

SOCIOLOGY

Paper 9699/01

Essay

General comments

There are many very good candidates who appear to appreciate fully the requirements for achieving success in this paper. Their answers draw on a wide range of relevant sociological evidence and theory and they are particularly skilled in identifying and responding to the analytical issues that underpin each question. There are also a lot of candidates who achieve well at a slightly lower level by offering answers that, while they contain a lot of relevant material, are mainly descriptive. To gain higher marks, this type of candidate needs to adopt a more analytical approach and concentrate on developing the skills of assessment and evaluation.

There are still some candidates who achieve very few marks because they rely on assertion and accounts of personal experience to answer the questions. It should be emphasised that it is only by using appropriate sociological evidence and theory that candidates can hope to gain marks sufficient to merit an AS Level pass. In this respect, it is particularly important that candidates have access to the recommended textbook for the syllabus, *Sociology Explained*, which is published by Cambridge University Press.

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

Questions

Section A

Question 1

Candidates who recognised that the question provided an invitation to discuss Marxist theory generally achieved good marks. There were some weak answers that were confined to a few oblique remarks about the nature of social order in general. Better answers demonstrated an understanding of one or more appropriate theories of social order. Good answers were based on a sound account of Marxist theory with a sustained assessment of its strengths and limitations as a contribution to understanding the nature of social order. The best responses usually included references to different strands of Marxist theory, including, for example, the contributions of Althusser and Gramsci.

Question 2

There were some weak answers that were confined to a few simple observations about interactionist theory. Candidates who provided a fuller account of interactionist theory gained more marks. Particular credit was awarded for discussing the contributions of different thinkers and schools within the interactionist tradition. Good answers went beyond a purely descriptive summary of interactionism to provide an assessment of the usefulness of the theory for understanding modern societies. There were some excellent answers that focused on the transition from modern to post-modern societies, noting that interactionist theory may have more relevance for understanding post-modern society.

Section B

Question 3

A few candidates unfortunately confused qualitative methods with quantitative methods. There were a lot of middling answers that provided a sound descriptive account of different qualitative research methods without addressing the issue of subjectivity specifically. Better answers demonstrated a good understanding of the specific features of qualitative methods and offered an assessment of the claim that such methods are too subjective to produce useful sociological research. Some candidates rightly noted that subjectivity in some respects may be viewed as a strength of the interpretivist approach rather than a limitation.

Question 4

A standard response focused on outlining the features of the positivist and anti-positivist perspectives as a way of illustrating the influence of theory on the choice of sociological research methods. Better answers also described a range of other factors that may affect choice of research methods. The best answers offered a well-informed analysis of the importance of ethical, practical and theoretical factors in the decisions that lead to the selection of particular research methods. There were a few very weak answers that merely described the strengths and limitations of different research methods without any attempt to link the material to the question as set.

Section C

Question 5

There were quite a few weak answers that relied on assertion and references to personal experience rather than drawing on relevant sociological evidence and theory. Some candidates couched their answers in terms of the distinction between ascribed and achieved status, while others offered a critical assessment of the meritocracy thesis. Better answers ranged more widely by considering the influence of class, gender and ethnicity in influencing life chances in modern societies. The best answers comprised a mix of appropriate sociological evidence, theory and assessment of the issues raised by the question. Candidates gained particular credit for appropriate use of post-modernist theory as a rejoinder to more traditional sociological perspectives on the significance of social inequality and class divisions.

Question 6

Weak answers generally were limited to a few simple points about the distribution of power in modern societies with no reference to the concept of a ruling class specifically. A middling type of answer identified a few relevant features of Marxist theory as a way of explaining the notion that power may be monopolised by a ruling class. Better responses moved beyond a descriptive account of the Marxist theory of power to consider other accounts of where power lies in modern societies. Some candidates made good use of relevant empirical evidence in discussing the distribution of power in particular societies. Other equally good answers relied more on an assessment of the main sociological theories of power, including sustained references to the Marxist, pluralist and elite theory perspectives.

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Paper 9699/02
Data Response

General comments

The general standard for this paper continues to rise as candidates become more skilled at answering structured data response questions. It is particularly pleasing to note that candidates are now generally avoiding the mistake of writing over-long answers to the (a) and (b) parts of each question. Most of the time in the examination should be allocated to answering the more demanding (c) and (d) questions. Candidates also appear to be paying more attention to the key command words - 'describe', 'explain', 'assess' - in each question and responding appropriately in their answers to the specified directive.

Centres seem to prepare candidates very well for Questions one and two, but answers to Question three are often weak by comparison. Question three attracts 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

- (a) Good answers noted that a peer group is composed of individuals of similar age and/or the same social status. There were some weaker responses that gained half of the marks for identifying some general features of a social group rather than referring to peer groups specifically.
- (b) The term sanctions was misunderstood by some candidates who saw it as including rewards as well as punishments. References to rewards as a way of deterring deviant behaviour gained no marks.
- (c) There were a lot of answers that gained around half of the marks by describing the stages of primary and secondary socialisation in relation to the development of the social identities of children. Better answers focused on the specific ways that children learn to interact with other people during infancy. Well chosen references to the work of Mead, Cooley, Piaget, and Oakley featured in the best responses.
- (d) This question was well answered by most of the candidates. A good descriptive account of structural (functionalist, Marxist) theories of socialisation gained a few marks. A better response often featured a discussion of the relative merits of the structural and interactionist perspectives on the construction of social identities. Wrong's argument about the over-deterministic aspect of many sociological theories was a strong point in many of the best answers to this question.

Question 2

- (a) Most candidates achieved full marks for this question. There were a few responses that confused validity with reliability.
- (b) Some candidates clearly failed to understand the term 'ethical problems' and they responded to the question inappropriately by describing general limitations of observational studies. Good answers described ethical problems such as invasion of privacy, lack of consent in covert observation, and the possible adverse psychological impact on the study group.

- (c) There were a few weak answers that were confined to some simple comments about participant observation unrelated to the specific wording of the question. Better answers discussed a range of factors that may influence the choice of research method with particular reference to the decision about whether to adopt a covert or overt approach in participant observation.
- (d) Quite a few candidates misunderstood the term 'non-participant observation'. Some confused the term with quantitative research methods, such as questionnaires and structured interviews. Others wrongly assumed that non-participant observation refers to *overt* observational studies. Good answers demonstrated a sound understanding of the different contexts in which non-participant observation studies are carried out. Candidates gained particular credit for using examples of relevant studies to illustrate their answers.

Question 3

- (a) A lot of candidates failed to gain marks because they defined *intragenerational* mobility rather than *intergenerational* mobility.
- (b) Most candidates were able to identify two reasons why sociologists are interested in studying social mobility, but many failed to describe these reasons with sufficient clarity to gain full marks.
- (c) Some candidates clearly had no knowledge of the appropriate textbook material for answering this question. Good answers discussed a range of problems that have been identified with studies of social mobility, such as the issues raised by using occupation as an indicator of social class and the relative lack of data on women's mobility.
- (d) Weaker answers were confined to a few general observations about the nature of class divisions in contemporary societies. Better answers focused on evidence from social mobility studies as a way of discussing the extent to which class divisions are breaking down. Some candidates made particularly good use of post-modernist theory to provide a critical angle on the issues raised by the question.

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Paper 9699/03

Social Change and Differentiation

General comments

In the scripts this year there was an overall improvement in the way in which concepts and the accurate use of empirical data was applied. The range of answers remains wide but more candidates are showing a greater understanding and evaluation that goes beyond juxtaposition. Although not answered by a large number of candidates it was pleasing to note that the quality of answers to **Section F**, the mass media, showed a greater understanding of the topic. There was also a greater use of contemporary material especially in relation to feminism. Some candidates who clearly had a good level of sociological knowledge had difficulties in applying it to the question as set and produced 'all I know' type answers.

In many cases candidates would benefit by writing shorter part **(a)** answers that are more relevant to the question. Some candidates seem determined to let the Examiner know how much they have learnt and although that may be an understandable feeling, good examination technique is about selecting the relevant information from all that a candidate knows and organising it in such a way as to answer the question set.

There was a small increase in the number of rubric errors and most of those candidates who did make errors answered one question from each section or both questions from three sections. However, most candidates answered three questions of an equal length with few showing signs of answering a final rushed question. More sophisticated candidates answered part **(a)** questions in a focused and brief way giving themselves time to develop a balanced and detailed answer to part **(b)** but many are still offering two parts of equal length or even a longer part **(a)** in spite of the mark allocation. **Section E**, work and leisure, remains unpopular.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This proved to be the most popular question on the paper.

- (a)** Most candidates understood the meaning of matrifocal families and gave a partial or detailed definition. The best answers then offered two accurate examples e.g. New World Black family and the Nayer, many good answers pointed out that men are not totally absent from these families and included reference to passing partners and brothers. Others gave more generic examples or reasons for their existence such as caused by death. A very small number of candidates defined patriarchal and not matrifocal families or defined matrifocal families but gave no examples.
- (b)** Most candidates showed a good understanding of the question and kept the focus of their answer on nuclear families in contemporary societies. It was disappointing that many candidates devoted time to describing the Nayer in detail as an example of an exception in contemporary societies, especially in view of the fact that many had not given them as an example in **(a)**. Some candidates are still using the research of Laslett and Anderson as if they are contemporary sociologists, in many cases over one or two sides. Others misinterpreted the question as one of the debate about fit, the superiority of the nuclear family or took the opportunity to list the functions of the family. Many candidates who offered an otherwise good answer wasted a lot of time explaining what families were like preindustrialisation.

Question 2

Only a small number of candidates opted to answer this question and those that did tended to either offer a very weak answer to the question or produce an excellent one.

- (a) Many candidates were unclear about the meaning of both status and elderly. This clearly weakened their answers, which tended to look at how the status has either improved or fallen. The idea of age as a social construct was almost entirely absent. The best answers showed how both of these changes can have happened and set the context of their answer in contemporary societies.
- (b) Although many candidates showed that they had a good understanding of the changing patterns of divorce on contemporary societies and could explain why this had happened, few could link these changes to the 'increasing unpopularity of marriage'. The best answers identified the functionalist reference in the question and then were able to fit their knowledge to a debate based on that perspective.

Section B

Question 3

This was a very popular question to which a full range of responses was offered.

- (a) Answers to this part of the question were generally good with some outstanding ones. Most candidates selected Functionalism or Marxism and accurately outlined some or all of the perspectives interpretation of the role of education. A lot of good candidates were able pick out specific writers such as Durkheim, Davis and Moore, Althusser and Bowles and Gintis. Some candidates described the views of two Functionalist writers as if they were two different theories. Some candidates wrote far too much on this question.
- (b) Some of the answers to this question displayed a very advanced knowledge of feminism and many went beyond the work of Stanworth and Ferguson and drew on more recent research. This is an improvement over previous years. In some answers there was a concentration on the work of feminists rather than the advancement their studies have made to the sociology of education. Few candidates assessed the value of feminism against other theories and studies of education.

Question 4

A number of candidates selected this question but it was not as popular as the first education question.

- (a) In this part of the question it was essential that the candidate understood the meaning of the concept of peer group. Many did but there were a substantial number who did not. Even amongst candidates that did understand the meaning of the concept there were few sound examples of peer group offered, such as Willis's lads, as many offered common sense examples. A few candidates offered examples of candidate-teacher relations.
- (b) This part of the question offered fewer problems to candidates who were able to explore the meritocratic debate usually by juxtaposing Marxism and Functionalism. However, there was a tendency to dismiss the meritocratic argument uncritically. Many candidates were also able to explore a wide range of research that went beyond social class to also explore issues of ethnicity and gender. Again the understanding of concepts was necessary to being able to answer this question as a small number of candidates confused meritocracy with mediocre.

Section C

Question 5

This was a popular question answered by many candidates, unfortunately a number applied information relevant to social order to part (a) and that of social change to part (b).

- (a) There were many answers that clearly outlined how religion may influence change and then supported their work with reference to the work of Weber and then gave specific examples such as Dr Martin Luther King, Poland and liberation theology. A small number of candidates also misunderstood the question and described how religion can change an individual's life; others described the benefits of religion.

- (b) Most candidates wrote clearly about the way in which the sociological theories of religion can prevent societies from experiencing the extremes of social change. This was usually from a Functionalist or Marxist perspective but a few, usually very good answers, also described feminist theories. Candidates who understood this topic well then went on to describe the weaknesses and limitations to be found in these points of view.

Question 6

This question was answered by a limited number of candidates.

- (a) Once again the key to doing well in this question was understanding the meaning of denomination. Some candidates appeared to want a question about sects. Many candidates accurately described the features of a denomination and then named examples. Others gave a definition but struggled to give examples naming either churches or sects. Some weaker candidates confused the concept of a denomination with dominating society.
- (b) Most candidates showed that they were very familiar with the concept of secularisation and were able to outline the arguments both for and against it. Some opted to ignore fundamentalism completely. However, those candidates who did understand both concepts were able to write thoughtful and accurate sociology that made reference to many societies.

It was disappointing to read many answers where the candidates quite clearly did not know what fundamentalism meant and described why the fundamentals of religion brought good to society.

Section D

Question 7

This question was a popular choice with many candidates.

- (a) Once more the key to a good answer was having a sound grasp of the concept of societal reaction. Many did not and described labelling without mentioning the reaction of society in that process. This gained some credit but the more accurate answer picked up on reaction, possibly using the work of Lemert and primary and secondary deviance, and then gave two clear examples.
- (b) Although many candidates picked up on the Functionalist implication in the question there was a tendency to be uncritical and to outline their understanding of crime in relation to social solidarity (many candidates did not seem to recognise this). Very few candidates then criticised this view with a range of other theories but confined themselves to a Marxist critique that saw solidarity being maintained for different reasons. There was very little distinction made between crime and deviance.

Question 8

This question proved to be the least popular of the questions in this section.

- (a) Many candidates explained why young men commit so much crime, which was not what the question was asking. Better answers described the type or amount of crime that young men commit or how the amount and type can change. The consideration of 'patterns' was largely ignored.
- (b) There were some excellent answers to this question that looked at ideological domination and the range of Marxist theories and then balanced that against other theories of crime. These were relatively few in number as many confined themselves to Marxism.

Section E

Question 9

Very few candidates answered this question. Of those that did few had a sound understanding of the meaning of the question.

- (a) Most candidates that answered this question had some ideas how different groups of people have different types of employment. Some went off the question by making reference to different life chances brought about by education or the lack of it.
- (b) A very small number of candidates had a very thorough understanding of the nature of bureaucratic organisations and wrote accurate answers, most of these concentrated on Weber, but there were also answers that were able to quote more recent developments. Others offered answers that contained very little reference to the question.

Question 10

As with **Question 9** very few candidates answered this question. Of those that did few had a sound understanding of the meaning of the question.

- (a) Answers to this question tended to refer to employment and how that could change rather than the problems in measuring it.
- (b) Virtually no answers to this question gave any indication that the candidate had any understanding of the meaning of alienation. There were a very few that answered the question set most of those that did use Blauner's four dimensions of alienation.

Section F

Question 11

This question was answered by a number of candidates and the overall understanding of the mass media is showing a pleasing improvement.

- (a) Although some candidates described the way in which the media impacts on audiences the majority were able to offer media representations of powerless groups. Some gave excellent examples of such representations amongst such groups as the disabled and the young as either patronising or demoralising. There was a need to include more on the process, in some answers, with more on factors like agenda setting.
- (b) The range of answers to this question was vast. At the lower end of the mark band candidates had no idea that the reference in the question was a Marxist one and no understanding of the meaning of ideological domination. At the other extreme there were accurate analysis and evaluation of several Marxist views set against those of others like the Pluralists. Greater use of empirical evidence would have been of use in answering this question.

Question 12

This question was answered by a number of candidates and as with **Question 11** the overall understanding of the mass media is showing a pleasing improvement.

- (a) Generally this was a well-understood question with the process clearly described and two appropriate examples offered frequently that of Cohen's Folk Devils and Moral Panics.
- (b) With this part of the question there were a wide range of responses. At the lower end of the mark bands answers concentrated on an uncritical acceptance of the question frequently quoting examples of violent television which has supposedly caused copy cat behaviour. Many candidates were quoting from psychological and not sociological evidence. Other more sophisticated answers interrogated the complexity of the question in terms of the effects of the mass media and other factors that may result in violence. Candidates displayed a greater knowledge of the influence of the media but were less sure of its impact on behaviour.