

Teacher's Notes

CRIME AND GENDER: A CRITICAL THINKING AND ESSAY WRITING EXERCISE BY JILL SWALE, KENDRICK SCHOOL, READING

Feedback on my schemes of work would be welcome, as I am working on a book about teaching sociology through thinking skills.

This scheme of work encourages students to interpret a variety of research findings to determine which side of a debate each item supports. They then evaluate the items, and finally organise their ideas in logical essay form.

STARTER ACTIVITY

- Discuss the general issue of the extent to which official statistics of crime can be trusted. You may already have touched on the Marxist view that the powerful over-emphasise the extent of working class street crime. The suggestion that relatively high black crime rates may reflect over-policing of black areas is a parallel example. Bring the focus round to gender differences in crime rates. Are they due to real differences in men and women's behaviour, or to different treatment by law enforcement agencies?
- Ensure students realise that official crime figures relate to public reporting and police recording, and that figures indicating the characteristics of offenders, such as their sex, depend on verdicts by magistrates and juries. The social construction of crime statistics is explained in a useful diagram in *Sociology in Focus* by Taylor et al., p 627.

MAIN ACTIVITY

- Provide the essay question for them to discuss briefly in groups. Ensure that they have identified the two sides of the debate and the sort of information that would be needed to support each side. Photocopy the chart for each group of two to four students and ask them to cut the items up. (If this is impractical, they can colour code them by category instead, but being able to move the items will help kinaesthetic learners).
- Ask the students to arrange the items in groups on the desk according to the viewpoint they support. If necessary provide headings such as 'Courts/ police lenient to women', 'Courts strict towards women', 'Women less likely to commit crime than men', 'Women offenders'.
- Ask students to evaluate each item and jot down their findings. Do they find the evidence convincing? Slips of paper could be provided for them write on and place next to each evaluated item. (Using a

different colour from the item slips could serve to reinforce the idea of accumulating lots of evaluation points as well as knowledge points in an essay.)

- After a few minutes, issue the checklist to help them identify more flaws or strengths in the studies. Here are some suggested answers:

- (1) c. e.
- (2) d.
- (3) Reasonable argument based on official statistics.
- (4) d. h..
- (5) a. Respondents may not have told truth. Method of calculations misleading. Does not differentiate according to the seriousness of each sex's offences.
- (6) a.
- (7) Likely to be correct.
- (8) e. h.
- (9) a. Word 'suspected' raises doubts.
- (10) a. d. e. h.
- (11) c.
- (12) Much evidence supports this finding.
- (13) d.
- (14) c. May soon become outdated.
- (15) g.
- (16) g.
- (17) g.
- (18) f. Contradicts No. (17)
- (19) g.
- (20) What about the other 60%?

PLENARY

- Ensure that students have successfully identified which items support each side of the debate, and have a range of evaluation points. Supply an uncut copy of the matrix to each student so they can record their findings for later. Discuss a suitable opening paragraph for the essay, and give guidance how to access further studies. Ask what conclusions they have reached and how to express these to complete their essays.



- Discuss the wider implications for sociology of this sort of issue. If we cannot trust official statistics, how are we to study sociology?
- Ask students to investigate alternative methods of discovering how much crime is committed (victim surveys and self-report studies).

WHY IS GAZ IN COURT FOR MUGGING? A MYSTERY SOLVING ACTIVITY BY JILL SWALE, KENDRICK SCHOOL, READING.

INTRODUCTION

The solving of a mystery by selecting and ordering relevant material through group discussion is a technique recommended by David Leat to encourage thinking skills. This activity is a modification of his approach as all the items are relevant to some sociological perspective, but the object is to decide which. It provides practice in interpretation of items and application of theories to actual situations, as well as consolidating knowledge of researchers. Sorting activities appeal to kinaesthetic learners.

INSTRUCTIONS

- (1) Photocopy the chart of the 30 numbered items about Gaz so that each group has a copy, and provide scissors. Ask the students to discuss the items and to arrange them according to the different perspectives they seem to support. How much help you give with this will depend on whether you are using this for revision, or are expecting them to guess at some of the perspectives from meeting them in other topics. You could elicit all the perspectives they have studied, list them, and ask them to see how many they can find. Alternatively if you have only taught three perspectives so far, ask three different groups to pick out items relating to those, leaving the other items for another time. Students should arrange the relevant items on the desk under headings. Some items could be related to more than one explanation. Encourage particular focus on these when they feed back to the class.
- (2) Provide the second set of items, the lettered details of perspectives and their sources. If you are planning to cover just a few of the perspectives this time, only provide the appropriate lettered items. Ask the students to pair up the numbered items about Gaz with the appropriate lettered items. This needs more detailed knowledge than the first task, such as distinguishing different subcultural theories.
- (3) Elicit evaluation of the alternative theories. Provide further uncut sheets to use as revision notes.

- (4) As a creative thinking extension task ask students to devise another scenario that could be interpreted from a range of perspectives, or to find such a story in a newspaper, and make synoptic links.

Solutions to Pairings

1. d	11. g	21. n
2. f	12. x	22. l
3. i	13. o	23. r
4. k	14. h	24. m
5. e	15. w	25. cc
6. b	16. z	26. bb
7. p	17. v	27. y
8. s	18. aa	28. q
9. c	19. dd	29. t
10. u	20. j	30. a

DEFINING THE CAUSE OF DEATH BY STEVE WALKER, WILLENHALL SPORTS COLLEGE, WALSALL

This is a useful resource for illustrating key themes in the positivist versus interpretivist debate about suicide. Students should examine the cases in groups either with each group discussing a different case or getting them to consider all of them. Follow up with plenary discussion

BRIEFING: THE GENERAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEY BY ROB POVEY, BABBINGTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEICESTER

Rob Povey has written another very useful briefing on a key source of social data

KEY TEXT: OPEN WORLD: THE TRUTH ABOUT GLOBALISATION, BY PHILIPPE LEGRAIN, REVIEWED BY STEPHEN THOMAS, CASTLE SCHOOL, THORNBURY

This book and the summary provides an important antidote to the rather one-sided coverage of the globalisation debate which too often features in the A level textbooks



CRIME AND GENDER: A CRITICAL THINKING AND ESSAY WRITING EXERCISE

Jill Swale

STUDENT ASSIGNMENT SHEET

AIMS:

- To get you to examine some important studies attempting to explain gender differences in crime rates.
- To encourage you to think critically about the methods sociologists use, and whether data can always be taken at face value.
- To help you to select material for a logically planned and balanced essay.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Read carefully and discuss the essay question below.
- 'Assess the view that the women's crime rate, according to official statistics, is lower than men's because of differential enforcement of the law.'
- A question beginning with the words 'assess' or 'evaluate the view that' implies that an alternative interpretation is possible. What are the possibilities here?
- Look at each item in the chart and decide whether the evidence suggests that women offenders are treated more leniently by law enforcement agencies, as the question implies, or more strictly. Alternatively does the item suggest a reason why women might actually commit less crime than men, suggesting that lower figures reflect reality? Finally, which items suggest females might commit a considerable amount of certain types of crime, perhaps more than males?
- Cut them up and group them according to the argument they support. Create headings for the categories.
- Many of these items, though relevant, may not be fully convincing. Think critically about each item and jot down evaluation points, perhaps on slips of paper placed next to the items.
- After thinking of criticisms of your own, use the following criteria to look for more:
 - (A) Were rigorous methods used to obtain the information?
 - (B) What were the sources of any statistics provided?
 - (C) Was the study recent enough still to be relevant?
 - (D) Is the evidence based on a large sample or a few cases?
 - (E) Does the researcher appear to have been objective?
 - (F) Is the study contradicted by another one?
 - (G) Does the study cover all types of crime or have a limited focus?
 - (H) Does the study assume connections between crime and other behaviour patterns which may not be substantiated?

FOLLOW UP

- Using textbooks and the Internet, find more studies to help you to decide whether the lower female crime rate reflects different patterns of behaviour by women, because of factors such as socialisation, social control and roles, or whether they are treated differently by police and courts.
- Consult sources explaining how official crime statistics are social constructions influenced by attitudes of the public, police and courts.
- Write an introduction outlining the debate. Then ensure you have divided the items into two sets supporting the different sides of the debate, discarding any you consider very weak arguments. Use the rest in a logical order as the basis of your essay, together with your evaluation points and any new material. Remember to write a proper conclusion, either stating which side of the argument you favour, or analysing why it is so difficult for sociologists to agree on this issue.



PERSPECTIVES ON CRIME AND GENDER

1. OTTO POLLAK (1950) argued that statistics seriously under-estimated female crime. This was because many crimes committed by female servants went unreported, as did other predominantly female crimes such as illegal abortions, prostitution, and domestic offences such as abuse of children, and poisoning of relatives.

2. Women are certainly capable of committing violent and horrific crimes. Famous examples include MYRA HINDLEY and MARY BELL, both of whom were involved in the murders of small children.

3. ANNE CAMPBELL (1981) observed that women are more likely than men to be cautioned than prosecuted. In 1990, of male offenders, 29% were cautioned and 71% were convicted, whereas the equivalent female figures were 49% cautions and 51% convictions.

4. WALUM (1977) tape-recorded conversations in a maternity ward, demonstrating that relatives treated newborn babies differently according to their sex. Girls were comforted when they cried and described as 'sweet', whereas boys were expected to be tough and noisy. Similarly nursery studies have also shown a greater acceptance of aggression in boys than in girls.

5. ANNE CAMPBELL (1981) carried out a self-report study about offences committed. Girls admitted to almost as many as boys in a male/female ratio of 1.2:1, comparing dramatically with the official ratio of 5:1. She included a mixture of trivial and serious offences in her questionnaire, giving every offence equal weight in the calculations.

6. POLLAK (1950) argued that police, magistrates and judges are mainly men and have been socialised to be chivalrous towards women, resulting in leniency towards female suspects.

7. According to HEIDENSOHN (1985) assumptions that females commit little crime partly arise from lack of studies of female offenders. Men have dominated sociology until recently, and have found it easier to study male gangs, especially when using participant observation.

8. Women are good at deceiving men. According to POLLAK (1950), they hide the discomfort of menstruation and fake orgasms, so they are likely to be more skilled than men at hiding crimes.

9. An NSPCC study of 8000 children in the 1980s found that in physical abuse cases, natural fathers were suspected in 61% of the cases, and natural mothers in only 36%.

10. STATHAM (1986) interviewed 30 parents determined to carry out non-sexist child rearing. They found it virtually impossible because of peer group pressure. Toyshops were full of weapons for boys and domestic toys for girls. This could explain a greater tendency for males to commit violent crimes later in life.

11. Conjugal role studies show that women, whether they do paid work or not, are expected to perform more domestic tasks than their partners. This gives them less time and opportunity to commit crime. Single women are less likely than men to go to pubs or be in the streets at night, where much crime is committed. Sometimes threat of physical violence from the male head of household confines females to the home (HEIDENSOHN, 1985)

12. In 1980 the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE CARE AND RESETTLEMENT OF OFFENDERS found that magistrates and judges are reluctant to give prison sentences to offenders who are pregnant, or those who have sole responsibility for looking after a home and caring for dependents. As children are far more likely to live with the mother if a couple split up, this results in a clear gender difference in sentencing patterns.



13. SARA THORNTON killed her abusive husband, but had the conviction reduced to 'manslaughter' in 1996. THE JUSTICE FOR WOMEN WEBSITE carries details of six similar cases of women who killed their violent husbands but received reduced or quashed sentences on Appeal.

14. CASBURN (1985) argued that courts are harsher with female juveniles than with males where truancy, sexual promiscuity or resistance to family authority are involved. There is a sexual double standard, where boys are expected to 'sow wild oats', whereas girls who fail to conform to traditional moral codes are punished severely.

15. Many women lack the specific knowledge to commit certain common types of crime, such as breaking into cars. They may also lack the physical strength to commit violent crimes.

16. THE INFANTICIDE ACT (1938) states that a woman who kills her own child of less than a year old should not be found guilty of murder, as the balance of her mind may not have fully recovered from the effect of giving birth (post-partum depression). Of 59 women convicted of infanticide between 1979 and 1988, none were imprisoned; all were given probation, supervision or hospital orders. From the 1980s courts began to recognise that pre-menstrual tension could cause women to behave irrationally, so that they could not be held responsible for their actions.

17. There is growing evidence of teenage female gangs in Britain, the USA and other developed nations. They adopt a 'feisty' attitude, controlling a 'patch', making up assertive nicknames for themselves, and subjecting those who wish to join them to tough initiation rituals. They may attack anyone who appears to challenge them, as well as committing thefts and other offences. This has been attributed by ANNE CAMPBELL to media showing more assertive female role models, and to the example of single mothers coping without male support (British Criminology Conferences, Vol. 1, 1998, Riot Grrl and Raisin Grrl)

18. MCROBBIE'S study of girls' 'bedroom culture' (1978) suggested that teenaged girls commonly spent leisure time in each other's houses, practising fashions, dances and listening to music. Boys were more likely to hang around the streets in larger groups. This was more likely to lead to delinquent behaviour by boys.

19. Corporate crime is less likely to be committed by women than by men because smaller proportions have management roles in business.

20. Women earn considerably less per hour than men, are more likely to work part-time and are more likely to have dependants. MANDARAKA-SHEPPARD (1986) in her study of six English women's prisons found that most of their offences were property crimes. 40% of those she studied were in extreme financial difficulties before and at the time of the crime, and made a conscious decision to do it to support their children.

