

SOCIOLOGICAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY (25 points):

The autobiography must be 5-6 pages double-spaced, 12-point font, with 1-inch margins.

Draft due Oct 5th, final Autobiography due Oct 26th

A key element of the sociological imagination and sociological curiosity is to explore the intersection of our personal biographies with larger social histories and the relationship between our personal troubles and public issues. This assignment is designed to help you develop your sociological imagination by integrating sociological concepts into a critical analysis of your personal biography.

In this essay, you will **apply** the above-mentioned **sociological imagination and curiosity to your own lives to write your sociological autobiographies**. The challenge of this essay is to turn a critical eye on your personal/social lives and experiences which you might have taken for granted, and shift your focus (or “make the familiar strange”) by examining your life through a sociological lens. To do this, you will need to step outside of yourself as if to observe your personal and social life from a slight distance to think critically about your experiences.

A sociological autobiography should include

- (a) a thesis statement of the topic (aspect of your own life) you are writing about;**
- (b) an explanation or description of the relevant part of your personal/social life and**
- (c) a sociological analysis of your experience using theoretical ideas, concepts, and sociological language from this course. You are NOT expected to use external sources.**

Below are some guidelines to help you with this process and with writing a good autobiographical essay:

1. Pick a topic: You will need to pick a topic or focus for your autobiography – that is a **particular social and/or personal experience in your life** that you would like to write about; **this is your thesis statement.**

You might start by thinking of yourself as moving among various social institutions (families, churches, work, school etc) as we have discussed in class, as well as in your larger culture (ethnic, familial, national, etc) and neighborhood. What goes on in your daily life in these contexts? What do you do, experience, interact with, notice? Find one thing about your life and experience you’d like to write about. For instance, you could focus on your experience using public transportation in NYC; your experiences finding a job or applying to college; growing up in American society under the influence of the media; moving between an immigrant home and mainstream American society; your experiences with work or religion or family etc.

2. Focus on YOU: The key to this assignment is to **write about YOU; you should use “I/me” when you’re writing NOT “we, us, people, they.”** In your essay, you will need to **describe and analyze your own experience.**

A good essay will

- a) Clearly state the topic or focus** of your essay, meaning the aspect of your life you will focus on. This is **your thesis statement**, and the center of your introduction.
- b) Describe:** Write 2-3 pages describing your experience, as connected to the thesis statement. The ideas need to be developed so the reader understands your experience.
- c) Analyze:** You will need to analyze your experience, that is, you need to think critically about the experience. What social institution(s) were the context(s) for the experiences you describe? What are the social factors that shaped this experience? Thinking critically also involves applying concepts learned in the course to your experience.

Here are some prompts that might help you think critically and apply concepts:

1. The self and society - how do larger social forces shape your experience? What social forces were these? How did you respond?
2. The intersection of culture, history and your biography – think about the historical moment in which you had that experience; would you have experienced it in the same way in another time period historically? In another time period in your own life?
3. The relationship between your private troubles and public issues - is your experience only your private experience? How is it related to larger social issues in society? Is your experience only a function of your individual abilities, nature, personality? is it framed by larger social forces and process (such as culture, norms, globalization, social location etc.)? how did your individual attributes interact with larger social processes in relation to this experience?
4. The role of power and structural inequality - How do your position(s) within systems of race, class, gender shape that experience? How did your group membership influence your experience?
5. Agency – How did you exercise agency within the experience? How do you think your experience impacts/interacts with larger social forces within which your life/experiences are unfolding? Has this process of writing your sociological autobiography shifted your understanding of your past or present experiences in some way?