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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

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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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