

Displacement, Identity and Belonging: An Arts-Based, Auto/Biographical Portrayal of

By Alexandra J. Cutcher

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Displacement, Identity and Belonging is a book about difference. It deals with ethnicity, migration, place, marginalisation, memory and constructions of the self. The arts-based and auto/biographical performance of the many voices in the text compliment and interrupt each other to create a polyvocal rendition of experience. The text unfolds through fiction, memoir, legend, artworks, photographs, poetry and theory, historical, cultural and political perspectives. As such, it is a book that confronts what an academic text can be. Written in the present tense, it weaves its narrative around one small Hungarian migrant family in Australia, who are not particularly special or extraordinary. Their experience may appear, at least on first blush, to be paralleled by the post-war diasporic experience for a range of nations and peoples. However in many ways, this is not necessarily so. It is this crucial aspect, of the idiosyncrasies of difference that is at the core of this work. The layering of stories and artworks build upon each other in an engaging and accessible reading that appeals to a multitude of audiences and purposes. The book makes significant contributions to the literature on qualitative research, and in particular to arts-based research, auto/biographical research and autoethnographic research. Displacement, Identity and Belonging is in itself an experience of journey in the reading, powerfully demonstrating a life forever in transit. This work can be used as a core reading in a range of courses in education, teacher education, ethnicity studies, cultural studies, sociology, psychology, history and communication or simply for pleasure. "Displacement, Identity and Belonging offers an excellent example of the use of novel approaches to social research that are designed to raise important questions and provide unique insights. The multigenerational perspective of Hungarian migrants to, and immigrants in, Australia, disclosed and examined herein, is not merely a fascinating and urgent topic in itself. It also encourages and enables the reader to imagine analogous social phenomena in other places and times. This fact, in conjunction with an extraordinarily effective format, is what makes this, for readers of all sorts, an important and empowering book - one that I heartily recommend. - Tom Barone, Professor Emeritus, Arizona State University (USA)

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Displacement, Identity and Belonging: An Arts-Based, Auto/Biographical Portrayal of By Alexandra J. Cutcher Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #10040360 in Books
- Published on: 2015-03-06
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.21" h x .69" w x 6.14" l, 1.28 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 290 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

Displacement, Identity and Belonging offers an excellent example of the use of novel approaches to social research. The text evidences various discursive modalities -- some gloriously poetic; others decidedly prosaic -- in the presentation and discussion of findings. The extraordinarily effective format, is what makes this, for readers of all sorts, an important and empowering book - one that I heartily recommend. - Tom Barone, Professor Emeritus, Arizona State University

Alexandra Cutcher is an empowered Gypsy metaphorically weaving together fiction, art, poetry, and narrative to create a rich tapestry of memories and stories. This compelling arts-based auto/biography grips the reader in a seductive way and offers a distinctive array of aesthetic engagements that help us grapple with these stories in powerfully revealing and instructive ways. She does a remarkable job of bringing her auto/biography to life and ultimately provides an exceptional example for others. - Rita L. Irwin, University of British Columbia

Originally a ground-breaking and highly visual arts-based doctoral portfolio, the research journey has fared well in its translation to a book. Through the well-crafted and warm personal stories and images we as readers are able to consider our own search for meaning and purpose and the resonances with our own lived experiences. At the same time and on another level Australia's search for identity and struggle with difference and diversity, with inclusion and exclusion, can be explored. An important, highly readable contribution to this burgeoning field. - Robyn Ewing, University of Sydney.

The structure of the text is itself an unfolding, modelling the journey that the author narrates so that we readers can experience it for ourselves. Travelling, in this way, is also a central experience alongside displacement - that is, travelling or movement is itself a kind of *emplacement*, one that co-exists with the notion and experience of *dis*placement. This book is a first-hand 'doing' that every reader, every migrant, every parent, child, artist and scholar should experience for themselves. Go buy a copy now! You won't be sorry. - Anne Harris, Monash University

This is a sweeping manuscript. Cutcher has represented complex human experiences in a manner that is largely seamless. The polyvocal forms of the work are powerfully evocative and one can hardly not be moved by the textual narratives, the photographic narratives and the conceptual artwork and, together, these work to induce high levels of resonance; I was alternatively moved, face tear-streaked, inspired, informed, challenged and impressed. This work is accessible to many readers and the writing is gloriously strong. J. Gary Knowles, University of Toronto

About the Author
Alexandra Cutcher is an artist, writer and academic from northern NSW Australia. She is currently Senior Lecturer at Southern Cross University and her passion is preparing Arts teachers for the complex demands of their future profession. Alexandra's current research focuses on belonging, identity and arts-based modalities in research and teaching. Alexandra is a dedicated teacher and spirited advocate for the Arts in schools.

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