

MARK SCHEME for the October/November 2012 series

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 should be read in conjunction with the question paper and the Principal Examiner Report for Teachers.

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Section A: The Sociological Perspective

1 "Interpretivists exaggerate the extent to which people are free to negotiate their social roles." Explain and assess this claim. [25]

- (0–6) Answers at this level are likely to be based on a few commonsense observations with little or no sociological backing. A few simple points about social roles may be worth three or four marks. If some limited understanding of the process of socialisation is demonstrated, this may merit the top of the band.
- (7–12) A basic account of the importance of socialisation in human development, with no reference to the interpretivist perspective as such, would fit the lower part of the band. To go higher, some knowledge of the interpretivist perspective on socialisation must be demonstrated, though it is not necessary at this level to refer to the social negotiation of roles specifically. Answers that use the interpretivist perspective to highlight the purported limitations in the functionalist view of socialisation would fit the top of this band. Assessment may be mainly or wholly lacking with answers at this level.
- (13–18) Answers at this level will include direct reference to the interpretivist notion that people are free to negotiate their social roles. Lower in the band, the discussion of the interpretivist perspective may lack subtlety and be rather narrow in the range of ideas/thinkers. Higher in the band, a wider range of material on the interpretivist perspective will be covered and some answers may distinguish between different strands of interpretivism (symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, ethnomethodology). To reach the top half of the band, there must also be an assessment of the extent to which people are free to negotiate their social roles. However, the assessment may lack depth at this level and is likely to be confined to a juxtaposition of different strands of determinist and voluntarist thinking in sociological accounts of the dynamics of human behaviour.
- (19–25) Answers at this level will provide a good account of the interpretivist perspective on socialisation and social interaction. The idea that people are free to negotiate their social roles will be fully explained. There will also be a sustained and well-informed assessment of the claim on which the question is based. Lower in the band, the assessment may still rely mainly on juxtaposition of contrasting sociological theories; for example, structural versus action theories of human behaviour. To go higher in the band, there must also be a more direct analysis of the extent to which interpretivists are justified in claiming that people are free to negotiate their social roles. The analysis may take the form of, for example, arguing that the interpretivist position (in relation to some interpretivist thinkers, at least) is not as 'voluntarist' as it might seem or as it has been characterised by some opponents. Another line of attack would be to stage a defence of a more determinist view of the influences on human behaviour, perhaps by referring to arguments from the structuralist perspective (including the ideas of Levi Strauss and Chomsky) or by noting relevant contributions from socio-biology. Post-modernist ideas might also be used to support (or possibly to refine) the overall tenor of the interpretivist perspective.

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2 Assess the evidence that the behaviour patterns associated with childhood are socially constructed. [25]

- (0–6) Answers at this level may be confined to a few simple assertions about the nature of childhood. Within that mode of limited response, were there any indications that the candidate understands the concept of social identity or the culturally relative nature of childhood experiences, a mark in the top half of the band would be justified.
- (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 answer. A general discussion of socialisation is not entirely inappropriate in relation to the question, though the relevance is somewhat marginal and so a response 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. There may be little or no attempt at assessment at this level.
- (13–18) Answers at this level will demonstrate a clear understanding of the requirements of the question in terms of discussing the socially constructed nature of childhood. A sound descriptive account of Aries' contribution to the debate, with no further development, would merit the lower part of the band. Alternatively, a description of some cross-cultural examples of differences in childhood would also trigger the lower part of the band. Higher in the band, a range of material will be used to show that the behaviour patterns associated with childhood may be socially constructed. This might include references to the contribution of different thinkers on the subject (Aries, Postman) and/or a range of relevant empirical material from historical and cross-cultural studies. To reach the top part of the band, there must also be some assessment of the arguments/evidence for deeming childhood socially constructed. However, the assessment may lack depth at this level and may tend towards assuming that the material presented in the answer self-evidently supports the idea that childhood is a socially constructed reality.
- (19–25) Answers at this level will show a good understanding of a range of arguments and evidence supporting the view that childhood is a social construction. There will also be a sustained and well-informed assessment of that view. Evidence of ethnic, class or gender based differences in childhood identities may be used alongside material from appropriate historical studies to advance the discussion in high quality answers. Lower in the band, the assessment may rely on using a range of additional evidence to support the line taken by Aries that the identities associated with childhood are socially constructed. Higher in the band, however, we should expect to see some willingness of the candidate to engage critically with the evidence used to support the idea that childhood is a socially construction. For example, the limitations in Aries' historical analysis might be noted and evidence from socio-biology might be used to suggest that the extent to which childhood is a socially constructed reality may have been exaggerated in the work of some sociologists. Post-modernist critique of the concept of 'social construction' might also be used to good effect in more sophisticated answers to this question.

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Section B: Sociological Methods

3 "Questionnaires have limited use in sociological research because the data they produce lacks depth." Explain and assess this view. [25]

- (0–6) A few vague comments about the nature of sociological research may be worth three or four marks. Answers that are confined to defining or providing examples of what questionnaires involve would fit the top half of the band.
- (7–12) Answers at this level will demonstrate a basic understanding of the strengths and limitations of using questionnaires in sociological research. Lower in the band, answers may be confined to a few broadly accurate observations about why the data produced using questionnaires lacks depth. To go higher, a wider range of strengths and limitations needs to be considered, though not necessarily with equal emphasis between the strengths and the limitations. The focus may be more on practical strengths and limitations in this band, with knowledge of theoretical issues proving somewhat lacking. There may be little or no attempt to assess the view expressed in the question at this level.
- (13–18) Within this band, the view expressed in the question will be explained fully, possibly by referring (implicitly or explicitly) to the interpretivist critique of quantitative data and the use of questionnaires in sociological research. A range of strengths and limitations of questionnaires will be discussed accurately and this will include some treatment of relevant theoretical issues. Higher in the band, there will also be an attempt to assess the overall value of questionnaires in sociological research. However, the assessment may lack depth at this level and is likely to be confined mainly to a simple juxtaposition of strengths and limitations or juxtaposition of different theoretical perspectives (positivist versus interpretivist).
- (19–25) Answers at this level will offer a full and well-informed account of why the data collected using questionnaires might be considered inferior to the insights provided by participant observation studies. The assessment will cover a range of strengths and limitations of each research method (questionnaires and participant observation) and will demonstrate a sound understanding of the theoretical issues involved. There will also be an attempt to reach an overall conclusion in response to the question and the extent to which this is developed may be the main discriminator between scripts within the top band. Answers that reach the top of the band are likely to question what is meant by the term 'limited' in relation to different types of sociological data and more generally raise questions about the basis on which research methods can be ranked against each other in terms of usefulness or degree of insight produced.

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4 "Non-participant observation has many more strengths and fewer limitations than participant observation." Explain and assess this claim. [27]

- (0–6) Answers at this level may be characterised by a few elementary comments about observation studies in general. Mention of a couple of relevant strengths and/or limitations of observation as a form of research would justify a mark at the top of the band.
- (7–12) Lower in the band, some relevant strengths and/or limitations of non-participant observation will be described, though the account may be limited to practical issues only. Higher in the band, a wider range of strengths and limitations of non-participant observation will be outlined, though the discussion may lack depth and any treatment of theory will be very basic. Answers at this level may be mainly or wholly descriptive.
- (13–18) Answers at this level will provide a sound account of the strengths and limitations of non-participant observation, covering both practical and theoretical issues. Lower in the band, the treatment of theory may be less well developed than the treatment of practical issues. Higher in the band, there will be a more accurate and detailed consideration of some of the theoretical issues concerning the use of non-participant observation in sociological research. To reach the top half of the band, there must also be some assessment of the view on which the question is based. However, the assessment may lack depth at this level and is likely to be confined to a simple juxtaposition of the strengths and limitations of non-participant observation and participant observation.
- (19–27) At this level answers will provide a good account of the practical and theoretical strengths and limitations of non-participant observation. There will also be a sustained and well-informed assessment of the value of non-participant observation relative to participant observation. Lower in the band, the assessment is likely to rely mainly on the juxtaposition of accounts of the two types of observation. Higher in the band, the assessment will also include a more direct response to the claim that non-participant observation has more strengths and fewer limitations than participant observation. This might include, for example, a discussion of research aims and values, reflections on the relationship between the researcher and the respondent, and issues of what constitutes good sociological research. Reward candidates who use references to relevant studies to show the type of context in which non-participant observation might be a particularly appropriate choice of research method.

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Section C: Social Differentiation and Stratification

5 "Barriers to upward social mobility have virtually disappeared in modern industrial societies today." Explain and assess this claim. [24]

- (0–6) A few assertions about social mobility broadly directed towards the question might be worth two or three marks. A basic attempt to explain the concept of social mobility would go higher in the band. Some broadly sociological observations about social class unrelated to the issue of social mobility would also trigger the top part of the band.
- (7–12) Lower in the band answers may be confined to a basic account of the meritocracy thesis or the functionalist perspective on social stratification. A basic account of the meritocracy thesis that also acknowledges some of the arguments and/or evidence that may be advanced against that theory, would trigger the top part of the band. Alternatively, a general run through of theories of social class, without any clear links to the issue of social mobility, could be rewarded with up to 10 marks. Some discussion of social mobility tacked on to an answer that relies mainly on a descriptive account of different theories of social stratification, would warrant a mark higher in the band. Answers at this level are likely to be mainly or wholly descriptive.
- (13–18) Answers that merit this band will focus directly on social mobility and the extent to which barriers to upward mobility have been removed in modern industrial societies. A sound account of the meritocracy thesis with some basic acknowledgement of its possible limitations would fit the lower part of the band. A sustained review of evidence from social mobility studies is likely to trigger the top half of the band. Higher in the band, there will also be some attempt to assess how far barriers to social mobility have been lowered or removed in modern industrial societies. However, the assessment at this level may lack depth and any conclusions reached are likely to over-simplify the issues.
- (19–24) Answers at this level will provide a good account of relevant theoretical and/or empirical material on the subjects of social mobility and social closure. The sociological thinking behind the idea that barriers to social mobility have largely been removed will be explained accurately. There will also be a sustained and well informed attempt to assess the view expressed in the question. Lower in the band, the assessment may rely mainly on the juxtaposition of different theoretical perspectives or different research findings on the subject of social mobility. To go higher in the band, however, the assessment must also include some more independent analysis of the issues raised by the question. Candidates at this level will avoid drawing simple, over-arching conclusions about the degree of 'openness' in the social structures of modern industrial societies and will add appropriate caveats, such as the point that opportunities for short-range upward mobility today may be far greater than opportunities for long-range mobility.

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6 "Racial discrimination can be explained entirely in terms of economic factors." Explain and assess this view. [25]

- (0–6) A few simple observations about the nature of racial discrimination may be worth three or four marks. A few assertions about the causes of racial discrimination, with only weak sociological insight, could reach the top of the band.
- (7–12) Answers at this level will provide a basic account of one or more relevant explanations of racial discrimination. Explanations may cover, for example, cultural/historical factors, the structure of the labour market, Marxist analysis, the impact of nationalism, and the various debates about the existence of an underclass. Lower in the band, answers may be limited to describing a single explanation or theory of racial discrimination, with no clear reference to economic factors. Higher in the band, more than one explanation will be offered and there will be some awareness (possibly implicit) of the role of economic factors in helping to explain racial discrimination.
- (13–18) To reach this band, there must be some direct reference to the importance of economic factors in explaining racial discrimination. Lower in the band, responses are likely to be confined to sound account of one explanation of racial discrimination that focuses on economic factors. Higher in the band, a wider range of explanations (structural and/or cultural) will be considered and there will also be an attempt to assess the view on which the question is based. However, the assessment at this level may lack depth and is likely to be confined to a simple juxtaposition of contrasting explanations of racial discrimination.
- (19–25) Answers at this level will demonstrate good knowledge of a range of explanations of racial discrimination, including one or more explanation that is couched in terms of economic factors. There will also be a sustained and well-informed assessment of the importance of economic factors in explaining racial discrimination. Lower in the band, the assessment is likely to focus on the strengths and limitations of particular explanations of racial discrimination. Higher in the band, there may also be some discussion of the overall value of structural (economic) versus cultural explanations of racial discrimination, with strengths and limitations in both approaches noted. The assessment may be supported by references to relevant studies and research findings. Sophistication in the assessment may also be demonstrated through using post-modernist theories to highlight the limitations in earlier sociological accounts of racial discrimination.