"Under"grad Depression: Economic Anxiety and the Construction of Young Adult Identities

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December 15, 2011

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Abstract

In 2008, Americans faced devastation resulting from one of the greatest recessions since the Great Depression. As a leading social institution, the economy and its fluctuations of recession and growth can have many impacts on the future of a society. This study examined the expectations and identities young adults have constructed during the aftermath of the recent economic downturns of the 2000s through Luckmann & Berger's (1966) theoretical perspective of social construction and Elder's (1998) principles of human agency and historical context. Specifically, it questioned current young adults perceptions of the recent economic downfall, or "The Great Recession", and how or if they believe it has affected their lives and the lives of others within their generation. Qualitative interviews analyzed how education and employment history of participants influenced themes of adulthood, job insecurity, and generational concerns. A particular finding of this research reflected possible social class and educational influences that affect the construction of a young adult's role in society, which could be beneficial to reexamine through further research.

In 2008, Americans faced devastation resulting from one of the greatest recessions since the Great Depression. As a leading social institution, the economy and its fluctuations with recession and growth can have many impacts on the future of a society. Major national downturns in the economy increase social strains, and while this can be difficult to grasp for all members of society, it bestows particular difficulties upon young adults. Fears and hopes fluctuate, opportunities are created or perpetuated, and pressure is placed upon young adults to "be the change" that establishes stability. Individuals use surrounding influences to reinterpret their own subjective realities and interpretations of the world in a way that can both alleviate and augment their anxiety and expectations for their personal goals as well as the future of society.

Currently, little research examines the educational and socioeconomic influences on the current young adult generation's expectations for their future in response to the aftermath of the recent recession. Analysis of past research shows much information on statistical data reflecting the young adult culture, but little research investigates personal interpretations of young men and women directly in the hands of the repercussions of the recession. This study examines how socioeconomic status and educational experience play a role in the level of anxiety faced by young adults entering life after college during an economic recession. Furthermore, a specific focus is placed on how different anxiety levels and perceptions of the recession may influence ideal expectations for a young adult's future. By analyzing qualitative interviews with young adults ages 19-23, this study finds that despite socioeconomic differences, young adults facing economic anxiety are more likely to socially construct identities dominated by powerlessness, insecurity and corruption.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the Great Depression, cultural and societal developments, such as increasing educational requirements, changing gender roles, and growing technological advancements, have had a major influence upon the standards of adulthood expectations. While many expectations persevere through history, fewer and fewer young adults believe they have entered adulthood or view themselves as adults (Yelowitz 2007). This trend of prolonging adulthood can be understood through an understanding of historical contexts and changing expectations of emerging young adults.

Shifts in Adulthood

In defining adulthood, Arnett (1998) finds that "accepting responsibility for one's self, making independent decisions, and financial independence" are the most common expectations for adulthood. Furstenberg et al. (2004) surveyed young adults to find that the definition of young adulthood has shifted from previous expectations of marriage and parenthood and to a focus on education, independence, and full time employment. Arnett (1998) argues that in the past, the desire for marriage was the significant factor that marked an adolescent's entrance into adulthood. Recent studies find that today's young adults do not hold marriage as important and instead seek financial independence as their key significant factor expressing adulthood. Furthermore, over 95% of young Americans define adulthood through completion of education and full-time employment, while under half consider being married and having children as a determinant of adulthood (Settersten & Ray 2010).

Adult experiences inevitably vary at an individual level, but specific societal influences can also change perspectives of adulthood and cause new expectations and statistical trends to develop. Time taken to transition to adulthood has greatly expanded, and women in particular show an increase in prolonging in the rise to adulthood since the 1960s (Furstenberg et al 2004). While many researchers focus their research from a young adult's individual perspective and experience, researchers have also argued that analysis of social institutions and policies will help better understand increasingly complex transitions to adulthood (Settersten & Ray 2010). Konstam (2007) analyzes the impact of individual experiences and presents the diversity among experiences of today's youth as an authoritative symbol that delays legal, social, and economic independence as adolescents transition into adulthood.

Leaving Home

Current young adults leave the home much later and with less predictability than in the 20th Century (De Marco & Cosner Berzin, 2008). Research argues that social class plays an effective role in this shift. Socio-demographic variables such as parental resources greatly influence how and when young adults decide to leave their family home (Avery, Goldscheider, Speare 1992). Bell et. al (2007) conclude that more young adults are "failing to launch" and have declined in financial stability to be able to leave the home and establish independence. While all young adults of all demographics have delayed adulthood during changing economic times, De Marco & Cosner Berzin (2008) found that adolescents of impoverished and lower income level families were more likely to leave the home and enter the workforce earlier than adolescents from families of other socioeconomic backgrounds.

Entering the Workforce

     In the twentieth century, particularly after the 1930s, men either went directly into the workforce at a young age or enrolled in military services prior to starting a family. By contrast, women entered the workforce after establishing an early family to support their families as well as their parents. Once families found prosperity after the war, women returned to being homemakers (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1987). Today, women resemble men in entering the workforce before establishing families, and both genders consider the importance of working hard within a career. As independence and education become an increasingly important determinant of adulthood, economic shifts create an extended enrollment in secondary education for young adults, which can extend the age of entering the workforce and becoming an "adult" (Fitzpatrick & Turner 2007).

     Niedzviecki (2004) found that while young adults assume that they can reach their dreams through hard work and determination, many are surprised by the disappointment, failure and alienation they experience once they enter the workforce. Konstam (2007) further examined that young adults approaching age thirty felt unprepared and dissatisfied with shifts in employment because the current workforce offers little to no assurance that hard work will be rewarded or that the American dream can be achieved.

Emotional Impacts of Economic Hardships

     Economic fluctuations are now playing a complex role in the way young adults view their past, present, and future at a personal, subjective level (Shanahan 2000). Shanahan (2000) understands shifts in adulthood through the anxieties created from

economic shifts, wars, and historical events that can increase delays of adolescence and increase inequalities within social stratification among young adults. Stein et al. (2011) argue that economic hardships affect the relationships children have with their parents, and that young adolescents understand economic hardships through the instilled perceptions of the economy parents give to their children. Stein et. al. (2011) also found that participants were overall pessimistic in their perceptions of the economic impacts on their lives and the young adults were more likely to experience anxiety and depression from economic pressures compared parents.

Haw (1982) presents a report that analyzed conditions of women in the work force since the Great Depression. Her findings show that women during this time were more negative than men in response to the economic environment and expressed great distress and concern for their working conditions. Women were exposed to different working environments and opportunities than men, such as fewer hours, more emotionally strenuous labor, and a lack of variation. However, in a more contemporary study of emerging adulthood, Arnett (1998) does not find that adulthood or economic shifts place significantly different stressors or expectations on women in comparison to men now that changing gender roles have allowed women to enter career fields previously unavailable. In contrast to Arnett's work, Weldy (2010) hypothesizes that economic recessions create anxiety and shift standards for both women and men so that having a job, rather than having a particularly desired job, becomes a mark of achievement.

THEORY

According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), social order is a product of humans. While features of the natural world can be a contributor of social order, social order cannot exist without human activity. Socialization is essential to the maintenance of the existing social order. Through socialization, people learn the generalities and abstractions of significant roles and attitudes which define the social order and can form a "generalized other," which means "the individual now identifies not only with concrete others but with a generality of others, that is, with a society" (p. 133). For Berger and Luckmann, the "generalized other" is an internalized social construction through which society, identity, and reality are understood as a social process within human consciousness. In other words, what is constructed as the reality in the outside world becomes constructed as reality in the internal world within a human.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that there are two perspectives of society: an objective reality perspective and a subjective reality perspective. Society as an objective reality can be observed through institutionalization and legitimation. With this in mind, a human then "not only interrelates with a particular natural environment, but with a specific cultural and social order" (p. 48). Habitualization, or the formation of patterns, provides direction and gives meaning to one's life. Berger and Luckmann explain how these routines can be socialized over generations to create a consciousness that this is "the real" way to behave. Thus, a social order "becomes real in an ever more massive way and it can no longer be changed so readily" (p. 59). This idea of routines within a "specific cultural and social order" exemplifies a modernist perspective, where a truth exists and a specific identity can be assumed.

However, Berger and Luckmann believe that society exists as both an objective reality and a subjective reality, and thus prefigure the postmodern turn. Berger and Luckmann (1966) claim that an individual subjectively defines and interprets his or her existence in the world while objectively internalizing the social reality observed. An objective reality is never perfectly internalized for individuals to subjectively give meaning to their reality. This subjective reality allows for endless understandings of society since there can be no one truth within individual interpretations. Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that what is objectively real may then also become what is subjectively real, but only in translation. Reality then becomes an ongoing production of constructed interpretations. Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that through an understanding of "reality" they can analyze how people socially construct "frames" to understand the world around them. An understanding of "knowledge" is not just empirical evidence given to something known, but it is also how "any body of 'knowledge' comes to be socially established as 'reality'" (p. 3). In everyday life, people's interactions, experiences, images, and discourse are negotiated, reconstructed, confronted, created, and imitated.

The experience of young adulthood can thus be shaped into constructed "frames" based on the historical and social events that take place during a person's life, and the impact of these shifting "frames" can be influenced by the time in which such events occur in a person's life. Social experiences shape one's identity, but each individual constructs their experiences and identity differently. A social constructionist understanding of reality allows one to have a deeper theoretical understanding of the life course as a developmental social experience. Within the life course as a developmental

theory, the key principles of historical context and human agency influence and explain how young adulthood can be individually socially constructed. The principle of historical time states "the life course of individuals is embedded in and shaped by the historical times and places they experience over their lifetime" (Elder 1998: 3). Under this principle, the Great Depression and the Great Recession may comparatively shape the experiences and expectations of young adults. As historical adaptations evolve, the principle of human agency establishes that "individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances" (p. 4).

Theoretically, the principles of life course theory intertwine with Berger and Luckmann's subjective framework. Young adults today not only construct an understanding of "reality" from subjective and objective individual interpretations, but also through adaptations that take place during specific historical experiences. Understanding societal experiences and influences becomes a way to both construct "reality" and shape personal identities at objective and subjective levels. While the principles of historical time and human agency reflect a general understanding of the social adaptations, choices, and actions that influence a human's life, the individuality of young adults in modern societies calls for the inclusion of a subjective understanding of social order and experience. The principle of human agency takes into account the subjective and objective influences of historical and societal factors, such as the economy, political systems, educational institutions, class issues, or consumerism that are crucial to American circumstances and experiences.

The developmental life course theory itself becomes a social constructionist perspective that can be crucial to understanding how an individual shapes their identity within a changing economy society. Each individual's "frame" is shaped by historical context of their existence and the social circumstances of their life, as well as the lives around them. An individual's view of the "reality" around them molds their view of their identity and placement within that "reality".

METHODOLOGY

Procedure

The researcher conducted qualitative research through interviews with young adults. The interviews took place in-person within each participant's home at the participant's suggestion. Since the research is based on personal opinions and experience, this was a strength because it allowed the participants to feel comfortable in the atmosphere in which they are being interviewed. The participants may have felt more at ease in this environment as opposed to a more public setting.

Each interview lasted between approximately forty-five to fifty-five minutes long. The informed consent form was given to the participant and obtained prior to the interview either in person or through email. Participants' names were changed so that they remain anonymous and retained their confidentiality. Participants were free to refuse questions of a sensitive nature.

The study focused on multiple open-ended questions [See Appendix] about their background, their work experience, and their perception of the impact the current recession has had on their life and the lives of other young adults. Certain terms within

the questions have dynamic meanings, so before the questions the researcher asked each participant to define adulthood in their own terms and guided further questions from that understanding. Specifically, questions regarded perspectives of the current economic crisis, social class, future expectations, individual perceptions of social standing, and current societal inequalities. Some examples of questions include: what are your current expectations and ideals for your work life to be in the future? What do you find to be the most difficult about living and negotiating our current economic recession? Do you believe you have a voice in our greater society? In your opinion, what should be the three top concerns of young adults in today's society?

The interviews were recorded to properly code data. The research was analyzed through open-ended coding without initial expectations. Open-ended coding allows the themes to develop across the interview, and this way the participant's experiences guides the data and unpredicted developing themes can be discovered. The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed for accuracy. Through transcriptions and open-ended coding, themes arose and were categorized into four general themes. The first theme focused on participant's constructions of adulthood. The second theme focused on the development of job insecurity and perceptions of the current economy. Following the development of participant's construction of adulthood and economic anxiety was their depictions of generational concerns. This included their views of the young adult generation of today as well as their perception of the values young adults hold today. The final theme developed from future-focused responses. Many participants expressed concerns for the future and changing expectations in response to the changing economy.

Participants

Participants were chosen through convenience sampling. The sample consists of eight young men and women, ranging in age from 19 to 23. Four participants were female and four participants were male. Two participants were Hispanic while the rest of the participants were white. Currently, five participants are enrolled in college and one participant obtained their bachelor's degree. Education and employment history of each participant were analyzed as an introductory theme to provide explicit details of the sample.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The main disadvantage of this study is the short time period in which to gather data and the small sample size obtained in result. Due to the broad population chosen, it is not possible to interview every young adult with at least one semester of college between the ages of 19 and 23, so the small sample size was not representative of young adults as a whole. While survey distribution would have obtained a more representative sample, the use of qualitative interviews and open coding was a strength that allowed access to richer data. Face-to-face interviews also create a level of interviewer bias, and the use of convenience sampling could have affected participants' answers.

Qualitative interviewing also accounts for many advantages to research. While the sample size was very small, the use of interviews allowed the researcher to access in-depth knowledge from the participants. Face-to-face interviews allow the researcher to account for both verbal and nonverbal cues observed durin the interview process. Qualitative interviews, rather than surveys, allow the researcher to be present to elaborate on any topic and clarify any discrepancies in the questioning that may arise.

FINDINGS

Education and Employment History of Participants

Each participant had at least one semester of higher education. One male participant and all four female participants were currently enrolled in college. Five (62.5%) of the eight participants attended at least one semester at a private university. One of these participants took a semester off after a year of private university attendance and then transferred to a public university. This leaves 50% of the participants having at least one semester within a public college. Two male participants stopped attending college within the first year to work and have not returned yet, but plan to in the future. Only one participant has received an undergraduate diploma.

All but one participant currently live in suburbs of a major urban city in the United States. Six (75%) participants identified themselves as middle class, two of these six claiming they were of "lower middle class", while two (25%) identified themselves as working class. Middle class was defined by participants as a household situation in which their family was "not struggling" and they viewed themselves as "having just enough". However, most participants remarked that a distinction between working class and middle class no longer exists or that they "made a lot of sacrifices and definitely are more towards lower middle class ever since the economy kinda changed", as one participant stated. Michael, another participant, argued, "what's the difference between a working class and a middle class? I pretty much think every class is a working class except for the rich people who don't do anything and just stay rich…I think the two classes are the same."

With the exception of one female, all participants currently works at least one minimum wage job. The other participant stressed the importance of needing to find a job immediately. Two participants worked two or more minimum wage jobs during this research. Three (42.9%) employed participants mentioned that they wish they had another source of income in addition to their current job. Every participant had experience with minimum wage jobs within the food industry and retail positions and touched upon the stresses of only being able to obtain temporary positions. Participants showed dissatisfaction with remaining in minimum wage jobs at this age. While many strove for economic independence, minimum wage jobs hinder this possibility. James stated, "there are times when I have tried to be economically independent, but like I said there's just times where I quit jobs and just gone from having money to being broke until I found another minimum wage job." Lisa also remarked:

> I think it's harder for kids to um, become economically independent at our age because of the recession and just because the cost of living is so high. It's hard to get a good job and it's really hard to support yourself on a minimum wage job…at my job at the factory I definitely learned that a lot of people work really hard um to ear basically minimum wage in crappy jobs and I'm glad I'm going to school and getting a degree in something I love…my experiences have showed me what I didn't want to do with the rest of my life.

Constructions of Adulthood

The top three responses that defined adulthood were responsibility, independence, and finding a steady job, concurrent with findings of previous research (Arnett 1998; Furstenburg et. al 2004). Every participant stressed the importance of establishing a sense of maturity. Many participants hesitated and were perceived to be uncertain of their responses when questioned about adulthood. They perceived adulthood as a subjective experience that was no longer defined by set stages that each individual had to follow to

become an "adult"; in other words, a specific age did not necessarily determine "being an adult". The ability to prioritize, set goals, and embrace a mature sense of responsibility is needed before being able to consider the entrance into "adulthood", according to participants. When asked if they considered themselves adults at this time in their life, only one participant firmly answered yes. While one female and one male both stating that they sometimes consider themselves adults, they stated that they still rely on the support and "reassurances" of their parents.

Unlike previous generations where marriage was considered a stepping-stone into adulthood, only the male participants mentioned marriage. James mentioned responsibility, prioritizing life, and maturity as the top factors that define adulthood. He believes "getting an education as soon as your ready to call yourself mature that's like the point you enter adulthood and just some people don't get that. It [adulthood] can be different individually, and that's how I think it should be seen." He also mentions right after that "marriage is part of adulthood but it's like one stage of it, I guess you could say." When asked if he felt he was an adult, Ryan responded, "No, definitely not right now. Getting married and stuff, that's pretty adult, ya know? Kids don't get married and go out having kids."

Job Insecurity

During the interviews, every participant expressed feelings of uncertainty, apathy, insecurity, and indecisiveness in response to the current job market. Particularly in response to the job market, participants revealed these emotions as they remark about the extreme fluctuations and unavailability of jobs, and well as the expressed need to have a "connection" or gatekeeper into the career of choice in today's society. Male participants

viewed the job market specifically as part of an economic cycle, while the female participants were more likely to focus on the emotional impact.

During the interviews, many participants hesitated and sighed during discussions of job expectations and the economy. David held the most negative image of the job market in his response: "the economy sucks and everyone is pushed in the 'dead end jobs'…Life would be better if the economy picked up, these economic recessions only make people desperate for money." Ryan also expressed the need to work hard while facing despair in the economy when he stated, "a dollar is hard to get, when you work hard for it you appreciate it more."

While participants revealed many uncertain and negative responses, many hopeful words of advice were given, such as "don't just settle for something less, go for something more. You just gotta figure out what you can do and how you can be a part of the greater society. Don't stop trying." Michael expressed his insecurities toward the job market by stating, "even if you have a college degree it seems harder to find a job let alone find a job in your career field. So yeah, sometimes you just gotta take what you can get and roll with it." One participant was concerned that education just was not enough to make it in today's society:

> It's not something hopeful to know I could go to school for six years and potentially just not find anything for that career. There's so many people working hard at a degree to do what they want to do and they just can't get a job and it just puts a lot of people down so they end up just not trying.

The apathy expressed toward the job market led to many participants to agree with the idea of "just taking what you can get". Other participants, like Ryan and Anna, described the job market as "grim" and a place where you need to "fend for yourself." While

everyone expressed dissatisfaction with the economy, there was a lingering idea of that

eventually they will be able to "just get by" that would alleviate participant's negative

insecurities about their future employment opportunities.

When asked about his views of the current job market, James responded:

> Honestly, I don't pay attention to all that all that much. I don't listen to news, I don't stay current, I know I should I just feel very depressed. I mean its something I should learn about but its not something I want to worry constantly about or focus on too much. What I hear is very different, people say there's no jobs others say there are jobs. But if the current job market is pretty bad then it could only get better.

Common to responses was the idea that the economy has created a job market in which

positions are only possible to obtain through luck and connections. Two participants in

particular discussed the idea of needing a connection to find a job. Anna believes

"everything is just all based on who you know and luck with getting jobs." Ryan sighed

during his interpretation of this need of connections for job obtainment and responded, "it

puts future job hunts into a very scary perspective because I will have to know somebody

to get into any job I want. It's very common. If you know somebody you're in, or at least

you have a bigger head start than everyone else." This ambivalence toward the job

market left participants feeling desperate, insecure, and concerned for their future.

Current Generational Concerns

Participants expressed extreme concern with the values and morals of young

adults within their generation. Only one participant held positive views of our generation

by praising young adult's ability to be more independent and individualistic than previous

generations. Participants felt that they are a part of a very corrupt generation that is

unaware of their surroundings and reliant on "false hopes". Many suggested a need to

change the "corrupt" morals of young adults today. James argued, "kids these

days…there's no gratitude. We have totally different morals than other generations had. I think that before they were more hard working people and ours are more like take everything that we can get and just take it for granted." David reflects upon the corruption he sees in his response that "our generation is crazy and not as mature as previous generations, we're selfish. Previous generations were more well brought up and raised better, our generation needs to learn to settle down a little bit more."

Anna expressed the concern that our generation needs to be more open-minded "because a lot of things today are rapidly changing and if you don't keep up and keep yourself open to new things then you're gonna end up stuck in the past and ignorant to the new times." She also was concerned with the future:

> The current generation has declined in values and like um, we dress inappropriately, we say vulgar things, we act inappropriately, um we have changed a lot of the customs. Like back in the day it would be unheard of…people act differently than they would back then. If you look at the television and the tv networks you see um how moral-less and scandalous people of our generation can be and it just makes me think like…like if you're going to do this now, what are you going to do when you have more freedom later on?

Awareness of societal issues was a big concern of participants, though many of them revealed that they were guilty of not paying attention to the news because it was "too depressing". Jennifer's greatest despair with her generation was in response to uninformed behavior:

> just the lack of knowledge about certain issues and the views people have before…they really think about what's happening in our economy and what's happening elsewhere. People our age typically just jump right on the first available bandwagon with other people and don't really…think outside the box or question things to stand up for themselves.

The expression of concern with the lack of knowledge of their generation and the corrupt behavior they observe led participants to stress the importance of maturity, responsibility and changing the morals of people at an individual level. Participants also stressed the

importance of every young adult going to college, whether attending a university, community college, or trade school.

Looking Toward the Future

In response to economic anxiety, participants dealt with the difficulties in their lives by staying optimistic about the future. While they felt disadvantaged in the job market, they felt hopeful for their individual futures. This study has found evidence that a positive outlook on the future, no matter what the current situation, gives a sense of hope that alleviates despair. Jennifer believes the best way to deal with hard experiences is to "be responsible for yourself and look out for only yourself…always look out for yourself and your future, it's important to always look ahead." However, the future is also something to be feared during difficult economic times because she stresses that she must "always think about savings and how [her] future is going to be affected by what's happening today. You always need to think about the future and how it is affected by what you do today."

Another participant with a pessimistic construction of the economy stressed, "although it seems like it's far away, something is bound to be good." With most of the participants focusing on taking life "day by day", it was not surprising that comments made regarding uncertainty of the future included, "only time will tell", "you just got to ride it out and hope for the best", and "look on the bright side and I guess just hope that things will get better." Optimistic constructions of the future allowed participants in this study to ease the uncertainty and dissatisfaction of their current lives.

DISCUSSION

A major trend in the interviews for this study found that participants who self-identified themselves within lower socioeconomic status were more likely to place societal blame for generational corruption on individual characteristics rather than structure. Four (50%) of the participants who self-identified themselves as lower-middle class and working class expressed the important need to change people before structural change can be obtained. One participant identifying himself as a middle class member "just trying to get by" expressed the need for structural change but his explanation focused on changing people's morals.

This study suggests that educational influences may also play a factor in personal versus structural blame. Of the participants with private higher education, all five, despite social class, brought up political structures as part of the problem and gave specific examples of needed change, such as whether they mentioned blaming personal characteristics or not. The less educated three participants stated the need to change the people, not society. One participant stated:

> I don't think structural societal change can do anything…pretty much this society gives people everything they need, they just, what we need to change is people; people need to change and you know, they have to want to. They have to want it. Don't change society, change people. Then you can change society that way.

Because this study examined a small sample, further research can establish the extent to which education and social class affects young adult's construction of societal blame.

Another important issue was the participants' feelings of powerlessness and lack of having a voice within society. Along with questions of societal change, the researcher probed questions of young adult's construction of their voice within society. Of the eight participants, only one participant (12.5%) believed he has a voice in our greater society and correlated his voice in response to being a member of the Hispanic community. Two

of the seven participants that do not feel they have a voice blamed it on the dominance of white middle class men in politics and social institutions. One participant blatantly remarked, "a voice can change the world, but I cannot."

The tendency for participants within this study to construct a negative view of their role in society supports the theoretical framework of human agency. Influences of historical and societal factors, in this case economic fluctuations, education and job market uncertainty, greatly influence the realities participants construct for themselves. Encompassed in economic insecurity and mistrust in leadership, participants have socially constructed "frames" in which the independence and responsibilities expected upon young adults shape the role they see themselves playing within society.

This study can be expanded to better understand the relationship between young adult's identity constructions, social class, and economic anxiety. This research presents important concepts of young adulthood as a new generation rises in society. Further research can help examine if the corruption and blame upon changing the people rather than the structure is unique to this small population or young adults as a whole within society. Participants in this study shared a common construction of immorality, corruption, and lack of knowledge that would be important to research if this holds true for the larger society.

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Appendix A. Sample Interview Questions & Statement of Consent

Informed Consent Form

You have been invited to participate in a study designed to provide insights concerning how the current generation of young adults anticipate and perceive their future role in society. This study aims to understand current young adults perceptions of the current economic downfall, or "The Great Recession", and how and if they believe it has affected their lives and the lives of others within their generation. The data will then be used in comparison to Glen Elder's study of young adults during the Great Depression to establish a historical cross-examination of young adult expectations in times of economic hardship. You have been selected because you are a young adult between the ages of 19 and 23. Your participation may contribute to a better understanding of your current generation's expectations for our society's future.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to engage in a face-to-face interview that is expected to take anywhere from 60-85 minutes to complete. Questions will be asked concerning background information, how you believe current young adults perceive the economic recession, and what you believe are the greatest influences on your expectations for the future. These conversations will be tape recorded in an effort to clearly and concisely convey your opinions. You have the option to ask the researcher to turn off the tape recorder at any point during the interview. After the interview, your comments will be transcribed and included in a report. After the interview has been transcribed, the tape recordings will be destroyed.

All completed interviews are confidential. Only the researcher will have knowledge of every participant in the study. The identity of each individual participant will be kept private between the researcher, the faculty advisor of the researcher, and the participant, and the identities of the participants will not be revealed under any circumstances to anyone aside from the researcher. Participation in the study may cause a small level of psychological discomfort due to sensitive subject matter. However, participants can choose to not answer sensitive questions without penalty. The study poses no physical risk.

If you have any questions about the interview, this form, or the overall research, please contact the researcher, Jessica Doherty, either by phone 708-915-9260 or email jdoher01@saintmarys.edu, or feel free to contact the faculty advisor, MaryAnn Kanieski, at kanieski@saintmarys.edu.

Your signature below signals your agreement to participate in the interview. Your signature indicates you have read this information and have chosen to participate in the study. You may withdraw from this study at any time. Should you choose to withdraw from the study, your comments will not be included. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty. A copy of this form will be given to you to keep.

Participant's Agreement
I hereby give my consent to participate in this study as a volunteer. I have been informed of the general nature and purpose of the study and I am aware of the expected duration of my participation in this study. I have been informed of the extent to which confidentiality of the records identifying me will be maintained and I have been instructed to whom to contact for answers to my questions concerning this exercise. I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I may discontinue my participation at any time, and that discontinuing participation will involve no penalty.

Signature of Participant: _____Date:_____
Signature of Researcher: _____Date: _____

Sample Interview Questions

1. How old are you?
2. Where are you from?
3. Can you tell me a little about your educational background.
4. Growing up, did you view yourself as working class, middle class, upper class, or a variation of the above?
5. Describe how your life growing up has influenced your understanding of your social class.

6. Would you be willing to share the current average income of your family household?
7. Would you consider yourself an adult?
   a. Do you think a specific age determines adulthood, or what other factors can determine when one enters adulthood?
8. Tell me a little about your previous and/or current work life.
   a. On a scale from one (least satisfied) to ten (most satisfied, how satisfied would you say you are with the positions you have had?
   b. On a scale from one (least satisfied) to ten (most satisfied, how satisfied would you say you are with your experience as a part of the workforce?
   c. What would increase your level of satisfaction?
9. Have you gained any important life lessons from your working experiences?
10. What do you think defines economic independence?
   a. How economically independent would you describe yourself?
11. When do you feel one should move out of their parent's/guardian's home?
12. Have you established expectations for living arrangements after college yet?
13. What would you describe as the biggest life challenge you have faced?
14. In your opinion, what should be the three top concerns of young adults in today's society?
15. What are your current expectations and ideals for your work life to be in the future?
   a. Are there any current future work life plans that differ from your expectations? To what degree to they meet up to your expectations?
16. Who or what has the greatest influence on your expectations for your future work life?
17. If you had to give advice to someone about to embark on his or her career path, what would you tell him or her?
18. Do you believe you have a voice in our greater society?
   a. If you could advocate a social change, how would you go about it?
   b. Do you think structural or social change is needed or can be obtained in today's society?
19. What do you find to be the most difficult about living and negotiating our current economic recession?
   a. What do you find the most satisfying about living during this time?
   b. What provides you with a sense of hope about your generation? Are there any specific influences?
   c. What provides you with a sense of despair about your generation? Please explain.