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| Guidance Document | Self-Reflective Research |
| Effective Review | HREB - Delegated & Full Board |
| Version | 001 |
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1.0 PURPOSE

The purpose of this guideline is to provide researchers with information on the ethical implications and requirements related to autoethnographic research.

2.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

Researchers, REB members and REB Office Personnel are responsible for ensuring that the requirements of this SOP are met.

3.0 DEFINITIONS

See Glossary of Terms

4.0 BACKGROUND

Self-reflective research methods such as self-study or autoethnography involve methods where the researcher serves as both investigator and participant. In this approach, researchers expand knowledge by reflecting on their personal experiences and using these insights to inform our understanding of the world.

Research, as defined in the Policy, and involving human participants falls within the scope of TCPS, and requires REB review (Application of [Article 2.1](#)). The Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2) mandates ethics review for all research involving human participants, including autoethnography, even when the researcher is the sole participant (p.13). Self-reflective research typically involves a scholarly reflection on one's own experiences in a particular context. It may involve narratives, reflections and/or analyses of experiences based on the researcher's observations of, interactions with, or information about other individuals or communities. In this type of research, at a minimum, the researcher is a research participant ([TCPS2 | Interpretations | Scope #10](#)).

Importantly, individuals who feature in the researcher's reflective experiences and provide data essential to addressing the research question are considered human participants for Research Ethics Board (REB) purposes. These individuals should be afforded the same rights outlined in the TCPS 2 as all human participants. Specifically, they should 1) Have their rights as participants respected; 2) Be treated fairly and equitably; and 3) Have their welfare and concerns taken seriously

5.0 KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The Panel on Research Ethics has clarified key ethics issues REBs should consider in self-reflective research activities such as autoethnography and self-study ([TCPS2 | Interpretations | REB review #13](#)). The primacy of REB review is to assess the ethical acceptability of the research

by considering its foreseeable risks, its potential benefits, and the ethical implications. REBs should assess the level of risk that the researcher is willing to assume to themselves.

5.1 Privacy and Confidentiality

In addition to these guidelines, self-reflective research activities present two unique challenges that researchers must consider: (i) protecting one's own privacy and confidentiality, and (ii) protecting the confidentiality and privacy of non-active participants.

5.1.1 Privacy and Confidentiality of the Researcher

Given that in self-reflective research projects, researchers are also participants, researchers must take special care to ensure that they are aware of all of the potential risks related to their own participation. Often, individuals find it more difficult to objectively assess the risks involved in their own participation when compared to assessing risks involved in others' participation. For many, this is because the dual nature of the researcher's participation as both researcher and participant blurs the line and makes it difficult to fully appreciate the risks involved in their own participation.

Researchers should be mindful of the possible negative consequences that may arise as a result of conducting self-reflective research. For example, once researchers reveal their experiences, their data may become irretrievable depending on their dissemination and data retention plans. Thus, it is important for researchers to think carefully about not disclosing things about themselves that they would not want others to know. This typically includes embarrassing items, intimate information, and stories that may have legal and/or professional implications. In cases where researchers wish to reveal sensitive information about themselves, they should consider implementing safeguards to protect their own confidentiality (e.g., publishing the document using a pseudonym, incorporating pseudonyms for all participants, changing the names of towns, schools, and so on).

5.1.2 Privacy and Confidentiality of Non-Active Participants

Some self-reflective research may also involve others with whom the researcher interacts or studies. The level of involvement of others in the research determines whether they are also research participants as defined in the Policy (Application of [Article 2.1](#)). The same precautions that researchers take toward privacy and confidentiality typically applies to protecting the privacy and confidentiality of those participants that feature in the narrative. Researchers should not disclose things about other participants in their self-reflective project that one would not reasonably want others to know.

If the REB determines that others are involved as research participants, the REB must assess how the researcher plans to manage the consent process. In general, researchers must seek participants' consent to participate in the self-reflective research.

In some exceptional circumstances, the researcher may request an alteration to consent requirements if they satisfy the REB that the provisions of [Article 3.7A](#) are met. In general, if the material on which the research is based (e.g., journal entries, recollections) was not originally intended for research, but is later proposed for research purposes, then the consent of the individual(s) and/or communities involved, if any, must be sought.

As with any research that poses risks of identification, the researcher and the REB should work together to minimize and/or manage these risks to individuals and communities who are mentioned in the self reflective research (e.g., remove identifiable information, disguise names and identities).

Note: Researchers conducting autoethnographic projects in small groups or communities need to be mindful of the fact that it may be especially easy to identify individuals in their projects, even if no identifying information is presented about the individuals. In such cases, special safeguards must be implemented by the researcher.

5.2 Consent

5.2.1 Ongoing Consent

Researcher's conducting self-reflective research must obtain consent from all participants, including those featured in the researcher's autobiographical experiences but not actively involved in research activities. Researchers must adhere to the guidelines in Chapter 3 of the TCPS 2 on Consent. The consent process in this context typically involves two steps:

Step 1: Initial Consent

Researchers must obtain initial consent from all participants before any data collection begins, including drafting. Retroactive consent is unacceptable.

Step 2: Ongoing Consent

Given the evolving nature of autoethnographic research, researchers should:

- (i) Provide opportunities for participants to reaffirm consent regarding major changes in how they are featured.
- (ii) Allow participants to reaffirm consent once a final draft is completed, before dissemination.

These steps are crucial to respect participants' autonomy, especially since their information is being used without active disclosure.

5.2.2 Unforeseen Participants

If researchers identify new participants during the research process, they must:

- (i) Notify the REB immediately at hreb@mtroyal.ca
- (ii) Suspend all research-related activities

The REB will advise on how to proceed. Using data from individuals who have not consented is considered research misconduct.

5.2.3 Tacit Consent

Researchers conducting self-reflective research studies do not need explicit consent for their own participation. Their consent is tacitly implied by their decision to conduct the research. However, researchers must demonstrate to the REB their awareness of what their participation entails, including potential benefits, dissemination plans, privacy safeguards,

and potential risks. If a second member is involved in the research (such as duo ethnography), then the researchers must demonstrate to the REB the additional members awareness of what their participation entails

5.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We gratefully acknowledge that this document has been adapted from the TMU Guidelines for Conducting Autoethnographic Research with permission.

6.0 REFERENCES

Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, December 2022

Panel on Research Ethics. (2025). TCPS Interpretations. Retrieved February 28, 2025, from https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique_interpretations.html

Toronto Metropolitan University. (2017). Guidelines for Conducting Autoethnographic Research. Retrieved February 28, 2025, from <https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/research/documents/ethics/guidelines-for-conducting-autoethnographic-research.pdf>

6.0 REVISION HISTORY

| Version | Effective Date | Summary of Changes |
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