Sociology 271

Book Review Guidelines

Fall, 2021

The purpose of this assignment is to familiarize students with the academic process of writing book reviews for academic journals. Many academics of various disciplines, including sociologists, write book reviews as part of their publishing careers. Being able to highlight and analyze relevant information contained in a book is an important process as it helps to identify the book's strengths and weaknesses, highlights the essential elements of the book, and places the book within the broader context of the discipline.

Rules:

Students will choose one of the four books listed below. (These are the same books that were listed under the "Optional Texts" section in the course outline.)

All four books were ordered and copies should be available in the bookstore. (You can also check out other sources as well, like Amazon, if you wish.) Two of these books are available online through the MacEwan library system. They are noted with a *.

Geise, Rachel. (2018). Boys: What it Means to Become a Man.



*Garrison, Gary. (2018) Raising Grandkids: Inside Skipped Generation Families.



Chua, Amy. (2011). Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother.



*Downe, Pamela J. (2021). Collective Care: Indigenous Motherhood, Family and HIV/AIDS



Book reviews are expected to be between **1250 and 1500 words** in length (no more; no less).

When writing a book review, students should begin by highlighting key insights (i.e. important or interesting aspects) of the book. If theoretical approaches or a research method is used in the book, they should also be included. Near the end of the review, authors should set out the intentions of the author when he/she wrote the book and any limitations that they found with the book, and provide suggestions for improvement. (If students feel that the book was well written and that there were no identifiable problems, then this could also be discussed in the review.) The type of academic audience that would be interested in reading this book should also be identified.

Please note that book reviews should not be chapter-by-chapter summaries of each of the individual chapters within the book. In other words, you do not want to write, "In Chapter 1, this happened …. In Chapter 2, this happened…..In Chapter 3, this happened…and so on. (Marks will be lost if reviews are done in this manner.) Instead, students should be identifying **themes** within the book.

A helpful hint on identifying 'Themes': In the past, when students have had difficulty with writing a review (i.e. they don't know where to start), they have come to my office to see me. In a discussion with them, I ask them to tell me five things that they found interesting about the book. Once they have set out these five things, then I tell them to take those five things (which tend to be themes), and expand on the ideas (by writing two or three paragraphs on each one of them.) By adding an introductory summary, along with a discussion of method (if there is one), as well as a discussion of positive and or negative aspects at the end (along with the academic audience and word count), they have their review in hand.

Thinking about the book that you have read in this way, may help you when writing your book review if you are stuck.)

Also, note that book reviews are not just summaries of the introductory chapter and concluding chapter. More detail from the chapters are required.

Book Reviews are to follow the style of the following example. (This is the way that book reviews are always set out in academia. Do not create your own style or else you will lose marks.) Note how the author introduces the book, how he delves into different themes of the book (and uses direct references from time to time) and how he ends the book with his own opinions. He also suggests the academic audience that would be interested in reading this book.

Example of a Published Book Review:

Lancy, David. (2008). The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Reviewed by: Pinar Kocak, University of Lethbridge

David Lancy's book, "The Anthropology of Childhood", is a synthesis of literature from ethnographic, historical, and other sources such as primate studies and archeology which deal with issues pertaining to children and childhood. In his synthesis, Lancy deliberately avoids esoteric theoretical formulations. Instead, he weaves together parallel anthropological perspectives on childhood to present a balanced, inclusive selection of anthropological research. Perspectives vary from those who argue that childhood is a time of culture, language, and skill acquisition (nurture) to those who argue that childhood is essentially a biological phenomenon (nature). In doing so, Lancy questions the ethnocentric lens through which researchers with Euro-American values tend to view children from other societies and historical eras. To differentiate among childhood experiences across cultures and time, Lancy introduces and utilizes two tools throughout his book: (1) classifying children into three distinct categories; and (2) comparing two distinct societal hierarchies. The book is seamlessly organized into chapters that also neatly tie into the economy as an underlying theme.

Lancy defines childhood as that "period when our offspring are too young to fend for themselves completely and require active nurturing" and explains how children are essentially viewed by their respective societies and cultures as: (1) desired, precious and priceless cherubs (a relatively rare and

recent view); (2) desired but commodified chattel; or (3) undesired, inconvenient and unwanted changelings. Further, through rich illustrative examples, Lancy explains how childhood, influenced primarily by the environment and the material circumstances in which it occurs, is not fixed but rather changes over time and space. One example Lancy provides is the relatively recent shift in the way children are defined in Western societies from that of chattel, in which parents expect an economic return for the effort they put into raising their children; to the current view of children as emotionally priceless yet economically worthless cherubs, where parents no longer expect an economic return from their children's work and instead may actually incur a loss (p. 108).

Essentially, Lancy's cherubs are those children who live primarily in developed, modern, Western countries where fertility and infant mortality are limited; and whose childhood begins in infancy (and at times prior to birth) and extends into or beyond the college years. Cherubs are those children who are "invested with tremendous inherent worth;" whose wellbeing, needs and desires are valued over those of other family members; who are assumed to require intellectual stimulation from birth onward and are thus afforded the right and need to play and be intellectually stimulated (pp. 370-372). Cherubs are those children who more than likely have "selfless mothers who lavish attention and instruction on their young well into adolescence" (p. 371).

The opposite of cherubs are Lancy's other two categories: changelings and chattel. Changelings are typically children who live in agrarian, traditional, developing countries where fertility and infant mortality are high and where some children are abandoned or disposed of if they suffer from a birth defect or they (especially girls) are seen as surplus. In such societies, childhood is relatively short. The child is welcomed by its kin only "as a bearer of its parents' (and extended family's) genes and as a contributor to the household economy" (chattel) once it passes through "the gauntlet of birth trauma, illness, and deliberate termination" (p. 13).

To study the value of children, Lancy compares societies in terms of two distinct hierarchies. He refers to the hierarchy found in contemporary, Western societies as a neontocracy. Children are the first social concern in a neontocracy; followed by attention to institutions catering to children's needs; then parents, grandparents, and pets in that order (p. 11). In contrast, Lancy refers to the hierarchy in traditional, agrarian societies as a gerontocracy in which society is dominated first and foremost by

attention paid to the ancestors; followed by elders, adults, adolescents, and lastly children (p. 11). Through such comparisons, Lancy examines how a child's worth in a society varies and is dependent on culture and economy. This encompasses the factors which come into play in deciding to bring a pregnancy to term as well as factors which come into play in deciding to raise a child.

In addition to exploring the biological, cultural, and economic basis of how childhood happens and how a child's worth is determined, Lancy also examines how children are raised; what is expected of them and their parents (particularly mothers); when and how children make the transition into and out of childhood; how and why play happens in childhood; and how, when, and why children receive formal schooling and are expected to work.

Lancy concludes by offering his interpretation of the literature reviewed throughout the book – tying everything ultimately to the economy. His conclusion reads in part:

> The net result of our mindset is that the marketplace decides the fate of children. In poor countries, a food shortage means many potentially sound children will suffer malnutrition and neglect. Dollars that could be sent overseas to vaccinate, educate, and feed these children are, instead, spent at home on expensive technologies and caretakers to keep alive children whose quality of life is non-existent. While sick, premature babies born to the well-off will survive through "miracles" of modern medicine, the poor will lose their otherwise healthy children to preventable diseases (pp. 375-376).

Replete with numerous references, illustrative examples, personal anecdotes and photographs, all detailing the interplay of biological and cultural forces that shape childhood, Lancy's book accomplishes two goals. First, it offers a "correction to the ethnocentric lens that sees children only as precious, innocent, and preternaturally cute cherubs…. [Making] the case for alternative lenses whereby children may be viewed as unwanted, inconvenient changelings or as desired but pragmatically commodified chattel" (pp. 2-3). Second, the volume highlights the importance of considering children's relative value through the hierarchy within which they live in order that it may lead to government interventions or changes aimed at increasing their value and hence their quality of life. Lancy accomplishes these goals by inductively drawing out his themes from select literature – noting patterns, identifying the underlying

forces that shape them and contrasting dominant, contemporary views of childhood with the wider, older views of childhood to explain how and why changes in childhoods may occur.

Lancy's intended readership, namely anthropologists of various theoretical frameworks and "teachers, fieldworkers, and policymakers who are laboring to improve the lives of children not fortunate enough to have been born into a privileged society," will find this book useful. I believe it is also an excellent teaching and reference resource for post-secondary students of any discipline focusing on issues relating to childhood.

Although Lancy himself aims to synthesize various streams of anthropological work on childhood – in hopes that it will serve as a catalyst to promote greater interaction among researchers and possibly reconcile the nature versus nurture debate within anthropology – his book can serve as a multi-disciplinary introduction. I do wonder, however, if its reception across various disciplines will be affected by the degree to which the author depends on anthropology. Other disciplines that may benefit from the book are sociology, law, education, medicine, history, archeology, philosophy, women's studies, and film studies, to name a few. I found "The Anthropology of Childhood" a pleasure to read, balanced, easy to follow, informative and engaging. I would recommend it to anyone interested in the topic of childhood.

Word Count: 1254

Additional Requirements:

Title Page, Page Numbers and Student IDs

For this assignment, do not include a title page, page numbers, or your student ID#. (As mentioned later in this paper, students who write excellent book reviews will be invited to submit their paper to an academic journal for publication.) Book reviews should be publication-ready. Title pages, numbering and student ID's are not required if your paper is published.

Style of Book Reviews:

Title of the Book and Name of Reviewer:

For this assignment, make sure you begin your book review with the full name of the book and publishing information (city of publication and press name) followed by the reviewer's name and institution. (Note: The University name is MacEwan University, not Grant MacEwan College or Grant MacEwan University.) Punctuation is also important. For example:

Black, Andrew. (2004). Insecurity in the New Era of Terrorism: How will Society Cope?
London: Langham Press.

Reviewed by: Your Name, MacEwan University

For the Text of the Book Review:

- There should be a 1 inch (2.54 centimentre) margin on all four sides. (This tends to come up automatically in Word.)
- Print no smaller than 12 characters per inch. Use a font like Times New Roman.
- Double spaced text throughout, However, if quotes are longer than 5 lines, they should be single spaced and indented on both sides. (Watch out for this! A lot of students make this mistake in their papers.)
- Canadian spelling should be used. (Most spell-checks are American, so using spell-checks where Canadian spelling is not included, can cause you to have spelling mistakes.)
- Check over your review for grammatical errors. Also, make sure the reading style flows by rewording awkward sentences and reworking short, choppy sentences.
- All numbers under 100 are to be spelled out in full (e.g. thirty-four percent). Page numbers are an exception.
- Do not refer to the book as a 'novel'. (A novel is fictitious.)
- The word count should be placed at the end of your review.
- Make sure to include the academic audience. (Watch out for this too! Many students lose marks because they did not include the academic audience.)

Bibliography and Page Numbering for Quotes within the Text

Given that you are writing about the contents of the book, referencing full bibliographic information from the book is not necessary. (In other words, do not include a Bibliography or Reference Page at the end of your paper.) However, if you are using quotes from the book, or identifying a particularly important point that is made in the book, reference the information by inserting the page number (i.e., p. 36) or the page numbers (i.e., pp. 35-37).

If you are using an e-book and there are no page numbers, use the Chapter instead (i.e., Chapter 2).

Note about Contacting the Author of the Book

Do not contact the author of the book to obtain his or her views about content, purpose, readership and so on. If you do so, you will lose marks.

Marking:

The book reviews will each be marked out of 100%. Refer to the course outline with regard to late papers and losing marks of 10% per day. With regard to how the papers will be marked, grammar, spelling, organization and style requirements will all be taken into account. I have set out a rubric in a file on Blackboard that may be helpful to you. You may want to keep it in mind as you write or check over your paper.

Important Note: If your writing style is poor, illegible, or indecipherable, this will affect all aspects of your book review as your ideas and points will not be fully expressed in a clear, concise, and logical manner. If this is the case, it is possible to receive a failing grade on this assignment. If you need writing assistance, contact MacEwan's Writing and Learning Services.

The book review is worth 30% of your course grade.