SELF-REFLECTIONS ON SELF-REFLECTIONS: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC DEFENSE OF AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Abstract
Autoethnography is a discipline of research that combines the autobiographical and the ethnographic to explore democratized scholarship and challenge the hegemony of situated knowledge. It is often denigrated and criticized, however, for being a kind of “navel-gazing me-search” instead of being recognized for its legitimate academic worth. In this autoethnographical account, I document my own engagement with lived experience as a cis-hetero white male challenging his own situatedness through experimentation and direct engagement with transformational autoethnographic research and feminist literature. In the process, I am to provide an autoethnographic defense of autoethnographical research and simultaneously demonstrate and extol this body of literature through the very medium that it presents.

Keywords
autoethnography, feminism, masculinities, schizoid personality disorder, Disney

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Prelude

Violence can be done in 140 characters.

It was on Twitter that I first found feminism and thus my way into the feminist literature and other scholarship into marginalized groups. In that way, Twitter can be a source for great good, but it is also abuzz with attacks on people. These attacks are often vicious and cruel, targeting people for their beliefs and efforts to work on behalf of marginalized and oppressed groups. Even the ideas get attacked, feminism and gender studies scholarship in particular. Much of it is derisive, damaging, violent—expressing antagonism toward people's expressions of self and right to be by unfairly mocking scholarship that helps them and all marginalized and oppressed persons.

The mockery I've personally experienced on Twitter, for example, knows few bounds and, for anyone familiar with standing up for feminist or anti-racist ideals on social media would know, can be overwhelming. Of all scholarship Twitter users seem to most gleefully mock, though, the one closest to my own experience is one of the most harshly treated targets. As much of Twitter as is aware of it loves to mock autoethnography and any scholarship that follows from it.

Consequently, there is an urgent need for a robust defense of autoethnography from its growing legions of cultural and digital critics. One may consider tweeted mockery and criticisms poor justification to warrant a robust defense of an entire discipline of scholarship, but Twitter is best described as the id of socially constructed experience, at least in this decade. Twitter criticism touches the primal pulse of the society that performatively generates it.

Redoubling the need to defend autoethnography from its critics, most do not understand the vulnerability inherent in autoethnography as a form of research. Uniquely among scholarship, autoethnography combines storytelling, personal insight, and high-impact social commentary into one fluid self-dialectical narrative that simultaneously displays and challenges personal discourses. This is why my own autoethnography serves as a robust defense of the methodology. Autoethnography set me free, to play upon the cliché. I found myself, to play upon another, reading autoethnography and focusing it upon my own story.

What better means than autoethnography to defend autoethnography? An autoethnographic defense allows autoethnography to prove itself by means of itself in direct reflection of how it allows selves to demonstrate their situated understanding of themselves to themselves and to the world in which they are performative actors. Just as Wall (2006) was able to give an autoethnographic account of her experience learning *about* autoethnography, I hope to offer a meaningful autoethnographic account of my experience integrating autoethnographic literature into experiments with my own lived experience in which I challenged my deepest assumptions about myself. In doing so, I will defend autoethnography by proving its worth to the personal, social, and scholarly growth of individuals who can benefit from lived experience as a path to self-constructed knowledge.

Throughout this paper, which will be presented in a series of dramatic acts like those in a play, I will highlight a series of vignettes of my lived experience concomitant with the vast body of autoethnographic research. Dramas are, like our roles in life, performances. The intersection of my scholarly working life and experimental, if turbulent, personal life provides the context in which this autoethnographic account attains meaning and value.

As autoethnographies tend to focus upon the transformative, many of the vignettes depict experiments against my identity, some quite ill-informed and others salient in their own ways. Other vignettes are utterly quotidian, for in the ordinary often we find the extraordinary when our minds have critically assessed prose and poetry. Many evoke truth from the powerful method of self-interview (Crawley 2012). Most importantly, however, the autoethnographic format will allow me to demonstrate the worth of autoethnography in overcoming my own failures and shortcomings and actualizing through a transformative process of performance, reflection, and scholarship that is likely not possible through other scholarly mediums.

This paper will guide readers through ten scenes in my life, written in three thematic acts, that proved transformative and remade my masculinities from the ground up. Each scene corresponds to a body of autoethnographic literature that situates it within the wider discourse. And while not all of these appear in the correct sequence of my experience—both my story and the lessons I drew from it are multidimensional and nonlinear processes—each is presented in a particular format to evoke the most meaning from my unique perspective and thus obtain the strongest objectivity I can from my limited perspective as a cis-hetero white male.

First, each scene will focus on a vignette offering a glimpse into my life, personal stories wherein I sought transformation. Second, each vignette will focus upon one or more compelling autoethnography that was part of my study of the field at the time when I was experiencing the story so recounted. Third, because of their importance in contextualizing my view of life, each will weave in themes from a unique Disney animated musical that rounds out the story and gives it a robust and unique quality that is sadly nearly always lacking from the male or masculine perspective. Finally, a capstone commentary on autoethnography ties the scene together and gives it weight as a social text. Saturated throughout is relevant literature that has helped me make these experiences meaningful.

To disclaim, any names given will be changed. To adopt a convention for this paper, they will be adapted from the relevant Disney classic in whichever scene they appear to protect the anonymity, person, and story of the persons to which they refer. This approach is likely to be unorthodox, but it is fundamentally who I am and how I lived my own lived experience. If I have learned anything from autoethnography, it is that we must tell our stories as we see it, from our own situated experiences. (Pitard 2015).

Act I: Finding Myself Inside Myself

Scene 1: Seeing my fairy godmother in a lesbian nun

It is critical to start from the beginning. I was and am again a gendered person in a gendered body. A straight, cisgendered, male person in a male body. But that serves as but one discourse with which I identify. I am not proud of it or the privileges it confers to me. Thus, I engaged with the autoethnographic literature and challenged myself and my sense of self until my identity emerged from what I now recognize as a tightly wound chrysalis of societal norms and expectations on performative identity. In the end, I emerged not as a butterfly, as the cliché runs, but as a man remade.

My goal was to investigate my own masculinity as it plays out within my psyche, my person, my gender performances, and my society. Because of the inherent power and privilege I retain as a straight, cisgendered male, this process was necessarily one of destruction within myself and reconstruction of myself from engaging what remained with my studies and my enveloping social environment. Now I can repay the favor. As Elizabeth Ettorre (2010) compellingly wrote in her autoethnography, “telling one's story can become a gift — 'a telling creating conversations that transcends our traumas' and a way of healing ourselves and others” (p. 7).

Ettorre tells us her story as a “Catholic nun and closeted lesbian in 1970s' USA,” focusing on “explaining the impact of drugs and alcohol research on [her] lesbian feminist sociological imagination and reflecting upon the place of 'deviant bodies' in the new genetics and generally in society” (Ettorre 2010). I was reading Ettore's account at a particularly closeted time in my life, one in which I was attempting to assume a fully masculine male identity that I could not make fit me. I pretended to be manly for my friends, laughing and making sexist jokes, lifting weights, eating too much, and belching in loud competitions with my equally over-masculine compatriots, even in public. We were young and we laughed, but I hid my discomfort and my shame at these overt displays.

Following her story, I tried self-induced drug research. I only did it once. I took a moderate dose of psilocybin mushrooms at a party. I was sure the experience would be transcendent and transformational, but after a little more than an hour of being entranced by the light-like splashes of color on a Thomas Kincaid painting in my friend's parents' den, I suddenly became self-aware of the trip and was uncomfortable. I felt trapped by the drug in a perfect analogue to the way I felt trapped by my need to perform a masculine personality for my friends, and so I turned back to Ettorre as soon as the trip ended. Engaging her autoethnography made me feel like I was okay, that I could be who I am and hide as long as I needed to and then still break free. I never needed to try drugs again to seek myself.

My friends had a difficult time accepting me as I started to break free from the culturally dominant themes to which I had been subject, notably, hegemonically masculine. My feminism was awakening, as was my contentedness with being what others derided as “beta” (Currie 2016). They are, of course, referring to the outdated and outmoded gender “theory” of “alpha” and “beta” males and females, the alphas being dominant and the collectors of the spoils (Fox 1971). While we are primates, however, we are also human, and the alpha/beta dichotomy applies very poorly to the human experience (Nishida et al. 1992). I am who I am, and like Ettorre, my story “can become a gift” (Ettorre 2010:295).

I had always hoped for my own Fairy Godmother—I have always harbored a deep and lasting love of the Disney animated classics, here referring to *Cinderella* (Geronimi 1950)—to come and transform me for my prince, to speak metaphorically. I struggled against a society that rejected my authentic self-expression and against myself for having to play along with it. I wished for a magic wand to remake my life, but I couldn't see that the magic wand was in me all along. Ettorre led me through my first steps toward realizing that.

These insights are available to *anybody* who wants them. *Anybody*. And reading and writing autoethnographies are among the best ways to cause dynamic, transformational shifts in both in one’s person and in one’s awareness of being culturally, morally, and historically situated.

Autoethnography is a scholarly discipline that provides a uniquely personal backdrop to complicated social phenomena (Coffey 1999:37). It allows one researcher to connect to her own story, but it also allows the reader to connect with a perspective that is utterly foreign, and yet familiar. I am not a lesbian nun experimenting with sex, drugs, and alcohol in the 1970s' USA, as was Ettorre (cf. Ettorre 2006), and I never was or will be. Her autoethnographic account of her emerging true self and its impact on the relevant feminist and queer literature, however, resonated with me at exactly the time in my life I needed it most, when I started to find myself for the first time—but not for the last.

Scene 2: I always wanted to be a swingin' cat

I just wanted to fit in, somewhere. I am, as it turns out, often lonely. I don't fit in because I'm different, a little "broken." My therapist has confirmed my long-held self-diagnosis of a moderate case of schizoid personality disorder. It leaves me withdrawn emotionally, hidden away within myself. I am told I present a false personality with superficial emotions to the world and that my inner emotional self has been stunted, perpetually at some age within my childhood. What I always wanted, as a result, was to fit in, to be like other people, to be liked by them, and to escape my loneliness.

I pondered the fundamentally withdrawn reality of myself while I read through Johanna Uotinen's autoethnographic account of cultural studies of technology (Uotinen 2010). Uotinen explores her own experience with ordinary electronic devices, like her cellphone, television remote, and DVD player, in a fascinating narrative that parallels it against the respirator that saved her life when hospitalized. For her, autoethnography allowed a study of "technology-related gendered everyday practices" and helped "make them visible" (Uotinen 2010:161).

“*PING! PING! PING!*” Uotinen repeatedly wrote, drawing the reader along through her story and analysis. She was referring to the alien noise intruding into her experience, driving her mad. Though she didn't realize it immediately, the sound came from the respirator, which was saving her life (Uotinen 2010). This account coincided with an experience far less grave and harrowing for me, but remarkably similar in the superficial details.

Several months before encountering Uotinen, I had purchased a very nice food dehydrator so that I could dry leaves foraged from my yard, garden, and nearby forest so that I could make my own herbal teas. The intention of these teas was less to do with saving my life than prolonging it, which in some respects is the same thing. Well, the infernal machine did not “*PING!*” like Uotinen's life-saving respirator, nor did it flash alerts on my screens like Uotinen's smartphone. Instead, it whirred. “WHIRRRRRRRRR.” Endlessly whirring, white noise whiter than white begging for a “*PING!*” that would end it. (I find both white and pink noise distracting.) The whir itself wasn't just annoying. It mimicked the sound of a microwave oven almost exactly.

One does not understand the insanity that one sound that is nearly identical to another sound can cause for someone until one lives through it. In this case, the endless whirring always seems like it might come to an end, providing a burrito or quick-fix of macaroni and cheese at the hail of a loud “*PING!*” and subsequent silence, but with the food dehydrator, it never does. It just goes on endlessly whirring until I turn it off. Every time I forget about it, re-enter the kitchen, and hear it again, I assume it's the microwave and that I must have started cooking something I don't remember starting to cook, but then I remember that it's the dehydrator. It's thoroughly maddening.

I told my friend “Scat Cat” about this problem, and he merely replied, “I don't know, man. You get hung up on some weird stuff sometimes.” The problem is that he's right.

The relevance of this vignette can be explained in terms of the under-recognized Disney film *The Aristocats* (Reitherman 1970). Of all the big-band musical scores in that film, one of the best is “Ev'rybody Wants to Be a Cat,” performed by Benjamin “Scatman” Crothers, Phil Harris, Robie Lester, and Liz English. What the song means is that everybody wants to be “a swingin' cat,” which plays a *double entendre* on the word “cat.” Obviously, it refers to feline animals, as the film's characters anthropomorphize, but it also rolls with the hip slang of the big-band swinger scene the movie features, to be a “cool cat,” a “swingin' cat,” meaning someone who is hip and fits in. “Now a square with a horn / can make you wish you weren't born,” (Rinker and Huddleston 1970) it rhapsodizes. I am that square with that horn, and I can make myself wish I wasn't born, for certain.

Telling this story in the context of an autoethnography allows me to connect my own struggle to the great struggles of others. Uotinen gives a more compelling defense of autoethonography here than I would write, but I will add to it from my own story's poignancy. She notes three significant reasons in the self-defense of autoethongraphy (which I am happy to report seems to be a common feature of autoethonographic accounts).

First, Uotinen writes, “Why, then, would autoethnography be worth doing, if it is so contradictory? Well, first of all, autoethnography offers tools for research that follow the idea of situated knowledge, which is central in women's studies.” (Uotinen 2010) Uotinen is correct. From my own account, I wanted to claim that it is also central in men's self-studies conducted in the self-reflected style of women's studies, but perhaps I claim too much (Ronkainen 2000:176–177). This makes me feel like I don't fit in with the field I cherish until I remember Uotinen's third point, which I can only come to after clarifying her second point.

Second, Uotinen observes, “Secondly, autoethnography makes it possible to follow everyday practices.” (Uotinen 2010) This seems self-evident. Authoethnography is most real and thus most valuable when it focuses first on the quotidian aspects of experience and expands outwardly into the social sphere from there. In no way is our experience more true than in our most everyday moments, and autoethnography, often criticized for trivializing academic research (Walford 2004:411), evokes the power of the everyday and gives voice to authenticity. In this deeply personal sense, it is akin to no other scholarly investigation.

Third, saving me from myself, Uotinen remarks, “The third benefit of autoethnography is that it is the researcher's own life, not someone else's, which is under consideration and exposed to criticism.” This articulation finds its mark. It is my life that is under consideration, including self-consideration, and I found autoethnography—both reading published works and writing my own—to be an excellent way to expose myself to my own criticisms. As she closes the relevant section, I found it to be the most poignant, “All ethnographic knowledge is subjective, context-bound and partial; it is committed to the persona perspectives and starting points of the researchers and readers (and informants) and has to be accepted – or rejected – as such (Clifford 1986:7; cf. Medford 2006:853–854)” (Uotinen 2010).

Scene 3: Looking like who I ain't

“*Let it go! Let it go!*”

I know I should apologize, that I shouldn't have inserted that earworm of a song (from Disney's 2013 animated blockbuster *Frozen* (Lee and Buck 2013)), but it is the overall theme of part of my story in which I learned that I look like who I ain't. Because I have schizoid personality disorder, I often think of “going Elsa” and simply freezing the world and going off to be my own sort of ice queen, shrieking “*Let it go! Let it go!*” in perfect mezzo soprano (Anderson-Lopez and Lopez 2013), but in addition to a million other flaws with this plan, I'm a baritone. Elsa, for all she symbolizes in me, is who I ain't. But because my experience is inherently subjective, and because I suffer from this disorder, I externalized and thought everyone was like this. They're not. I'm different, and I had to learn that somehow.

I look pretty normal. I'm fairly tall at just under six feet, but I have a stringy, physique. No one looking at me on the outside could possibly realize that my emotional world is frozen. It's part of the crushing loneliness of schizoid personalities, which is in constant conflict with an overarching panic about emotional closeness and revelation. Yet again, I found an answer to this difficult issue in the autoethnographic literature.

Natalie Wigg-Stevenson's (2017) account “You Don't Look Like a Baptist Minister: An Autoethnographic Retrieval of 'Women's Experience' as an Analytic Category of Feminist Theology” spoke to me in a way little else (besides *Frozen*) could. Wigg-Stevenson, despite her hyphenated name, is a Baptist minister, and she utilized autoethnography “as a response to the crisis of representation in the Humanities.” (Wigg-Stevenson 2017:182) Her account also freed me from an aspect of my crisis of self-loathing.

Wigg-Stevenson caught me in my schizoid bubble with this important phrase: “But as generations of feminist, womanist, *mujerista*, queer and other liberation theologians have now demonstrated, no one woman's experience is representative of every other's; no single group of women-identified people can define coherently or fully the concept, 'woman.'” (Wigg-Stevenson 2017) This is undoubtedly true, and I desperately hope it generalizes to my own conclusion that no one person, including my psychoanalyst or any single group of schizoid-identified people, can define coherently or fully the concept, “person exactly like I am.”

For Wigg-Stevenson, the problem is clearly the contextual and discursive struggle between being a Baptist minister, a woman (see Bible verse, 1 Timothy 2:12), and a feminist, with a hyphenated last name, no less, which many Baptist congregants are likely to find “uppity.” For me, it's merely with being normal, but I hope I don't appropriate too much by saying I can relate.

From her experiences, Wigg-Stevenson was able to learn thus observe, “Autoethnography is often concerned with epiphanies (Denzin 2014:13–15, 28–30; Walton 2014:5), those slight shifts in perspective that reveal the possibility for slippage within the systems of cultural reproduction that individual bodies bear” (Wigg-Stevenson 2017). Also, individual minds, including those with personality disorders from which they desperately want to escape but cannot, independent of the price of psychoanalysis.

Autoethnography is often defended as a means by which scholars can discover themselves in the world and from which their own social truths may follow (Espino et al. 2010), but to me it is more than that. Autoethnography is the unique way in which a scholar or seeker can discover the authentic self in others and have it lead oneself to oneself, with subjective but widely applicable social truths that follow. That is, autoethnography is the study not just of truth through the self, but of truth through the legitimacy of selfness (Jordan 2001:42).

Scene 4: My whole new world

It's hard being a schizoid, even as a privileged white, cisgendered, heterosexual man. Being diagnosed with it was crushing even though it was just a confirmation of my self-diagnosis. It sounds like schizophrenia, which obviously nobody wants, and it was terrifying. I no longer *thought* I was weird. I had proof. It was very destabilizing, and finding my feet again took a long time.

Here, I have to diverge from the usual flow of my autoethnographic catalogue of finding and challenging myself (as is recounted in the next act of this drama). Many of these vignettes occurred concomitantly with reading the relevant autoethnographic literature that freed up and categorically placed my personal experiences in a broader discussion. In this case, I was diagnosed three full years before I was fortunate enough to stumble upon Renata Ferdinand's compelling autoethnography about having been diagnosed with lupus, which she described as being “like a black woman's Charlie Brown moment” (Ferdinand 2016).

I am not black, nor am I a woman. I did not and cannot have the quality of experiences Ferdinand did, but I can relate to having Charlie Brown moments (Carby 1996). Finding out about my schizoid personality disorder was almost exactly that, except that I am white, male, and in no way daring to compare my struggles to hers, for example, to her “own insecurities of being stereotyped” and “the ways that doctors interact with [her]” (Ferdinand 2016:1). I am regretfully shut out of those experiences, so I have no choice but to listen to them, learn from them, and honor them. This capacity, of course, is a gift of autoethnography.

I will not provide the exact details of my diagnosis. Even though I have grown, I have not grown enough to share something *that* deeply personal. I have only grown so far enough to know that my perspective as a straight white male shuts me out of other perspectives in a way that weakens me, though that weakness can be a constant source of strength. In that way, being a man against one's wishes is like being one with schizoid personality disorder. Thus, it will suffice to say that calling my diagnosis a “Charlie Brown moment,” as did Ferdinand (2016), applies nearly perfectly.

For example, Ferdinand writes, “When the lupus diagnosis came, I was just beginning to see some of the beauty of life. I was now an assistant professor, which afforded me a comfortable lifestyle. But now, like Charlie Brown would say, 'For one brief moment today I thought I was winning in the game of life. But there was a flag on the play.' I cried for the unattained possibilities. And how would I tell my family? I had barely even heard of lupus myself.” (Ferdinand 2016)

Except that I'm white and male and therefore do not have access to the depths with which this problem impacted Ferdinand, I can relate exactly (Carby 1996). My experience cannot match hers, despite my overwhelming identification with this powerful moment in her life, but her autoethnography provides me a clear looking glass into a life I can but attempt to understand through my own. Through her autoethnography, Ferdinand taught me to realize I can see myself simultaneously as a whole but struggling person who is and is not defined by a terrifying diagnosis, but also that because of the nature of schizoid, I can but see myself as through a glass, darkly. Ferdinand writes,

> I use autoethnogrpahy to tell the story. Autoethnography is a way of “connecting the personal to the cultural” (Ellis and Bochner 2000:739). Denzin and Lincoln (1997) explain autoethnography best:
>
> > Autoethnography is setting a scene, telling a story, weaving intricate connections among life and art, experience and theory, evocation and explanation … and then letting it go, hoping for readers who will bring the same careful attention to your words in the context of their own lives. (p. 208)
>
> By using my personal experiences and a discussion of illness and Black women's health, I critically examine larger critical race issues of race, gender, and the social barriers to healthcare. (Ferdinand 2016)

I wish I could critically examine larger critical race issues of race, gender, and social barriers in healthcare, but I cannot (Carby 1996). All I can do is read Ferdinand and use her autoethnographic account to remind myself that with every autoethnography I receive, just as with every diagnosis I experience, I, like Princess Jasmine is promised from Aladdin, can come to a *whole new world, a new, fantastic point of view* (Clements and Musker 1992; Menken and Rice 1992).

Autoethnography is but solipsism if all it does is allow scholarly introspection. It must also look outward and identify crucial structural problems within society. As Adams, Ellis, and Jones (2015) put it, the first goal of autoethnographic inquiry must be to "extend existing knowledge and research while recognizing that knowledge is both situated and contested" (Adams, Ellis, and Jones 2015; cf. Adams 2011).

From these autoethnographically infused vignettes, particularly leaning upon the more meaningful autoethnographies of structurally marginalized persons, which comprise Act I: Finding Myself Inside Myself, it is clear that there are deep structural problems in society working against the different. Difference of race, gender, sexual orientation, political positioning, and neurotypicality all exhibit profound structural biases against them, reinforcing the copious body of literature supporting the idea that we are still living in a cis-hetero-white-male hegemonically patriarchal ableist and racist society (Goodley 2014; hooks 2000; Luchies 2015). The value of autoethnography to present social transformation by documenting the lived experience of marginalized "differents," then, is manifest, and from it follows the profound worth of autoethnography as a scholarly performance and transformative accomplishment at remaking societies and the persons within them.

Act II: Unmaking Myself

Scene 1: Cutting my strings

In “Knee-High Boots and Six-Pack Abs: Autoethnographic Reflections on Gender and Technology in Second Life,” Delia Dumitrica and Georgia Gaden (2008) document their experiences with the online virtual world platform known as Second Life. In a virtual world environment, they observe, gender profoundly “frames representation and performance of gender, while technical skill becomes a crucial factor in constructing our ability to play with this performance.” (Dumitrica and Gaden 2008). This relates to my experience as a schizoid personality, in which my own emotional life is a virtual performance, not just of gender, but of emotional maturity within the superordinate context of a gendered person.

I have no experience with Second Life, but I did play with another popular virtual world platform, *The Sims*. It isn't quite accurate to say I “played” *The Sims*, so much as that I enabled it and then watched it, trying to glean insights into myself by observing the animated avatars live out a virtual existence upon which I was inflated to the unrealistic status of perfect external observer. Most of the behavior of the avatars is boring and trivial, just like in reality, and this observation, combined with insights from Dumitrica and Gaden's autoethnography, enabled me to become my own Pinocchio (Disney 2009). That is, I was able to see myself and my various competing masculinities in a new way for the first time and finally cut my strings to myself (McDowell 2001). The result of this self-interrogative, self-interaction was a process of transformation of my masculinities by directly experiencing them and challenging them on their own terms.

A new chapter in my life had begun once I undertook this process, one in which I could focus inwardly on myself, outwardly on the world, and finally start to test my growing suspicions about my social reality. Many of the masculinities I subscribed to—or, more appropriately, tried to identify with without success—represent deeply problematic features of social and material reality that self-interrogation and autoethnographic exploration enabled me to confront and ultimately challenge (Roblou 2012).

After a particularly trying and sweaty evening, I was left deeply pondering the ideas dancing behind Dumitrica and Gaden's words. These stand out: “Often times, we would remind ourselves that, after all, the sexuality and gendered bodies we encountered were not that remote from their presence in our real life experiences, like for instance flipping through the pages of a women's or men's magazine. And that, although we interpreted them as oppressive, they might be differently perceived from other situated perspectives” (Dumitrica and Gaden 2008:17). Importantly, but less importantly than these crucial issues of gender and society, are those situated perspectives from which I see these things differently, allowing me to cut my own strings and, honestly, become that much less wooden, that much less of my own puppet.

Autoethnography brings to light an imperative to critically examine the society in which we are trapped. It reveals that society is a ship that must be rebuilt, plank by performative plank, while at sea. It challenges us to cut our own strings by “featuring the perspective of the self in context and culture, exploring experience as a means of insight about social life, embracing the risks of presenting vulnerable selves in research, and using emotions and bodily experience as a means and modes of understanding” (Adams, Jones, and Ellis 2015:103).

Scene 2: It means no worries

Autoethnography provides a window into worlds one could not otherwise have, and it thus provides glimpses, if not access, to perspectives that can break apart one's psychological and social indoctrination. So it passed that I discovered my own "*Hakuna Matata*" moment ("it means 'no worries,'" (John and Rice 1995) according to the legendary and beloved 1994 Disney animated drama *The Lion King*, (Allers and Minkoff 1994)) while seeing myself in the perspective of Anna Kouhia's (2016) autoethnographic account of a short film, *Crafts in Our Lives*, chronicling her experiences in the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) world of craftmaking.

Kouhia's account of DIY culture where it intersects with feminism allowed me to unmake the part of myself that couldn't believe in myself. I may never be a film maker, nor will I ever be good at making crafts or other old-fashioned goods, but I can DIY remake myself into a person who holds a "problem-free philosophy" (John and Rice 1994). Kouhia's autoethnography paved the way.

I particularly enjoyed how Kouhia started her autoethnography, noting, "The rapid rise of the subversive Do-It-Yourself mentality (DIY), accompanied by a growing interest in traditional craft skills, has been taking place in contemporary craft culture in recent years. The popularity of craft-making, especially among the younger generation of makers, who have contributed to the craft resurgence by embracing crafts with new tools and technologies, revolutionary aesthetics, and an emancipatory feminist ethos (e.g. Bratich and Brush 2011; Minahan and Cox 2007; Winge and Stalp 2013)" (Kouhia 2016). DIY culture in crafting is clearly shaking up the external world (society) of young craft-makers and instilling revolutionary and emancipatory feminist themes from which I could draw my own conclusions.

Kouhia continues, echoing my central argument:

> Recently, the distinction between the subversive and non-subversive forms of crafting has, however, become contested as traditional home crafts have started to gain popularity amongst the young, urban, politically aware generation of women (Groeneveld 2010; Hackney 2013; Minahan and Cox 2011). The renewed interest in traditional craft practices together with the enthusiasm for ethically conscious counter-cultural consumption that has been increasing over the past two decades in the West, has further given rise to a retro-feministic phenomenon known as 'nanna' (Hunt and Phillipov 2014) or 'nana' (Minahan and Cox 2011). (Kouhia 2016:268).

I can relate. As I realized that I was coming into my own as a no-worries self-remaking DIYer crafting my own destiny, the now-famous Women's March on Washington occurred in protest of the election of president Donald J. Trump. Trump meant worries. While I cannot craft for myself, I was able to purchase a subversive pink "pussy" hat (shaped like a cap with cat ears, knitted of pink yarn) from a young feminist with a compelling nose ring. She sold it to me for $35, assuring me it was made out of sustainably harvested wool that she spun herself from her suburban goat collective. Luckily, I was able to wear my hat while watching the march on television and live-tweeting the event in solidarity, which provided me a contextual feeling of control that preserved my nascent no-worries mentality through a very trying time. (Loza 2014). I was proud of my feminism, and I was proud to show it with my subversive craft-made hat, which I have affectionately named "Nala" (Allers and Minkoff 1994).

Autoethnography gave me the context to find my innermost hangups and connect them to a source of feminist strength (Nala, and the transactional person I become while wearing Nala), but more importantly, it allows people like Kouhia to challenge social tropes even by recognizing the inherent subversion of entrenched power structures in society that are possible through knitting. It reminds me of a very recent autoethnography I only just came into contact with, in fact, in which a highly stressed male person and autoethnographer, Felix Morin, overcomes his anxiety with being a gendered person and other problems by self-identifying as a hippopotamus. (Morin 2017) The subject may seem silly, even for an autoethnographic account, but that just goes to show the importance of personal perspectives in the transformational dialectic of autoethnography (Adams 2011). One can say Morin is strange, but no one can say he is *wrong*. (Ellis and Bochner 2000).

Act III: My New Myself Arising

Scene 1: The simple bare necessities

In this third act of my performative exploration of autoethnography's value, I use purposefully chosen lived experiences to gain insights into the various aspects of my masculinities and to challenge my preexisting assumptions about identity. As throughout the rest of the work, autoethnography is both the tool and the lens with which much of this work is inspired, completed, and interpreted. The vignettes in this act are a bit more raw, and the experiments I conducted, while ultimately informative and transformative, were all disastrous until the last, in which I overthrew my masculinities at last and embraced the nearest thing a male-gendered person to fully developed feminism. This act documents self-discovery through self-destruction, and it provides a look into a brief but intense part of my lived experience.

I asked myself: *What if I'm gay?*

I have never suspected I might be gay. I was always attracted to women, and I have never been particularly attracted to men (except for a weird fascination with kissing them suddenly while they're talking to me sometimes). These roles, however—straight, attracted to women, not attracted to men (with noted caveat)—are thoroughly described throughout the feminist literature (tracing back to the seminal “Doing Gender”) as ultimately being *performative* in nature (West and Zimmerman 1987). It could be that the dominant discourses of our largely hegemonic cis-hetero-patriarchal society were preventing me from knowing whether I am actually gay (Cox et al. 2010:119). To understand the various masculine discourses that characterize my lived experience, through a transformative process of self-interview I realized I had to test myself.

I came upon this, the most radical idea of my life, while reading an underappreciated autoethnography about two “Gaysian” junior faculty members at Michigan State University, in which they “interrogated [their] embodied performances as 'gaysian' (gay and Asian) through the framework of complex intersectionalities.” (Eguchi and Spieldenner 2015)

My own complex intersectionalities were precisely what I wanted to interrogate, and where Eguchi and Spieldenner “engage[d] in embodied performance strategies such as silence and humor to navigate the hierarchy and engage critical pedagogy in the classroom,” (Eguchi and Spieldenner 2015) I knew I had to utilize far more serious embodied performance strategies than they. They did poignantly write, however, “I realize that my gay Asian/Japanese transnational body matters as I engage in performing who I am within the material and symbolic context of a U.S. university” (Eguchi and Spieldenner 2015). That gave me an idea.

I don't have a transnational body, but I suspected I might have a gay body and just not realize it. This provided a perfect context to test self-interview techniques like are presented in Sara L. Crawley's examination of her own theoretical identities (Crawley 2012). So I began. In the process of questioning and cross-examining myself, I realized I could not possibly *know* my sexuality without testing it, and maybe not even then.

Immediately I thought of one of my friends. He is gay and, to believe his stories of his rampant use of the social hook-up app for gay men called "Grindr," is pretty much "down for whatever," as he puts it, almost anytime. For the purposes of my autoethnography, and because it suits his bear-like stature and manner, I will refer to this friend of mine as "Baloo," from the fun Disney classic *The Jungle Book* (Reitherman 1967). Taking on the role of young Mowgli for myself (in relation to "Baloo" only, not in age), I approached "Baloo" with a proposition for helping me test my sexuality.

After our conversation, I suddenly understood what Eguchi and Spieldenner (2015) meant when they wrote, "we repeatedly experienced our gaysian bodies as being perceived outside of the prototypical faculty image," except that my own experience was "sudden," not "repeated," and I was experiencing my cis-hetero body outside of its prototypical masculine image.

I pulled up to "Baloo's" house at a quarter to eight and took two heavy slugs of tequila from my flask before knocking on the door. When Baloo answered, I was flooded with nerves and excitement. He was wearing only a pair of boxer shorts and a tank top, and he invited me in. He was warm, as always, and he smelled better than my usual masculine performance would let me admit at the time.

The details of our encounter can be largely omitted for propriety, but I will say that I could not claim to have hated the experience, though I certainly didn't like it. Much to my shame and my struggle, as I cannot be sure, I do not think that I could find homosexuality an acquired taste. I have no plans to try again, at least not yet, but drawing from Eguchi and Spieldenner (2015) once more informs me of the greater social insights available from my experience with “Baloo”: “I am also ideologically forced to neutralize and/or deemphasize my queerness to conform to heteronormativity” (p. 129).

Straight men live lives shut out of the homosexual experience and cannot understand it, and it is because the pull of their masculine identities (which are often informed by the hypermasculine ideal promulgated in heteronormative culture and media) is so strong (Scharrer 2001). I hated my experience because my sexuality rejected it, like what motivated Eguchi and Spieldenner to neutralize their own beings, and yet I could not be sure it wasn't just a performance at the intersection of my masculinity and normative heterosexual assumptions about myself.

I wasn't able to square these feelings with the greater social pressures I was putting myself under until one day when I finally looked at myself in the mirror and acknowledged my own reality to myself. “I sucked a dick,” I stated plainly and out loud to my nervous reflection, and the knot of tension that has arisen started to disperse. These are the so-called “simple bare necessities” (Gilkyson 1967) of a performative accomplishment of gender in a cis-hetero-patriarchal social hegemony that constrains both gay- and straight-identified persons (Rifkin 2010:10). Our authentic and hypothetical-conceptual selves under examination require experimentation and full acknowledgement (Neisser and Jopling 1997).

Of course, again, we see the profound influence of autoethnography upon the personal and the social. No other mode of self-interrogative discourse is so effective, for, autoethnography uniquely “synthesizes both a postmodern ethnography, in which the realist conventions and objective observer position of standard ethnography have been called into question, and a postmodern autobiography, in which the notion of the coherent, individual self has been similarly called into question” (Reed-Danahay 1997).

Scene 2: Making a man out of me

Another self-doubt that always plagued me where it came to the performance of my masculinity is that it wasn't masculine enough. That feeling, of course, sat at odds with my feminist ideals, but it still seemed like a calling. I sought to explore another side of my masculinity about a month after I had my encounter with “Baloo.” I decided I should learn to fight and see if the tough-guy masculinity I once sought truly held anything for me.

Going in, I feared and suspected it did, to be honest, but unlike with the encounter with “Baloo,” which raised more questions than it answered (like, “Why do I hate performing gay roles? Is it predominantly a homophobic or heterosexual masculine discourse that defines this normative aspect of my masculinity? And how can I possibly tell?”), my first trip into a “cage match” left me with no doubt. Whatever kind of man I want to be, I don't want to be the kind that has to beaten up by a bunch of sweaty men in “fight shorts” and “rash guards” just to prove I am a man. (Karlsson 2014; Vaccaro and Swauger 2015).

The story of what happened when I signed up for a month-long trial at a mixed martial arts (MMA) gym has just been told (I got beaten up repeatedly and experienced the aspect of toxic masculinity most attracted to violence), so I won't talk about it again (cf. Bealer 2011; Kupers 2005; Vaccaro and Swauger 2015). I'm not much of a fighter, and I don't want be either. My atypical masculinity isn't defined by fighting. It's defined by other things, and it need not be tough, athletic, or imbued with ringside machismo to be valid. More interesting than the twice-weekly beatings I got at the MMA gym for the three weeks I attended are the motivations for my exploration there and the coping mechanisms I utilized after each “class” (if seventy-five minutes of calisthenics, basic techniques, and getting punched from the position called “the mount” counts as an educational experience).

I went because I wanted to be sure my suspicions that this more violent, “toxic” masculinity didn't fit my personal discourse, and I coped by reading through autoethnographies while nursing bruises and sore muscles with ice packs after my “classes.” I looked specifically for an autoethnography related to sporting injury and, because the body of autoethnographic literature seems already to chronicle so many vibrant niches of human experience where it makes routine interactions with social environments. I found Katherine Dashper (2013).

Dashper was injured in a horse-riding incident, hurting her face and teeth, with which I immediately could commiserate. For her, her injury “prompted [her] to reflect on the ways sporting participation and injury are both constrained by and constitutive of gender identity” (Dashper 2013). Obviously, my conclusions do not fully agree with Dashper's, which centered on feminist themes around the struggle for women to feel self-confident with their appearances in a beauty-obsessed culture. They do, however, relate both to the feelings of inadequacy in sport and identity (hers feminine under the constraints of conventional attractiveness, mine masculine under the constraints of being tossed around and abused by bigger, stronger men) and to her underlying conclusions about the value of feminism at breaking masculine tropes in society.

For example, Dashper spoke as if directly to me when she wrote, “A male rugby player or boxer with a missing or discolored tooth can more easily reconcile his altered appearance with masculine norms—his teeth may not subscribe to norms of attractive appearance and self-care in western societies, but this can be explained and excused by his participation in a body-contact sport, which has high masculine capital. This is not the case for female athletes, and this may be a contributing factor in female athletes' willingness to wear protective gear, such as mouthguards” (Dashper 2013:330).

Dashper gets it exactly right, both about the high masculine capital (with which not every male-gendered person conforms or wants to conform (cf. Karlsson 2014)) and about the inaccessibility of the male experience to the female experience in sporting injuries, and thus more broadly (Morgan 1973). More grandly, the same applies to life itself. Through my participation in a MMA class, performing a masculine ideal I could not identify with, I learned that I do not agree with high-male-capital masculinities, and through reading Karlsson (2014) and Dashper (2013) as an intellectual coping mechanism for my painful losses on the mat, I learned that my inaccessibility to feminist and female narratives makes feminist perspectives and my own personal feminism that much more important (Overall 1998:82–84).

In that gym, and through reading Dashper's autoethnography, I found myself wanting to identify with, and yet completely removed from Disney's Mulan (Cook 2004), who had to do the reverse of what I did and succeeded. The *Mulan* story is an almost perfect illustration, as elucidated through Dashper and my own lived experience, of how male-gendered persons have no access to the feminine perspective and yet female-gendered persons not only understand but can thrive in the masculine perspective when they wish to take on those performative roles. This is precisely what Ellis (2004) point when she wrote, “In autoethnographic work, I look at validity in terms of what happens to readers as well as to research participants and researchers. To me, validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible. You also can judge validity by whether it helps readers communicate with others different from themselves or offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers- or even your own.”

Scene 3: I be done seen 'bout ev'rything

“Well, I be done seen 'bout ev'rything / When I see an elephant fly,” sang the Black crows in Disney's animated classic *Dumbo* in one of the most unabashedly racist scenes in American film history (Sharpsteen 1941; Wallace and Washington 1941). This song bears special meaning for me, however, in the context of its inherent racism and the systemically racist forces that operate in our society. It forces me to contemplate the ultimate situatedness of my white cis-heterosexual male knowledge and oppressive masculine knowledges (Pettersson 2007:47–58). It thus stands as a motivational soundtrack by means of oppositionalism to investigate other perspectives, by which I have to mean to listen to them (Bleakley 2014).

I was reminded of this theme and motivated to act during a very tumultuous point in my life; I sought to delve into the depth of my situated position and to challenge it. (Challenging it proved possible, I found out, but overturning it proved impossible.) It sent me on a different kind of quest into myself, and it reminded me of a moving piece of autoethnographic literature by Rachel Alicia Griffin (2012), “I AM an Angry Black Woman: Black Feminist Autoethnography, Voice, and Resistance.” Griffin wanted to “talk back” to “systemic oppression” from her situated and uniquely informed stance “as a biracial (Black and White) Black woman.” Her autoethnography is an anthem to the situatedness of knowledge, and a call for all scholars and others to challenge themselves to understand why Black Feminists, in particular, have a right, even a duty, to be angry at almost everything, most or all of the time (Williams 2001).

My own journey, which Griffin inspired, led me to find out if I had any grounds upon which to be an angry neuro-atypical cis-hetero white male (I don't), which led me to the unlikely pit of researching the so-called “Men's Rights” literature to determine if it says anything of worth (it doesn't). While I refuse to quote the majority of the rampantly sexist and misogynistic claims and arguments in the “MRA” (Men's Rights Activist) literature here, I will permit myself to summarize one that seems most persuasive to sympathetic ears: that men are people too and therefore also have rights.

Superficially, this argument seems to make sense. “We need to get used to the sound of our own voices demanding space and respect because each one of us deserves it, and we must understand that we are all worthy of the energy of one another,” writes Griffin (2012). Men's Rights Activists (and white supremacists) could easily, from their privileged position in society and subsequent dismissal of the realities of systemic racism and sexism, claim that this applies also to (white) men. It does not because their voices have been heard, and the white, patriarchal hegemony already gives them more space than deserved (Flood 2005).

Consider, for example, another compelling autoethnography by Paige Averett (2009), “The Search for Wonder Woman: An Autoethnography of Feminist Identity.” Averett engaged in an art project concerning “her connection to men,” which led her to engage in a feminist “search for Wonder Woman, whom she views as a role model who encourages both masculinity and femininity *in women*” (emphasis added) (Averett 2009). What she achieves is nothing less than a “small social movement” that helped her, those around her, and social workers more broadly “become aware of the patriarchy.” (Averett 2009)

Of primary importance in Averett's autoethnographical research is that Wonder Woman represents masculinity and femininity in women, proving that the female perspective is more powerfully objective situated than the male (Averett 2009). One might note, for example, that there is absolutely nothing “feminine” about Superman, Batman, Popeye (after consuming his iconic can of spinach), Mighty Mouse, Captain America, or Iron Man. That is, male heroes across a spectrum of platforms provide men only with a window into masculinity, which is to say a mirror into what they already believe about the world, whereas female heroes provide women a clear view at the interplay of both masculinities and femininity at the same time (Hills 1999). The “man's world” patriarchal bias, and the problematic results of this bias upon society, are well documented. (Compare this with Griffin (2012) through the lens of intersectionality to see just how situated knowledges can be.)

Of course, none of this heady scholarship can provide the same insights as veridically lived experiential learning, and so I attempted to replicate Averett's project for myself, looking for Wonder Woman in myself, and following Averett's methods. [Author's note: I dare not appropriate Black Feminism from Griffin and so did not attempt to find Storm, a powerful Black superhero with control over weather and lightning (metaphorical for Griffin's account of Black Feminist Anger) from the Marvel Comics universe (Wonder Woman is a DC Comic character)].

For motivation, I needed only to read a single passage in Averett's project, where she instructs, “Yet through his character [Wonder Woman], Marston also created a woman who 'had it all': the ability to love, femininity, great beauty, an abiding connection to others, and an ability to submit. In describing Wonder Woman, I believe I am also describing aspects of myself” (Averett 2009). She then goes on to state, “As a social worker, like Wonder Woman, I was and am committed to social justice for all” (Averett 2009).

That was what I needed to hear, so I copied Averett's methods in “a search for Wonder Woman” by searching a toy store for a Wonder Woman action figure. Averett's autoethnographical account depicts the tremendous sexism in our society contained in the outrageous fact that she, with her “possibly more dichotomous than her” “self-proclaimed redneck” friend Phil, who drives a “amazingly disgusting pickup truck,” could not find a Wonder Woman action figure at the toy store, despite intense searching (Averett 2009). Sadly, be it because I am a man that a patriarchal world caters to, or because a major Wonder Woman film recently came out, I had no trouble finding many Wonder Woman action figures on Amazon.com, a few of which I purchased and have arranged powerfully on the shelf above my writing desk.

This demonstrates multiple problematic compliances, in accordance with Averett (2009), with the conclusion that there remain deep undercurrents of sexism and misogyny in society. Only after a major cinematic blockbuster came out did toy manufacturers decide that Wonder Woman is worth making into an action figure because, situated male knowledge and its hegemonic situation over neoliberal capitalist and corporate America believe that only when something is financially profitable is it worth pursuing (Gong 2010).

In my search for Wonder Woman, to return to my own autoethnographical account of my experience, I learned a few things. Most importantly, I realized by the ease with which I found Wonder Woman action figures and through creative play with them that I *cannot* find Wonder Woman. My male positioning in this stage of neoliberal capitalist society excludes me from that possibility (Pease 2013).

I realized I wanted to try to become Wonder Woman to find my inner strength but that it cannot be done because I am a man. I cannot know the full strength of Wonder Woman, who is powerful both as a female in herself and as a female in a man's patriarchal world. Even were I to find the strength of Superman, because I am a man, I am trapped in my male-situated knowledge, while Wonder Woman has arisen to tremendous masculine and feminine power together within a woman's world that transfers effectively into our man's world (Butler 2011).

The ultimate conclusion of this experience is profound, with implications for society. The MRA claim is that men are people and deserve rights too, but that is false. Men do not merely deserve rights. Men, like women, deserve the opportunity to fight for and earn their rights, and as women (such as Averett (2009), Griffin (2012), and Wonder Woman) amply demonstrate through the entire history of the women's liberation movements and many waves of feminism, women *have* fought for and won their rights from the hands of oppressors. Men, by contrast, were merely granted them (by other men, it must be said) and so, as of yet, have not fought for or earned their rights. Indeed, they cannot do so until the patriarchy itself is overthrown and men experience a version of the same subjugation they've visited upon women for millennia, if not for all of human history.

Epilogue: Becoming My Own Story

Part 1: Now I'm part of your world

I destroyed my own sense of entitled masculinity and reduced myself to the empowered state of self-awareness of my privilege. Thus my need, to paraphrase the early Wittgenstein, of remaining silent and listening, and through many lived experiences interpreted through the lenses of autoethnographies, especially feminist and Black Feminist autoethnographies, I feel I can claim, like Ariel in Disney's *The Little Mermaid* (Musker and Clements 1989)), that I am (almost) “part of your world” (Menken and Ashman 1989), meaning I have awakened to the true importance and philosophical resilience of feminism, especially as illustrated in feminist standpoint theory and radical constructivist epistemologies.

Drawing from the autoethnography of Crawley and Willman (2017), I realize the full import of their observation that “Radical feminism's consciousness-raising was a process of inventing a knowledge from everyday life which analyzes the sexual relations ruling over women.” This is the crucial contribution of autoethnography, which revealed my personal limitations while uncovering points about oppression and power dynamics of which I cannot help but to be complicit. And I am not only glad that they write, I realize that they *must* because of these entrenched dynamics. As they note, “Avoiding writing sexual embodiment renders female-bodies experience, including a wide variety of racialized, classed, globalized, politicized embodiments, non-existent” (Crawley and Willman 2017).

This is the tragedy of patriarchy. Crawley and Willman's paper's status as a compelling autoethnography revealed to me in a way no other scholarly medium could my own limitations and situatedness within marginalizing power structures (Crawley and Willman 2017; Francis 2004). They articulate this problem perfectly in writing, “One problem with an activism that calls for a radical queering of sexuality is that it relies on a vision of the individuated, volitional actor—as though it were possible to wield choice. Importantly, sexual embodiment projects are not akin to willful political identities; they are reiterative, practical, ongoing, long-term re-actions to the contexts of our everyday lives” (Crawley and Willman 2017).

Their remedy is my remedy: “A focus on lived experience provides an important corrective to the unversalizing tendencies of past radical feminisms, instead theorizing the proliveration of our diverse embodied reactions to the multitude of pressures via race, class, gender, heteronormativity, religiosity, nationality, and so on.” (Crawley and Willman 2017) That is, they advocate, as I echo, for the value of autoethnography. Specifically, as they put it far better than I ever could myself, “We utilize autoethnography to pluralize knowledges about lived, female embodiments—in other words, by deeply and graphically interrogating our own sexual, gendered, radicalized, class-based embodiment projects” (Crawley and Willman 2017).

These poignant observations echo Maréchal (2010), “autoethnography is a form or method of research that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic field work and writing.” They also corroborate Carolyn Ellis (2004), who defines autoethnography itself as, “research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political.” Only autoethnography provides such a conduit and such an opportunity and process for self and societal transformation.

Part 2: I will be my own prince, and someday I will come

Having awoken socially through autoethnography and to its power as a scholarly enterprise, I am ready to offer my final defense of this vital form of academic research, *pace* the naive critics on Twitter and elsewhere. This is the final scene in my play, where the prince, if you will, finally comes and kisses the princess, except here with the genders dutifully reversed and heteronormativity firmly repudiated. As the wistful song, “Someday My Prince Will Come” (Morey and Churchill 1937) in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (Hand et al. 1994) preemptively laments, someday my prince will come. I am my own prince, however, and autoethnography is what has come to awaken me. Someday, fortunately and thanks solely to autoethnographical research and emulation, was, speaking figuratively, but a long chain of yesterdays.

Autoethnography, in the telling words of Ellingson and Ellis (2008), is a critical “response to the alienating effects on both researchers and audiences of impersonal, passionless, abstract claims of truth generated by such research practices and clothed in exclusionary scientific discourse.” The autoethnographer's gift to scholarly research is an outright rejection of objective “scientific” methods in determining social truths. All knowledge is situated, and all perspectives matter, but not all perspectives are equally important (Usher 2000:27).

In absolute agreement with Loots (2016), the power of autoethnographic research is in storytelling. In her case, as a dancer, feminist, and choreographer, she articulates, “I, too, am a storyteller. I am a theatre maker, choreographer, dancer, academic, teacher and feminist. This article brings together some of my differing selves as I begin to interrogate, through this academic text and the process of writing and reflecting, on my own artistic process as a dance maker and choreographer” (Loots 2016). This is the fundamental power and utility of autoethnography: combining differing aspects of a single person and fusing it to academic reflection and scholarly writing to reveal social truths through qualitative methods unavailable in any other way.

Perhaps best in the autoethnographic literature, Loots (2016) articulates the power and importance of storytelling within autoethnographic research. “As with all good storytelling, the starting point is always the self; and more acutely for a dancer and choreographer (and feminist), the body. This written article thus aims to be one text written with a body answering to another text written physically on and through the body – the corporeal act of dance-making” (Loots 2016). How else, if not autoethnographical self-search and research, could such insights be found and made available to the scholarly feminist literature? I do not think it is possible.

To close, a final reflection from Loots (2016) bears mentioning, if not trumpeting. “And, finally, this too is the value of ethnographic or autoethnographic studies: that we keep meaning open, fluid and multiple in an interplay of self, in relation to a constantly shifting world and to the practice of making art. This is a democratising and feminist impulse that honours multiple voices and processes, and opens up rather than shuts down” (p. 389). This, in fact, needs no elaboration, especially from a male-gendered person.

In conclusion, then, while I set out to write an autoethnographical defense of autoethnography, self-reflections on self-reflections, I have been proved largely superfluous in the effort just as I have discovered about my cis-hetero white male situated knowledge. Autoethnography defends itself with itself and for itself, making it not only the ideal social research tool, but the ideal feminist tool—for just as autoethnography proves itself to the world with itself, so too does feminism prove itself (and women) to the world as their own fierce, undeniable embodiment of feminism and female-gendered persons worldwide.

Exeunt.

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