**Assignment #1 Part B: Essay**

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GNED 1407 Introduction to Sociology

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Assignment #1: Part B is an exercise in evaluating the credibility of information by comparing, in a respectful and unbiased way, two different sources about the same topic. I will be relating that topic to social issues through the lens of the sociological theory of Symbolic Interactionism, which is about “the way people interact with each other to create the social world in which they live.” (Carl & Belanger, 2015, p. 14). This essay will conclude with a personal reflection on the assignment and how the process of evaluating sources will apply to my academic, professional, and personal life.

I chose to analyze the first option, on the topic of "The Family." This entails comparing the following two sources: a [statcan.gc.ca](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2021001/article/00032-eng.htm) article and a [family-vlogger](https://taylorfamilyvlogs.com/how-to-keep-kids-active-during-the-pandemic-mom-life/) post about family health during the pandemic. Option 1 stood out to me because of its focus on public health during the pandemic.

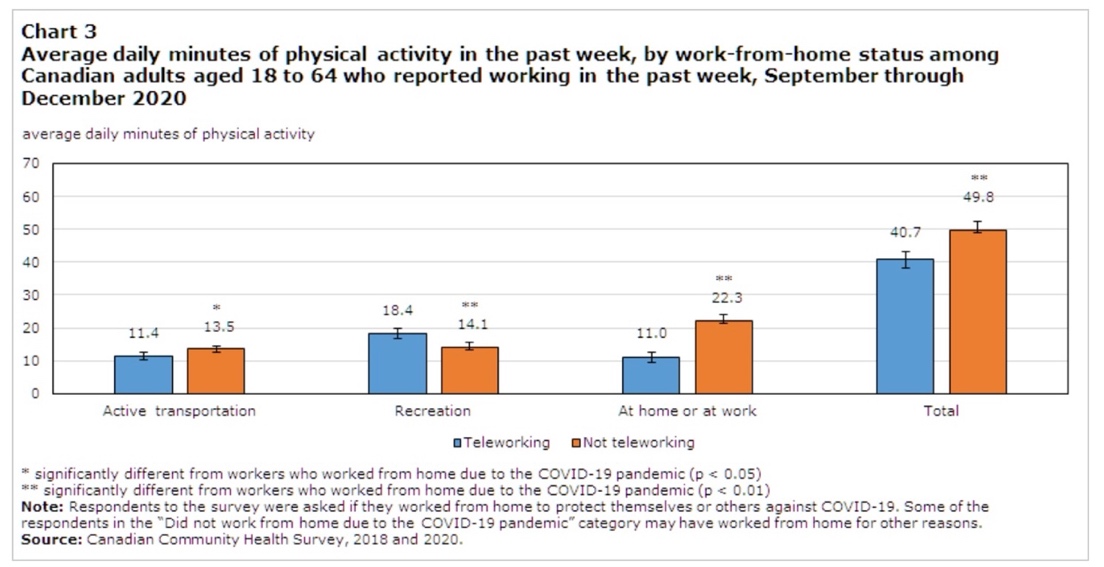
This topic resonates with me because my late partner passed away in 2021 while he was working from home, following his employer’s pandemic response plan with the intention of staying safe and healthy. Ironically, a latent effect of that work from home policy was that he was not at the office, so no one was around to notice or call for help when he collapsed. These events challenged my confidence in my ability to assess health risks, so it made me more interested in analyzing the two sources of information about that topic.

Another reason why I chose option 1 is that it involves analyzing the credibility of Statistics Canada compared to a blog post. It feels like it should be obvious which source is more credible, but it is interesting to set aside my bias, question those assumptions, and explore what exactly makes it true.

The two sources share only a few similarities. For example, the subheadings in the Statistics Canada article (“Workers who worked from home reported less physical activity” (Watt & Colley, 2021))and the title of the vlogger post (“How to Keep Kids Active during the Pandemic? MOM LIFE” (Taylor, n.d.)) are both conveying information about recreational activities during the pandemic. This could mean that they are both trying to reach the same audience, to inform or influence similar people. These titles and subtitles imply that both audiences are weighing the risk of failing to recreate against the risk of contracting COVID-19 while recreating. Families that wanted to stay healthy during the pandemic needed to decide if doing group activities would be worth it, when there was a real risk that they could contract (or transmit) a communicable disease.

To that end, the Statistics Canada article is stronger because it provides the audience with analysis of data that samples a larger group of people, it cites peer reviewed sources, and it identifies the methodology for collecting the data they use for analysis and visualization. It gives readers a technical breakdown of the risk from a data standpoint. Figure 1 is an example from the Statistics Canada article that demonstrates all these strengths.

**Figure 1**



From: (Watt & Colley, 2021)

By contrast, in the vlogger post, Taylor shares anecdotes about their own family’s activity: “we found a perfect place where the kids can release some energy and express their creativity without the harm of being infected” (Taylor, n.d.), does not cite any sources, and refers to government announcements without providing any context: “This was our primary concern when the government announced that classes will be canceled this year…” (Taylor, n.d.). Therefore, the vlogger post is based on their opinion, which hurts its credibility as a basis for health decisions, especially in comparison with the fact-based Statistics Canada article.

Overall, the Statistics Canada article is more credible because it conveys peer-reviewed data and facts.

During the pandemic, the **symbolic** **meaning** of group events shifted as people grappled with their newly created social reality, with new risks in simple **interactions** together (“30 people took part in what appeared to be social events in different parts of Downing Street… The claims are set to heap yet more pressure on the prime minister, who is facing calls to resign.” (Walker & Taylor, 2022)). Going to the gym began to carry new stigmas, becoming a reputational risk instead of a symbol, label, or signal of health. Before the pandemic, the **manifest** function of going to the gym was to practice a healthy lifestyle, but during the pandemic, gymgoers had to contend with a new **latent** function: spreading the COVID-19 virus. This is why it was so important to have credible sources to rely on for informed choices about personal, family, and community health and safety.

Through Erving Goffman’s theory of dramaturgy, a Symbolic Interactionist lens that says “all social life is like acting” (Carl & Belanger, 2015, p. 17), we could interpret shifting social dynamics during the pandemic as new stage directions for people who thought of themselves as healthy pro-social people. When people received conflicting stage directions from different sources about what healthy people should do, it became crucial to identify which sources were authoritative. Without a clear authoritative source, different social groups adopted different norms.

Personally, my biggest lesson from this assignment was how to think about a topic through the lens of a sociological theory. It is not easy to parse my thoughts about public health information during the pandemic, but this assignment helped me practice thinking about it through an established theoretical framework: Symbolic Interactionism.

I tried my best to make the sentences and concepts flow well from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph in this academic essay, and after several rounds of edits I think I have done well with that. It felt good to strengthen both the “academic writing” and “evaluating sources” skills, because it will be useful for my personal, professional, and academic life going forward.

At work, I helped design and document business-to-business software-as-a-service tools, which means that I dealt with organizing information into hierarchies and providing trustworthy sources of technical product knowledge. If I continue in the knowledge management space, any practice with evaluating sources will be valuable to help me maintain unbiased perspectives on potentially controversial topics like public health and artificial intelligence.

Personally, since we will soon be in a provincial and federal election cycle, during a chaotic time in global politics, it will be imperative to effectively evaluate sources to make informed voting choices. Finally, in academic pursuits, I won’t be successful if I can’t identify credible sources and cite them properly, so I am grateful for any opportunity to practice.

References

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