

The Mass Observation Project

Winter 2008 Directive

The weeks leading up to the design of this directive have been dominated by two key issues (if you leave aside the Russell Brand/Jonathan Ross affair and the BBC!). I mean of course the financial recession - also known as the credit crunch - and the US elections.

Part 1 relates to how you are experiencing the present financial crisis. Part 2 is about your views and experiences about the rest of the world – poverty abroad, health problems and overseas aid.

As always you must feel free to pick and choose the questions you answer but of course, the more you write and the more detail you give, the more valuable your account will be to people in the future trying to understand what life was like in 2008.

As usual, please start each part of your directive reply on a new sheet of paper with your MO number (NOT name), sex, age, marital status, the town or village where you live and your occupation or former occupation.

Remember not to identify yourself or other people inadvertently within your reply.

Part 1: The world financial crisis

How you are affected

A few weeks ago the Guardian asked 100 people how they were being affected by the financial crisis and I thought it might be useful to ask you some of the same questions:

How do you feel about the present financial crisis?

How worried are you about your job (or the jobs of those near to you)?

If you have a pension, how worried are you about it?

Has the crisis affected your shopping habits? If so, how?

Have you changed your behaviour in any other ways? For example, are your plans for Christmas/New year affected?

If you have a mortgage are you concerned about keeping up payments?

Do you have savings? If so, have you moved them recently?

How impressed are you by Gordon Brown's and Alistair Darling's handling of the crisis?

Who do you feel is most to blame for the crisis (the *Guardian* poll suggests: Thatcher, Brown, Bush, UK Banks, International financial system and "we are all to blame")

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Part 2: Global poverty and health

In this section of the directive, we'd like you to write about poverty and health in other countries and your views on the ways in which we in the UK, as both individuals and within organisations (including the government) offer support.

Your views in general

Most of the questions below are about responding to humanitarian crises in the developing world. However, it would be useful if you could start your reply to this section by saying what your understanding is of the causes of poverty and inequalities throughout the world. What longer term responsibilities do we have as individuals living in the developed world or through our governments for the developing world?

Government overseas aid

During the US election campaigns, candidates from both the major parties referred to overseas aid and the possibility that it can't be as generous because of the financial crisis. For example the new US Vice President, Joe Biden said:

Well, the one thing we might have to slow down is a commitment we made to double foreign assistance. We'll probably have to slow that down.

What do you think? Do you feel that we can tackle poverty in our own communities at the same time as supporting overseas aid or do you feel we should concentrate on problems in the UK? Do you think the UK gives enough aid to developing countries? Do you think that the aid that is given is well spent?

Giving to charities which provide overseas aid – or not?

Do you contribute to any charities that provide overseas aid such as Oxfam or Save the Children? Not everyone feels that giving to charity is worthwhile and many people cannot afford to do so. Please describe your own position on this. If you do contribute, please list and say why you have chosen those charities.

Do you contribute specifically to medical charities (such as the Red Cross)?

Charitable gift tokens

Have you ever given or been given a present in the form of a charity gift token (like an Oxfam voucher for a goat, or a contribution to a school)? What are your views on these tokens?

Travelling abroad

Have you visited any countries where you have seen poverty first hand? Please tell us about those experiences.

When you choose a holiday, does the level of poverty in a country affect your decision? If so, how? What concerns have you about disease in other countries and the health risks to you and your family/friends when you travel abroad?

Working abroad: gap years and other projects

Did you, or anyone you know, have a "Gap year" which involved working to improve working to improve the conditions of people in other countries? Please describe.

Part 2 continued

What do you think about gap years in principle? It is not only young people who work abroad but older people who join with organisations like VSO. What do you think about this as a way of contributing to fighting poverty. Would you do it?

Policies on ethical practices

Are you aware of any policies on overseas aid or ethical trade held by organisations you are connected with (eg your employer, your school or college, your trade union, your religious association or any political groups you belong to). Do you support any such policies?

Information about poverty in other countries

Where do you get most of your information? (eg TV, radio, Internet,) Do you have much direct personal experience, either from your own travelling or from direct contact with people who have come to this country from developing countries?

Health professionals from abroad

Should we in the UK continue to recruit doctors and other health professionals from countries which have very serious health problems?

Part 3: The Ups & Downs of Friendship

Much is written and said about love affairs and marriages when they go wrong but much less on friendship when it turns sour or difficult. In this part of the directive, we would like to hear about your experience of the ups and downs of friendship.

Ideas about friendship

Would you start by talking about how you define a “friend”?

Please clearly state your age at the start of this section as well as your usual other biographical information.

Difficult friendships

Friendships can often face stresses and strains or can be difficult to keep going. Sometimes people fall out and make up regularly, or simply endure relationships out of duty or necessity. We could suggest examples from public life – Gordon Brown and Tony Blair, or John Lennon and Paul McCartney for example had to continue working together even after their friendships became tense. If you follow the friendships of celebrities you might have noticed that they often seem to have lots of ups and downs. Madonna for example seems to have very on-off friendships with women.

Part 3 continued

Have you had any experiences of difficult or up and down friendships in your life? For example, have you ever kept going with friends who you actually find a drain, or who irritate, upset or bore you?

If so can you describe your experiences and why you still maintain these friendships?

When friendship ends

Have you had important friendships where there was a falling out? Can you describe what happened and why?

How did you feel at the time? Or perhaps there was a drifting apart for no very obvious reason.

If so, did you feel regret, relief or simply that this is the natural course for some friendships? Do you think these friendships are permanently lost to you?

Have you changed the way you think about or approach friendship over the years?

Old friends

What about meeting up with friends from the past? Have you re-contacted former friends e.g. through websites like Friends Reunited or Facebook or through school and college reunions?

If you've been through any experiences like this, please tell us about them.

Please post your response to:

**The Mass Observation Archive
FREEPOST BR 2112
The Library
University of Sussex
Brighton BN1 1ZX**

Or by email to: moa@sussex.ac.uk

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