

# Reflective essay of the family



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Write a short autobiographical piece relating to the theories and concepts discussed in the first half of the course. How might parts of your own or your family's life observe, illuminate or be illuminated by the theories and concepts discussed in weeks 1-5 of the course?

I was born in Italy and resided there till the age of twenty-eight. I lived in a regional town of around forty-thousand inhabitants with limited cultural opportunities. I studied for a baccalaureate in business and entered the working environment as a news cameraman. In Italy, this would be the equivalent of a blue-collar worker. After having been working for ten years I moved to London and commenced employment as a sales and account manager in I. T. This job required intellectual application to office administration and high degrees of interpersonal relations, combined with knowledge of the product and its application within the marketplace. My increased earnings allowed me to purchase a home for the first time. Access to cultural opportunities in London has broadened my knowledge and understanding of the arts. London has allowed me to realise my potential to become a professional and commence this process by undertaking a history degree. My experience of London has been one of inquiry and integration within a tolerant and multicultural environment.

I will now seek to observe and to illuminate by application to my life some of the concepts and theories discussed in the first half of the course.

Conventional wisdom has redefined the social structure of society by cataloguing the population into three classes: the rich, the middle class and the poor. This is very likely to represent the current classification in Italy.

Therefore, the distribution of income is the main factor why classes still exist

through the buying and selling of labour.[1]In Italy, I would have been classified as being a member of the poor class. Italy is characterised by a stark division between highly industrialised districts and underdeveloped areas of peasant farming. However, it is not always the case that farmers are positioned in a lower economic class than those of white-collar workers. For instance, and from my own experience, Italian farmers may be economically better-off than public servants because of the potential to sell their produce in their own shops and to secure a higher income. Accordingly, their economic capital is directly converted in the form of property rights and tangible assets such as houses and cars.[2]By relocating to London my observable classification within a conventional understanding of class remained unchanged because I could only sell my skills and labour.

Now applying Bourdieu's frameworks for class in Italy, I would have been considered as having a low economic capital. However, Bourdieu's concept of cultural and social capitals applied to my employment as a news cameraman demonstrates an enrichment of both those capitals due to the enlargement of my social contacts. It could be claimed that I had found the perfect fit and I was floating like a '*fish in water*': my habitus, made up of layering built up by experiences grounded in my body and mind, had met a social world of which it is the product,[3]therefore, I was experiencing the world pleasantly and I was in my comfort zone.

Being a newcomer in London brought about the experience of a downward shift on all my capitals. Work, education and social networks had to be rebuilt. When someone steps out of the comfort zone it is likely to resemble a '*fish out of water*', a suffused sense of inadequacy.[4]The new

environment has offered me opportunities to improve my education and expand my social contacts. Bourdieu suggests that it is under conditions of *hysteresis* [5]- when you are a fish out of water - that great changes can occur. The hysteresis effect might provide an explanation of how I can make sense of my new environment based on my habitus, and on my capacity to decode parallels between the previous context and the new one.

The seven classes of the Great British Class Survey of 2013 are built upon the development of certain sectors of economic activity, such as the *technical middle class* and the *new affluent workers* .[6]In Italy I would have been included in the *traditional working class* . Using the Survey Calculator twice and ending up in two different classes, it was evident that I provided the same social and cultural capitals and only modified my income. Firstly, when I used to work as an account manager, I was assigned to the group of *Established middle class* , secondly, now that I am a student, I fall within the *Traditional working class* . Mike Savage, one of the promoters and researchers of the survey, in his BBC Radio 4 interview, has stated that the study has moved away from the occupational classes.[7]This would not be the case, in fact as the results of my two surveys demonstrate, it does not take into consideration cultural and social capitals. I also agree with Colin Mills, lecturer in sociology at Nuffield College Oxford, that the nature of the BBC sample is somewhat flawed: the 160. 000 respondents of the online survey are most likely to be more educated and in highly paid jobs, whereas the respondents of the face-to-face research of 1000 people are more varied and allowed to build more classes[8]. It can be claimed that the findings of the BBC survey come from the information provided by the smaller research,

hence the internet survey plays almost no role in defining these categories and the class I fall in.

It can be clearly observed that, by applying class theories to my own life, only one class theory demonstrates any depth of analysis with regards to social and cultural aspects, namely the one developed by Bourdieu. By moving from Italy to London, my class has shifted upwards in all my three capitals.

## References

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[1]<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm#007>[accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2017]

[2]Pierre, Bourdieu, ' The Forms of Capital', in John Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* , (New York, 1986), p. 243

[3]Pierre, Bourdieu and Loïc J. D., Wacquant, ' *An invitation to reflexive sociology* ', (Cambridge, 1992), p. 127

[4]Diane, Reay, Gill, Crozier and John, Clayton, (2010) ' Fitting in or standing out: working-class students in UK higher education', *British Educational Research Journal* 32(1), p. 11

[5]Pierre, Bourdieu, ' *Outline of a theory of practice* ', trans. Richard Nice, (Cambridge, 1977), p. 78

[6]Mike, Savage et al., ' A new model of social class? Findings from the BBC's Great British Class Survey experiment', *Sociology* 47(2), p. 230

[7]<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07gg1kb>

[8] *Ibid.*