Reflective Statement

Name: Sami Semmar

University of Toronto
As I am an undergraduate student planning for embarking on graduate school, developing research techniques is a fundamental skill I have to develop. As part of the Introduction to Sociology course, a content analysis project was assigned. This was my first research paper at university, and for it, I developed a variety of research strategies and techniques. The research question assigned to our group was “How are parenting roles of men and women depicted in the media?”

A central requirement to answer the research question was to select 50 items from specified newspaper articles. As a beginner in the research process, I had to book a one-on-one consultation with the reference librarian, Jesse Carliner, at the Robarts Library. After discussing the research topic, the librarian guided me to consult the database for Canadian newspapers: Canadian Newsstand Complete. This rich resource was completely appropriate for the requirements of the project since the articles had to be selected from Canadian newspapers. The next step was to find keywords that would narrow the research results. The topic of the research question exhibits two independent variables: gender and the media depiction of parenting styles, so by using a Venn diagram to brainstorm keywords, the first search string that I used was: mother OR father. With these keywords along with the specified timeline (September 2015 – March 2016), more than 2000 results came up. After I read few articles, I was directed to new keywords that I had not consider in the beginning of my search. Therefore, by manipulating the AND/OR Boolean variables, this process was reiterated until I developed a more sophisticated search string consisting of: (parent*) AND (father OR dad OR daddy OR mother OR mom OR mommy OR son OR daughter OR child* OR kid OR teen* OR adolescent OR adolescence).

In addition to finding popular media articles that answered the research question, scholarly articles had to be cited in the literature review section. In order to proceed to the writing process,
I attended the Research and Writing Seminars offered by the E.J. Pratt Library: Literature Reviews, Writing to Cite, and Annotated Bibliographies. In the Literature Reviews seminar, I learned different techniques on how to look for scholarly articles that fit the research topic in question. In the case of my content analysis, I started first by using keywords related to gender and parenting roles. However, different authors may use different terms to relate to gender, so in my research, finding all the necessary keywords to capture all the sources was a time consuming process. The strategy was to use the controlled vocabulary approach. In fact, by selecting one source from the keyword search, it guided me to a predefined subject heading, which listed all the sources related to the chosen scholarly article. As a result, I did not have to think about all keywords that different authors used in their articles. I also used skills that I learned from the Writing to Cite seminar, especially the different ways of in-text citation methods such as quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing. Although the American Sociological Association (ASA) style is the formal referencing style used by many sociologists, the instructor recommended adopting the American Psychological Association (APA) style throughout the paper. In organizing my bibliography, I had the chance to use my Refworks account inasmuch as it offered the feature of being able to manage as many sources as I used in my paper. The Refworks software was suggested through one of the consultations I booked with the reference librarian, Colin F. Deinhardt.

In addition, using reputable peer-reviewed sources is crucial to support the literature review. I consulted the Sociological Abstracts database in relation to my content analysis. To measure the reputability of the source, I considered the number of times that the source was cited by other authors listed in the database. For instance, *Does Father Care Mean Fathers Share?: A Comparison of How Mothers and Fathers in Intact Families Spend Time with Children*, by Craig (2006) was cited 247 times by different academics, which indicated a considerable reliability of
this source. Furthermore, before submitting my research project, I consulted the Woodsworth Academic Writing Center. Essentially, not only did this resource give me the opportunity to have hands-on feedback about the writing presentation of the project, but the instructor at the center also provided handy tools to pay attention to grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure at any stage of my writing process.

Overall, I strongly believe that I have developed resourceful writing and research skills throughout this project. The foundational strategies acquired will be, therefore, pivotal in my upcoming assignments. In the direction of amplifying on the research, I would collect articles beyond Canadian newspapers. I would compare and contrast the statistical findings from Canadian newspapers with non-Canadian newspapers so that the research will provide a global perspective. I would, therefore, apply the skills that I learned by selecting an international newspaper database. In that case, the Research guides by subject at the University of Toronto Libraries website is the direction I would explore. The International section in the Newspapers: Current and Historical guide recommends consulting the major current international newspaper databases such as ProQuest International Newsstand and Factiva. As a result, academic resources from the University of Toronto Libraries are unquestionably valuable for me as a current and future researcher.