

MARK SCHEME for the May/June 2011 question paper
for the guidance of teachers

9699 SOCIOLOGY

9699/12

Paper 1 (Essay), maximum raw mark 50

This mark scheme is published as an aid to teachers and candidates, to indicate the requirements of the examination. It shows the basis on which Examiners were instructed to award marks. It does not indicate the details of the discussions that took place at an Examiners' meeting before marking began, which would have considered the acceptability of alternative answers.

Mark schemes must be read in conjunction with the question papers and the report on the examination.

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Section A: The Sociological Perspective

1 “Marxist theory no longer has any relevance for understanding modern industrial societies.” Explain and assess this claim. [25]

- (0–6) A few general points about the characteristics of modern industrial societies today might be worth two or three marks. Higher in the band, answers may demonstrate some limited understanding of Marxist theory, though with no clear links to the question as set.
- (7–12) A basic account of the main features of Marxist theory will feature in this band. At the higher end, this may be supplemented by, for example, references to other theoretical perspectives and/or basic recognition that there are different strands to Marxist theory. The response at this level will be largely or wholly descriptive.
- (13–18) A sound account of Marxist theory will be provided and there will be a basic attempt to assess its relevance for understanding modern societies. The assessment may be developed in various ways including, for example, through consideration of relevant empirical studies and/or references to contrasting theories such as those associated with Weberian, feminist and post-modernist thinkers. Contrasts with functionalist theory may have some value, but this approach is likely to be rather uninspiring in relation to the question. At the higher end of the band, look for developments such as consideration of different strands of Marxist theory and/or some nascent recognition of the complexity of the issues raised by the question.
- (19–25) Answers at this level will demonstrate a good understanding of Marxist theory and make a concerted and well-informed attempt to assess its relevance for understanding modern industrial societies. Within reason, we should not be too prescriptive about how ‘modern societies’ is defined by the candidate, and the analysis need not be confined to Western industrial societies. At the lower end of the band, the assessment may rely heavily on identifying general weaknesses and/or strengths with Marxist theory. Higher in the band, the focus will be on specific points about the relevance of that theory for understanding modern societies, albeit that this may be conveyed through theoretical debates rather than by reference to relevant empirical material.

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2 “The social identities associated with childhood vary historically and are influenced by factors such as social class and ethnicity.” Explain and assess this view. [25]

(0–6) Answers at this level may be confined to a few simple assertions about the nature of childhood. Within that mode of response, any indication that the candidate understands the concept of social identity or the culturally relative nature of childhood experiences, would justify a mark in the top half of the band.

(7–12) Some candidates may respond to the question by discussing the importance of socialisation in the construction of human identities. References to so-called feral children are likely to figure in this type of response. A general discussion of socialisation is not entirely inappropriate in relation to the question, though the relevance is somewhat marginal and so an answer that is based solely on this approach would merit no more than 10 marks. A better answer within this band would demonstrate some awareness that the social identities associated with childhood, to some extent, vary historically and/or across cultures. A few basic references to Aries' work, for example, would be sufficient to reach the top of the band. Likewise, the use of cross-cultural examples of differences in childhood would be a way to demonstrate a basic understanding of the requirements of the question.

(13–18) A sound account of Aries' contribution to the debate about the social construction of childhood, with little or no assessment, would merit the lower part of the band. Similarly, a reasonably detailed description of cross-cultural examples of differences in childhood would be worth up to 15 marks. To reach the top part of the band, however, there needs to be some assessment of the view expressed in the question. This could be in the form of a critique of Aries' work or the evaluation might be developed through identifying a wider range of historical and/or cultural evidence to support the notion that childhood is a social construct. At this level, the assessment will lack subtlety and range.

(19–25) As for the top of the previous band, though the assessment will now be sustained and well directed. Each dimension of the question will be addressed to some extent, so that the candidate discusses not only the historically relative nature of childhood, but also explores the influence of social class and/or ethnicity on childhood identities. While the general line of argument adopted by the candidate may be to support Aries' view that the identities associated with childhood are socially constructed, at the top of the band there should also be awareness of some of the limitations in the evidence and arguments used by Aries and other sociologists who view childhood as a social construct. Appropriate references to socio-biology and/or post-modernist theory might also be used to demonstrate the sophisticated analysis required to trigger the top of the band.

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Section B: Sociological Methods

3 Assess the strengths and limitations of using official statistics in sociological research. [25]

- (0–6) At the lower end of the band, there may be misunderstanding about the nature of official statistics, perhaps confusing this source with primary research using questionnaires and interviews. Higher in the band, answers will contain a few relevant, though poorly-developed points about the strengths and/or limitations of secondary data in general.
- (7–12) Answers at this level will identify some relevant strengths and limitations, but will be lacking in some key respects. For example, the response may be restricted to considering only the practical advantages of using official statistics in sociological research. There will also be little or no evidence of assessment at this level. Answers that are confined to examining the strengths and limitations of just one example of official statistics (for example, suicide statistics or crime rates), can achieve no more than 12 marks.
- (13–18) A wide range of strengths and limitations will be identified, and these will cover (though not necessarily with equal emphasis) both practical and theoretical points. Examples from studies may be used to illustrate key points. At the top of the band, there will be more detailed treatment of relevant theoretical issues (objectivity, validity, reliability) alongside the practical points. The assessment may be mostly implicit, i.e. through juxtaposing points about strengths and limitations. To reach the top of the band, some explicit assessment is required, albeit at a basic level.
- (19–25) As for the previous band, except that now the assessment will be explicit and well informed. Answers may consider other types of secondary data as a way of making relevant comparisons with official statistics. The assessment will demonstrate a good understanding of relevant theoretical issues, alongside practical considerations in using official statistics. This may involve examining how sociologists in different theoretical perspectives utilise secondary data, and official statistics specifically, and perhaps discussion of how official statistics have been employed in particular sociological studies.

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4 “The quality of the evidence produced by longitudinal studies more than compensates for the practical difficulties involved in carrying out this type of research.” Explain and assess this view. [25]

- (0–6) At the lower end of the band, there may be misunderstanding about the nature of longitudinal research, perhaps confusing it with participant observation or the use of historical documents. Higher in the band, answers will demonstrate a basic understanding of the nature of longitudinal studies, but offer very little detail or development that is relevant to the question as set.
- (7–12) At this level, we may expect a basic account of the strengths and limitations of longitudinal studies. The specific wording of the question will be addressed only in passing; we will be offered a descriptive response that focuses on the general features of longitudinal research. Lower in the band, answers will be rather list-like. Answers at the top of the band will include some extension of key points, perhaps through references to actual longitudinal studies and/or links to relevant theoretical perspectives.
- (13–18) There will be a clear and well-informed account of the strengths and limitations of longitudinal studies that covers both theoretical and practical issues, though not necessarily with equal emphasis. At the top of the band, candidates will begin to address the specific wording of the question, though the discussion may be somewhat truncated and elementary. There will be some evidence that the candidate understands the practical difficulties that may compromise the value of longitudinal research, e.g. difficulty in recruiting and maintaining a suitable sample, problems in maintaining continuity in the research team over long periods of time, the expense involved, and the difficulty in maintaining adequate contact with the group when they are not being studied.
- (19–25) At this level, candidates will assess the potential value of longitudinal studies and reach balanced and reasoned conclusions about how far, if at all, it compensates for the practical difficulties involved in undertaking this type of research. Answers at the top of the band will make some incisive points, such as observing that the value of the method may vary to some extent depending on the subject studied, the theoretical perspective adopted, and the relationship with any other methods that may be involved in the study.

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Section C: Social Differentiation and Stratification

5 “There are no longer any clear divisions between the working class and the middle class in modern industrial societies”. Explain and assess this view. [25]

- (0–6) A few general statements about social class with no direct links to the question would fit the lower part of the band. At the top of the band, answers may be confined to a few simple references to changes that have occurred in the class structure since the onset of industrialisation.
- (7–12) At this level, answers will provide a solid descriptive account of one or more relevant debates, e.g. embourgeoisement, proletarianisation, class fragmentation, post-modernist theories of class, etc. Lower in the band, the answers will lack detail and may contain some inaccuracy. Higher in the band, the accounts will be more detailed and possibly include references to some relevant studies.
- (13–18) Answers that cover a good range of relevant debates may feature at this level, though to reach the higher part of the band some appropriate assessment must be offered. The assessment is most likely to take the form of a critique of the embourgeoisement and/or proletarianisation theories, though many other approaches are possible.
- (19–25) As for the previous band, except that the assessment will be more developed and better informed. Answers that stop at 1950s/1960s debates (embourgeoisement, proletarianisation, etc.) would need to be very well done to trigger this level and even then could not reach the top of the band. Some awareness of developments in the class structure in recent decades is essential to reach the top of the band, and this may be achieved, for example, through appropriate references to post-modernist theory and/or references to the decline of employment in the manufacturing sector.

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6 “The inequality experienced by many ethnic minority groups is caused by racial prejudice.” Explain and assess this claim. [25]

- (0–6) At this level, answers may be confined to a few observations about the forms of inequality experienced by many ethnic minority groups. Higher in the band, there may be some simple links to the idea of racial discrimination, though the points made will be based on assertion rather than sociological evidence and reasoning.
- (7–12) Lower in the band, answers may focus mainly on describing the inequality experienced by many ethnic minority groups, though this will be linked in a basic way to a discussion of racial discrimination. Higher in the band, answers may provide a solid account of the part that racial discrimination plays in explaining the inequality experienced by many ethnic minority groups. Alternatively, a more limited discussion of racial discrimination will be combined with a few basic references to other relevant factors that may explain ethnic inequality.
- (13–18) Different explanations of ethnic inequality will be explored at this level, but at the lower end there will be little or no attempt at assessment. One approach would be to focus on the contrast between structural and cultural explanations, though it would also be possible to address the question in less theoretical terms through references to relevant studies of the inequality experienced by ethnic minority groups. Higher in the band, there will be a basic attempt to assess the explanations offered.
- (19–25) As for the previous band, except that the assessment will be more developed and better informed. The limitations of explaining ethnic inequality purely in terms of racial discrimination will be noted, and higher in the band candidates may also assess the strengths and weaknesses of alternative explanations, such as those within the functionalist and Marxist traditions. Appropriate references to post-modernist accounts may also feature in the best answers.