

# **School of Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work and Social Science**

## **Studying Social Policy - ASSIGNMENT 1 - Critical Review**

**Submission 28 October 2014**

**Harriet Sergeant "When nothing matters – The nihilism of the rioters has been fostered by the state"**

**The Spectator, 13 August 2011, p12-13 (The Spectator is a weekly publication, ideologically very close to the Conservative Party).**

**In 350 words you are required to produce a critical review of the attached article – a critical review implies a discussion of both strengths and weaknesses. A bullet point format is acceptable providing that meaning is clear to the reader.**

**What are the positives you can take from Sergeant's discussion? Was it clearly written? Did it have a coherent structure? How was your understanding of the rioting of August 2011 advanced?**

**What do you see as the flaws in her article? Inconsistencies? Contradictions? Lack of Clarity? Sweeping generalisations? Bias?**

**An understanding of 'August 2011' is not the central objective of this exercise – rather it is developing you skills as a critical thinker and reader. Nevertheless, the events of that month are a major concern for us as students of social policy. They exposed many issues at the core of our discipline: crime, schooling, the family, equality, citizenship, poverty, class, gender, ethnicity, social cohesion, alienation ..... all notions which will be visited and revisited throughout your degree programme.**

**mw2014**



# When nothing matters

The nihilism of the rioters has been fostered by the state

HARRIET SERGEANT

On the third day of the London riots, I spoke to Mash, a member of a Brixton gang whom I befriended three years ago. He was standing outside an electronics shop in Clapham, watching the looting. I could hear shouts, glass breaking but no police sirens. I urged him to go home. 'Harri man,' he remonstrated down the telephone, his voice hoarse, 'You don't get to do this every day. You do your ting, and you don't get arrested. It's wild and exciting. These few days, it's our time.'

The riots engulfing areas of London and other cities this week are not about poverty or race. They are about young men like Mash who are barely literate, unemployed, with no future and nothing to lose. For them, this is a dream suddenly come true. Their favourite video games have become a reality. They have got what they never had before: power, a sense of achievement and lots of goodies. Most of us want the same things. The difference is that we can get them without setting London ablaze.

I met Mash while interviewing black Caribbean and white working-class boys around the country for a think-tank report. The young men I interviewed had very obviously failed to make the transition to manhood and successful adult life. Their failure leaves them disengaged from society and its values. The majority find themselves trapped in an extended, semi-criminal adolescence well into their twenties and thirties.

The former Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, has been quick to blame this sudden explosion of violence on Conservative tax cuts. He has a nerve. These young men came of age during the 13 years of Labour rule. They are Blair's children and the left's creation. It is not deprivation that has stunted their lives but the policies of the previous government in three key areas: school, work and home.

To begin to understand the mayhem in



our cities, look at a set of figures on literacy rates that came out a week before the riots began. Teaching a child to read and write is not difficult or expensive. Much poorer countries manage to do it. The statistics in the UK are staggering. A full 63 per cent of white working-class boys and just over half of black Caribbean boys at the age of 14 have a reading age of seven or below. How does that translate into the criminality on our streets? Humiliated in lessons, by 14, the young men I

*These young men came of age during the 13 years of Labour rule. They are Blair's children*

interviewed had either dropped out or were excluded. They then spent their time hanging around on the streets, turning up to school only to sell drugs or stolen goods.

Studies show that about half of the prison population has a reading age below that of an 11-year-old. Of one south London gang I met three years ago, all were bright but semi-literate. Three are now in prison. Bigs, the former leader of one of Brixton's most notorious gangs, received his first prison sentence at 15. 'Other people go from school to university,' he told me. 'We go from school to prison.'

Our educational establishment puts its cherished beliefs first and the child a very distant second. They emphasise what ought

to work. They do not investigate or make use of the evidence that shows what children actually need to thrive: discipline, structure, plenty of exercise and something in which to identify and take pride (many find this only in gangs). Faced with a child who is incapable of 'directing his own learning', teachers will ask what is wrong with the child or blame his background — not their teaching.

Over and over again, the previous government put the interests of teaching unions above those of pupils. Even with our dismal educational results for

our poorest children — only one in six white boys on free school meals have mastered the three Rs — just 12 teachers out of a workforce of 450,000 have been suspended for incompetence in the past nine years.

The second key factor is the change in Britain's job market. Forty years ago, a young man could leave school at 16 with few, if any, qualifications, get a job in a factory and, at 19, support a wife and child. Now there are far fewer such jobs. This leaves working-class black and white boys particularly vulnerable to the other major change in the job market: immigration. According to the ONS, of the 1.8 million rise in employment over the Labour years, 99 per cent went to immigrants. Since David Cameron came to power, the figure has dropped, but only to 82 per cent. This leaves the native poor with little or no chance of finding employment and doing something good with their lives.

This invidious situation is made worse still by the effect of benefits. Far from lifting these young men out of poverty, it bolts down the hatch. Again and again, I have found myself in court speaking on behalf of young men who have tried to get jobs, only to find they were better off sticking with benefits. One young man I spoke to was offered a job only to be told by his Job Centre adviser not to take it. After the loss of his rent, council tax and utility payments, he would have been £30 worse off.



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The young men now roaming our streets frighten us because they have such total disregard for our values. But then they have disengaged from society for a reason. They see nothing in it for them. And in this they are quite right. The overwhelming attitude of all the young men I encountered was despair at the prospect of a life on benefits.

The third area in which government intervention has been disastrous is in the home. Politicians are now appearing on TV demanding that parents keep their children under curfew. I wonder what planet they are living on. Certainly not the same one as the boys I know, for whom grown-ups are absent or ineffectual. The children do not even get fed properly. A recent survey found that 49 per cent of British parents did not know where their children were, or whom they were with, in the evenings. Some 45 per cent of 15-year-old boys spent four or more evenings a week hanging about 'with friends', compared with just 17 per cent in France. Tuggy Tug, a gang leader, said of his friends, 'I get more from them than I ever did from my family.' His recent spell in jail was his first experience of spending time with adult males.

Nearly every one of the young men I interviewed had a young single mother. Britain has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Europe. Despite the huge amount of evidence of the harm this causes children, the Labour government made single motherhood an attractive proposition. Since 1997, a single mother of two children has seen her benefits increase by a staggering 85 per cent.

To accuse these young girls of being feckless is unjust. They are responding to the economics of the situation. They are as much victims of the crisis in our schools and the perverse influence of benefits as teenage boys. They have grasped the consequences of our dysfunctional education system: boys take to crime, girls get pregnant. The government has put young girls in a position where the only career open to them is to have children — whether they want to or not, whether they will be good mothers or not. The state has taken over the role of both husband and father and has failed at both. We have seen the effects of that failure this week.

On the other end of the telephone, Mash gave me the latest. Usually confined to one small area, he was relishing the freedom of being able to move around London without being attacked by other gangs. 'Only people to worry about is the feds,' he said. 'But the feds are scared, Harri. We can see it in their eyes. They are scared 100 per cent.' We should be scared, too.

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# **SCHOOL OF NURSING, MIDWIFERY, SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

## **Studying Social Policy**

### **Assignment 2 - Key Concepts**

**Researching, and using your own words,  
construct a definition of the following  
concepts:-**

- **equality**
- **social policy**
- **community care**

**submission 28 October 2014**

**between 100 and 125 words for each  
concept**

**School of Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work and Social Sciences**

**Studying Social Policy –**

**Assignment 3**

**Essay Writing Exercise**

**Submission - 2 December 2014**

**NOT a typical student essay. In some ways excellent but also deeply flawed. You are required in 400 words to critically assess the attached essay identifying both its strengths and weaknesses – bullet point format is acceptable but meaning must be clear to the reader.**

**mw2014**

***With reference to 'gender', 'ageing' and 'disability'  
examine the relationship between 'social  
constructions' and the development of social policy  
(1500 words)***

The notion of a social construction is a valuable tool for students of social policy but not always one that is easy to grasp. Social constructs are not *out there* waiting to be discovered, and they do not have an independent existence. For example, 'poverty' as concept, as something we can identify and measure, *is* a social construction. Social scientists, commentators and wider society create this category and determine what constitutes 'poverty'. It is an historically and culturally specific concept. If it is something which society creates, then its meaning and experience will vary from society to society and change over time. Our notion of poverty in the industrialized nations will be distinct from that of poorer nations such as Sudan or of Bangladesh. It will not correspond to that of medieval England. As Nick Crossley maintains:-

To say, 'it's a social construct' ..... means that we believe the phenomenon in question to be the product of a particular society or



societies like it, rather than being something which is natural or inevitably hard-wired into our biological constitution and invariant.

(2005: 296-7)

'Old age', for example, can be understood as not simply a biological category but also as a social construct. Growing older does, of course, involve physical change but it is the significance of these changes, the way they are understood, that is the concern of social scientists. In Britain we tend to construct old age in negative terms – as a time of deficiency, decline and burden (Timonen 2008). This social construction is neither 'natural' nor 'inevitable'. Most importantly, it can have implications for social policy and welfare practices. Clarke and Saraga (1998: 2) have argued that:-

The construction of difference is a necessary starting-point for the study of social policy because how differences are constructed – the way they are made to mean something – is the basis from which decisions about social life flow. How we define or interpret a pattern of difference has profound consequences for how it is to be acted upon.

Ageist constructions can 'seep into' social policies and welfare practices to shape priorities and agendas. One can now begin to make sense of the claim that hospital services for older people are less well developed; of age-based rationing in health care, or that research into illnesses associated with ageing

is less well funded. The notion of ageist constructions can help us 'unpack' inadequacies in the regulation and inspection of residential care for the elderly compared to that of younger adult or, the relatively late arrival in Britain of laws against age discrimination.

Similarly, constructions of gender have had a powerful influence on the development of social policy. Historically, women were defined as 'the other', as dependent on men and, as mentally and emotionally frail (Lister, 2003). Prior to 1882, on marriage, a woman's property by law was transferred to her husband (Gittens, 1993). Only in 1928 did British women achieve the right to vote on the same basis as men (Rowbotham, 1999).

Before 1991, in England, a man could not be charged with the rape of his wife (Charles, 2000). These are policies which were underpinned by patriarchal notions about gender, gender roles and divisions. It is not only women who are the 'victims' of distorted and debilitating social constructions. Even today, traditional constructions of 'fatherhood' inform policies and practices on paternity leave and access to children following divorce - often to the detriment of men (Harris, 2007).

Feminists have maintained that health care policy and practices do not develop in a vacuum but are inevitably influenced by the powerful ideas of the day. Anne Witz (1992) has argued that medicine is an essentially 'male'



institution. Until the 1876 Medical Act women were refused entry into the medical profession and were excluded from medical school. They were deemed suitable to nurse but considered to be intellectually and physically incapable of practising medicine. Even today, the NHS has a gender stratified workforce. Although anti-discriminatory policies and equal opportunity policies are in place, men still dominate the heights of the medical profession. Women *are* represented in the ranks of general practitioners but remain under-represented in the 'elite' of surgeons. The careers of women doctors continue to be hindered by 'the glass ceiling' and a hostile male culture.

Historically, medicine has reflected and reinforced the idea of men having the right to exercise control over women and their bodies. Surgeon Peter McEwan (1934: 575) writing in the British Medical Journal, insisted that 'Hysterectomy must not be resorted to without the intelligent consent of the patient, and, *if married, of her husband* (emphasis added) and the cooperation of her doctor'. Similarly, in the same publication, gynaecologist Michael Muldoon (1972: 84) confirmed the legality of female sterilization as a form of family planning given the informed consent of both the wife *and her husband*. Up to the 1960s, in Britain (and in many parts of the world today) a husband's consent was required before many hospitals would

perform a hysterectomy (surgical removal of the womb). These policies and practices may seem extraordinary to us today but they mirrored and reinforced the dominant and patriarchal ideas of the time.

Similarly, the way we construct 'disability' will impact on educational and welfare policies related to impairment and define the experience of disabled people. Such constructions may not be grounded in reality and they may be 'erroneous', however, as Graham Hughes (1998: 80) points out:-

It is a well-established sociological adage that if people define situations as real, then they are real in their consequences. Thus if disability is defined and seen as a tragedy and/or a 'natural' and determining condition (as seems to have been the dominant categorization of disability in the UK in the twentieth century), then disabled people will be treated and responded to as if they are victims of a tragic accident or circumstance.

It is important to recognize that social constructions can inform social policy, however, the relationship between social constructions and social policy is more complex. It can be a two way process - i.e. social constructions inform social policy *but also* social policy can shape dominant social constructions. For example, policies which educationally segregate children with a disability, reinforce a sense of 'difference'; not least in that able-bodied

children are denied an opportunity to question the social construction of disability that they themselves have absorbed. Likewise, exclusionary immigration policies, whilst a response to a particular and negative construction of 'immigrants' implicitly serve to reinforce that construction.

The concept of social construction is a very useful tool for social scientist and is an invaluable way of thinking about the development and implementation of social policy. However, social constructions are sometimes difficult to recognize *as social constructions* as they often appear to be 'common sense' -

"This is what women are like". "This is what fathers should be". "This is why black people are different from white people". Initially, many social constructions appear to have a 'natural' quality that seem to reflect the social worlds in which we live. Where then, does that leave us as social scientists and what might it mean in terms of how we study and research social policy?

Social science demands a critical scepticism; that we think again about taken-for-granted categories such as disability, 'race', gender, old age, sexuality. It is vital that we recognize that these categories are not 'natural'



phenomena but social constructions. A critical approach to social policy requires us to put aside 'common sense', our preconceptions and prejudices and calls upon us to 'problematise' the taken for granted. This is an idea which is at the very heart of social science. Zigmund Bauman has argued that for social science to be an effective 'lens' through which to properly understand society, it must 'de-familiarize the familiar'. Similarly, Clarke and Cochrane insist that:-

.....in order to study society we must distance ourselves from what we already know. We need to become 'strangers' in a world that is familiar. The defining characteristic of a 'stranger' is that she or he does not know those things which we take for granted. Strangers require the 'obvious' to be explained to them. In doing social science, then, there is a need to stand back from what we already know or believe and be distanced from, or sceptical about, those things which 'everybody knows' (1998: 10).

This requires a conscious effort, an 'openness' and a self questioning by the student of social policy. Perhaps some of the most important questions we ask, are questions we ask of ourselves. Something that is not always a comfortable experience!

To conclude, there is very strong evidence of a close relationship between social policy and social constructions.

(1540 words)

## References

Charles, N. (2000) *Feminism, the State and Social Policy*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Clarke, J. and Saraga, E. (1998) 'Introduction' pp 1-2 in E.Saraga, (ed) *Embodying the Social: Constructions of Difference*, London, Routledge.

Crossley, N. (2005) *Key Concepts in Critical Social Theory*, London, Sage.

Hughes, G. (1998) 'A Suitable Case for Treatment? Constructions of Disability' pp 43-90 in E. Saraga, (ed) *Embodying the Social: Constructions of Difference*, London, Routledge.

Rowbotham, S. (1999) *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States*, London, Penguin.

Saraga, E. (ed) (1998) *Embodying the Social: Constructions of Difference*,  
London, Routledge.



# **School of Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work and Social Sciences**

## **STUDYING SOCIAL POLICY**

### **ASSIGNMENT 4**

#### **Presentation Leaflet – 300 words**

#### **Submission 2 December 2014**

You are required to produce a leaflet on 'presentations' aimed at first year university students. Your leaflet should be.....

- informative
- clearly expressed
- attractively designed/laid out
- within the word limit of 300 words

There are whole text books devoted entirely to presentation skills, and you are required to distil the essential qualities of an effective presentation in just 300 words! You will need to be economical and absolutely clear in your use of language.

Your leaflet needs to make sense to a student with no experience of presentations. Ideas must be sufficiently developed; for example, it is not enough to say "try not to be nervous"; suggest that good preparation will give confidence in the task at hand and help contain anxiety. It will not be enough to say "try to hold the attention of your audience". The leaflet must tell the reader how this can be achieved; for example, stressing the importance of eye contact, body language.....

In the seminar you will be working in groups on the content of the leaflet - identifying the 'key qualities'; thinking about communicating information with economy and precision; considering the design and layout of the leaflet.

# **School of Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work and Social Sciences**

## **Studying Social Policy**

### **Assignment 5**

#### **Researching Assignments Exercise**

**Imagine that you are researching an essay entitled  
“Fatherhood is emerging as an increasingly important issue  
in the study of social policy”. Discuss.**

- 1) Using Solar, identify and fully reference (Harvard) three books which explore the social/social policy aspects of ‘fatherhood’.**
- 2) Using Solar, identify and fully reference (Harvard) three journal articles which explore the social/social policy aspects of ‘fatherhood’.**
- 3) Identify and briefly describe the aims of three websites which might have relevance to the social/social policy aspects of ‘fatherhood’.**

**Submission – 2 December 2014**

**300 words in total**

# **School of Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work and Social Sciences**

## **Studying Social Policy**

### **Assignment 6 – Reflective Essay**

Drawing upon the Skills Audit completed at the beginning of the module, you are required to reflect upon your overall (i.e. not simply within this module) learning experience in Semester 1 and to outline an action plan for your study in Semester 2 and beyond.

**Submission Date - 16 December 2014**

**1000 words**

Within the assignment, you are to demonstrate, implicitly or explicitly....

- 1) that you understand what is meant by the term 'reflective learning'
- 2) an ability to reflect critically on your learning experience
- 3) evidence of how 'reflection' has, can or will enrich your learning experience

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