Autoethnography through the Prism of Foucault's Care of the Self

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Introduction

In this chapter, I reflect on the self of autoethnographic inquiry through the prism of care, in particular, Foucault's reworking of the notion of the care of the self from ancient Greek philosophy. Through this prism, the self of inquiry is constituted through rigorous self-scrutiny and attempts at self-mastery, and intimately concerned with tensions between engagement and disengagement - between work and 'time-out' from work. The themes I explore include: relations between leaders and stakeholders; the complexities of expertise and 'best practice'; and confessional writing as something which might look and feel self-promoting, but instead be self-renouncing. I hope this chapter will serve as an invitation to consider Foucauldian ideas - and their classical origins - to help to frame and interrogate what we are *doing* with self-disclosure and the processes of reflection that underpin it.

Staking out the territory

My personal journey to the self of autoethnography comes via sustained reflection on the notion of reflexivity. Elsewhere I have argued that we should not underestimate the challenges of using the self of inquiry in the context of disciplines understood to be predominantly empirical, that is, usually assumed to be the study of things beyond the self (Tomkins, 2011; Tomkins and Eatough, 2010). Critical discussions of reflexivity urge us to be mindful of the risk of "indefinite navel-gazing [and] dangerous solipsism" (Latour, 1988, p.155). Such arguments stem from discussions about reflexivity, i.e., are relevant across multiple research paradigms and approaches, but they have a special piquancy for autoethnography.

In reflecting on these issues, I have found Ellis (2004) very helpful in laying out a spectrum of ways in which the self can be positioned within autoethnography, which both shape and reflect the objectives of inquiry in different ways. For instance, 'confessional ethnography' (Van Maanen, 2011) focuses consciously and deliberately on the researcher-I, and has clear connections with diary studies and ethnographic memoirs. Towards the other end of the spectrum, 'contingent autoethnography' is where "an author writes about others, most likely not planning to study anything about the self. Then in the process of research, the researcher discovers his or her connection to the material and to the world studied" (Ellis, 2004, p.51). Ellis' analysis has helped me to frame my own reflections about researcher positioning as a kind of pendulum, which swings between self and other (other conceived very generally to include another human being, or some other phenomenon or entity outside oneself). For me, a key question for any piece of reflexive work is whether the pendulum swings towards using the self to illuminate the other, or towards using the other to illuminate the self (Tomkins, 2011). The former sees the self of inquiry as facilitator, the latter as confessant.

Whether grounded in reflexivity in general or autoethnography in particular, most discussions of the self of inquiry tend to assume that the self's presence in organization is *as a researcher*. There appears to be less coverage of the sort of analysis made possible when we are engaged in organizational matters in some other capacity, and discover and/or develop rich material for reflection. Within the context of organization and leadership studies, this is perhaps somewhat surprising, since an increasing number of business school scholars have had careers outside academia (see for instance, Learmonth and Humphreys, 2012; Tomkins and Nicholds, 2017), and might well have both commitments and opportunities which stem at least as much from their previous careers as their current ones, or indeed, come about from having a general reputation as someone who might be able to make a helpful contribution to organizational matters.

In this chapter, I ground my reflections in the type of inquiry that is not a-priori tagged as 'research', that is, where the researcher-I is, at least initially, some other kind of professional-I or inquirer-I. I connect with Schein (2001) in seeing an interesting differentiation between *researcher*-initiated inquiry (including action research, where subjects become co-researchers; Reason and Bradbury, 2001) and *client*-initiated inquiry (including various modes of consultancy, facilitation and advisory work). As Schein (2001, p.228) suggests, "some of the best opportunities for…inquiry actually arise in situations where the setting is created by

someone who wants help, not by the researcher deciding what to study". Schein's own reflections are grounded in a clinical setting, but I think the implications of this distinction have relevance across a broader range of inquiry settings, especially in connection with the dynamics of organizational and institutional selves.

Schein (2001) suggests that client-initiated inquiry throws into sharp relief the ethics of intervention and engagement in organization. In other words, the opportunities and challenges of inquiry may be different when the relationship is not between researcher and research participants, but between different organizational *stakeholders*.[i] In such settings, there is potentially more space and flexibility for the constitution and negotiation of different selves, and for the exploration of manifold nuances of self/other relations, than in more tightly defined, and often taken-for-granted protocols of relationships between researchers and research participants. When one moves from the researcher-I towards a broader, arguably looser, professional-I or stakeholder-I, the work is no longer simply about investigation; it highlights the multiple ways in which people engage in, and disengage from, institutional processes, practices and relationships. Such questions of engagement, involvement and relationship provide rich material for the relational ethics of autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2011).

Relational ethics: philosophies of care

With this as backdrop, the connections I explore in this chapter relate to the constitution and negotiation of the self, and the ways in which the possibilities (and restrictions) of selfhood unfold in the dynamics of engagement and disengagement in our relations with others. To guide this exploration, I turn to philosophies of care, considering some of the ways in which care's qualities of attentiveness, responsiveness and concern might both reflect and inspire relational inquiry for, as Noddings (1984, p.4) suggests, an ethic of care takes "relation as ontologically basic".

Care has been a central philosophical concern for millennia, going to the heart of our most fundamental questions about the nature of the human self, our relations with others, and the qualities of our engagement in the world. Care has been theorised in many different ways, notably as a feminine counterpoint to a masculine ethic of justice (Gilligan, 1982). Noddings (1984) suggests that justice is rights-based whereas care is needs-based, and that needs are more fundamental than rights. Other theorisations differentiate between 'caring about' and

'caring for' (Dalley, 1996); the former can be a generalised moral and/or affective concern, whilst the latter often means the practical business of tending, which can occur without morality or affect.

Within organization studies, care and the related concept of compassion have been associated with workplace self-esteem (McAllister and Bigley, 2002), organizational commitment (Lilius et al., 2012), organizational performance (Cameron et al., 2003), and organizational resilience (Boyatzis et al., 2006). Central to critical discussions of organizational care is the question of asymmetry, and whether care relations are fundamentally relations of dominance and inequality, which position care-recipients as dependent and hence inferior (Kittay and Feder, 2002; Munro and Thanem, 2018). Related to this issue of asymmetry, care has been theorised explicitly as a practice of intervention and engagement. Thus, Tomkins and Simpson (2015) highlight the potentially negative effects of being on the receiving end of care interventions which are decisive and substitutive, rather than less interventionist modes of care which are designed to enable others to resolve problems for themselves. In a sense, this care dynamic mirrors that foundational mapping of organizational discourses as machine (focused on efficiency and fixing) versus organism (focused on flourishing and enabling) (Morgan, 2007), or as Heifetz et al. (2009) propose, technical problems versus adaptive challenges.

Of course, underpinning both philosophy and practice of autoethnography are various assumptions about, and implications for, our understandings of the self. With this in mind, the particular aspect of care that I explore here is the notion of the *care of the self*. This is a concept with increasing currency in organizational life, indeed, in social and institutional relations more generally. Popular contemporary understandings of self-care conjure up the idea of someone who attends to his or her own needs and desires, perhaps even to the extent of vanity or self-obsession. Such an understanding fits seamlessly with what Cederström and Spicer (2015) call the 'wellness syndrome', which involves nurturing oneself towards optimal well-being, happiness and success, not least through careful, even neurotic, attention to our bodies and what we both feed and deny them. Indeed, the modern-day rhetoric of self-care invokes a sense of 'me, me, me!', in which care has become associated with *taking 'time-out'* from work and dedicating oneself to leisure, relaxation and restoration. In short, contemporary discourses of self-care emphasise *disengagement*, which both relies on and sustains privilege, i.e., it is a possibility for those who can afford to take themselves away from the pressures of institutional life to cosset the self (Tomkins and Pritchard, 2019).

Care of the self as practice of inquiry

Taking 'time-out' to cosset oneself is not how self-care has always been understood, however. There are variants of the idea in classical philosophy from Socrates, Plato and Xenophon, through the Stoics, Cynics and Epicureans, via the advent of Christianity, and towards modernist and post-modernist notions of identity and the self. At the well-spring of this philosophical trajectory is the figure of Socrates, whose elaborations of self-care or *epimeleia heautou* - never written down by Socrates himself, of course - have been interpreted, challenged and refashioned for millennia (see, for instance, Nehamas, 1998). Different interpretations of Socratic self-care - both ancient and modern - have all wrestled with the question of the constitution of the self, not as a given, but as the subject of *work*.

It is through Foucault's eyes, however, that Socratic self-care has attracted the attention of contemporary organizational scholars (Ladkin, 2018; Lynch, 2016; Randall and Munro, 2010; Tomkins and Pritchard, 2019). Foucault's engagement with the classics is the topic of often heated debate (Boyle, 2012; Porter, 2012), including arguments over his translation and interpretation of ancient Greek and Latin texts. Indeed, such arguments serve to emphasise the very historicity and contingency of knowledge that Foucault himself elaborates. Thus, the possibilities of selfhood which a philosophy of self-care both assumes and enables look different depending on whether one is operating from the perspective of ancient Greek society, or with the 'benefit' of hindsight as to how our understandings of the self will develop over subsequent centuries. As Porter (2012, p.195) suggests, "it's not at all clear what it would mean to return to such a picture of the ancient Greek self while also holding onto a historical trajectory in which that self is destined to become Christian - indeed, is already groping its way towards an unfree, prohibition-based Christianity".

In this chapter, I ground my reflections in Foucault's understandings of the possibilities of self-care, however idiosyncratic. To this end, I mostly bracket the question of how accurate these are as an interpretation of his classical forebears. I consider how Foucault's reading of self-care might resonate within our own contemporary relational and institutional practices of self, not least because of a relative lack of historical and cultural distance between Foucault's world and our own. In other words, my interest here is in how Foucault uses the classics to construct the present, rather than rediscover the past (Fowler, 2000).

For Foucault, an engagement with classical philosophy allows us to rescue the idea of self-*care* from its role as subsidiary to self-*knowledge*, that is, the famous Delphic order to 'know thyself' (Foucault, 1997a, 1997b). Indeed, Foucault sees self-care as prerequisite or condition of any kind of knowledge - whether of self or otherwise - for it was caring for oneself that brought both the need and the possibility of knowing oneself into being. As a set of practical, experiential and ethical doctrines which operated collectively as both duty and technique, self-care:

> "Took the form of an attitude, a mode of behaviour; it became instilled in ways of living; it evolved into procedures, practices, and formulas that people reflected on, developed, perfected and taught. It thus came to constitute a social practice, giving rise to relationships between individuals, to exchanges and communications, and at times even to institutions." (Foucault, 1986, p.45)

Contrary to contemporary associations with self-cossetting, Foucauldian self-care is not a project of narcissism:

> "It does not mean simply being interested in oneself, nor does it mean having a certain tendency to self-attachment or self-fascination. *Epimeleia heautou* is a very powerful word in Greek which means 'working on' or 'being concerned with' something… It describes a sort of work, an activity; it implies attention, knowledge, technique." (Foucault, 1997c, p.269)

The work of self-care involves deep, habitual reflection and self-scrutiny. It is through such scrutiny that we might craft our own way of being, not in the sense of rediscovering some kind of true, essential self as if it were something lying dormant within us all along, but as a life-long process of, indeed, commitment to, self-constitution (Foucault, 1997c). In his later works especially, Foucault sees self-care as a practice through which one opens up lines of freedom by shaping oneself, challenging oneself, mastering oneself (and one's appetites), and surpassing oneself (Foucault, 1997d).

Practices of self-care include the identification and elimination of bad or sloppy habits, that is, self-care involves unlearning as much as learning (Foucault, 1997a). It requires judgment,

focus and prioritisation between the more and the less important (Foucault, 1997c). Whilst it can have a certain curative or therapeutic aspect (which dominates popular associations with respite and restoration), it is more powerfully concerned with struggle, and it demands courage to exercise as an ongoing commitment (Foucault, 1997a). Self-care unfolds in practices of self-writing which, as we will see later, serve a range of purposes through the ages (Foucault, 1997b). It also requires attentive listening, especially in Stoic and Epicurean elaborations (Foucault, 1997a). In Stoic variants, techniques of self-care intermingle with the examination of conscience, including systematically reviewing what one has done, what one should have done, and rigorously comparing the two (Foucault, 1997b). Across all these different elements and emphases, the purpose of self-care is truth. Care does not set itself up in opposition to knowledge; rather, it demands that we approach the project of knowledge from the perspective of the self, and the work that we do to constitute that self for the purposes of understanding (Foucault, 1997a). Through care of the self, we might hope to make ourselves not 'fit for purpose' so much as 'fit for truth'.

Foucault's understanding of self-care is profoundly social. On this point in particular, Foucault's reading of Socrates has been challenged, with Nehamas (1998, p.14), for instance, suggesting that "Socrates' project was more private than Foucault allows. Socrates was primarily concerned with the care of his own self, and he urged his fellow citizens to undertake a similar *private* project for themselves" (my italics). Foucault, however, insists on self-care as required for the public good, both through our own words and deeds, and by encouraging others to practise self-care as social duty in their own words and deeds. This is a view of self-care not as a solipsistic project of self-coddling; rather, it takes its inspiration, its energy, and its form from relations of institution and community, both formal and informal:

> "All this attention to the self did not depend solely on the existence of schools, lectures and professionals of spiritual direction for its social base; it found a ready support in the whole bundle of customary relations of kinship, friendship, and obligation. When, in the practice of the care of the self, one appealed to another person in whom one recognised an aptitude for guidance and counselling, one was exercising a right. And it was a duty that one was performing when one lavished one's assistance on another, or when one gratefully received the lessons the other might give." (Foucault, 1986, pp.52-3)

In short, Foucauldian interpretations of self-care give us a set of commitments and practices which revolve around engagement in, not disengagement from, the world and our duties to one another. Such profoundly relational ethics unfold in dynamics of self-constitution (not self-discovery) and the possibilities these afford for both freedom and truth. Self-care is thus a practice of inquiry, not a lure to take 'time-out' for leisure. It throws up fascinating possibilities and provocations for how we might see the self of autoethnography, some of which I suggest below, interwoven with reflections from my own inquiry experiences and encounters.

Challenging the 'no brainers'

One of the most profound implications of Foucauldian self-care is that it insists on the identification and interrogation of taken-for-granted knowledge - those 'no brainers' which are so patently true that we do not bother to fight either for or against them (Lynch, 2016). Ladkin (2018) develops this idea in her discussion of Foucauldian leadership ethics, grounded in the case of former US president Barack Obama's failure to close Guantanamo Bay, despite claiming this as one of the most urgent, most self-evidently righteous, objectives of his first presidential term. She suggests that it may be precisely the self-evident correctness of the action that led to its non-delivery, for it was so obviously the right thing to do that Obama may not have invested enough time, energy or care in building the political alliances necessary to actually make it happen (Ladkin, 2018).

From this perspective, our 'no brainers' are precisely what need to be most rigorously scrutinised in our practices of self-care, because they are "the invisible cages which hold expectations in place and which can limit manoeuvrability" (Ladkin, 2018, pp.312-313). This connects with Foucault's emphasis on the intertwining, indeed, co-constitution, of knowledge and power, often crystallised in Foucauldian studies as 'power/knowledge' (Fejes and Dahlstedt, 2013; Rouse, 2005). Indeed, many of Foucault's works are concerned with how it comes about that we know something, and how some things get established and embedded as facts, whilst others do not. For something to become an accepted fact, a taken-for-granted norm, or a classificatory distinction, it must undergo a thorough process of ratification and endorsement by those in authority. Knowledge is thus not a dispassionate concern, but rather, a political manoeuvre, which both implicates and is implicated in regimes of authority and expertise and the ways in which these enable or repress certain ways of being (e.g., Foucault, 1987c). In such a manoeuvre, some versions of events are constructed and legitimised as more

normal or acceptable than others, and some versions of selfhood are constructed and legitimised as more normal or acceptable than others. So, if we are to take self-care as an invitation to free ourselves up to be/become the sort of person who can *really* make a difference in the institutional settings we encounter, that is, *really* work towards being 'fit for truth', we should be especially wary of the 'no brainers'.

Whilst appealing philosophically, challenging the 'no brainers' in practice is easier said than done. This is because they are part of what constitutes our feelings and performances of expertise and the confidence that these inspire. They therefore have a seductive power which can make it difficult to expose them to the sort of ruthless scrutiny suggested by a Foucauldian self-care. For instance, when invited into organizations to advise or facilitate (i.e., as stakeholder-I), I can persuade myself that I have grasped pretty quickly what the main priorities and main barriers to action and implementation might be. The narrative in my mind goes something like: 'oh yes, I have seen this issue countless times before in my corporate career; therefore, I can add value by trying to hasten this client's interpretations towards this conclusion in order to save them time and energy (and hence also prove my worth)'. Through a Foucauldian prism, however, it is precisely when a solution comes so quickly and easily, and when it seems to both draw on and confirm our expertise, that we should perhaps be most wary of it.

In my experience, it is easy to conflate the 'no brainers' with the idea of 'best practice'; when something is self-evident, it is also likely, surely, to be 'best'. Here (and not for the first time), I see connections between Foucault's discussions of self-care and Heidegger's elaborations of care. In this particular instance, I think Heidegger's discussion of 'the They' (*das Man*) (Heidegger, 1962, sections 126-130) crystallises the risks of 'best practice', which is 'what *They* do'. 'The They' are not *real* others, but rather, the anonymous, unattributable and unowned sense of how things are supposed to be; it is how *one* does things. When immersed in the ways of 'the They', we follow methods and procedures without reflecting on how things could potentially be different; in other words, without exercising the self-care of which Foucault speaks. As Tomkins and Simpson (2015, p.1022) insist, Heidegger's 'the They' represent a fundamental threat to authenticity, for "however busy or successful or ambitious we may be, if our plans and projects simply mirror the possibilities in the world around us, we remain inauthentic".

Through the prism of both Foucauldian self-care and Heideggerian authenticity, it might be possible to loosen our grip on the idea of 'best practice'. Perhaps this means reinterpreting at least some of the expertise we might bring to organizational inquiry, so that it is not (just) an expertise of knowing things which are retrieved from a memory bank of what is right or useful or standard. Rather, it might become an expertise of role-modelling how to acknowledge, but also interrogate, assumptions of 'best practice' and the 'no brainers', not in order to rule them out altogether, but to use them only if the scrutinies of self-care suggest them as a viable way forward *in this particular instance*.

Challenging the self-evident is thus more than just an abstract, philosophical concern. As Ladkin (2018) argues, a 'no brainer' mindset can turn worthy intentions into ethical failure, as commitments made too early and too automatically often lead to disappointment, and become reinterpreted *post-hoc* as insincere, that is, as "theatrical salvo, a flourish which had not been carefully thought through" (Ladkin, 2018, p.313). In passing, I would also share just how common it is, in my experience, for leaders - both corporate and political - to over-commit in the early stages of their time in office, biting off way, way more than either they or those around them could ever hope to chew. 'No brainers' are perhaps part of how and why this comes about; and they are fuelled by popular discourses such as the crucial 'first 100 days', which prioritise action over care.

Ultimately, challenging the 'no brainers' is more than just a way to avoid the mistake of over-committing. 'No brainers' are directive and restrictive, so resisting them might help to broaden discussions and open up new possibilities; for too certain a reliance on the self-evident narrows down the space for nuanced reflection on all options, both those already in view and those which are yet to emerge. Clearing the taken-for-granted away from the space of both reflection and discussion creates possibilities for thinking about things more radically for, as Lynch (2016, p.184) suggests, losing the self-evident is "when Gestalt shifts become possible". This is when ideas of genuinely transformational potential might be released from their chains.

Exploring the paradox of self-disclosure

Discussions of autoethnography stress the significance of writing as both product and process (Ellis et al., 2011). Ellis (2004, p.180) proposes "that the writing is the way you find out what you are thinking", which suggests that it is often through writing that we both uncover and construct our relation to both self and topic. Crucially, such writing involves decisions about the nature, purpose, style and extent of self-disclosure. Earlier I referred to a spectrum of inquiry styles, with 'confessional ethnography' (Van Maanen, 2011) at one pole of that spectrum - or one end of a pendulum swing - using the other to illuminate the self (rather than the self to illuminate the other). By even framing it this way (i.e., as an extreme, which is focused on *me rather than you*), I probably reveal my own anxiety about the narcissism of self-disclosing modes of inquiry. Indeed, the following joke has stayed with me since my own (empirical) PhD: "But as the Fijian said to the New Ethnographer, 'That's enough talking about you; let's talk about me'." (Sahlins, 1991, p.85).

Foucault highlights how practices of self-disclosure have changed their form and function at different stages in history, and not always had an intrinsically confessional aspect (Foucault, 1997e). At various times, self-disclosure has been associated with the self-*constitution* of Socratic care (which both assumes and fashions human agency), and at other times - notably since the advent of Christianity - with self-*renunciation* (which involves penitence in the face of a higher agency) (Foucault, 1997b). It was with Christianity that 'know thyself' came to dominate 'take care of yourself' as man's core edict, and the path to truth became infused with a morality based on purification, that is, selfhood became something to be renounced for the sake of the salvation of the soul (Foucault, 1997b).

For Foucault, therefore, self-disclosure is an issue of historical and ideological contingency. Crucially, it is interwoven with relations of power, especially when constituted as confession, for:

> "One does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual

in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation." (Foucault, 1980, pp.61-62)

In 21st century institutions, confessional practices are no longer restricted to the sphere of religion, but infuse many aspects of social and organizational relations, leading Fejes and Dahlstedt (2013) to suggest that the West is now 'the confessing society', using confession as its dominant instrument for producing and regulating truth, including truth about the self. When we confess, we give ourselves over to institutions of authority, whether in the shape of priest, therapist, doctor, counsellor, administrator, lawyer, or educator; and we agree, tacitly or explicitly, to accept their evaluation, instruction and correction. Moreover, we have technologies of confession unimaginable only a couple of generations ago, such as social media and blogs, through which we make ourselves visible and knowable to a mostly invisible and unknown audience, which judges our disclosing self against both spoken and unspoken criteria (Karakayali et al., 2018; Siles, 2012).

Self-disclosure is thereby a mechanism through which one subjects oneself to disciplinary norms and expectations, and accepts and incorporates a self-moulding in their image. Even apparently benign forms of self-disclosure take on a different complexion when viewed as Foucauldian practices of confession and/or subjugation, for:

"Confession has now less to do with salvation and much more to do with self-regulation, self-improvement and self-development. In other words, confession actively codes a subject as productive and autonomous, but a subject who is *already* governed through participating in confessional practices. The practice of telling all, or telling our own story, has become a means of identifying individuals and establishing and enforcing their location within power/knowledge networks. Confessional practices involve self-interventions into those aspects of the self that have hitherto remained unspoken and therefore unregulated." (Edwards, 2008, p.30)

In the domain of education and learning, for instance, artefacts such as personal development plans or learning contracts become part of the fabric of disciplinary power, because they are a

sanctioned mechanism for laying out our achievements and confessing that there is (always) still more to do, that 'room for improvement' so beloved of human resource management conversations. Discourses of learning, such as those produced through 'the learning organization', construct and reward committed learners, and create sinners and outcasts in those who fail to live up to expectations of life-long self-improvement and its operationalisation in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) (Fejes and Dahlstedt, 2013; Tomkins and Pritchard, 2019). The regulation of learning selves extends beyond the boundaries of organization and into wider societal spaces, too. For instance, the rituals of the unemployed, i.e., enrolment at job centres and the requirement to provide proof of attendance at re-skilling programmes, can be seen as a powerful sanction through which the unemployed-as-sinner must hope for redemption through practices of self-disclosure and self-reconstitution as someone committed to re-training and re-skilling (Berglund, 2008). Confession is now a tool of society and the state, not just the church.

So, through a Foucauldian prism, there is considerable paradox in self-disclosure. Writing oneself into the texts of public space can both liberate and restrict: Through the lens of Socratic self-care, such self-disclosure potentially liberates, for then it is seen as a vital means of self-scrutiny and reflection in the endeavour to make oneself 'fit for truth'. However, through the lens of confession, whether religious or secular, self-disclosure is a restrictive envelopment in relations, regimes and scripts of power. Moreover, our senses can deceive us, for it may *feel* liberating and empowering to write our own story and our own version of events but, from a Foucauldian perspective, this is a *narrowing* of the possibilities of freedom and an *abandonment* of the self.

A Foucauldian take on self-disclosure therefore throws down the gauntlet to anyone working autoethnographically with an explicit focus on the authorial-I: Is self-disclosure an act of self-constitution or self-subjugation? Is it grounded in freedom-seeking self-scrutiny to rid ourselves of unhelpful habits, or in self-purification and self-renunciation as we hand ourselves over to the judgement of others (real or imagined; worldly or other-worldly)? Could it be both these things, and if so, how might one go about differentiating between the two? There are no easy answers to these questions, but this should not discourage us from self-writing, for Foucault insists on an intimate relationship between writing and vigilance, and such vigilance is the life-blood of care (Foucault, 1997b, 1997e).

Eliciting the relationality of self-care

In this section, I consider a further problematic for autoethnography, namely the question of whether/how an inquiry which is overtly and explicitly about oneself can ever be about the other. My own articulation of the pendulum offers a view in which either the self or the other must be the focus of inquiry, i.e., that I am *either* using myself reflexively to help illuminate the other, *or* I am using the other as a mirror onto myself (Tomkins, 2011). In such a framing, an inquiry cannot easily be *both about me and about you*.

A Foucauldian understanding of self-care suggests alternative ways of approaching this issue. For Foucault, even when it is overtly about the self, e.g., in self-writing, self-care is a relational endeavour, because:

> "To write is…to 'show oneself', to project oneself into view, to make one's own face appear in the other's presence." (Foucault, 1997e, p.216)

Foucault acknowledges that Socratic self-care means encouraging others to take care of their *own* needs, for:

> "I don't think we can say that the Greek who cares for himself must first care for others. To my mind, this view only came later. Care for others should not be put before the care of oneself. The care of the self is ethically prior in that the relationship with oneself is ontologically prior." (Foucault, 1997d, p.287)

However, this does not mean that self-care is a private business (Foucault, 1997b, 1997c). For Foucault, self-care is the beating heart of social, community and institutional relations, because mastery of self through self-care means that we are less likely to abuse our power over others (Foucault, 1997c). Self-care is thereby an ethical commitment to resist both psychologically projecting and concretely inflicting our own unprocessed questions of selfhood onto others. In other words, *even when it is explicitly about me, it is ethically and existentially about you, too; not least because it is for your benefit.*

The idea of self-mastery for the benefit of others is relevant for many aspects of organizational life, but it has particular resonance for discussions of leader/stakeholder relations. Foucault's self-care is the work of freeing ourselves up from our unexamined habits, addictions and appetites, that is, it is a *leadership of the self;* and he makes connections between leadership and self-care explicit:

> "The good ruler is precisely the one who exercises his power as it ought to be exercised, that is, simultaneously exercising his power over himself. And it is the power over oneself that thus regulates one's power over others." (Foucault, 1997d, p.288)

This depiction is not about a single leader exercising self-reflection and self-mastery in order to lead more effectively or benignly from above, because the relationality of Foucauldian self-care makes it less individualistic than this. But neither does it deny that there are differences in status and experience between us, i.e., self-care unfolds in relations in which people help and guide each other based on their particular qualifications and expertise. Thus, to my mind, Foucauldian self-care is not a project of demolishing asymmetry. It is, rather, the fabric of interdependent social and institutional relations, which disconnect asymmetry from issues of inequality and exploitation, seeking instead an asymmetry grounded in ethics and mutual responsibility. In other words, self-care is how we might all agree to work on mastering ourselves - to exercise this very particular kind of 'leadership' - in order to resist the abuse of power and a life spent unreflectively based on the 'no brainers'. And whilst it may seem almost oxymoronic that a care that sees the self as ethically and ontologically prior should also rely on *reciprocity*, I think it offers a lexicon for exposing what it feels like to be on the receiving end of other people's successes and failures of self-care. In other words, the paradox of self-care as mutual responsibility throws a spotlight on what it is like to be a stakeholder of the other in organizational relations.

This is, indeed, how I myself came to think about the relevance of Foucauldian self-care in organizational inquiry. In recent times, I have found myself using a prism of self-care to reflect on relations with organizational practitioners who have asked for my input, that is, people in formal leadership positions and/or leaderly roles such as chair of board meetings. I have noted what it feels like to have 'no brainers' 'done' to me as stakeholder-I, that is, to feel that one is

'being managed' through the application of the directive, the confident and the self-evident, which displace possibilities for respectful scrutiny and debate. (In truth, I have found a way to frame what it is like to be on the receiving end of the sort of leadership which I myself tend to practise, especially in conditions of pressure.) The prism of self-care has helped me to make sense of my own responses to such 'management', and I have noted a strong frustration, hurt and desire to back away from proceedings when on the receiving end of the 'no brainers'. In short, my own self-care morphs from engagement to disengagement.

Thus, a Foucauldian insistence on sociality and reciprocity highlights precisely the tension between engagement and disengagement to which I referred previously as conflicting readings of self-care as either work or leisure. Earlier, I implied that this tension might simply reflect a difference between philosophical and popularized understandings; but I now want to suggest a more fundamental interrelationship. In short, I wonder whether the notion of self-care as escape, retreat and self-healing might be seen as a response to a failure of self-care in others. Thus, the seemingly opposite notions of self-care as work versus 'time-out' - engagement versus disengagement - are perhaps more intimately intertwined and co-constitutive than previously implied. In an ironic Foucauldian twist, bubble-baths - both real and metaphorical - are thus a consequence of a *failure* of self-care (*mine and yours*), rather than its embodiment.

Such reflections suggest the value of both being and scrutinising what it means to be a *stakeholder,* rather than a researcher (as traditionally understood); for as stakeholder, one is really in the midst of the ebbs and flows of organizational power and their implications for the constitution of the self. Within the specific context of leadership, they also highlight how rare it is to see organization through the eyes of stakeholders, even in models which explicitly theorise the work of leadership as grounded in multi-stakeholder settings, such as responsible leadership (Doh and Quigley, 2014; Maak, 2007). Even when we hear about the importance of stakeholders, this tends to be from the perspective of leadership, and is usually posed as a question of what leaders might do to relate more effectively with 'their' stakeholders.

My point here is similar to the argument made about 'employee engagement' by Sambrook et al. (2014), namely that differences between 'managing engagement' and 'being engaged' are often glossed over. 'Managing engagement' is something that leaders do, supported by human resources and organizational development practitioners and consultants. 'Being engaged', on the other hand, is something that warrants an insider view from the perspective of those

stakeholders upon whom such strategies and programmes of engagement are deployed. This is, of course, where autoethnographic methods might be of particular value (Sambrook et al., 2014).

Seeing organizational dynamics through the eyes of a broader range of stakeholders also brings other theorisations of organizational care into view. For instance, Gabriel (2015) develops a psychoanalytic view of the caring leader as the product of followers' fantasies and projections, based on the archetype of the mother who shows us unconditional love and preferential treatment. From this perspective, stakeholders' perceptions of being denied care can inflict significant emotional damage on them and reduce the moral standing of the leaders in question. Tomkins and Simpson (2015) emphasise the stakeholder disengagement that results from too directive an intervention of care, which is a variant of the experience outlined here of being hit by the 'no brainers'. In a range of ways, therefore, philosophies of care can illuminate the complexities of engagement and disengagement amongst multiple organizational stakeholders, and what each of us might both do and resist as we care for ourselves.

Pulling the threads together

In this chapter, I have suggested several ways in which the care of the self might inform any sort of inquiry which makes sustained use of the self. I have sketched three variants of self-care as self-constitution (engagement); confession (renunciation); and retreat (disengagement). I think that these different understandings are not co-incidental, or indeed, *mis*understandings; rather, they might usefully be seen as a repertoire of manoeuvres for the self, which urge us to really scrutinise what we are doing in organizational inquiry, and why.

Through the prism of Foucauldian self-care, it may be precisely when a piece of work is most seemingly 'confessional', i.e., mostly overtly about oneself, that the ethics of relationality come most forcibly to light, for it is here that we confront the ways in which selfhood is enmeshed in relations of power. I have argued for the importance of challenging the 'no brainers' as a technique of self-writing and self-inquiry, and reflected on the paradoxes of self-disclosure (as potentially both freedom and cage) and sociality (with the self both ethically and ontologically prior, yet interdependent) as instances of such technique in action.

To my mind, self-care offers autoethnographers food for thought not only for method, but also for substance. Thus, a relational self-care throws into sharp relief the experiences of different organizational stakeholders, and the ways in which different people's projects of selfhood intersect and interact. Despite an inexhaustible interest in the experiences of leaders over other organizational stakeholders, I argue that the dynamics of Foucauldian self-care show stakeholders as just as complex, interesting, frustrating, impressive and important as leaders. This has considerable relevance in today's organizational configurations where many people, both internal and external, have experience and expertise to offer, and our work as organizational scholars might well be more focused on how to help this happen. In short, the dynamics of Foucauldian self-care offer ideas and provocations for how to encourage stakeholders - including ourselves - to approach the subject of organization with care.

I am not, of course, suggesting that this view of stakeholder dynamics as intersections of self-care can only emerge in inquiry settings which are client-initiated (Schein, 2001); merely that this is how it has happened for me; and that this has sensitised me to the myriad ways in which the self can be positioned and manoeuvred - engaged and disengaged - when encounters are not tagged a-priori as 'research'. In other words, the dynamics of self-constitution come vibrantly to life when we loosen the anchoring of self in the 'researcher' identity and allow new opportunities for self-understanding to unfold. With such loosening, we might perhaps glimpse the possibilities of freedom which Foucault's Socratic adventures bring forth, for:

> "Philosophy is that which calls into question domination at every level and in every form in which it exists, whether political, economic, sexual, institutional, or what have you… This critical function of philosophy derives from the Socratic injunction 'take care of yourself', in other words, 'make freedom your foundation, through the mastery of yourself'." (Foucault, 1997d, pp.300-301)

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[i] I use the notion of stakeholder and the stakeholder-I to encompass a range of subject positions and relations with organization, including followers, colleagues, collaborators, advisers, suppliers, investigators, etc. I specifically differentiate between leaders and stakeholders to draw out the value of autoethnography as a way of putting oneself in the shoes of the stakeholder and, from this standpoint, examine what it feels like to be led.