

Teaching resource: Pioneers of Social Research

Featuring life story interviews with significant researchers



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Introduction

We have developed a range of worksheets which will help focus teaching on selected themes: women and social research, poverty and inequality in the UK, community studies, pioneering research methods and reusing archived data.

Each worksheet contains links to selected extracts, followed by questions relating to the extract and the theme that it addresses. As students may want to listen to the audio extracts which accompany the text, they may want to bring headphones if working in a class.

Background to the Pioneers of Social Research

Between the 1940s to the 1970s, British social research experienced an unprecedented flowering, enabling researchers to carry out their work on a scale and with a methodological diversity which could not easily be repeated today. For example, Peter Townsend, for his in-depth national study of old people's homes undertaken in the 1970s, *The Last Refuge*, not only used elaborate quantification, but personally visited over a hundred institutions throughout Britain, even taking a temporary job as a bath attendant in one home, recording and theorising from his experience.

In the early 1990s, Professor Paul Thompson, himself a pioneering oral historian at the University of Essex, launched a 'search and rescue' mission to track down data from classic and definitive studies in social research, carried out by British researchers since the 1950s; understanding that they were at risk. With ESRC funding he started Qualidata, which worked to resurrect and make available primary fieldwork materials, often languishing and forgotten in home or office cupboards. As well as preserving interviews and fieldwork notes, which are now available through the UK Data Service, he also interviewed the studies' investigators. [The Pioneers of Social Research, 1996-2018](#) collection brings together insightful interviews with some of the most significant and notable researchers in the British Social Science sphere. We have a comprehensive [Bio-bibliographical guide Pioneers of Social Research](#).

The Pioneers interviews

Interviewees offered their research data for archiving and explained in their own interviews the personal, social and intellectual context and antecedents of their research. Each individual interview covers the researcher's family, background, key influences and detailed accounts of their key projects.

Due to the in-depth nature of these interviews, some exceed 20 hours of recording. The UK Data Service holds the recordings and transcriptions from interviews with 58 Pioneers, ranging from anthropologists, to sociologists and economists. Transcribed interviews and interview summaries are downloadable as a collection, through the UK Data Service [Data Catalogue](#) and are also available to read online through [QualiBank](#). Full audio files are

available on request and each individual additionally has their own playlist on [YouTube channel Pioneers of Social Research](#) that comprises a selection of thematic audio extracts.

The British Library now holds the copyright in the recordings, but the data are openly available and can be used with acknowledgement of the British Library and Paul Thompson, freely for a non-commercial purpose, which is under the type of licence below.

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These interviews are of unique and salient value. The UK Data Service, alone has published from the collection, two special issues of the International Journal of Social Science Methodology: 7, 1 (2004) and 11, 2 (2008). Paul Thompson, principal investigator on the project, is also set to release a book in 2018, based on the pioneers of social research.

Women and social research

The women's liberation movement along with emerging antidiscrimination laws in the 1960s paved the way for women in social research.

Up until this point, women's experiences had been under-researched and women had been under-represented in academia as a career. New lines of feminist enquiry by women pioneers began to question inequalities and to highlight women's experiences in the workplace and in the home.

Activities

Read through and listen to the following extracts, then answer the questions that follow.

1. [Women and Education](#) by Leonore Davidoff
What were Davidoff's early influences in shaping how she understood gender roles?
2. [Analysing Mothers Alone](#) by Dennis Marsden
Can men study 'women-centred' topics?
3. [Feminism and women in anthropology](#) by Pat Caplan
4. [From researcher's wife to researcher](#) by Mildred Blaxter
5. [Lack of careers for women in sociology](#) by Meg Stacey
6. [Discrimination against women researchers](#) by Leonore Davidoff
What did all these women pioneers have in common?
What were the influences which prompted these women pioneers to begin careers in social research?
What challenges did these women pioneers face when starting out in their careers as social scientists? Do you think that women today face similar struggles?
What contributions did the early women pioneers make to social research?

Key texts

- Blaxter, M. (1990) *Health and lifestyles*. London: Tavistock Routledge.
- Blaxter, M. and Patterson, E. (1982) *Mothers and daughters: a three-generational study of health attitudes and behaviour*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Caplan, P. (1985) *Class and gender in India: women and their organisations in a South Indian city*. London: Tavistock.
- Davidoff, L. (1995) *Worlds between: historical perspectives on gender and class*. Cambridge: Polity Press
- Douglas, M. (1966) *Purity and danger*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Marsden, D. (1969) *Mothers alone: poverty and the fatherless family*. London: Penguin Press.
- Okely, J. (1992) *Anthropology and autobiography*. London: Routledge.
- Stacey, M. (1960) *Tradition and change: a study of Banbury*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Links

[The Women's Library](#)

[UK Web Archive British Library](#)

[Pat Caplan interviewed for the Leading Thinkers Collection at the University of Cambridge](#)

[Mary Douglas interviewed for the Leading Thinkers Collection at the University of Cambridge](#)

Poverty and inequality

The definition of poverty shifted throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Early poverty studies carried out in the late nineteenth century measured poverty in absolute terms according to the amount of money people had and how much they needed to afford the basic supplies for survival.

In the 1960s Peter Townsend carried out the largest and most detailed social surveys into poverty ever undertaken in Britain. He was taken aback by the extent of poverty and how much it had been underestimated by official statistics.

It had been widely believed that Britain had all but eliminated poverty with the construction of the welfare state and post war affluence.

Townsend redefined poverty as relative, finding that although people were surviving, many were living without the necessary resources for adequate participation in everyday activities and customs.

Activities

Read through and listen to the following extracts, then answer the questions that follow.

1. ['The Last Refuge' and participant observation by Peter Townsend](#)

What observations did Townsend make about the way the elderly were treated in the institution that he visited?

What did he learn about the way society treats the poor?

Who are the deserving poor and who are the undeserving poor? Why?

2. [Family relationships and class by Dennis Marsden](#)

How significant do you think this contextual material - about Marsden's childhood observations of his extended family and the community they lived in - is in understanding his academic interest in single mothers and the effects of poverty?

3. [Mothers and Daughters: Transmitted deprivation and social policy 1 by Mildred Blaxter](#)

What is transmitted deprivation?

Reading through Blaxter's extract and exploring her collection on Mothers and Daughters, did Blaxter agree with the theory of transmitted deprivation? Discuss.

4. [Work rich and work poor households in Sheppey by Ray Pahl](#)

What observations did Pahl make between the informal economy and its links to poverty?

Explore the collections by two or more of the following pioneers:

- Peter Townsend
- Dennis Marsden
- Mildred Blaxter

1. What contribution did these pioneers make to the sociology of poverty and inequality?
2. What assumptions about working class families did some of the early pioneers make?
3. How was poverty measured by the early pioneers of social research? Give examples.
4. What explanations for the causes of poverty were given by the pioneers?
5. Examine the ways in which sociologists have defined and measured poverty and wealth in the UK.

Key texts

Blaxter, M. and Patterson, E. (1982) *Mothers and daughters: a three-generational study of health attitudes and behaviour*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.

Marsden, D. (1969) *Mothers alone: poverty and the fatherless family*. London: Penguin Press.

Pahl, R.E. (1984) *Divisions of labour*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Stacey, M. (1960) *Tradition and change: a study of Banbury*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Townsend, P. (1975) *Sociology and social policy*. London: Lane.

Townsend, P. (1962) *The last refuge: a survey of residential institutions and homes for the aged in England and Wales*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Links

[Warwick institute of health: Intended and unintended suffering: the legacy of Meg Stacey's ideas and work](#)

[Problem of poverty in early 20th century Britain](#)

[Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research](#)

Community studies

Community studies draws upon both sociology and anthropology in order to study the inter-relations of social institutions and social structures within a particular community.

Researchers are usually engaged in a range of research methods including ethnography and participant observation, often spending a considerable time engaging with the community of interest. The fieldworkers will involve and immerse themselves in everyday activities and observing group behaviours - sometimes even living amongst the members of the community. Many of the researchers featured in this Pioneers resource worked in the field of community studies.

Ray Pahl studied the Isle of Sheppey and was concerned with the household divisions of labour of the inhabitants of the island and how these were related to the wider social forces at that time.

In Paul Thompson's *Living the Fishing* (1983), he explored the links between family and community culture and economic adaptability in Scottish fishing communities.

Meg Stacey carried out one of the best known British urban community studies, *Tradition and Change: A Study of Banbury* (1960).

Activities

Read through and listen to the following extracts, then answer the questions that follow.

1. [Designing the first Banbury study](#) by Meg Stacey
2. [The first and the second Banbury study](#) by Meg Stacey
3. [The second Banbury study and replication](#) by Meg Stacey

What was Stacey's motivation for doing the second Banbury study?

4. [Difficulties in generalising from a case study](#) by Ray Pahl

What difficulties did Pahl have in presenting the data that he collected from the Isle of Sheppey?

Download the essays from the [School Leavers Study](#) which were written in 1978. Select and read through a sample of ten essays.

*Please note that the students' original (often poor) spelling has been retained in these essays to give a sense of authenticity.

- What do you think the 1978 essays tell us about life on the Isle of Sheppey at that time?

Key texts

Bell, C. & Newby, H. (1971) *Community studies*. London: Unwin.

Charles, N., and Crow, G. (eds) *The Sociology Review: special issue: community re-studies and social change*, Vol 60, August 2012, Issue 3

Pahl, R. E. (1984) *Divisions of labour*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Stacey, M. (1960) *Tradition and change: a study of Banbury*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thompson, P. (1983) *Living the Fishing*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Links

[Centre for Urban and Community Research, University of London](#)

[Centre for Urban Studies, University of Bristol](#)

[Raymond Firth interview for the Leading Thinkers Collection, University of Cambridge](#)

Pioneering research methods

In the 1950s and 1960s, Britain saw sociology increasingly gain recognition as an academic discipline.

This development enabled social researchers to carry out their work on a scale which could not easily be repeated today.

It was an opportunity for the development of innovative methodological techniques for studying society, including observation, survey design and interviewing techniques.

These new methodologies enabled fresh understandings of social change and social movements in post-war Britain as well as offering new insights into the lives of ordinary people.

Activities

Read through and listen to the following extracts, then answer the questions that follow.

1. [The Health and Lifestyle Survey 2](#) by Mildred Blaxter

According to Blaxter, what were the advantages of adopting a qualitative approach to researching health?

2. ['The Last Refuge' and participant observation](#) by Peter Townsend

In this extract Townsend describes his participant observation in a care home for the elderly. What was the effect of this experience on his understanding of the experience of elderly people? What conclusions did he draw?

3. [Random sampling in The Family Life of Old People \(1957\)](#) by Peter Townsend

What problems did Townsend encounter when sampling for his research into the lives of old people? How did he tackle these problems?

Other useful extracts

[Mildred Blaxter](#)

Surveys: Combining statistical and qualitative analysis 1 and 2

Mixed methods: Mixed methods and discourse analysis 1 and 2

[Peter Townsend](#)

Participant observation: Sampling and participant observation

[Jack Goody](#)

Participant observation: Using participant observation

Researching as insiders or outsiders: Being a foreigner

[Paul Thompson](#)

Interviewing elites: How not to interview elites by Paul Thompson

General questions

Identify and explain one problem of using surveys to explore health.

Why were social surveys important within early sociology?

What we can learn from such auto/biographical material?

Do audio, film or written life stories have the same or different merits?

Key texts

Caplan, P. (2003) (ed) *The ethics of anthropology: debates and dilemmas*. London and New York: Routledge.

Stacey, M., Batstone, E., Bell, C., and Murcott, A., (1975) *Power, persistence and change*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Townsend, P. (1962) *The last refuge: a survey of residential institutions and homes for the aged in England and Wales*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Townsend, P. (1979) *Poverty in the United Kingdom: a survey of household resources and standards of living*. London: Allen Lane; Penguin Books.

Links

[Mary Douglas video clip, Leading Thinkers, University of Cambridge](#)

[Web Centre for Social Research Methods](#)

[UK Data Service case study with Mike Savage's Popular Social Identities in England, 1950-2000](#)

Reusing archived data

In the 1970s and 1980s Ray Pahl conducted a series of research projects on the Isle of Sheppey investigating patterns of work and social life which resulted in his classic sociological text: *Divisions of Labour* (1984).

One example of these projects is the *School Leavers Study* in which Pahl asked teachers at a local comprehensive school to set their students a particular essay ten days before they were due to leave school permanently.

Pahl asked pupils in their final year of school to imagine what their futures would be like and to write a short essay as if looking back over their lives.

This resulted in a collection of 141 handwritten essays, which are now held with The UK Data Archive. These essays were digitised and made available to download in 2012.

In 2010 Dawn Lyon and Graham Crow led the [Living and Working on Sheppey](#) project which explored the recent history and changes in working lives on the Isle of Sheppey over the last 40 years.

In one strand of this project they replicated Pahl's *School Leavers Study* and asked 110 school leavers to write the same essays as the children in 1978, imagining what their futures hold.

The project digitised and coded Pahl's original essays and compared these against the new essays. Together these two sets of essays offered fascinating new insights into the

aspirations of Sheppey's young people (and young people more generally) and cover a range of topics including, health, education, career, family and leisure.

Activities

Read through and listen to the following extract.

1. [Difficulties in generalising from a case study](#) by Ray Pahl

Download the essays from the [School Leavers Study](#) which were written in 1978. Select and read through a sample of ten essays.

*Please note that the students' original (often poor) spelling has been retained in these essays to give a sense of authenticity.

1. What themes can you identify in these essays?
2. What do you think the 1978 essays tell us about life on the Isle of Sheppey at that time?
3. Compare the five essays from 1978 to the five essays from 2010 that you can listen to on the Living and Working on Sheppey website. What thematic differences can you identify between the aspirations of the students in the two sets of essays?

Key texts

Crow, G. and Takeda, N. (2011) 'Ray Pahl's sociological career: fifty years of impact', *Sociological Research Online*, 16 (3) 1: <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/16/3/11.html>

Crow, G., Morgan Brett, B., Winterton, M., (Eds) (2011) '[Young Lives and Imagined Futures: Insights from Archived Data](#)', *Timescapes Working paper*.

[FQS Special Issue on secondary analysis of qualitative data, Vol 6, No 1 \(2005\)](#) [Online journal]

Lyon, D., Morgan-Brett, B. and Crow, G. (2012) 'Working with material from the Sheppey archive', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 15(4) [Special Issue: Perspectives on working with archived textual and visual material in social research], pp.301-309. doi: 10.1080/13645579.2012.688314

Pahl, R.E. (1978) 'Living without a job: how school leavers see the future', *New Society*, Vol. 46, No.839, November, pp.259-262.

Pahl, R.E. (1984) *Divisions of labour*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Weddell, E., Lyon, D., Crow, G., Morgan Brett, B. (2012) 'Imagining the Future: What can the aspirations of school-leavers in 1978 and 2010 tell us about the changing nature of society?' *Sociology Review*.

Links

Pahl, R.E. (2012). *School Leavers Study, 1978*. [data collection]. 2nd Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 4867, [DOI: 10.5255/UKDA-SN-4867-1](https://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-4867-1)

[Reusing qualitative data](#)

[UK Data Service case study with Graham Crow's *Living and working on Sheppey*](#)

Collections

Mark Abrams

[Quality of Life; Sunderland, 1973/74](#)

[Quality of Life; Urban Britain 1975](#)

[Quality of Life; Stoke, 1973/74](#)

[Opinions and Attitudes of Senior Girls, 1973](#)

[Quality of Life: Urban Britain, 1973; UK](#)

Sara Arber

[Family Planning in Trinidad : the Problem of Discontinuation, 1975](#)

[Changes in the Structure of General Practice: the Patient's Viewpoint, 1977](#)

[Older Men: their Social Worlds and Healthy Lifestyles, 1999-2002](#)

[Survey of Census Users, 1987](#)

[Optimising quality of sleep among older people in the community and care homes: An integrated approach](#)

[General Household Survey \(Surrey Files\), 1973-81](#)

[General Household Survey Teaching datasets, 1979 -1995](#)

Mildred Blaxter

[Mothers and Daughters: Accounts of Health in the Grandmother Generation, 1945-1978](#)

[Health and Lifestyle Survey, 1984-1985](#)

David Butler

[National Opinion Polls Merged Political Surveys, 1963-1966](#)

[British General Election Results, October 1974 and May 1979](#)

[Political Change in Britain, 1963-1970; Merged File](#)

John Bynner

[Economic and Social Research Council 16-19 Initiative; a Longitudinal Study of Two Cohorts of Young People, 1987-1989](#)

[1970 British Cohort Study: Twenty-One-Year Sample Survey, 1992](#)

[1970 British Cohort Study: Twenty-Six-Year Follow-Up, 1996](#)

[1970 British Cohort Study: Ten-Year Follow-Up, 1980](#)

[1970 British Cohort Study: Sixteen-Year Follow-Up, 1986](#)

Pat Caplan

[Concepts of Healthy Eating Food Research: Phases I and II, 1992-1996](#)

[Papers, 1969 - 1980 of Patricia Caplan](#)

[Pat Caplan Collection](#)

Ivor Crewe

[BBC Election Surveys, 1983-1987](#)

[Research Productivity of Political Science Departments in UK Universities, 1977-1983](#)

[British Parliamentary Constituencies, 1955-1974](#)

[British Parliamentary Constituencies, 1979-1983](#)

[Fulton Commission Investigation into the Civil Service, 1967](#)

[British Election Study, 1969-1979](#)

[Measurement of Party Identification in the United Kingdom, 1999-2000](#)

[Public Attitudes to Parliament \(State of the Nation\), 1972](#)

Duncan Gallie

[Social Change and Economic Life Initiative Surveys, 1986-1987](#)

[Employment in Britain, 1992](#)

[Skills Survey, 2006](#)

[Skills Survey, 2001](#)

[Skills and Employment Surveys Series Dataset, 1986, 1992, 1997, 2001, 2006 and 2012](#)

Jonathon Gershuny

[General Household Survey, 1973 : Leisure Questions](#)

[Daily Life of the Unemployed, 1982 : Social and Psychological Dimensions](#)

[United Kingdom Time Use Survey, 2014-2015](#)

[General Household Survey Cross-Year Leisure Activities, 1973-1997](#)

[British Household Panel Survey Calibrated Time Use Data, 1994-2004](#)

[Human Capital and Social Position in Britain: Creating a Measure of Wage-Earning Potential from BHPS Data, 1991-2004](#)

Harvey Goldstein

['A/AS' Level Examination Data for Advanced Multilevel Modelling, 1994-1997](#)

[Screening and Special Educational Provision in Schools, 1983](#)

[Sample of GCSE Examination Results for Pupils from London Schools, 1990](#)

Jack Goody

[World Ethnographic Atlas, 1967-1971](#)

[Uterine Sibling Groups in Ghana, 1972](#)

[Papers of Sir Jack Goody](#)

Harry Goulbourne

[Living Arrangements, Family Structure and Social Change of Caribbeans in Britain, 1995-1998](#)

David Lockwood

[Affluent Worker in the Class Structure, 1961-1962](#)

Dennis Marsden

[Mothers Alone: Poverty and the Fatherless Family, 1955-1966](#)

[Education and the Working Class: Some General Themes Raised by a Study of 88 Working-Class Children in a Northern Industrial City, 1946-1960](#)

Ray Pahl

[Three Hertfordshire Villages Survey, 1961](#)

[Life Styles and Patterns of Mobility in Hertfordshire Commuter Villages, 1964-1965](#)

[Managers and Their Wives: a Study of Career and Family Relationships in the Middle Class, 1965-1967](#)

[Metropolitan Villages Survey, 1966-1968](#)

[School Leavers Study, 1978](#)

[Creation and Collapse of an Occupational Community, the Case of Sheerness Naval Dockyard, 1950-1980](#)

[17-19 and Unemployed on the Isle of Sheppey, 1980](#)

[Isle of Sheppey Survey, 1981: Divisions of Labour](#)

[Social and Political Implications of Household Work Strategies, 1978-1983](#)

[Employers on the Isle of Sheppey, 1981-1985](#)

[Changing Sociological Construct of the Family, 1930-1986](#)

[Families, Entrepreneurs and Entrepreneurial Values, Britain and Russia, 1915-1991](#)

Raymond T. Smith

[Papers of Raymond T Smith](#)

Paul Thompson

[Family Life and Work Experience Before 1918, 1870-1973](#)

[Pioneers of Social Research, 1996-2018](#)

[Family Life and Work Experience before 1918, Middle and Upper Class Families in the Early 20th Century, 1870-1977](#)

[Black Immigrants to Britain, 1890-1975](#)

[On the Edge of Later Life, 1930-1990](#)

[Growing Up in Stepfamilies, 1958-1990](#)

[Families, Social Mobility and Ageing, an Intergenerational Approach, 1900-1988](#)

[Fishing Community and Industry: East Anglia and North East Scotland, 1870-1950](#)

Peter Townsend

Poverty in the United Kingdom: a Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living, 1967-1969

Family Life of Old People, 1865-1955

Old People in Long-stay Institutions, 1965-1970

Katharine Buildings, 1885-1962

Last Refuge, 1958-1959

Subemployment Study, 1972-1973: Main Household Survey

Subemployment Study, 1972-1973: Follow-Up Survey

Studies of Poverty among the Sub-employed in Three Special Areas, 1968-1969

Papers of the Child Poverty Action Group, 1965-1998

Papers of the Disability Alliance, 1973-1998

Michael Young

Family and Kinship in East London : Bethnal Green Survey, 1954-1955; Children

Family and Kinship in East London : Bethnal Green Survey, 1954-1955; Siblings

Family and Kinship in East London : Bethnal Green Survey, 1954-1955; Subjects

Family, Work and Leisure in the London Region, 1970 : Main Study

Family, Work and Leisure in the London Region, 1970 : Diaries

www.ukdataservice.ac.uk

help@ukdataservice.ac.uk

+44 (0) 1206 872143

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