

From the Abbey to the Academy; the Autoethnography of an Academic Sports Tourist

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Abstract

This is not an average doctoral thesis. It takes both the author and his audience on a socially-constructed journey of self discovery. It explores the emotional world of evocative 'heartful' sociological introspection. I aim to target your imagination from the outset. I attempt to illustrate the unmistakable influence that our memories inevitably have on the way we subsequently (re)interpret our sense of personal and public belonging to the present. In doing so, I explore the multiple ways in which we all continually (re)establish and socially categorise our much-needed self esteem. More specifically, I look at our unique attachment and emotional affiliation to the various cultural societies within which we are all located. This is my attempt to not only locate, but legitimise my personal involvement in the field of special interest tourism. This is my autoethnography.

My thesis explores the potential of embracing, not ignoring, our subjectivity. It looks specifically at the powerful influence that our socio-cultural identities have on our everyday behaviour, including the things we do whilst at work. It is a tale about the importance of finding the right balance between 'being there' and 'being elsewhere'. It is about me accepting my self indulgent professional personality. It is not, however, a narcissistic tribute. I could not have done this alone. My autobiographical story has undoubtedly/undeniably been influenced by the inspirational thoughts of many other people, including a handful of likeminded social scientists. This is not just an honest reflection on who, or what, I discovered during ethnographic excursions to Melbourne, Auckland and Wellington. It is a candid analysis of why the thought of being there meant everything to this particular ethnographer (a self-confessed sports fanatic). It offers a literary-inspired reinterpretation of the impact and implications that followed my decision to allow a little self indulgence, and a lot of sociological imagination, into my search for a meaningful academic identity.

I will never forget the findings that I have found during the construction of this thesis. I will never, for example, recommend that anyone signs up to travel on an international sports tour package trip by themselves, especially if it involves two teams/nations that they do not fanatically follow. More significantly, however, I will never forget the alternative path that my own ethnographic excursion allowed me to discover. I found an equally unforgettable new space at the end of the line. I found an exciting new position in the field of special interest tourism. I found that my best findings were waiting for me at the end.

The biggest challenge was not finding the best people to follow, but actually discovering the most authentic place to start, and the most appropriate time to stop. My conclusions are all based around the realisation that being there isn't everything when it comes to conducting an interpretive ethnography on the behaviour of sport tourists. On the contrary, it is somewhat unavoidable. I was everywhere. I had a truly unmistakable impact on the findings that I discovered along the way to my many different, if not particularly difficult, conclusions. As a result, I now firmly believe that an

ethnographer's re-interpretation of everything they have seen (or heard) during their time in the field is significantly influenced by everywhere they have ever experienced prior to the moment in time in question.

I realise that saying our past not only influences our present, but also impacts upon our immediate future does not represent a major contribution to academic knowledge. The manner in which I have proven to explore and evaluate this long-established fact, however, represents arguably my biggest offering to the academic community in which I hope to soon be accepted. I had always suspected that we were guilty of letting a little self indulgence into our everyday lives. I am now convinced. More importantly, I am now happy to admit it to anyone who points the finger in my direction, and confident to accuse others I suspect of overlooking the significance of their own emotional subjectivity. I am not, however, willing to make any sweeping generalisations based on my findings. I can only talk about me.

Ultimately, it is my life that I have placed firmly under my microscope. Having done so, however, I would love to see a lot more evocative autoethnography within the study of special interest topics such as sports event tourism. I would love to evoke a noticeable response from those who read my story. Finally, I would strongly encourage every interpretive ethnographer (past, present and future) to take a tactical time out and fully familiarise themselves with the person they see in the mirror each morning/evening.