

## 4.2

# Different Questions: Different Essays

In many ways a question is an invitation. You are being invited to demonstrate what you know about a topic and how skilful you are at various ways of using social scientific explanations. One way of getting used to understanding the way questions work is to look at the different ways a question can be asked about a particular topic.

Here we provide examples of different questions on a specific topic, and then we give you the opportunity to try it for yourself. The example we choose is body piercing.

- Compare and contrast male and female body piercing in the UK today.
- How far can theories of class be used to explain body piercing?
- 'Body piercing today is just a fashion that will go as quickly as it came.' Evaluate this proposition with reference to contemporary UK society.
- Is there any connection between periods of economic prosperity and recession on the one hand, and the prevalence of body piercing on the other?
- What arguments could be put forward for a minimum age for body piercing? How valid are they?
- Describe and evaluate two theories that account for the phenomenon of body piercing.
- How has body piercing developed in the UK during the 20th and 21st centuries?
- Is body piercing in the contemporary UK a postmodern phenomenon?
- How far can the prevalence or otherwise of body piercing be related to the fashion industry?
- How is 'body piercing' defined in the contemporary UK?
- To what extent can body piercing in the UK today be stratified by age?
- 'Body piercing is merely an aesthetic phenomenon.' Discuss this statement in relation to the contemporary UK.

- 'Body piercing is a risk to one's health, as well as a risk to one's self-image in later life.' Discuss.
- Compare and contrast body piercing in two different societies.
- <http://www.safepiercing.org/> is the website of the Association of Professional Piercers. Does the professionalization of body piercing in the US today mean that having it done is no longer an individual choice?

You get the drift. Combine your topic with almost any concept or idea out of your textbook, and you can find a different way to ask a question. That gives you a good idea of the infinite variety of ways in which people and their societies interact, and also the infinite variety of ways in which you can interrogate the evidence, and the theories that seek to explain that evidence.

Now try it for yourself. Think of a topic that interests you, whether in your course or in your daily life or work. Write it down and then think of a half dozen different questions you could form around the topic, based on your subject background.

If inspiration fails you, try one of these:

- The suburbs
- Laboratory mice
- The Pet Shop Boys
- Urban cycling
- Shopping
- The prevalence of men at high levels of political life
- Why do people keep dangerous pets?
- Gardening
- Transition towns
- Slow food movement
- Peak oil
- Aging populations
- *The X Factor*