



Now Is the Time for Autoethnography

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Abstract This manifesto establishes contextual justifications for doing autoethnography, articulates why autoethnography matters, and reminds us of how to manifest the future of and for autoethnography.

Keywords: *autoethnography, manifestos, neoliberalism*

What to do . . .

When democracy is no longer understood as a system of government in which power is vested in the people but is instead handed over to a ruling elite . . .

When political figures across the world casually announce that people are suffering from “democracy fatigue” . . .

When fanaticism swells into violence on both sides of the political spectrum . . .

When income disparity and inequitable social relations are so normalized that the poor accept that they are responsible for having caused their downcast state . . .

When whole swaths of disenfranchised populations who are not given a place at the table are seen instead as society’s disposables, because worth is measureable by profitability . . .

When having a “good life” means being able to watch the latest television show, follow your favorite celebrity, buy cheap gas, and eat inexpensive food processed by multinational corporations . . .

When policy makers are indifferent to the health care needs of the people . . .

When 62% of all bankruptcies in the U.S. are due to medical expenses (LaCapria, 2016) . . .

When 54% of the U.S. federal budget goes to military spending (National Priorities Project, n.d.) . . .

When 6% is allocated for education (Giroux, 2014, p. 9; LaCapria, 2016) . . .

When \$100 billion of tax income is lost annually through tax haven abuse (Giroux, 2014, p. 9) . . .

When “disinvestment in schools, social programs, and an aging infrastructure is not about a lack of money” (Giroux, 2014, p. 9) . . .

When reasoned dialogical discourse is replaced with ideological position taking . . .

When corporations are anointed by the Supreme Court as people . . .

When human failings are seen as opportunities for a “gotcha” discourse rather than as a way toward learning and understanding . . .

When intolerance is legitimated politically and socially as “religious freedom” . . .

When political candidates spout sexist, racist, and xenophobic rhetoric and are not booed off the political stage but instead gain popularity and are hailed as the ones who can Make America White Again . . .

When access to an education is financially out of reach for those who most need the economic benefits an education will provide . . .

When educational administrators govern faculties through fear and divisive labor practices . . .

When educational institutions value efficiency over pedagogical effectiveness . . .

When graduating students are calculated as “outputs”¹ . . .

When boards of regents calculate higher education budgets on recruitment, retention, and “outputs” . . .

When people begin to think all these events are just the way things are . . .

When people stop being able to recognize that people are responsible for these events . . .

When people fail to grasp that these events have material effects on individual people’s lives . . .

We need to do autoethnography.

We need to do autoethnography because it matters.

It matters because statistics stun but do not move people to action.

It matters because power is enacted and felt upon the body, and it is there that the true cost is measurable.

It matters because true-to-life tales are “equipment for living” (Burke, 1973). The “how” of being tells us much more than the “what”; it gives us ways of moving through the world as ethical, socially responsible, and critical beings.

It matters because it allows us to feel into experiences we could never know otherwise.

It matters because it teaches us empathy, the defining characteristic of being socially well-adjusted and compassionate humans.

It matters because when the self is crafted on the page, we can pause to reflect, to feel, to know.

It matters because top down is only for the birds.

Manifesting the future of autoethnography requires that we:

1. Remember, amidst the swirl of sociopolitical oppressions, that cruelty is enacted upon individual lives.
2. Remember, amid the vocal cacophony of anger, political maneuvering, position taking, and violence, that there are silences that we have yet to listen to.
3. Remember that stories, crafted well, with evocative clarity, function like tuning forks inviting the chorus of humanity to sound and resound with somatic and emotional awareness.
4. Remember that emotional understanding compels change.
5. Remember that incivility and civility are social constructions that hamper the creation of compelling autoethnography.
6. Remember that raw, unprotected expressions of experience peel away ideological blinders.
7. Remember that story is a primary mode of knowledge acquisition not just because what's told is reasonable but because stories move us to see differently, to be different than we were before.
8. Remember that single stories make small changes, which, one by one, build coalitions.
9. Remember that each autoethnography is more than one person's story.

We must remember these things because autoethnography connects us across differences, through desires, in spite of oppressions, and within our experiences. Autoethnography connects us to something much larger than our individual selves. When we connect, together we can listen to the lost, heal the hurt, discomfort the comfortable, and voice our vision for individual and social betterment.

Note

1. The Performance Based Budgeting (PBB) system, which is being instituted at Bowling Green State University, uses terms such as *inputs* (new students) and *outputs* (graduates) to measure our performance. PBB is being implemented at a number of colleges and universities across the United States.

References

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About the Author

Lesa Lockford is professor and chair of the Department of Theatre and Film at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. She teaches acting, voice for the stage, performance studies, and qualitative methods. Her book, *Performing Femininity*, was published in 2004 by AltaMira Press. Her essays appear in *Qualitative Inquiry*, the *International Review of Qualitative Research*, and *Text and Performance Quarterly*, among others. She is a performer whose original performances have appeared at various academic venues.