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Book Review: Tessa Muncey, *Creating Autoethnographies*, London: Sage Publications, 152 pp. ISBN: 978-1-84787-472-6

In terms of a restorying approach, the publication of this very readable book is timely for entrepreneurship scholars because autoethnography despite being a seldom used methodology can help unravel the complexity of individual agency. According to Muncey (2010: xi) autoethnography helps unlock the assumptions behind the “muddled, idiosyncratic fluid eccentricities that make us unique”. There have been ‘how to’ books on autoethnography before but in this one Professor Tessa Muncey brings the subject to life for a busy researcher by telling stories and describing her storied approach to research. The value of this book is that after reading it one becomes inspired by the challenge of publishing qualitatively different research. Indeed, Professor Muncey, in talking of the established orthodoxy of publishing in journals stresses that such “Published work has a tendency to focus on the successful, the rags to riches victim to survivor... the stories of the successful”. (2010: xi). This is significant because it reminds us that as researchers we have an entrepreneur within us, seeking to rise from obscurity. As Muncey explains, autoethnography can provide a theoretical justification for including the i-centric voice as well as helping to make sense of deviant cases (2010: xii) making it an imaginative and insightful methodology. This in its own right should make it of interest to serious scholars of entrepreneurship because autoethnography is about “showing and telling” (2010: xiii) and in such personalised creative writing one develops a relationship with the reader by building up tensions via the introduction of layered and lived experience.

The book is structured in an easy to follow manner. The purpose of chapter one is to answer the question – Why do autoethnography? It does this by advising the potential author to discover the true individual behind the research. In chapter two, Muncey explores the concepts of personal worlds and probes the constituent parts of individuality. It is all about knowing yourself in (and through) your writing. According to Muncey, autoethnography permits one to mix art and science. In chapter three, she explains how autoethnography makes sense of individual experience by discussing it in the wider context of ethnography, phenomenology, narrative enquiry and other participant observational techniques. In chapter four, readers are shown and told how to plan and craft an autoethnographic account. Muncey introduces and discusses simple concepts such as artistic tools, writing strategies and tactics involved in the creative writing process. This is followed up in chapter five by a discussion of how to deconstruct the autoethnographic accounts of others to establish the three facets of legitimacy, truth and memory central to the autoethnographic process. In chapter six, Tessa Muncey then presents a complete autoethnographic account of her storied professional life to demonstrate in a completed text what an autoethnography could look like. In the final chapter, Muncey makes an appeal to the creative writer within us to start a new story and in the telling she describes the autoethnographic storying process. All the chapters are structured with a summary, further reading tasks and a bibliography at the end which help embed the overall message.

The power of autoethnography as a restorying tool is that it provides general explanations in storied forms, not theories. As Muncey (2010: 1/2) remarks it is a style of writing that allows one to escape (for a while) from having to

jump through methodological hoops to “please the triumvirate of the academy, the publishing world and yourself”. It is thus a research approach that privileges the individual and a wonderful medium of getting across intangibles as well as complex feelings and experiences. Understanding such intangibles is central to understanding entrepreneurial process. It is therefore a very useful tool for challenging publically accepted narratives (like those of heroic entrepreneurship). However, as Muncey (2010: xvi) remarks speaking uninhibitedly can come at a price. Throughout the book Muncey talks of the perils of adopting the autoethnographic voice and how this can add an emotive element to your research practices. Muncey advises readers to develop an understanding of the power of your voice by first practicing it during oral presentations. Taking this advice at an entrepreneurship conference, this reviewer presented an oral autoethnographic account during a presentation and experienced first hand the raw power and emotionality which the genre can invoke in both orator and audience. It is one thing to read about unleashing a dangerous passion but there is no substitute for experiencing it first hand. This book will provide you with the knowledge to begin developing your autoethnographic voice.

This book is therefore a must read for serious entrepreneurship and business school researchers interested in narrative methodologies. It is a thought provoking book with the power to change ones research philosophy and outlook. I thoroughly recommend this book to all scholars of entrepreneurship and small business and will ensure that my PhD students are familiar with it.

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