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 aid in the book’s structure. To be defined as an autoethnography, each introspective analysis must be used in this section, powerful wielded to create self-identity.

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 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 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 autoethnography. 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.