**INTRODUCTION TO DUO-ETHNOGRAPHY**

**by Simon Moss**

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| **Introduction** |

Duo-ethnography is a research methodology in which two, or sometimes more, researchers converse about experiences in their lives that revolve around some topic—such as their sexual orientation, community work, or career. As they listen to the other person, they become more likely to remember and reinterpret their own experiences and memories. They also interrogate one another as they start to become more aware of commonalities and differences in their interpretations and perspectives. Finally, they report the stories that evolve during the conversations as well as the meaning they gradually derive from these conversations. This document outlines how researchers may be able to apply this methodology.

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| **Aims of duo-ethnography** |

Researchers conduct duo-ethnography to achieve a range of objectives. The following table outlines these aims as well as how duo-ethnography achieves these aims.

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| Aim | Benefit of duo-ethnography |
| The researchers want to learn about their own lives—to derive meaning from their experiences in a specific facet of their lives | * The other person will offer perspectives that challenge their own assumption * The other person will relate experiences that might prompt memories these researchers had overlooked * As they converse about their perspectives with the other person and convey their stories, they start to reframe their experiences and contemplate these experiences more deeply and authentically |
| The researchers want to convey beliefs and experiences that deviate from the dominant, entrenched perspectives; they want to demonstrate the diversity of events and perspectives across society, questioning mainstream assumptions | * As the researchers compare their experiences with one another, they become more aware of how their background may have shaped their beliefs and perceptions—demonstrating the diversity of experiences * Duo-ethnography is thus designed to uncover alternative perspectives rather than pursue a single theory or description of some issue * The conversations precede the literature review; therefore, the dominant perspectives that pervade literature reviews are not as likely to bias or limit these conversations |
| The researchers want to understand a relevant socio-cultural issue to a greater extent | * As they gain trust with one another, the conversations enable the researchers to explore some issues honestly and candidly. |
| The researchers want to extend the insights and perspectives of readers | * Duo-ethnography is designed to inspire readers to recall similar events and experiences in their lives—and to reframe and reconsider the meaning or implications of these events and experiences * Readers thus immerse themselves in the report actively rather than read passivelys |

**When to apply duo-ethnography**

Duo-ethnography is suitable whenever you want to achieve these aims with another researcher—another researcher who likes to discuss and explore an overlapping issue or problem. Nevertheless

* you need to feel secure enough to disclose your perceptions and perspectives honestly
* you need to feel secure enough to permit someone else to challenge these perceptions and perspectives

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| **How to apply duo-ethnography** |

To apply duo-ethnography, every pair of researchers applies a distinct set of practices. And these practices evolve, somewhat unpredictably, over time. Nevertheless, some commonalities have gradually emerged, as the following table outlines (for an excellent summary, see Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012).

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| Practice | Details |
| Choose a suitable research partner to conduct duo-ethnography | * Often, you may discover that you naturally and frequently converse with another researcher about an interest you both share—such as the barriers in academia or the challenges of counselling violent people. * You might then decide that a duo-ethnography is a suitable approach to extend, record, and publish these conversations * This approach is especially appropriate if you discover that you share many perceptions or attitudes on this topic—but also diverge quite frequently as well   Variations   * Duo-ethnography does not have to be confined to two researchers—but is occasionally extended to three or more researchers * Indeed, some researchers have conducted a duo-ethnography by themselves, in which they contemplate some issue from two distinct roles, perspectives, or identities—such as the role of manager and subordinate |
| Generate stories | * As you converse with the other researcher, you will often elicit memories of relevant stories; that is, the data—the narratives and perspectives about this matter—will be unveiled naturally, usually while speaking in person, online, or over the telephone * You would usually agree to record the audio, and perhaps the video, of these conversations as well as transcribe these conversations too * Nevertheless, you might sometimes set aside specific times to converse about this topic * You might even send each other emails about your relevant memories, to evoke memories in the other person * However, the stories might emerge somewhat haphazardly as well. When you write about these stories later, you can organize these narratives in a more logical fashion, such as thematically or chronologically. |
| Collate artefacts | * Besides the conversations, you might also collate other artefacts that are relevant to this topic—such as photos, yearbooks, assignments, speeches, relevant songs, and diary entries. * You might utilize these artefacts to elicit relevant memories * Or you might include photos of these artefacts in the report, to illustrate particular experiences |
| Integrate the literature | * The literature review about this topic should not precede the conversations; otherwise, the dominant culture may skew the researchers * But, occasionally, conversations might spark a motivation to review the literature about some topic * This literature can be included in the report as well |
| Structure the stories | When you write a report, you need to convert these data—conversations, insights about the conversations, and artefacts—into a compelling narrative. To achieve this goal, you should apply several principles  **Order of data**   * You should arrange the data logically. * Perhaps you might classify the data into themes—and then report each theme in sequence. * For example, if writing about counselling violent people, the themes might include guilt about compassion towards client, guilt about anger towards client, a sense of futility, and so forth * Or, you might arrange the data chronologically, from events that happened many years ago to more recent events   **Presentation of data**   * Often, the report will begin with an introduction, in which the issue or problem is outlined, often with reference to literature * Next, the report may comprise 5 to 10 sections, each corresponding to one theme or issue * Each section might begin with a couple of paragraphs that outline the theme—such as the perspectives you both shared as well as the key differences. These sentences will often use the word “we”, such as “We both felt that…” * Then, you might present a transcript or excerpt of a relevant conversation, sometimes accompanied by photos * The stories of both researchers should be represented to a similar extent; no one person should be dominant |
| Maintain some transparency | * Some researchers maintain an audit trail to substantiate their data * They may, for example, include links to webpages that store their stories, transcripts, and detailed discussions of the content, called excursuses |

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| **The rationale that underpins duo-ethnography** |

**History of duo-ethnography**

Thus far, this document has merely outlined the main aims and practises of duo-ethnography. But, to appreciate duo-ethnography, you need to understand the principles that underpin and guide this approach. Some insight into how this methodology evolved could help you appreciate these principles. For example

* After a school performance, one of the pioneers of this approach, Joe Norris, discovered that audience members did not only speak about the play—but how the play elicited memories of their own lives
* This insight partly motivated the development of a methodology that elicits memories in readers and helps readers interpret and reframe these memories

Other philosophical writings then shaped the development of duo-ethnography. One of the most relevant is the work of Pinar on “currere”. This word implies that life is like a curriculum in that individuals gradually acquire skills, knowledge, and beliefs over time, usually haphazardly. They also contemplate how they developed. That is, they attempt to unpack the trajectory of their lives—to understand the motivations, events, and circumstances that shaped their development. This journey comprises four stages

* regressive: they reminisce about the past
* progressive: they contemplate the qualities they could develop, or events they could experience, in the future
* analytic: they examine their life now—the present
* synthesis; they derive meaning from this present

In duo-ethnography, the other person helps the individual undertake these phases, interrogate themselves, and derive this meaning to understand, or even change, who they are.

**Other principles**

Besides currere, several other principles inspired or underpin duo-ethnography. The following table outlines these principles (for more details, see Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012).).

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| Practice | Details |
| Polyvocal | * Most reports, even when published by several authors, attempt to develop a unified narrative—as if written by one person with one perspective * In contrast, duo-ethnographies convey the perspective of each researcher separately, underscoring the commonalities and differences * Nevertheless, the report will include some joint narratives, in which the two individuals are not distinguished |
| Disruption of meta-narratives | * These multiple voices are utilized to challenge the notion of a meta-narrative—the notion that some phenomenon can be reduced to a unified theory or perspective * The differences between the researchers are celebrated rather than trivialized * In this sense, duo-ethnography, like auto-ethnography, is a post-modern approach—rather than constructivist. Nature is perceived as dependent on culture, comprising contradictory and changing features. |
| Liberation of the self from the self | * The researchers are inspired to refrain from the temptation to label or reduce themselves to simple descriptions, such as “I am shy” * Instead, the researcher explores different ways of conceptualizing themselves—releasing themselves from limited depictions of who they are * With the assistance of the other person, they liberate themselves from themselves, becoming aware of other facets of who they are |
| Quality is derived from the rigour of the collaborative inquiry | * Researchers who adopt this approach do not seek universal or stable truths * Hence, the quality of research does not revolve around the degree to which the insights are true * Instead, quality reflects the degree to which the researchers interrogate, reframe, and reconsider their perspectives. |
| Trust must evolve over time | * The researchers must develop enough trust to reveal themselves candidly * That is, they need to feel they can disclose their perceptions and interpretations, despite their knowledge the other person will interrogate these perspectives |
| Thick description (Geertz, 1973) | * A thick description is a depiction of the data that do not only refer to superficial behaviors but also represent the circumstances or context of these behaviors. The meanings of these behaviors are thus more likely to be appreciated * Duo-ethnography imparts thick description because the narratives are connected to vivid stories |
| Writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2008) | * Writing as a method of inquiry is a principle that implies that researchers learn as they write—an assumption that proponents of duo-ethnography tend to adopt |

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