Pragmatic Autoethnography: Thoughts on why it may be needed

Autoethnography is a reflexive subjective narrative qualitative research method, both a product and a process, whereby the researcher (‘auto’) depicts (‘graphy’) their understanding of their lived experience within an ethnographic (‘ethno’) or socio-cultural context [1].

Autoethnographic approaches embrace the spirit of first person experiential story-telling from varying perspectives: ‘evocative’ emphasizes feelings/emotions [2], ‘analytic’ emphasizes the theoretical analysis of broader social phenomena [3], ‘critical’ emphasizes critical theory. Personal, relational, cultural, and theoretical reflexivity is essential [4].

At the heart of pragmatism is actionable knowledge; inquiry is viewed as an experiential process, with experience, knowing, and acting interconnected [5]. Pragmatism favours multiple methodologies that ‘work best’ to understand specific issues, and generate and apply practical knowledge [6].

Autoethnography offers pragmatists an important methodology to reflect on their research. Nevertheless the use, or adaptation, of existing autoethnographic approaches may not ‘work best’ and risks ‘method slurring’ [7]. Moreover, while pragmatism is rooted in subjectivity, it differs ontologically and epistemologically from social constructionism.

A discrete ‘pragmatic’ approach is thus suggested to support researcher deliberation on why, how, and to what effect they are investigating, acquiring, and applying knowledge within their research environment. The ‘pragmatic’ emphasizes the experiential process of generating actionable knowledge.

References: