

Developed by Trina Smith (smit1603@umn.edu). ** Book review and family history options adapted from Professor Erin Kelley's assignments.**

**Sociology 3501
Topics for Final Paper
Fall 2004**

You have three different options for writing your final paper. Each option will require a different kind of research and result in a different kind of paper. The options are:

- a) An analytic book review
- b) A family history interview and analysis of that interview
- c) An analysis of an international document and reports on a family topic.

You must tell me which one of these you plan to do by 9/30/04. Besides which option you decide, please tell me what topic you would like to study with these.

Each paper will have a different focus and you will talk about different things. However, keep in mind the course objectives:

1. Understand why the term sociology of families is a better term than sociology of the family.
2. Understand the diversity and similarities of families in our society, both globally and locally.
3. Understand the social location and history of their own families better.
4. Understand that the family is a social institution and its effects.
5. Understand that the family is a gendered institution
6. Understand the diversity of family forms and different definitions of family.
7. Have a sociologically informed answer to the question of why the family is seen as a fundamental unit to society.

Furthermore, keep in mind both the positive and negative aspects of family life. Also think about the sociological imagination in how society tends to individualize problems and neglects to look at the structural issues.

*** A special note of credit and thanks to Professor Erin Kelly. Parts of this assignment, including the list of books, the analytic book review, and suggested topics for the family history assignment, have been adapted from her work and assignments. *****

1) Analytic Book Review (*Book List Attached at End of Document*)

For this option, you will read a scholarly book related to sociology of families. You may chose a book on the attached list or have a book approved by me. You are not writing a book report. Of course you will have to summarize the book's arguments and findings, but you will also be utilizing critical and analytical thinking skills by making an argument about the book. This might be that you argue that the author's conclusions do match

his/her data. Or you may argue that an author's findings justify a particular policy or course of action. You may compare the author's arguments to readings from class. You may also look at the how book helps you explain or make sense of something you have experienced in your family life or someone close to you. Whatever argument you make, make sure that you link the book to material from both class readings and lecture. I will hand out a more detailed paper about this assignment and grading rubric in a few weeks. If you start reading before then, make sure to take notes about the author's methods, arguments, and main findings. ***Book List Attached at End of Document.***

2) Family history interview and analysis

For this option, you are going to research an issue or aspects of your own family life that you are interested in. You can conduct informal or semi-formal interviews with family members, collect oral histories of family members, or write your own personal narrative. As a supplement, you could also analyze family pictures and other documents that you have available.

Maybe there is a specific event that happened in your family, such as divorce, that led you to take this class or you are interested making sense out of this experience. You could write a personal narrative and in the process relate it to sociological research in this area. If you do go this route, I request that you read a few journal articles or book chapters beyond the class readings to relate to your experience. Remember, sociologists try to put experiences in perspective.

As I said above you may conduct informal or semi-formal interviews with family members if you do a family history paper. However, only do this if: a) *you feel comfortable* and b) *the other person is also comfortable talking to you about this*. Explain this is for a sociology class. Talking to other people in your family is not required and do not pressure anyone who does not feel comfortable. You can write your own personal narrative.

Some possible topics you might be interested in are generational differences in family life (for example decisions to marry and have children; combining work and family), how class or race has affected your family life; specific events (i.e. divorce); the structure of your family (i.e. a "blended" family); adoption; or another topic you are interested in. Just make sure the topic is sociological. It would be a good idea to clear your topic with me.

3) Analysis of International Conventions Relating to Families

For this option, you will analyze both a convention that relates to families and country reports on the implementation of the convention. You will analyze reports from at least two countries in which you will analyze the differences and similarities between the two. Conventions you can choose from include:

Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations); the CRC

or

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (United Nations); called "CEDWA"

You can find full text versions of these conventions on the University of Minnesota's Human Rights Center's Webpage: <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instree/ainstls2.htm>

You can find country reports for these Conventions on the United Nation's webpage:

For the CRC: <http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf> (hit the CRC link; Click State party report; then you click E for the countries you wish to look at, meaning this document is in English).

For CEDWA: <http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf> (same for CRC except you look under CEDWA)

* Some countries will have more than one report, so try to look at all of them for your paper. I will hand out more detailed information on how to do this paper in the next few weeks.

Picking Your Topic Assignment: (worth 5 points)

This is due on Thursday, September 30th. This is what is necessary to include:

- a) Which option you are choosing for your final paper.
- b) Which book you are going to read for the book review; which topic you are going use for the family history option; the two countries you are going to use for the international option.

The more information you can give me, the more feedback I can give you.