

James A. Blatt

November 10, 2019

SOC-103

Sociology of Families

Critical Thinking Essay 4

The Nordic Theory of Everything by Anu Partanen

We'll read part of The Nordic Theory of Everything by Anu Partanen to supplement Chapter 8

1. Read pages 63-67; reflect on Jennifer's experiences. Discuss whether her experiences are consistent with the overall reality of American families.

Jennifer's first experience with pregnancy is different than most Americans. She's granted ample time off by her employer and it's both paid and unpaid. Most American families get up to 12 weeks of unpaid Family Medical Leave Act time when they work for a company employing fifty or more people, or no guaranteed leave whatsoever when the company employs less. The average employee in the United States gets just 10 sick days after 1 year of work. Jennifer's insurance also covered a lot of her expenses, whereas the insurance of most do not.

2. Read pages 67-78; reflect on Hanna and Olli's experiences. What strikes you as interesting or important? What types of social support do Nordic countries offer families?

Nordic countries (Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark) support pregnancy as structurally pronatalist. They recognize that "the long-term health of their societies and economies depends first and foremost on healthy relationships between children and their parents, between spouses, and between parents and their employers" (Partanen, 67). Nordic countries offer guaranteed paternity and maternity leave that starts up to 1 month before birth, and extends up to 3 years afterwards; reintegration into the workplace after transitioning their child into daycare; free or heavily subsidized daycare; a base standard of medical care for all expecting mothers; and post-birth support of mother and child as they move back into society. Hanna and Olli, who work as management consultants, were able to take the time from their prestigious positions to

be active parents and maintain their professional employment (identity). They did not fear losing their job or being denigrated at work because their employer was supportive of their decision to have another child. Even as they adopted a child out of Africa, where they had to live for 6 months prior to taking full custody, the employer was supportive. For both their first and second child they enjoyed the support of both society and their employer.

3. Read pages 78-83; what are the benefits of Finland's baby box? How might the contents of the box shape parental behavior?

The benefits of Finland's baby box are numerous. As part of their basic level of care and social support every parental unit receives one baby box from the government filled with things like diapers, a bath thermometer, new clothing, parenting books, and such which encourages the pronatalist social structure of all Finns. By encouraging the pronatalist social structure, no one feels cheated that taxes are higher than they might otherwise have been to support the next generation, or that others at work who choose to have children are granted special leave to care for them. The box informs responsible behavior by opening-the-eyes of the parents-to-be concerning what the government thinks responsible parents ought to consider and by ensuring that every child have the same basic start in life, with parents at least thinking about how to do what's best for their new baby.

4. Describe the "boomerang kids" phenomenon. Why is it so prevalent in many of the world's most affluent societies? What forms of social support are offered to young adults in Nordic countries?

"Boomerang kids" are adult children over the age of about 27 who return home to their parents house because they either 1.) don't make enough money to support themselves with housing, or 2.) because they spend differently than their parents and refuse to live lean. It is so prevalent because mom and dad have a particularly hard time turning junior away in his hour of need in his early and late 20's, which is when, according to Chapter 10, money spent on kids by parents is increasing. In Nordic countries, housing stipends for college students and at-risk persons who couch surf or are staying with friends are the norm, and living in dormitory style housing with other young people in a similar situation is common. Also, there are supports for food and education that are offered which the United States can't, or won't, match.

5. What are your takeaways from this reading? Connect your takeaways to a concept from Chapter 8 or Chapter 10 of your textbook.

The fact that the United States is pronatalist but structurally anti-natalist really comes to life from the reading. It seems that all is utopia in the Nordic countries (Finland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark) respecting children. I think it's important to work for a law that guarantees paternity leave in the United States and at least 26 weeks of maternity leave, even if only half of these weeks are paid. While I like the idea of a baby box, I don't believe it to be a good idea for the United States and I think that our individualistic mentality of "they chose to have kids, why do I pay to support them?" will always merit serious consideration.

My significant other is a childless adult property owner who can't stand paying property tax because he never had kids and he doesn't see any need to support the neighbors' kids education, who are a Catholic family with a many children in public school. While I disagree with him on this point, his position is not uncommon.