

Other Animals and Me: Auto-ethnography Assignment

Nonhuman Animals are deeply entangled with many areas of human society from the grand scale to the personal level. In this assignment, students will consider how their day-to-day life is impacted by Nonhuman Animals and, conversely, how their human day-to-day life impacts other animals in the world. To do this, the student is invited to compose an auto-ethnography that critically examines their personal life as it is influenced by relationships with other animals.

All submissions must be in a Microsoft Word document and include approximately 1,500 words of text including a bibliography. This text should not simply describe but rather provide a critical analysis of the observations included. Citations are expected (4-6 academic, peer-reviewed sources), and they must be substantially engaged. This auto-ethnography is designed to encourage a deep engagement with required and supplementary readings covered in the first, foundational weeks of the class. Therefore, no independent research should be engaged, and all citations must all derive from module materials.

In the analysis, students should consider how sociologists understand our relationship with other animals. In doing this, they will consider how their own lived experience supports or challenges the academic literature. Students should also think structurally as is good practice in sociology. This means asking how the everyday is shaped by larger social systems and institutions. For instance, if you had cow's milk (or plant milk!) for breakfast, why do you think you made that choice? You might consider the influence of government nutritional guidelines, the food industry, advertisements, culture, norms, values, the social construction of taste, etc.

Some suggestions for analysis include but are not limited to:

- Mealtimes
- Interactions with or observations of free-living animals
- Interactions with companion animals
- Animals in entertainment (video games, books, music, etc.)
- Feelings about other animals (excitement about meeting a dog, apathy toward pigeons, discomfort with meat, etc.)
- Emotional life (how do animals impact your well-being?)
- Clothing (vegan or nonvegan footwear, jackets, etc.)
- Hygiene (vegan or nonvegan cosmetics, toiletry items, animal-based vitamins, etc.)
- Observations about the experiences of other animals interacted with

The ethnography should conclude with a paragraph that reflects on how the project itself has caused you to consider (or reconsider) your relationships with other animals.

Students are invited to be creative in their approach. Students might consider analyzing a single day, a week, a month, or more in their life. Photographs (or any other artifacts that can be embedded in the word document) are welcome.

The format is flexible, but students might consult methodology books or articles on auto-ethnographies available through the library for more inspiration on how to compose the assignment.

Submission Checklist

Introduction

- General overview of your approach/plan of action
- Clear statement of paper's intention is present
- "So what" of your paper is evident
- 5-6 sentences

Body of paper

- Informal exploration of your relationship with other animals is systematically recorded
- Auto-ethnographic approaches to sociological questions have been consulted to guide format of your paper
- Analysis of observations is sociological
- Structural analysis is present
- 4-6 academic, peer-reviewed sources from the module to date are referenced
- 3-4 paragraphs

Conclusion

- Personal reflections are included
- The sociological import of your project is highlighted
- 5-8 sentences

Bibliography

- All references used are on topic or add substantially to argument
- Sources come from the first 4 weeks of class material; No outside sources
- All sources are peer-reviewed and academic
- Most, if not all, of the sources are sociological
- Format is consistent
- Free of errors (do not skip this section when you proofread)

Format

- Uses headings and subheadings as appropriate
- Double-spaced, 12 pt. Times New Roman

- Page numbers, bottom right
- Avoid over-repetition, including information intended for the bibliography in the essay body, superfluous headings or footers, and other distractions which pad your word count
- Free of spelling and grammar errors
- Flow and tone are appropriate
- Writing style is academic, not newsy/bloggy
- Colloquial language avoided
- Ample **transitions** are included
- No sweeping statements and generalizations without citation to back it up
- No fluff or filler (especially in your introduction!)
- Counterarguments to your position(s) have been accounted for and are fairly represented
- Your position(s) is/are based in evidence, not personal opinion or conjecture
- Quotes are used **very sparingly if at all**; [sandwich technique](#) is used
- Paper is 1,500 words including bibliography (if you need the full 1,500 words and wish to exclude your bibliography from the wordcount, that's fine)
- Paragraphs are 4-12 sentences; any more or less should be edited

Before you submit, did you...

- Clarify any questions or confusions with your Module Convener?
- Verify that all sources are peer-reviewed and relevant?
- Avoided websites, non-academic sources, and non-discipline-specific reference materials (**this includes dictionaries and encyclopaedias**)?
- Considered counterarguments?
- Scanned the paper to make sure the "so what" is consistent?
- Reviewed the readings for the finer points?
- Really pay attention to good, solid, meaningful transitions?**
- Proofread?
- Avoided quotes except where absolutely necessary?
- Note the word count?
- Run spell check and grammar check?
- Backed up your work in a safe location?**
- Visited the Student Learning Advisory Service ([SLAS](#)) as appropriate?