autoethnographers ethical challenges on how to write to multiple audiences. While writing to multiple audiences, the ethnographers need to consider the ways to protect the others who shall appear in the texts.

These above principles/guidelines and/or practices might pave a path for creating ethical autoethnography considering the Eastern and Western worldviews. However, there shall be other ways to ensure autonomy, beneficence, and justice. Likewise, we agree with Ellis

(2009) that our hearts and minds might disagree from time to time to explore our *Dharma* and *Karma* in autoethnographic inquiry. These disagreements allow us and others to think further on suggested ethical principles/guidelines. Ultimately, the above principles/guidelines might be helpful for autoethnographers. On the other side, autoethnographers might be engaged in contextual and relational ethics. These engagements connect ethnographers and participants' personal and professional experiences to protect themselves and others while presenting autoethnographers' *Dharma* and *Karma*.

Overall impressions of ethics of self and others in autoethnography clearly show the complexities of ethical research practices among autoethnographers. The central questions that emerge here are: who are the research participants and what are the processes required to create autoethnographic inquiry to explore the autoethnographers' *Dharma* and *Karma*? These questions further suggest that the "autoethnographers navigate and address the issues of ethics before, during, and after the writing process" (Tullis, 2021, p. 113). Inherently, autoethnography is an ethical research methodology that serves as a healing process. This healing process in the autoethnography explicitly serves no harm as a guiding principle of non-maleficence and beneficence for protecting others and no harm to the autoethnographers. Further, autoethnography is flexible, and in some cases, ambiguous. The flexibility and ambiguity offer room for discussion that ethical research has not accomplished by aligning with conventional ways of conducting autoethnography (Tullis, 2013). However, autoethnography needs to regard ethics as a process (Ellis et al., 2011) to explore *Dharma* and *Karma* of autoethnographers to their context. Hence, autoethnography establishes and enacts practices that focus on the respect of others and the self.

### Concluding Thoughts

In autoethnographic inquiry, autoethnographers are concerned with three domains of ethics in their research: first, they are being ethical towards the people we are implicating in our writing, second, the ethic of self-care, even while being critically reflexive about oneself, and third, being ethical with/for our readers; that is, being engaging and dialogic and inviting them into your world. In doing so, autoethnographers' ethical responsibilities are with autoethnographers themselves in their context within the principles of non-maleficence and beneficence in any worldview. These ethical responsibilities offer the authorial power to autoethnographers to represent their *Dharma* and *Karma* for those research participants who are going to be included in their texts. This situation with authorial power aligned with the ethos and/or principles of *Dharma* and *Karma* reveals that the responsibility of the autoethnographers is even greater than the world of actions full of chaos of complexity where they might be challenging the status quo, injustices, and inequalities by doing no harm for self and others. However, in autoethnography pertaining to Western worldviews and to some extent in the Eastern worldview, most of the autoethnographers address the ethical considerations at the end of the methodology section as an afterthought as an ethical principle. In fact, this afterthought contradicts the overall process of the autoethnographers to reflect their *Dharma* and *Karma*, but these issues need to be addressed throughout the research process in the form of the principles.

While addressing these issues, ethics of autoethnography needs to be visible in the processes and even in the ethos of life writing by using different logics and genres and even in the meaning-making process that might be helpful for a novice researcher who wants to attempt autoethnographic inquiry. Further, in the first author's MEd and ongoing PhD study, he is confident that ethics of self and others in autoethnography are not largely an afterthought; this has to be illustrated throughout the research process where purposed theoretical referents might be aligned with the practice by representing the broader spectrum of a lifelong task in relation

to others' actions. Likewise, autoethnographers need to consider the possible ethical pitfalls and vulnerability from start to finish of the autoethnographic inquiry. In doing so, autoethnographers might receive the blame for challenging the grand narratives. Hence, in academia, there is a need for a debate from the scholars regarding the self-narration of their context, within the notion of procedural ethics as *Dharma* and situational ethics as *Karma* to be the ethics of autoethnography in general in the East, West, and particularly in South Asia.

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Furthering the social justice agenda through relational practice. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919877015>

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**Acknowledgements:** Sincere thanks go out to everyone who helped us edit and improve our article on behalf of the authors. We are thankful to Bruce Lilyea, PhD, senior editor TQR, for invaluable assistance in revising our article. We are indebted to the Kathmandu University School of Education for providing a research-based environment, direction, and ongoing support. Likewise, we thank the University Grants Commission, Nepal (<https://www.ugcnepal.edu.np>), for a PhD Fellowship and research support [Grants Number: PhD-77/78-Edu-05] to Niroj Dahal.

**Funding:** This work is funded by University Grants Commission (UGC) Nepal with UGC Grants Number PhD-77/78-Edu-05.

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### Article Citation

Dahal, N., & Luitel, B. C. (2022). Understanding and encountering the ethics of self and others in autoethnography: Challenging the extant and exploring possibilities. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(12), 2671-2685. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5572>

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