

ITEM C

Anti-school subcultures are groups of pupils whose norms and values differ from the mainstream values in the school and are characterised particularly by hostility towards the school. There are some variations on the idea: where Willis identified a group who were anti-school and anti-education, others have found evidence of subcultures who were anti-school but pro-education.

One way to study anti-school subcultures is participant observation. This might give a researcher an insight into the pupils' everyday lives. However, the researcher may struggle to gain access to the group.

Applying material from Item C and your knowledge of research methods, evaluate the strengths and limitations of using participant observation to investigate anti-school subcultures.

ITEM C

Some sociologists argue that even though teachers have a professional duty to treat all pupils fairly, they often give negative labels to pupils based on the pupils' social class, gender and ethnicity. Pupils may respond to these labels in a variety of ways, including forming anti-school subcultures.

Sociologists may use experiments to investigate teachers' labelling of pupils. One problem is that laboratory experiments are not naturalistic and this can affect the way teachers and pupils act. With covert field experiments, however, the real purpose of the research is not known and this may help to overcome the Hawthorne Effect. Another issue is whether a particular statement or action on the part of a teacher is actually an example of unfairly attaching a label to a pupil. This is very much open to interpretation by researchers.

Applying material from Item C and your knowledge of research methods, evaluate the strengths and limitations of experiments for the study of teachers' labelling of pupils.

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Material deprivation is a widespread problem throughout the United Kingdom today. Some pupils experience material deprivation in their home background and this can have a negative effect on their educational experience. For example, a lack of income with which to buy educational resources, or having to live in cramped conditions, can affect academic performance. Some parents may feel that they have failed if they cannot provide adequate income for their family.

Sociologists may use questionnaires to investigate material deprivation in pupils' backgrounds. To use questionnaires effectively, sociologists need to identify and gain responses from parents, but accessing a suitable database of contacts may prove difficult. Parents may also not be willing to discuss such a sensitive issue as material deprivation. On the other hand, substantial quantitative data may be generated by using questionnaires, allowing sociologists to identify patterns and draw comparisons.

Applying material from Item C and your knowledge of research methods, evaluate the strengths and limitations of questionnaires for the study of material deprivation in pupils' home backgrounds.

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Supporters of marketisation policies claim that an education market gives parents greater choice over which school their children can attend. Sociologists are interested in investigating just how much parental choice there actually is in this education market. Some parents are much more aware than others of how 'to work the system', even to the extent of manipulating the rules in their favour.

Sociologists may use structured interviews to investigate the extent of parental choice in education. However, although structured interviews are useful for gathering factual information, they are probably less effective when it comes to finding out parents' attitudes and feelings. Also, how far parents are likely to give honest answers to the questions put to them in a structured interview may depend upon whether they feel their role as a parent is being challenged by the questions asked.

Applying material from Item C and your knowledge of research methods, evaluate the strengths and limitations of structured interviews for the study of the extent of parental choice in education.

ITEM C

Some sociologists have pointed to the ease with which traditional gender identities can be reinforced in classroom interaction. Verbal abuse and other more subtle processes such as the 'male gaze' can have an impact on gender identity. Sociologists have found that some male teachers may even collude with male pupils in 'putting down' girls.

Sociologists may use non-participant observation to investigate the ways in which classroom interactions reinforce traditional gender identities. Observing classroom behaviour at first hand enables researchers to see what actually goes on rather than getting a verbal account after the event. There is also the potential for greater insight through direct experience of classroom interaction. However, it is very difficult for the observer to avoid being noticed and this can affect the behaviour both of teachers and of pupils.

Applying material from Item C and your knowledge of research methods, evaluate the strengths and limitations of non-participant observation for the study of the ways in which classroom interactions reinforce traditional gender identities.

ITEM C

Many sociologists have examined the relationship between social class and achievement and have found that there is a clear pattern of middle-class pupils outperforming working-class pupils. However, sociologists also want to understand the reasons for this pattern.

Sociologists may use official statistics to investigate social class differences in achievement. These allow researchers to see trends and patterns over time which can help to reveal cause-and-effect relationships. Official statistics can be highly representative because they are often collected across a wide range of institutions. However, it is very difficult for the researcher to be sure that official statistics have not been manipulated in some way by the organisations for their collection.

Applying material from Item C and your knowledge of research methods, evaluate the strengths and limitations of official statistics for the study of social class differences in achievement.