Memoirs

In: The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods

By: Robin M. Boylorn
Edited by: Lisa M. Given
Book Title: The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods
Chapter Title: "Memoirs"
Pub. Date: 2012
Access Date: April 16, 2020
City: Thousand Oaks
Print ISBN: 9781412941631
Online ISBN: 9781412963909
DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909
Print page: 505

© 2008 SAGE Publications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
This PDF has been generated from SAGE Research Methods. Please note that the pagination of the online version will vary from the pagination of the print book.
Memoirs, or life stories, are collections of significant or memorable events in one's life that are captured in narrative form. The researcher or author is the main character of a chronological or fragmented story that highlights significant or memorable events during the research or author's personal experience in the field. Memoirs are based on a compilation of information gathered during the process of discovery and the process of writing. These stories can be written from fieldnotes, journals, taped interviews, transcripts, and memory.

Memoirs hold collaborative potential as a research tool because they represent the researcher's knowledge and understanding of a particular subject matter; they can also be used as research material. Some researchers have relied on memoirs to serve as data for projects and opportunities to get an insider view of the field they are studying.

Writers make themselves vulnerable by reflecting on their experiences in the field, reflections that include uncomfortable situations and potential biases they may have had prior to the study, exposing themselves as a participant in their own research endeavor. The negotiation of the writer's positionality becomes a part of the story being told and details that would not be included in the final research report are detailed in the memoir of the research experience. Memoirs require authors to name their experiences, identify commonalities, and make personal judgments, giving the reader the insight of the researcher's point of view and the benefit of his or her experience. Memoirs reflect research scenarios, techniques, and potential outcomes that prepare researchers for the field experience and the postfield experience.

Memoirs require writers to have the capacity to write evocatively with amazing detail and description, merging the immediacy of their experience with the intellectual jargon of their field. As a research method and approach, memoir writing can be beneficial and therapeutic for the writer, but some of the limitations of the method include the focus on a single experience and interpretation of an experience that might lead to overgeneralization or dismissal of other experiences.

---

“**I Offered My Heart**: Excerpt from a Memoir

If and when I fall in love, she never promised it would last, only laughed at the possibility, pretending to know how pitiful and desperate I would become, how sprung and wide open I would be. My mother envisioned an attractive man with a ridiculous name. She warned me to guard my heart and not wear it on my sleeve. Importantly, I must learn how to dress for church, how to wear a slip, how to put on stockings. Defiantly, at eighteen I stopped wearing slips, and was undoubtedly labeled a hussy when a staring eye could detect my pantyline. My heart, because it didn't understand the logic of caution, was unguarded, unprotected from the honey smooth lines of a pretty man. Needy for the love and affection I could only get from a man, I offered my heart as a token of my affection, and usually had
it returned, broken.


Another concern for memoir writers is that the story has the capacity to implicate identifiable characters in the life of the author. In order to protect the integrity and anonymity of characters, these stories occasionally include some fictional elements and pseudonyms.

Though the story focuses on a specific event or a turning point, it also tells the overall story of a life over time, including predictable everyday life occurrences. Memoirs are somewhat one-sided because even though they may consider and mention alternative perspectives, the voice, truth, and ideology of the author is privileged. Memoir-style writing is used in qualitative approaches such as autoethnography, reflexive ethnography, and narrative inquiry.

Robin M. Boylorn

http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n259

See also

- Autobiography
- Autoethnography
- Creative Writing
- Diaries and Journals
- Everyday Life
- First-Person Voice
- Life Stories
- Lived Experience
- Reflexivity
- Storytelling
- Writing Process

Further Readings


Goodall, H. L.(2000). Writing the new ethnography.Lanham, MD: AltaMira.