

SOCIOLOGY

Paper 9699/01

Essay

General Comments

The overall standard of the scripts for Paper One continues to improve. It is particularly rewarding to note that increasingly candidates are making good use of references to relevant sociological studies and theorists in their answers. The Examiners are reporting fewer cases of poor quality answers that rely on assertion and general knowledge only. Knowledge and understanding of sociological concepts, evidence, issues and theories was demonstrated well in the majority of the scripts this session. A lot of answers though are still rather too descriptive to merit high marks. While a few candidates demonstrate very good skills in assessment and evaluation, the majority would benefit from more coaching and practice in this important aspect of exam technique.

Some candidates also need to pay more attention to the wording of the questions. There were quite a few examples again this session of candidates seemingly answering the questions they hoped to be asked rather than addressing the questions actually set. For example, quite a few candidates seemed to be primed for a question on socialisation and they subsequently tried to make their rehearsed answer on that topic fit question two. The outcome was that those candidates provided somewhat tangential answers to the question. More effort was required in order to fit the learnt material on the topic of socialisation to the specific issues raised by the question.

There were very few cases of rubric error. The number of candidates answering more than the required two questions has declined significantly over the last few exam sessions and that is a very welcome development.

Questions

Question 1

There were a few weak answers to this question that focused on discussing the influence of socialisation on human behaviour, with no direct links to the question as set. Better answers provided an accurate account of the debates between positivists and interpretivists about the scientific status of sociology. To reach the top of the mark range, however, candidates also need to discuss explicitly what features of human behaviour might make it difficult, or even inappropriate, to study social interaction using the methods and procedures of the natural sciences. That requirement gave rise, in the higher quality answers, to some interesting discussion about the extent to which human behaviour is measurable and predictable and the philosophical issues in the debate between voluntarism and determinism also often featured in answers at this level.

Question 2

Some weaker answers were confined to a simple account of the process of socialisation. A slightly better response went further by attempting to demonstrate why socialisation is important in shaping human behaviour. However, to gain higher marks the answers needed to focus on the social construction of childhood identities specifically. Candidates who achieved this often drew heavily on the work of Philip Aries. In some cases, good use was also made of references to cross-cultural differences in the treatment of children by adults. High quality responses included an assessment of the extent to which the identities associated with childhood are socially constructed. The assessment was delivered in some cases through a critique of Aries' work and/or by drawing on findings from socio-biologists that claim to identify similarities in the behaviour of children across different cultures.

Question 3

A few candidates confused qualitative with quantitative methods. Some answers focused on the debates between positivists and interpretivists about the nature of sociological investigation. While that approach gained some credit, on its own it was rather too abstract and theoretical to achieve high marks. Better answers combined a discussion of broader theoretical issues affecting choice of research methods with a review of the strengths and limitations of specific quantitative methods, such as questionnaires and structured interviews. Some candidates made good use of examples from studies where quantitative methods had been deployed. High quality responses also included an explicit assessment of the *usefulness* of quantitative methods in sociological research.

Question 4

This was a popular question and in almost all cases was answered in a way that demonstrated sound understanding of the main features of participant observation. The distinction between covert and overt participant observation was also well understood. Some answers were limited to a rather simple account of the strengths and limitations of the covert approach, often with the focus mainly on practical issues. Better answers addressed a wider range of practical, theoretical and ethical concerns, and this was often delivered through useful references to particular participant observation studies. At the top of the mark range, answers included an explicit assessment of the relative merits of covert and overt observation.

Question 5

Some of the answers to this question concentrated on evidence and debates about social mobility, with the specific links to the question left rather vague. Such responses gained some credit but were too tangential to achieve high marks. Some answers provided an overview of the nature of class divisions in general today and this approach was rather too broad to trigger the higher mark bands. Better answers focused on the debates about embourgeoisement and/or proletarianisation. Candidates who brought the discussion up-to-date by considering the affect of recent changes in society on the status and position of the affluent working class gained particular credit. That was often achieved by referring to post-modernist contributions and/or by considering recent studies designed to re-visit Goldthorpe and Lockwood's classic Affluent Worker study.

Question 6

This was the least popular question. Weak answers relied mainly on assertion and general knowledge in discussing the supposed causes of ethnic inequality. Some poor quality answers also achieved little more than a basic description of certain features of ethnic inequality in employment. Better answers included a sound account of the Marxist perspective on ethnic inequality and made links to paid employment specifically. To achieve high marks, it was also necessary to contrast the Marxist accounts with other perspectives, such as the functionalist, Weberian and post-modernist approaches. High quality answers evaluated explicitly the strengths and limitations of Marxist explanations of ethnic inequality in employment.

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Paper 9699/02

Data Response

General Comments

The overall standard of the scripts was similar to the last two exam sessions. The answers were evenly distributed across the three questions and there were few cases of rubric error. Some candidates continue to answer three questions rather than the specified two questions, and it is likely that they harm their chances of success in the exam by spreading their effort too thinly in this way. It would be better to concentrate on answering two questions well rather than answering a third question on the off-chance that in this way a higher overall mark might be achieved.

Some candidates are still spending too long in answering the shorter (a) and (b) questions. In some of the scripts the answers to these questions are longer than the answers to the (c) and (d) questions. That is an example of poor use of time by the candidates concerned. Each **Questions (a)** requires only a single sentence response, or two sentences at most. Each **Question (b)** can be answered well in a short paragraph. Yet some candidates write up to two sides of text in answer to each of the (a) and (b) questions, thereby leaving an inadequate amount of time to answer the more demanding (c) and (d) questions. Better preparation of the candidates in terms of exam technique would help avoid this error in the allocation of time between the different questions for this paper.

Questions

Question 1

- (a) Many candidates correctly noted that ideology refers to a set or system of ideas. Some gained full marks by defining the term through reference to the Marxist notion of an idea system that supports the power of the ruling class. Answers credited with one mark only often included reference to 'ideas' or 'beliefs' as a defining feature of ideology, but failed to note the group or collective aspect of ideology. A few candidates confused ideology with idealism.
- (b) Good answers identified two distinct reasons why School candidates conform to their expected roles. Some answers were restricted to just two marks because they focused only on the influence of socialisation as a factor encouraging conformity. Better answers often includes examples of sanctions and/or rewards that might be used to encourage conformity among School candidates.
- (c) There were quite a few weak answers to this question that were limited to a few simple points about the importance of socialisation in shaping human behaviour. Better answers addressed the question by focusing on reasons for non-conformity, such as under-socialisation, material deprivation, the existence of sub-cultures, anomie and political divisions.
- (d) This question was well answered overall, with most candidates demonstrating at least a basic understanding of the functionalist theory. Good answers considered different strands of functionalism through, for examples, references to the concepts of value consensus, system integration, mechanical and organic solidarity, and the collective conscience. An assessment of the functionalist theory was a requirement to gain marks at the top of the range. Some candidates provided this assessment through questioning some of the philosophical assumptions in functionalism, such as the emphasis given to determinism and the focus on grand theory and macro analysis. Other answers provided an assessment by juxtaposing functionalism with other sociological perspectives such as the Marxist and the interpretivist theories.

Question 2

- (a) A few candidates confused 'reliability' with 'validity'. Some also wrongly defined reliability as referring to research data that is accurate or trustworthy. A few mentioned that reliability refers to research methods that can be replicated readily, but they failed to develop the answer further and so gained only one mark. Candidates who noted that reliability refers to research studies that can be replicated and produce the same or similar results, gained both marks.
- (b) A few candidates confused sampling with research methods such as questionnaires and interviews and so gained no marks. Quite a few answers identified two sampling methods without describing what each entails; two marks were awarded that type of response. Random sampling and snowball sampling were the two most frequently quoted sampling methods.
- (c) There were quite a few tangential answers to this question where the candidate focused rather widely on the problems a sociologist might face in making his or her research study representative. Better answers concentrated on the problems in gaining a representative sample, such difficulties in identifying an appropriate sample frame and then accessing the right people for the sample.
- (d) Most candidates demonstrated at least a basic understanding of what is involved in carrying out longitudinal surveys. A few candidates confused longitudinal surveys with participant observation studies. Good answers assessed the strengths and limitations of longitudinal surveys in terms of both practical and theoretical issues. Some candidates almost impressed the Examiners by demonstrating knowledge of particular studies based on longitudinal surveys.

Question 3

- (a) There were quite a few answers that gained only mark because they defined sexual division of labour in a rather general way as relating to genderised differences in social roles. Better answers demonstrating awareness that the concept refers to structured differences in *work* roles specifically.
- (b) Weaker answers often discussed generally the inequality that women may face in the workplace without relating their points specifically to similarities with the position women may occupy within the domestic sphere. Good answers noted, for example, similarities between the tasks women typically perform in the home and the type of work they are likely to undertake in paid employment outside the home.
- (c) There were some poor answers to this question that relied on ill-informed assertion about the impact of biological differences on the ability of women to compete effectively with men in the workplace. Good answers referred to appropriate sociological evidence and theories to explain why women often still earn less than men in paid employment. For example, some candidates made effective use of the dual labour market theory and concepts associated with feminist theory such as patriarchy and sexual stereotyping.
- (d) A surprisingly high proportion of the answers to this question demonstrated little or no understanding of Marxist feminist explanations of sexual inequality in the workplace. Some fairly weak answers were limited to a general account of Marx's concept of class exploitation linked to a few general observations about the inequalities that women typically face in paid employment. Better answers were based on a sound account of Marxist feminist ideas, including references to Engel's analysis of the links between private property and the exploitation of females, the reserve army of labour, and the significance of the divide between the private and public spheres. Answers that reach the top of the mark range included a clear assessment of the strengths and/or limitations of the Marxist feminist perspective on sexual inequality in the workplace.

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Paper 9699/03

Essay 2

General comments

The standard of answers continues to be maintained and this session more candidates submitted responses that display sociological knowledge. Most candidates selected their answers from the first four sections of the examination paper and the mass media with just a few opting to answer questions on work and leisure.

Candidates would be well advised to take care with their answers to the first part of each question in order to gain most credit. In answers requiring definitions it is not necessary to give lengthy answers and examples are certainly not required as that is a necessary part of **section (a)(ii)** however, the definition that is given should be detailed if the full 3 marks are to be gained. A few candidates give appropriate examples in a i) and then fail to offer them in a ii) where the marks are available. Some candidates have a tendency to run their examples together in **part (a)(ii)** and if these are somewhat similar then that can be difficult for examiners to judge and award marks.

A continuing cause of difficulty to many candidates is the lack of understanding of sociological concepts, this was shown in both the definitions and in the extended essays. Some candidates continue to offer a generalised answer to the question rather than the one that was set. Candidates would be advised to spend no more than 15-20 minutes on **section (a)** in order to leave time to plan and develop an essay.

In order to improve marks, candidates must make sure that they spend at least some part of the answer directly answering the central issue that has been outlined in the question as well as looking at contextual issues.

There were a very small number of rubric errors in this examination but some candidates who displayed a sound sociological knowledge for two answers then struggled to produce a convincing answer for their third. However, there is a growing tendency for an increasing number of candidates to display the skills of analysis and evaluation.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

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

- (a) (i) There were many accurate definitions of family based on kinship, obligations and family relationships. A lot of candidates relied on Murdock's definition of a nuclear family exclusively. A small number of candidates defined households.
- (ii) Most candidates gave two appropriate examples such as nuclear, extended, reconstituted etc. A few candidates gave three or more examples, in doing so they spent far too long on this section of the paper to the detriment of the rest of their paper.
- (b) This question was answered with a full range of responses that concentrated on the functions of the family and the possible loss of function. At the lower end of the mark range answers agreed with the proposition and gave a Functionalist support of the answer and some ignored the 'modern industrial society' in the question. Fuller responses were able to reassess this view. Some candidates confused function with different family structures others developed answers that concentrated on the state's social policies.

Question 2

This question was answered by a small number of candidates but those who did had a very good understanding of the question.

- (a) (i) All candidates understood childhood as a period of time when socialisation occurs but only those who linked this to the concept of social construction in some way achieved the 3 marks. Some candidates referred to Aries and his research but surprisingly few made comparisons between the past and the present.
- (ii) Most gave acceptable examples frequently contrasting childhood in a western society compared to another type. Many gave specific examples such as childhood amongst the Ite or another named society.
- (b) Most candidates were well aware of the requirements of this question and outlined the Functionalist view of the family as caring for the needs of its members and then compared this to a variety of other views that covered women, children and in some answers certain men. There was excellent use of feminism by many candidates. A few candidates read into the question an inference that was not there and answered a question asking how the family protects its members from society. Answers would have benefited by being more specific in their references.

Section B

Question 3

Many candidates answered this question and it resulted in a range of responses.

- (a) (i) Most candidates gave sound definitions showing that different candidates have different opportunities in education based on their social group. Many candidates named the social group and although this frequently made their definition clear it was not a necessary part of the answer and had to be repeated in the next section to gain the marks.
- (ii) Most candidates gave good examples based on ethnicity and gender; some did little more than name them for one mark where others ended up with descriptions of mini essay length. Although these answers gained full marks they had usually done this part the way through and again it was an example of poor allocation of time. Many candidates who did not gain full marks on the first part of the question did so on the examples.
- (b) Most candidates had a good understanding of the meaning of meritocracy but a number answered from a common sense view with little or no sociological evidence. Many did not go beyond a simple Functionalist view and again had no depth to their understanding. Others not only had a firm grasp of Functionalism and the key thinkers but also a range of theories and empirical data that challenges this view. In some answers there was too much descriptive detail of the British educational system which added little of credit to the answer.

Question 4

This question proved to be equally as popular as the other education question on this paper. It was generally well understood by most candidates.

- (a) (i) Excellent definitions of subculture were given by most candidates, some however, described culture rather than subculture.
- (ii) Candidates who gave examples of candidate subcultures generally did well. There were many instances where Willis was quoted with his 'ear'oles' and 'lads' as well as Woods typology. Some candidates gave examples of subcultures rather than candidate subculture.
- (b) This was a question that most candidates answered really well. They were not only able to outline the effects of classroom activities on candidate behaviour but they also gave an account of the influences outside education that impact on educational achievement. There were some excellent evaluations of the studies that were used. A few candidates only considered the impact of in School factors and did not make any reference to the out of School factors on education.

Section C

Question 5

In general fewer candidates answered questions on religion in this examination and the division between the questions was about equal.

- (a) (i) Defining religious organisations proved to be challenging for a number of candidates but there were some very good definitions of structures that exist to support religious communities,
- (ii) Most gave excellent descriptions of church denomination or sect. A few candidates described a church in terms of a building rather than giving a sociological definition and some named Christianity and Islam or other belief systems as their examples.
- (b) Good answers were ones that fully understood the meaning of the question. These focused on organisations and the way in which they may or may not be losing influence around the world. This was correctly set within the framework of the secularisation debate but some candidates just looked at secularisation in a general way. In order to reach the higher mark bands the central theme of the question must be addressed directly and then other surrounding issues can be developed. A small number of candidates took a moralistic view of the question rather than a sociological one to the detriment of their answer.

Question 6

This proved to be the slightly less popular question from the religion section

- (a) (i) Understanding the meaning of the concept was of course crucial to the question but a substantial number of candidates did not. Although their answers contained some reference to culture they gave descriptions of defending culture rather than as a means of coping with hostile pressures.
- (ii) If the concept had been understood then appropriate examples such as religious dress codes were given. If not then inappropriate answers were given.
- (b) There were a number of excellent answers that explored both the Functionalist and other views of the long term prospects for religion. Many of these were well supported by examples that reflect the religious diversity to be found worldwide. A number of candidates only considered the Functionalist view and this limited their answer to the lower bands.

Section D

Question 7

As usual this section proved popular with candidates of whom a number selected this question. As a question in the section on crime and deviance that should have been the major part of the answer but many only considered the mass media and no other influences on crime levels.

- (a) (i) Most candidates offered accurate and substantial definition of the term but there were a disappointing number who described the feeling of panic brought on by stressful situations.
- (ii) The problem outlined in i) carried into this answer. Those who had understood the term gave good examples such as Cohen's Mods and Rockers, those who did not offered non sociological answers.
- (b) As outlined in the introduction a number of candidates interpreted this as a question about the mass media. Although it was entirely appropriate to include evidence about that there are other influences on levels of crime supported by a number of key thinkers and these needed to be developed as well in order to gain high marks.

Question 8

A question that was well answered by the majority of candidates who selected it.

- (a) (i) Most candidates understood the meaning of the term and described it well but some of those who did understand its meaning did not get full marks because although they stated that deviancy increased they failed to explain that the process of media attention being brought to certain acts can then result in intensified police activity which increases levels of deviance.
- (ii) Most candidates who answered this question well did so by quoting empirical data such as that of Cohen or Young. This contrasted with those candidates who tried to do so by explaining trends in crime rates and they struggled to produce a convincing answer.
- (b) This question was answered with a degree of sophistication by a large number of candidates who not only outlined the strengths and limitations of the Interactionist approach to crime and deviance but then went on to contrast this with a number of other theoretical standpoints. There was a lot of evaluative consideration in a great number of answers. Some candidates answers were assertive and contained very little sociological evidence.

Section E

Question 9

Few candidates chose to answer this question and although there were some who had been prepared on the necessary materials there were a number who offered purely commonsense answers with no sociological detail.

- (a) (i) Most candidates were able to define this well as the service sector.
- (ii) Some candidates gave good examples of employment changes that have occurred in modern industrial societies that frequently made use of changes relating to gender, age or type of work undertaken.
- (b) Even those candidates who made no use of sociological material were able to make some reasonable points about the nature of employment. There were others who were able to show much more development and to widen the debate beyond gender to include other factors such as ethnicity.

Question 10

This question was answered by very few candidates.

- (a) (i) Again those candidates who understood the concept were able to define it well.
- (ii) Good examples included status and income. Weaker responses gave examples that were not related to work.
- (b) Most answers to this question were non sociological and Examiners were left with the impression that candidates had not studied the appropriate material and had little or no understanding of the meaning of professionalisation..

Section F

Question 11

This question resulted in a wide range of responses from candidates.

- (a) (i) Hegemony was a concept that was well understood by the vast majority of candidates although not many drew attention to domination via consent.
- (ii) Good use was made of such processes as agenda setting and the social position of journalists.

- (b) Although there were a few answers in which candidates struggled to get to grips with the question most were able to debate the strengths and weaknesses of the pluralist inclusive stance against a range of other theories.

Question 12

Of the questions on the mass media this one was answered by more candidates than the first.

- (a) (i) The hypodermic syringe model was well understood by nearly all candidates but not many noted the one way process with the audience helplessly absorbing the message from the media.
- (ii) Most gave appropriate examples of the way in which researches find difficulties in studying audiences. Others gave problems of research in general rather than when researching audiences and this caused many to gain no marks.
- (b) Most answers to this question were very good showing a good understanding of cultural effects studies as well as a range of other studies, A few candidates seemed to be confused about the nature of cultural effects rather than basing their answers on the effects of culture.