

The Situation, the Story & Research Questions

Background & Foreground: As we start the research process, one thing I want you to keep in mind is that on *Jeopardy*, **the answer is a question**. The same thing is true for research. **The answer you are ultimately looking for is a good question**. One obstacle many writers experience in arriving at a good question is confusion about the situation-vs-the story.

“The situation is the context or the circumstance, sometimes the plot; the story is the emotional experience that preoccupies the writer: the insight, the wisdom, the thing one has come to say.”

Vivian Gornick, The Situation and the Story, 2001

Research is about testing and growing your insights by putting them in dialogue with not only other people’s insights but also empirical data. Your personal narratives were full of insight. Today in class we’re going to practice investigating larger societal trends and issues inspired by your personal experiences. Some of the issues (and many of them overlapped) that came up in your narratives (in no particular order) were:

- Economics (recession, job loss, housing)
- Drug Addiction
- Domestic Violence
- Grief & Loss
- Women’s physical and emotional health
- Bullying
- Adolescence & Sexuality

We’re going to now visit the website **The Council for Contemporary Families** (<http://contemporaryfamilies.org/>). **Based on a link visited in class you are going to respond to one of the prompts below.** Start now.

A) Describe “the situation” of the issue and identify disciplinary perspectives (sociology, history, economics, psychology, etc.) the issue puts at play.

B) Describe your personal point of entry into the issue. If you don’t have one, or can’t handily identify it, what does thinking about an issue that normally doesn’t impact you reveal to you about your own experience(s)?