Introduction for Faculty Colleagues

Sociology 111 (Introductory Sociology) is populated almost completely by first-year students, most of whom are meeting general course distribution requirements.

One departmental goal for the course is that “Students will learn to recognize and challenge the assumptions about social life that guide their everyday lives.”

In a society where sex and gender are centrally important, societal lessons of what it means to be a girl or boy are transmitted through several social institutions – the family, of course, but also healthcare, schooling, religion, and the economy.

In this assignment students will conduct disciplined examinations of the contemporary U.S. material culture marketed for children (birth through high school). They will be evaluated on the ways that they collect their data, as well as on the credibility of the conclusions they reach.

The Assignment I Distribute to Students

SOC 111 – Introductory Sociology

Group Project - Content Analysis: Consumer Products for Children (10 pts)

One group will visit the children’s clothing sections in local stores, another group will review children’s literature and video games, and a third group will visit toy stores (in each case, some members of your team might go in person, while others observe online). The groups will present their findings to the class on October 10, using either Powerpoint, posterboard or some other visual format to illustrate their data and support their conclusions.

In class discussion that day we will use your findings in all these areas—clothing, toys, books, etc.—to analyze the role that consumer products play in socializing children into “appropriate” gender roles.

Instructions

1. Complete your Background Research:
a. Read the assignments on gender socialization; these sections lay out many social influences on people’s learning what it means to be male/female. Take notes during the showing and discussion of Kilbourne’s Killing Us Softly.

b. Keep in mind also our readings about research methods.

2. Investigate: Visit a store (in person or on-line) so that you can observe the items offered for sale to children (from birth through high school). I encourage your group to look at different age periods (infancy, preadolescent, adolescent) across several product categories.

3. Interpret: When you are at the store pay attention to where items are displayed, how they are organized, how they are packaged, how they are designed. Whether you are in a store or looking online, do you see clues about which items are for girls or boys? Make lists of the items intended for boys/girls. Are there non-gendered items? Provide visual examples of what you see.

4. Report in Writing: Your group should submit one report (max 1000 words, double-spaced, 12-point, in-text citations if used, no cover page) analyzing what you observed:
   a. Summarize & Interpret: What patterns did you see (kinds of objects, names, colors, advertisements, store placement, packaging, pictures suggesting use, etc)? Was there anything unusual or unexpected?
   b. Compare & Contrast: How can you tell that an object is intended for a girl or boy? Are some items encouraging boys and girls to be similar to each other (“gender-neutral“)? Document your comparisons with visual examples in your presentation/poster.
   c. Conclude: What kinds of things might children learn about gender from these items? Think for example about how clothes design might affect a child’s movements, or how particular toys might affect their interests. Are there objects that present a version of adult behavior in miniature? Are there objects meant purely for children to play as children?
   d. Generalize & Evaluate: Based on your evidence from these products, what does it mean to be a boy or girl today? In other words, what do these products say about how boys and girls look like, act like, enjoy doing, and so forth?

5. Communicate Visually: Prepare a poster, PowerPoint, or other visual presentation that responds to at least some of the questions listed under
section 5, below – you might use photos, advertising literature, downloaded images, or actual objects. (Posters and PowerPoint slides should have only a few words, for quick and easy understanding – it’s all in the visual impact).
## Grading

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<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Minimal 0-10 pts.</th>
<th>Satisfactory 11-20 pts.</th>
<th>Excellent 21-30 pts.</th>
<th>Your Score</th>
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<td>Paper provides statements of methods used, generalizations, recognition of patterns.</td>
<td>Examples but no generalizations, or generalizations that are not supported.</td>
<td>Several generalizations with one supporting example each, or several examples but few general patterns identified.</td>
<td>Numerous examples identified, and they are helpful in supporting your generalizations.</td>
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<td>Students demonstrate understanding of terms through appropriate use in paper and oral report.</td>
<td>Report and Visual make only perfunctory reference to course materials.</td>
<td>Ideas from readings are invoked in your paper, but they are not central to your arguments</td>
<td>Analysis continually integrates data with points raised in textbook.</td>
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<td>Visual presentation illustrates and supports your paper report.</td>
<td>A few examples, but no real order or connection to your paper</td>
<td>Visual examples are clearly organized by paper sections. Labels are present but do not always aid in highlighting important points (i.e., too many words or too few labels)</td>
<td>Visual presentation supports and illustrates your ideas in your paper. Any text is abbreviated but sufficient to see why you are including it.</td>
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<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Inadequate 0-6 pts.</th>
<th>Adequate 7-10 pts.</th>
<th>Your Score</th>
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<td>Paper uses appropriate format, grammar, spelling and punctuation.</td>
<td>Many mechanical problems interfere with your presentation.</td>
<td>Occasional errors, but not enough to interfere substantially.</td>
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**Total Score (out of 100):**

*All members of a team will ordinarily receive the same grade, but team members will be asked to comment on whether every member contributed fairly to the effort; this might affect individual members’ grades.*