

SOCIOLOGY

Paper 9699/01

Essay

General comments

Many of the candidates achieved a pleasingly high standard of work and the quality of answers overall continues to show gradual improvement. **Questions 1, 3 and 6** proved the most popular by equal measure. While the other questions were less popular, each one still attracted a lot of answers. Some candidates still appear to struggle with the concept of the social construction of childhood. When asked to write on that subject, as in the case of **Question 2** this session, many of the candidates fall back on a rehearsed answer about the process of socialisation in general rather than discussing the historical and cross-cultural evidence that supports the notion that childhood is a socially created phenomenon. Knowledge of the work of historian Philip Aries is particularly helpful in answering questions about the sociology of childhood.

It is still noticeable that some candidates attempt to answer the questions by offering general observations and assertion, rather than by referring to appropriate sociological evidence and theories. It should be emphasised that answers that rely mainly or solely on a somewhat simplistic general knowledge fall some way below the standard required to achieve an A/S pass grade. Knowledge, such as that drawn from subject textbooks for this specification, is one of the key skills that candidates need to demonstrate in order to be successful in the examination. Answers that reveal little or no knowledge of the kind found in the appropriate textbooks will inevitably gain very few marks.

There were a few candidates who answered more than the required two questions, but overall cases of rubric error were rare.

Question 1

Candidates answering this question generally demonstrated a sound understanding of the functionalist theory of social order. Good accounts distinguished between different strands of functionalism and referred to a wide range of relevant concepts, including the notion of value consensus, mechanical/organic solidarity, the organic analogy, system integration and functional prerequisites. To trigger the higher mark bands, however, it was also necessary to assess the functionalist theory. Some candidates made very good use of Marxist theory to highlight limitations in the functionalist accounts of social order. There were a small number of high quality answers that contrasted functionalist theory with a wide range of other sociological theories, including the feminist, interactionist, Marxist and post-modernist perspectives. In an alternative approach, a few candidates used references to appropriate empirical evidence and studies to critically dissect the functionalist theory of social order.

Question 2

Good answers to this question often started with references to the work of Philip Aries and his claim that the social identities associated with childhood vary historically. Some candidates also made good use of references to cross-cultural differences in childhood. Weaker answers mistakenly interpreted the question as an invitation to discuss the importance of socialisation as an influence on human behaviour. While this tangential approach merited some marks, without specific reference to childhood it failed to address the key issues raised by the question. Answers that reached the top band mostly succeeded in discussing the social construction of childhood in terms of historical differences, social class and cultural factors.

Question 3

This was a popular question and most of the answers demonstrated a sound understanding of the differences between the two research methods, questionnaires and participant observation. Weaker answers were confined to a few basic observations about the practical strengths and limitations of using questionnaires in sociological research. Responses that merited marks in the mid-range often featured a sound account of the practical and theoretical strengths and limitations of questionnaires, but with little or no comparative references to participant observation. Better answers had an appropriate analytical focus and responded to the wording of the question specifically. Responses at the higher level generally discussed the strengths and limitations of questionnaires through carefully chosen comparisons with participant observation. Persuasive evaluative conclusions about the relative merits of the two research methods emerged in answers that reached the top of the mark range.

Question 4

Candidates who answered this question were mostly able to identify a range of strengths and limitations associated with the use of official statistics in sociological research. Some answers, however, failed to go further than a discussion of official statistics, and so merited no more than half marks at best. Better answers considered a range of secondary sources, often with references to media content, historical documents, diaries, and pre-existing sociological research. In order to trigger the top mark band, it was necessary to analyse the different sources of secondary data by making reference to the issue of subjectivity in particular. Candidates who drew the positivist and interpretivist perspectives into their answers in relevant ways particularly impressed the Examiners.

Question 5

Weaker answers to this question were often confined to either a simple summary of Weber's view of stratification or else a run through of Marx's theory of social class. Better answers considered the ideas of both thinkers, though in the middle of the mark range the responses were mainly descriptive. Good answers were based around a concerted attempt to analyse how far Weber's view of stratification overcomes the limitations with Marx's theory of social class. Particular credit was awarded to candidates who noted that, alongside the strengths, there are many limitations in Weber's contribution to the study of social stratification. Some candidates chose to illustrate this point by making helpful references to feminist theory and/or the contribution of post-modernist writers.

Question 6

This was a popular question, but unfortunately it attracted a lot of 'general knowledge' type answers based primarily on assertion and generalisations rather than detailed sociological knowledge and understanding of the issues. Better answers often used different strands of feminist theory as a foundation for addressing the concerns raised by the question. An alternative approach seen in a few answers involved summarising the findings from recent sociological studies of sexual inequality. Most of the high quality answers combined feminist theory with empirical evidence to construct persuasive arguments about the extent to which sexual inequality has been eradicated in modern industrial societies. Candidates who questioned the effectiveness of educational reforms in bringing an end to sexual inequality demonstrated particularly good analytical skills.

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Paper 9699/02
Data Response

General comments

There has been a gradual improvement in the overall standard of response for this paper over the last few examination sessions. However, it also remains the case that, with many candidates, the skills of answering structured data response questions are not fully developed and, as a consequence, they struggle to achieve more than middling marks. The view of the examiners is that such candidates could achieve higher marks by reflecting more carefully on the skills and techniques required to answer the different types of question on which Paper 2 is based. For example, more practice in defining terms accurately and concisely would be helpful in terms of helping candidates gain marks for the **(a)** questions. Tighter focus on the wording of the question would be particularly helpful in answering the **(c)** and **(d)** questions. A more analytical and evaluative approach to the **(d)** questions would help candidates to write answers that trigger the top mark band.

Question 2 proved the most popular, though there were also many answers to each of the other questions. There were very few rubric errors. A small number of candidates answered only one of the questions and thereby reduced their chance of achieving a good mark for the paper.

Question 1

- (a)** Most of the candidates demonstrated some knowledge of the term 'researcher bias', though many struggled to provide an accurate definition and so they gained one mark only for a partial understanding of the term. Candidates are encouraged to practice the skill of defining key terms concisely and accurately so as to be better prepared for answering this type of question in the examination.
- (b)** This question was well answered, with the majority of the candidates able to provide a clear account of two problems that a sociologist might face in seeking to interpret objectively the actions of other people. Some answers made little or no reference to the problem of making *objective* interpretations and so were unable to gain full marks.
- (c)** Middle range answers to this question tended to be based on a descriptive account of the main elements of the interpretivist perspective. Better answers were more analytical and made clear distinctions between the nature of the physical world and the characteristics of human behaviour. Focus on the issues of free will and determinism in relation to human behaviour was often a feature of answers that merited high marks.
- (d)** Weaker answers were confined to a few vague remarks about the supposed problems involved in studying human behaviour scientifically. A better type of response that merited the middle of the mark range involved contrasting the positivist and interpretivist positions. To achieve high marks, however, it was necessary to assess the view expressed in the question directly. Candidates who met that requirement demonstrated good knowledge of relevant contributions from the philosophy of science, including the ideas of Kuhn, Popper, Feyerabend, Lakatos, and the realists.

Question 2

- (a)** Most of the candidates who answered this question gained full marks for recognising that a structured interview is a research method based on pre-set questions that are asked in the same order every time. A few candidates defined the term unstructured interviews, rather than structured interviews, and so failed to gain marks for this question.

- (b) Some candidates described the advantages of interviews in general rather than focusing on group interviews, and so they gained no marks for this question. There were quite a few answers that identified one or two relevant advantages of group interviews, but failed to describe how those advantages arise in sufficient detail to gain full marks. However, a lot of the candidates achieved full marks for this question by describing, in adequate detail, two advantages of group interviews.
- (c) Weaker answers to this question were often restricted to a few simple points about the possible problems with research methods that are deemed too formal, and links to feminist theory specifically were non-existent. Better answers made a concerted attempt to explain why feminists are critical of research methods that are constructed in a formal and hierarchical manner. High quality responses also demonstrated a good understanding of how choice of research methods may be influenced by the dominant concerns of feminist theory. References to relevant research studies also often featured in answers that merited the top of the mark range.
- (d) There were some weak answers to this question. These answers were limited to a few simple observations about unstructured interviews with little or no attempt to assess the strengths and limitations of that research method. Better answers that triggered the middle of the mark range identified in a descriptive way several relevant strengths and limitations of unstructured interviews. Answers that reached the top mark band covered a wider range of relevant points, reflecting on both practical and theoretical issues, and including an explicit assessment of the value of unstructured interviews in sociological research. References to relevant research studies helped to illustrate key points and was frequently a feature distinguishing the higher quality response.

Question 3

- (a) Some candidates confused the term 'life chances' with the notion of life expectancy and therefore failed to gain any marks for this question. Good answers noted that life chances refer to the outcomes of the distribution of power in society that shape the opportunities that a person has to realise his or her goals.
- (b) Quite a few answers failed to refer to the problems of measuring social mobility and instead discussed the extent to which social mobility exists in modern industrial societies. Good answers identified problems in measuring social mobility such as the difficulty of locating the social position of many people in terms of occupation and the fact that researchers use different criteria for ranking occupations.
- (c) Weak answers often comprised just a few vague comments asserting that rates of social mobility have an impact on class formation. Better answers explained the links between social mobility and class solidarity/fragmentation. References to the formation and breakdown of class cultures often featured in high quality answers to this question. The Affluent Worker study was used in some answers to provide a useful empirical basis for exploring the issues raised by the question.
- (d) This question was answered well by a high percentage of the candidates. Weak answers were based on assertion rather than using appropriate sociological arguments and evidence. Answers that reached the middle of the mark range were often based on a descriptive account of the meritocracy thesis with little or no assessment of that theory. Better answers questioned the extent to which barriers to upward social mobility have been removed in modern industrial societies. High quality responses featured references to appropriate theories, including the Marxist and feminist perspectives. Candidates who made effective use of post-modernist ideas about class breakdown particularly impressed the examiners.

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Paper 9699/03

Essay 2

General comments

Overall the standard of answers has continued to be maintained. Answers to questions about the mass media are becoming both more popular and displaying a growing amount of accuracy especially in relation to empirical data. It is pleasing to see that many candidates are now using details of their own societies successfully in many answers.

In order to ensure that candidates receive the credit that they are due, some attention should be given to the approach to answers that are given to the first part of questions. In questions requiring definitions it is not necessary to give lengthy answers, and examples are certainly not required as that is a necessary part of the next section, but the definition that is given should be detailed if the full 3 marks are to be gained. Some candidates have a tendency to run their examples together in part a) ii) and if their examples are somewhat similar then it can be difficult for examiners to judge whether there are two separate examples.

The main issue that continues to cause difficulties is that of the lack of understanding of sociological concepts, this was shown in the definitions given, in the extended essay answers and in the tendency to answer a different question rather than answer the one that was asked.

There were few rubric errors this year but a small number of candidates who displayed a sound sociological knowledge for two answers then struggled to produce a convincing answer for their third. However, there is a growing tendency for an increasing number of candidates to display the skills of analysis and evaluation.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This was the most popular of the questions on the family, in fact the most popular question on the paper.

- (a) Some excellent definitions of a household were given with the most successful, clearly outlining what differentiates households from families. On the other hand there were some candidates who described homesteads or defined households as families. The majority of candidates who defined the term correctly then went on to give substantive definitions that ranged from extended and nuclear to more specific examples. Those candidates who failed to define the term accurately either gave weak or inappropriate examples, such as cutlery and teapots, or gave reasons for different households existing rather than describing them. Some candidates gave the cereal packet family as an alternative to the nuclear one. Some reasonable answers failed to gain full marks by not distinguishing clearly between family and household.
- (b) The majority of candidates understood the question and outlined the theory and then offered a range of evidence both to show the enduring popularity of the nuclear family and the full range of diversity to be found. There were many excellent answers, well focused on the question. At the lower end of the mark range answers tended to look at diversity within the family and the changing position of women. However, there were also a number who clearly did not understand the meaning of diversity. A number of candidates are still not following the instruction in the question and are including examples of families like the Nayer, when they are asked about modern industrial society.

Question 2

This question was only answered by a small number of candidates most of whom had a sound understanding of what it was asking for and there were many excellent responses.

- (a) Good understanding of the concept was shown and many candidates described how Ann Oakley had developed the concept. Good examples of the effects of gender socialisation were given that frequently used examples from either family life or education. Some candidates offered overlong examples and went into description of examples; candidates need to be careful to make sure their answers relate directly to the question to make the best use of their time.
- (b) Again this question was answered well with most candidates showing how life had changed for women in modern industrial society as well as noting the limitations of this process. It is good to note that there is a continued good use of feminist work in the answers of many candidates although a few candidates were obviously unclear about the meaning of patriarchy. In terms of examination technique candidates who have an excellent understanding of the issues and a wide range of knowledge need to ensure that they keep the question in mind and not to get distracted into giving lists of their knowledge.

Section B

Question 3

This question was answered by many candidates and those that did had a clear understanding of the question, in particular **part (b)**

- (a) As with many questions, understanding the concept was the key to success. Most candidates did, and those achieved well; those that did not understand the concept did not achieve well, confusing cultural with economic capital. Once that mistake had been made the examples given were frequently inappropriate with many talking about the effects of economic advantage or economic disadvantage on educational outcomes. Many made specific reference to Bourdieu with credit.
- (b) There were some excellent answers to this question about the impact of social class on education that both looked at the way in which meritocracy may have weakened the limitations caused by class and the evidence to show that this argument may be flawed. Some answers that were otherwise excellent missed the opportunity to do even better by failing to at least mention that there may be other influences on achievements like gender and ethnicity. Again in this question some candidates covered an immense amount of material about different factors, including both in and out of school ones, but they would gain greater benefit by being analytical with this material rather than just describing information.

Question 4

From this section this question proved to be popular with candidates.

- (a) Generally this concept was well understood by most, although a few candidates explained that the hidden curriculum was taught. Many examples of the way in which it operates were given but a substantial number of candidates failed to explain how this process can have an outcome on achievements and in this way were unable to gain the highest marks. Some candidates who gave good definitions in i) then went on to give different ones in ii) and thereby gained less marks than they could have.
- (b) Another question in which candidates were able to show a good understanding of the sociological debate and in which they were able to make use of the feminist theories to advantage. A few candidates at the lower end of the mark band explained the advantages of educating girls, which again showed a lack of understanding of the meaning of the question. Much of the information given was of a somewhat dated nature in terms of feminist research.

Section C

Question 5

Few candidates opted to answer this question.

- (a) The concept disenchantment was clearly understood by most of the candidates who answered this question and that enabled them to select two appropriate examples of the process. A small number did not, once again highlighting the major limitation of not understanding concepts; actions such as chants were being described as disenchantment.
- (b) There were some good answers to this question but the concept of religious observance was one which caused some problems to some candidates. Others described the types of observance which takes place but with little or no reference to the marginalised. Some candidates stated that observance was only practised by the marginalised. Most evidence came from observations in society and answers would have benefited from some theoretical input; what was covered tended to be from the classical theorists and answers would have benefited from more up to date material.

Question 6

Of the questions on religion this was the most popular with candidates

- (a) Pluralism was wrongly taken by many to mean many religions existing in the world or belief in many gods; once more this gave rise to weak or inappropriate examples. Other candidates had a good understanding of the plurality of religions in one society and gave accurate descriptions of societies such as the UK and America as their examples.
- (b) The variety of ways in which power can be operationalised were utilised by many candidates in the answering of this question, but in general candidates were more comfortable with the concept of secularisation than in engaging with the issue of power. Good comparisons were made to past societies and to differing evidence within contemporary societies of both traditional and a more developed nature. Once again though, answers would benefit from a more detailed theoretical dimension.

Section D

Question 7

This question proved to be popular with candidates.

- (a) White collar crime was defined well by the vast majority of candidates but many then named white collar criminals in their example rather than giving examples of the crimes. A very small number of candidates wrongly quoted robbery and murder as their examples of white collar crime. In this particular question some candidates gave the examples of corruption as their first example and then went on to describe a situation of corruption as their second but thereby only scoring once.
- (b) There were many excellent answers to this question that looked both at the evidence to support the view that the working class do commit most of the crime in society, as well as the contrary view. Issues such as the unreliability of statistics as well as crime from other groups were included. In this question, as well as in others, more use of empirical data would have been useful and some candidates gave the example of female criminality as evidence that it is not solely a working class phenomenon overlooking female membership of the working class. Examiners noted that in a small number of cases candidates had completed a vast number of pages for this question and then gave a very short third answer. It is always good examination technique to try to split time evenly.

Question 8

As with the previous question this one was answered by many candidates.

- (a) Many very good answers were given to this question that both offered an accurate definition of labelling and then supported that definition with two good examples. The best of these examples were taken from studies such as that by Cohen of the Mods and Rockers. This was not the only way to answer the question but it proved very effective. Others tried to define by example and ended up with a confusing answer.
- (b) Some candidates were able to get to grips with this question and show that they understood the processes that underpin law enforcement. Most looked at the way in which policing can have an impact on the perceived levels of crime. Very few candidates considered how the way in which the law is constructed can influence the appearance of crime and the power that some groups have to do this. Some struggled with the meaning of 'processes'.

Section E

Questions 9 and 10

Very few Centres had prepared candidates for these questions and the few responses that existed were poor, leaving examiners with the impression that many candidates had not studied this topic. **Question 10** showed slightly more knowledge from candidates than **Question 9**.

Section F

Question 11

This question was answered by a number of candidates and most of those who did had a reasonable understanding of its meaning.

- (a) Many candidates had a clear understanding of the meaning of media representation and were then able to define it accurately and support that with two examples. There were a small group of candidates who struggled with the concept and described the media representing everything, those answers tended to name different types of media as their examples.
- (b) This part of the questions resulted in some very weak answers that took the approach of describing in a list like way the sorts of media that exist and the types of people who may use it. There were a small number of excellent examples that evaluated the Pluralist/Marxist debate. In general there was a lack of understanding of the Pluralist view.

Question 12

This question was answered by a small number of candidates but most of those who did had a reasonable understanding of its meaning.

- (a) As with the other questions, requiring definitions that understood the meaning of content analysis was essential to doing well. Many did so, but some answers tried a 'catch all approach' of including all they knew about the types of media that exist in order to answer the question. In those cases the examples were rarely appropriate.
- (b) Candidates showed that they had a good understanding of the hypodermic syringe model and could explain how that is supposed to work well. It was clear that there was a better understanding of the hypodermic syringe model than that of content analysis. Evaluations of the model were weaker but many candidates were able to assess it against a range of other theories.