Chapter 8
Self–as–Subject for Doctoral Research

Robin Throne
Northcentral University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter presents reflections on the use of self-as-subject research within doctoral education as a pathway to explore meaning of study phenomena to uncover new knowledge from the individual of the self. Knowledge is contextual and discoverable from within this rich internal experience of the researcher-participant and extant and contemporary perspectives are presented to illustrate the importance and appropriateness of the selection of self-as-subject research methods including autoethnography and heuristic inquiry for doctoral-level research. The importance of the relational aspects of the doctoral researcher and doctoral research supervisor is briefly considered as well as contextual and institutional aspects necessary to inform doctoral researchers who may choose these methods of inquiry.

INTRODUCTION

What is needed is, in the end, simply this: solitude, greater inner solitude. Going into yourself and meeting no one for hours on end, that is what you must be able to attain. – Rainer Maria Rilke (1934)

In the first chapter of *The Self*, author and editor Clark Moustakas (1956) said, "Experience is true to the person when he is himself alone. In such experience perception is unique and undifferentiated" (p. 3). It is this unique and undifferentiated inner self that can serve as the subject of research and holds an available wealth of unknown waiting to be explored within doctoral education by means of systematic, empirical research methods designed specific to explorations of self-as-subject. However subjective a study of self may be for the researcher, the nature and conventions of systematic empirical data collection and analysis can serve as a vehicle to uncover previously unknown findings not clear to the subject-as-researcher to better understand the dynamic whole self, society, culture, world. The research approaches discussed in this book, specifically autoethnography and heuristic inquiry (HI), are two sound, coherent, and systematic approaches used by doctoral researchers desire to explore "epiphanies" whereby

a transformative experience warrants further inquiry of the lasting, deep, and rich recollections that persist from the phenomenon. These transcendent phenomena, as Moustakas noted, are worthy of as a deep examination as much as any physical ailment or disorder, and he later systematized the process of examination of this human experience using the Greek origin for heuristic inquiry to discover or find meaning from this lived experience of self by using empirical research methods (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). Moustakas, 1990, 2001).

While the parallels between HI and autoethnography were described by various researchers throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Ellis and Bochner (2000) described autoethnography in their extant work as an iterative cycle of first looking at the outer then inner, then reiteratively inner to outer, until personal and cultural or societal perspectives become blurred. Later Adams, Ellis, and Jones (2017) defined autoethnography as a method to gather the personal experience to interpret larger cultural, social, political, experiences, and beliefs utilizing a systematic method of rigorous self-reflection or reflexivity (Figure 1). Further, Bochner (2018) noted rigor in autoethnography must be pragmatic and literary-based and not use traditional scientifically-based forms of rigor. Instead, rigor should be replaced with measures for resonance and evocation as autoethnography, performance research, or other arts-based research are as much forms of expression as inquiry and should be evaluated within this context (Bochner, 2018).

Figure 1. Autoethnography as reflexivity (adapted from Adams et al., 2017)
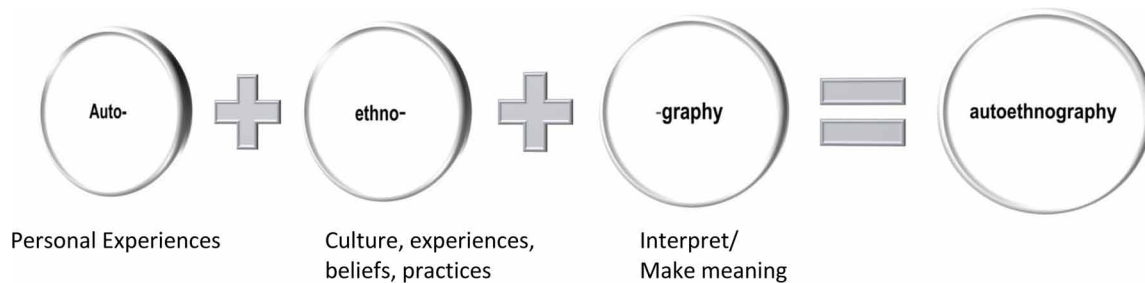
Likewise, Moustakas (1990) noted HI as a way of knowing that comprises the investigator's consciousness, perception, sense, and knowledge to collectively elucidate further knowledge, and ideally a better understanding of new regions of the self to inform the greater human experience through reflexivity (Figure 2).

Thus, reflexivity is necessary within self-as-subject, whether autoethnography or HI, to allow the researcher to embed the investigator's experience within the self, amidst the scholarship of theory and practice (McIlveen, 2008). In the representation phase, both methods allow for interpretation of meaning from the inner to the outer reflective analysis of experience, which only the heuristic researcher or autoethnographer can form or articulate individually or collectively (such as in collaborative autoethnography), from a systematic introspective and reflexive consideration of a lived construct or phenomenon.

For many doctoral programs across disciplines, these very human, intrinsic, and experiential self-focused phenomena are allowed as a basis for doctoral research and a root for further elucidation in a doctoral-level research project or dissertation research study. For some doctoral scholars, the very nature of self-introspection as research can be fraught with self-doubt as a doctoral scholar may fear these methods are lesser in rigor than methods that involve the study of others (Learmonth & Humphreys,

Related Content

Sustainable Urban Development: Strategies To Support The Melbourne 2017 - 2050
Koorosh Gharehbaghi, Bambang Trigunarsyahand Addil Balli (2020). *International Journal of Strategic Engineering (pp. 59-72).*
www.irma-international.org/article/sustainable-urban-development/255142

Practice as Research: Developing the Workplace Project
Stan Lester (2016). *Contemporary Approaches to Dissertation Development and Research Methods (pp. 116-132).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/practice-as-research/156934

iChecker: An Efficient Plagiarism Detection Tool for Learning Management Systems
Samuel P. M. Choiand Sze Sing Lam (2019). *Scholarly Ethics and Publishing: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice (pp. 232-247).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/ichecker/222310

The Scholarly Practitioner as Steward of the Practice
Jill Alexa Perry (2016). *Contemporary Approaches to Dissertation Development and Research Methods (pp. 300-313).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-scholarly-practitioner-as-steward-of-the-practice/156946

Contemporary Issues in the Ethics of Data Analytics in Ride-Hailing Service
Victor Chang, Yujie Shiand Xuemin Li (2019). *International Journal of Strategic Engineering (pp. 44-57).*
www.irma-international.org/article/contemporary-issues-in-the-ethics-of-data-analytics-in-ride-hailing-service/230937