

Sociology bridging work

Task 1: Please complete the below table. You will need to complete your own research in order to do this. You should spend 1-2 hours on this task including filling the table in. You can expand this table/make your own version. The following websites may be helpful:

<https://www.tutor2u.net/politics/topics/marxism>

<https://thesociologyguy.com/a-level-sociology/>

	Marxism	Feminism	Functionalism
Key points of the theory/perspective			
Key thinkers	i.e. Karl Marx	i.e. Germaine Greer	i.e. Durkheim

Task 2: Article & Questions

One of the first topics you will learn in Sociology is Education. Please read the following attached article and answer the questions that follow. You can hand write these or type them. Please bring them with you to your first lesson. There is no set amount of marks for these questions but as a guide you should spend around an hour on this task.

(You can save the article images and zoom in on your device if you are struggling to read them)

The questions to answer are:

1. What evidence is there in the article that a lack of ambition is a key reason for failure to achieve well in education? Can you think of any evidence aside from what is in the article?
2. What is meant by ethnographic research?
3. What is meant by 'habitus', (a term from sociologist Bordieau) and why is it relevant to young people, education and crime?
4. What links are made in the article between poor educational outcomes and crime?

and other official bodies. Meanwhile, there are significant societal costs related to welfare payments, reduced economic activity and greater demand for health and social services (Coles et al. 2010).

NEET rates are highest for young people from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds, but white working-class males are more likely to be NEET than those from most other backgrounds.

Educationally, white working-class boys are the lowest performing group in Britain and, while pupils from poor backgrounds generally do less well at school than their more affluent peers, the gap is widest among white children. There has, more broadly, been much public discussion about how the white working classes are becoming marginalised, angry or 'left behind'.

The rise of a problem category

The term 'NEET' is now used across Europe and elsewhere but its genesis lies in the collapse of UK manufacturing and the demise of the traditional youth labour market which began in the 1970s. Sixteen and seventeen-year-olds were, however, disqualified from receiving unemployment benefit towards the end of the 1980s and, while this helped drive unemployment figures down, it also meant that a new label for unemployed young people was required.

Initially, the term 'Status-Zero' was used for labelling the young unemployed, but Status-Zero obviously carried negative connotations and was soon replaced by the ostensibly more neutral 'not in education, employment or training' (Simmons et al. 2014).

The rise of NEET as a policy discourse, however, was far from politically neutral. Postwar Britain was characterised by a measure of compromise between labour and capital but this 'settlement' was under considerable strain by the 1970s, as a series of social and economic crises gripped the nation. Margaret Thatcher then became prime minister at the end of the decade and social democracy, corporatism and a commitment to full employment were all abandoned.

Market forces, the role of private entrepreneurs and controlling public spending became the order of the day. Subsequently, a quarter of all UK manufacturing jobs were lost under the first Thatcher government and Britain's industrial base continued to wither thereafter.

Later, successive New Labour governments increased public spending but also embraced finance capitalism, competitive markets

and the production of new skills and forms of knowledge to meet the challenge of globalisation. The key to prosperity, both for the individual and society lay, it was argued, in more education and training. Connexions, a national advice and guidance service, was introduced, aimed largely at marginalised youth.

Today, NEET is often used to describe 'young people' up to the age of 24 outside education and work. This stretching of the NEET category means it now encompasses everybody from 16-year-old school-leavers with no qualifications or work experience to middle-class graduates taking a 'year out' before commencing employment. On one hand, this means the term NEET has lost much of its meaning and explanatory power, but it is also part of an ideological shift. Structural unemployment has effectively been recast as a problem of individual participation (Simmons and Thompson 2011).

The Brunford Estate

See Box 1 for information on how the study was conducted. According to popular discourse, post-industrial 'Grantborough' in the north of England has now reinvented itself and it is often presented as a fashionable, vibrant and dynamic place to live. But, while Grantborough has experienced substantial inward investment and regeneration, significant unemployment and other forms of disadvantage still exist there. Disparities in income, education, health and housing are among the widest in Britain.

All those who took part in the research grew up in local-authority housing in the Greenwich area, over half came from single-parent families and the majority of their parents were economically inactive.

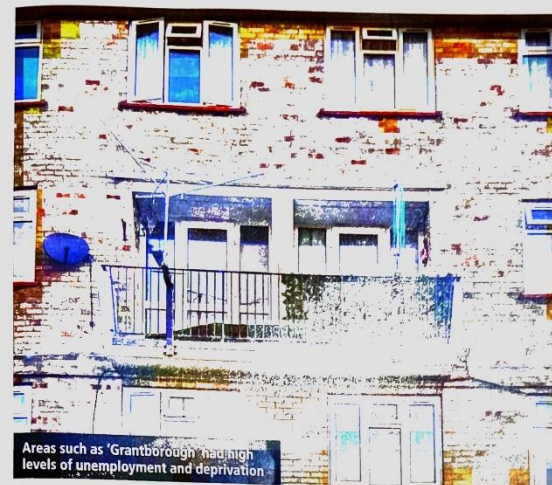
Box 1 Methodology: ethnography

This paper is based on an ethnography (2017) conducted in 'Greenwick', a deprived part of 'Grantborough', a large post-industrial city in northern England which suffered mass unemployment, deindustrialisation and urban unrest during the 1970s and 1980s. (Note that it is common practice in ethnographic research to alter the names of people and places to protect participants' right to anonymity.)

The ethnography followed the lives of 13 white working-class men, aged 16–24, all of whom were NEET for at least 6 months prior to the research. Data collection took place on the Brunford Estate, a place dominated by social housing and 'pedestrian-only' precincts, and characterised by antagonism between young people, the police and other authorities.

Those who took part included young offenders, early school-leavers, young parents and individuals with a history of mental health problems. All participants remained NEET throughout the research, although many engaged in illicit activities for financial gain. Over 130 hours of fieldwork was conducted by a researcher who was formerly a youth worker on the estate. This included participant observation on the street, in cafes, grocery stores, fast-food outlets and bookmakers' premises.

A programme of semi-structured interviews took place in participants' homes or those of their associates. The rest of the time was spent on telephone calls, text messages, walking about the estate or just 'hanging around' with participants.



Areas such as 'Grantborough' had high levels of unemployment and deprivation

I knew from a young age that I lived in a rough area...You just grow up different because the odds are against you...' (Dean)

The importance of 'habitus'

How, then, do we make sense of all this? One answer might lie in the work of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977). Bourdieu argues that different individuals and groups

possess different forms of social, economic and cultural capital, which are more or less valuable in different 'fields', such as education, employment, business or the arts.

According to Bourdieu, people from higher social-class backgrounds tend to possess more legitimate capital in terms, for example, of wealth, status and connections which help them 'get on', especially in education and work. He also argues that those from different backgrounds tend to have different *dispositions* — ways of dressing, speaking and acting, otherwise known as 'habitus'.

Our participants from the Brunford Estate were well aware that they had the 'wrong' sort of capital for getting good jobs:

Everything, man...dress, where I live, talk...They don't want to give them [jobs] to people like me. They want to give them to...Harry Potter-looking kids...wearing pants and shirt and all that, it's not me. So, because I don't wear that, I get judged and seen as less. It's madness.' (Andy)

It is also worth noting that all but one participant had worked at some point, although their experiences of employment were usually short-lived and negative. Jake, for example, left his job after a dispute over pay.

It's just put me off work...couldn't have been a worse experience...To be

blunt, I can only get a shit job at the bottom-end on low pay so it's not very motivating.' (Jake)

In essence, most participants in this study had become 'discouraged workers' (Eurofound 2016) rather than having an intrinsic aversion to work.

Conclusion

For Bourdieu, *habitus* produces particular ways of thinking and behaving, and an understanding of what is possible for people 'like me'. The participants in this study appeared to have reconciled themselves to the 'limited opportunities that exist for those without much cultural capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

Consequently, people in this position — like these young men in Greenwich — attempt to draw on particular forms of 'street capital' to legitimate themselves as subjects of value in more familiar environs. Or, in other words, they appear to have concluded that being 'someone' locally is better than being nobody elsewhere.

KEY POINTS

- This article discusses the results of an ethnographic study of 13 white working-class young men aged between 16 and 24 living in a deprived area.
- They were not in education, employment or training (NEET) and suffered from a variety of social and mental health problems. Education was seen as alien and irrelevant.
- They, and others like them, were disempowered and their community destabilised by the loss of secure employment.
- Despite some popular stereotypes of young people such as these, they expressed a desire to be 'normal' — to have a partner, a home and a job.
- Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' is useful with regard to these young men, who had different forms of social, economic and cultural capital from many others.

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Acknowledgements: I would like to thank my University of Huddersfield colleagues, Ron Thompson and Gail Connolly, for their role in completing this research upon which this article is based.



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Most came from homes with at least some history of employment, largely in low-paid jobs in retail, cleaning and care work.

Some participants possessed low-level GCSEs, although almost half had left school before the age of 16, either through expulsion or voluntarily. While de-industrialisation has had far-reaching implications across society, it is fair to say that our participants came from a fraction of the white working class which has been significantly disempowered and destabilised by the loss of secure employment.

Our data suggest that there is a significant disjuncture between participants' experiences of school and life on the estate:

From young, I just knew I wasn't going to do good in school. I never even tried...I would prefer to hang around on the streets than go to school.' (Michael)

[I]t just didn't make sense...people I knew were getting arrested, getting raided...and they're trying to teach me about *Macbeth* and how to solve equations, and it just wasn't matching up with my life.' (Dean)

EXAM-STYLE QUESTION

Assess the view that the failure of many young white working-class men to engage with education and employment is the result of a lack of ambition. (OCR style, 40 marks)

Although this question is in the style of the OCR exam, it raises important issues and is also relevant to those following other specifications. It is worth doing some preliminary research before writing your answer, so that you can quote a couple of statistics — perhaps linked to the overall academic performance of this group and the proportion who are NEET (remember to define this term).

Use the information in the article to discuss both the wider structural changes brought about by deindustrialisation and some of the views expressed by the young men in the research. You might come to the conclusion that lack of ambition is a factor, but also that this is linked to the wider changes affecting their community. Use Bourdieu to introduce some sociological theory, and make sure that there is an evaluative approach to your answer throughout.

Write a brief conclusion in which you show how what you have written addresses the set question.

Post-compulsory education was also regarded as largely alien and irrelevant:

Education ain't for us. My friend went to enrol, but because he went in a tracksuit, they were telling him he can't come to college dressed like that... Back in the day, you could just turn up...chat with a tutor, fill in a form... Now you have to fill in loads of forms, do English, do maths...they expect too much. (Hayden)

[T]hey try to send people to all these shit employability courses, when they should be sending you to the right ones...The government should be working with...big companies, and not let them open any store, unless they hire people in that area...' (Jake)

No participant was formally employed throughout the fieldwork and nobody was actively looking for work:

My mates never had a job, so I didn't ever get a job...before you know it, you're in a circle...Same shit every day, doing nothing, same shit, different day, same circle, same people, same thing.' (Hayden)

Common themes included smoking cannabis, drug dealing, violence and involvement with the criminal-justice system. Jake said, 'It was more normal to sell drugs than get a job' and that, 'If you don't sell drugs no one would speak to you.' Such habits appeared, at least initially, to be symptoms of a certain kind of morality which characterised life on the Brunford Estate:

[P]eople do drugs and crime and shit... that's all you know, it's all you see,

crime, drugs, police, drink, robbing, fighting, everything.' (Michael)

Imagine all the Greenwich people went to a nicer place, the same problems would happen there, people would be trying to find shots, [drug addicts] to start a phone up [sell drugs], riding motorbikes and all that shit.' (Andy)

One of the strengths of ethnography, however, is that it allows researchers to 'get close' to individuals' thoughts, feelings and emotions — and data from the study also suggests that conventional attitudes and ambitions were not uncommon, even if they said they just wanted to be 'normal', have a girlfriend, a job and a place to call home:

I do want a job...to be working...a normal life. To be comfortable you know what I mean, just living life... family, a house, a car, a dog and a job.' (Dean)

[J]ust stable and humble and that's it...a job I like, a family, kids and our own home. I'm not assed about a Ferrari on the drive.' (Andy)

It was evident that at least some believed their predicament was substantially influenced by broader structural inequality.

Like, how can I do well in school...if I'm surrounded by violence, or an alcoholic family, having no breakfast in the mornings or any clean clothes? Waking up on freezing-cold winter mornings... we had no electric or heating, so I just wouldn't go school.' (Michael)



The participants were conscious of the wider changes affecting their community.

Deprivation, class and young white masculinities

Robin Simmons

Why do many young white men from poor neighbourhoods see education and training as irrelevant to their lives? Why does crime often seem a better option than work?

EXAM LINKS

- Social inequalities
- Culture and identity
- Work, poverty and welfare

This article presents findings from an ethnographic study of 13 young white men classified as NEET (not in education, employment or training), living on a deprived housing estate in the north of England. It deals with participants'

orientations to education and employment, and while the data are clearly troubling, some of the findings also challenge negative stereotypes about NEET young people commonly found in policy circles, the media and popular discourse. The article concludes by using some of the ideas of the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, to make sense of the study's findings.

Life among the NEETs

In Britain, the number of young people classified as NEET tends to be higher in

poorer areas. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds are most likely to spend extended periods of time outside education and work. They are also more prone to social isolation, poor self-esteem, low confidence and various limiting illnesses and conditions. Those who are long-term NEET are moreover, more susceptible to involvement in crime, drug use, anti-social behaviour and adult unemployment. NEET young people are also less likely to participate in the educational process and have lower levels of institutional trust relating to policing, health, education