

Handing IRB an Unloaded Gun* **

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*Indicates a fictional name.

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Abstract: This performance autoethnography is a reflexive account of how my autoethnographic manuscript entitled “An Unloaded Gun: Negotiating the Boundaries of Identity, Incest, and Student/Teacher Relationships,” was accepted for publication at *Deviant Behavior* and then blocked by the IRB at the University of Memphis. The overt reasons for the “denial of approval” differ greatly from accounts of reasons given behind closed doors. By weaving layers of my experience, excerpts from my manuscript, and the responses of others, into a narrative, I create an ongoing performance ethnography which resists the “tacit norm of silence” regarding discussions of incest and student/teacher attraction. In addition, by framing autoethnography as a breach of the academic norms regarding scientific inquiry, I can start to make sense of how IRB as a committee of individuals used the resources at hand such as the existing conservative religious/political context, their individual identities, the formal roles they were being asked to enact, and the written rules they had before them, to co-construct a narrative which rendered my manuscript un-publishable.

Handing IRB an Unloaded Gun

A rag-doll floats buffeted by the ocean currents, her mouth sewn up, her limbs bound.

* * *

A woman sits curled up on her side in the corner of a padded cell, her arms bound around her body by a straight jacket. Duct tape slashes an X across her face where her mouth used to be.

* * *

According to Chilean mythology, the Imbunche (pronounced eem-boon-chai) is a mythical “creature whose bodily orifices have been sewn shut to prevent suspected evil from expressing itself. The creature, ironically, became known for its great prophecies after being silenced.” (<http://www.atmenmagazine.com/thetiethatbind.htm>). In other Latin American versions of the myth, an imbunche is a baby, in a fetal position, bound up in rope (http://www.robertsonstudio.com/pages_art/art3.html).

Imbunchar is the ritual ceremony whereby priests or male witches (brujos) steal newborns and bind them up or, in other versions, break or amputate body parts to somehow mark the future of the child. Tortured, with all of their orifices sealed up, these children are raised in a cave with no contact with the outside world. My manuscript, “An Unloaded Gun: Negotiating the Boundaries of Identity, Incest, And Student/Teacher Relationships,” has been subjected to imbunchar. It has been bound up and silenced because the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Memphis ruled that it was unethical to publish it. It is my fear that my imbunche and others are silently prophesizing a future that faces autoethnography.

* * *

On Saturday, July 07, 2003, at 10:16 AM, Carolyn Ellis wrote:

Dear Carol,

We are up in the mountains of NC where we are building a summer home . . . Let me give you my initial impression after a quick reading...and then from Tampa perhaps we can talk . . . I think this is so frightening because it is written about the Carol now, not the Carol so much of the past . . . Plus you are dealing with teacher/student stuff, which is sticky. And some might even see you--as you question yourself--in the role of potential abuser. You step into the role of his mother. So it is "risky business."

No doubt we've all had feelings for students . . . so you tap into that. And you tap into the multiple realities of the stories we tell ourselves and live out...Of course many don't want to acknowledge or even be aware of those multiple stories so you make them very uncomfortable.

And you show very well how abuse lingers for people and continues to affect their lives, sometimes most of all when they seem to be doing fine. . . Plus you take us into things like thinking about suicide and the reality of breakdowns....Whew...a lot and very powerful.

The question is how much to tell and to whom. I think we need to talk about that probably on the phone or face to face . . . I don't have the answers . . . but they usually come in interaction.

* * *

On Saturday, October 18, 2003, at 05:52 PM, Carol Rambo wrote:

Elizabeth,

The article is a 50ish page monster (attached) about how I fell apart when I got tenure. I don't know if you know my work using my experience with incest and having a mentally retarded mother or not, but that is my background. The article in question sort of documents my falling apart and almost (ALMOST) sort of, kind of, having an affair with a male student. It has been accepted at Deviant Behavior, with revisions. My chair has decided he needs to read it this weekend and he will get back to me. He is clearly scared.

. . It is my hope to illustrate how sexual harassment happens for some and to cultivate compassion for harassers and understand them as people with undealt with issues, who use their mentor role to try and get their needs met. There needs to be a mechanism to teach graduate student academics

that their issues will come up in the mentoring role and that they are responsible to share their thoughts and feelings with colleagues so that they will not act on them. Likewise the academy needs to own that sexual attraction is natural and should not stigmatize a colleague who comes forward wanting help to do the right thing.

* * *

On Saturday, October 19, 2003, at 05:52 PM, Elizabeth Wood wrote:

Carol,

. . I can't imagine your losing your job over this. I "can" understand how bureaucrats (like those who appear in the story after the Judicial business breaks open) would be fretting and worried. But so much of that is unnecessary. If they run the place, sure, your job is in jeopardy, but if the people who run the place have at least an ounce of sense, in terms of protecting academic freedom, speech, or even furthering human knowledge, they will see that there is so much more to be gained from this work and other work like it that they will have to stand aside and let the thing be released into the world . . .

. . The greatest value in this piece for an academic audience, it seems to me, is the opportunity to begin recognizing themselves and their colleagues... You have a long section at the end, spoken by the old avuncular man, that acknowledges how "un-unique" parts of this story are. That seems to me to be important enough to place at the beginning if you are going to draw readers in. (My fear, obviously, is that unsympathetic readers will immediately be turned off by the degree of openness, honesty, and rawness of the personal trauma to which you and Eric both give witness).

. . I think the title is wrong. This is a very loaded gun. I understand the reference to the unloaded gun in the narrative, but the subtitle refers to issues which are all loaded guns. Perhaps what your work is trying to do is to "unload" those guns?

* * *

I grip the cool lubricated metal of the Ruger's gun barrel with my lips, not wanting to let it touch my tongue. The smell wafts up the back of my throat as I inhale, filling my nasal cavities with its oily pungency. I taste it anyway as I exhale the air over my tongue and turn the gun over in my mouth. With the gun upside down, I stare at both of my index fingers on the trigger and realize that to do the job right and not blow a hole in the back of my throat and neck, the tip will need to be situated up against the

curve of the roof of my mouth. I slide the tip to the apex of the curve to get it just right. If I meant business, if I had guts, this gun would be loaded. I'm just playing.

Part of me says, "Get it loaded, then put it in your mouth! See what it feels like."

I answer this part, sensibly, "I don't really want to do this. I'm just experimenting with the feeling, sort of forcing myself to shit or get off the pot."

"You need a loaded gun," I insist. I eye the clip, spring-loaded with only nine bullets. My fingers are too raw from loading it to fit the last one in. My pulse pounds in my skull. My eyelids are pasted open against my eye sockets. Everything is accelerated and hyper-real. The bathroom light glares painfully as it bounces off the porcelain and chrome. The floor tiles are hard and cold against my body, and I smell water. The sensible part, the one who is not goading me on, wonders, "Is this how it goes with some suicides, is this the doorway? Do they answer that voice and keep upping the ante and just do it? But I'm okay, just experimenting so that maybe I'll stop thinking about killing myself all the time. Maybe I can see once and for all I don't really want to do it."

The other voice, dissatisfied with my lack of courage, says, "But you don't know anymore than you knew before, doing it this way. You need bullets in the gun to really get it," (Rambo, unpublished manuscript, 2003).

* * *

"I'm going to give it to you straight and be blunt. This manuscript should never see the light of day-- ever. If it were mine, I'd bury it under the nearest rock—deep." The departmental chair stabs the manuscript repeatedly with an index finger.

And later, "Think of it as a catharsis, you've written it, now just put it aside and move on."

And later still, "If this were widely circulated it might harm your career, you might endanger your chances for promotion to full professor."

"Are you saying I should be ashamed?"

"No. But I do think it's an experience peculiar to you. There's no reason to write about this, nothing generalizable. No benefit to any one."

"Really? You didn't connect with anything you read at all?"

The head shakes no across the table from me.

“You act as if sexual harassment were running rampant through the institution.”

“You don’t think so?”

The head shakes no, again, “Not the way you make it sound.”

“But we’ve had three in our own . . .”

I am cut off with force, “Yes, but I took care of that.”

We reminisce a minute about one situation we both were involved in “taking care of.”

“Anyway, I can only advise you, I can’t prevent you from publishing it.

However, I think your manuscript needs to go by IRB, first. The way you portrayed, what did you call him, Eric, in the manuscript, is not very flattering.”

* * *

----- Original Message -----

From: "Carol Rambo" crambo@midssouth.rr.com

Subject: IRB

I have read the website carefully. On page 12 in guidelines <http://www.people.memphis.edu/~irb/guidelines.doc>, I'd like to call your attention to their definition of Research. I did not gather and analyze information in a systematic way. Mine is autoethnography. My article is not an IRB concern because it is not research by their definition. "Eric," is not a human subject that I systematically did something with.

* * *

----- Original Message -----

Subject: IRB

Hello Carol:

I respectfully disagree with you. Strongly so. I think you will have a hard time convincing a review board that an article centering on a human subject and written for an academic journal that is peer reviewed is not research. What is it, if not research? Of course, the ultimate word on all of this is the IRB, not me. But I strongly urge you to bring

this whole matter to their attention prior to disseminating your work through a publication, conference, or other means. It is a serious matter.

...Carol, in my view this is not even close. And even if it were, I don't think it is good for your career (although this would be your choice), I think it poses possible harm to the other subject in the article (and maybe to others), and it reopens an unfortunate chapter in the department's history -- one that I hope has been put behind us. Please put the whole situation before IRB.

* * *

A dirty, brown-haired, four-year-old girl shuffles into a spotlight; wearing grownup spiked-heeled pumps, dressed as a princess. The tattered and filthy back of her powder blue, oversized, silk dress rests bunched up in the vacant space inside her pumps, behind her heels, draped in a u-shape between the two shoes. Her hair is matted; her face is snot-smearred, tear-stained, and dirty. Her lower lip protrudes; her jaw thrusts outward. In a defiant little girl voice, she delivers the following soliloquy:

Don't laugh at me. If you did not go through something like this, sometimes I hate you. I hate your innocence. I hate that you got to have a time in your life when you didn't know what sex was. I hate you for letting them beat me, for not rescuing me. I hate you for letting me think I had to keep this to myself or no one would love me. I hurt so bad I resent your peace, your light-heartedness, and your ability to experience joy. I'm so jealous of you I could rip your face off the front of your skull. I fucking hate you.

And I wished you loved me. I desperately crave for you to love me. I'll do anything for you. Please, dear God, can you just love me? I'll behave, clean up, and wash dishes. I'll say "please" and "thank you." I'll compliment you on how you look and how wonderful you are. I'll walk around on eggshells constantly so as not to offend you. Please just love me. I am a disaster inside but I won't trouble you with it. I won't say anything. If you just loved me, it would all clear up. Honest.

And then I'll hate you. Hate you for not letting me show you who I really am, hate you for making me feel scared that I'll lose the love I have from you, hate you for loving only the fake eggshell-walking image of me I present to you. You force me to splinter into more than one self, the one I feel safe to show you, and another who lives in the dark.

Love is a lie; faith in goodness a sucker bet. They will fuck me, fuck me, fuck me all they can until I just wake my sorry ass up and stop having hope that anything will be different. Hope is a bitch. Hope should be strung up and eviscerated. My worst pain has emerged out of hope, dashed. Hope of rescue, hope of food, hope of a nice place to live, hope they won't hit me, hope that I can finally be a nice, normal little girl, hope that this meaningless existence will finally be meaningful. Fuck hope.

I live under siege and can't stop being this way. And if you listen to me, you can help me. If you can "not" judge me and show me how to accept myself as I am, all of me will have the freedom to step out into this light where I can be seen, and heal. And if you have felt any of this yourself, as you accept me, you can accept yourself, and the rest of the world. Nothing else really matters. Little girls and little boys are hurting all over the world. These are the effects of trauma. You are hurt by this too.

The little girl turns away and exits the harsh spotlight, the heels of her shoes clacking across the floor, flapping against the bottoms of her feet, the fabric of her dress rustling into the darkness. Silence fills the space when the clacking, flapping, and rustling subside, only to be interrupted from time to time by infrequent sniffing, (Rambo, unpublished manuscript, 2003).

* * *

Imbunchar

* * *

I am not offered a chair; there is none. I sit on the floor in the hall, outside the conference room, in a black jacket, skirt, hose, and heels, waiting my turn. A loud male voice booms, "Rambo? Rambo? Good God, what a name for this one." After mild laughter and a moment, the door opens and the committee asks me in.

* * *

"Why did you show it to your chair?"

"I'd have never put it by IRB."

“I would never, ever have submitted it to the department chair for inspection; nor should it have gone to the IRB.”

“You should have just done it and asked for forgiveness later.”

* * *

I should assume I have to be secretive regarding my manuscripts. I should have published it “stealthily.” This attitude promotes openness, honesty, and nonjudgmental acceptance regarding my topic.

* * *

Because of my breakdown, I had not published anything since 2000. In 2003, I was desperate to tell my chair that, at last, I had landed one. At first, he was pleased. Three days later, he told me he was worried about the topic and insisted on reading the manuscript.

* * *

The University of Memphis

Institutional Review Board

To: Carol Rambo
Sociology

From: Chair, Institutional Review Board
For the protection of Human Subjects

Subject: An Unloaded Gun: Negotiating the Boundaries of Identity, Incest,
And Student/Teacher Relationships (H04-34)

Date: November 13, 2003

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects reviewed the above referenced project on November 13, 2003, and has denied approval.

Our concerns relate to the subject other than yourself described in the application. Since the student is also a survivor of incest and, as a result is most likely psychologically

fragile, the board felt that the psychological risk to him should he discover the publication of the study is far too serious and outweighs whatever benefits may accrue from this study. We understand that the likelihood of his seeing this study is remote, however, even though that probability is small, the risk is enormous. Similarly, we would not approve of trying to obtain informed consent from the student for the same reasons.

Your description of the student as unstable, combined with being a survivor of incest, and the fact that you were in a student/teacher relationship with him simply precludes any consideration of informed consent or publication.

* * *

Sorrow floats.

* * *

----- Original Message -----

Subject: Dead in the water

That is too bad. I am sorry. I think it could have made a great contribution beyond even the content; having to do with the style of paper it represents. This morning I was talking to someone about your paper and they commented on how it fit into an emerging trend that merges personal experience or perspective with theory. I have seen several attempts at it but yours was the "most well done." Don't know what to tell you except that I'm sorry and DEVIANT BEHAVIOR'S offer is still there. I do not understand why he cannot give his consent; victims of trauma testify in court, write books, appear on television!!!! There is no question that adults have this right-IF THAT IS THE ONLY ISSUE?

Craig

* * *

I sit awkwardly at the table next to Stanley*, sipping a glass of Merlot. Stanley finally says, "I'm so sorry it worked out this way but there's more to it than you realize.

You really need to talk to Fred*. Get with Fred, we take him seriously, he sits on that

*Fictional name.

board for a reason. And we were worried about you, your physical safety. You don't understand what was at stake. We did it to protect you.”

* * *

----- Original Message -----

Date: 04/04/04

Below is an excerpt from the minutes of the January IRB meeting. Please accept my apologies for not getting this to you in a timely manner.

Susie Hayes

* * * * *

- Chair distributed copy of an email received from Dr. Rambo asking if it would be okay to publish her article if she did not include her name or the name of the University. The board decided that if the article is published in a scholarly journal and counts as a research publication, then she may not do it. *Motion was made and seconded that publishing this article as research is unethical and to not approve. Motion passed.*

* * *

Carol: I am sorry to get back to you so slowly.... I did look your manuscript over at the time and concurred with the committee. I would be glad to talk to you about how you might camouflage it, but as it stands now you would be putting yourself in harms way.
-Fred-

* * *

“You’re so full of piss and vinegar, I used to be too, when I was younger, but it’s all different now. Too much at stake.”

“That’s not going to fly here at the University of Memphis, maybe at Berkley, or somewhere else in California, or New York, but not here. Memphis is the buckle of the Bible belt.”

“Oh God, don’t tell me you still believe in integrity and ‘being open?’ [Laughter].

I don’t know how old you are or how long you’ve been here, but you better wake up,

smell the coffee, and figure out how things really work around here. How long do you figure you can stay this naïve?”

“I don’t give a tanker’s damn . . .you know, I bet I’ll regret saying this later, but I’ll say it anyway. I don’t give a tanker’s damn about your human subject. This is all about liability. The University doesn’t like lawsuits or anything that could tarnish its image.”

“It’s nice to have a crusade, but do you want to be a martyr for this? I don’t, and you should ask yourself exactly why you would be willing to risk your job. That’s right, your job. You need to look deeply at this; there’s some questions you need to ask yourself about why you want to publish this so badly, why you are so invested in this.”

“Don’t think I’m willing to stick my neck out for you. I can’t support you; can’t take a stance. Had my own troubles round here and just one more thing, just one, and I’m history.”

“I’ve been accused of sexual harassment twice, myself. They both lied, trying to blackmail me for a better grade. One was very uptight, a religious conservative, and she took things out of context . . .”

“No one gives a god damn about the truth, it’s about liability.”

“You can’t publish that manuscript anywhere. I don’t care if you submit it to Vogue, Cosmopolitan, Ladies Home Journal, Soldier of Fortune, or Field and Stream, you can’t publish that anywhere.”

“If I thought bitch slapping you would bring you to your senses, I’d do it.”

* * *

I scribble rapidly across my clipboard as Fred makes his remarks. I say, "I know a couple of scholars, Norm Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, who are collecting stories about these sorts of IRB decisions."

"Oh that'd be just great, really great."

* * *

-----Original Message-----

From: Carol Rambo [mailto:crambo@midsouth.rr.com]

Sent: Tuesday, May 25, 2004 11:38 PM

To: OHRP

Subject: Appeals process

To the Office of Human Research Protections:

I wrote a manuscript about an experience I had with a student which was accepted for publication in a scholarly journal. At the last minute, my chair thought it needed to go before our IRB. My IRB reviewed it and determined I could not publish the manuscript. I had to pull it from publication. Many people believe my IRB has misinterpreted what should happen with my manuscript. Some believe that because it is autoethnography and I did nothing systematic with a subject, it should never have been submitted for IRB approval. Where do I get information regarding:

1. An appeals process, if, for instance, I think my IRB has made an honest error in their evaluation of my research.
2. Can I publish my article in a non-research oriented venue if my IRB has turned it down? One member told me in a private conversation it meant I could not publish it anywhere? Is he correct?

Sincerely,

Carol Rambo, Ph.D.
Associate Professor

-----Original Message-----

From: Elyse I. Summers, J.D. [mailto:ESummers@OSOPHS.DHHS.GOV]

Sent: June 3, 2004 9:55 AM

To: Carol Rambo

Subject: Appeals process

Dr. Rambo:

The issues you have identified appear to be largely between you and your institution.

That said, from what you have described it sounds as if it is possible that the activities in which you engaged did *not* constitute research involving a human subject if it did not involve "a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. Activities which meet this definition constitute research for purposes of this policy, whether or not they are conducted or supported under a program which is considered research for other purposes. For example, some demonstration and service programs may include research activities." 45 CFR 46.102(e).

As you have identified, for your purposes, the key determinations will turn on the interpretation of the terms "systematic" and "*designed to contribute to generalizable knowledge*" (emphasis added).

However, OHRP acknowledges that the regulations at 45 CFR 46 provide a floor, not a ceiling, in terms of human subject protection; it is within your institution's authority to provide any additional restrictions in this area that it sees fit.

I hope this is helpful.

* * *

Colleague after colleague tells me, "You need a lawyer."

* * *

Oh God! I can't breathe.

* * *

Mother keens over her dead baby's body.

Sorrow floats,
dead in the water,
silent.

My Imbunche.

* * *

"Don't tell me to fucking shut up."

Something fleeting darts in and out of my consciousness.

"Fuck keening over dead babies' bodies." Shadow, my dark companion in the unpublished manuscript, demands attention. A dark ninja ballerina dances the dance of a

whirling dervish, breathless, ecstaticly angry, seeking revenge. I almost see her, almost grip her firmly to control her, but she slips away.

* * *

My colleague tells me I am naïve; that I need to be bitch slapped; that I am something to be laughed at because my name is Rambo and because I want to engage in open dialogue regarding how we can find ourselves in compromising situations with our students. I defy you old man. Just because you have given up hope, just because you are so jaded by certain institutional realities that you laugh at integrity, it does not give you the right to be abusive. I hope your heart can handle this.

* * *

Am I a fool to care about integrity?

* * *

I am so frustrated and hurt I don't give a rat's ass about integrity anymore.

* * *

I care deeply about integrity; that is why I am writing this story.

* * *

Lets talk hypothetically here. Lets just say someone already had the manuscript and decided they wanted to assign it to his or her class. How could I control what he or she chose to do with it?

* * *

The article was intense. The way it was written at some points made me as a reader feel uneasy for her. Like when I'm watching a movie and know something is going to happen so I can't quite look directly at the screen, but rather from the corner of my eyes so as not to make direct eye contact.

* * *

The courage I felt it took to write the piece gave me the nerve to write about my shadow and share it with others. Additionally, it gave me strength against the fear of what others may think of what I write. It inspired me to look inward and not be ashamed to write about what I saw. Secondly, the article made the life of a professor seem more "real." This article conveys that professors are not perfect, have real life problems, and pasts that will intertwine with their profession. Not only does this make me feel more normal as I move through grad school and my first experiences with teaching, but it also makes becoming a professor more realistic.

* * *

I admit that I only touched on one layer of my own shadow in last week's writing, but it helped me to gain the courage to take that step. Also, the events that unfolded with Eric were just...wow! Not only did it give voice to the fact that professors and teachers are sexual beings, too, and whether we like it or not, we may occasionally be attracted to a student, and vice versa, but it also demonstrated how seemingly minor actions and events can inadvertently escalate into chaos (ex. filing the report with campus security).

* * *

It amazes me that we are taught how to teach, what to teach, and not how to interact with our students. ...We're really never taught how to deal with these awkward day-to-day situations. If something shady happens, you're supposed to just go report it. However, as we read in her piece, this isn't always as easy as it seems.

* * *

The fact that she said she was "just playing" in this episode with the gun rang through my head as I read further into the article and saw the way she got excited by "playing" with potentially dangerous scenarios in her head (such as having violent sex with her student, Eric). Her fear of Eric is often indistinguishable from her attraction to him; fear and attraction melt together in a fascinating way in this article. Although the degree to which danger and taboo excites her clearly seems to be a result of the horrible childhood trauma she has survived, I could relate just a little to be attracted to someone that I "shouldn't" be (such as being a teenage girl and having a crush on the rebellious boy in school that my parents wouldn't approve of).

I especially liked her last paragraph, including the line, "All of my stories and interpretations are true, even when they stand in sharp contrast with

one another." This contrast is exactly what struck me most about the piece: the contrast of her being a professor AND a former exotic dancer and trauma survivor, the contrast of her fear AND attraction to Eric, along with her desire to maintain an "appropriate" student/teacher relationship. Also, the contrast of the rest of her story with the fact that she is a mother and wife was particularly profound to me. I believe contradictions exist within all of us, although hers are likely more pronounced than the "average" person's since she has had anything but an "average" life. These contradictions are what make all of us so complex, and add to the great mystery that is life.

* * *

I appreciated the vulnerability she offered. She was vulnerable to the university's disapproval, to her husband's jealousy (though I don't know him), to her student's advances, and finally, to her own unwanted emotions.

* * *

After reading this piece, I was able to find a hidden 'alter ego' of my own. I wrote about my shadow that, for the most part, I keep hidden as a means of functioning in the workplace. I never really thought of the actions I engage in to survive and get ahead in the workplace as deviant before. They may certainly be seen as so.

* * *

...it addresses a part of our humanity that goes un-talked about. We know what professors are "supposed to do," but this article offers a glimpse into what may happen. There are many phenomena that occur outside of the "shoulds" and they are important because they exist.

... It is but a cultural script that renders her experience deviant. But what happens if we challenged those scripts? Better yet what happens if we succumb to silence? I believe that her work needs to be out there for people to read so that we can better identify the scripts and evaluate them.

* * *

I was a little distracted by:

Judgement #24: No. No. No. I've heard enough. I've heard too much.

Comparison #82: Damn, I wish I could write like that.

Memory #49: (Mother, closing the dining room window.) Quiet! What will the neighbors think?!

Questions #12-5: When you put your name on something like this, does it become your brand? Is it what people end up remembering about you? Do they remember your work? Or do they just remember your story?

Hesitation #14: Does this mean I have to explore my relationship with my father before I can honestly write about his funeral?

Comparison #22: I missed grading a student's speech last semester because I was busy checking her out.

Hesitation #5: If her students read this, does this undermine her effectiveness in the classroom?

Memory #18: I had just moved to California. I sat in a workshop as the facilitator asked all of the survivors of sex abuse to raise their hands.

More than half of the room raised their hands. This was beyond my realm of belief.

Judgement #42: I can understand why her university does not want this published with her name.

Judgement #57: Troublemaker.

Memory #6: One of the most stable, independent woman I know tells me that her number one fantasy is being raped. Not too P.C., but it gets me off every time. She smiles, shaking her head in wonder.

Judgement #22: Push/pull. Back/forth. In/out. Desire/repulsion. Is she creating this drama? Do I create my dramas?

Worry #22: Damn, this ethnography thing is way more complicated than I thought.

* * *

In my opinion, no ethical line was ever crossed and therefore there should be no grounds for dismissal of her position as a teacher... it seems tragic that her hard work and efforts can't be shared with others.

* * *

A performance ethnography (Denzin, 2003; 1997; Ellis, 2004) unfolds as I portray this set of events. This representation of handing IRB *An Unloaded Gun*, is a performance ethnography of resistance. The culture of the academy, this text, and performance collide, blurring distinctions between performance, representation, and ongoing reality. But what is it I am resisting?

A big machine rolls down the highway, sightless, mindless, bearing down on me in the guise of ethics, science, and rationality. When a set of "rules" are implemented regarding a situation, they seemingly take on a life of their own. The machinery of the institution reeled out of control regarding my experience with "Eric," through paternalistic and legalistic discourses. I

cannot discuss the specifics here, except to say that the institutional response to Eric was “overkill.”

So too IRB, an appendage of this machine, careens around the corner bearing down on me, ethnography, and autoethnography specifically. On the face of it, these board members, performed their identity by enacting a medicalized model of research which was conceived of to protect the interests of human subjects. They interpreted the rules in such a way as to suggest that the risks of publishing my manuscript outweighed the benefits. Behind closed doors they were afraid of litigation and feared for my “safety,” things which were not part of the expressed purpose of an IRB and thus were not performed publicly.

No one on campus outside of the Police and Judicial Affairs knew the identity of “Eric.” All records of the incident are sealed in an envelope in the Judicial Affairs Office at the University of Memphis. These facts, coupled with the reality that the chances of Eric picking up a copy of Deviant Behavior and recognizing himself as the fictionalized character in the manuscript were remote, point to the fact that the IRB’s joint, collective, action regarding my manuscript was also “overkill.”

As a result of their performance, the princess in blue, the incest survivor, has been silenced. “Eric,” who was not offered a choice to speak, was silenced also. Ultimately, the key determinations did not turn on the interpretation of the terms "systematic" and "*designed* to contribute to generalizable knowledge," as suggested by the Office of Human Research Protections. It turned on the interpretations of a nine-person committee trying to enact their identities as academics, located inside a system of evaluative discourse which does not match the contingencies of autoethnography nor ethnography in general.

Through constructionist theory, I have cultivated compassion for the IRB at the University of Memphis. Harold Garfinkel (1969) suggested that society functions through the collective observance of “tacit rules.” He would send his students out to violate these tacit rules and watch what occurred around the “breach.” If something was problematic, if it did not have a formula or recipe which informed participants how to act towards it, the business of social interaction came to a halt until the participants could figure out a set of responses to it. If I observe IRB’s denial of approval to publish my autoethnography as a reaction to a breach of the tacit rules regarding childhood sexual abuse, student/teacher relationships, and scientific writing formats, their seemingly senseless conduct becomes sensible.

Regarding childhood sexual abuse, there is a “tacit norm of silence” (Rambo 2004). To speak about it in public is considered “rude” behavior which disrupts the flow of social interaction because most audiences do not know how to react to such a disclosure. Many adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse implicitly and explicitly understand this and choose to stay silent regarding their abuse. The IRB, when faced with a discussion of incest, coupled with an exploration of student/teacher attraction, may have found them selves overwhelmed by the substance of my manuscript and not known how to react to the content.

In addition, without a set of rules regarding the treatment of ethnography and autoethnography, the committee was forced to “ad-hoc” meaning regarding the situation. Because autoethnography is uncharted territory with IRB, they do not have a practiced stance nor a formal set of rules to evaluate it. Their fallback position was to formulate a response based on the existing conservative religious/political context, their individual

identities, the formal roles they were being asked to enact, and the written rules they had before them. Based on these interpretive resources, flying-by-the-seats-of-their-pants, they wrote the narrative of Eric and me as untellable, thus reinforcing the tacit norm of silence. It is this tacit norm of silence I resist by writing this as performance ethnography.

* * *

I wrote in an email to Peter and Patti Adler recently, stating: “I could never explain how much this hurts.” And I can’t.

* * *

The gun was never loaded; bear that in mind.

* * *

My Imbunche.

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