Youth Cultures: Guidelines for the Mini-Research Assignment

This assignment is designed to give you some practice at becoming a researcher, asking research questions, gathering data, analyzing results and drawing conclusions (which you will do again in your major research project later on in the semester). It is also designed to enable you to learn about how people develop ideas about youth cultures—from personal experience, from people they know, from the media, or from some other source—and to what extent people are influenced by stereotypes. We might then be able to draw some conclusions about how different kinds of sources of information influence attitudes toward youth cultures.

You are free to select your own research question, but here are some suggestions. You should choose only ONE question to guide your investigation:

1. To what extent are attitudes toward youth cultures created by media representations rather than by personal experience?
2. How significant is the style or outward appearance of members of youth cultures to outsiders in determining their attitude toward the culture?
3. How much does the average person know about various youth cultures and how do they acquire their information?

Because style and self-presentation are important parts of subcultural identity, I suggest using a visual representation of a culture as a way of eliciting responses. You can also simply ask a set of questions. In either case, you should choose at least five people and ask them all the same questions. Suggested questions:

1. What youth culture does this image represent to you?
2. What about the image captures the culture for you?
3. How much do you know about this culture? (Ask for some specific examples of what they know.)
4. Where did you get your information about the culture?
5. What is your view of the culture?

You can ask other questions as well, but make sure you determine the viewer’s attitude toward the culture and how that attitude was formed.

Write up
Be sure to include the visual if you use one and an explanation of why you chose it and how it represents the culture to you. In approximately 500-1000 words, summarize the results of your research, analyze the results, and draw some conclusions. Since this is a short report, you need not bother to write a formal introduction and conclusion. Just get right to the point and stop writing when you're done. Whom did you interview and why?
How many males and how many females? What age, race, class? Did you select people for a specific reason or did you try to get a random sample? You don’t have to report each person’s answers to each question, although you may. You should, however, tell us how many people answered each question in a given way (3 out of 6 males learned about the culture from a TV show). Look carefully at any differences in responses depending on factors like gender and race. Does that breakdown lead you to draw any specific conclusions? How significant are your results and the conclusions you can draw based on your data? This is a very small sample, but were there results that you felt were especially valid and would apply to a larger sample as well?

Criteria for evaluation:
This assignment is worth 10 points
Ability to ask and answer valid question (thinking like a social scientist): 4 pts
Quality of evidence: 4 pts
Presentation: 2 pts

I am looking to see if you can formulate a good question, approach it objectively like a social scientist, gather good data, and use that data effectively to draw persuasive conclusions.