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## **Book Review**

**Boylorn, Robin M. and Mark P. Orbe, (eds.). 2016. *Critical Autoethnography: Intersecting Cultural Identities in Everyday Life*. London, New York: Routledge**

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The book *Critical Autoethnography* dives into the humanity of sociological research. Personally and investigatively, the book looks at multiple ways in which our personal selves interact with the impersonal world. Autoethnography is a tool that can be used to investigate who we are, how the world sees us, and how we can interact with the world; therefore, through qualitative personal narrative, the book details multiple ways in which we can define self.

The central theme of this book is an investigation of how each person defines and develops self. The inclusion of various sociological theories of self also aid in the book's structure. To be defined as an autoethnography, each introspective analysis must be supported and structured by sociological theory; the book includes established explanations that could give rise to each individual's development of self.

The book is divided into four sections, each detailing different circumstances in which a definitive

"self" can be defined: 1) Complicating Mundane Everyday Life Encounters; 2) Embracing Ambiguous and Non-Binary Identities; 3) Negotiating Socially Stigmatized Identities; 4) Creating Pathways to Authentic Selves.

The first section, "Complicating Mundane Everyday Life Encounters," argues that self-identity is developed through specific experiences. One's identity is constructed through moments in which our identity is questioned, and especially how one is shaped by the experience. This chapter delves into the profound and lasting effects that experience can project on one's identity, and how one experience can become an entire identity. One example is a woman's experience as the first member of her family to go to college. She is suddenly not identified by others through her complex history with drugs, rehabilitation, and transformation of her family and choices, which were axial aspects of her developed identity. She is simply identified as a first-generation college student, and she begins to accept the new identity as well. The chapter asks,

*how can one reintegrate their old identity into a new identity that forms during an experience?* This is investigated in the personal reflection of a woman whose husband gets cancer, and the couple develops a “sick identity,” in which the cancer affects every aspect of their lives, including their sense of self. Ultimately, the first section outlines how identity is shaped through specific experience.

In the second section, “Embracing Ambiguous and Non-Binary Identities,” we find the definition of self through intersectionality. Each chapter tries to find identity through overlapping labels in which the subjects find applied to them. We learn about a woman who finds identity at the intersection of Black, White, woman, and lesbian. She does not identify “self” with just one of her labels, so she creates her own at their crossroads. The self that each other finds is one that they create, taking aspects of their many identities to forge a path to their own authenticity. Intersectionality is the tool used in this section, powerfully wielded to create self-identity.

In the third section, “Negotiating Socially Stigmatized Identities,” autoethnography is used to investigate how one can interact with a world that denies one’s identity; additionally, the section critically looks at how having to fight for acceptance of one’s identity can shape that identity. Focusing specifically on performance identity, the section asks, *how can a sense of self survive despite stereotypes and expectations of stigmatized identities?* Furthermore, *how do outside expectations shape the identity of marginalized people?* We find answers through autoethnography and the personal reflection of what it means

to have a marginalized identity. A self-identified “bear” performs his role as a fat, hairy, gay, man while slowly learning how to accept his own identity. A Black woman applies the many stereotypes of her identified group and compares them to her own reality; she finds her authentic self because of and through those stereotypes, simultaneously embracing and rejecting them. This section discusses the effect of marginalization on the construction of identity.

In the fourth and final section, “Creating Pathways to Authentic Selves,” the chapters highlight societal flaws that block the development of self. The section asks, *how can we change society to field the way to effective self-construction?* The idea of how society can change for us instead of how we can change our identity for society is a pivotal aspect of autoethnography. The section combines the introspective research aspects of autoethnography and extrapolates the findings. Creating a pathway to an authentic self is personal and investigative, encompassing the critical aspects of autoethnography.

The investigative tool of autoethnography is far-reaching. It is a blend of critical analysis and deep introspection. This method of sociological research is in a unique position to be used to create a very rare product: research that is personal. It is more than how one feels about a certain aspect of their environment, but a detailed assay of what, why, and how that environment exists. It is the crux of sociological work, how our personal selves interact with the world in which they are enveloped. Due to the first person style of writing,

autoethnography can provide an extremely unbiased collection of data, a feat that is difficult to replicate in the social sciences. This diverse and far-reaching collection of essays is critical to understanding the true impact and range of autoeth-

nography. It provides a curated, encompassing display of the various forms, and sets a base that describes why the method is so vital to sociological research. Truly, this is a critical collection of autoethnography.

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