

Workshop 2: Write your own story

Writing project: autoethnography as narrative. 'Lockdown stories'

The purpose of this activity is:

1. To allow you to experience the writing of your own story (i.e. via autoethnography) and;
2. To put ourselves in the shoes of our participants and experience what it is like to be asked to share a story.

How does it feel to be asked to share a personal story? What is the experience like? What do you notice with regards to the shape, structure, style and content of your story? What analytical insights come through in this small story about your experience?

You can write about anything you like, but for the purpose of the activity I've suggested you could write about a typical day in 'lockdown'.

The focus of this story might involve selecting one habit, ritual, practice, or behaviour in lockdown and reflecting upon this, and articulating why and how it has been significant for you (and/or others). Doing so will help you discover what these activities say about you, your personal experiences, and the ways those personal experiences connect to the experiences of others.

Autoethnography is both an easy and a difficult form of writing. It is easy because we are writing about what we know: ourselves. It is difficult because we must communicate the significance of our experience to our audience, making a connection between our own experiences and those of our readers. The story must offer some takeaway value, and the writer who writes about the event must be able to answer the question 'so what?' The answer to this question is the primary insight of the autoethnography.

Autoethnographies are not just chronological narrations of events. They communicate the event's meaning and leave readers with an idea of what it might have been like to experience it themselves.

Instructions:

1. You could write about a typical day in 'lockdown'. The focus of this story might involve selecting one habit, ritual, practice, or behaviour in lockdown and reflecting upon this, and articulating why and how it has been significant for you (and/or others).

2. Give your story a title
3. Don't be overly concerned about the word limit. (If you can write around 500 words that will be enough but write as much or as little as you like).
4. Spend 30-45 minutes writing your story
5. After lunch we will share our stories
6. Please note that the stories and any information they contain should be treated in confidence in the confines of this SRA workshop in order to respect the privacy and confidentiality of the authors.

Example of autoethnography on 'dining out alone'

For an example of autoethnographic writing see the reading included by Jackie Goode (2018) 'Being One's Own Honoured Guest: Eating out Alone as Gendered Sociality in Public Spaces'. *Sociological Research Online*, 23(1): 100-113.