Autoethnography in Vocational Psychology: Wearing Your Class on Your Sleeve

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Abstract

This article addresses reflective practice in research and practice and takes the issue of consciousness of social class in vocational psychology as a working example. It is argued that the discipline's appreciation of social class can be advanced through application of the qualitative research method autoethnography. Excerpts from an autoethnographic study are used to explore the method's potential. This reflexive research method is presented as a potential vehicle to improve vocational psychologists' own class consciousness and to concomitantly enhance their capacity to grasp social class within their own spheres of research and practice. It is recommended that autoethnography be used for research, training, and professional development for vocational psychologists.

Social class has long been an issue of focus for vocational psychology; however, recent literature has called for its renewed emphasis in the field (Blustein, 2006; Diemer & Ali, 2009; Heppner & Scott, 2004; Whiston & Keller, 2004). The

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optimistic aim of addressing social class will ultimately require the delivery of career development services directed at socioeconomic need and will depend on psychological practices that are informed by research and theories sensitive to social class. Accordingly, scholars and practitioners—and their teachers and supervisors—will require various theoretical and professional means by which to take up that challenge in an appropriately informed manner. We approach this challenge by presenting a qualitative research method that can be used by vocational psychologists to raise awareness of their own social class phenomenology and to explore how they can integrate class-related meaning into reflexive research. Doing so, we present another path by which vocational psychologists may pursue the notion of *critical consciousness* (Blustein, 2006; Blustein, McWhirter, & Perry, 2005; Diemer & Blustein, 2006).

Objectification of Social Class

Psychology, as a social science and a profession, has developed sophisticated systems of education, training, supervision, credentialing, and registration. Take for example the *scientist–practitioner* model, which embodies the notions of dispassionate objectivity, technical proficiency, and professionalism. Although we flexibly adhere to the positivist tradition and ideals of the scientist–practitioner approach in our various professional, supervisory, managerial, and academic roles, we assert that psychology's scientific and professional systems and discourses require careful consideration with respect to class. With its inherent principles of objectivity and professionalism, the positivist paradigm in psychology entails concomitant establishment of boundaries between the psychologist and the individual client or research participant as an "other." With respect to social class, this process may risk what Lott (2002) described as psychologists *distancing from the poor*.

Following the arguments of other scholars (e.g., Blustein, 2001; Lott, 2002; Richardson, 2000; Roberts, 2005), we suspect that the enculturation of vocational psychologists in the traditional positivist paradigm may inadvertently limit their capacity to fully appreciate and operationalize a sensitive view of class in research, theory, and practice. The enculturation of dispassionate objectivity concomitant with positivism may well serve the development of a scientific professional, but it may concomitantly suppress or limit a professional's understanding and expression of his or her own personal background in terms of social class. We are not suggesting that individuals who identify with the positivist tradition are necessarily dismissive or ignorant of issues associated with social class; instead we wish to consider how vocational psychology can further its sensitivity to social class through reflexive research and scholarship. A similar case has been made successfully for multicultural competencies (e.g., Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, & Wise, 1994), in that scholars and practitioners should develop the skills, knowledge, and moreover, the self-awareness to better understand and work with individuals and communities of various cultural backgrounds.

In terms of reflective practice, the notion of distancing (Lott, 2002) is of crucial import; for it is at the juncture of the psychologist and the individual that we can

observe and experience the interpersonal confluence of their respective personal conditions and histories (McMahon & Patton, 2006). The formation of a genuine relationship implies the inherent vulnerability of the psychologist; and it requires consideration of personal dimensions that may be beyond the practitioner's immediate self-consciousness and awareness of countertransference. Accordingly, the potential impact of the objectification of class by psychologists must be considered further, perhaps through the lens of countertransference as suggested by Blustein (2006). He asserted that practitioners may have "little exposure to their own inner life with respect to working" (p. 290) and that the discipline should give attention to understanding and sharing means of exploring countertransference.

In the frame of countertransference, one should consider that the positivist paradigm lends itself to the objectification of the psychologist (and the client or research participant) by the discipline's reification of the objective in its own self-referent rhetoric and by the psychologists himself or herself acting likewise on a personal–professional level (i.e., performing to the expectation of objective behavior). Accordingly, through an emphasis on professional objectivity, and by engendering conditions of practice that psychologically separate the inherent dimensions of one's historical and current self, a psychologist can create a distanced and objectified other in himself or herself and in his or her research participant or client. Furthermore, a psychologist whose original social class is imbued with certain morals and values pertaining to work and income may be unwittingly placed in a position of psychological conflict in which he or she must undertake professional thinking and activities that are incommensurate with those original and historical influences on his or her identity formation. Having been professionally conditioned in the culture of the positivist paradigm, he or she may be at risk of being "out of touch" with those aspects of identity formation, which are unwittingly shared with clients and research participants from or in a particular class. In psychologically retreating to the positivist paradigm's stronghold of objectivity and defending against the threat of realizing one's own social origins, vocational psychologists may carry on unaware of their own personal–professional strengths *and* limitations with respect to engaging with issues of social class. Thus, despite its potential as an organizing framework for training and practice, the positivist paradigm may inadvertently foster *distancing* and diminish psychologists' self-awareness of social class (Lott, 2002).

As a function of countertransference, a practitioner might inadvertently and without malice project onto a working-class client his or her own unconscious conflicts embedded in his or her past class-related struggles of a personal nature, which he or she may not have sufficiently resolved. For example, a practitioner who overcame his or her working class privations through individualized motivations of sheer determination, anger, or revenge, may be at risk of judging working-class clients who feel stuck in their lot in life as being somehow inadequate and not up to the hero's journey of rising up and out of their situation. Surfacing and resolving these conflicts through a process of awareness raising may at least offer the practitioner—and client—the psychological safety afforded by self-awareness: such that the

practitioner may take care of countertransference in counseling and supervision and not engage in judgmental behavior (which could, for all intents and purposes, resemble the objectified psychological logic and rhetoric of clinical diagnosis).

Critical Consciousness

Within vocational psychology, the process of *sociopolitical development*, manifested as critical consciousness through *conscientization*, has been proffered as a vehicle for improving the vocational aspirations and conditions of disadvantaged client individuals and communities (e.g., Diemer, 2009; Diemer & Blustein, 2006; Diemer & Hsieh, 2008). For example, psychologists committed to social justice may work to raise their clients' understanding of their social and historical conditions (e.g., long-standing poverty, unemployment) with the purpose of assisting clients to reformulate their history of disadvantage and received narrative of disempowerment, to a new narrative that features aspiration and sense of efficacy. In this article, we do not address the conscientization of individuals and communities as clients or research participants; instead we reflexively turn our attention to psychologists and a process by which they may become self-conscientized of social class. We predicate this objective with the assertion that a psychologist who is apprised of his or her own social class will possess additional psychological scope for understanding the class issues of his or her research participants, clients, and communities.

In his treatise for a psychology of work, Blustein (2006) recommended that scholars develop an *empathic understanding* for that psychology: that they should aim to construct an *experience-near understanding* of and connection to the issues and people of interest; which equally applies to the development of experience-near understanding of social class. Blustein anticipated that this aim would be questioned, due to objectivity being ostensibly forfeited in the pursuit of subjectivity. To counter, Blustein argued that researchers' values are inherent in theorizing and research anyway, and moreover, that empathic understanding would not necessarily threaten scientific validity. Blustein wrote

> In my view, empathic introspection offers a means of reducing a critical gap in existing psychological research pertaining to the distance that we create between our clients and research participants and ourselves. Ideally, empathic understanding can help researchers to make their values more explicit as they are exposed to aspects of participants' lives that may have been inaccessible or inadequately understood. (p. 240)

With respect to research and the development of theories that are established on empathic understanding, Blustein recommended strategies such as including participants in research teams so that they may fully contribute and assist researchers in gaining an enhanced understanding. Such inclusive research practices are well founded and reflect accepted methods such as participatory research (e.g., Kidd & Kral, 2005). Despite their inclusiveness, however, such approaches are unlikely to induce a genuine understanding that is affectively experienced by the psychologist unless he or she

reflexively reveals and articulates to himself or herself, his or her embedded subjectivity in the process. Although including participants expands the potential for understanding—and we emphasize our support for this approach—it is still inherently at risk of a being a process of objectification of the participant or phenomenon as the *other* when conducted on the foundations of a positivist paradigm, which necessarily emphasizes objectivity. Instead, we aspire to an experience-near empathy, which is embedded in the psychologist's experience of himself or herself in relation to class.

To advance the *Emancipatory Communitarian Approach* to vocational psychology, Blustein et al. (2005) recommended that scholars and practitioners "strive to instill a critical consciousness—not just among the powerless but the powerful and privileged" (p. 167). They went further by stating "critical consciousness must start with us" and "we advocate that students and practitioners read narratives from workers and students who are struggling in their lives" (p. 168). Again, we concur and we suggest that research methods that facilitate self-awareness offer a promising avenue toward reflexive research.

We suggest that the development of such important dimensions of critically self-conscious practice necessarily requires the radical inclusion of the psychologist as his or her own subject of interest with respect to his or her practices and social class. This of course presents another round of challenges inherent in the subjectivity–objectivity dual in scientific practice; but resolution of the conflict would transcend the practitioner to a critical *meta-consciousness*. To advance toward the goal of fostering critical self-consciousness, in the following section, we introduce *autoethnography* as a reflexive research method toward critical consciousness within psychologists, their research, training, and practice.

In conceptualizing social class, we adopt the *Social Class Worldview Model* and the *Modern Classism Theory* (Liu, Soleck, Hopps, Dunston, & Pickett, 2004), which posit that social class is a multifaceted psychological phenomenon, rather than a simplistic demographic and objectified descriptor based on income, occupation, or geographic location. In relation to the aforementioned notion of critical consciousness and conscientization, Liu et al. (2004) suggest that

> consciousness is the degree to which an individual has an awareness that he or she belongs to a social class system and that this system plays out in his or her life; attitudes are those feelings, beliefs, attributions, and values related to social class as the individual understands it and the related congruent behaviors . . . ; and saliency is defined as the meaningfulness and significance of social class to the individual. (p. 104)

Although the Social Class Worldview Model consists of other theoretical domains, *consciousness, attitudes*, and *saliency* constitute an individual's phenomenal understanding of social class. In relation to the purpose of this article, our questions are: How can a vocational psychologist's awareness of his or her own social class consciousness, attitudes, and saliency be developed so as to support the process of reflexive practice? How can psychologists' consciousness of class be enhanced to influence practice and scholarship? How can attitudes toward class be reflexively explicated, deconstructed,

and written into theoretical meaning? How can the relevance and importance of class be highlighted to and by psychologists, not with class posited as just another variable to be measured and accounted for, but as an avenue through which meaning and connection can be developed between person, theory, and practice?

Autoethnography

Ethnography takes interest in what people do, make, use, and how they know and describe their phenomenal worlds (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Mattis, & Quizon, 2005). Broadly conceptualized, autoethnography is a form of ethnography; with the definitive feature of autoethnography being the researcher's taking himself or herself as the subject of inquiry. Autoethnography may be

> research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social and political. Autoethnographic forms feature concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection portrayed in dialogue, scenes, characterization, and plot. Autoethnographies may combine fiction with nonfiction. (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, pp. 189-190)

The process of autoethnography typically entails a researcher (as the self-observed participant of a study) describing elements of his or her life and experience in explicit detail, and, moreover, in reference to a specific ethnographic topic and integrating that experience nearness with theory.

The production of an autoethnographic study may involve autobiographical writing as a process or its collection as a form of qualitative data; however, autoethnography is not the same as autobiography. The latter is descriptive and oriented toward the presentation of a life history whereas autoethnography is focused on a specific phenomenon of theoretical interest and one which is embedded in a certain context accessible by the researcher.

Furthermore, while the performance of autoethnography has the potential to engender feelings of release as a confessional process for the author, autoethnography's purpose is the production of research in which person, phenomenon, and theory are articulated. In this way, it may be distinguished from the clinical traditions of supervision and self-exploration of personal issues, which may influence practice. Although autoethnography may expose psychological themes that constitute an individual's countertransference in terms of a research process, it does not act in the place of the clinical analysis of countertransference. Confessions within supervision, or self-confessions, are not ordinarily melded with theory toward answering a specific scientific question or exploring an interesting phenomenon nor are they ordinarily aired in public through the literature so as to inform other psychologists of the interpretation of the experience of a specific phenomenon of interest to the discipline.

It is useful to consider autoethnography from the perspective of the philosophical foundations of psychology as described by Ponterotto (2005) and Morrow (2005); and

we do so here, albeit briefly. In their respective schemes, positivists and post-positivists represent the traditional empirical psychology, with post-positivists offering some concessions in terms of the nature and study of reality. Constructivists posit that there are multiple constructed realities dependent on recursive relationships between perception and context. Critical theorists posit a negotiable reality that is mediated by power dynamics embedded in language, culture, and history. The values of the researcher inherently drive critical research along with a desired social and political outcome. Constructivists recognize their values, yet attempt to contain their potential to influence the interactions between observer and observed. McIlveen (2008) suggested that autoethnography would best reside within the remit of constructivist–interpretivist and critical–ideological paradigms as described by Ponterotto and Morrow. Both paradigms would admit autoethnography as a method but with varying emphasis on the place of the researcher's subjectivity and experience of the phenomenon in view.

In methodological terms, two types of autoethnography may be identified. Anderson (2006) described *analytic autoethnography*, an approach which is more akin to post-positivist psychological science and *evocative autoethnography*, which represents a style better related to constructivist and critical paradigms for psychology and advocated by the scholars Ellis and Bochner (Ellis, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The analytic approach tends toward the objective analysis and rhetorical style familiar in positivist psychology and involves reporting in an objectified style whereas evocative autoethnography aims to achieve empathy and resonance within the reader and may even manifest in literary styles such as poetry.

Autoethnography has been established as a qualitative research method in the disciplines of anthropology, education, and sociology (Anderson, 2006; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Etherington, 2004; Roth, 2005; Spry, 2001) and has, for example, been used to investigate the reflexive experience of research (du Preez, 2008; Humphreys, 2005; Vickers, 2002) and research supervision (Ellis, 1999). It has also been applied as a pedagogical method toward conscientization in the field of school teacher education (e.g., Austin & Hickey, 2007). Unfortunately, there are few examples of autoethnography within the psychology literature (e.g., Langhout, 2006; J. L. Smith, 2004). To partly fill that void, we now present a summary of the research process of performing an autoethnography written by the first author (McIlveen, 2007).

Performing Autoethnography: An Example of Practice

The Case

The first author completed his PhD on the development of a new career assessment product *My Career Chapter* (McIlveen, 2006). In conducting his PhD research, the first author and his doctoral supervisor agreed that the research endeavor should be critically reflexive: revealing the candidate's motivations and personal saturation in the research processes. They asked these reflective questions of the project: How was the career assessment product under investigation in this PhD project brought

into being? Why were particular theories chosen for the research project? These ostensibly ordinary questions for a candidate engaged in doctoral research transpired into vigorous personalized reflexivity, which became a study in itself. Ultimately, his commitment to reflexivity drew the researcher toward the nexus of the topic of his research, the nature of his profession as a psychologist, and his early origins and social class. Accordingly, the PhD candidate and his research activities as a vocational psychologist became the topic of ethnographic interest, and autoethnography was an ideal research method for the reflexive process.

Data Collection and Analysis

To study himself as part of the research project, the author gathered together all of the data necessary for the performance of autoethnographic writing, which may entail a variety of sources of qualitative data (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). There were tangible, material data (e.g., notes taken during doctoral supervision sessions, old papers written in other degree programs, music, refereed published papers, and photographs). There were periods of structured reflection and periods of spontaneous recollections, both associated with various emotional experiences. To facilitate reflection, the author used the stimulating questions by Watson (2006), which enable practitioners to consider their values, background, and influences on practice (e.g., Where do your values and beliefs come from? How do your family, your gender, and your multicultural background affect your values?). These questions effectively operationalized aspects of consciousness, attitudes, and saliency identified in the Social Class Worldview Model (Liu et al., 2004). Conversations with colleagues and friends (cf., Tillmann-Healy, 2003) also provided additional sources of data, as well as serving as reference points to determine the truthfulness of recollections.

   The reflexive approach to the PhD candidate's understanding of his research was based in a supervision milieu that was conducive to exploring the subjective and personal process of conducting research in an objective and objectified discipline. For example, discussions between the candidate and the supervisor focused on their shared historical experiences with respect to class; their respective travails and transitions across classes, which were imbued with some degree of angst; and how their own evolving critical consciousness brought the discipline, and its power structures and dynamics, into focus. The collection and iterative analyses of data in this way were both reflexive processes of the research endeavor and products of the *conscientization* of his class and his practice of research in vocational psychology. The production of a written narrative was also part of the analysis process, but this is dealt with as a process of reporting the research.

Reporting the Research

There are a number of ways to write up autoethnography particularly in terms of the difference between analytic and evocative methods (cf. Anderson, 2006). The author

of the example described here (McIlveen, 2007) deliberately set out to write in a style that was consistent with the recommendations and reporting guidelines for qualitative research in counseling psychology (viz., Morrow, 2005). This approach was taken so as to provide familiar intellectual boundaries associated with psychology's conventions—for both author and prospective reader. Morrow's recommendations for a Method section for qualitative research slightly, yet meaningfully, differ from the usual stipulations and entail the additional subsections of *Philosophical assumptions or paradigm* underpinning the research and *Researcher-as-instrument statement*. Completion of both subsections requires exposure of the researcher's positioning so as to honestly inform the reader of the researcher's perspective, thus enabling the reader to consider the analyses and conclusions in a more speculative or critical light. When using autoethnography as the research design, the researcher-as-instrument statement becomes the main body of the research project itself. In the example used here, in which the notion of scientist–practitioner in vocational psychology was brought into focus, the author first established himself as a vocational psychologist to fulfill the autoethnographic criterion of being a *complete member researcher* (Anderson, 2006).

The manuscript was written over a period of approximately 6 months. Its writing process commenced with a structured approach of setting up the manuscript according to the conventional reporting format, as described previously. Throughout the writing process, the autoethnography itself became part of the reflexive process of data collection and analysis. Narrative threads were pursued to their conclusion; as the writing process progressed through iterative cycles of checking and returning to data, themes were derived from the data and the writing process itself. Draft on draft became a growing autobiographical account, which threaded back into theory.

Results and Discussion

At its end, the autoethnography revealed the life of a young rural, working-class boy who set out to overcome his experience of stigma and class oppression. Emerging from the text was a personal story in which the author's early experiences of social class became a predominant feature and eventually the plot of the narrative analysis. Examples of text from the narrative analysis subsection *Working-class Boy Made Good* exemplify the author's transition from rural working-class adolescent to metropolitan middle-class profession:

> I was raised the son of an iconic Australian sheep shearer, in a working class family, and one without much money. Whilst shearers enjoy elevated status within the lore of the Australian working class as the quintessential "hard-worker", they have also been the target of negative stereotypes promulgated throughout a century of industrial struggle. ... My first paid employment was as a roustabout working in sheep shearing sheds. This semi-skilled occupation is very much the lowest of the pecking order of the Australian wool industry. (McIlveen, 2007, p. 301)

Although successful in his transition, the author revealed moments of doubt that were akin to the experiences of participants in a grounded theory study of academics' transitions into the world of higher education from their outside cultures and class (Nelson, Englar-Carlson, Tierney, & Hau, 2006); for example:

> I can now speak dialects of the Australian rural working class and the metropolitan middle-class with utter confidence; my social self changes according to context and I mostly feel emotionally secure and comfortable with both. This class-jumping is all much to the paradoxical horror of my father, who, on the one hand is deeply proud of my achievements within the middle-class, but in the spirit of working class egalitarianism so stereotypically Australian, is equally dismissive of my social status and likes to bring me "down a peg or two" in a playful laconic fashion, not hurtfully, but to ensure that his egalitarian values instilled within me are not lost or diminished. (McIlveen, 2007, p. 302)

In the discussion section of the study, the author wrote implications for theory, research, and practice. The author concluded that his motivations and personal saturation in the research endeavor was partly related to his overcoming class barriers. Although personally and professionally confronting, especially at time of submission for publication (cf. Vickers, 2002), the resultant autoethnography drew a narrative between the objective abstractions of a specific scientific theory and the technology of the PhD produced by the author through the profoundly personal lived experiences of the author; thus revealing his consciousness of class and its nexus between theory and practice. In this example, it was the autoethnographic process of reflecting on and writing about the personal, historical dimensions of class, which fostered the development of critical consciousness in relation to a vocational psychologist's experience of his class background and the influence of that background—presently felt—on his research practices. Having accounted for his transition across classes, the author recommended that vocational psychology would benefit from learning how scholars develop or evolve theories and practices not simply on the basis of traditional empirical terms but additionally in terms of the scholars' being embedded in their own culture and history.

Discussion

Among the difficulties faced by persons in transition between one social class and another is the awareness of being different. Individuals in transition tend to attempt to gain an understanding of the particular and peculiar practices and conventions of the group they wish to join, to know how to behave in the hope that they will be "accepted or least tolerated" (Schutz, 1971, p. 91). Through autoethnography, the first author described his own socialization in a rural, working-class world, and the difficult processes he undertook of behaving, consciously, in the ways of the middle class to make a place for himself in the professional world.

Autoethnography is a "self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts" (Spry, 2001, p. 710). From a social constructionist or critical/ideological perspective, autoethnography presents an opportunity to investigate the dialogical and relational aspects of identity and work—in the case presented here, it was the nexus of identity as vocational psychologist and social class. Scholars and practitioners are privileged to be on the "inside" of the professional discourses (e.g., theories and practice technologies). Through autoethnography, they may bring other spheres of their existence to theory by publicly presenting a self-case study that intimately informs theory and melds a narrative that cannot be achieved through the intellectual process of distancing between researcher and subject. Who better could write about the psychological theory of social class than a vocational psychologist who understands the personal phenomenology of a felt experience inherent in a specific social class in which he or she lived or lives? Thus, autoethnography is a form of enquiry from the insider's perspective.

Maslow (1966) argued for a psychology of science in which the scientists as persons were studied. Similarly, Runyan (2006) explored the personal side of the psychology of science and argued that the psychobiography of well-known psychologists provides a way of understanding the science of psychology: a psychology of psychology. Indeed, Runyan highlighted the very personal nature of the performance—the doing—of psychology by outstanding figures such as Freud and Skinner. Although autoethnography is, as a research method, not autobiography per se, there are parallels with the application of psychobiography for understanding how individual psychologists engaged in the science of psychology. As a reflexive self-study, autoethnography provides the psychologist with a method to understand himself or herself in the performance of his or her research into a particular phenomenon of interest, which, like himself or herself, is embedded in a sociocultural context: thus, a critical self-ethnography interpreted in terms of psychological theory. Furthermore, it is here the psychologist can provide an insider's perspective on what may only be accessible in terms of objective observations made from the outside and therefore transcend the objective–subjective divide.

Limitations

Is autoethnography subjective? Yes. However, if done rigorously, autoethnography may secure the conditions of sound qualitative research with the constructivist–interpretivist or critical–ideological paradigms described by Ponterotto (2005) and Morrow (2005). Evocative autoethnography will never fulfill the requirements of the positivist paradigm as a research method; although analytic autoethnography may have some scope within the remit of post-positivist research. We do not aim to overstate the case for autoethnography and emphasize that it is but one possible way to conduct reflexive research.

A crucial, pragmatic limitation on autoethnography, however, is the dearth of theoretical and methodological guidance on how to perform and report an

autoethnographic study within the discipline of psychology. From a psychological perspective, we tentatively suggest that autoethnography may be considered a form of self-reflective, psychobiography (Runyan, 2006), *narratology* (Hoshmand, 2005), or *narrative analysis* (Smith & Sparkes, 2006). Perhaps by beginning at these theoretical locations—and they may not be ideal—the field may be in a better position to appropriate and reconstruct the method into a form more familiar to psychology. Until psychology has generated its own criteria of epistemological merit specific to autoethnography, we may borrow from other disciplines (e.g., Anderson, 2006) and apply higher order criteria used for qualitative research in psychology (e.g., Morrow, 2005; Parker, 2004).

Potential Applications. In this article, we have suggested that autoethnography can be used as a form of learning for reflexive research and practice and developing awareness of class-related issues and one's experience of class. A number of scholars have suggested that practitioner training and learning is an ideal site at which to instill awareness of issues pertaining to social justice and class (Gainor, 2005; Hansen, 2003; Nelson et al., 2006; O'Brien, 2001; Patton & McMahon, 2006; L. Smith, 2005). Diemer and Ali (2009), for example, suggested that class and classism could be addressed in the process of training in career counseling. In this way, autoethnography could be used as an advanced training for graduate students or professional development activity for psychologists in the field, so as to contribute to their capacity to better understand social class and act in a more informed manner while performing their counseling. As autoethnography is a qualitative research method requiring abstraction from personal experience to theory and practice, to scholarly dissemination, graduate students' and psychologists' training in the method could entail scaffolding through the application of experiential learning activities, which potentiate self-awareness (Minor & Pope, 2005), such as the activity, which enables graduate students to explore their scholarship as scientists and practitioners (Croteau & McDonnell, 2005). Such learning activities could then be focused on specific phenomena of interest with the requirement that the learner integrate his or her experience with theory.

In this article, we have focused on social class and autoethnography. The method may be extended to other issues relevant to the development of critical consciousness (e.g., ethnicity, gender, sexuality, body), or applied to unusual experiences that may not be accessible to or frequently experienced by the mainstream professional population and, as such, go without theoretical interpretation and communication in the literature. This offers promise to psychologists who seek to better understand the psychology of a phenomenon, which is to manifest reasons beyond their scope. For example, a person of one race or gender can never truly know, in a positivist sense, the experience of living a life within the skin of a person of another—and vice versa.

Similarly, psychologists practicing career development in the field might be personally exposed to phenomena that do not readily manifest in university clinics or teaching settings, which facilitate research activities. These may be rare or

inaccessible events or experiences, presumably of interest to other psychologists (e.g., experiencing situations of routine or unpredictable extreme personal threat or violence within a workplace; suffering with an intractable illness or disability which affects on occupational performance; psychologists of one ethnic or national background transitioning their practice to different ethnic region or nation). The limitations on access to such experiences may concomitantly limit the documented and theorized psychology of a particular phenomenon. Reading and hearing our colleagues' experiences written in autoethnographic form gives some scope for others in the discipline to better understand the phenomena when it is interpreted in terms of psychological theory and practices.

Conclusion

Some scholars question the capacity of the field of career development to have an impact on the problems presented by social class, because psychological theories simply do not adequately deal with class as a lived experience (Richardson, 2000). Unfortunately, this position may be reinforced by the dearth of literature on the issue of psychologists' training, understanding, and personal experience in appreciating different social classes (Lott, 2002; Nelson et al., 2006; L. Smith, 2005; Smith, Foley, & Chaney, 2008), let alone the relation of class to theory and practice in vocational psychology specifically (Blustein, 2001; Diemer & Ali, 2009). To partly answer the challenge of the discipline's capacity to impact on social class, in this article, we have introduced the qualitative research method autoethnography as a way to facilitate reflexive research and practice. We suggest that autoethnography has the potential to develop within vocational psychologists their critical self-consciousness of issues related to social class in theory, research, and practice; and through excerpts of a case example have indicated how it transformed the research and practice of a vocational psychologist.

Through its depth of critical self-reflection and writing about oneself in context of a phenomenon of interest and theory, autoethnography also presents an opportunity for scholars and practitioners to bring theory and practice closer together (cf., Murdock, 2006) as a genuinely personalized synthesis. Of course, autoethnography requires ongoing theoretical and practical development before it can be appreciated as just another qualitative research method within the disciplinary realm of vocational psychology.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

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Bios

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Jan du Preez is a practicing counseling psychologist and the manager of counseling section of student services at the University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia. Prior to this role, he worked in a variety of settings in South Africa, across the disciplines of educational, counseling, and organizational psychology. He has a research interest in the factors contributing to student success at university, with a particular interest in applying narrative approaches to facilitating student self-efficacy. He enjoys listening to music and spending time with his family.

Wendy Patton is Executive Dean, Faculty of Education at Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia. She has taught and researched in the areas of career development and counseling for many years. She has coauthored and coedited a number of books and is currently series editor of the Career Development Series with Sense Publishers. She has published widely with more than 100 refereed journal articles and book chapters. She also serves on a number of national and international journal editorial boards. She enjoys environmental landscape revegetation.