

Second Essay Assignment: Interview and Report: How Young Adults Think about School, Work and Relationships

Due Date: Nov. 11, 2014 (in class) [5-page limit, 12-pt. font, double spaced]

This assignment is aimed at exploring how young adults think about marriage, cohabiting and parenthood – as well as their future in general. Today, as marriage is on the decline and cohabiting is on the increase, sociologists are uncertain about how men and women in their twenties think about both kinds of relationships, as well as parenthood. Many young adults are no doubt more focused on questions about how to acquire the jobs or careers they want and need, and the education or training necessary for them. Whatever their focus, young adults make decisions that will shape their lives.

In this assignment, we will explore the thinking behind these key decisions, as well as people's hopes about their future. It is possible that plans or wishes about marriage and parenthood influence decisions people make about education and employment; it is also possible that decisions made about education and employment will influence marriage and especially parenthood in the future. Meanwhile, gender, social class, race/ethnicity and religion influence the ways people think about their future, and the decisions they make in young adulthood. We should be attentive to these important influences as we interpret what we hear in the interview.

In your essay, you will summarize what you have learned about how the person you interviewed thinks about his/her future (especially his/her hopes and goals), and something about the thinking behind the decisions s/he is making now, has made or will be making, as well as how this person thinks about gender, cohabitation, marriage and parenthood. In this summary, you will highlight what you think is important, and try to make sociological sense of what you heard. That is, you should develop some sociological analysis, by asking yourself the following kinds of questions:

- 1) Are this person's decisions about work and education influenced by assumptions that they will marry, and/or be a parent in the future? Is this related to gender?
- 2) Do his/her decisions and concerns about education and work seem to take priority over those about relationships, at this point in time? What seem to be the relative significance of these matters to him/her? Why? How does this person think about current employment possibilities, and those in the future?
- 3) Is this person worried about how they will combine job/career and parenthood in the future? Do they think about this issue as they make decisions about school and future employment? Is this about their gender?
- 4) Do parents' (or other family members' or friends') experiences seem to influence this person's decisions about education and work, or feelings about marriage and parenthood?
- 5) Does this person see cohabitation as different from marriage? How so? Why, do you think?
- 6) What does this person want with respect to how the income earning and the housework and child care will be allocated in their family? Is this attitude related to their gender?

How to proceed: Select a person who is 19 to 26 years of age for this interview. The person you interview *must not be in your family*. Nor can you interview someone who is in a position subordinate to you (e.g., a person who works for your family, a person your parent supervises at work, etc.). Nor can you interview your girlfriend or boyfriend, or past girlfriend or boyfriend!

Present the person you wish to interview with the **Information Sheet**, allow them to read it, and then ask them if you might interview them.

- Note that you need to show extra respect for vulnerable people (ie any people who perceive themselves to be disadvantaged in our society). Take care to assure them that the research poses no potential harm to them. And be sure that it doesn't! Also, **DO NOT** interview a person for whom these questions are likely to cause any upset (eg a person whose parents just divorced, or someone who just broke up with their girlfriend/boyfriend).

[Note: you need to get this Info Sheet, the Consent Forms and the Questionnaire from the course website, at www.chass.utoronto.ca/~bfox/soc314]

Doing the Interview: After they have read the Information Sheet, ask them if they are willing to be interviewed. If so, set up a time and place that is convenient to them to do the interview. Be sure the interview can take place in private.

Before you begin the interview, you need to have this person sign the **Consent Forms**. They should keep one and you should keep your copy. Ask him/her if it is ok for you to record the interview (and have him/her sign the permission on the Consent Form). If they do not want you to record the interview, or if you are unable to record it, take notes.

Then, to conduct the interview, you will use the **list of questions** I have designed and put on the website. You can record the interview (if you receive permission from the person you interview), or take notes during it. (Please be careful beforehand to adjust the questions to fit the person you are interviewing.) During the interview, you should feel free to pursue issues that arise – that is, that the interviewee mentions and seems to be happy to discuss. In that case, you may encourage the person to talk more, with a comment such as, “Can you tell me about that?” or “That sounds important (or interesting); can you tell me more?” You might, for example, wish to explore any comments they make about their parents, siblings or friends who seem to exert some influence on their thinking. Use your judgment, though, about whether to pursue a topic that might cause upset or embarrassment for the interviewee. And you *may not* ask questions on issues not already on the questionnaire, and which do not arise during the course of the interview.

Handling the material: You must take precautions to ensure **privacy and confidentiality** for the person you interview. To keep what you learn confidential, please do not store the Consent Form in the same place as the interview material, and do not put the interviewee's name on the interview material. Use a pseudonym (or fictional name) for him/her in your report. And store the interview material in a secure place. You must destroy this material after the project is complete. In writing about the interview, use the

pseudonym and also ensure that nothing in the write-up would allow someone to identify the person you have interviewed.

The essay: Your **summary** of the interview (i.e., the essay that you will hand in) should focus on what you covered in the interview and address questions like those raised on page 1. Summarize what you think you learned about the decisions this person is making (or has made), in relation to what they think about, or expect, or hope for in terms of intimate relationships and family. Describe what you learned about this person's decisions and plans and thinking, but also about how they are thinking about cohabiting, marriage and parenthood. As well, develop some sociological analysis (whether this involves discussing the impact of their social class, race/ethnicity, family experiences, the current economic climate, or gender on their decisions, hopes for the future, priorities, and/or attitudes).

Specifications: Page limit – 5 pages. (double-spaced, 12-pitch type) Use APA style if you cite any reading material (chapters, articles).

Some tips on writing this essay:

Avoid generalizations. Students often begin essays with a sentence containing sweeping generalizations. For example: “In every society there is.....” or “Families are always....” These statements are usually incorrect, and they fail to tell the reader what the paper is about. Also avoid ending your essay with a moral theme like “We all do the best we can.” Write like a sociology student instead!

Begin with a description of what the paper is about. Give your main argument (or thesis) and a brief summary of what the paper will describe. Also include a description of the person you interviewed and their relationship to you. Both are important for us to put what they say in context (and perhaps learn something of why they say what they say).

Be sure to ask yourself “**why**” as you summarize what you learned. Tell us what you think is important about the person's thinking, especially that related to family, relationships and gender – and the possible reasons why s/he is thinking this way.

Generally, you want to develop some sociological analysis of what the person told you about how they think about jobs/career, family, marriage, parenthood, gender roles, and the issue of handling both family and employment. (If the person lives at home with his/her parents, that might have raised some issues worth discussing – in light of the argument and findings of K. Newman.). You also want to **quote** the person you interviewed to support what you are saying about this person. But, you will develop your explanations and analysis, not adopt theirs.

Write clearly, in sentences and paragraphs containing one theme or point only.

PLEASE NOTE: You will be graded on how carefully and thoughtfully you present what you learned in the interview (especially with respect to how this person is thinking about work and relationships) AND the extent to which you develop some sociological analysis. Using any insights you have from course material is a good idea.

Use APA or ASA style for citations you use. Be very careful about not **plagiarizing** any material from any source: If you quote directly from any reading

material, use quotation marks and put the writer's name and the date of the publication in parentheses. Do the same (minus the quotation marks) if you paraphrase any material. To cite something from a lecture I have given, just cite 'Fox lecture' in parentheses.