4-5-2022

Solipsism as a Challenge of Doing Autoethnographic Inquiry

Chet Nath Panta
Kathmandu University, chetnath@kusoed.edu.np

Bal Chandra Luitel
Kathmandu University, bcluitel@kusoed.edu.np

Recommended APA Citation

Solipsism as a Challenge of Doing Autoethnographic Inquiry

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to unpack and critique different forms of solipsism and whether its impacts on autoethnographic inquiry are overly self-referential. This paper offers thoughts on Western and Eastern perspectives on the self. It is argued that autoethnography as a genre and method of inquiry confronts challenges and tensions in terms of epistemology, methodology, and ethical issues, particularly the issues of solipsism as a major challenge. It is often critiqued that autoethnographers are not able to establish a clear theoretical standpoint and the autobiographic texts lack convincing arguments and scholarly rigor. In the meantime, it is not pragmatic to undermine the intent of autoethnographic inquiry which provides a space for culturally and politically relevant experience and embodiment. To this end, this paper explores the nuances of solipsism, theoretical and definitional gaps, and ways to critically deal with this issue while pursuing autoethnographic inquiry incorporating Western and Eastern perspectives of the self.

Keywords

autoethnography, critical self-reflection, moral relativism, solipsism, subjectivity

Creative Commons License

Solipsism as a Challenge of Doing Autoethnographic Inquiry

Chet Nath Panta and Bal Chandra Luitel
Kathmandu University, Dhulikhel, Nepal

The purpose of this paper is to unpack and critique different forms of solipsism and whether its impacts on autoethnographic inquiry are overly self-referential. This paper offers thoughts on Western and Eastern perspectives on the self. It is argued that autoethnography as a genre and method of inquiry confronts challenges and tensions in terms of epistemology, methodology, and ethical issues, particularly the issues of solipsism as a major challenge. It is often critiqued that autoethnographers are not able to establish a clear theoretical standpoint and the autobiographic texts lack convincing arguments and scholarly rigor. In the meantime, it is not pragmatic to undermine the intent of autoethnographic inquiry which provides a space for culturally and politically relevant experience and embodiment. To this end, this paper explores the nuances of solipsism, theoretical and definitional gaps, and ways to critically deal with this issue while pursuing autoethnographic inquiry incorporating Western and Eastern perspectives of the self.

Keywords: autoethnography, critical self-reflection, moral relativism, solipsism, subjectivity

Introduction

I would like to begin this paper by limiting my focus on solipsism as the main challenge of doing autoethnographic inquiry. The underpinning idea is that where the self and other dialectics are present, there is always a chance of undermining others. The point is that an autoethnographer tends to be more self-referential when swept by solipsistic thoughts. Connectedly, Chang (2008) articulates that in autoethnography "the life of self is the primary focus of inquiry, and others are explored in auxiliary relationship with self" (p. 65). Similarly, Hughes and Pennington (2017) argue that "questioning and unveiling the self is at the heart of critical autoethnographic work" (p. 9). So, it appears that an autoethnographer may minimize the limitations of this mode of inquiry through critical self-reflexivity acknowledging the contribution of other self.

Autoethnography as an autobiographical genre of writing (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) has been a profound tool for self-exploration. Autoethnography connects life and art so as to create autoethnographic texts to change the world (Holman Jones, 2005). Further, Wall (2006) mentions that culturally relevant personal experience consolidates autoethnography. However, an autoethnographer has been "confronted, challenged, moved and changed" (Wall, 2006) by their everyday practice, experience, and learning. Considering self as a social phenomenon, Church (1995) contends that "my subjective experience is part of the world, the story which emerges is not completely private and idiosyncratic" (p. 5). The idea of Church underscores the essence of autoethnographic research so as to critically navigate beyond the self.

Unearthing limitations of autoethnography, Maydell (2010) argues that "it is impossible to engage fully with the autoethnographic research practice without understanding the impact of others on identity construction of self" (p. 1). This argument points out the issues of identity

construction of the researcher and the need of theorizing as an exploration of "personal undertaking involving a commitment to comprehend the world" (Hammond, 2018, p. 1) in collaboration with other(s) in autoethnographic inquiry. But I argue that adhering to an established theory is not necessarily a condition for carrying out an autoethnographic inquiry. Pointing toward the strategic dangers associated with autoethnographic engagement, Ploder and Stadlbauer (2016) argue that "autoethnographic texts can and do include theoretical elements from other texts and contribute to theory building in other research contexts" (p. 759). To this end, researchers need to remain mindful of these constraints of autoethnography to contribute to scholarship through the process of theorization.

The paper further unearths some internal contradictions within the philosophy of solipsism. An effort is further made to see theoretical as well as definitional gaps. As autoethnography is more than a self-referential inquiry, I unpack the notion that self might be deconstructed through questioning and critiquing, thereby embracing autoethnography so as to reconstruct and re-story the self at a deeper level through self-inquiry. Unpacking the issues of solipsism, the paper incorporates critical analysis of its forms, viz. ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological solipsism from Western as well as Eastern perspectives. Further, the paper explores some ways to deal with the issues of solipsism while pursuing autoethnographic inquiry. Eventually, the paper draws conclusions and implications to minimize solipsism, acknowledging the existence of other minds and minimizing the tendency of being overly self-referential. As a school leader possibly in difficult circumstances, I have been "confronted, challenged, moved and changed" (Wall, 2006) by my everyday practice, experience, and learning. Autoethnographic projects have been my source of critical self-reflection so as to unfold and re-story my multi-layered personal and professional self. Writing about my moments of struggles, thoughts, and feelings as a school leader and a PhD scholar seems akin to braving the wilderness (Brown, 2017. p. 2).

Solipsism Defined

Pertaining to the etymological meaning of the term "solipsism," Henriksen (2013) mentions that "solipsism (from Latin *solus*, alone, *ipse*, self) is a philosophical concept that refers either to the idea that only oneself and one's own mind exists (metaphysical solipsism) or to the idea that only oneself and one's mind can be fully known (epistemological solipsism)" (p. 116). Further, Brost (1992) mentions that the term solipsism means literally "self-alone," and less literally either "I alone exist" or else "I alone am conscious" (p. 747). Similarly, Sass (1994) considers solipsism as "a vision of reality as a dream, but with awareness of the fact that one is dreaming" (p. 34). The literal sense seems more idealist as it doubts upon the existence of independent physical world, where less literal view assumes the possibility of the existence of the physical world but does not believe in the existence of the other minds. It sees the problems of other minds potentially unaware of the existence of others and considering oneself as "only conscious being in existence" (Horgan, 2020, para. 1. Pihlström (2020) takes solipsism as "the view that the world is my world, that is, nothing exists independently of my mind, my thought or my experience" (p. 1). Solipsism is considered as an extreme form of subjective idealism that refutes any valid ground of the human mind for believing in the existence of other except itself (Britannica, 2019, June 14). So, solipsism embraces the idea that there is no space for considering the existence of anything beyond self.

To crystalize the concept of solipsism further, Thornton (2004) mentions that a solipsist thinks: "I am the only mind which exists or my mental states are the only mental states" (para.1. In a similar vein, Horgan (2020) argues that a solipsistic person being imprisoned in subjective awareness remains extremely sceptical of the external phenomena and holds a belief that they are the only conscious being having existence in the universe. Reilly (2018) points out that

solipsism embraces total subjectivism, and the experience of the person is considered the totality of existence. These arguments portray how a solipsist person gets engulfed in the confined zone of the self like a frog in the well.

It is argued that anyone could be a solipsist to some extent. The essence of this point could be that solipsism is an inherent issue of self-inquiry, whereas narcissism embraces illusionary self and there is a possibility of over-claiming and falsehood. The perspective of solipsism poses a challenge to our philosophical orientation (Pihlström, 2020) as it sometimes stands itself as a philosophically-disoriented or false issue even though it is not so in reality. Being sceptical of this mode of inquiry, Gellner (1998) opines that "neither the pattern, nor even the mere existence of external reality can ever be substantiated. All you have is your own data, yourself…" (p. 44). In other words, this notion holds a belief that nothing exists beyond my mind and experience. Wittgenstein calls solipsism a metaphysical or philosophical illness that emerges from passivity and deludes an individual to consider that the world is shaped by their idea alone. He calls such vision the metaphysical vision of a solipsist (Sass, 1994). This vision appears to be quite blurred as it does not acknowledge the existence and contribution of other minds.

Thus, based on the definitions mentioned above, it seems that solipsistic persons hold a view that nothing exists beyond their mental states and would not come into existence without them. It indicates excessive self-absorption being extremely sceptical of the external world. It might correlate to past, present, and future as psychological memories, though present moment appears to be more dominant. So, it appears that a solipsistic person remains quite indifferent to the external world, is not sure about the emotions, perceptions, and feelings of others, and remains self-indulgent. The issues of different forms of solipsism are discussed in the following sections.

Ontological Solipsism

Ontological solipsism is a fundamental variant of solipsism. It acknowledges the presence of only one self-conscious being in the universe. Pertaining to this, Pihlström (2020) argues that "the world is my world, or that everything there is equals to, or depends on the contents of my thoughts" (p. 2). Ontological solipsism posits that reality relies on subjectivity and individuality. It prioritizes "my thoughts, my experience, or the contents of my consciousness" (Pihlström, 2019, p. 7). It is also termed a blunt form of solipsism as it incorporates the notion of "only I exist." Pertaining to the puzzling doctrine of solipsism, Fumerton (2018) argues that "I embrace solipsism, I am endorsing the view that I am only the existing thing. If you embrace solipsism, then you are endorsing the view that you are the only existing thing" (para. 2). So, it appears that an autoethnographer may come across this mode of solipsism being overwhelmed by the feeling that nothing exists beyond their thought. To this end, an attempt has to be made to transcend the self.

The Upanishads (philosophical-religious Sanskrit texts of Hinduism) deal with *atman* (inner true self). Jones and Ryan (2007) interpret that "the atman is the self or soul. The word is derived either from the root *at* (to move) or the root *an* (to breathe). It is used for both the individual self and for the transcendent self" (p. 51). It is also argued that the concept of *atman* in the East transcends the self, meaning that it looks for the connection between individual self and *Paramatma* (the Super soul). To further illustrate the concept of *atman*, let me present the teachings of Maharshi (1990), who mentions that knowing the *atman* is akin to knowing the universe and God. Referring to the ideas of British Philosopher Alan Watts upon his interpretation of Eastern philosophy on the conception of the Self in the East and the West, Wolter (2013) mentions that "in the East, the idea of the Self is indeed one of the complete unity with the creator. In the West, it is clear that the idea of the Self is perceived as distinct

from God" (p. 7). Burke (2012) contends that "the Self, the spirit, is completely outside of time and space (which are illusions anyway), yet it can scan time and space, moving backward and forward simply because of the fact that it is one…The Self is truly whole and therefore all-embracing" (p. 17). He discusses the bigger omnipresent self from the Vedantic point of view- a philosophy (darshan) of Hinduism. Pertaining to the Western perspective, Wolter (2013) argues that "in traditional Western dualistic understanding, something is either existent or non-existent- there is no third category that is neither existent nor non- existent" (p. 1). For Socrates, the essence of the philosophy was "to know thyself."

From the discussion above, it appears that the Western perspective or philosophy of solipsism believes in the existence of only individual conscious self with nothing existing beyond it; Western perspective refers to the philosophical thinking of the Western world from the pre-Socratics time, whereas the Eastern perspective assumes universal self. In this connection, Bhawuk (2011) argues that the Eastern philosophy talks of interconnected and interrelated self, not exclusionary self. It seeks oneness and harmony of self, while Western perspective holds a reductionist view of the self.

Epistemological Solipsism

Pointing out the impossibility of separating metaphysical and epistemological solipsism, Pihlström (2020) argues that "if epistemological dimension is taken to be central, the claim is rather that I cannot know (certainly, at least), or even justifiably believe, that they don't" (para. 51). Epistemological solipsism gives primacy to the first person as the source of the knowledge of the world. It holds a belief that knowledge gained by oneself can be only true knowledge, and rest is unsure and untrustworthy. Fumerton (2018) argues that the epistemological root "is going to put some sort of emphasis on the self standing alone" (para. 1). One cannot be sure of existence of other minds. This notion may delude an autoethnographer while making a mention of culturally connected self and socially constructed knowledge. Ploder and Stadlbauer (2016) highlight that "the epistemic power of an autoethnographic text depends on its potential to connect with the stories of the recipients and evoke reflexive moments in their minds and bodies" (p. 754). His sharing aligns with the Eastern perspective of all-encompassing Self, which contradicts the Western perspective of the individual self as a source of knowledge. The Eastern perspective gives due focus to self-knowing and self- transformation. Hinduism also holds a belief that self-knowledge eliminates inner darkness and leads to enlightenment. Arguing against the notion of Descartes "*I think, therefore I am*," Kumar (2010) mentions that "only in relationships with others will you blossom. You are because others are, and others are because you are. We all exist, flourish, blossom and mature in this mutuality, this reciprocity, and the web of relationships" (p. 58). This perspective portrays coexistence and harmonious relationship in making sense of the world under investigation. One cannot flourish alone, as it is elsewhere said that our network is our net worth. Humans are a culturally and universally embedded Self.

Descartes makes an attempt to escape solipsism, and justify the dictum, "I think, therefore, I am" (Cogito, ergo, sum). In this regard, Descartes also appears to be a solipsist. Showing reservation upon the philosophy of Descartes, Sadhguru (2019, 6:52) articulates "Tell me, is it because we exist we may think? Or is it because we think we exist? Which way is it? Because we exist we may think. They think it's more of an existence than existence." To clarify further, an existence indicates individual exclusionary Self, where existence indicates inclusive or all-embracing self. And there is a possibility that inclusiveness and individuality might exist at the same time. The Eastern notion of self embraces the notion of inclusive consciousness and coexistence. From this vantage point, the Eastern concept of self tends to be less solipsistic than the Western notion of self.

I would like to present some local proverbs/metaphors to discuss how self and self-knowledge is perceived. One of them is *aafu namari swarga dekhinna* (literally, the heaven can only be seen after our death). The essence of this proverb is that until we experience or perceive something ourselves, we will not be able to know what it is like. The next proverb is *aafu chha sansar chha, aafu chhaina kehi chhaina* (literally, if I exist, the world is out there). This proverb also gives primacy to individual experience, with nothing existing beyond it. Another proverb, *kuwako bhyaguta* (meaning frog of the well), shows how our epistemological horizon gets limited as we confine to a certain space or mental state. In other words, it reflects the moment of being devoid of the external world. The world does exist with or without our experiences.

From the discussion on epistemological solipsism, it appears that an individual is the source of knowledge and wisdom, and the knowledge gained by oneself is the only "true" knowledge. On the contrary, the Eastern perspective assumes coexistence and reciprocity of knowledge. The Hindu philosophy further adheres to infinite self as *I am not the body, I am the soul. Shivoham, I am Shiva* (Bhawuk, 2011) Deconstructing self through constant questioning at a deeper level might take the self to the next level. This approach exists in the East. Giving credit to Sri Raman Maharshi as a pioneer of self-inquiry, Swami Shankarananda (2007) mentions that "self-inquiry is the mother of all spiritual methods and all forms of meditation. It is direct, sleek, and effective. It requires no religious belief, nor any dogma to practice" (p. 1). Shankarananda's words of wisdom indicate self-inquiry as a pathway of discovering and realizing the self that offers insights to deconstruct the false assumptions of the mind so as to reveal the true nature of the self. The remarks of Shankarananda also highlight the methods of acquiring self-knowledge through careful and contemplative observation of our everyday practices.

Axiological Solipsism

Axiological or ethical solipsism maintains that self is the only thing that matters most. This notion of solipsism pays a high value to self which might make an individual excessively self-indulgent. It is argued that a solipsist has a weaker moral positioning and there is a chance of being confined to one's own point of view, ignoring the worldview of others. Moser and Carson (2001) state that "beliefs or standards about moral issues are relative to different individuals and different societies" (p. 1). The ethical norms depend on local contexts and consensus. Their perspective is based on the idea of moral relativism or ethical relativity, which holds a belief that there are no universally accepted moralities; they may have only local validity (Velleman, 2013). Moral relativism is the perspective that there is no universally accepted ethical code of conduct and they depend on traditions and convictions of people and are contextual. Autoethnographers may encounter unanticipated dilemmas and ethically challenging situations. In this situation, they abide by critical self-reflexivity and ethical appraisal so as to consolidate their moral positioning being aware of culture and context.

The Eastern aphorisms such as *appo deepo bhava* (be the source of light yourself), *I am Satchidnand* (I am eternal bliss, enlightened, and pure self), *aham brahmashami* (I am the universe), *I am Shiva* (shivoham) and so on highlight the significance of the Self. The Eastern perspective appears to embrace a broader self that is universal Self. In other words, the Eastern perspective seems to render value to all-encompassing self rather than exclusionary individual self.

Methodological Solipsism

Methodological solipsism emphasizes the first-person perspective more than others' points of view. Putnam (1983) argues that "the methodological solipsist holds that all our talk can be reduced to talk about experiences and logical constructions of our experiences" (p. 236). Pertaining to methodological solipsism, Sober (1995) argues that solipsists hold a belief that they are completely confined to their own experiences. Their beliefs and experiences do not have any reference to the external world. Brost (1992) considers methodological solipsism as "research strategy" in cognitive psychology to study other minds. And there might be arguments regarding how this research strategy might support the pursuing of autoethnographic inquiry. One argument is that an autoethnographer may adopt methodological solipsism as a research strategy to the investigation and understanding of others (Pihlström, 2020).

From the discussion on methodological solipsism, it is evident that self is the starting point of philosophical or logical construction of experiences. This view is found to be backed by the idea of Rene Descartes, "method of doubt," that one cannot be certain of other things but is able to question his or her existence. It invokes a sort of universal doubt, possibly being stuck in a loop of extreme scepticism. Methodological solipsism might limit researchers in terms of generating information, meaning making and theorizing as they tend to be self-referential and undermine the knowledge and experiences of others. In this connection, Sparkes (2007) points out that autoethnography as constructive process is inspired by embodied struggles and personal meaning without necessarily taking support of any theory. So, an autoethnographer needs to critically see the self-narratives through critical self-reflexivity.

Addressing the Challenge

Taking solipsism seriously, Thornton (2004) argues that it is hard to entertain the solipsistic notion that other human beings could be devoid of any conscious pattern of thoughts, emotions, or experiences, and are weird and bewildering. In a similar vein, Kumar (2010) points out that from the Vedic perspective, the notion of "*I am only right or I only exist*" is a tamasic way of living which gives rise to monopoly and monoculture (tamasic way is associated with inertia, darkness and stagnation). So, it appears that I cannot just be myself alone. There is web of network and relationships for my *being*. To illustrate this concept further, I would like to present one local metaphor: *ma nabhaya barbadai hunchha,* meaning that chaos might occur in my absence. To counter this maxim, let me present another metaphor: *raja marer rajya adkidaina,* meaning that the nation continues to operate even after the demise of the king (ruler). These local metaphors and epistemology seem to urge an individual to expand the boundary of their sensation and thoughts.

Putting an effort to minimize solipsism might be our duty as a human being. We need "to resist the tendency to slip into the easiness of being alone" (Pihlström, 2020, p. 49). The idea of whether only one's mind exists or only one's mind or knowledge can be truly known so far tends to be sceptical and unjustified (Henriksen, 2013). In a similar vein, Humpston (2017) argues that self takes central stage over entire thoughts and perceptions, dissolving the boundary line between self and others. From the arguments above, it appears that an autoethnographer needs to be aware of being too self-indulgent and acknowledge the existence of others. Further, Horgan (2020) mentions that "perhaps the best way to cope with the solipsism problem in the weird, lonely time is to imagine a world in which it has vanished" (para. 21). I disagree with this view of Horgan as it is hard to imagine a world completely devoid of solipsism. Some degree of solipsism might be essential to ponder upon the contribution of self.

An autoethnographer is anticipated to be a critically reflective practitioner who is mindful of minimizing navel gazing, and rather focuses on transformative and ethical dimensions to deal with the issues of solipsism. Taking this mode of research as a critical project and focusing it from praxis level may help to minimize the challenges and dilemmas that loom over us while navigating through autoethnographic inquiry.

Autoethnographers are charged with being insufficiently rigorous, theoretical, and analytical and too aesthetic, emotional, and therapeutic (Ellis, 2009; Ellis et al. 2011; Keller, 1995). Countering the arguments at some point, I argue that autoethnographic inquiry is more transformative than an act of navel-gazing. It is often said that solipsism is a position that does not have a strong moral positioning. A solipsistic person centres the reality toward themself and sees the problems of other minds. They hold a belief that nothing exists beyond their understanding. They do not acknowledge others and tend to be self-referential. They adhere to the notion that reality is what they dream it to be.

Solipsism refutes otherness. It challenges our understanding of others. It promotes the tendency of "placing oneself at the centre of the world and seeing everything else as mere background for one's own experience" (Pihlström, 2020, p. 5). Another key issue is that a solipsist attaches no meaning to feelings, thoughts, perspectives and emotions of others (Thornton, 2004). Considering irrefutability of solipsism, Watson (2016) argues that solipsism should not be treated as a joke. It has to be taken as a serious philosophical challenge. To this end, solipsism may be overcome to some extent, being open to criticism, reducing scepticism, and considering that there is a world beyond our mental state. An attempt also has to be made to know other minds in order to minimize solipsism. Deconstructing and demystifying the myth of "I only exist" or holding the centre stage pertaining to thoughts and perceptions by oneself, an autoethnographer needs to remain mindful of not being swept away by solipsistic thoughts.

Holman Jones (2005) views autoethnography as socially just act with an intent to produce analytical and accessible writing so as to change us and the world around us. From the arguments mentioned above, it appears that an autoethnographer needs to carry out research being mindful of its potential threats instead of discarding them, as these issues and differences are what we live with as viewed by Rorty (1982). To this end, it seems pertinent to carry out autoethnographic inquiry, taking it as a critical project and maintaining critical self-reflexivity so as to cope with autoethnographic moments of challenges and dilemmas. As a practitioner of autoethnography, I am trying to see my coexistence with others being aware of the connectedness of my autoethnographic narratives to the social context I live by.

Conclusions

Autoethnographic inquiry connects the personal to the cultural (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). However, controversy still surrounds autoethnography (Ellis et al. 2011; Dull, 2021; Holman Jones et al., 2005; Hughes & Pennington, 2017). This mode of inquiry is said to incorporate researcher's bias and prejudices which pose a threat to its academic rigor (Shim, 2018). An autoethnographic inquiry is further charged with being methodologically less transparent research.

An autoethnographic mode of inquiry confronts epistemological, methodological, and quality standard related challenges. "The kind of radical foundationalism that Descartes embraced might naturally lead, then, to the conclusion that we can only know of our existence and the perceptions and thoughts that reside there" (Fumerton, 2018, para. 6). In the meantime, Jackson and Mazzei (2008) argue that "autoethnography remains accountable by considering the political constructions of an 'I' that remains sceptical of authentic experience" (p. 314). Further, Fumerton (2018) argues that being suspicious of others' existence is necessarily a false claim.

As an autoethnographer tends to make their self visible in their research, there is a higher chance of being solipsistic. Pertaining to the validity of autoethnography as a postmodern research method, "criticism abound and the debate rages" (Wall, 2006, p. 154); however, as a critical research project, autoethnography embraces culturally embodied personal experience, thereby creating a space for the subjective self, challenging the conventional criteria of maintaining validity of research. To this end, being mindful and critical of ethical and moral positioning as well as an idealized self-image, an autoethnogrpaher needs to ponder upon the issues of non-comparability, over claiming, and moral relativism. Being aware of disempowering aspects of solipsism, an autoethnographer is expected to acknowledge the feelings, perceptions, and thoughts of self and others and take into account the nexus of socio-cultural milieu.

Implications

Solipsism is taken as a major challenge to autoethnography. An autoethnograper may be disturbed by the solipsistic thought and remain overly self-referential while maintaining positionality of the self. From this perspective, an autoethnographer needs to keep an open mind and embrace the intent of the inclusive and culturally embedded self. It is observed that solipsism is incoherent but may not be a false philosophical theory. It may be an inherent challenge of autoethnography but might be required to some degree in order to give meaning to the personal experiences and/or narratives. It seems pertinent to contextualize the issue of solipsism. An autoethnographer needs to transcend the perceptions that "I am the only source of the knowledge of the world" without undermining other self. To put in other words, they are not expected to act like visually impaired men in the story of "Six Blind Men and the Elephant" and have to get out of the boundary of fragmented and reductionist views of the world.

An autoethnographer needs to pursue this mode of inquiry, being self-critical and epistemically open as far as possible. Methodological solipsism might limit researchers in generating information, meaning making, and theorizing processes. Taking an integral view of autoethnography, an autoethnographer needs to be mindful of the moral positioning with subjective awareness while embarking on autoethnographic inquiry, minimizing solipsistic views as far as possible. To this end, the use of multiple logics and genres through multi-epistemic lenses may reduce the extent of solipsism. Let us envisage self-inquiry as a method to minimize solipsism, focusing on self within a cultural context. As of me, I frequently get into identity dilemmas as I navigate my culturally embedded self. Gradually, autoethnographic unfoldment seems to enable me to keep my agency intact, exploring my layered self with a sense of ethical responsibility and critical self-reflexivity as a transformative school leader in the making.

References

Bhawuk, D. P. S. (2011). *Spirituality and Indian psychology: Lessons from the Bhagvad-Gita.* Springer.

Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2019, June 14). *Solipsism. Encyclopedia Britannica.* https://www.britannica.com/topic/solipsism

Brost, C. (1992). Solipsism. In J. Dancy & E. Sosa (Eds.), *A companion to epistemology* (pp. 747-748). Wiley-Blackwell.

Brown, B. (2017). *Braving the wilderness. The quest for true belonging and the courage to stand alone.* Ebury Publishing.

Burke, A. G. (2012). *The Upanishad for awakening.* The Light of the Spirit Monastery.

Ellis, C. (2009). Fighting back or moving on: An autoethnographic response to

critics. *International   Review   of   Qualitative   Research*, *2*(3),   371–
378. https://doi.org/10.1525/irqr.2009.2.3.371

Chang, H. (2008). *Autoethnography as a method*. Left Coast Press, Inc.

Church, K. (1995). *Forbidden narratives*. Gordon & Breach.

Dull, A. (2021). Informing without conforming: Applying two frameworks to enrich
autoethnography.   *The   Qualitative   Report,   26*(11),   3307-3317.
https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.5030

Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical
Social Research*, *36*(4), 273-290. https://doi.org/10.17169/FQS-12.1.1589

Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity. In N.K.
Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 733-
768). SAGE.

Fumerton,   R.   (2018).   Solipsism.   *Encyclopedia   of   Psychology*.
Encyclopedia.com: https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-
almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/solipsism

Gellner. E. (1998). *Language and solitude: Wittgenstein, Malinowski and the Habsburg
dilemma*. Cambridge University Press.

Hammond, M. (2018). An interesting paper but not sufficiently theoretical: What does
theorising in social research look like? *Methodological Innovations*, 11(2).
https://doi.org/10.1177/2059799118787756

Henriksen, M. G. (2013). On incomprehensibility in schizophrenia. *Phenomenology and the
Cognitive Sciences*, *12*, 105–129. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-010-9194-7

Holman Jones, S. (2005). Autoethnography: Making the personal political. In N. Denzin & Y.
S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 763- 797).
SAGE.

Horgan, J. (2020). How do I know I'm not the only conscious being in the universe? *At
Scientific American, online*. https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-do-i-
know-im-not-the-only-conscious-being-in-the-universe/

Hughes, S., & Pennington, J. (2017). Autoethnography: Introduction and overview.
Autoethnography, 4-33. SAGE. https://www.doi.org/ 10.4135/9781483398594

Humpston, C. S. (2017): The paradoxical self: Awareness, solipsism and first-rank symptoms
in   schizophrenia.   *Philosophical   Psychology*,   *31*(2).
https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2017.1410877

Jackson, A. Y., & Mazzei, L. A. (2008). Experience and "I" in autoethnography: A
deconstruction. *International Review of Qualitative Review*, *1*(3), 299-317.
https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.3282.4800

Jones, C. A., & Ryan, J. D. (2007). *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*. Facts on File, Inc.

Keller, E. F. (1995). *Reflections on gender and science*. Yale University Press.

Kumar, S. (2010). *Spiritual compass. The three qualities of life*. Green Books.

Maharshi, R. (1990). *Self-inquiry*. Board of Trustees, Sriramanaasramam.

Maydell, E. (2010). Methodological and analytical dilemmas in autoethnographic research.
Journal Research Practice, 6(1). Retrieved from: http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/
article/view/223/190

Moser, P. K., & Carson, T. L. (2001). *Moral relativism: A reader*. Oxford University Press.

Pihlström, S. (2020). *Why solipsism matters*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Putnam, H. (1983). *Realism and reason*. Cambridge University Press.

Ploder, A., & Stadlbauer, J. (2016). Strong reflexivity and its critics: Responses to
autoethnography in German-speaking cultural and social sciences. *Journal of
Qualitative Inquiry*, *22*(9), 753-765. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800416658067

Reilly,   G.   C.   (2018).   Solipsism. *New   Catholic   Encyclopedia*.   Retrieved   from:

https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/solipsism

Rorty, R. (1982). *Consequences of pragmatism*. University of Minnesota Press.

Sadhguru [English Speeches]. (2019, November). *Developing an inclusive consciousness*. [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/Iw363WNPReQ.

Sass, L. A. (1994). *The paradoxes of delusion: Wittgenstein, Schreber, and the schizophrenic mind*. Cornell.

Shim, J. (2018). Problematic autoethnographic research: Researcher's failure in positioning. *The Qualitative Report*, *23*(1), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2018.2621

Sober, E. (1995). Why not solipsism? *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 55*, 547-566.

Sparkes, A. C. (2007). Embodiment, academics, and the audit culture: A story seeking consideration. *Qualitative Research*, *7*(4), 521-550. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794107082306

Shankarananda, S. (2007). *Self-inquiry: Using awareness to unblock your life*. Shaktipat Press.

Thornton, S. P. (2004). Solipsism and the problem of other minds. *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, online. https://iep.utm.edu/solipsis/

Velleman, J. D. (2013). *Foundations for moral relativism.* Open Book Publishers.

Wall, S. (2006). An autoethnography on learning about autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 146–160. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500205

Watson, R. A. (2016). *Solipsism: The ultimate empirical theory of human existence*. St. Augustine's Press.

Wolter, D. C. (2013). In search of the self: Eastern versus Western Perspectives. *Oglethrope Journal of Undergraduate Research*, *1*(1), 1-9. https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/ojur/vol1/iss1/1

Author Note

Chet Nath Panta is a PhD scholar in educational leadership at Kathmandu University, Nepal. He is serving in the capacity of head teacher at Sisneri Secondary school, Lalitpur Nepal. He is an ELT professional as well. His areas of interest include critical pedagogy, positive psychology, autoethnography, transformative learning, and issues of school leadership. Email: chetnath@kusoed.edu.np

Bal Chandra Luitel, PhD, is a professor in the Department of STEAM Education at Kathmandu University, Nepal. He coordinates the KU components of a transformative education project called Rupantaran that aims at engaging Master's and Doctoral students to bring forth autoethnographic narratives unfolded during their immersion in a school transformation process via transformative epistemologies armed with new analytics arising from dialectical, metaphorical, poetic and narrative for conceiving, expressing and implementing visions of inclusive and life-affirming STEAM education in Nepal. Email: bcluitel@kusoed.edu.np

Article Citation