

Getting Ready For <i>Sociology</i>		
Your Name		
A Level Sociology	Education with Research Methods	AQA

We are delighted you have chosen to study Sociology at Haywards Heath College.

Instructions: This pack will help you make the best possible start to studying this subject.

The tasks in this pack:

- should take you **about 4 hours to complete.**
- should be handed into your teacher when teaching starts with your name on it for assessment or uploaded to Teams in your first week of study (we'll show you how to do this when you get here)

If you need help: The tasks are designed to get a bit more difficult as you work through them as they are preparing you for studying at a higher level and to become an effective independent learner. You should try to get as far as you can working on your own but if you do need help, please email us at info@haywardsheath.ac.uk telling us which Getting Ready For pack you are working on and what help you need. Help is available throughout the summer holidays.

Skills Focus for this Getting Ready for Pack	
Knowledge and understanding of education achievement and gender Interpretation of data	Research design Written communication skills

Welcome to Sociology at Haywards Heath!

Sociology is the study of how society impact on our lives. The first topic we look at is Education and then you will move on to look at the methods sociologists use to study society. This getting ready pack will help you to understand one of the key topics in Education – different achievement for boys and girls - and will also get you thinking about how you might find out about this using sociological methods. The questions and activities are on page 5 of this pack, please do them when requested.

The Gender Gap in Education

Every year since 1986, girls have outperformed boys at GCSE. On average the number of girls achieving 5 or more grade 4 (or equivalent) and above is 10 percentage points above boys. It is important to understand that these are average figures, some boys will do very well, and some girls won't do so well.

Please do Task 0.1 now

Sociology is an evidence-based subject

This means our opinions and theories must be backed up by evidence and facts about society. Sociologists therefore collect evidence methodologically by carrying out research to establish whether their theories are correct.

Tina Rampino carried out research into the gender gap. **Please do Task 0.2 now** and read an article she wrote about her work (pages 6-9 of this pack), then answer the questions on page 5 of this pack.

Sociological research methods

Sociologists use a wide variety of methods to obtain data (information or evidence) about society. We can classify this into:

- Quantitative and qualitative data
- Primary and secondary sources of data

Quantitative data is numerical – how many girls and boys passed 5 or more GCSEs, how many girls took GCSE physics etc

Qualitative data gives a ‘feel’ for what something is like – what it feels like to do well in an exam or to be a girl studying physics.

Primary data has been collected by the sociologist themselves. Methods include:

- Questionnaires – lists of questions which are sent out by post or electronically for people to complete themselves
- Interviews – questions are asked either face to face or over the phone and the researcher writes down the answers
- Experiments – the researcher can change variables to see how people behave either in a laboratory which is a controlled artificial environment or in the field which is in people’s natural environment like a workplace or school
- Observation – a researcher observes people in their natural environment to see how they behave.

Rampino investigated the gender gap by interviewing students to find out about their aspirations.

Secondary data is information collected by someone else which a sociologist can use. This can be a quick and cheap method of collecting data, but as the information was not collected by the sociologist it might not give the exact information they needed. This includes:

- Official statistics – data collected by the Government, for example exam results.
- Documents – any written material. Sociologists use 2 kinds:
 - Public Documents – produced by organisations such as schools. For example, OFSTED reports
 - Personal Documents – produced by ordinary people such as letters and diaries

To investigate the gender gap Rampino used official statistics (PISA data) to find out about gender differences in achievement across different cultures.

Is there a difference in how boys and girls prepare for their exams?

You are going to investigate this question. To do this sociologically you will need to carry out some research. There are several ways you could do this, but for this activity you are going to write a questionnaire.

First you need to find out a bit more about questionnaires. **Answer q1 of task 03.**

Now work on **questions 2 and 3 of task 03**, you need to design your own questionnaire to find out how girls and boys were preparing for their GCSEs and how much revision they were doing and what their attitudes to school and their mock exams were. You could do this on paper, or you could use Survey Monkey <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/> which will allow you to send out a questionnaire with up to 10 questions for free. Your questionnaire should:

- Ask between 5 and 10 questions
- Include both *open* and *closed* questions (look up these terms if you need to)
- Avoid leading questions e.g. 'would you agree you worked hard in year 11?' is leading, it is better to ask 'how hard did you work in year 11' and give some options for answers
- Introduce yourself and explain what you are doing and why. Tell people whether their information will remain anonymous (people are more likely to answer questions if you keep them anonymous). Explain how their data will be used.

Once you are happy with your questionnaire, get 5 responses from girls and 5 from boys who have recently completed their GCSEs.

How to present your findings

Once you have your completed questionnaires you need to collate the information and report on your findings (**Task 04**). You can hand this in as a 6 slide presentation or as a written report of up to 500 words. Either way please use the following headings:

Aims – what were you hoping to investigate?

Methodology – describe the method you used (self-completion questionnaires), how you carried it out (paper based or electronic), how you chose and contacted your respondents, did they all return the questionnaires?

Findings – what are the obvious similarities and differences between the boys and girls? Consider creating graphs and charts to display your quantitative data. Use quotes from your respondents to demonstrate similarities and differences shown by qualitative data.

Conclusion – Why do girls do better than boys in their GCSEs? Answer based on what you have read and what your questionnaire showed.

Evaluation – What would you do differently if you were to do the research again? What have you learnt about sociology? What have you learnt about social research?

Nature versus nurture

Task 05 is an optional extension task if you are aiming for a high grade.

“Which is more powerful, nurture or nature?” write a paragraph answering this question.

Watch a documentary (or even 2) or read a sociological book

Task 06 is an optional extension task if you want to spend a bit more time thinking sociologically

Watch “No more boys and girls, can Britain go gender free”

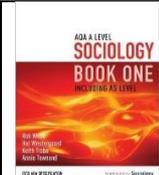
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wN5R2LWhTrY>. Or watch “Louis Theroux Altered States 1: Love without limits” on iPlayer. This is about polyamory and will get you thinking about different forms of the family ready for our Topic of Families and Households which we do at the end of the year.

Look at the optional reading list for sociology, choose one of those books (not the Giddens textbook) and borrow it from the library or buy it second hand. Read the chapters you find most interesting.

Getting ready to study

Your last task is to get ready for college by getting the equipment you will need.

You need to buy a textbook:

	<p>Webb, R., <i>AQA A Level Sociology Book One</i> (3rd ed. 2015) ISBN 9780954007913</p> <p>AQA A Level Sociology Book One Including AS Level: Book one: Amazon.co.uk: Rob Webb, Hal Westergaard, Keith Trobe, Annie Townend: Books</p>
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We encourage students to use a lap-top in class (you can borrow one from our LRC, you don't need to own one) but if you choose not to you will need a lever arch folder to put all your notes in and a pack of dividers to keep your file well organised.

You need to bring a pen and some paper to class and may want to have highlighter pens too.

You will need some cards to create ‘flashcards’ for each topic. Alternatively, you could download a flashcard app to your phone, for example try quizlet <https://quizlet.com/en-gb/students>

We do a lot of mind maps in class and for homework, you might prefer to do this electronically too, spend some time looking at free mind mapping apps to see which you like best.

Handing in your work

Either print your work and bring it to your first Sociology class, or after the first class you can submit it as an assignment to Teams (don't worry, we'll show you how!)

Hopefully you have enjoyed your first taste of sociological investigation, we look forward to teaching you in September!

Summary of all the tasks

Target Grade	Type of task	Task and subject specific skill reference	Deadline
All	Getting you thinking	<p>0.1 Mind map Make a mind map around the question: ‘Why do girls out-perform boys at GCSE’?</p> <p>Think about factors inside of school and outside of school.</p>	First week of term
All	Reading and note taking	<p>0.2 Reading and Comprehension. The Gender Gap.</p> <p>Read the article by Tina Rampino (pages 6-9 of this pack) and answer the questions that follow.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you understand by the nature/nurture debate? (Research online to find out more) 2. What biological reasons are given explain why girls out-perform boys in some subjects? 3. What social reasons are given to explain why girls out-perform boys? (Social reasons are factors in a person’s environment that might shape their beliefs, attitudes and behaviour). 4. Add any ideas that you hadn’t already thought of, to the mind map you make for task 0.1, using a different colour. 	First week of term
All	Sociological research	<p>0.3 Carry out your own Sociological research</p> <p>Read the information about sociological research methods.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Find out about the research method of questionnaires. In no more than 3 sentences, explain what they are. List strengths of the method and limitations of the method. 2. Design a written questionnaire to investigate differences in how boys and girls studied in year 11, and how much revision they did. Find out about their attitudes to school, learning and exams. 3. Carry out your questionnaire with a sample of 5 boys and 5 girls who have just completed year 11. 	First week of term
All	Report writing	<p>0.4 Research report</p> <p>Write up your investigation. This can be done as a power-point of not more than 6 slides, or as a typed report of not more than 500-750. (See guidance above).</p>	First week of term
Extension	Higher order thinking	<p>0.5 Evaluate the nature/nurture debate</p> <p>Which is more powerful nature or nurture? Write a paragraph in response to this question</p>	
Extension	Thinking Sociologically	<p>0.6 Watch a documentary or read a book</p> <p>Watch “No more boys and girls, can Britain go gender free” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wN5R2LWhTrY and/or “Louis Theroux Altered States 1: Love without limits” on iplayer or read one of the books on the optional reading list (pages 10 &11)</p>	

The education gender gap

Tina Rampino

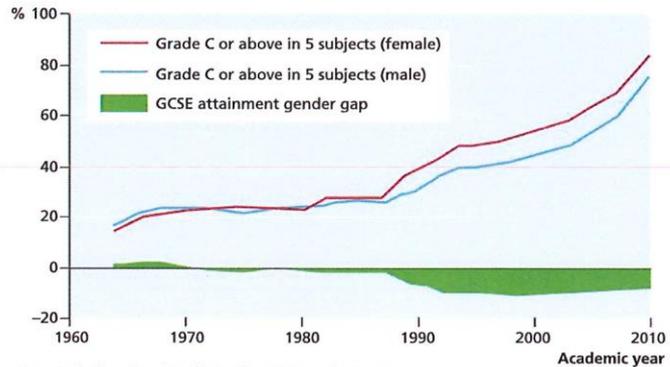
Each year, exam results seem to demonstrate the gap in educational achievement between girls and boys. What can sociologists tell us about the reasons for this?

Both equal access to education and equal opportunities to succeed at school are very important issues on the policy agenda and for sociologists. One reason is that education is a key determinant of future earnings.

Gender differences in educational attainment have become a major concern in England. This is always emphasised by the media each year after the GCSE results come out. As shown in Figure 1, girls have been doing better than boys in exams at school and this attainment gap has been evident and persistent since the late 1980s. For instance, in 2011 the proportion of girls attaining the minimum governmental requirement of at least 5 GCSEs at grade A*–C was 83%, compared with only 76% of boys.

Nature or nurture?

Gender differences in any life domain are ascribed to factors related to either nature or



Note: Grade A* was introduced during the 1993/94 academic year
Source: Department for Education 1963–2011

Figure 1 Percentage of school leavers achieving 5 or more GCSE/O-level/CSE grade A/A* to C

Signposts

This article provides a useful summary of some of the main differences in the educational achievement of boys and girls, together with a reminder of some arguments in the nature/nurture debate where educational success or failure are concerned. You should look carefully at the illustrative data provided, as the interpretation of data presented in this way is an important sociological tool. Similarly, look at the methods used in the research, which make use of both primary and secondary data and also provide an example of the benefits of longitudinal studies to some kinds of research.

The article discusses the importance of attitudes and aspirations to educational success, and highlights some differences between the genders with regard to these. Also of interest are the latest findings from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), where you can see what, if anything, has changed. You can access PISA 2012 at:

This article provides a wealth of useful material for students taking the 'Education' topic.

nurture, or a combination of both. According to the nature argument, differences between males and females are biologically determined, innate and time-invariant (i.e. they do not change over time) and as such these will always persist. On the other hand, the nurture argument claims that it is the

environment (i.e. family, institutions like school, society, etc.) in which individuals live that creates gender differences.

Social science researchers are committed to understanding the extent to which these theoretical frameworks can explain gaps in social and economic outcomes related to



What can sociologists tell us about why girls, on average, do better than boys in exams at school?

EDUCATION IS A KEY DETERMINANT OF FUTURE EARNINGS

gender. This is both in order to offer policy makers useful guidance to eliminate these differences, but also to promote equality within society (Marini 1990).

Let us look at a concrete example in order to understand better how the nature and nurture arguments can explain gender differences in educational outcomes which result in gender differences in future earnings.

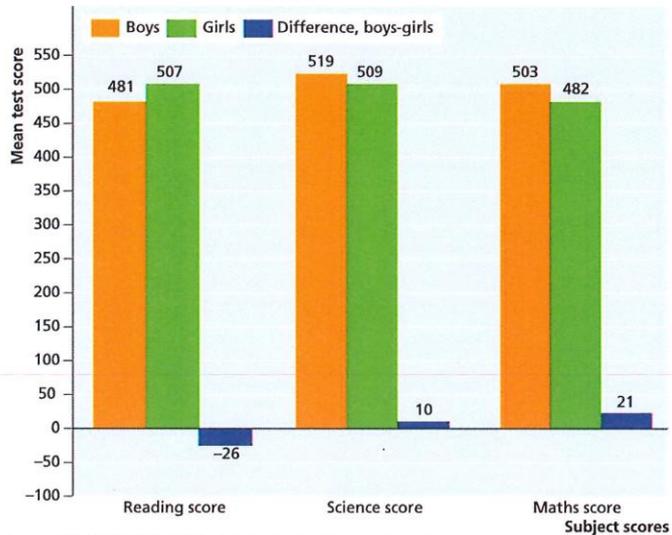
Reading, maths and science: the nature argument

Figure 2 reports average PISA scores attained by students in England in reading, mathematics and science tests in 2009 (Box 1). On average, girls outperform boys in reading, and boys do much better than girls in mathematics and slightly better in science. The nature argument maintains that girls are better than boys in English because they naturally have greater verbal and reasoning abilities, whereas they are worse than boys in mathematics because they have lower spatial awareness and they understand shape and form comparatively less well. According to this view, these verbal advantages and spatial-awareness disadvantages are biologically determined and, supposedly, time invariant.

In Figure 3 we can see the gender difference in PISA score by subject between 2000 and 2009. Again we can observe that girls are, on average, systematically better than boys in reading tests, but always worse than boys in science and mathematics tests. What we can see in this figure that we were not able to observe from the previous one is the fact that subject-specific gender gaps are not constant over time, which leaves room for a further explanation for gender differences in education.

Box 1 PISA

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international study that was launched by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1997. It aims to evaluate education systems worldwide every 3 years by assessing the competencies of 15-year-olds in the key subjects of reading, mathematics and science. To date over 70 countries and economies have participated in PISA.



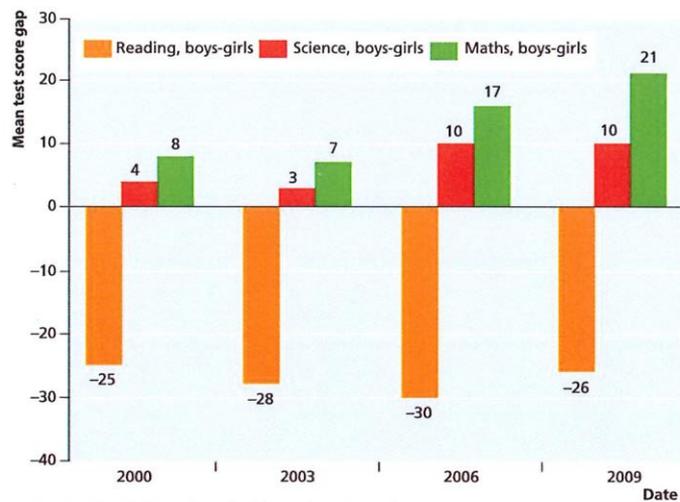
Source: OECD (2010), PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do

Figure 2 PISA scores by subject and gender (England, 2009)

Beliefs, attitudes and behaviours: the nurture argument

According to the nurture argument, the environment in which boys and girls operate determines gender differences in beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. Researchers have realised that from a very young age children are treated differently according to

their gender. Boys are encouraged to play with toys that are useful for developing those spatial abilities which make them better than girls at mathematics; girls are encouraged to play with dolls and be quiet and obedient, and this contributes to the enhancement of their reasoning and reading comprehension abilities.



Source: OECD (2010), PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do

Figure 3 Gender differences in PISA test scores by subject (England, 2000–09)

AS EARLY AS AGE 14 GIRLS TEND TO CHOOSE NOT TO ACQUIRE A STRONG MATHEMATICAL BACKGROUND

As girls grow up they feel the need to conform to a stereotypical gender identity, which wants them not to engage in mathematics. Evidence was found that as early as age 14 girls tend to choose not to acquire a strong mathematical background and, as a consequence of this, are underrepresented in those professions that require a solid mathematical background and that pay higher than average salaries, such as engineering (Favara 2012).

The role of aspirations

In recent years the government Cabinet Office has placed particular emphasis on the role *aspirations* can play in promoting social mobility through the reduction of the socioeconomic gradient in educational attainment. In addition to this, positive educational attitudes and aspirations are positively correlated with educational attainment. They are also known to reduce the risk of engagement in undesirable behaviours (such as deviant and antisocial conduct in young people), benefit receipt in

Boys' educational attitudes and aspirations tend to deteriorate at around the age of 12 to 13 years

adulthood, and teenage single-motherhood (Cabinet Office 2011).

In our analysis of gender differences in educational attitudes and aspirations we try to combine the need for further understanding on the formation of educational attitudes and aspirations with the need to explore possible gender discrepancies in the latter (Box 2).

The questions

We capture our measures of educational attitudes and aspirations through the answers that 11 to 15 year olds provide to the following questions:

- 1 Does it mean a great deal to you to do well at school?
- 2 Do you think it is very important for you to get your GCSE exams (Standard Grades in Scotland)?
- 3 Do you want to leave school when you are 16, or do you plan to go on to sixth form or college?
- 4 Would you like to go on to do further full-time education at a college or university after you finish school?

The answers to the first two questions provide information on educational *attitudes*, whereas the answers to the remainder provide information on educational *aspirations*.

Box 2 Methods

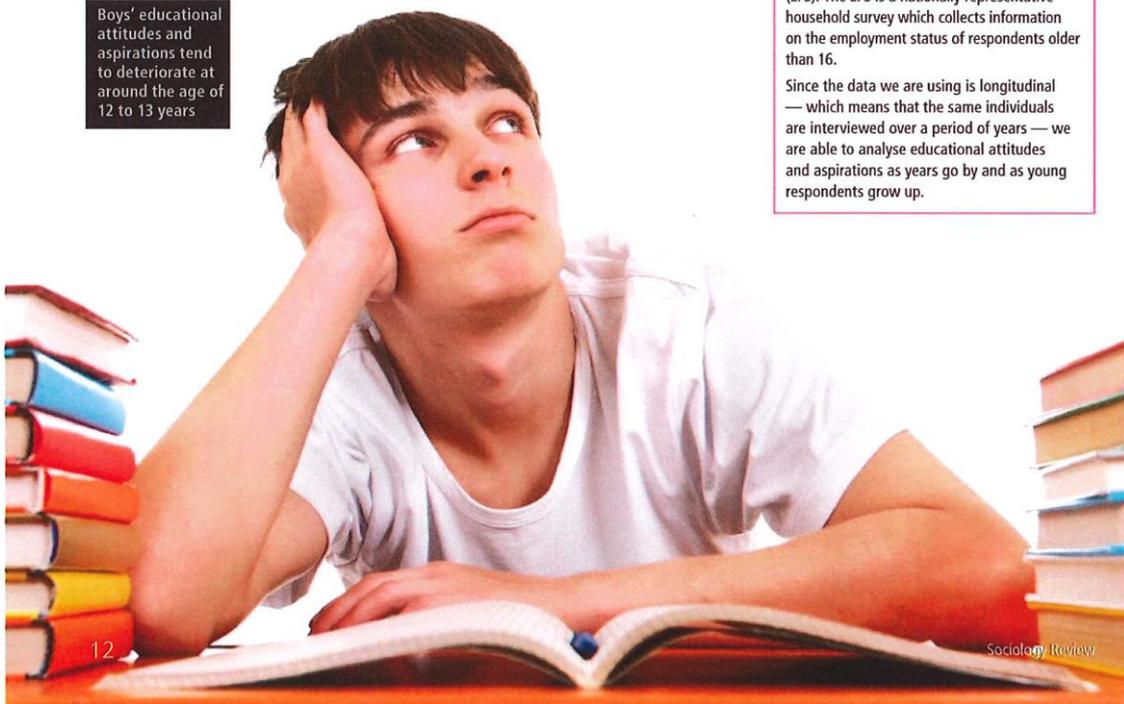
In our applied research we try to assess whether boys and girls display different educational attitudes and aspirations and whether these gender differences are either mitigated or exacerbated by specific individual characteristics and family background. We are able to answer our research questions using data from the Youth Panel component of the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS), which contains information on a representative sample of British households who were interviewed yearly between 1990 and 2008.

Information on individuals aged 11 to 15 years is collected by means of a self-completion questionnaire that covers various dominions of young people's lives:

- use of leisure time
- health and health-related behaviour
- subjective wellbeing
- relationship with families and peers
- aspirations and attitudes towards education and school

In addition, we are able to recover information on parental and household characteristics, such as parental education and attitudes towards education, family income and housing tenure, from the main BHPS survey, and on the gender-specific regional youth unemployment rate using data from the UK Labour Force Survey (LFS). The LFS is a nationally representative household survey which collects information on the employment status of respondents older than 16.

Since the data we are using is longitudinal — which means that the same individuals are interviewed over a period of years — we are able to analyse educational attitudes and aspirations as years go by and as young respondents grow up.



The findings

Our research reveals that girls report more positive educational attitudes and higher educational aspirations than boys. In fact, girls are more likely than boys to say that it means a great deal to them to do well at school, that it is very important to them to get GCSEs, that they want to stay in school after age 16, and that they want to go to university after they finish school.

These results are important because they hold even when we take into account relevant factors that are known to affect educational attitudes and aspirations, such as parental education and income, housing tenure, the business cycle and the respondent's age (Rampino and Taylor 2013).

In order to gain further insights into the role of gender in shaping educational attitudes and aspirations we decided to evaluate whether specific family contexts or individual characteristics contribute to either exacerbate or mitigate the gender differences we found so far.

From a very young age most boys are given toys that develop spatial abilities, while girls still tend to be encouraged to play with dolls and be quiet and obedient

The effects of family and individual characteristics

Even though girls still do better in terms of educational attitudes and aspirations when compared to boys, our analysis reveals that boys benefit more than girls from living in a household where at least one parent has a university degree or holds positive educational attitudes. Parents are considered as holding positive educational attitudes if they report that it is 'very important' for their child to complete GCSEs/A-levels, or if they would like their child to go to university.

In addition to this, we found that boys' educational attitudes and aspirations tend to deteriorate at a very young age (between 12 and 13 years old), whereas those of girls are either stable or improve as they grow up.

Finally, contrary to girls, boys do not take into account the business cycle when reporting their educational attitudes and aspirations. During economic downturns, when it is more challenging than usual to find a job, investing in education can be a good alternative, as opposed to experiencing potentially long periods of unemployment.

References and further reading



Cabinet Office (2011) 'Opening doors, breaking barriers: a strategy for social mobility' (policy paper).

Emmerson, C., Frayne, C., McNally, S. and Silva, O. (2006) 'An economic evaluation of the early impact of Aimhigher: Excellence Challenge on pre-16 outcomes update to previous analysis', Department for Education and Skills.

Favara, M. (2012) 'The cost of acting "girly": gender stereotypes and educational choices', Discussion Paper No. 7037, IZA.

Marini, M. (1990) 'Sex and gender: what do we know?', *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 95–120.

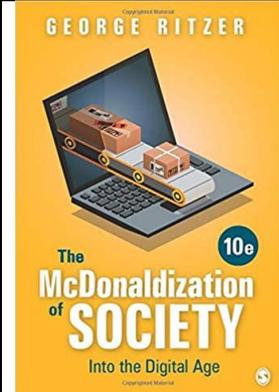
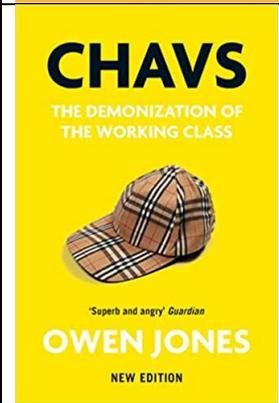
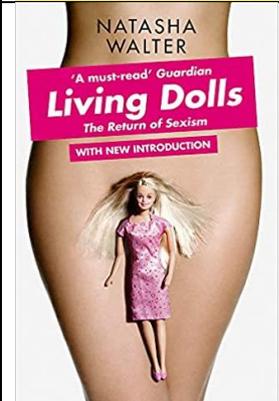
Rampino, T. and Taylor, G. (2013) 'Gender differences in educational aspirations and attitudes', ISER Working Paper Series, pp. 2013–15.

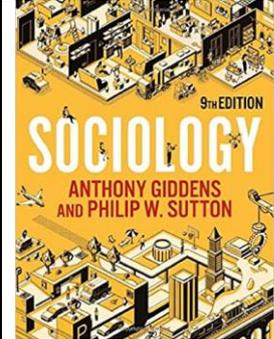
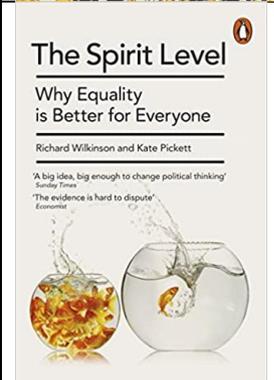
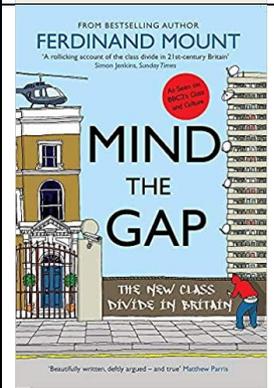
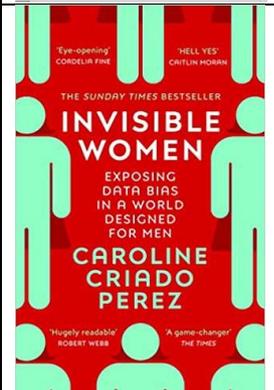
Tierney, J., Baldwin Grossman, J. and Resch, N. (1995) *Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Public/Private Ventures*.



A-Level Sociology Reading List:

This is a list of optional reading that will give you a head-start on Sociology A-Level, giving you an introduction into a variety of different theories and studies we will study throughout the two years. Enjoy!

		<p>Ritzer, G., <i>The McDonaldization of Society: Into the Digital Age</i> (2021)</p> <p>The McDonaldization of Society: Into the Digital Age: Amazon.co.uk: Ritzer, George: 9781544398013: Books</p>
		<p>Jones, O., <i>Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class</i> (2020)</p> <p>Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class : Owen Jones: Amazon.co.uk: Books</p>
		<p>Walter, N., <i>Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism</i> (2021)</p> <p>Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism: Amazon.co.uk: Walter, Natasha: 9781844087099: Books</p>

		<p>Giddens, A., <i>Sociology</i> (2021)</p> <p>Sociology, 9th Edition: Amazon.co.uk: Giddens, Anthony, Sutton, Philip W.: 9781509539222: Books</p>
		<p>Wilkinson, R & Pickett, K., <i>The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone</i> (2010)</p> <p>The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone: Amazon.co.uk: Pickett, Kate, Wilkinson, Richard: 9780241954294: Books</p>
		<p>Mount, F., <i>Mind the Gap</i> (2010)</p> <p>Mind the Gap: Amazon.co.uk: Mount, Ferdinand: 9781906021955: Books</p>
		<p>Perez, C <i>Invisible Women: exposing the gender bias women face every day</i> (2020)</p> <p>Invisible Women: the Sunday Times number one bestseller exposing the gender bias women face every day: Amazon.co.uk: Perez, Caroline Criado: 9781784706289: Books</p>