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3/28/25

Social Autobiography/ Memoir

My life is not only just a swarm of personal experiences but it also includes the broader social structures that have influenced my identity. I will be using sociological imagination to look into how my family, my identity, my culture, gender roles, deviance/ social norms, work, and education have guided my journeys and aspirations in life. The sociological imagination was created by C. Wright Mills, and it looks at the connection between personal experiences and societal structures. This concept has really helped me to look at how family, education, and my culture have helped shape me into the person I am today and will continue to become.

I feel as if I have a strong sense of self identity because throughout my life I have gone through ups and downs. According to Mead's concept of the self, identity is also shaped by social interactions with family, peers, culture, work, and education. These have all contributed to me having a clearer sense of who I am. Through these struggles, which I talk a bit about later with peer pressure in high school, I have been able to maintain my own self identity and develop more resilience, which has only helped me have a stronger self identity. Societal norms and expectations that are placed on students and young adults have affected how I see myself and navigate any challenge that is thrown my way.

Growing up I came from two hard working parents. My mom decided not to attend college right after high school, and never made her way back, but she has always had a job that helped our family. My dad, however, did go to a small two- year college, so he also had a job that

set my family up for success so we could be comfortable. This reflects Weber's concept of life chances, since my father's education granted him access to significant financial opportunities, which were beneficial to my mom and I as well. I was socialized from a young age that working as an adult wasn't a choice, but it was undoubtedly a necessity since I had two parents who worked full time. Regardless of their different educational paths, neither of my parents pushed me to further my education at a university, they just told me that either way I needed to have a job that'll hold me over, demonstrating the working-class emphasis. My parents' jobs have set me up for the success that I have been giving, and they were able to help me continue my education and go to college, reflecting how family background and economic capital shape educational attainment. I feel like having my parents as my role model has really shaped me into who I am and helped me find my identity as a child. I've grown up knowing that I need to have a job and work for the things I want.

Throughout childhood my close family was never super religious, but we did have certain traditions we followed. Both of my parents grew up going to church every Sunday, but stopped going once I got older. However, we still went to church for Christmas and Easter, which is an example of Durkheim's concept of social integration. This ritual maintained a relationship to our religious community, but when COVID-19 shut down our country, it disturbed our traditions of attending church on holidays. This illustrates how external societal factors can influence group cohesions. My close family hasn't continued with these traditions since the end of the pandemic, and now our holidays consist of group get-togethers instead. These traditions have now become norms to my whole family and will continue as all of the young kids in my family grow.

I came from one of the biggest high schools in Vermont, so in high school, I was surrounded by a lot of people who were participating in underage drinking, drinking and driving, and smoking. Although at some points I felt pressured to join my friends while they were drinking, I ultimately chose not to for my safety and for the respect of my family. There were times where my friends would label me as “boring,” “lame,” or a “goody two-shoes” all because I didn’t participate in the activities they were choosing to act in. Being labeled as “boring” is an illustration of labeling theory which is how society may label certain behaviors or individuals by deviants. I was given the “boring” label by society. My decision to not engage in these activities line up with Hirschi’s Social Control Theory because I chose my academics and family preferences instead of participating with my friends and disrespecting my families wants from me. This strengthened my social control to societal norms, despite the peer pressure I faced. The experience I had of being labeled as “boring” is also connected to Goffman’s concept of stigma because when my friends labeled me as “boring” it could have created a negative self identity.

As a woman, growing up I’ve noticed the split between male and female career paths. As someone who comes from a huge family, most of the women in my life have ended up in nursing or a very similar healthcare field like radiology, education, or nutrition for example. I, myself, am also in school for nursing currently and have followed along the same path most of the women in my family have. I’ve also noticed that the men in my family pursue careers in engineering, joining the military, something to do with mechanics, or something to do with law enforcement like police officers or firefighters. I feel that this is a big reflection of gender socialization theory because it reflects how women are usually pushed towards more caregiving roles and men are usually pushed towards more jobs in trade fields or law enforcement. I do feel

that some of the older generations within my family are only supportive of my education because I chose something that was more female dominated. I chose this because this is what I want to do personally, but I feel like if I had chosen something more male dominated they wouldn't agree with that decision. I've noticed how this has split my family and how this stereotype has changed throughout generations.

As someone who holds themselves to high standards and has anxiety, I have always pressured myself to have good grades and often felt the pressure of perfectionism, which is supported by societal expectations of success. Especially throughout my high school years, I always held myself to a high expectation. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital explains how students from different backgrounds enter school with different levels of academic preparedness. I came from a family that was able to send me to preschool and prepare me for my future years in elementary school, as well as help me further my education by supporting me in my decision to attend college, even though I wasn't pressured or pushed to go to college. My parents have always made sure I've always had an amazing education. Looking back, I can tell how it was beneficial of my parents to send me to preschool, as it prepared me for kindergarten, and it helped shape some of my social skills that were beneficial in elementary school. Since I didn't have that inequality barrier that some unfortunately do have, I can tell how the skills I learned throughout elementary school, middle school, and high school have helped me grow and mature into who I am today as a college student. I am very fortunate to not have that inequality barrier that Bourdieu focuses on in his theory.

As I discussed in earlier paragraphs like the one discussing my family and their working background, as well as when I discussed my education, I come from a working class family, and I've always been taught that I need to have a job as an adult. I was 15 when I got my first job because a lot of places around me wouldn't hire you until the age of 15, and I've had a job ever since. My family has always supported me wanting to continue my education and pursue a career in nursing. I know that having a job will set me up for as much financial stability as possible because I've always grown up around adults who work hard for what they have. Another reason I was able to go to college to pursue nursing is because I went to a really good high school and I have been provided the resources needed for college. My teachers in school set all their students up for success with whatever goals and plans they had for themselves after school. The superintendent, principal, and administrative assistant were always there to help you, and they were always looking for advice from students on how they could improve anything without the school, so all students were set up for success equally. Pursuing a career in nursing, and any college degree in general, raises the chances of you being able to get a job upon graduation. Not only does having a college degree increase my chances of having a college degree, but it also helps out the shortage of nurses in the U.S. since there's a very high demand for nurses and healthcare workers. All of this relates back to how my family has been a role model for me and my working life, and the factors that have led me to the work I do now, and will do in the future.

Sociological imagination and social structures are very important for understanding how society always influences us personally. It's helped me realize how society has shaped me into who I am today. I've realized how my family has influenced my actions and choices in life, and how my peers have also influenced me. Society is a big part of our lives whether we realize it or

not, and there's a lot of influence in our everyday surroundings that impact who we are. I've noticed how the norms within my generation have not only impacted me but also my peers. As I move forward in my professional journey, I realize that my path in life is not only my personal decision but it's also influenced by societal factors. Moving forward in my life, I hope to use my awareness of how sociology impacts me daily. Sociological imagination could really help me in a lot of ways in the field of nursing by realizing how society can affect my patients' health, access to care, and their overall well being. It'll help me to look at their health as not only their fault, but look at how society also influences their health. Overall, it's extremely important no matter what field you're going into because it's actually reality and we're affected everyday.



