

Ancestry, Society and Personal Identity
SOCI 421
Department of Sociology



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Office location: Annex 111A

Classroom: Annex 113
Class time: Wednesdays, 6:30-9:00
Office hours: Tuesday/Thursday, 9:00-12:00
and by appointment

Calendar description

This course attempts to locate personal biography in the context of one's social history. Students' genealogies provide the starting point for explorations of family heritage, social history, and personal identity. Students will apply sociological ideas to help them understand how biography and history shapes personal and family histories. Three credits.

Course objectives

Through research and discussion, we contemplate the intersections of biography and history. The readings focus on autobiographical and storytelling methods and on how social location, ritual, and social memory frame and influence identity. We explore how social experiences such as class, gender, race, and ethnicity influence our sense of self and identity. Students construct a "sociological" family tree to guide their library research and write three autobiographical essays.

Required reading

Course-pack, and a few brief assigned readings or podcasts used for class discussion.

Evaluation exercises	Option A	Option B	Due date
1. A sociological family tree & reflection	10%	10%	Sept. 12 (19*)
2. Seminar leadership <i>and</i> participation	20%	10%	
3. A 1500 word essay on class background	20%	15%	Oct. 10
4. A 1500 word essay on a gender	20%	15%	Nov. 7
5. A 4500 word essay <i>incorporating</i> 3 variables	30%	25%	Nov. 28
6. Final examination ~ see below	---	30%	

Final Examination

The final exam contains short-answer and essay questions on the readings in the reader. *Option A provides students the choice of not writing the final exam. **Eligibility for Option A** is reserved for students who: 1) attended *at least* 10 full classes (and submit extensive reading notes assigned for classes missed), 2) completed *all* assigned work on time, 3) *actively* participated in seminars, and 4) maintained an *average* of 65 percent on course work.*

Sociological Family Tree and Reflection

Due September 12; beginning of class

Each student will complete a sociological family tree and a 400-word reflection about doing this work. Worksheets will be distributed at the first class. Provide as much *descriptive detail* as you can; variations are expected. Further instructions will be given during class. **The graded family tree must be attached to all essays.** If, due to circumstances, you receive permission to submit the sociological family tree on *Sept. 19**, see me to get started on your social class essay.

Course essays

The course essays are auto-ethnographies (*not diaries*). Each essay involves *an analysis* of how your *social location* and the *social location of recent ancestors* influence your personal identity. The first essay is an exploration of your *social class of origin*. The second essay is on *gender*. The third essay is an integration of class, gender, and a third variable, *race or ethnicity*. Students may request, and make the case for, selecting a different third core identity variable (e.g., *religion, immigration, political turmoil*) or linked core variables (e.g., *French Catholic*). Students will discuss the *sociology* of these variables – not *your* autobiography – during class. It is up to you whether you wish to discuss aspects of your ancestry or analysis during seminars. Your goal in all three papers is *to use the sociology literature to write an auto-ethnographic account* of the variables in shaping your identity, and how you understand yourself vis-à-vis your ancestors and how they navigated social class, gender and the third variable. Further instructions for the papers and seminar discussion are provided in each class. *Essays are due at the beginning of class. To be on time, you must attach the sociology family tree that I graded with each essay.*

Class attendance and seminar participation

Class attendance is required. Understanding the essay requirements is contingent upon class participation. If you cannot attend class, you are recommended to find a more suitable course.

Class organization

There are *two types of seminar work*. Normally, the first 75 minutes involves a discussion of a course reading and the second 75 minutes involves a discussion of projects and project research. For the last class, each student will make a ‘reflection presentation’ lasting 15-20 minutes.

Seminar leadership

Students working in pairs will *co-lead* 2-3 seminars focused on an assigned reading. The length of your seminar leadership will vary, but it would normally last about 75 minutes. You will be assigned your reading and seminar partner *one week prior to your seminars*. You and your seminar partner will prepare a method to direct the class in a *critical discussion* of the reading. Leading a discussion is preferred to a lecture; however, you are encouraged to introduce core concepts, the thesis, and the thesis development as you develop discussion of the reading.

Discussion of the course readings

With regard to the course readings, *each student should come prepared to participate*. You are required to read the assigned article and prepare written notes. I expect each student to come to class with their reader and reading notes prepared on the assigned reading (i.e., identify and define key concepts, summarize the main argument, and prepare commentary, such as your thoughts on the objective, methods, premise, or conclusions of the study, and say why). Please prepare a few ‘talking points’ about the reading to support the seminar leaders.

Discussion of research related to project work

Discussion after the break focuses on the projects, with some time spent on *your* research on *your* variables. For instance, students will be selected to introduce material from the readings they have found to be pertinent to their research (based on your library work). *You are NOT asked to discuss your autobiographical analysis*, but to explore the sociological aspect of the various identity variables that may inform an autobiographical analysis.

Failure to bring your reader and reading and project notes to class will influence your seminar grade and whether you will be eligible for “Option A”. The quality of your participation will influence your seminar grade. *Please strive to involve all classmates in the discussions.*

Required Readings

1. Callero, Peter L. 2003. “The Sociology of the self”. *Annual Review of Sociology* 29:115-133.
2. Clarke, George Elliot. 2011. ““Indigenous Blacks”: An Irreconcilable Identity?” Pp. 399-406 in *Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation through the Lens of Cultural Diversity (Volume III of the Speaking My Truth Series)*, edited by A. Mathur, J. Dewar, M. DeGagné. Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation Research Series.
3. Hollingsworth, Laura and Vappu Tyyska. 1988. “The Hidden Producers: Women’s Household Production During the Great Depression. *Critical Sociology* 15(3):3-27.
4. Gillis. 2004. Gathering together: Remembering memory through ritual. Pp. 89-103 in *We Are What We Celebrate*, edited by A. Etzoni and J. Bloom. New York: New York University Press.
5. Gillis, John R. 2011. Our Imagined Families: The Myths and Rituals We Live By. Working Paper No. 7: The Emory Center for Myth and Rituals in American Life.
6. Goodsell, Todd L and Liann Seiter. 2011. Scrapbooking: Family capital and the construction of family discourse. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 40(3):318-341.
7. Langellier, Kirstin M. and Eric E. Peterson. 1993. “Family storytelling as a strategy of social control.” Pp. 49-76 in *Narrative and Social Control: Critical Perspectives*, edited by D. K. Mumby. New York: Sage.
8. Loseke, Donileen. 2007. The study of identity as cultural, institutional, organizational, and personal narratives: Theoretical and empirical integrations. *The Sociological Quarterly* 48:661-688.
9. Smart, Carole. 2011. “Families, Secrets, and Memories.” *Sociology* 45(4):539-553.
10. Waterston, Alisse and Barbara Rylko-Bauer. 2006. Out of the Shadows of History and Memory; Personal Family Narratives in Ethnographies of Rediscovery. *American Ethnologist* 33(3): 397-412.
11. Zerubavel, Eviatar. 1996. “Social memories: Steps to a Sociology of the past.” *Qualitative Sociology* 19(3): 283-299.
12. Zussman, Robert. 2006. “Picturing the self: my mother’s family photo albums. *Contexts* 5(4): 28-34.