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Inventing Adulthoods:
Emergent Focus Group
E.g. of observer note-taking
8.12.00.

The group was held in the conference room at SBU. There was a tape recorder each side of the table, with the 2 microphones on the table facing each end. Facilitator (SH) was sitting one end of the table and the 4 participants sat two opposite each other. The moderator (SFS) was sitting a little way away from the table. The focus group lasted about 1 ¾ hours.

There were 4 young men in the group:

1 From Rural site: He was wearing long shorts and trainers, with a long sleeved t-shirt. He has dark curly hair and a little beard.
2 From Deprived Estate: Wearing a t-shirt and jeans
3 From Leafy Suburb, but had travelled from XXX University where he is in his 2nd year: wearing a large-knit cream polo neck sweater and a jacket; fair hair cut fairly short.
4 From Leafy Suburb, now in his 1st year at XXX University: wearing grey sweatshirt and grey trousers; short fair hair; glasses.

Comments: 3 and 4 were possibly more confident than 1 and 2, but not significantly. 1 was good at giving his views and 2 was thoughtful before giving his opinions. We had had a fear that 4 might dominate a bit, but this was not so, and he was not an overwhelming presence.
3 was more forthcoming and jokey in the group than he had been during the lunch or in normal conversation, and had quite a lot to say from the start. They were all confident enough to begin things saying 'In my view…' when giving their individual views.
2 was quite reticent at times, but also very open in his views, for instance, about saying that he did not want long term relationships through his fear of a partner dying.

Comments on discussion of statements:

You make your own luck in life

This was a fairly short discussion. 1 and 2 were asserting that 'it's up to you' while 3 was coming in with a class view of your start in life and relating it to luck on snooker. 4 brought in aspects over which people have no control, such as floods, and the weather.
They tended to talk about making your own luck.
(4 was talking about if you come from a middle class family, and you read the daily Telegraph, this influences your views, and this is out of your control, while 3 then jokes about the Daily telegraph

University is a waste of time

This statement caused smiles and laughter. 2 defended the value of his working experience (he has not been to university). 3 gave the various reasons that people go to university – some through not knowing what they are doing, and refers to his being keen on earning money. 4 wanted the best of both worlds – money and an enjoyable lifestyle, and recommends university as 'great fun'. 2 defended an individual standpoint of having the drive to do things and found it hard to agree or disagree with the statement. 1 then chips in with a different viewpoint as someone who is not into money – he wants to do an acting degree. This sort of discussion could have put 1 and 2 on the defensive but it did not.

People still expect a job for life

4 talks a lot on this statement, about not wanting a job for life, but still wanting to be in the same area of work etc., so not endorsing a career change. 1 joins in later and talks more then, and 2 says that he has never expected a job for life.

In general, 1 and 2 tend more than the others to lean on the table do, while 3 and 4 tend more to lean back in their chairs.

If you want to get on…

All made reference to this being similar to the first statement, taking it to mean that if you want to get on, you have got to make an effort, get out and at it – kind of attitude.
(When 2 was talking here, (prompted by SH), on aspects of his education and background, he was leaning forward on the table, fiddling with the stickies' and it looked as if his hand was trembling a little.)

Travelling just puts off starting real life

All tended to see travelling as positive, and were delivering clichés such as 'travelling IS life' (1). He (1) is definitely not keen on being stuck in the Rural area. 4 talks about his wanting to do voluntary work in Asia. SH has to prompt 2 to speak on this, it seems it is not something that is big in his life.

There's no such thing as being British anymore

This was the statement that was discussed for the longest time and it got a bit tense at times. 4 talked a lot with reference to the British Empire and Victorian days, and said something about 'being honest with yourself' which others generally thought was not very relevant, especially 1 who thought that being British is not all it is cracked up to be. 3 was more diplomatic about it still being present, in the union jack underwear etc. while 2 said nothing but was watching 4 intently. Eventually SH tried to draw him (2) into the discussion, and he thinks carefully about it and then speaks of being an individual, and of 'Britishness' being a tourist attraction. 1 supports him. SH then asks about Europe and 4 immediately declares himself as being British but NOT European. 3 gently disagreed with this, as does 1, and 2 said that he would rather call himself European than British.

It's a good time to be a man

There was laughter all round when 3 read this one out.
3 was then generally making supportive (and pc) remarks about it being a good thing to get rid of sexism and chauvinism, and that it's good that men don't have to be a breadwinner anymore. 4 said that women are said to be taking men's jobs but that this is 'hogwash' and asserted that he was 'happy as I am'. SH moves the discussion on to being a 'boy' or a 'man', and the talk speeds up a bit, and the general assertion is that being a boy and immature is rather enjoyable, while being a man is rather 'dull'. 1 claims that he would like to swap around between being a boy and a man, in and out of these roles. There was talk about responsibilities, which 2 mentions when he finally contributes to this, having been quite silent for a while.

People still expect a relationship for life

All disagreed with this statement. 4 talked about relationships as being an 'emotional security blanket'. 1 thought this assumption (the statement) has never happened and that nothing has in fact changed. 3 now got quite involved and was leaning forward, elbow on the table (instead of being slumped in the chair as he tended to be), but this also meant that I could not hear what he was saying very clearly. 1 was in a relationship that had so far lasted 3 months and he thought that it would go on and on. 3 comments that you think your last relationship will last for life (which is interesting because he has never admitted to having any relationships in the individual interviews).
(The tapes both end in the middle of this discussion, so we decide to have a very short refreshment/loo break)
SH then asks about the women's point of view. 2 talked about not wanting a long-term relationship because he does not want to die on someone or vice versa, but hopes that this feeling will change. (All participants ended up leaning forward on the table in the course of this discussion). There was a bit of talk about marriage in other cultures. Then SH brings in the subject of gay marriage. 2 (who is gay)

remains impassive and does not respond until 4 asserted that he does not have a problem with homosexual relationships as long as they don’t involve him, and talked about heterosexual relationships/marriage meaning that you can have children. 2 then countered this by asking if this means that infertile women cannot get married because they cannot have children.