Teaching notes

Using this issue

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This document briefly describes the resources provided as SociologyReview Extras for this issue, and then offers suggestions for using each of the articles in this issue.

In this issue there are some practice questions for ‘Families and households’, with guidance to help you give a good answer. There is also a research exercise on ‘Education and methods’, which will help you revise the strengths and weaknesses of different research methods when applied to a particular research topic. There are links to useful sites for various topics, and the PowerPoint presentation looks at education for girls in a global context, which will link to the article on development goals as well as to issues of gender.

Social class and school friendships (p. 2)

There is a wealth of material here showing some of the ways in which social class impacts on people’s lives. As the research subjects are probably similar in age to you, you should be able to reflect on the extent to which the general pattern of same-class friendships is applicable to your own life.

The following points will help you to engage in a formal or informal class or group discussion which will help to bring out some of the main points of this article.

• The students’ objective class background was identified by reference to their parents’ occupation, using the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) categories. What is the difference between ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ social class?

• The author talks about the ‘shared understandings and experiences’ of friends from the same social class background. What examples of these can you think of for both working-class and middle-class students? Some are given in the text, but you should be able to think of others.

• The author talks of both material and symbolic ‘class signifiers’. In the text, it is suggested that these include clothing and language. Can you think of other examples?

• On the whole, the fact that most students form same-class friendships leads to what the author refers to as ‘patterns of social closure’. What do you think is meant by this?

• What implications can you think of that lead from such ‘patterns of social closure’ in terms of the influence exerted by social class on people’s lives?

Why ethnography matters (p. 8)

This is an excellent discussion of a method that many students seem to know little about. Note the importance of funding for researchers, and how some types of research are more likely than others to find it easy to attract funding. Make sure that you know what is meant by ‘big data’ and the areas where the author realises its usefulness. In the section of your course folder you use for ‘Methods’
(you do have one, don’t you?) you should make a note of the criticisms that are often levelled against ethnography and, most importantly, how Oli Williams addresses these criticisms. If writing about ethnography in an exam, this would really help you to gain marks for evaluation.

As a small class exercise, you could think about the area in which your own school or college is located. If you were to do an ethnographic study somewhere in this area, what might be available to you? What difficulties might you come across if you were to do a similar exercise to Oli Williams?

At the end of the article, the author refers to an ethnographic study Gang Leader for a Day. The first link below will take you to a brief outline of the book, and the second is an interesting question-and-answer interview with the author, Sudhir Venkatesh. Used appropriately and in a relevant context, this source would be good to use in an exam as an example of a particular type of ethnographic study, and a more recent one than A Glasgow Gang Observed, which is highly favoured by students.

http://tinyurl.com/56t32g
http://tinyurl.com/nncbsau

**British Asians and family structure (p. 18)**

This interesting article is another example of an ethnographic study. If you read it carefully and make suitable notes, it will give you plenty of material to display not only knowledge of members of a particular group in society, but also the important skills of analysis, application and evaluation.

Many students when answering questions on British families fall into the trap of failing to acknowledge the considerable diversity of family patterns, including both between and among different ethnic groups. This article will increase your knowledge in this area. Look carefully at the article to see how the authors compared the findings from their study with quantitative data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and analysed this information. The criticisms regarding Berthoud’s suggestion of three patterns of diversity in family formation in Britain will not only allow you to show evaluation of this view, but should also remind you of the importance of frequently checking hypotheses in sociology to see whether the evidence continues to support them. Finally, you should be able to apply some of the material in this article when you answer the practice questions.

**Is global development possible? (p. 24)**

This article contains a considerable amount of interesting information. You should read it carefully in conjunction with your class notes on this topic. In order to make the material manageable and have it in a form that will be helpful for revision purposes, take a sheet of A4 paper in the landscape (sideways) position, and draw lines to divide it into four. In the top-left section, write down the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and in the top-right section the criticisms of these goals mentioned by the author (don’t forget headings so that you know what the content is about). In the bottom left-hand corner select half a dozen of what seem to you to be particularly important Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and use the bottom right-hand section for criticisms of these goals.
Mental illness and stigma (p. 30)

This article is very useful not only for those taking the ‘Health’ topic, but for sociology students generally as it raises important issues about culture and identity, and stratification and differentiation. Try to get hold of a library copy of Anna Gekoski’s book What’s Normal Anyway? if you are interested in reading more about the well-known people she interviewed. A particularly useful activity would be to visit the website mentioned in the references (http://www.time-to-change.org.uk), click on the ‘Resources’ section, then go to ‘Research and reports’, where you will find some very helpful material on research into this topic.

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