
1-25-2020

Always a Student of Autoethnography

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Recommended APA Citation

Gloviczki, P. J. (2020). Always a Student of Autoethnography. *The Qualitative Report*, 25(1), 197-198.
<https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2020.4393>

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Always a Student of Autoethnography

Abstract

In this paper, I examine the role of a specific place, Minnehaha Falls in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, as a particular grounding space on my autoethnographic journey. I assert this grounding space calls me to remember that I am, and will always be, a student of autoethnography.

Keywords

Autoethnography, Storytelling, Space

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Always a Student of Autoethnography

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In this paper, I examine the role of a specific place, Minnehaha Falls in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, as a particular grounding space on my autoethnographic journey. I assert this grounding space calls me to remember that I am, and will always be, a student of autoethnography. Keywords: Autoethnography, Storytelling, Space

I scan my disabled body, Cerebral Palsy with tremors and all, for its grounding space(s): A summer visit to Minneapolis always brings me to Minnehaha Falls. I take in the vantage point, the same one every year, anywhere near the railings. The exact location does not matter. It is the feeling of being there that I remember: the feeling is why I return. In a land of more than 10,000 lakes and one big river, the Falls exemplify Minnesota's connection to the water for me. In our divisive American cultural moment, I feel myself holding on to the things I understand. To do so is, I am sure, to oversimplify needed complexity. And there is definitely risk in yielding to that which is extraordinarily felt. Building and sustaining culture, though, is in one way an emotive activity. The Falls are not only a natural wonder. The Falls are also a gathering place, a landscape in which to appreciate nature's vastness and beauty. The Falls are my grounding space. Autoethnographer Dwayne Custer is right to write about the ways autoethnography as method brings forward: "the shifting sands of time and space" (2014, p. 2). At the same time, though, I am always a student of autoethnography, gripping for the way that it might reveal (or unearth) what exists between self and social. Taking this approach, I endorse the way Henrietta Williams Pinchon explains that storytelling "allows students to systematically explore themselves within a culture and/or phenomena that may yield meaningful results so that they may make connections to the research process" (2013, p. 7). I seek to place the (my) body into a dialogue with those structures that support, nourish, develop and/or constrain it. Autoethnographically, I am always a student of where and how and why to place, and thus invigorate, my body. I speak only for myself, of course, but, perhaps, I speak not only of myself. Communities congregate around those locales that fill them with meaning and purpose. If certain landmarks can be bringers of joy, Minnehaha Falls is one such destination for me. Maybe it is for you, too.

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Author Note

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Article Citation

Gloviczki, P. J. (2020). Always a student of autoethnography. *The Qualitative Report*, 25(1), 197-198. <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol25/iss1/13>
