

SOCIOLOGY

Paper 9699/01

Essay

General Comments

The general standard for this paper continues to rise as candidates become more skilled in responding to the analytical requirements of the questions. It is particularly pleasing to note that a higher number of candidates are making good use of references to appropriate sociological studies and theories in their answers. There is also evidence of improved understanding of the post-modernist contribution to Sociology.

Centres seem to prepare candidates very well for the **Section One** and **Two** questions, but answers to the Section Three question are often weak by comparison. The Social Stratification questions attract responses from a lot of candidates who appear to have little or no relevant sociological knowledge and understanding. The answers are often based on assertion and references to personal experience rather than utilising appropriate evidence and theory. Responses of that type invariably fail to achieve marks sufficient to merit a pass grade at AS Level.

There were no rubric errors and most candidates appeared to have little difficulty in completing two answers in the designated time.

Questions

Question 1

Weak answers to this question were often confined to a few general observations about the mechanisms through which socialisation occurs. There were also many candidates who wasted time by describing the cases of so-called feral children, without making clear the relevance of this material for the question set. Better answers outlined the functionalist theory of socialisation and made comparisons with other relevant perspectives. Candidates who contrasted the determinism of structural theories with the greater emphasis on individual meaning and expression in the interactionist tradition, generally achieved high marks. Answers that drew on relevant empirical evidence to illustrate the complex nature of the socialisation process, also merited high marks.

Question 2

A lot of candidates spent rather too long outlining changes that have affected the social position of women in recent times. This left them little or no time to address the key part of the question dealing with the relevance of feminist theory today. Good answers demonstrated a sound understanding of the different strands of feminist theory and the revisions that have been incorporated in the feminist perspective to take account of the changing social position of women. A few candidates impressed with their knowledge of post-modernist feminist theory.

Question 3

This was a popular question and most candidates who answered it demonstrated a sound understanding of the different sources of secondary data. A typical response meriting around half marks described the strengths and limitations of a few sources of secondary data, often with the emphasis placed on official statistics. Such answers tended to lack appropriate references to relevant theoretical issues. Better answers also included a sustained assessment of the usefulness of secondary data in sociological research. References to relevant studies and theoretical perspectives helped to support high quality responses.

Question 4

There were a few weak answers that were confined to some elementary remarks about different research methods, with little or no direct links to the question set. A better response provided several examples of the ways in which the researcher might influence the outcome of a sociological study. To reach the top of the mark range, however, it was also necessary to assess the claim that no matter what research method is used the outcome of the study will be influenced by the researcher. In general, candidates who answered this question could have made more use of references to relevant studies.

Question 5

Weak answers to this question offered only a few commonsense observations about the causes of poverty. Better responses contextualised the question in terms of Oscar Lewis' culture of poverty thesis. To reach the top level of the mark band it was necessary also to consider other explanations of poverty, such as the Marxist and Weberian contributions. There were a few high quality answers that discussed in detail the tension between cultural and structural explanations of poverty and also, in some cases, referred to relevant post-modernist ideas about the nature of poverty today.

Question 6

Some candidates offered a rather general and undifferentiated account of Marxist theory that had only tangential links to the question set. Better answers maintained a clear focus on the usefulness of Marxist theory for understanding class divisions today. Once again, an analytical approach was necessary in order to reach the top of the mark range. Some candidates satisfied these requirements by using post-modernist ideas about class as a counter to the claims of traditional Marxist theory. Candidates who recognised that Marxist theory has passed through various revisions since Marx's time also gained particular credit. Some candidates made good use of empirical evidence to illustrate the nature of class divisions today and how the economic and social conditions of the working class may have changed since the nineteenth century.

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Paper 9699/02
Data Response

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. At the other extreme, however, there continue to be many candidates who appear to enter the exam with little or no knowledge of the relevant subject content. It should be stressed that success in the examination depends highly on the ability of the candidate to demonstrate a sound understanding of appropriate sociological concepts, explanations and theories. Study of the recommended textbooks is a key part of the process through which candidates prepare adequately for meeting the demands of the question paper.

Many answers to the (d) questions are overly descriptive. While some marks are available for these questions for knowledge and understanding, the candidate should concentrate primarily on providing an analytical response where the emphasis is on assessment and evaluation of arguments and issues. Long passages describing relevant studies and theories are unnecessary and consume valuable time that would be better spent answering the question directly.

There were no rubric errors.

Questions

Question 1

- (a) Many candidates achieved full marks by noting that ideology refers to a set or system of beliefs. Some candidates made useful links with the notion of the ruling class maintaining power through promoting ideas that create false consciousness.
- (b) There were many answers about social control in general that failed to make appropriate links to economic factors that might encourage social conformity. Good answers referred to the need to work in order to earn a living in capitalist societies. Some candidates also rightly identified poverty as a significant obstacle to overcome in acquiring the means to oppose the status quo.
- (c) Good answers were often based on a summary of the Marxist and pluralist theories of the role that the State plays in maintaining social order. There were also quite a few answers that gained around half marks for identifying some of the mechanisms through which the State exercises power e.g. police, law courts, military, etc.
- (d) Most candidates were able to demonstrate some relevant knowledge of Marxist and functionalist theory. However, the answers were often very descriptive and so achieved marks no higher than the top of the middle mark band. Good answers made a clear attempt to assess the strengths and limitations of each theory.

Question 2

- (a) Most candidates recognised that qualitative research refers to an in-depth study of people's meanings and understandings that is non-statistical and therefore not capable of generalisation. A few candidates confused qualitative research with quantitative research.

- (b) Some answers discussed sources of researcher bias without making appropriate links to the personal characteristics of the interviewer. Better answers addressed factors such as race, sex, class, body language, and mannerisms, as characteristics of a researcher that might influence the respondent's answers in an in-depth interview.
- (c) Weak answers were confined to a few general remarks about interviews in general. Good answers demonstrated a sound understanding of the nature of in-depth interviews and the advantages that they offer for those who support qualitative research.
- (d) Weaker answers were often confined to a basic account of the strengths and limitations of interviews in general. Better answers focused on in-depth interviews specifically. The highest marks were reserved for candidates who attempted to assess the claim that the limitations of in-depth interviews far outweigh the advantages. Good answers often included references to relevant studies and theoretical perspectives.

Question 3

- (a) Most candidates recognised that life chances refer to the opportunities available to a person to obtain the things that are defined as desirable in society.
- (b) Most candidates were able to identify two powerful groups and describe the source of their power..
- (c) Weak answers were confined to a few general remarks about social class that lacked strong links to the wording of the question. Better answers identified appropriate reasons why the pattern of class relationships tends to repeat itself over time. In that context, there were many useful references to the culture of poverty thesis and the concept of material deprivation.
- (d) There were a lot of middle range answers that provided a sound, but descriptive account of the nature of class divisions today. This type of answer often focused on the embourgeoisement and/or proletarianisation theses. Good answers often demonstrated a sound understanding of the post-modernist view that class differences are largely irrelevant today. To reach the top of the mark range it was necessary to assess this post-modernist claim, though candidates often struggled with this aspect of the question.

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Paper 9699/03

Social Change and Differentiation

General comments

Generally candidates were well prepared and answered three questions of similar length but there were some who managed only a rushed final answer. There were few rubric errors and those that occurred tended to be when candidates answered too few rather than too many questions. Some candidates still offer an overlong answer to part **(a)** as compared to part **(b)**, a number of good candidates still evaluate in part **(a)** which is not a part of that section of the question. A very small number of candidates still run their answers together leaving it to the examiner to judge where the break should be.

It is worth pointing out that there is very little benefit to be gained by including complex diagrams that take the candidate a lot of time to produce. Part **(b)** questions are about developing the debate of the essay and diagrams tend to inhibit this.

Those candidates who understood the nature of the questions and were well prepared with a range of sociological evidence as well as having a good grasp of concepts did well. There were some candidates who were confused by several of the concepts and offered definitions that had no merit. Having a clear grasp of the meaning of the concepts of sociology is an essential part of displaying a sound understanding of the subject.

However, a pleasing number of candidates were able to offer definitions of questions and support their answer with relevant examples to part **(a)** of questions but many would do better with more reference to theory and empirical data in part **(b)** of their answers.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This question was answered by a large number of candidates.

- (a)** There were many sound answers that defined status as the social position within the family and that then went on to give relevant examples such as the head of the family, son, daughter etc. There was some confusion with status within society as opposed to the family as asked by the question as well as muddle between status, structure and role on the part of some candidates. Some candidates defined the family, which gained no credit in this question, and some of these descriptions were very long.
- (b)** There were some very good answers to this part of the question that identified and explained the Marxist view, although very few acknowledged the debate within Marxism as to whether the family is an institution of the state or not. Examiners were able to see a much greater use of feminism in relation to this question. Some candidates confused the question with one that was asking about loss of function or the provision of services by the state or gave a generalised discussion of the role of the family with no specific reference to the state.

Question 2

A very popular question.

- (a) Once again there were a range of sound answers that defined structure in relation to the family and then gave appropriate examples of which nuclear and extended were the most popular. A number of candidates explained in detail how structures were formed. In this question it was noticeable that answers were very long. A small number of candidates described the quality of relationships which was unnecessary. Another small number also tried to answer the question by saying that the structure of the family is the structure of the family which gained no merit.
- (b) A well answered question where candidates explored a wide range of factors that influence the status of marriage. Ease of divorce, changing status of women, remarriage rates and the contradictions of capitalism to name just a few. Others chose to describe the consequences of divorce or loss of function of families. There was a tendency to discuss the reasons for divorce rather than to concentrate on the status of marriage. Many candidates noted the trend to remarry but failed to link this to the status of marriage.

Section B

Question 3

This was a reasonably popular question.

- (a) The key to answering this question well was understanding the nature of the concept. Many candidates did this well supporting their answer with such examples as Bourdon; others did not and explained the concept as lack of culture or even as no culture. Others answered with no reference to education. There was much confusion between cultural and material deprivation.
- (b) This was a well developed answer on the part of the vast majority of candidates who supported the limitations and the exceptions to educational success that ethnicity may have as well as the other influences on educational achievements. As ethnicity was highlighted in the question it should have been evaluated. Weaker candidates tended to concentrate on labelling and made little or no reference to ethnicity, although there are other factors worthy of consideration. As ethnicity was mentioned in the question it had to be included in the answer for candidates to score well. A very small number of candidates confused ethnicity with ethics.

Question 4

A number of candidates answered this question but it was not as popular as **Question 3**.

- (a) Again a good response to this question was shown by a clear understanding of the concept. Many candidates did this well supporting their answer with such examples as Willis's lads and ear oles. Others confused sub-culture with class or gender or described youth rather than candidate subcultures.
- (b) Some candidates interpreted this as a question as one of the power of teachers to decide who goes into which stream and these gained some credit. Other candidates showed how the ruling class control access to education as well as control of the system and the impact of that on less privileged groups. There were some very good feminist interpretations of this question as well as a functionalist critique of these views.

Section C

Question 5

This question was answered by a very small number of candidates.

- (a) Most candidates could define disengagement and give at least one example of the process but there was a suggestion by some that it was the breaking off of an engagement.

- (b) Most of the candidates who answered this question described the religious participation of ethnic minority groups and many candidates who did this saw ethnic groups as one group. Few understood the meaning of cultural defence.

Question 6

This was the more popular of the religion questions.

- (a) There were many good descriptions of the features of a sect and most were supported with at least one relevant example.
- (b) This was identified as a question involving a discussion of secularisation by the vast majority of candidates who then explored a range of theory or evidence to evaluate this view. The work of Marx, Comte, Durkheim and Weber was very well understood as well as more contemporary thinkers such as Martin, Wilson and Bruce. The best candidates chose examples of secularisation (or not) from a wide range of modern industrial societies. A few confused psychological explanations for the continuance of religion with sociological ones.

Section D

Question 7

This question was answered by a reasonably large number of candidates.

- (a) This question gave rise to some variety in the definition of a master status, one that overrides all other status that an individual may have. It was in this question that many candidates showed a complete lack of understanding as they described master status as crime committed by masters or bosses or even as it being white collar crime.
- (b) This question did not result in many very good answers as candidates seem to be limited in the discussion of female crime. Issues such as not being caught or the way in which individuals are dealt with were the main concerns of answers rather than the existence of criminal activity. Even if not charged or caught, criminal activity can still have taken place and prostitution is seen by many candidates as a crime of females that does not involve men. A number of candidates implied that the elderly are born old. However, there were some excellent examples of the whole range of criminal activity.

Question 8

This was the less popular of the questions on crime and deviance.

- (a) Again the key to a successful answer was understanding the question. Most candidates did, giving answers based on Durkheim's normlessness; examples were frequently based on the work of Merton. Once again there was confusion about the nature of the concept and anonymous was offered as a definition. There were some overlong answers to this question.
- (b) Most answers concentrated on the Functionalist view that the question was implying and received credit for this. Those that used the Marxist theories of crime and deviance tended to concentrate on the inevitable in the question and overlooked the necessary in it.

Section E

Question 9

This question was answered by virtually no candidates and those that did left examiners with a clear impression that they had not been prepared for this topic as they could give few examples and relied on unsupported assertion in their answers.

Question 10

A very small number of candidates answered this question.

- (a) Several concise and accurate definitions of alienation were given and most were able to support this with examples. Again this was a question for which a number of candidates did not have the appropriate knowledge as they were defining automation and in several instances aliens.
- (b) The majority of candidates who answered this question gave a basic description of how technology has altered production in the work place. There was some discussion of unemployment but little reference was made to life outside of employment.

Section F

Question 11

Very few candidates answered this question.

- (a) The few candidates who answered this question were able to show how the media can over-exaggerate an incident causing it to happen more. Many quoted Cohen's classic study in support.
- (b) Again the few who answered this question identified the Pluralist implication in the question and evaluated it from the conflict theory perspective.

Question 12

This was the more popular of the questions on the mass media.

- (a) This proved to be an accessible question for most candidates who were able to explain how the media is able, through its images, to change culture and to support their answer with examples.
- (b) Very few good answers were seen to this question. Most candidates agreed, uncritically, with the question and there was an over-reliance on psychological rather than sociological explanations. Better answers acknowledged that there is a debate about the way in which the media may, or may not influence levels of violence in society.