SOCIOLOGY

| Paper 9699/01 |
| Essay |

General comments

Overall, there was a very high standard of responses to the questions for this paper. At the highest level, there were several examples of candidates demonstrating an extraordinarily detailed and mature understanding of the relevant subject matter. There were many more candidates who were able to show a very good knowledge of the appropriate sociological material, without quite having the incisive analytical skills to trigger the very top marks. There were fewer examples of very weak answers this session. It was pleasing to note that a high number of the candidates made good use of relevant examples from sociological studies to illustrate their answers.

There were relatively few cases of rubric error. Some candidates mistakenly seemed to think that they were required to answer two questions from each of two sections of the Paper. There were also a few candidates who answered only one question.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1

Most candidates correctly recognised that this question provided an opportunity to discuss issues surrounding the debate between structural and social action theories of society. Weak responses tended to be confined to a few general observations about the process of socialisation. A slightly better response involved describing the main features of the functionalist theory of socialisation. Better answers compared functionalism with other structural theories and also examined contrasts with one or more social action perspectives. Some candidates made good use of post-modernist contributions to the debate about the role of society in shaping human behaviour.

Question 2

Some answers to this question focused rather too much on describing the differences between quantitative and qualitative research methods. It would have been more appropriate to consider the wider theoretical issues surrounding the debate between positivists and interactionists over the status of sociology in relation to science. Good answers provided an accurate summary of the positivist perspective and followed this with an assessment of the strengths and limitations of that view of the relationship between sociological research and scientific enquiry. Impressively, some candidates also considered different views of science, with useful references to thinkers such as Popper, Kuhn, Lynch and the Realists.

Question 3

There were quite a few answers that were rather tangential to issues raised by the question. For example, candidates wrote about the factors that influence choice of research method. While this approach incorporated material of some relevance to the question, it was a somewhat indirect and ultimately unsatisfactory way of assessing the role that values play in sociological research. There were also a lot of answers that simply described the strengths and limitations of a number of different research methods, with little or no attempt to link the material to the ways in which value judgements might influence the process of sociological enquiry. Better answers demonstrated a clear awareness of some key debates about the role of values in sociology. This often included references to the relevant contributions of thinkers such as, for example, Weber, Berger, Becker, Gouldner, Wright Mills, and Lyotard. There were also some very good answers that focused on explaining how the use of particular research methods may result in the values of the researcher influencing the data collected.

Question 4

A lot of the answers were limited to discussing the strengths and limitations of participant observation in general, with no clear reference to the issue of subjectivity raised by the question. This type of response, if done well, could gain around half of the marks available. To go higher, however, there needed to be some focus on the debate about subjectivity specifically. Another feature of better answers was the ability to draw a clear distinction between overt and covert participant observation and to demonstrate the strengths and limitations of each approach with particular reference to the issue of subjectivity. It was pleasing many candidates used references to appropriate participant observation studies to illustrate their answers.

Question 5

Typical of a rather basic response to this question was the answer that described some key features of Marx's theory of class without considering the relevance of Marx's writings to understanding industrial societies today. Better answers considered more recent contributions to social class analysis and some also reviewed other theoretical perspectives that have engaged in a debate with Marxist analysis. Some candidates made very good use of post-modernist views about the relevance of social class today and the value of the Marxist approach to understanding social stratification. Candidates who used evidence from recent studies of social inequality and social mobility gave impressive answers.

Question 6

Most of the candidates who attempted this question showed some understanding of the concept of patriarchy. There were a few answers that gained only modest marks because they went no further than a simple description of some examples of sexual inequality in modern industrial societies. Better answers attempted to explain the reasons why sexual inequality exists. This was often framed in terms of a summary of different strands of feminist theory, though some candidates also included useful references to functionalism and post-modernism. The best answers made explicit use of the concept of patriarchy to assess the strengths and limitations of different sociological explanations of sexual inequality.

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│ **Paper 9699/02**   │
│ **Data Response**   │
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General comments

A pleasingly high standard of responses were seen again this session from a significant proportion of candidates. There were fewer examples of very weak answers and the candidates generally seemed to be interpreting the questions more accurately than was the case in some previous sessions. However, the Examiners still found many cases of candidates writing over-long answers to parts **(a)** and **(b)**, which carry fewest marks. A more concise style in answering these questions is to be encouraged. Answers that extend to more than two or three lines are required only for parts **(c)** and **(d)**.

Rubric errors were rare. A few candidates attempted to answer all three questions and possibly wasted time in so doing. Some candidates failed to number each answer appropriately, so that it was difficult to distinguish between parts **(a)**, **(b)**, **(c)** and **(d)**.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

(a) Most candidates correctly noted that status refers to the attribution of prestige or honour to a social position. Some merely distinguished between ascribed and achieved status and so failed to answer the question. A few candidates defined status purely as a synonym for social position and therefore gained just one mark for the answer.

(b) Some candidates defined the term 'sanctions' without providing examples and therefore gained no marks. Good examples described particular sanctions, such as ostracism, labelling, imprisonment, and fines.

(c) Weaker answers were confined to a few comments about social order in general. Good answers discussed forms of social order that might be applied in closed institutions specifically. Some candidates impressed with references to appropriate sources such as the work of Goffman, Becker and Foulcault.

(d) There were some rather limited answers that merely described the main agencies of socialisation. There were also some answers that contained inappropriate references to feral children. Better answers described accurately the functionalist theory of socialisation and provided a sustained assessment of that perspective. Candidates who were able to distinguish between different strands of functionalism gained higher marks. High marks were also awarded to answers that recognised the importance to the question of the debate about determinism in sociological explanations of human behaviour.

Question 2

(a) Most candidates were able to defined the term 'validity' accurately for two marks. Some confused the term with reliability and so failed to gain any marks for the question.

(b) Some candidates mistakenly cited longitudinal studies and experiments as examples of secondary data. A few confused secondary data with primary data. Good answers briefly described two relevant examples, such as official statistics, historical documents, newspaper reports, television programmes, and the previously published research of other sociologists.

(c) Some weaker answers were confined to a few simple contrasts between particular quantitative and qualitative research methods. Better answers demonstrated a sound understanding of the interactionism and how it differs from the positivist perspective.

(d)   Some answers were over-generalised and failed to note important differences between the various types of secondary data. Better answers referred to relevant distinctions, such as that between quantitative and qualitative secondary data, and personal and public documents. Candidates who discussed both particular types of secondary data and considered wider issues about the overall usefulness of desk research, generally achieved the top band for this question.

Question 3

(a)   The term 'absolute poverty' was defined accurately by the majority of candidates. A few candidates wrote confusingly about absolute poverty being the inability to escape an impoverished position in society.

(b)   Quite a few candidates merely defined the term 'relative poverty' without providing examples. Such answers gained no marks. Some answers were rather tangential in focussing on differences in income between different social groups. Good answers provided two appropriate examples of the poor lacking access to goods or services that are widely available to the majority of society.

(c)   Some answers only gained around half of the marks because they were too narrow, often confined to a simple account of Marxist class theory. Better answers considered several respects in which the existence of the poor might benefit the wealthy and powerful members of society.

(d)   Some candidates confused the culture of poverty thesis with the cycle of poverty. Good answers recognised that the question offered an opportunity to discuss Lewis' classic theory of poverty and to contrast it with other accounts, such as those from a structuralist perspective. Some answers confused Lewis' theory with the ideas of the New Right, wrongly attributing to Lewis the idea that poverty can be explained in terms of character deficiencies among the poor.

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General comments

The overall standard of candidates' answers was maintained this year with a pleasing number of candidates showing a range of more contemporary data and a sound understanding of concepts. Weaker candidates were once again hampered by a lack of understanding of concepts and a weak grasp of basic theory. Examiners commented on the pleasing standard of many answers that dealt with issues relating to gender, in particular the use of up to date data, which was excellent in a significant number of scripts. Some Examiners were able to state that the quality of answers from many Centres showed that they had been well taught and were well prepared for the examination. Some had obviously enjoyed their studies and were able to write with a degree of passion and conviction as well as display good levels of knowledge and understanding. Many candidates produced careful analysis and evaluation of the work of key thinkers and there were some very interesting conclusions. Some candidates faced difficulties because they had a very weak grasp of theory and lack of understanding of key terms.

Although specific sections of the paper are related to particular aspects of sociology, candidates should be reminded that terms and concepts have a wider sociological meaning. When candidates are asked for a definition they should, in the first instance, relate their answer to the wider aspects of sociology before a consideration of its meaning in relation to the specific topic is given. If candidates are required to give a narrow definition they will be asked to do that by the question. For example 'define the term matriarchy in relation to the family' as opposed to 'define the term matriarchy'.

In order to make the allocation of marks for examples in parts **a(ii)** candidates who present their answers in the form of one example is, another example is, make the awarding of marks straight forward. Another technique is to leave a space between the two examples. This is much clearer as opposed to the examples that are presented together and explanations for the two examples are frequently twisted into one giving Examiners the task of having to interpret the answer which could be to the detriment of the candidate. Some candidates this year actually numbered their examples and this proved a very effective method.

There were a limited number of rubric errors his year and little evidence of rushed third questions. It was noticeable, however, that candidates from a small number of Centres had all answered six questions instead of three.

It remains a general element of good practise to answer the question that has been set. A small number of candidates were well prepared in terms of knowledge and were determined to show what they knew or to redefine the question in line with what they wanted to say. In these cases the awarding of marks was a result of overlapping knowledge and these types of answers were limited to band two results. In general, in order to improve, candidates need to develop their knowledge and understanding of research, practice and apply evaluation in essays, and to think about the relevance of what they are writing in the context of the question that has been set.

<u>**Comments on specific questions**</u>

Section A

As usual this was the most popular section on the paper with most candidates answering one question from this section.

Question 1

This question was answered by a small number of candidates, the majority of who had a sound grasp of its requirements.

(a) The definition of matriarchy required candidates to describe matriarchy in society and not just in terms of the family although including matriarchy in families was also appropriate. In most cases the concept was well understood with excellent examples of matriarchal family forms being described. Examples offered not only included those from past societies such as the Nayer but also those from modern societies such as the New World Black Family. A small number of candidates offered the Kibbutz as an example of a matriarchal family which was an inappropriate example as it is not headed by females but rather aims to be egalitarian. A small number of candidates used matrifocal and single parent family as interchangeable terms. Generally candidates who gave specific rather than generic examples did better.

(b) The question of domination of family life was well understood by the majority of candidates who answered this question. The best examples were those that concentrated on modern industrial families and made little reference, other than by passing, to traditional or historical examples like nineteenth century Preston or the Nayer. Another discriminator was the amount of research that candidates were able to use to support their answer. Many weaker candidates offered assertive answers that gave generalised examples, and better ones supported assertions with empirical evidence from modern industrial societies. A number of good candidates considered issues of the rate and pace of change and used contemporary text and theory.

Question 2

This was the most popular question on this examination paper and answers to it ranged from excellent to those based on commonsense understanding.

(a) Most candidates had a firm grasp of the extended family and either interpreted it as a larger group sharing living space and economic cooperation or that of a kinship group interacting on many levels, either of which interpretation was acceptable. Better answers gave definitions that included both horizontal and vertical references. Examples of other family structures were well understood and candidates used such examples as nuclear and single parent families with a few weak candidates describing different family roles rather than structures.

(b) Many candidates interpreted this question as one or the universality of the nuclear family. Although much of the material relevant to that debate also applied to this question, some consideration had also to be applied to 'dominance'. A small number of candidates interpreted the question as one of the dominance of single parent families or of dominance within the family. Diversity of family type was central to the question and the very best answers considered such issues as the life cycle of the family and the relevance of changing life styles. Some candidates also were diverted into issues concerning the functions of the family or the supposed advantages of family life. Weaker answers were over reliant on historical data but better ones were well supported with recent research.

Section B

This section remained a popular one with candidates and both questions were answered in large numbers. In the majority candidates had a secure grasp of the necessary knowledge to answer appropriately.

Question 3

A popular question, well answered by the majority of candidates, however, some did not understand the meaning of social solidarity.

(a)   A range of definitions were offered for the concept of social solidarity with a number of candidates giving excellent descriptions that frequently made reference to the work of Durkheim. Weaker responses described processes of socialisation rather than the consensus of society brought about by the shared norms and values gained through socialisation. Others thought that it was the same as value consensus. Many appropriate examples from education were given such as the hidden curriculum and the way in which schools reward and encourage candidates, but in answers to this question a number of candidates gave the same or similar descriptions of their examples which limited the level of marks that they were able to gain. It is better to offer examples that are clearly different to ensure the maximum marks for these types of questions as many answers were hampered by overlap. In order to do well two examples had to be identified for which the supporting descriptions were clearly different.

(b)   Meritocratic education systems are well understood by the vast majority of candidates. Some answers were limited by a general support of the proposition in the question but candidates supported their answer with a range of mainly functionalist evidence. Many identified a clearly meritocratic trend but more complex answers also showed the problems with lack of meritocracy from a range of variables covering class, gender and ethnicity from a variety of perspectives. Able candidates clearly enjoyed the challenge of the question whilst weaker ones struggled with the terminology. Most of the evidence offered was from the British education system which reflects available research.

Question 4

This question was also answered by a large number of candidates, most of whom answered the question well.

(a)   If the concept was understood cultural reproduction was defined well but this proved to be a concept that some candidates found challenging. A number of candidates took the words independently, defining culture and reproduction from a dictionary viewpoint, and then put them together. Others interpreted cultural reproduction as a process of socialisation. Although having the notion of culture gained some credit it missed the point of reproducing social status from one generation to another. Others concentrated on norms and values at the expense of the ways in which these are transmitted to the next generation. It followed that good definitions were supported by appropriate definitions whilst weak ones tended to concentrate on aspects of socialisation with particular reference to gender. Aspects of the hidden curriculum and subjects such as History figured highly in many answers.

(b)   Nearly all candidates correctly focused on labelling and the other processes under the control of teachers as the main thrust of the question. From that starting point the best answers then went on to look at a range of other influences on candidates' performance and some assessment of the relevant balance on outcomes that they have. Many answers were well supported not only with theoretical and classical data and displayed a good understanding of interactionism but were weak on empirical research. Weaker answers tended to be assertive. There were some very good detailed and analytical answers the very best of which were analytical throughout.

Section C

This section of the examination is not as popular as it once was but there were many examples of good answers within it. Some Centres would be advised to guide candidates when answering these questions as some candidates have a tendency to lecture the reader about the advantages to be gained form religion and this sort of answer rarely enables the candidate to access the higher mark bands.

Question 5

Again the key to a successful answer to this question was in understanding the concept of marginality and some candidates struggled with this. A more accurate understanding was displayed in relation to the essay.

(a) A number of definitions of marginality related their answer to society rather than, as specified in the question, religion. Although such answers gained some credit they were limited by this. Other answers gave detailed definitions of marginalised groups taking refuge in minority religion. Most saw marginality as related just to the poor but others had a wider understanding. Definitions showing good understanding were supported by appropriate examples such as ethnicity or age or by type such as sect. Some candidates who offered both sect and cult were limited as their descriptions of these two tended to be the same, a good example to show how candidates can improve their performance by describing things that are clearly different.

(b) The role of religion in promoting or preventing social change was well understood by most candidates. There were a limited number of answers that debated social change or not, in general without reference to religion, and there were others that listed the supposed positive or negative effects of religion. Those candidates who fully understood the requirements of the question and who did not get sidetracked into these issues mostly answered well showing a strong theoretical background and giving a range of relevant evidence. Some answers were limited to a study of classical theorist but there were a number that were mature and displayed arguments from well read candidates.

Question 6

(a) Religious pluralism was well understood in the context of multi-faith societies but there was less understanding of the toleration of a plurality of religions. Most candidates were able to identify two societies in which religious pluralism can be found as this applies to many societies but some of the descriptions of these societies also lacked the understanding of toleration.

(b) A well understood question by many candidates. There were some outstanding examples that used a variety of contemporary feminist views both to show how patriarchy is still served by religion as well as some views that were described as 'hopeful' and showed how some change had developed. There were a number of answers that moralised against the idea of female liberation. Candidates are well advised to avoid this type of discourse in any answer.

Section D

This section of the paper remains one that is very popular with candidates.

Question 7

(a) Another concept that showed some lack of understanding on the part of some candidates was status frustration. A number of weak answers described frustration in a commonsensical way. The discriminator was the way in which the candidate linked their answer to social position and the way in which the individual finds their possibility for advancement blocked. Many candidates gave appropriate examples such as Merton but this question, as with some others, was handicapped by answers that ran explanations into one making it difficult to award marks for brief descriptions of two examples, others contained overlap in their descriptions. The best examples were those that set them in the context of sociological research.

(b) Most candidates were clear about the meaning of deviancy amplification and were therefore able to address the question from a position of understanding. However, there was a general lack of reference to the role of the media in the process and in terms of the development of the essay a number of answers were hampered by over lengthy descriptions of the work of Cohen and Hall. It was appropriate to use them but it would have been a much more efficient use of time in the examination to have made the point about the findings of the study and then move on to something else. Little was gained by describing what was said in the study.

Question 8

(a) Deviant career was another concept that was not securely understood. Many candidates described acts of deviance rather than the process by which individuals move from a situation in which they are not seen as deviant to one in which their deviance has become fixed. In a number of instances candidates who had failed to offer a convincing definition did give two appropriate examples such as formal and informal controls as well as examples based on specific institutions like the family. Candidates who had offered a definition showing understanding were able to give convincing examples. Many related their answers to formal and informal processes of social control.

(b) The majority of responses were able to show the Marxist connection in the question and describe a number of ways in which the proposition could be interpreted such as law making, negotiation with the agents of social control and dominant ideology. There was a good range of answers with the very best evaluating the proposition against a range of other theories. Many answers were comprehensive covering a range of differing perspectives in terms of ruling class influence on crime rates in different societies. Some candidates showed a lack of understanding of the meaning of 'ruling groups'.

Section E

This remains the least popular section of the paper and with a few outstanding exceptions most answers to these questions are weak. Examiners noted that some Centres had clearly prepared their candidates for this section of the paper and this was evident in the quality of answers. Many answers, however, leave Examiners with the distinct impression that the topic has not been studied from a sociological perspective.

Question 9

(a) Most defined this term successfully, unfortunately they were a small number of candidates who saw it in connection with aliens. Answers of the latter type tended to give examples that were inappropriate whereas the former concentrated on such causes as normlessness or powerlessness. Blauner was used successfully by a number of candidates both in their definitions and their examples.

(b) Examiners saw very few answers to this question that displayed a sound understanding of the nature of bureaucratic organisations. Those that were had a good understanding of bureaucratic typologies, their strengths and weaknesses, as well as alternative types of organisations.

Question 10

The majority of answers to this question were non sociological.

(a) This question seemed to be answered by a number of candidates who had not studied the sociology of the topic and candidates who appeared to have misread the question. A sound definition of the concept needed some reference to choice within it. There were a surprising number of answers that failed to mention this and described luxury. Some candidates offered examples that described the problems involved in doing work, others understood the nature of the question posed and described the difficulties of categorisation.

(b) The majority of answers to this question linked identity to social status and the status gained by work contributing to identity. Very few had a secure knowledge and understanding of the ways in which work can contribute to identity. However, there were a few answers that showed a sophisticated understanding of the way in which identity is developed. Overall most answers were weak.

Section F

The mass media is a section of the examination paper that is of growing interest to candidates.

Question 11

(a) Globalisation was a term that was well understood by a minority of candidates but few had problems offering two appropriate examples. One difficulty encountered was that although two examples were given, the description of the examples was identical. It is a much better tactic for candidates to offer examples that are clearly different if they are to maximise their marks.

(b) A question that was well answered by the majority of candidates who were able to juxtapose the pluralist and Marxist arguments. There were some useful arguments and a wide range of materials referred to by candidates in a number of Centres. Weaker answers lacked evaluation or a range of perspectives.

Question 12

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

(a) Most candidates understood the meaning of cultural effects and offered accurate definitions of the term. There were a few who described culture and had no understanding of the term. Better answers distinguished between long term and short term effects. The majority of candidates gave two convincing examples of the way in which audiences use the mass media. There was some very good use of the research of McQuail.

(b) This question was not about the way individuals are affected by the mass media in terms of being made happy or sad, but rather the theory as it relates to the way in which human behaviour and beliefs are altered. It needed to be evaluated against other theories like the hypodermic syringe model. Many candidates did this affectively whilst others merely juxtaposed ideas and rival theories.