

Autoethnography: self, identity and reflection as categories of analysis in Ethnography¹

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Abstract: The autoethnography associated with ethnographic research emerges in the literature with the research of Ellis and Bochner starting from 1999 and in it, it gains space as an alternative to ethnographies that address: stories and life, self-report and the ways in which the researcher tries to insert himself as a subject of speech in the ethnographic narrative. The guiding questions are: What is autoethnography? How has the term been conceptualized and what are the categories associated with it? Who are the most cited authors in these studies and how do they explain autoethnography? The objectives of this article are to explore the concept of autoethnography, to identify methodological-epistemological lines that guided the analyzed research, and to outline a conceptual profile of the categories associated with the term. The methodology used was the systematic literature review (RBS-Roadmap) and the *Atlas.ti23 software* for the analysis and derivation of results from 2,200 articles in English. Of these, 286 articles were selected that used the term autoethnography in the title. As preliminary results, we point out that although the articles emphasize self-writing, in the first person, calling attention to categories such as self, identity and reflection, the excessive use of autobiographical or biographical narrative can make the ethnographic enterprise ethno, of autoethnography, less or less important.

Keywords: autoethnography; self; identity; reflection; ethnography

1 Introduction

[In a] ascending dialectical movement of resilience and success [she] exposes in her life story the ideal of looking at the other and talking to him as the subject of her story, which has become a daily work of struggle in favor of the excluded and of search for the overcoming of social injustices in Brazil [...] autobiographical writing gives us the opportunity to communicate through narratives, often romanticized [...] among

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many things that memory allows us to remember, especially those that we idealize and those that we actually live (Autor, 2022).

Autoethnography is the central theme of this article. A complete history of autoethnography has not yet been written, and in Brazil, it is a topic that has been little explored. Recognized in its origin, in predominantly Anglo-Saxon publications, its most recognized authors are the North Americans Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner.

It begins by asking – What is autoethnography? Is autoethnography a method derived from ethnography or a synonym for autobiography? Is autoethnography a new epistemology of knowledge from qualitative research approaches, or just a method? However, without intending to broadly answer these questions, it is intended to outline paths for the understanding of autoethnography based on how current studies approach the term, its concepts and meanings. This is done with a systematic review of the bibliography of the last decades, which presents the main authors and their arguments on the subject, explores the critique of autoethnographic research, traces the limits and congruences between ethnography and autoethnography, and the key points for the recognition of autoethnography as ethnographic research, or different from it. Therefore, the origin of the term is discussed below.

Carolyn Ellis explains that, analytically, it is important to make a distinction between an idea of autoethnography and the term autoethnography. She speaks in the sense that many ethnographers have practiced autoethnography long before naming it. The author clarifies that it was only very recently, approximately three decades ago, that the term circulated, with more specificity, in the scientific community (Kafar; Ellis, 2014)

According to Ellis (2004), the term autoethnography was first used in 1975 by anthropologist Karl Heider to refer to the account of what people do when they write about them. In his study, Heider asked 50 students at the *Grand Valley Dani School* in Indonesia – What did they, as people, do? To the collective responses, he named autoethnography, explaining that “...the students’ perception of the world was an autoethnography” (Heider, 1975, p. 3). Four years later, David Hayano (1979) became the first anthropologist to write about Heider’s findings. Hayano associated autoethnography with internal studies in which the researcher becomes a native, or insider, within the community or culture he or she studies – a type of ethnography currently defined as indigenous or aboriginal. In his essay: *Autoethnography: Paradigms, Problems and Perspectives* (Hayano, 1979, p.103), he deliberately disregarded ethnography as – “studies that explore one’s own life through ethnographic processes” and created a clear distinction between ethnography and autoethnography.

Heider (1975) and Hayano (1979) begin to coin the term autoethnography, but its definition and application differed significantly from what Ellis and Bochner (2000) had in mind in the late 1990s when they developed the concept of autoethnography. Heider and Hayano did not consider autoethnography as a transgressive research activity that pushed,

rejected, or expanded the boundaries of traditional ethnographic writing practices. They did not see autoethnography as a critical reaction to troubling concerns about silent authorship, the need for researcher reflexivity, or a humanizing, moral, aesthetic, emotion-centered, political, and personal form of representation.

However, the credit for the creation of the term is attributed to David Hayano (1979). He delimited the use of the term and gave it meaning, applying it to anthropologists' cultural studies of their own people, in the sense that the researcher is a full-fledged insider by virtue of being native and acquiring an intimate familiarity with the group or attaining membership in the group studied. Later, social scientists used the term to refer to stories that feature the self or that include the researcher as a character, while literary and cultural critics applied the term to autobiographies that consciously explore the interaction of the introspective self personally engaged with cultural descriptions mediated by language, history, and ethnographic explanation.

Ellis (2004) exemplifies that in autoethnographies, the traditional historical framework and the specific dates and events usually expected in autobiographies are minimized. Instead, the authors "...attempt to demonstrate the lived experience and humanity of themselves and their people to outside audiences" (p.38)

For Ellis and Bochner, (2000) autoethnography is a type of research on personal experience combined with a cultural study. Autoethnographers explore their personal experiences through an ethnographic lens, but they also reveal their fragile selves that can be influenced by and resist cultural interpretations.

Due to rapid movement in both directions, personal and cultural divisions blur, often becoming unrecognizable. Autoethnographic, written in the first person can include short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, personal essays, diaries, fragmentary writing, and social scientific prose. These texts explore themes of action, dialogue, emotion, corporeality, spirituality, and self-awareness in relational, family, institutional, and community narratives influenced by history, social structure, and culture, which are expressed through action, feeling, thought, and language.

By treating autoethnography as a genre of writing or research stories about which many types of narratives are autobiographical, one can recognize autoethnography as a blurry genre, which glosses over many different forms of first-person accounts and narratives of personal experience. Essentially, it creates a narrative identity for an exclusive community, which is not described through a one-size-fits-all rhetorical approach.

Autoethnographers use personal experience to describe—and sometimes critique—cultural beliefs, perceptions, practices, and identities. For Bochner and Ellis (2006), people in the process of discovering what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles can be seen as producers of rigorous self-reflection.

Autoethnography is, then, a genre of autobiographical writing that exhibits multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. From one side to the other, autoethnographers look, first, through a wide-angle ethnographic lens, focusing outward on the social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; Then they look within, exposing a vulnerable me that moves and can break through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. As they approach back and forth, inward and outward, the distinctions between the personal and the cultural become blurred, sometimes unrecognizable.

The questioning of the validity of autoethnography as a method, rather than as an act of self-indulgence (Delamont, 2009), raises the question of what an autoethnography is and what can be interpreted as the approach that sustains it. The review of the literature presented in this text reveals that autoethnography involves a critical reflection on personal experience to provide a contribution to knowledge, particularly on important issues, normally sensitive or outside the limits (Ellis; Adams; Bochner, 2011; Jones; Adams; Ellis, 2013; Chang, 2015). However, its growing acceptance by researchers, in an increasing number of disciplines, reveals that there is no single stance in terms of orientation and approach (Adams; Manning, 2015) or writing style (Chang, 2015). Instead, it can range from an analytical, theory-based account to imaginative and expressive dialogue (Harwood; Eaves, 2017).

Ellingson and Ellis, (2008), discuss that defining autoethnography has proven to be a difficult task. Pioneering scholars in these studies have thus far provided multiple definitions for autoethnography according to its purpose, data sources, data analysis, and writing style (Keles, 2022). On the other hand, autoethnographers who prefer the conventional third-person voice believe that the first-person point of view is decidedly subjective because it foreshadows the researcher's own interpretation of lived experiences (Caulley, 2008). They claim that third-person narrative offers them an objective and analytical voice. They use the third-person voice to create a balance between the personal experiences and cultural analysis of the narrator that is a desired characteristic of analytical autoethnography (Adams; Manning, 2015; Anderson, 2006).

2 Methodology: literature review and document analysis

The methodology developed is the qualitative research, of an inductive nature, of the Systematic Bibliographic Review (*RBS-Roadmap*) type, combined with the computational analysis produced by the *Atlas.ti software*²³. Within the scope of this session, it will be presented how the *RBS-Roadmap* was developed and how the analyses of the texts selected for the study were carried out with the *Atlas.ti23 software*. It is understood that the use of *Atlas.ti23* was of crucial importance for the development of this text, as well as for most of

the articles included in this dossier, with regard to the analysis of the ethnographic data of the aforementioned researches.

The study developed for this article began in April 2023, at this time, a total of 5,890 (five thousand, eight hundred and ninety) documents were compiled with the criterion of including the word – ethnography – in the title. Publications between 1999 and 2023 were considered as cut-off periods, with 2012 being the most productive year. Next, only the texts that contained the term – *autoethnography*, in the English language, were selected. The term appeared 8,231 times and was the second most cited in the overall sample. From this data, we underlined the term – *autoethnography* in capital letters, in the titles and it was possible to select 286 (two hundred and eighty-six) documents from: books, book chapters, articles and theses. All documents in the following languages have been deleted: Portuguese and Spanish. The criterion for the exclusion of such documents is justified by the fact that there are only twelve documents in Portuguese and four in Spanish, a number considered too small for the use in three languages in the *Atlas.ti* software²³. In addition, the analysis of texts in English allowed greater flexibility in the use of the *software* that was developed to be used in this language. In this sense, although pertinent, the selection made can be considered as a geographic and linguistic delimiter of the sample.

In this context, the largest category or keyword accessed was – autoethnography, followed by the subcategories – self, with a frequency of 7,739 times; *identity*, 5,254 times, and *reflection*, 1,964 times. We sought to analyze these three categories in a correlated manner in the selected articles. This search was carried out by digital electronic means on the following academic platforms:

Scielo – Scientific Electronic Library Online; Periódicos Capes; Microsoft Academic Search e HighBeam Research; Biblioteca Digital de Teses e Dissertações; ERIC - Educational Resources Information Center; Educ@-Publicações Online de Educação; PubMed; Arca (Fiocruz); Boline International; Directory of Open Access Journals; Google Scholar; Google Books; SpringerLink; Open Library; Scirus; Vadlo; Anthropological Index Online; Anthropology Review Database; Encyclopedia of Psychology; Ethnologue; Psycline; Social Science Research Network; SocioSite; The SocioWeb; WorldWideScience; Library of Congress; The British Library Catalogues & Collections; Internet Public Library; iSEEK Education; Virtual LRC; References.net; Jstor; Elsevier; Scielo; Google Scholar, ResearchGate; TQR; SagePub; ePrints; eJolts.; Digital Scholarship; Springer; Aera; Sociopedia; Academia; OpenAccess; De Gruyter APA PsycNET; American Psychological Association (APA) E-papers; Wiley World Scientific; Taylor & Francis.

The Systematic Literature Review (*RBS-Roadmap*) was used as a methodological marker and guide to assemble the database. Thus, the Comfort approach was chosen;

Amaral and Silva (2011) at this stage of the research. For the authors, the *RBS-Roadmap* is a technique for acquiring, understanding, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating a set of scientific articles in order to establish a basis for a given topic studied.

With the use of *RBS-Roadmap*, the literature review was carried out in an organized, safe, valid and replicable manner. To this end, it was important to define the boundary line of the research to be developed, considering the scientific perspective, the keywords, the authors, the journals and the sources of preliminary data.

The *RBS-Roadmap* suggested by Conforto, *et. al.* (2011), follows the phases common to literature reviews in scientific research. In a systematic and epistemic way, we sought to access and select the texts, identifying the gaps in the theories explored by other researchers so that, from the initial phase, this process could be carried out in a reliable way. The phases of the *RBS-Roadmap* followed to access and select the documents were three: input, process and output – they make up the research flow in the following sequence: access, selection, analysis, synthesis, evaluation and writing of the text.

The first phase – entry – consists of access to the documents to be explored, already explained in the previous section. In it, a database with 286 documents was created according to the criteria defined by the authors.

In the second phase – process – the documents were organized by theme, and these thematic texts were reviewed and selected according to their relevance to the object of study. The analyses were initiated with the *Atlas.ti23 software*, processing the texts and generating: a list of words; the map of concepts; the list of concepts with their frequency in the texts; the co-occurrences between the most frequent concepts; the search for citations transforming each concept into codes; the sum of the frequency of these citations per code in the texts, and; finally, the concept maps, by code.

Then, these results were listed and the concepts were reduced, which derived the thematic categories and subcategories of content analysis from the texts. Finally, the results were synthesized in tables and graphs that will not be presented in this article.

Based on the list of concepts, these terms were grouped and regrouped by semantic affinity, with the aim of reducing these thematic subcategories to a number of terms that in turn named the subcategories. These steps of the process will be carefully described in the next section of this article, which will be dedicated to explaining how the *Atlas.ti23 software was used* and the results obtained.

In phase three of the *RBS-Roadmap* – output – the theme, categories and subcategories are described, synthesizing the analyses in the form of a text containing the contents pertinent to them in a critical way. At this stage, the body of the text is defined as the intersection of theories and perceptions exposed by the researchers who authored the texts selected for this article and the critical analyses given to them by the authors.

As described, the *RBS-Roadmap* has been simplified in its phases to process the categories. In it, the compilation of data on the basic categories of the study was contemplated: *self*, identity and reflection. Finally, all documents were named in the following order: year, author, title and type of publication. In this way, they were ready for analysis by the *Atlas.ti23 software*.

The beginning of the analysis work took place by adding the documents, identifying the recurrent terms in the data and coding them. Thus, soon after the importation of the documents from the systematic search for the subcategories began, they were classified and separated by hermeneutic unit, whose contents were interconnected with the other main thematic categories: *self*, identity and reflection. In this way, three distinct projects were created, one for each thematic category, always associated with the main category, since all the texts derived from it.

For the purpose of identification in hermeneutical units, the term that named this category is highlighted in the title of the text in capital letters. This emphasis on the name of the category evidences its relevance to the study.

In the next phase, the documents were analyzed, since they were already separated by hermeneutic unit and named according to it, although the software allows the researcher to choose as many documents as he wishes, which was done according to the authors' choices. The program displays an enumerated list of texts lined up in ascending order, although this order can be reversed. Next to the documents, the number of citations that each text has is shown, considering the codes generated by the program and added to the analyses. It also presents the title of the project and the resources that were activated by the researcher to process the analyses. The title of the project is followed by a summary of the choices made with the number of: documents, groups of documents, citations, codes, group of codes, memos, group of memos, networks, links between codes and links between citations. In addition to a tab with the overview of the project and another with comments. The way the program screen is presented depends on the researcher's choices and the work completed from the tools activated in the program. The data is processed and encoded, generating distinct reports according to these choices.

3 Research: from coding to the construction of scientific texts

In the case of the research carried out for this article, four reports were generated: word lists, concept list, code manager, citation manager. The reports are exported in the form of a *Microsoft® Excel®* file, they contain a list of concepts, accompanied by the frequency of citations of the analyzed texts. Include concepts that have been marked as code. In this case, 95 (ninety-five) concepts were transformed into codes. The tables generated in

Excel can be manipulated according to the researcher's choice, in numerical order, alphabetical order, colors, among other resources. These listings allow the researcher to explore groups of words by meaning and, subsequently, compare them with concepts electronically generated by *Atlas.ti23*. The list of words also makes it possible to list those words that are not automatically included as a concept, such as the names of the authors of the analyzed texts.

The table of concepts was visualized in the form of concept clouds, in which the 95 concepts derived from the analyzed documents were automatically compiled. The word cloud is organized by size and the predominant ones are shown in larger size and the others, in order of decreasing magnitude, circulate around the predominant ones. This is one of the ways in which the results in this function are presented. There are two more forms of presentation: tree and table.

It is also possible to generate a list of enumerated documents, followed by the frequency of citations generated per document. The word cloud of concepts, means that the texts have been reduced by meaning to form such concepts. Concepts may or may not be converted into codes. In this analysis, all concepts were transformed into codes. The concept – *autoethnography* and the terms and phrases associated with it – were individually highlighted, as well as the frequency of citations at the bottom of the screen. On the right side of the screen, there are two columns: one with the citations properly identified by text and the other with the codes.

Next, we will describe the use of *Atlas.ti23* and the citations associated with the concept and code that appear highlighted, followed by the codes contained therein. The program allows the generation of a code report and a code citation report. This made it possible to work *offline* with these reports. This also allowed us to combine codes and co-correlate them with each other. In order for such a combination of codes to occur, the researcher activated the code manager function and then the code co-occurrence function.

The code manager allowed the codes included for analysis to be listed alphabetically along with the associated citations. The code – *autoethnography*, appears in the middle of the screen in the form of a cloud and the quotations referring to it, broken down by belonging. It was even possible to access the page of the document in *Portable Document Format* PDF where the corresponding citation could be viewed.

The program allowed the visualization of other codes contemplated by the citation. From these codes, groups of associated codes were created by visualization logic. Thus, the different codes were combined into a group of codes: on one side the code that was being analyzed is arranged and on the other side the citations. In this same line of analysis, *Atlas.ti23* allowed the management of citations created by code co-occurrences.

This function was used to combine the term *autoethnography* in the researched universe in correlation with the three codes/concepts/categories: *self*, identity and reflection that appeared in columns, side by side. It was possible, for example, to obtain the selected codes in a column, and next to the codes, the number of citations by codes is displayed. You can also get in the middle column the relationship with all the codes, the number of possible combinations per code, and on the left you can see the citation with the identification of the article and the page where this citation is located in the text. A horizontal column shows the exact phrase where the word is in the text, and lastly, the combined code numbers and their lists appear.

All of the functions demonstrated – project creation, document import, coding with concept clouds, code management reporting, citation and code co-occurrence – are available to aggregate inferences and notes and later be used in the writing of the article. The complexity of the project created by the program, up to this point, requires the researcher to pay close attention to define which concepts form the thematic subcategories pertinent to the main category, defined in the *RBS–Roadmap*, in order to meet the objectives and answer the proposed questions.

Concepts are automatically generated, grouped by textual meaning of words; by groups of words and by approximation of meaning. It should be noted that the meaning of the terms is given to the choice of the researcher, who attributes to the term the value that is best associated with the object of study. These codes derive concepts that are manually reduced by meaning, giving rise to thematic subcategories.

To facilitate this work, the program provides for the use of comments that can be written at any stage of the process. Comments are usually associated with codes with each other, and with quotations. They change according to the writing and pertinence to the topic. They usually turn into longer memos during the latter stages of the analysis, making it easier to write the final paper.

Comments can be written at all stages of *Atlas.ti23*. Comments, unlike memos, are always directly linked to code, quotes, or part of the analysis for which you write them. Memos are stand-alone notes and have a specific type of function in the *Atlas.ti23* project and in the text to be described. Memos can be grouped together and can have comments on their own. Comments are broader and have an independent space in the *Atlas.ti23* program, as well as codes and citations.

In the case of this article, the comments complement the citations. They were used here to remember and draw attention to the content of the quotation and thus, later on, they were used in the writing of the final text. Memos are more than just repositories of thoughts, but documents of a job and life. When a researcher sits down to write a memo, a certain degree of analysis occurs. The very act of writing memos and making diagrams forces the

researcher to think about the data. And it is in thought that analyses occur (Corbin; Strauss, 1990).

At this stage of the analysis using *Atlas.ti23*, the writing of the memos is important, because most of the analysis happens when you write down your findings and not just by clicking on the software's own functions. The ideas captured in memos are pieces of a puzzle, the soul of the work, which are later assembled in the writing phase of the text. Theory building, associated with network building, also involves writing memos. The memos in *Atlas.ti23* may be just text on their own, or they may be linked to other parts of the code reports, quotes, or other memos.

In the case of this article, memos were produced in separate files in *Microsoft Word*®. *Atlas.ti23* is especially useful for categorizing and manipulating the content of texts. It simulates the traditional *desktop* style of paper and pencil for content analysis. It also allows the combination of interactive functions of texts and images, but it could be through maps, conversations originating from social networks, geolocations, hypertexts, among other formats. It modifies codes by issuing memos and comments linking citations according to the selected categories. The comments can be used to allow the researcher to locate himself in the structure of the analyses performed, since the data resulting from them can be transformed into text that portrays the results of the analyses.

At this stage, the collected data is used to identify, by function and relevance, the most important citations to be written as results. The thematic subcategories and their connections derived from the analysis of words, concepts, codes, quotations and comments are identified. The memoranda are created and from them begins the writing of the text revealing the results of the analyses and systematizing the contents derived from them. It is up to the author to choose the way to critically articulate these data in order to present them in such a way as not to lose sight of the analyses processed. They started with the thematic choices, selection and systematization of the documents using the *RBS-Roadmap*, then they are analyzed by *Atlas.ti23*, and finally the writing of the text can begin.

For this article, the traditional way of writing was chosen, transferring the quotations, comments and memos to the *Microsoft Word*® program. In it, the major category and subcategories were worked on in an attempt to interconnect them in a systematic, meaningful and narrative way. A text was created from premises derived from the general ideas expressed by the authors and in a process of comparison, corroboration, exclusion, among other styles of construction of the scientific text. An attempt was made to write a cohesive, clear and representative text of the whole, meaningful for the category. That is, we sought to answer the proposed questions without losing focus on the object of study and the objectives of the work it proposed to develop. As an example, the subcategory – *self*, was de-

scribed in the light of the concepts that were transformed into codes and that are imbricated in the fragments of the quotations raised.

So far, we have gone through the phases of the *RBS-Roadmap*, outlining the data that were exported to the *Atlas.ti23 software* and that were analyzed from the three thematic categories. Numerous functions of the computer program were worked on, and, with the result of these analyses, we started writing the text.

Next, autoethnography is discussed as the main theme-category and the subcategories associated with it: *self*, identity and reflection. The most cited authors and their importance for the discussion of the theme are presented below. The sub-themes of the 286 selected documents are analyzed through a critical interpretation of their content. At the end of the section, the main results of the analyses are described in the light of the proposed objectives, outlining the limitations of the study and its contributions to ethnography in education and expanding the final considerations with arguments and counterarguments on the main theme.

4 Conceptualizing autoethnography in Anglo-American speaking countries

Studies on autoethnography are still in their infancy in Brazil, despite decades of research in the United States and other English-speaking countries. Only in recent years have dossiers and articles on this theme appeared in the country. This article discusses and reflects on Anglo-American thought regarding issues of identity and culture.

There are numerous definitions of autoethnography and they refer in some way: to a systematic approach using ethnographic strategies; the linking of personal experience to social, cultural and political issues, and: to a critique of certain discourses within a cultural context with a vision and hope for change (Allen-Collinson, 2013; Allen-Collinson; Hockey, 2005; Chang, 2008; Duncan, 2004; Ellis, 2004; Ellis; Adams; Bochner, 2011; Jones; Adams; Ellis, 2013; Pelias, 2003)

In the context of identity studies in Anglo-American speaking countries, sociologists Carolyn Ellis (2004) and Arthur Bochner (2000) are widely cited. Ellis has been recognized since the 1990s for her studies of personal narratives in qualitative research. Together, Ellis and Bochner have published and edited several books on what they call the autoethnographic method (Ellis; Bochner, 1996, 2000, 2005; Bochner; Ellis, 2005, 2016). The other most cited authors in the 286 documents accessed were: Hernandez (2017), Holman Jones (2016), Denzin (2013), Johnson (2013), Smith (2004), Anderson (2006) and Richardson (1994).

Ellis and Bochner's (2000) definition of autoethnography focuses on autobiographical description and the importance of ethnographic explanation. Anderson (2006) and Chang

(2008) refer to autoethnography as an approach that must combine cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details. This means that autoethnographers are expected to reflect, analyze, and interpret their stories within their cultural context. Researchers who engage in autoethnography cannot study themselves without referring to their position in relation to others (Chang, 2008). Self-discovery, in a cultural sense, is closely related to understanding others. If others refer to members of one's own community, the self is reflected in others in a general sense. However, if the others refer to members of other communities, understanding the similarities between the self and the others captures only a part of an understanding of them (Fa'avae, 2018).

While Ellis and Bochner (2000) are interested in the descriptive character of the method, defining autoethnography as "autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interaction of the introspective and personally engaged 'self' with cultural descriptions mediated by language, history, and ethnographic explanation" (p.742), Chang (2008, p.44) takes a slightly different approach, focusing on the analysis of autoethnography "combining cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details". These two types of definitions illustrate the dual character of autoethnography as a method, translating this duplicity into a more traditional perspective (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p.9). It can be said that as a method, autoethnography combines autobiographical elements and observations based on multiple identities. The aim of these autoethnographic researches is to explore, describe and analyze personal experience, within broad and complex social contexts, in order to understand the cultural experience in which one is inserted (Ellis, 2004).

The word autoethnography originates from the Greek: self (*self*, in oneself), *ethnos* (nation, in the sense of a people or group to which one belongs, a culture) and spelling (*grapho*, to write, the way in which writing is constructed). It means writing a representation of the relationship between the self and the other, where that self is a neutral observer. He looks at the other, but also at himself, at his own emotions and thoughts to understand what is happening in that context (Ellis and Adams, 2024). For Ellis (2004), this is a perspective that attempts to combine the social sciences and humanities and personal history writing, in their relations to theory and to academic research.

It would be like using what we know about ethnographic methods, but trying to express it in a way that is more literary, more like a story, through a performance or art, and the interaction of the introspective, the personal engagement of the I (the research subject). It's a confusing kind of orientation between genders. It serves both to understand the human experience and to be a therapeutic process, of searching for the meaning of oneself. It is a methodology used to deeply explore our relationships and interactions with other people. Ellis further relates autoethnography as a *way of life* that would help us see the world as a story and see ourselves as part of that story, which would make us more empathetic to other

people. The term autoethnography has multiple understandings, but it mainly refers to the method and product of research and writing. (Ellis, 2004; Ellis; Adams; Bochner, 2011).

In general, the purpose of autoethnography is to describe and analyze one's personal experience through a narrative in order to understand the cultural experience in which one is inserted (Ellis, 2004). As such, when approaching stories and life, reports of oneself and the ways in which the researcher tries to insert himself as a subject of speech in the ethnographic narrative, she relates to a kind of writing of the self. Self-writing is a way of producing knowledge based on the reflection of personal, subjective, embodied experiences and, as such, in opposition to what comes from outside, to the other, to what is different from oneself. The ethnographic approach seeks to experience, reflect and represent the relationship of oneself with the cultural environment, contrasting this subjective experience with the collective experience. Many researchers base their narrative, their writing of themselves, on issues of identity (political dimension) and on various forms of representation, highlighting misunderstandings, prejudices and silencing (academic, social). This method is recognized among its peers for its transformative character, for giving voice to those who speak and in favor of those who speak and also as a place of speech, given the essays, articles and theses that revolve around studies of gender, race, class, age and sexuality, geographic location and other social and political issues. At the same time, autoethnography can be a very difficult task as it can cause doubts and anxieties for the writer (Wall, 2008).

The use of narratives and personal experiences in academic work and representational practices in qualitative research appears, at first, as a method that sought to account for a social and political change in American society in the 1960s and 1970s (Adams; Jones; Ellis, 2014). This period was impacted by the questioning of social and political identities, such as the Black Power movement, second wave feminism and the Vietnam War. Reflection on identity gave rise to new areas of study, such as African Americans, gender, which focused especially on identities as social and political experiences of those who suffered from social injustice. From this experience there was an emphasis on the reflexivity of qualitative research and the recognition of the ways in which social identities - race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, health, among others - impact "...what and how we study, as well as what we see and how we interpret what we study" (Adams; Jones; Ellis, 2014, p.30). This research method, which uses reflexivity and subjectivity, that is, life experience, also proves to be a counterpoint to traditional scientific research, which uses objectivity as its instrument for guaranteeing the integrity of the research. For the authors mentioned, objectivity in social research obscures the twists and turns that research projects usually take. While in autoethnography, the author is both subject and researcher (Cunningham; Jones, 2005). At the same time, the use of the first person, the self, in the research report indicates greater acceptance of the personal narrative as a way of creating meaning in life (Boyle; Parry, 2007).

It can be said that the self is the individual perception of who we are based on our experiences and social interactions. Identity is the representation of our self, what we present to the world, which can be influenced by various factors, such as culture, society and personal experiences. While reflection is the ability to examine our own thoughts, feelings and actions, and is a crucial component of narrative, of self-writing. Foucault (2004) considered that in writing it is possible to realize that the act of writing is also the act of showing oneself to others. When writing about ourselves, we are essentially exploring and articulating our self and our identity. Furthermore, when we practice this writing, we look inside ourselves and reflect on who we are.

This self-writing, also called by Adams, Jones and Ellis (2014) “personal ethnography, personal experience, personal narrative, personal writing, autobiography and reflection” (p. 18), is an introspective process that involves the expression of thoughts, feelings and personal experiences. It is a form of self-exploration and self-understanding. In it, the concepts of self, identity and reflection are intrinsically linked and are fundamental to understanding how we perceive ourselves and how we present ourselves to the world.

A characteristic that unites all autoethnographies is the use of personal experiences to examine and/or critique cultural experience. But what differentiates this type of report from biographies or autobiographies? Can't we consider them the same thing? For Adams, Jones and Ellis (2014), however, not all personal writing is autoethnographic, since for them there are additional characteristics that distinguish autoethnography from other types of personal work (such as biography and autobiography). These include purposefully commenting on and criticizing culture and cultural practices; make contributions to existing research; embrace vulnerabilities, and; create a reciprocal relationship with the audience to force a response (Adams; Jones; Ellis, 2014). This explains autoethnographers' desire to focus on ways of producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research based on personal experience; into something that sensitizes readers to issues of identity or silenced and marginalized experiences. The vulnerability of experiences can create forms of representation that deepen our ability to empathize with people who are different from us (Ellis; Bochner, 2000).

Autoethnographers, by questioning systems, practices, cultural beliefs and their own experiences, through self-reflection, reveal the self of the research subject. At the same time, they offer the reader direct access to this introspective experience through multiple identities. The concepts of self, reflection and identity are intrinsically related in the autoethnographic narrative. They are interdependent and one does not exist without the other. They complement and correlate with each other. The personal narrative, the writing of oneself, generates a range of meanings and ways of being where identities are tested, defined and reconstructed.

Below are some examples of these narratives that go far beyond issues of race, gender, sexuality, nationality, religion or age, as they can interconnect in a complex way, creating an intersectionality between two or more elements. The concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) explores how multiple aspects of identities manifest simultaneously in interactions with other people and is identified in several of these narratives as an important element in the study of culture and identities. Thus, we can find stories that narrate reflections on child adoption processes, experiences and pedagogical practices, illnesses and disabilities, multiple identities, music, motherhood, ideologies and beliefs, language and translanguaging, mysticism, performance, technology and, more recently. Narratives surrounding the Covid19 pandemic (Mielle, 2023; Kempny, 2022). Todas as narrativas trazem a questão da reflexão como imprescindível na investigação do *self* e da identidade.

However, the concept of self, on which the analysis of autoethnography is based, remains elusive. Despite the difficulty in defining the self, we see the development of characteristics integrated into autoethnography, such as self-study, self-reflection, self-awareness, self-reflection (self-reflection), self-understanding, self-observation, among others, which are used to help describe and analyze personal experiences. Reflection on oneself can be used to generate data that makes the subject visible within the narrative.

Using elements of self-study inquiry, I explore how my cultural habitus influenced my experiences as a school science and biology teacher before transitioning to teaching science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) in preservice education programs. teachers (Hamilton, 2021, p.3).

The researcher's involvement in reflective practices, which activate memory and support the study of self, is what makes their practices and narratives conscious. Researchers who share their identity development with readers can illustrate how self-study based on autoethnographic inquiry can lead to more effective use of the self (Struthers, 2012). This visibility of themselves appears through positive and negative events in each person's life. As one of the self-reflective research methodologies, autoethnography can help in understanding these aspects.

Lumsden (2023), when narrating his activity oriented towards strategic management, carried out by employees from universities in the United Kingdom, reflects on the process of producing his autoethnography.

In the process of doing autoethnography, self-reflection was experienced as a swinging pendulum movement, oscillating between the performative public-academic self, which attempted to conform to organizational expectations, and the hidden private-self, which criticized and resisted these. expectations. The pendulum was a means of self-reflection and

critical investigation in the author's attempts to deconstruct, process and make sense of her experiences (p.1).

Roberts (2014) in her essay *Negating the Inevitable: An Autoethnographic Analysis of First-Generation College Student Status* offers an account that intertwines her memories and reflections to exemplify the ways in which, in her own words,

[...] my experiences with culture, social class, and power have impacted my positionality, development, identity negotiations, and status as a first-generation college student/graduate (...) I am referring to intersectionality, specifically as the intersections of my cultural identities informed my understanding of power and my experiences with oppression within higher education institutions (p.48).

Roberts draws on childhood experiences and her relationship with her parents to explain her goal of challenging supposedly inevitable educational outcomes for marginalized and underprivileged individuals like herself. For her, social stigmas and traumas can be overcome through the creation of meaning through ethnographic reflexivity.

Many autoethnographers write narratives that revolve around the challenges of living with and responding to socially stigmatized identities regarding race, class, gender/sex, sexuality and ability. They challenge assumptions of their social identity by revealing the ways in which their identities often require social and cultural adjustments and performances.

Yomtoob (2014) reflects on the conflicts she experiences based on people's perception of her. As a middle-aged, non-heterosexual, Jewish Arab American woman, she uses her lived experiences and testimony of discrimination to interrogate orientalizing, racialization, sexism, and heteronormativity. Regarding autoethnography, she believes that "one of its many values is that it allows us to approach the experience of discrimination and understand it from the perspective of the person to whom it happens" (p.145)

We see that writing the self-narrative is a work of memory, reflection and identity construction at the same time. Autoethnographic research on one's own identity can take place through self-observation of situations, activities and daily experiences and it can be multidimensional.

Leal-Covey (2015), during the writing of her doctoral thesis, describes that doing her autoethnography allowed her to reveal to herself the intersectionality and interconnected identities of what she calls her multiple cultures: being a woman, with a physical disability and an immigrant from Mexico to the United States. Her qualitative analytical autoethnography involved determining whether multicultural people are at greater risk of mixing identities. She realized that by exploring her cultural experiences, "I would be better able to understand the people around me and myself" (p.4). Intersectionality would help to understand the com-

plexity of identities at the individual level, and interconnected identities would help to see how relationships between people, at a systemic level, shape individuals' identities.

Morella-Pozzi (2014) writes about her privileged and disadvantaged experiences as a student and faculty member with a non-visible disability. In what she calls a terrible dichotomy, she discusses the idea of being simultaneously i/legitimate and the conflicts she experiences. She discusses intersectionality from multiple positions of privilege and marginalization to encourage disability awareness.

Autoethnography is also used to reflect on experienced inequalities, such as racial and gender discrimination and oppression. Several studies explore the topic of the influence of ethnic-cultural roots and the internalized values of families of origin on the contextual development and expression of multiple identities, especially those of marginalized groups.

Some authors use ethnographic performance, using music, poetry or the body as a point of articulation for academic consciousness and body literacy, problematizing the power relations that are linked to these selves, cultures and practices (Spry, 2011; Jones; Pruyn, 2018; Cayari, 2019) Its emancipatory potential and its use as a method of investigation had already been made explicit in Spry's (2001) essay, which, although aware that emotion and poetics are a kind of academic betrayal, was what his self-reflection imposed on him.

Thirteen years after I was sexually assaulted, deep healing began when I began to rewrite this experience as a woman with strength and agency, rather than accepting the sexual assault victim discourse embedded in our phallogentric language—and therefore systems. of values. This kind of transformative and effective potential for the researcher, the researched and the reader/audience is the main objective of effective autoethnography in print and performance (p.712).

Diving into herself helped her reinhabit her body while allowing others to interpret it in the context of their own experience. Such movements and interpretations that autoethnography can provoke for both those who write and those who read can also function as a type of therapy. In cases of narratives whose theme is illnesses and disabilities, self-writing allows individuals to reconstruct fragmented and difficult life stories, attributing meaning to them. As Richards (2008, p.1722) states, “this approach is fundamental to the narrator's identity and self-esteem, helping the person feel fully integrated again” .

These essays seek to show through these self-writings or self-narratives how identity, culture and relationships are interconnected. The examples seen from autoethnographies are critical, vulnerable, situational, personal, and serve as examples for understanding how cultural identities intersect with everyday life.

Autoethnography, despite all the advantages that could be pointed out, can be a very difficult task as it can cause doubts and anxieties about how to represent oneself, how to

carry out objective research while being subject and object at the same time, how others will react to your story and how to work ethically in autoethnography. For Wall (2008), autoethnography gives her the opportunity to reflect on these and other questions, it has been a learning experience that shows how to think about these questions differently than traditional and social science ethnography.

Personal writing is a powerful tool for exploring and expressing our self and identity. However, we must recognize the limitations of this narrative, both in capturing the complexity and fluidity of our self and identity and in ignoring or neglecting the culture (ethno) in which researchers are embedded, since in these studies the use of the term ethnography was associated with ethnographic research only to validate self-narratives.

5 Final considerations: arguments and counterarguments

The most recurrent arguments against the use of autoethnography in academic writing revolve around its strong emphasis on writing the self (Poerwandari, 2021; Plonder; Stadlbauer, 2016). This question is at the heart of the resistance to accepting autoethnography as a valuable method for qualitative research. Another criticism concerns the reality of personal narratives or autoethnographies: how much they represent reality and the authors' invention, since they are not supported by empirical data.

Sara Delamont (2007, p. 1), an influential sociologist and experienced ethnographer, states that this type of ethnography depends mainly on the ethnographer's reflection, as she is "...essentially lazy – literally lazy and intellectually lazy" (p.1). She presents six arguments against autoethnography, namely: not being able to combat familiarity; cannot be ethically published; be experiential rather than analytical; focusing on the wrong side of the division of power; revoke the ethnographer's duty to go into the field and collect data, and; not to arouse interest in order to become the object of sociology.

Countering the sociologist's speech, Olmos-López and Tusting (2020) argue that autoethnographers, when analyzing their own experiences in a sociocultural context, are not covered by Delamont's criticism. Likewise, the academic works they analyzed expose the flaws in the author's reasoning and demonstrate why, from the ethnographers' point of view, autoethnography is seen as a theoretically sound method for studying culture.

One of the proposals presented by the authors as a key strategy for improving reflexivity in autoethnography is co-constructed, or collaborative, autoethnographies. In this approach, research can go beyond a single individual, adding the perspective and reflexivity of an entire team. According to Olmos-López and Tusting, since autoethnography is generally described as the ethnography of the self, the concept of team autoethnography, although it may seem paradoxical, is innovative. Therefore, in a multi-researcher project, especially

in environments focused on academic practices, adding the team approach component to autoethnography can provide significant and qualitatively relevant results to the research. In this way, the authors who defend autoethnography as a method explore new possibilities, and with them, they not only try to reduce the noise of current criticisms of the method, but to overcome them, in our view, with strategies common to traditional ethnographic research.

Regarding the ethical nature of the autoethnographic approach, the impossibility of anonymity and confidentiality of those who narrate can be a problem in academic terms. This happens because the narrative is rarely just the subject who writes, since he makes associations with people in his family, in his surroundings, even changing their names. The impossibility of anonymity may even prevent the continuation of autoethnographic research (Sparkes, 2024), since the university's Ethics Committee may consider that it is not in compliance with regulatory standards for research with human beings.

Another criticism that can be made regarding the autoethnographic method in scientific research is the researcher's neutrality in relation to the researched subject, which includes himself. It is important to remember that the representation of oneself is not neutral, since through reflexivity and self-reflection, the researcher seeks to understand himself, within a given context. He transforms, like a chameleon in the eyes of himself and others. Your objective is, first, to understand who you are and then to see yourself as an agent and belonging to a certain group, to a context. The autoethnographer seeks, within his academic practice, to give voice to his worldview, his vision of himself within this world. He constructs a narrative where at the same time, through self-analysis, he identifies himself as belonging to one or multiple identities. His identity is multiple.

Despite some criticisms and arguments that have been presented about autoethnography, it can be said that it offers the researcher/author a different epistemology and ontology that situates them amidst the complexity and challenges of the experiences incorporated during their writing.

This article sought to offer examples of diverse, considered, effective, applied and innovative autoethnographies, exploring definitions and demonstrating the main characteristics of this method that has existed for more than twenty years and involves epistemological, relational, cultural and ethical foundations.

The authors, when analyzing autoethnography as a qualitative research method, used tools and techniques to create projects using computational resources: the systematic review (RBS-Roadmap) and the Atlas.ti23 software. This software proved to be an excellent resource for coding and subsequent analysis of the various articles. This made it possible to make visible identities, knowledge and particular voices relevant to a range of documents in English on the topic.

The challenges and futures of autoethnography include understanding it as a feminist, post-humanist, and decolonizing practice, as well as a method for studying texts, translations, and trauma. Within the narrative of the article, it is implicit how one can support and supervise autoethnographic projects and offer perspectives on publications and ways of evaluating an autoethnographic study.

Even today we still live in the dominant paradigm of modern science, which was based on the exclusion of the subject/researcher, separating him from the object. It was ignored that scientific theories are not the pure and simple reflection of objective realities, but co-producers of the structures of the human spirit and the sociocultural conditions of knowledge (Morin, 1999, p.7).

The autoethnographic methodology, by uniting subject and object, creates links between cultural aspects and biological aspects. The researcher/author, by showing his identity and reflecting on it, in an embodied and situated way, recognizes himself as an agent of change. He then seeks to produce meaningful, accessible, evocative research; a narrative that sensitizes readers to questions about identity, to subjective experiences that are generally silenced or vulnerable in academic discourse (in terms of social issues).

Our criticism lies in the weight and space that subjectivity occupies in self-writing and, consequently, in academic research. The multiple cases exemplified throughout the text are situational and specific, restricted to situated identities, even if they generate identification. The aim here is to emphasize that excessive emphasis on autobiographical or biographical narrative can make the ethnographic enterprise, autoethnography, smaller or less important.

Furthermore, the autoethnographic narrative can lead to a lack of objectivity in data analyses, while at the same time it can generalize the results to a wider population. Remembering that the autoethnographic experience is always contextual and individual, although one of its objectives is to generate empathy and recognition by peers.

It cannot be forgotten that autoethnography, perhaps due to the considerations mentioned above, is still not widely accepted in all academic areas. Some question its validity and scientific rigor (Delamont, 2009, Mattos, 2022), however, it still finds researchers in various parts of the world motivated to write self-narratives.

In this way, it can be said that autoethnography, as a method of investigation within qualitative research and, among them, ethnography, offers valuable insights for understanding and studying the subjects of scientific practice. We also add that the concomitant use of other approaches and methodologies in scientific research should also be considered to enrich studies in education and culture.

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