

Mass-Observation in the 1990s
Spring Directive 1993

This directive will look a little different to those of you who are veteran Mass-Observers. Please bear with us as we are trying different versions of the Spring Directive. As you write, please include ages and dates when things take place.

It is also very helpful if you would, as you have been doing for some time now, make a note of your sex, age, occupation and town of residence on the top right hand side of your reply together with your M-0 number. Anyone worried about being easily identified should give an unspecific job title (eg health worker in North Yorks village). Remember to disguise names and places if you think anything you write down may be sensitive.

If this directive seems to be a lot of work, remember that you have three months in which to reply, so please don't feel obliged to tackle it immediately or all at once. Feel free to take your time.

Part 1: Growing up

At least one Mass-Observation has already predicted that the Spring Directive will be about youth, and especially because of the recent media coverage: the problems of youth - violence, delinquency, vandalism, truancy, family breakdown, abuse of all kinds. It's hard to escape the public concerns, but do you feel the media present a realistic picture?

In this directive, I want you to put this issue into a more personal context. Think about what it means to grow up in Britain today. What was it like for you? What is it like for children today? How has it changed? What of the future? How do articles in the newspapers or programmes on television relate to your own experience and observations, when you were young, and now? **Special task** during the next week, if you find yourself watching TV, listening to the radio or reading your usual newspaper and the subject of youth and growing up is mentioned, could you please note down your reactions to how the subject is treated?

When you answer this directive, please give your opinions, and your understanding of why things are as they are but please also relate this to your own experience as a child, as a teenager and as an adult, perhaps as a parent or grandparent, and give examples.

Your own childhood: relationships with your parents, other children, other adults in your household or neighbourhood. You might like to write about child-rearing in your family, expressions of love and affection, discipline, table manners, punishment and rewards, rules in the home, standards of behaviour, changes over time, differences between parents or other adults.

What would you say were the major influences on your behaviour as a child? Parents? Brothers and sisters? Friends and school mates? School?
Other influences - television, the cinema?

Were you a "good" child or a "naughty" child? Or neither? Or both? Were you explicitly taught "wrong" and "right"?

Were you, or any member of your family or friendship group, ever involved in any anti-social behaviour or any illegal activities? Can you tell us about it?

For people under 18: please write about your experiences now, the expectations we have of young people, your own views of your upbringing, of other young people, and of the media coverage.

For parents: use the guidelines above to describe the upbringing of your own children. What do you think are the key issues in child-rearing? Was/is there a difference between theory and practice? What did/do you most enjoy about having children? What do/did you least enjoy? What have you found most difficult? Have you ever sought the advice and support of relatives, friends or outside professionals in dealing with problems with your children? Please feel free to write at length.

How much influence do you think parents have in relation to other influences on children and young people?

If you are a grandparent: you may wish to comment on the upbringing of your grandchildren, the differences between them and your children, your own role in their upbringing.

If you don't have children or are not closely related to children, please relate your views to the young people you know, or the parents you know, and give us your observations and conclusions.

Everyone: Do you think there is there a problem of crisis proportions affecting young people in our society? Do you think gender makes a difference? Do you think class makes a difference? Do you think children are in more danger these days? Do you think we are all in more danger from young people these days? If you think there is a crisis, how do you account for it? Where do you think the solution lies?

Part 2: What You Read

Those of you who have been writing for Mass-Observation since before 1987 will have already written something about your reading habits. Part 2 is asking some of the same questions again but in a different way. The answers you give are of interest to Brian Street, David Bloorne and me in our research on writing and reading, and will complement some of the answers you gave to the Education Directive of Spring 1991. The interviews with some of you that David and Brian have done have also prompted this section.

Look around your home today. What sorts of reading matter can you see? Write as full an account as you can about what and where you read and where (and how) you keep what you read.

Part 3: Foreigners

Do you think of the locality you live in as a "community"? What goes to make up a "community" eg neighbours helping each other, people being members of local clubs and associations, just meeting and chatting in the street/at the shops/ at the pub or cafe, lots of people you just nod to on passing? Has it changed since you moved in? For example, is it less or more like a "community"? Why?

Are there any people in the locality where you live that are thought of as "foreigners"? What makes them "foreign"? For example is it length of time they have lived there, accent, appearance, life style? What do people who have moved into your locality have to do to be "accepted"?

This directive is being paid for by Enterprise in Higher Education in order to provide teaching and research materials for University of Sussex courses in Social Anthropology.

Please return your directive (enclosing one of our labels addressed to yourself) to:
The Mass-Observation Archive, Freepost 2112, The Library, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 1ZX

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You should find enclosed a flyer for a new book by Joseph McAleer, a Canadian researcher, who visited the Archive on several occasions and used the early Mass-Observation material in his book. I thought you might like to have information about it in case you wish to buy it, or order it from your library. Unfortunately it does not count as an "M-0" book so we can't offer copies at a reduced price. However, the publishers have made a financial contribution to the mailing of this directive.