

Sociology 101: Principles of Sociology
Fall 2007 Assignment II
Due: Thursday, December 6, 2007

THE CULTURE OF FEAR: SOCIOLOGICAL INSIGHTS

We pride ourselves on being the only species that understands the concept of risk, yet we have a confounding habit of worrying about mere possibilities while ignoring probabilities, building barricades against perceived dangers while leaving ourselves exposed to real ones. – Jeffrey Kluger in a November 2006 Time article “How Americans are Living Dangerously”

Introduction

“Americans are afraid of many things that shouldn't frighten them,” writes Barry Glassner in *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans are Afraid of the Wrong Things*. According to Glassner, “thanks to opportunistic politicians, single-minded advocacy groups, and unscrupulous TV ‘newsmagazines,’ people must unlearn their many misperceptions about the world around them. The youth homicide rate, for instance, has dropped by as much as 30 percent in recent years,” says Glassner, “and up to three times as many people are struck dead by lightning than die by violence in schools. False and overdrawn fears only cause hardship,” he writes. “In fact, one study shows that daughters of women with breast cancer are actually less likely to conduct self-examinations--probably because the campaign to increase awareness of the ailment also inadvertently heightens fears.”

In this course so far, we have constantly debunked sociological myths and have based this debunking in the social science research published. The great task of this assignment is to illustrate how Glassner debunks things we should not fear. I would like for you to incorporate concepts learned in class up to this point to answer the question – why do Americans fear the “wrong” things? **This paper is worth 150 points (15%) of your final grade.**

Assignment Details

You are asked to write a 3-5 page paper that integrates your entire knowledge of sociology and apply it to the book *The Culture of Fear...* by outlining how the book could be viewed through a sociological lens to better understand why in society today, there is this “culture of fear.” Specifically, your essay needs to address five interlocking questions:

1. What is Glassner’s specific argument about why Americans fear the wrong things? As a point of clarification, what does Glassner mean when he says the wrong things?
2. What is an example where he debunks a specific societal misconception?
3. Glassner writes a very detailed account of why Americans do not need to fear things perpetuated by (for instance) the media. How would a sociologist view Glassner’s account? How would you incorporate our discussion of the power of institutions in his argument?
4. What are some issues with Glassner’s book? In particular, is there a way to debunk Glassner?
5. What is your opinion of Glassner’s book? Should we fear? Are we too fearful? What are your thoughts on how global change can eliminate fear?

Grading Criterion

Your essay will be judged primarily by ⁽¹⁾ how well you convey your understanding of the book, ⁽²⁾ how well you incorporate sociological concepts, and ⁽³⁾ how well you answer the five questions listed above. The point distribution is below:

50 pts – Your accurate explanation of your chosen fear from the book.

[You need to illustrate that you fully understand one of Glassner main debunkings in the book by choosing one specific “American fear” and outlining why he feels Americans should not be fearful. You also must supply a critique of his argument.]

50 pts – Your use of sociological concepts and how they relate to the book.

[You need to successfully incorporate the concepts that you have learned this semester to supply a more thorough sociological analysis of the book.]

30 pts – Your thorough discussion of Glassner’s main argument.

[You need to go beyond just a summary here. Use direct quotes and paraphrasing to recreate Glassner’s main argument in a concise manner.]

20 pts – Your viewpoint on Glassner’s arguments.

[You need provide a sound critique of Glassner. You need to create a cohesive essay that ends with your viewpoint on whether we as Americans do fear and if so, if we should fear.]

Writing Guidelines

Having performed one other writing assignment prior to this one, I feel that grammar should not be included in the grading rubric. I **expect** that you proofread, edit, revise, spell/grammar check, visit the writing studio, have a friend read it, turn in a rough draft, etc. – essentially produce an **error-free** and **coherent** essay. Thus, your grade will not be *enhanced* by crafting a well-written essay. However, **15** points will be deducted from your grade if your paper is not carefully written or does not follow the guidelines outlined in the previous paper (3-5 pages, double-spaced, and in a 12-point Times New Roman, Garamond or similar font). Thus, I strongly urge you to visit the writing studio or turning a rough draft.

This paper is due at 8:00am on Thursday, December 6 **in class**. Absolutely **no** late papers or **emailed** final papers will be accepted unless special permission is granted.