

MARK SCHEME for the October/November 2008 question paper

9699 SOCIOLOGY

9699/02

Paper 2 (Data Response), 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.

All Examiners are instructed that alternative correct answers and unexpected approaches in candidates' scripts must be given marks that fairly reflect the relevant knowledge and skills demonstrated.

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

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- 1 Sociologists who believe that society can be studied in a scientific way are known as positivists. They claim that it is possible to identify external variables determining human behaviour on the basis of which general social laws can be formulated. However, writers in the interpretivist tradition, such as Max Weber, have criticised the positivists for exaggerating the similarities between sociology and the natural sciences. Sociology has not achieved anything like the degree of agreement, certainty or ability to predict of the natural sciences. It cannot, for example, use laboratory experiments in the same way to derive its data. This makes it far harder for sociologists to separate and control variables in order to establish the cause or causes of events.

Positivists generally accept that there are practical difficulties in applying the methods of the natural sciences when studying social behaviour. However, they argue that what sociologists do is, nevertheless, scientific in that sociology constitutes a body of organised knowledge developed through systematic enquiry using techniques that approximate to those of natural science, producing valid data and using methods that are high in reliability.

An altogether different view of science has emerged from what has been termed the 'realist' school. This argues that it is misleading to typify science as being based on experiment and that, outside the laboratory, scientists are faced with as many uncontrollable variables as social scientists. Many explanations in science are based on theory rather than direct observation of the underlying causes of an event. Hence, the realists claim that the differences between sociology and the natural sciences are not as great as the critics of positivism have suggested.

Other writers, such as Kuhn and Lakatos, have pointed out that even in the natural sciences knowledge to some extent is socially constructed. This brings into question therefore the idea that the natural sciences are in some way more objective or value-free than the social sciences.

- (a) In the context of scientific research what is meant by the term *variables*? [2]

Variables are the factors that may influence the outcome of an event or experiment. An answer along these lines would be worth two marks, with one mark for demonstrating partial understanding e.g. 'variables are things that cause other things to happen' or 'variables are the things scientists try to control when setting up an experiment'.

- (b) Describe *two* problems with using laboratory experiments in sociological research. [4]

Reward references to any appropriate practical, theoretical and ethical problems that inhibit the use of laboratory experiments in sociological research. One mark for each problem identified and a further mark for clearly describing each problem.

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(c) Explain what it means to say that knowledge is socially constructed. [8]

- 0–4 Very limited understanding of the question will be a characteristic of answers that fit the lower part of the band. A few limited comments about the ideas of Kuhn, Lakatos or other relevant contributors to the philosophy of science, would be worth 2 or 3 marks. Some very simple attempt to explain the idea of knowledge being socially constructed would reach the top of the band.
- 5–8 At this level the idea of knowledge being socially constructed will be tackled directly, though the explanations offered may be rather basic at the lower end of the band. It is possible to reach the top of the band by outlining relevant contributions to the debate about the status of science e.g. Kuhn, Lakatos, the Realists, Feyerabend, Lynch, post-modernist writers, etc. However, if this approach is adopted there must be an attempt to show in what sense the work of these thinkers highlights the social influences on scientific investigation. In other words, the relevant links to the question set should be made explicit in answers that merit the top of the band.

(d) Assess the interpretivist critique of positivism. [11]

- 0–4 A simple account of positivism with no further development of the answer would merit 3 or 4 marks. Similarly, some oblique reflections on interpretivism with no direct links to the question would fit the upper part of the band.
- 5–8 A basic account of the limitations of positivism from the viewpoint of the interpretivists would trigger the lower part of the band. A more substantial review of the interpretivist critique of positivism would merit higher marks within the band. Answers at this level will be mostly descriptive, though some simple assessment might be expected in answers that reach the top of the band.
- 9–11 Answers at this level will demonstrate a good knowledge of interpretivism and its contrasts with the positivist perspective. There will also be a clear attempt to assess the interpretivist critique. This might take the form, for example, of arguing that interpretivists have exaggerated the differences between the social sciences and the natural sciences, or a defence of positivism could be partly constructed through exploring the ideas of the Realists. Lower in the band the assessment will be limited to a few standard observations, but a more thoughtful and sustained analysis can be expected in answers that merit full marks.

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- 2 Participant observation is a widely used method of sociological research. This approach involves the researcher becoming a part of a group or community in order to study it. Gaining access to the group in order to begin the research can be problematic. Some researchers choose to reveal their identity to some or all of the people they are studying. This is known as *overt* participant observation. In *covert* participant observation, the research is carried out secretly, with the researcher concealing his or her identity from the group.

Once access has been gained, the extent to which the participant observer might influence the group or activity being studied has to be considered. This is particularly a problem with overt participant observation, as people are likely to behave differently if they know they are being observed. But even if the researcher carries out the investigation secretly, the presence of another person may still affect the behaviour of the group.

Participant observation is a good way of studying human behaviour in depth. Interactionists favour this method because they believe that the purpose of research is to get as close as possible to the realities underlying human relationships. However, critics argue that observers run the risk of getting so close to their subjects that they lose objectivity. The validity of the research findings would be undermined in this way. There are also a number of ethical and practical problems associated with participant observation studies.

Widely quoted examples of participant observation studies include the following: Laud Humphrey's study of homosexual behaviour in public toilets, *Tearoom Trade*; Eileen Barker's study of a religious sect, *The Making of a Moonie*; and Erving Goffman's study of a mental institution, *Asylums*.

- (a) What is meant by the term *validity*? [2]

Validity is the term used in sociology to describe data that gives a true measurement or description of what it claims to measure or describe. An accurate answer along these lines would be worth two marks, with one mark for demonstrating partial understanding of the term e.g. 'validity means truthful' or 'validity means the study findings are accurate and correct'.

- (b) Describe *two* problems that an observer may face in gaining access to a group in order to begin the research. [4]

Problems in gaining access might include, for example, being accepted by the group, blending into the group if a covert observer, tracking down and making the initial contact with group members, and for covert observers, explaining your presence in the group without arousing suspicion. One mark for each problem identified and a further mark for describing each example clearly.

- (c) Explain why participant observation is a good way of studying human behaviour in depth. [8]

0–4 A few general observations about the strengths of participant observation, with little or no direct connection to the question set, would be worth 2 or 3 marks. To go higher in the band, there must at least be a simple attempt to explain why participant observation is a good way of studying human behaviour in depth.

5–8 Answers lower in the band may contain some material that is focused on describing the merits of participant observation in general rather than addressing the specific wording of the question. However, to justify this band there must at least be some attempt to explain how sociologists are able to study human behaviour *in depth* by using participant observation. Higher in the band, the explanation will be sustained and well formulated.

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(d) Assess the strengths and limitations of covert participant observation. [11]

0–4 A few general points about the strengths and/or limitations of participant observation in general might be worth 3 or 4 marks. An answer that confuses overt and covert observation throughout can score no more than two marks.

5–8 *Covert* participant observation will provide the main focus of the answer at this level, though some of the strengths and limitations identified may also apply to overt participant observation. Lower in the band answers may be limited in range and/or describe mainly practical pros and cons of covert observation. To go higher, a wider range of relevant points needs to be offered and we might expect some relevant theory to be included in answers that merit the top of the band. Any assessment may be somewhat implicit and/or rather basic at this level.

9–11 A good range of practical, theoretical and possibly ethical issues related to covert participant observation will be covered. There will also be some attempt to evaluate the pros and cons of using this research method. The assessment may be a little pedestrian lower in the band, but it needs to be more developed and subtle to merit an award of full marks.

3 Ascribed status refers to social positions that are fixed through life, as with a caste system. An achieved status is one where individuals take up a social position according to their own talent and ability. Functionalists argue that status in pre-industrial societies is largely ascribed, whereas in industrial societies it is increasingly achieved on the basis of merit. Talent, ability, ambition and hard work are steadily replacing ascribed characteristics as the criteria for determining a person's position in the class system.

If the functionalist view is correct then industrial societies should be characterised by a high level of social mobility as people move up and down the social scale on the basis of their achievements. Many studies of social mobility have been carried out by sociologists in order to determine whether industrial societies are becoming more 'open' in the sense of there being greater equality of opportunity and less inherited privilege.

Taking occupation as the indicator of class, researchers have distinguished between long-range and short-range mobility, and between inter-generational and intra-generational mobility. However, there are various problems associated with using occupation as an indicator of class for the purposes of studying social mobility. It is also problematic that many studies have not included data on women's mobility, and patterns of female mobility tend to be rather different from men's. Likewise, ethnicity has not always been identified by researchers as an independent variable that may affect opportunities for upward social mobility.

(a) What is meant by the term *inter-generational mobility*? [2]

Inter-generational mobility refers to the movement up or down the social scale between generations of the same family. Two marks for an accurate definition along these lines and one mark for demonstrating partial understanding e.g. 'father being a factory worker and son being a clerk' or 'families bettering their social position over time'.

(b) Describe *two ways* in which an individual can achieve upward social mobility. [4]

Ways of achieving upward social mobility include, for example, through marriage, inheritance, winning the lottery, career progression, entrepreneurial activity, etc. One mark for each example identified and one mark for describing each example clearly.

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(c) Explain why using occupation as an indicator of social class may give rise to problems when studying social mobility. [8]

0–4 A few general points about the problems of studying social mobility, with little or no reference to occupation, would be worth up to 2 marks. One or two simple comments about why occupation is problematical as an indicator of social class would justify a mark in the top half of the band.

5–8 A sound account of some of the limitations in measuring social class on the basis of occupation would trigger the lower part of the band. To go higher, the discussion of occupation and social class needs to be linked explicitly to problems that may arise when studying social mobility. For example, researchers may classify occupations differently and so the results of various mobility studies are not strictly comparable. Similarly, a person's occupation does not necessarily say anything about the extent of any investment income they have. Also, the prestige and status associated with particular occupations can vary over time, making it difficult to compare mobility studies from different eras.

(d) Assess the functionalist view that social position is increasingly achieved on the basis of merit in modern industrial societies. [11]

0–4 A few random remarks about social class with little or no clear linkage to the question may be worth 2 or 3 marks. A very simple and possibly flawed attempt to describe the functionalist theory of stratification could trigger the top of the band.

5–8 A basic descriptive account of either the meritocracy thesis or the functionalist theory of stratification would be worth 5 or 6 marks. An answer that links the meritocracy thesis to the broader functionalist view of stratification might merit a mark higher in the band. To reach the top of the band, there will be some attempt to assess the functionalist view (perhaps through juxtaposition with another relevant theory) though the analysis will be rather limited in scope and depth.

9–11 The idea that social position is increasingly achieved on the basis of merit will be explained fully in answers at this level. The notion that there is a meritocracy will be scrutinized and the assessment will possibly rely mainly on references to contrasting perspectives, most likely the Marxian and feminist theories. Good use of empirical evidence to question the notion of a meritocracy might be a feature that would allow full marks to be awarded. Similarly, well informed use of post-modernist ideas about social class would be another way of demonstrating the sophistication required to merit the top of the band.