Writing the Family

Women, Auto-Ethnography, and Family Work

Kathleen Skott-Myhre, Korinne Weima
and Helen Gibbs

*Sense*Publishers

TRANSGRESSIONS: CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

Cultural studies provides an analytical toolbox for both making sense of educational practice and extending the insights of educational professionals into their labors. In this context *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* provides a collection of books in the domain that specify this assertion. Crafted for an audience of teachers, teacher educators, scholars and students of cultural studies and others interested in cultural studies and pedagogy, the series documents both the possibilities of and the controversies surrounding the intersection of cultural studies and education. The editors and the authors of this series do not assume that the interaction of cultural studies and education devalues other types of knowledge and analytical forms. Rather the intersection of these knowledge disciplines offers a rejuvenating, optimistic, and positive perspective on education and educational institutions. Some might describe its contribution as democratic, emancipatory, and transformative. The editors and authors maintain that cultural studies helps free educators from sterile, monolithic analyses that have for too long undermined efforts to think of educational practices by providing other words, new languages, and fresh metaphors. Operating in an interdisciplinary cosmos, Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education is dedicated to exploring the ways cultural studies enhances the study and practice of education. With this in mind the series focuses in a non-exclusive way on popular culture as well as other dimensions of cultural studies including social theory, social justice and positionality, cultural dimensions of technological innovation, new media and media literacy, new forms of oppression emerging in an electronic hyperreality, and postcolonial global concerns. With these concerns in mind cultural studies scholars often argue that the realm of popular culture is the most powerful educational force in contemporary culture. Indeed, in the twenty-first century this pedagogical dynamic is sweeping through the entire world. Educators, they believe, must understand these emerging realities in order to gain an important voice in the pedagogical conversation.

Without an understanding of cultural pedagogy's (education that takes place outside of formal schooling) role in the shaping of individual identity–youth identity in particular–the role educators play in the lives of their students will continue to fade. Why do so many of our students feel that life is incomprehensible and devoid of meaning? What does it mean, teachers wonder, when young people are unable to describe their moods, their affective affiliation to the society around them. Meanings provided young people by mainstream institutions often do little to help them deal with their affective complexity, their difficulty negotiating the rift between meaning and affect. School knowledge and educational expectations seem as anachronistic as a ditto machine, not that learning ways of rational thought and making sense of the world are unimportant.

But school knowledge and educational expectations often have little to offer students about making sense of the way they feel, the way their affective lives are shaped. In no way do we argue that analysis of the production of youth in an electronic mediated world demands some "touchy-feely" educational superficiality. What is needed in this context is a rigorous analysis of the interrelationship between pedagogy, popular culture, meaning making, and youth subjectivity. In an era marked by youth depression, violence, and suicide such insights become extremely important, even life saving. Pessimism about the future is the common sense of many contemporary youth with its concomitant feeling that no one can make a difference.

If affective production can be shaped to reflect these perspectives, then it can be reshaped to lay the groundwork for optimism, passionate commitment, and transformative educational and political activity. In these ways cultural studies adds a dimension to the work of education unfilled by any other sub-discipline. This is what Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education seeks to produce—literature on these issues that makes a difference. It seeks to publish studies that help those who work with young people, those individuals involved in the disciplines that study children and youth, and young people themselves improve their lives in these bizarre times.

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INTRODUCTION

This is a book about the family. In a very important way, it is a book about being a woman in relation to the current form of family under the current regime of post-modern capitalism in North America. The authors are three women whose interest in the family stems from their own unique and varied experience with its force and substance as a social form. The text is comprised of three auto-ethnographies. Each section looks at the family from a radically distinct perspective rooted in the author's own life experience, both personal and professional. All three women are involved in working with young people and each section reflects a desire to find a way in which an understanding the family might enrich and benefit this work.

In the first auto-ethnography, Korinne Weima provides a writing of the family as an insider. She explores family in two parallel realms of her own lived experience, external and internal. She explains that the inspiration for exploring these two realms of experience arose from the following quotation:

We all have two families, one that we live *with* and another we live *by*. (Gillis, 1996, p. xv)

She argues that for two key reasons, the quotation immediately had a profound effect on her. First, she had never considered the thought of having two families at the same time: the external that one lives *with,* that has evolved in composition over the course of time, and another internal family that one lives *by*, that represents one's personal ideal notions of the family construct. Second, and most importantly, the quotation prompted the realization that the internal lived *by* family ideal continually informs perceptions about the external lived *with* family.

Overall, Gillis's (1996) quotation, then, provides the (under)tone for Weima's auto-ethnography, dividing her lived experience into two separate, but related, realms: (1) the external (lived *with* family); and (2) the internal (lived *by* family). As she explores these two realms of lived experience, she addresses the hegemony of the

nuclear family as the idealized lived *by* family structure both internally and in our dominant culture. Weima notes that what presents the greatest challenge to writing about the family is the fact that it is a ubiquitous phenomenon. Certainly, one could write at length about instances of nuclear family idealization that are immediately apparent. What Weima is concerned about, however, are the instances of nuclear family idealization that remain unrecognized. To explore and deconstruct these family idealizations, Weima uses postmodern theory and alternative histories of the family that challenge our common beliefs about its structure and purpose. In particular, Weima maps the way that the evolving field of psychology constructed the family as a site of discipline for the emerging capitalist society. Unpacking this history in both contemporary pop-culture forms, such as Dr. Laura Schlessinger and Dr. Phil McGraw, and through the historical appropriation of parenting as a form of social control, Weima explores the ways in which our family life is written through our social experience.

In the second auto-ethnography, Kathleen Skott-Myhre examines the family from the perspective of gender, race, class, and culture. Specifically, she explores the ways in which the relationships between mothers and daughters are shaped by family patterns developed under colonial and patriarchal regimes of power and force. Using her own experience as a woman of Irish descent raised in North America, Skott-Myhre engages a postmodern feminist analysis to explicate the manner in which power comes into play across generations of women living within patriarchal family systems. Utilizing the power analytics of Foucault, critical race theory, feminist psychoanalysis, theories of cultural hybridity, and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome, she argues against traditional psychological tracings of the family. She makes a case that such tracings obscure important elements of female experience and limit the creative possibilities inherent in mother-daughter relationships. As a counselling psychologist, she argues for a new mapping of the family based on the contingent and creative possibilities of the family as an open-ended system of creative force across generations.

She concludes with a proposal for a new approach to family therapy with young women and their mothers based on her alternative mapping of the family.

In the final auto-ethnography, Helen Gibbs extends the analysis of the family as a site of disciplinary power through an examination of her own work as a child protection social worker. In this final self-study, Gibbs offers us a perspective from outside the family. Unlike the first two, whose focus is on the experience of women within the family, Gibbs focuses on the role of the social worker that engages the family on behalf of the system.

Gibbs's chapter takes some steps in examining the child protection system from a position that is rarely discussed. Specifically, Gibbs explores how Foucault's concept of disciplinary power can be used to demonstrate how power operates within the client/worker relationship. This relationship is shown to be complex with power flowing bi-directionally, rather than hierarchically. Instead of viewing power imbalances as a function of state control, she shows how the client/worker relationship is constituted by the worker, the client, the organization and the social body. She utilizes auto-ethnography to document her personal encounters with youth and families as she exposes the disciplinary practices and instruments to which she was subject as a worker and used with the families she encountered.

Given that the child protection system is constantly shifting and changing in order to improve its ability to safeguard children, a greater emphasis is required to examine how workers operate within this complex, overwhelming, and multi-dimensional world. Gibbs demonstrates that by engaging in a reflexive examination of her position of power, different approaches to making intervention beneficial to all involved become available. This is important if child protection work aims to work *with* clients rather than *on* clients.

WRITING THE FAMILY: THEORY AND AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY

Each of the authors in this volume has chosen to interrogate the family as a kind of social structure founded in relations of power

and force. Although each author engages the family from a unique position and perspective, the authors share certain theoretical affinities and an interest in postmodern research approaches such as those articulated in the work of Michel Foucault, as well as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. That is to say, they hold an interest in the ways in which power functions as both an instrument of discipline and control while simultaneously offering new creative possibilities for flight and liberation. In this sense they see the family as

> [n]ot only a product of the larger society, but also its producer and reproducer. Any adequate historical understanding of family must acknowledge its central role in social and political as well as personal relationships, in societal as well as biological reproduction. 'The family' may be classified as a 'natural' or biological unit, a 'traditional,' divinely ordained, and universal entity, but it also very much a social construction. It is whatever we need it to be, at once the source of all good and of all evil. (Comacchio, 1999, p.6)

A Government Machine?

The family then for each of the authors of this volume operates in some sense as an instrument of the dominant regimes of power. It is interesting to note that while the family has maintained a relation of mutual self-interest with the prevailing regime of power, it was not until the period of modernity that the family, as a unit, became of interest to the state. In other words, as Marx (1987) has pointed out in *The German Ideology*, the division of labor between men and women prescribed by the earliest forms of patriarchal society sets the template for discipline and domination. However, it is only with the advent of the modern state with its proliferation of disciplinary mechanisms that the family reaches its full force as a site of discipline on behalf of forces outside itself.

This shift begins at the end of the Feudal period. Foucault (1978) indicates that until this time the sovereign was not concerned about the state of affairs within families or their health and well-being.

This is not to say that there was no relation between the sovereign and the patriarchal head of household. Rather, that relation allowed for a relative autonomous sphere of influence for the head of household separate from the obligation to the state. As the newly instituted state form develops, the "art of government," which involved making the head of the household responsible for all aspects of the family's life, begins to become increasingly seen as an avenue through which the needs of the sovereign could be achieved (Tait, 2000). Over time, therefore, the family's designation as a governing unit became emphasized.

Similar to Foucault, Aries (1967) argued that in the fourteenth century, the modern family began to take shape. The system of power changed from the sovereign as overseer of the population to that of patriarchy, where males were identified as the dominant force within each family. Therefore, "a value was attributed to the family which had previously been attributed to the line. It became the social cell, the basis of the State, the foundation of the monarchy" (Aries, 1967, p. 367).

The significant piece here is that the family served a specific function for the sovereign that elevated the importance of families and precipitated the beginning of its manipulation by outside forces. Donzelot, in his book *The Policing of Families* (1979), argued that the central role of the family became the production and government of good children. This production was overseen by "medical, educational, and psychological experts who successfully bridged the gap between the inner workings of the family unit and the broadest objectives of government" (Tait, 2000, p. 69).

Comacchio (1999) identifies how the concept of family has become so encompassing and enduring when she says:

> Much of the family's symbolic power comes from the religious, moral and ideological forces that have sustained it in the face of continued threats, real and imagined. Add to these the power of law, education, science and the state, and it is clear why the family's institutional basis is so durable. A pervasive ideology of 'familism' has left few social relations untouched. (p. 147)

Comacchio highlights a number of key points. The family has been subjected to religious and political forces that have strengthened its purpose and argued its usefulness. Any "attack" on the "ideal" family is often matched with activism from people or groups who promote religious ideology. Significantly, the family has also functioned as a means to teach appropriate conduct to future generations (Tait, 2000). Middle class norms have been promoted and perpetuated, either through families incorporating these norms into their daily lives or by its use as a baseline to judge families who do things differently. Those families who fail to meet the "norms" are often labelled as deviant or dysfunctional. Obviously, all three of the auto-ethnographies in this volume are centrally interested in the ways in which dysfunction and deviance operate within the family as a disciplinary machine of the state.

AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY: METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

We have used the term auto-ethnography to describe each author's contribution to this volume. However, what is this methodology exactly and why is it used here? Certainly, one reason that auto-ethnography even begins to be an option for researchers such as the authors here is that over the past few decades, methods used to conduct research have broadened. Arguments launched by postmodernists about our ability to "know" others, group people according to characteristics, and be objective, have brought forth the inconsistencies and limitations of scientific research (see Tierney, 2001). Postmodernists have suggested that knowledge is not something "hidden" within individuals waiting to be "discovered." Rather, knowledge is created by and between individuals and groups. Knowledge, then, is not unitary but shifting, based on social, cultural, and political contexts. This is different from the modernist model that suggests that knowledge is cumulative and linear and could be obtained value-free within the research process. Post-modernist researchers acknowledge that there are limitations to knowledge being described because language is not neutral. Over the years, philosophers have pointed out that the "facts" scientists saw were

inextricably linked to the vocabulary they used to express or represent them (see Rorty, 1982; Toulmin, 1969).

The recognition, especially within the qualitative field, that completely objective research is not attainable has led to new approaches to conducting, and writing up, research. One approach shifted the focus of the research onto "observing the observer" and writing more directly, from the source of one's own experience (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p.747). This style of research and writing is commonly referred to as auto-ethnography.

<div align="center">WHAT IS AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY?</div>

Ellis and Bochner (2000) defined auto-ethnography as "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (p. 739). Usually written in first person accounts, the researcher's personal experience is used to illuminate a particular culture, event and/or institution. Often starting with the exploration of a social experience, the researcher reflects back on self and looks deeply at *self-other interactions* (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Through this process of examination and reflection, the researcher comes to know him/herself in deeper ways. As Ellis and Bochner (2000) argue, "by understanding yourself comes understanding of others" (p. 738).

Over the years, the use of auto-ethnography has evolved in a manner that makes exact definition and application difficult. Historically, the earliest transcription, as provided by Heider focused on ethnography to describe one person's account of what others do (as cited in Reed-Danahay, 1997). Conversely, Hayano interpreted auto-ethnography in the more literal sense, as a study in which anthropologists study their own peoples (as cited in Reed-Danahay, 1997). In the early 1980s, Brandes was the first author to focus on the importance of telling autobiographic life histories within the broad ethnographic description of cultural phenomena (as cited in Reed-Danahay, 1997).

In the late 1980s, Denzin enhanced the former interpretation by explicitly avoiding any notion of the researcher as an outsider

capable of objectivity in his or her ethnographic writing (as cited in Reed-Danahay, 1997). He made this distinction by explicitly stating that the autobiographic life history of the researcher is textually melded, and inseparable from, the ethnographic writing about others (as cited in Reed-Danahay, 1997).

In the mid-1990s, Pratt went beyond the focus on autobiographical life histories within ethnographic writing, and recognized the unavoidable engagement between dominant discourse and autobiographical representations (as cited in Reed-Danahay, 1997). Pratt interprets auto-ethnography, therefore, as the opportunity to write about alternatives to the dominant meanings that infiltrate life histories and cultural understandings (as cited in Reed-Danahay, 1997).

Recent interpretations of auto-ethnography recognize the inevitable infiltration of the author's surrounding dominant culture. Reed-Danahay (1997) defines auto-ethnography as "a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context" (p. 9). Similarly, Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont (2003) state that, "[a]utoethnography intimately and categorically relates the research process to both the social world and the self" (p. 65). Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggest that it is now appropriate to incorporate under the broad rubric of auto-ethnography studies that have been referred to by other similarly situated terms, such as personal narratives, narrative ethnography, and critical autobiography.

Auto-ethnographic studies vary in their emphases, some focus on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethno), and on self (auto). According to Carolyn Ellis (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), what they have in common is an autobiographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Auto-ethnographers gaze back and forth, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations.

Auto-ethnography is the giving of attention to personal feeling thoughts and emotions and "…by exploring a particular life . . . [I]

hope to understand a way of life" (Ellis, 1991 p. 737); it is a way to research sensitive topics that might not be accessible through other means (Philaretou & Allen, 2006; Ronai and Ellis, 1992), a way to better understand the data of research participants through engaging similar personal experiences (Clarke/Keefe, 2006), and a way to contextualize the self in his and/or her social and cultural surroundings (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Auto-ethnography can be conceptualized as a version of ethnography in which the subject is the self (Anderson, 2000; Philaretou & Allen, 2006); an act of resistance performed by subordinated people against dominant cultures in colonial or post-colonial environments (Pratt, 1992, 1994); or as "evocatory" performance art designed to provoke the reader into analytical thought (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

The telling of one's experience is not to attempt to explain or to seek the singular truth but rather to bring attention to the complexities of lived experiences. Auto-ethnography acknowledges that recollections of one's experiences are always stories, in that they are never fully complete in recalling the past. Instead of trying to analyze the past it provides a story so that readers decide for themselves what meaning it has for them in their lives. Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggest that these texts "long to be used rather than analyzed, to be told and retold rather than theorized and settled; to offer lessons for further conversation rather than undebatable conclusions" (p. 744).

Bochner (2000) described why he turned to auto-ethnography as a research method:

I wanted a more personal, collaborative and interactive relationship, one that

> centred on the question of how human experience is endowed with meaning and on the moral and ethical choices we face as human beings who live in an uncertain and changing world. I also wanted to understand the conventions that constrain which stories we can tell and how we can tell them and to show how people can and do resist the forms of social control that

> marginalize or silence counternarratives, stories that deviate from or transgress the canonical ones. (p.744)

Here, Bochner addresses that auto-ethnography is an effective means to document one person's experience of examining relationships within the world. Similar to the intent of this project, Bochner used auto-ethnography to examine how we are faced with conventions that attempt to constrain us but also how we find ways to resist and create new ways of being (see Ellis & Bochner in Ellis & Flaherty, 1992).

There are two further reasons that this research method fits with the methodology of the present project. First, because auto-ethnography situates the researcher as the subject, the issue of positioning is dealt with in detail. Not only does the critical role that researchers play in selecting and conducting research get identified but it is continually addressed throughout the process. This is important, as identifying one's position in relation to the project and to the participants has become a crucial element of good qualitative research (see Acker, 2000; Gabriel, 2000).

Second, auto-ethnography acknowledges that the researcher is an "active agent" who will be impacted by listening to, and writing about, other people's stories and allows for documentation of this "transformation." The authors in this collection were drawn to the idea that auto-ethnography "stresses the journey over the destination" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 744). This is important because it identifies that there is so much more to research than just the final results. It is a process that is personal, convoluted, agonizing, and transformational. Stressing the journey also resists the standard practice of portraying social life and relationships as a "snap shot" (p. 744). Ellis and Bochner (2000) argue that researchers have been trained into this monologic style of reporting but this style of reporting has left some researchers dissatisfied with the product as it is not representative of their lived experiences. Rather than aiming to report truths, auto-ethnography promotes dialogue (Ellis & Bochner, 1999). Readers are engaged with the text on an emotional level, thinking along with the researcher about their own personal experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

From this perspective, auto-ethnographers are seen as "boundary-crosser[s]" and "can be characterized as that of a dual identity" (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 3). Therefore, the usefulness of the method can be extended to include the ability to "question the binary conventions of a self/society split, as well as the boundary between the objective and the subjective" (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 2).

Forms of auto-ethnography vary and may include one, or a combination, of the following: first-person texts, "short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, scripts, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose" (Ellis, 2004, p. 38). Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont (2003) supplement this list of auto-ethnographic forms by adding: "dialogues", "diaries", and "biographical reflections" (p. 65). The freedom in auto-ethnographic form is extended to the acceptable range of author expression. Gergen cited in Bochner and Ellis (2000) argues that:

> In using oneself as an ethnographic exemplar, the researcher is freed from the traditional conventions of writing. One's unique voicing—complete with colloquialisms, reverberations from multiple relationships, and emotional expressiveness—is honoured. In this way the reader gains a sense of the writer as a full human being. (p. 14)

AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY: ADDRESSING CREDIBILITY.

Writers of auto-ethnography are not interested in developing a specified framework for others to follow. This is too much like other formalized methods of inquiry which in many ways limit and constrain ways of collecting information. However, this has left auto-ethnography open to criticism, as it does not provide clear guidelines, especially for those who judge qualitative inquiries (Holt, 2003). Rather than providing a framework, Ellis and Bochner (2000) discuss how issues that are often questioned in qualitative research such as validity, reliability, and accountability can be addressed.

One aspect of promoting credibility in qualitative research is describing the history/experiences of the researcher such that he or she is viewed as a capable researcher. In contrast to some other research methods, using auto-ethnography allowed for the personal life histories, professional practices, and lived experiences of the authors to provide critical context to this collection.

A level of accountability is therefore extremely important. Accountability involves documenting who the person is who is collecting and analyzing the evidence. Auto-ethnography recognizes that as researchers we are not only central to the selection of the topic but also how the research will be analyzed and reported. Rather than attempting to control for researcher bias, auto-ethnography uses the researcher's lived experience and relationships as a topic of investigation (Noy, 2003). For the authors of this collection, then, research becomes a way in which they can take personal accountability and make obvious the fact that all research is biased by the researcher's history, values, beliefs, life experiences, and so forth. Auto-ethnography allows the researcher to show the importance of the researcher's own experiences in their own right. It removes the false impression that one is able to keep personal experience out of research.

Validity or credibility of qualitative research can be addressed through instituting practices that promote rigor. However, an acceptance within the field of what these practices are has remained hotly debated (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). In response to arguments around inconsistencies of practices within qualitative research, Sandelowski and Barroso (2002) argue that due to the wide range of methodologies that fall within the rubric of qualitative research, no singular set of procedures can exist. Rather, each qualitative approach needs to be evaluated in a manner that is congruent with the intentions set out in the beginning of the research process. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the researcher to explain how validity will be addressed. For this, we turn to Ellis and Bochner's (2000) explanation on how auto-ethnography can address issues of validity. They said, "validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude: it

evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible" (p. 751). Therefore, this collection aims to create a document that will resonate with, and hopefully inspire, other people in their work with families or in their own personal experience of their family.

One of the main differences in post-modern research is the move away from establishing findings that generalize across the population. Rather, through the use of the researcher's case, the reader creates the generalizations for themselves, given their own experiences. There is a shift from "generalization across cases to generalization from within a case" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 744).

Michel Foucault (1980) poses a question with which the authors in this volume have wrestled while determining how to approach academic writing: "What types of knowledge do you want to disqualify in the very instance of your demand—is it science" (p. 85)? Implicit in this question is the idea that being scientific in one's approach has the capacity to disqualify other ways of knowing. As authors who are specifically interested in non-dominant discourses as a both feminists and anti-oppressive researchers, each author in this volume has taken Foucault's challenge seriously. In what ways does the scientific approach keep us from hearing other voices?

Each of the authors here is rooted in the field of counselling and psychology. Without exception, they have found the dominant paradigms of modernist psychology inadequate to their needs as researchers and practitioners. Auto-ethnography as a kind of writing against the grain is an underutilized methodological process in the field of psychology. Auto-ethnography as a method of self-examination, reflexivity, and actualization allows for what Magnet (2006) calls deconstructing the implications for counselling of the privileged position that the therapist/researcher holds. At the same time, it facilitates the pointing out of various struggles and inconsistencies that each author faces in her multiple subject positions as woman, as family member, as instrument of state power, as raced, gendered and classed subject, and as an academic of working class background. Each of the authors here also takes note

of the work of Mary Louise Pratt and her use of auto-ethnography as a tool of resistance in the representation of subordinated people by the dominant culture. It is the intention of the authors in this volume to create a text that will resist both the dominant configurations of women within families as well as traditional research methods.

Ellis and Bochner (2006) describe auto-ethnography as "unruly, dangerous, vulnerable, rebellious, and creative," as a genre of writing that "shows struggle, passion, embodied life, and the collaborative creation of sense-making in situations in which people have to cope with dire circumstances and loss of meaning" (p. 433). Skott-Myhre notes that this is where she struggled with the more traditional approach to qualitative research and auto-ethnography when attempting to use a more systematic and detached approach. She reflects that she wants this project to be much more compelling, "I want people to feel the story in their guts, not just know the 'facts' in their heads" (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 435). She aligns herself with Ellis and Bochner (2006) when they say, "our goal is to open up conversations about how people live, rather than close down with a definitive description and analytic statements about the world as it 'truly' exists outside the contingencies of language and culture" (p. 435). This sentiment deeply resonates with the way that all three authors in this collection approach the way they work with people in therapy and social work.

In using auto-ethnography, the authors will be investigating their experiences as both therapists and academics from their various perspectives with the hope of contributing to an ongoing exchange of ideas filled with multiple voices from diverse backgrounds. In speaking as women, they are attempting to open up a space to valorize other women's voices. Each will be focusing on the covert language of those they have encountered in their families and workplaces in an attempt to "explode" this hidden language in public so that other women can know it is possible.

This approach comes with a cautionary note. As explicated by Joan Scott (1992), the experiences or stories shared here are not to be used as irreducible evidence nor should it be assumed that what is

proposed is generalizable to a specific population. Rather, the reader is encouraged to think *with* the story instead of *about* it (Bochner and Ellis, 2002).

<div align="center">WHAT IS GOOD AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY?</div>

Bochner (2000) offer six ways to judge auto-ethnography in terms of how effective it is in helping the reader to "understand and feel the phenomena under scrutiny" (p. 270):

1   The use of concrete detail to describe "not only facts but also feelings" from the commonplace triviality of everyday to the raw "flesh and blood emotions" felt as people cope with life's contingencies.

2   The incorporation of structural complexity "that rotates between past and present reflecting the nonlinear process of memory work."

3   The display of "emotional credibility, vulnerability, and honesty" on the page while digging at and exploring beneath one's actions, "limitations", "cultural scripts", "contradictory feelings", "ambivalence", and "layers of subjectivity."

4   The believable expression of "two selves" as historically transformed from "who I was to who I am."

5   The standard of "ethical self-consciousness" that shows sensitivity for how other people are represented, as well as "for the kind of person one becomes" through the process of storytelling (i.e., "moral commitments and convictions that underlie the story").

6   The ability to move the reader's "heart and belly" as well as his/her mind by acting out the subjective life in ways that shows the reader what "life feels like now and what it can mean."

It is with this last admonition that we conclude our introduction. It is our hope as auto-ethnographers that we can move the reader to reflect upon his/her own life, identity and practices. In investigating a social phenomenon as ubiquitous and deeply rooted in our central psyche as the family, we hope we can unsettle some of the disciplinary overlays that hide what Weima calls the *lived with* family from view.

As women, we hope to introduce a feminist/womanist perspective to our reading of the family that emphasizes relationship over structure, creative becoming over disciplined behavioral shaping, and mutual reciprocity over hierarchical force. To this end we share our lives, experience, research and reflections. We hope this will be a beginning that opens new lines of inquiry and reflections that shake the world to come.

Part I

**My Two Families: An Auto-ethnographic Exploration
of the Internalized Lived By and the Externalized
Lived With Family Experience**
Korinne Weima

WE ALL HAVE TWO FAMILIES

Taken in totality, the following auto-ethnographic piece explores family in two parallel realms of my lived experience: external and internal. The inspiration for exploring these two realms of experience arose from the following quotation:

> ...we all have two families, one that we live *with* and another we live *by* (Gillis, 1996, p. xv).

For two key reasons, it immediately had a profound effect on me. First, I had never considered the thought of having two families at the same time! My external that I live *with,* that has evolved in composition over the course of time. And my other internal family that I live *by*, that represents my personal ideal notions of the family construct. Second, and most importantly, the quotation prompted the realization that my internal lived *by* family ideal has continually informed my perceptions about my external lived *with* family.

Overall, Gillis' (1996) statement provides the (under)tone for my auto-ethnography, dividing my lived experience in two separate, but related, realms: (1) the external (lived *with* family); and (2) the internal (lived *by* family). As I explore these two realms of my lived experience, I address the hegemony of the nuclear family as the idealized lived *by* family structure both internally and in our dominant culture. I must admit that writing a parallel analysis of these two experiences (inner and outer) of the family has been no small feat.

What presents the greatest challenge to writing about the family is the fact that it is a ubiquitous phenomenon. Certainly, I could write at length about instances of nuclear family idealization that are immediately apparent. What I am concerned about, however, are the instances of nuclear family idealization that remain unrecognized: hidden in the nothing. Let me try to explain what I mean.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

WORLD – PERCEPTIONS = NOTHING

Recently, I attended a symposium wherein the speaker discussed how an art canvas must represent nothing before it can mean something. In other words, an art canvas—in itself—represents nothing until it acquires meaning through the perceptions of an observer.

Upon hearing this statement, I understood why it has been a challenge to write about a phenomenon that is so ubiquitous. After all, if I apply the same logic to my auto-ethnography and conceptualize the world as an art canvas, nullified of meaning without my own perceptions, then a formulaic reduction would be as follows:

$$\text{World} - \text{Perceptions} = \text{Nothing}$$

Reduced/deduced from this formula is nothing—my nothing. And so I ask, what is left in my nothing? Post-modern thinking suggests is that what remains invisible (in my nothing) are my taken-for-granted truths. They remain invisible because they are so deeply intertwined into my being.

CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?

Certainly, you could say that I am in a crisis of sorts.
After all, I am confronting the hegemony of my internal lived *by* family and how it affect(s) the feelings I have about my actual lived *with* family. Of course this awkward experience forces me (in) to the unfamiliar.

$$\text{Crisis (present state)} + \text{Return to the "Commonsense World"}$$
$$\text{(to occur, arguably)}$$

$$=$$

$$\text{Therapeutic effect (to be determined)}$$

It is curious how, once again, I've minimized my lived experience into a formulaic abstraction…

*   *   *

MY LIVED *WITH* FAMILY

I return to the statement made by Gillis (1996) that inspired the division of my lived experience of family into two separate realms:

> ...we all have two families, one that we live *with* and another we live *by* (Gillis, 1996, p. xv).

My lived *with* family formation has evolved four times over the last three decades. I have experienced the transition from the traditional nuclear family, to a single-parent family, to a common-law family, and now, to its present form as a step-parent family. Regardless of the changes in formation (as a result of different constituent members), I *feel* I have been a part of the same one lived *with* family—perhaps as a result of what Laing (1969) refers to as perceiving a shared "family synthesis", as will be discussed in Chapter One of this auto-ethnography. That is, despite its variability and sudden changes in lived expression, I've considered it as being the same lived with family.

On the other hand, my internal lived *by* family evolved slowly, in response to sudden, traumatic changes in my lived *with* family circumstances. Thus, my internalized thoughts about the lived *by* family (what I thought was considered socially acceptable) were in a constant state of "catch-up" to what was transpiring around me.

I believe that my internal lived *by* notions of an ideal family continually informed my perceptions about my lived *with* family. And because my internal lived *by* notions of family evolved more gradually, in response to my lived *with* family circumstances, differences have always existed between them. I explore the differences between my internalized lived *by* family and the one I actually lived *with*.

* * *

CRISIS MEANS TO THERAPEUTIC EFFECTS

To engage in such an exploration, I will revisit my previous internalized notions of the ideal family (my lived *by* family), how it became internalized through modern psychological discourse, and how its normalizing gaze may have been harmful to the perceptions I had about my lived *with* family. Such a nonlinear exploration requires a non-traditional methodology, such as an auto-ethnography.

It is my contention, and hope, that auto-ethnography can be therapeutic. The therapeutic (re)turn/effect/growth can only be revealed, however, upon my return from the process of crisis/abstraction, after I have deconstructed my lived by family ideal. As Tyler (1986) argues, it is only upon my return to the "commonsense world," that the product/auto-ethnography (the process in documentation form) may reveal a renewed outlook on my lived *with* family. I am hopeful that I can reveal what could be different within the everyday experience of my lived *with* family, within my lived *with* commonsense world.

Alas, I (re)align my auto-ethnography intentions to fit Tyler's (1986) therapeutic context, to produce a space wherein my internalized family ideal (influenced by society's hegemonic image) is thrown into crisis/abstraction. By placing my internalized lived *by* family ideal into a space for questioning, I am deconstructing it. By deconstructing my internalized lived *by*, I am putting into movement different possibilities of thinking about my lived *with* family. Within this space of crisis, things get messy as many voices get thrown into the mix. The braided exploration that best describes this process is a parallel recursive analysis. Let me explain what I mean.

PARALLEL RECURSIVE ANALYSIS

Imagine my auto-ethnography like a long braid of hair. Following one fragment of hair with your eyes, notice how it weaves in and out—appearing recursively—yet remains parallel to the others. Similarly, I pull fragments of writing forward, and push others back, allowing them to appear and retract recursively, but always remaining parallel to the others. In other words, no fragment is ever

forgotten, nor does it ever appear in exactly in the same way. Instead, fragments are recursively brought forward—imploded into the next—to produce continually thickening parallel analysis.

In this way, format and methodology are intimately related because my writing format *is* the methodology. Overall, what is created is an unconventional, uniquely textured, and what may be conceptualized as a recursive parallel analysis.

Each recursion can arise from one of two main areas: my personal voice(s) and those of the outside academic and socially constructed world of dominant psychological discourse. As such, each area is potentiated with a multiplicity of voices. The imported voices range from the refined academic and hegemonic ideals, to the raw popularized and satirized constructions of the family ideal. I purposely unfold the refined, and then raw, to shadow how the ideal family tracing is first internalized through dominant psychological discourse, and then, percolated throughout popularized venues of indoctrination. Taken together, they provide the objects/code from which I recursively reflect and respond, unbridled by the linearity of temporal and spatial restrictions.

In the first recursion in Chapter Two, I explore the hegemonic definitions of the ideal family from outside sources, only to implode these objects into my own internalized ideal definition of family through personal reflection. I begin with the literature of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) because their theoretical concepts of mapping and tracing provide the basis from which the rest of the crisis/abstraction oscillates. Mapping and tracing are not dichotomous concepts, but instead, the tracing is one representation off the map of infinitely lived realities. In the personal reflection that follows, I implode these theoretical concepts to demonstrate how the idealized nuclear family structure is but one tracing of family on the infinite map of lived expressions of family. I will reflect how the hegemony of this nuclear family tracing is harmful to the remaining expressions of family structure.

In Chapter Three, I continue the discussion of the idealized nuclear family tracing by introducing R.D. Laing's (1969) notion of

internalization. I will use this code to reflect upon the notion of a shared family auto-ethnography, and how it is maintained to the degree the nuclear family tracing is internalized in each family member. I will also reflect on how family members engage in transpersonal defenses, acts on the other, in an effort to maintain the shared family auto-ethnography when it is threatened. More specifically, I will explore the most common transpersonal defense, the act of mystification (a complex process of subtle coercions that may or may not be recognized by the other).

In the second recursion, I carry forward what has been imploded, deconstructed, and analyzed within the first chapter and introduce new objects for reflection. In this way, each recursion enhances the parallel analysis, thickens the braided exploration, and provides more depth to my crisis/abstraction and deconstruction of the ideal lived *by* family.

Thus, in Chapter Four, I pull forward the theoretical concepts of mapping and tracing (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and internalization (Laing, 1961; 1965; 1969), along with the personal reflections I have made, and implode them into the next recursion of codified literature. More specifically, I pull forward the notion of the internalized family tracing and implode it, by exploring its ethological formations.

I use the outside voice of Ian Parker (1995; 1997; 2005; 2007) to discuss how the nuclear family tracing is internalized through the process of psychologization. Psychologization is the term used to describe how dominant psychological discourse imports ideas from other dominant discourses, in order to bolster theoretical pronouncements. Thus, psychological discourse uses other dominant discourses (e.g., biology, medical, anthropology, and so on) effactually to idealize the nuclear family structure as the normalized template, against which all other forms of family are compared and contrasted. The psy-complex is the network of psychological venues that effactually produces the notion of family normality and abnormality on the basis of compositional structure.

Also in Chapter Four, I carry forward the previous theoretical concepts and introduce the concrete lived experience of Canadian families using the outside voice of Mona Gleason (1999). More specifically, Gleason (1999) provides the historical context of how psychologists gain access to families, and then exercise their "technologies of normalcy" (p. 9). Extending from Foucault's notion of technologies of the self, Gleason (1999) speaks of the "technologies of normalcy" that make families self-regulating and self-deprecating units (p. 9).

Within this chapter, I will also dissect the popularized venues of family indoctrination and offer the voices of dominant psychological proponents Dr. Laura Schlessinger and Dr. Phil McGraw. I chose these two public figures because they personify the current state of popular psychology, and because their popularity in the Western culture reflects how we have normalized and accepted the language and techniques of psychology into the everyday lives of the family.

In the third and final recursion, I carry forward what has been imploded, deconstructed, and analyzed within the third and fourth chapter, and introduce new objects for reflection. The recursive parallel analysis has grown into a thick and in-depth braided exploration, and this is the last recursion for crisis/abstraction and deconstruction of the ideal lived *by* family, prior to my (to be determined) return to the commonsense world.

Thus far, in my recursive parallel analysis, I have pulled forward: the theoretical concepts of mapping and tracing (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), internalization (Laing, 1961; 1965; 1969), the process of psychologization through the psy-complex network (Parker, 1995; 1997; 2005; 2007), the normalization of the ideal family (Gleason, 1999), the popularized ministrations of the ideal family (McGraw, 2004), and finally, the reflections from the third and fourth chapter which include the raw satirized conceptualization of the ideal family.

In Chapter Five, I talk about how the redundancy of the tracing obstructs infinitely lived expressions of family conceptualized on the map. I bring forth the outside voices of Deleuze and Guattari (1987),