SOCIOLOGY

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Paper 9699/01

Essay

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General comments

The overall level of performance was of a similar standard to that achieved for this paper in other recent exam sessions. A pleasingly high number of candidates demonstrated considerable in-depth knowledge and understanding of the relevant topic areas and were able to offer analysis and evaluation of appropriate sociological explanations and theory. There are still many candidates though who achieve no higher than middling marks largely because they produce answers that score well in terms of knowledge, but which provide the Examiners with little to reward for assessment and evaluation. Answers of this type are primarily descriptive rather than analytical. For candidates in this category, the key requirement in order to gain higher marks is to develop the skills of manipulating and applying their knowledge in a way that provides a reasoned and well-argued response to the issues raised by the specific wording of each question. Much can be achieved in this respect through the practice of essay writing technique, with the candidates encouraged to appreciate the importance of focus and structure in the construction of well organised answers. Teaching candidates to distinguish between descriptive and analytical responses to questions is another way to raise awareness of what is required to secure high marks in the examination for Paper One.

There were no rubric errors and candidates generally seemed to make good use of their time in the examination.

Question 1

This was a popular question that was answered well overall. Moderate answers were confined mainly to a basic descriptive account of the central features of functionalist theory. Some candidates impressed by distinguishing between different strands of functionalist theory, making good use of references to key thinkers such as Durkheim, Malinowski, Parsons, Merton, and Davis and Moore. Good answers included a sustained assessment of the strengths and limitations of the functionalist model of how society works. The assessment was delivered in most cases through contrasting functionalist theory with ideas from other perspectives, chiefly Marxism and interactionism. Some astute candidates also noted relevant similarities between functionalism and some of the other sociological perspectives. Candidates who were able to construct a plausible line of argument in response to the question of whether functionalist theory has more limitations than strengths, generally also demonstrated sufficient depth of understanding to trigger the top mark band. Candidates were often well informed about the limitations of functionalism, but not so clear about the strengths of the theory.

Question 2

Many candidates were clearly well prepared for answering a question about 'sociology as a science'. Their answers generally demonstrated a good understanding of the debates about the status of sociology and the links between the subject and the logic and methods of the natural sciences. To merit the top mark band, however, answers also needed to apply knowledge of the relationship between sociology and science to the specific wording of the question. Many candidates unfortunately failed to go beyond a descriptive account of the general features of the positivist and anti-positivist positions in sociology. A few answers though did impress by being analytical and focusing on the methodological and philosophical implications for sociology of the supposed 'unpredictability' of human behaviour.

Question 3

Weak answers to this question were confined to a few general points about research methods with no clear or accurate linkages to the distinction between quantitative and qualitative approaches. Better answers that merited the middle of the mark range provided a sound run through of the general strengths and limitations of quantitative and qualitative research methods. To gain high marks though the specific issues of objectivity and the usefulness of the data collected needed to be addressed. Some candidates impressed by demonstrating that objectivity can be defined in different ways and pointing out that all research methods can be regarded as problematical in terms of how adequately they guard against the intrusion of bias and subjectivity. Responses that noted the difficulties in defining 'usefulness' in relation to research data also succeeded in identifying a very relevant line of analysis.

Question 4

There were a few poor answers to this question that consisted only of a few disparate points about research methods in general. Better responses explained clearly the links between theoretical perspectives and research methods, with the focus often on the distinction between positivist and interpretivist positions. Contrasting the influence of theory with a discussion of practical and ethical factors that may influence choice of research methods was a common feature of the best answers. Candidates who triggered the top mark band also reached clear and well-supported conclusions about how important theoretical approach is in influencing choice of research methods.

Question 5

Most of the candidates who attempted this question recognised that it offered an opportunity to discuss social mobility and changes in the class structure and cultures of modern societies. Some weaker responses were confined to a general descriptive account of different theories of social class, with little or no attempt to assess the relevance of these theories for understanding societies today. Better answers drew directly on a range of relevant sociological argument and evidence about life chances and changing patterns of social mobility. Some candidates made very good use of the post-modernist critique of traditional sociological perspectives on social class, noting the increasing importance of consumption patterns and the fragmentation of identities in modern industrial societies. The best answers demonstrated a very clear understanding of the social changes that, arguably, have led to a weakening of the importance of social class as a factor influencing the lifestyles and experiences of people today.

Question 6

There were some rather uninspired answers to this question that merely described Marx's theory of class and its relevance for understanding the relative deprivation of the working class. Better answers considered a wider range of explanations for why the wealthy might benefit from the existence of the poor. Contrasting Marxist and Weberian perspectives on the question provided a useful angle, and some candidates also gained credit for introducing the 'culture of poverty' thesis as an alternative to structural accounts of poverty. The best answers also considered in what ways governments might benefit from the existence of poverty and this often involved investigating relevant economic, political and ideological factors. There were a few excellent answers that addressed the issues raised by the question in the context of global poverty and the relations between developed and developing societies.

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General comments

Candidates continue to show improved technique in answering the structured data response questions for this paper. There are now fewer cases of candidates spending too long answering the shorter (a) and (b) questions. Moreover, answers to the (c) and (d) questions are better organised and more detailed than was the case when the paper was first introduced a few years ago. Failure to read the questions carefully remains a weakness with some of the candidates. Too often the Examiners report cases of candidates who have answered a slightly different question to the one set. Candidates exhibiting this problem would clearly benefit from more practice at reading and interpreting exam-style questions prior to the examination.

Teachers should also be advised to remind candidates that some clues to constructing sound answers can be found through a diligent reading of the stimulus data that accompanies each question. For example, in the paper for this exam session the stimulus data for question two informed candidates that content analysis is widely used to investigate media representations. However, some candidates clearly overlooked this 'clue', as they failed to mention media studies when answering **Question 2b** on research topics that might be suitable for investigation using content analysis.

There were no rubric errors and, on the whole, candidates appeared to have no difficulty completing two answers in the specified time.

Question One

(a)   Most candidates demonstrated some understanding of the term 'socially constructed'. However, a lot of answers gained only half marks due to a lack of clarity or precision in explaining the meaning of the term.

(b)   A few candidates wrongly interpreted this question as an opportunity to contrast the experiences of so-called feral children with those of children subject to 'normal' human socialisation. Overall, however, this question was answered very well, with candidates drawing relevant cross-cultural comparisons between the behaviour patterns of infants in different societies.

(c)   Some answers were limited to identifying the general mechanisms of socialisation and this approach merited half marks. Better answers focused on the processes of social learning in infancy specifically the ideas of G.H. Mead was particularly relevant in this context.

(d)   Quite a few answers described the cases of feral children as a way of demonstrating the importance of human socialilsation. Without further development, this type of approach merited no more than half marks. Better answers adopted a more analytical approach and drew on a wider range of sociological sources. Contrasting the functionalist and interactionist views of socialisation proved a popular and effective way of addressing the issues raised by the question. Some candidates also made good use of Wrong's critique of the determinism that characterises much sociological thinking about the processes of socialisation. Post-modernist theory also featured to good effect in a few answers at the top of the mark range.

Question Two

(a) Most of the candidates correctly noted that a case study is an in-depth investigation of a single case or a few selected examples of a social entity.

(b) Good answers described research topics such as investigations into gender stereotyping, racial prejudice, moral panics in the media. Quite a few candidates, however, seemed unsure about what content analysis involves and they lost marks by describing research topics that would be inappropriate for the specified method of research.

(c) There were a few poor answers that described the process of experimentation without making appropriate links to the positivist perspective. Better answers identified several reasons why positivists might favour the use of experiments. Ease of controlling and manipulating variables, ability to identify causation, reliability, and the high status of scientific research, were among the reasons most frequently mentioned in explaining the attractions of experiments for positivists.

(d) Almost all of the candidates demonstrated at least a basic understanding of the strengths and limitations of using official statistics in sociological research. Weaker answers tended to be confined to discussing practical points, such as the cost effectiveness and time saving benefits of official statistics. Better answers contained more theory and good links were often made between the use of official statistics in sociological research and the positivist perspective. At the top of the mark range, the usefulness of official statistics in sociological research was assessed in a sustained manner and candidates offered plausible conclusions on the subject.

Question Three

(a) Most candidates had no difficulty in defining the term 'sexual division of labour'. However, a few candidates confused the term with the notion of sexual equality and the removal of gender segregation in work tasks.

(b) A few candidates wrongly interpreted the question as an opportunity to discuss the reasons why sexual inequality in the workplace still exists. Most answers though rightly focused on describing examples of sexual inequality in the workplace.

(c) Weaker answers described some of the features of sexual inequality in the home and/or the employment sphere, but without analysing the possible links between the position of women in the home and their experiences in paid employment. Better answers used a range of theory and/or research findings to illustrate ways in which sexual inequality in the home may hinder women's advancement in paid employment.

(d) A few weak answers attempted to explain the existence of sexual inequality in paid employment without referring to any particular sociological theories. There were also some candidates who discussed the feminist approach in general rather than identifying the specific contribution of different strands of feminism. Better answers began by outlining the key features of the Marxist feminist approach to explaining sexual inequality in paid employment. This was followed by an assessment of the Marxist feminist perspective that was often delivered through an account of contrasting theories of sexual inequality, including other feminist approaches and the functionalist, post-modern and Weberian explanations.

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General comments

Generally candidates improved on their performance in the first section of the questions in this new format. The candidates answers were more concise and focused on the concepts about which they were being asked. In order to do well a very brief answer to the definition could gain full marks as long as it was accurate. In the section that required two examples, a brief description was required and most candidates did this well with a small number still writing an overlong answer. At the other extreme a few did little more than name the example which could only be awarded 1 mark as a description is required. In order for candidates to do well in this section they must realise that all concepts have a sociological meaning and it is this that they are being examined on not any meaning that may come from general use.

In relation to the questions that ask candidates to give two examples, they should pay particular attention to the form of the question. If the question asks for examples from a specific field such as education then they must do so in order to score well. A number of candidates took examples from other areas of sociology therefore weakening their answers.

Overall candidates who did well displayed a thorough understanding of the concepts and a detailed knowledge of the sociological literature both of theory and empirical data. The lack of knowledge about basic concepts is still a major barrier to success for some candidates. However, a pleasing amount of contemporary evidence was offered in support of answers especially on questions concerning religion. There was a tendency to conflate examples within one description rather than distinguish points clearly.

Use of time appeared to be well planned with very few candidates showing evidence of a final rushed answer.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This question was answered by a small number of candidates.

(a) Most candidates offered clear definitions of kinship relations based on blood, marriage and adoption. A few confused the concept with friendship. Weaker candidates confined their answers to 'blood'. Many concise answers were given based on different kinship relationships such as extended or examples from specific societies. Weaker candidates gave examples of kin and these answers gained less credit.

(b) Few candidates who opted to answer this question had a clear grasp of the possible links between social class and different family structures. Those that did also had alternative links to put forward. Many candidates chose to describe different types of family structures, a few with no reference made to class. Others described the Functionalist theories of 'fit'.

Question 2

This was the most popular question on the paper and there were many excellent answers showing that candidates had a clear understanding of the meaning of the question.

(a)   Most gave accurate descriptions of the meaning of conjugal roles but some candidates failed to mention them in relation to marriage or cohabitation and concentrated on the family, which lost them marks. Most gave accurate sociological descriptions of relevant roles but some answers described family roles of mothers and fathers rather than of the conjugal pair. Some candidates assumed that conjugal meant equal.

(b)   This was a generally well answered question with candidates giving good explanations of how the family may, or may not, oppress weaker members. Most of these were looking at the way in which women were or are treated in families with better answers involving the elderly, children and even some men. There was a tendency to evaluate by juxtaposition rather than give reference to studies of social change and family relationships. Some candidates became tangential in their answer as they opened the debate to discuss the position of women in society which was not a requirement of the question.

Section B

Question 3

Both of the questions on education received a lot of answers and this one was generally well understood.

(a)   The nature of material deprivation as being without some or all of the necessities of life was well understood by most. However a few candidates described cultural deprivation and then went on to give examples of that concept. Examples that were given mostly rested on the lack of equipment and the impact of that on education with use made of the length of time given to education for those materially deprived. Some good answers made use of studies such as that of Douglas in outlining the impact of lack of resources. Some candidates had a tendency to repeat the examples in a slightly different way.

(b)   Most candidates had a firm grasp of how education can act as a form of social control and were able to quote a variety of Functionalist and Marxist views. Better answers well supported their argument with a range of empirical data. Many candidates described a whole range of classical theorist rather than focusing on the key issue of social control. It was also good to see a range of exceptions to the success of education in controlling pupils quoted.

Question 4

This also was a question that many candidates chose to answer.

(a)   Most candidates had a good understanding of gender stereotyping but many linked it to examples rather than the social construction of gender. A number of candidates gave examples that ignored education, which was part of the question. Candidates must take care to read the questions carefully.

(b)   Those candidates who had a clear understanding of the nature of interactionist studies and theories were able to answer this question well. Many, however, chose to list different theories of education and this failed to address the question. Even those who did understand the nature of interactionism frequently did not 'assess the contribution' to our understanding of the ways pupils experience education. Many answers displayed a lack of balance.

Section C

Question 5

Questions on religion were as always popular with this one being the more popular of the two.

(a) Most candidates had a good understanding of social function as an action of an institution of society that aids the society to operate efficiently. A few candidates offered gatherings as examples rather than integration or comfort frequently from theoretical perspectives as the more able candidates did. Most gave appropriate examples and theories.

(b) This question was well answered with candidates giving accurate descriptions both of the way change can be helped or hindered by religion. Most candidates began with a classical view and the better ones then extended their answers to go beyond the work of Weber and the structural theorists to include material from more contemporary examples.

Question 6

A smaller number of candidates selected this answer compared to **Question 5**

(a) Defining new religious movements proved difficult for some candidates although they knew it was connected to religion; they had no clear understanding and included any religious movement. Inappropriate examples such as Protestantism were given as well as Jehovah's Witnesses. However, many did realise the meaning of the concept and gave relevant examples such as the Moonies. Others failed to define the concepts whilst at the same time giving appropriate examples in (ii).

(b) Most candidates who answered this question were able to give an assessment of the role of religious organisations in modern industrial societies and set their answer in the secularisation debate. A few also include the growth of NRMs as an aspect of this debate. The post modern and organisational aspects of the question were largely ignored.

Section D

Question 7

This proved to be a popular question and generally well answered.

(a) Again if the candidate understood the concept the question was well answered and supported by two appropriate examples usually Stan Cohen's Mods and Rockers and Stuart Hall's Policing the Crisis. A few candidates offered loosing morals as a definition and gave inappropriate examples. A few who did understand the concept gave one appropriate example and then one such as the War of the World's.

(b) Again candidates showed that they had a good understanding of the question and although some agreed with the question and justified why crime is a young male working class activity there were many good answers that evaluated this proposition against a range of evidence. There was evidence of a good knowledge of both theory and empirical data that frequently included reference to gender, ethnicity and white collar crime,

Question 8

This question was answered by a significant number of candidates the majority of whom had a clear grasp of the question.

(a) The defining of social order was a task that discriminated between candidates. Most had an understanding of a society that lacked discord but only a few were able to give a sophisticated answer of the meaning of social order. Many examples relied on descriptions of policing but there were also a number of excellent answers that defined social order from theoretical perspectives usually that of Functionalism and Marxism

(b) Nearly all the candidates who selected this question realised that it was from an Interactionist view. A few did not and just listed different theories of crime. Some candidates made no reference to deviance again showing how important it is to read and interpret the question carefully. Some candidatures really excelled on this question giving excellent descriptions and analysis of the Interactionist view and then assessing it against the other theories relating to deviance.

Section E

Question 9

This question was answered by very few candidates.

(a) There were some good definitions of scientific management but many candidates who answered this question defined management as a general term and not the concept which was asked. Candidates who understood the concept gave examples such as that of Taylorism and Ford. Those who did not described management situations.

(b) There were some good answers to this question but a significant number of answers to this section included information that related to the general position of women in society and in particular the family. Although much of this was accurate it was not relevant to this question that asked about the work place specifically. Few answers went beyond traditional feminist accounts.

Question 10

Very few candidates answered this question and most of those who did left the Examiners with the distinct impression that they had not studied this topic.

(a) Virtually no answers to this part of the question knew what the concept meant and they described professions and then gave weak examples to support their answers.

(b) Candidates who answered this question mostly described the process by which identity is formed with little or no reference to employment other than to the economic situation employment puts the individual in.

Section F

Question 11

Questions on the mass media have become increasingly popular and the standard of work submitted for these questions has been improving steadily.

(a) This was a well understood concept from many candidates with some excellent examples that were taken either from a theoretical, manipulative, or practical, gate keeping, view. Both of these were acceptable. Some Examiners noted a lack of understanding amongst the candidates of some Centres, again flagging up the necessity of clear understanding of sociological concepts.

(b) Most of the candidates who answered this question agreed with the proposition and gave contemporary examples to show how this was happening. Few were able to give much theoretical background to this and few candidates showed that it was a possibility that cultures can resist the onslaught of conglomerates.

Question 12

This question was answered by about the same number of candidates as **Question 11** but whereas in 11 part **(a)** was answered rather better than part **(b)** it was the reverse for this question.

(a)   There was a general lack of understanding with the term operational control and it was confused with allocative control, although that term was not used. Once the definition is weak the examples that follow it tend to be the same. The more accurate answers concentrated on the role of editors and journalists in the production of the mass media.

(b)   This essay question was answered well by the majority of the candidates who attempted it. They had a clear knowledge of a range of the theories that account for the relationship between the mass media and the audience and were able to give some analysis of the strength of all or some of these theories. Debates about the extent of 'influence' were generally good but there was less certainty about the extent of the influence on attitudes and behaviour. Many candidates relied solely on the work of Bandura as evidence.