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Data Driven: An Autoethnographic Short Story

Peter Joseph Gloviczki
Coker College, pgloviczki@coker.edu

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Abstract

In this paper, I use an autoethnographic short story (Jago, 2005, 2011) to examine data-driven life in media culture (Kellner, 1995) and the emergence of a quantified self (Wolf, 2010).

Keywords

Media, Autoethnography, Lived Experience

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Data Driven: An Autoethnographic Short Story

Peter Joseph Gloviczki

Coker College, Hartsville, South Carolina, USA

In this paper, I use an autoethnographic short story (Jago, 2005, 2011) to examine data-driven life in media culture (Kellner, 1995) and the emergence of a quantified self (Wolf, 2010). Keywords: Media, Autoethnography, Lived Experience

When I woke up this morning, the first thing that I reached for was my glasses. The second was my smartphone. I thumbed the home button and scrolled through my texts, then through my email. Before I was even fully awake, I headed to the treadmill.

*

There is a treadmill in my office at home. I use it to workout. As I have written in the past: “I like to get on the treadmill first thing in the morning. I don’t go for very long — 10 minutes usually — and at this point I’m simply working on consistency” (Gloviczki, 2015a, para. 1). I am now using autoethnographic methods (Sikes, 2013) to expand on that concept. I am seeking, as autoethnographer Andrew C. Sparkes has written, to “contribute to sociological understanding in ways that, among others, are self-knowing, self-respectful, self-sacrificing and self-luminous” (Sparkes, 2002, as cited in Sikes, 2013, p. 187). I’ve been increasing the incline, which can go all the way up to 10.0. My treadmill, which I bought on the NordicTrack website, tells me how fast I’m going (usually 1.0 or 1.5) and how far I have traveled in miles. These data captivate me: I use them as markers of consistency, a way to keep pace on my journey.

*

Media and cultural studies scholar Douglas Kellner (1995) has written: “A media culture has emerged in which images, sounds and spectacles help produce the fabric of everyday life” (p. 1). In this paper, I use an autoethnographic short story (Jago, 2005, 2011), to continue my ongoing investigation of technology in everyday life (Gloviczki, 2015b; in press). I realize I use my smartphone in a way that makes me “always on, always at work, and always on call” (Turkle, 2011, p. 202). Moreover, I also recognize the ways that my life is increasingly data-driven (the data in my smartphone, the data on my treadmill). In this way, data are the catalyst for my morning routine: I keep authoring and answering emails and texts because there are more of them, but I also keep walking on the treadmill because I know there are more steps to take. When writing about my treadmill use in popular media, I asserted the importance of the audience, stating: “I walk to make them proud because I know that sentiment will keep me walking” (Gloviczki, 2015a, para. 3). Having taken this autoethnographic journey, I now realize something even more fundamental. Throughout my treadmill use, a quantified self (Wolf, 2010) emerges: data wake me up, data keep me walking.

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Author Note

Peter Joseph Gloviczki (Ph.D., University of Minnesota, 2012) works as an assistant professor of communication at Coker College in Hartsville, South Carolina, where he also serves as Coordinator of the Communication Program. His first scholarly book is *Journalism and Memorialization in the Age of Social Media* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). His recent journal articles appear in *Health Communication*, *Humanity and Society*, *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, and *The Qualitative Report*. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: pgloviczki@coker.edu.

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