

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

SOCIOLOGY

H580

For first teaching in 2015

H580/01 Summer 2019 series

Version 1

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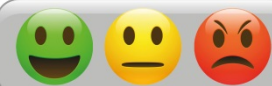
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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper 1 series overview

This year, similar to last, the overall standard of responses was good. There was a wide range of responses, suggesting that the paper differentiated appropriately. The vast majority of candidates attempted to answer all questions of the paper and managed to time their responses well. There were very few rubric errors and candidates seemed overall well prepared knowing the Assessment Objectives of each question. However, it was apparent that some candidates did not evaluate in the questions which specifically asked for evaluation; that is, Question 3 in Section A and the 24 mark questions in Section B. Candidates need to be reminded of the importance of addressing all three Assessment Objectives, particularly when the question asks to "Assess this view" or to "Briefly evaluate". Occasionally, timing was clearly an issue with some candidates leaving a question out because they had run out of time, perhaps indicating a lack of practice in working under timed conditions. In Section A, the use of the sources continues to be answered well with the vast majority of candidates engaging with both sources and interpreting them well, linking the sources to their wider sociological knowledge and also signposting when they are using the sources. In Section B, the Families and relationships option was the most popular topic, followed closely by Youth subcultures. Few centres chose the Media option.

Key point call out

Candidates should practise under timed conditions as much as possible to get used to writing under pressure. By doing this students can get a greater sense of how to manage their time effectively so they can respond to all the relevant questions asked.

With every question, in order to achieve marks in the highest mark band, candidates need to include a range of sociological evidence and to discuss these with some depth. Some responses, particularly the 20 mark questions in Section A and the 24 mark question in Section B, did not include the required range and depth of sociological evidence. "Evidence" can include studies, theories, concepts and contemporary examples, although it should be noted that responses which rely heavily of contemporary examples will not score very highly because on their own, contemporary examples are not good sociology. Candidates and teachers should also be mindful that when marking, examiners will annotate every point made and decide whether it is developed, underdeveloped or undeveloped – this will then provide a guide for the mark given. For example, in Question 3, if a point simply said that traditional femininity is declining due to changes in attitudes among females to not be stereotypical any more – this would be undeveloped; if this was added to with a brief description of laddettes – this would be underdeveloped; if this was further added to with depth about Jackson's study then it would be a fully developed point.

Key point call out

To get the highest mark in the essay questions, candidates should be aiming for the following depth and breadth:

Question 3: three fully developed points of Knowledge and one fully developed point of evaluation.

Question 5, 8 and 11: two fully developed points of Knowledge and one fully developed point of evaluation.

Question 6, 9 and 12: three fully developed points of Knowledge and three fully developed points of evaluation.

In terms of Assessment Objectives, Knowledge and Understanding (AO1) remains the strongest area; strong responses were able to offer a whole range of sociological knowledge, mainly in the form of concepts and studies, but sometimes making relevant use of sociological contemporary theory. AO2 (application) seemed to have improved from last year with the majority of responses being successful in interpreting knowledge and applying it to the specific question or context. In terms of AO3 marks (analysis and evaluation), as mentioned earlier, some responses did not evaluate at all; this was particularly true for Questions 3, 6, 9 and 12. Candidates and teachers should heed the Key Point Call Out box above specifying the required amount of evaluation needed for these questions in order that they do not under- or in some cases, over-evaluate. In addition this year saw a substantial increase in the use of juxtaposition in essays. Juxtaposition is defined as a tangential point when a candidate strays from a question and is often when an essay becomes 'list-like'. This was mostly seen in the essay questions and although the candidate will feel that they wrote a lot, the highest mark for evaluation for a juxtaposed essay would be Level 2. For example, in Question 9, a candidate may stray in to juxtaposition by listing other theories relating to deviance (Functionalists would argue this..., Marxists would argue that...) without any mention of how it critiques, differs or compliments the Interactionist perspective (what the question was about). Having said that, candidates who offered a range of detailed and substantiated evaluation points could still access the top mark band for evaluation marks.

Key point call out

Candidates should make sure that their evaluation points address the question and do not become 'list-like' to avoid juxtaposition. Techniques such as using the words of the question at the start and end of the evaluation paragraph should help maintain the focus of the essay throughout.

Section A overview

This section comprised of three compulsory questions that all candidates needed to answer, with one question needing the source to be used and referenced.

Question 1

1 Explain, using examples, the concept of high culture.

[6]

High culture was clearly explained as being linked to the higher or upper classes and this was credited as being the core meaning. This was often then further developed through discussion of social closure, links to the 'Old Boys Network' or the difference with popular culture. Examples used included opera, classical music, literature/ theatre and a few mentioned sports such as polo. The best candidates were able to provide a core meaning, two examples and three development points to get full marks. Occasionally, some candidates got confused with popular culture and gave unclear examples such as an 'addiction to shopping' which was not credited.

Exemplar 1

High culture is a term describing the activities that the higher classes participate in, in order to maintain their high status among their peers. They are often viewed as culturally rich and give the individual participating in them more cultural capital.

One example of high culture would be attending the opera where individuals from high classes can watch and gain knowledge from the performance and socialise with other high class individuals.

Another example of high culture would be to read many respected scholars and literature such as William Shakespeare. This would allow the high class individual to gain intellectual knowledge and be able to discuss complex concepts among their peers, thus maintaining their high status.

Here we can see a full mark response, which is very clearly set out with a core definition plus development. The candidate then describes two more examples and develops them to make two further points. Excellent technique and also very succinct.

Question 2

Refer to the full question paper for source details

- 2* Using sources A and B and your wider sociological knowledge, explain how the police act as agents of social control. [12]

This question requires candidates to both engage with the source and to also use their wider sociological knowledge. To a large extent it was only the source part of the question that was referred to in the majority of responses. The best responses were able to discuss a range of concepts linked to each source, for example positive and negative sanctions, ideological state apparatus and well-reasoned examples, e.g. the London Riots. This was then further developed with links to Waddington or Althusser regarding social control. Weaker responses included common-sense discussions bordering on repeating the source information or describing the photograph without any real sociological insight. In general the sources were applied well but lack the wider sociological knowledge to support them.

Exemplar 2

In ~~Source~~ Source A from BBC news stated the use of "cut-outs of police officers" to "deter shoplifters in Berkshire". The use of this they will be "used in shops". The use of this should decrease the rate of shoplifting as it did so previously in Oxford city. The police officers will "continue patrols". The use of police officers like this ~~and~~ according to Source A and wider sociological knowledge suggests that

Here we can see an example of 'lip service' whereby the candidate has almost lifted the text from Source A and repeated it in their response. Although the candidate will think they have written a fair amount, they have not offered any insight. This was similar to their treatment of Source B and therefore received a total mark of 2 for this question.

Question 3

- 3* Outline and briefly evaluate the view that traditional femininity is rapidly declining as a type of identity. [20]

On the whole, this question was answered well. The most common responses used Sharpe, Wilkinson, and Jackson for knowledge and were able to gain full development with the depth of their explanations or the use of concepts, e.g. genderquake. This was often critiqued using the work of Oakley or Parsons to explain how females are still socialised into traditional femininity and this was developed well. Occasionally, there was too much evaluation with candidates providing a number of developed points when one would suffice. Some candidates focused on masculinity instead and how that was changing with no mention of femininity and this was not rewarded.

Exemplar 3

Another way in which traditional femininity is rapidly declining as a type of identity is through the way many women in contemporary society are abandoning traditional gender roles and are defying stereotypes. Jackson (2006) discusses the ladette culture describing how many women are actively going against their traditional expectations of how women should be. The ladettes participated in binge drinking, one-night stands, swearing, smoking and behaved very crudely, in a way that was similar to the male 'lad' counterpart. Denicombe (2001) also discussed this type of behaviour among women linked to the ladettes and realised an increase in female 'risk-taking' behaviour. Women in contemporary society who have no restrictions about how to act and behave are experiencing a period of subversion, whereby they can defy stereotypes and partake in the same activities as men. This as a result suggests that traditional femininity is rapidly declining as a type of identity as many women now choose to subvert it.

Here we can see an example of a fully developed point. They have identified the point they want to make – abandoning traditional gender roles and defying stereotypes – and then use two studies to back up this point.

Section B overview

Candidates had the option to select whether they did further questions on Families and relationships, Youth subcultures or the Media. The majority of candidates opted for the Families and relationships option, although Youth subcultures was also popular. It was noticeable that some candidates were also employing a strategy in answering higher mark questions first in order to give them the appropriate amount of time and not leave higher mark questions to the end.

Option 1 overview

Families and relationships was the most popular option and it was clear that candidates were well prepared particularly in terms of theory and studies that they were able to recall. Some candidates struggled with Question 6 and while they were able to list a range of studies regarding family relationships on issues such as housework and decision making, were not able to fully address the question on the dark side of family life.

Question 4

OPTION 1

Families and relationships

- 4* Outline **two** ways in which families are becoming more 'child centred'. Illustrate your answer with examples. [12]

Most candidates could provide two ways the family had become child-centred, however the depth and breadth of these responses was variable. The best responses used concepts such as 'pester power' or Furedi's work on paranoid parenting to make developed points on answering the question. However, weaker responses provided unsubstantiated comments such as families having fewer children and parents spending more time with them with no concept, study or theory to reinforce their point, therefore only achieving Level 2. On occasion, there was a tendency to use laws or policies however these were often not focused on the family but on society and did not score highly.

Question 5

- 5* Explain and briefly evaluate the view that reconstituted families challenge the nuclear family norm. [16]

This question was answered reasonably well with most candidates providing lengthy descriptions of reconstituted families and how they may have come about. Some candidates drifted into changes due to divorce or family diversity debates and then struggled to find their way back to the question, losing focus. Functionalist writers such as Parsons and Murdock were often used on both sides of the argument. Weaker responses included descriptions of which family type was best suited to disciplining children. The best responses demonstrated confidence in using sociological evidence to formulate a clear response using the work of the New Right in particular and how the nuclear family was challenged.

Question 6

6* Assess the view that there is a 'dark side' to all families.

[24]

This relatively straightforward question elicited a mixed response particular around the definition of what the 'dark side' is. The best candidates correctly interpreted it as evidence of domestic violence or abuse and typically used research by Dobash and Dobash, Stanko, Ainsley and Radical Feminism in support of the question. For evaluation, candidates drew on research from Functionalism (Parsons) and Post-modernism (Giddens; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim) to disprove that the family had a dark side or to illustrate that individuals now had a choice as to whether they stayed in abusive relationships or not. Some candidates did not understand the question and tried using general theory such as Marxism to make their points, which invariably did not score very highly. General theoretic approaches such as Functionalism and Marxism provide candidates with few opportunities to gain good marks; they did not link the perspectives sufficiently to the question yet spent some time describing the approaches. Occasionally some candidates did not understand what was meant by the dark side of the family and used examples of decision making or money management, or they did but then discussed different versions of the family not focusing on domestic violence, etc. Such responses did not score highly.

Option 2 overview

The Youth subcultures section was the second most popular option and it was generally done well with good use of theory and studies. As mentioned previously, candidates had a tendency to use juxtaposition on Question 9 more than any other question on the paper.

Question 7

OPTION 2

Youth subcultures

7* Outline **two** ways in which subcultures are related to hybridity. Illustrate your answer with examples. [12]

Most candidates were able to answer this question well with two clear ways on how subcultures were related to hybridity. The best candidates selected two clear examples supported by at least one piece of research with Nayak and the 'white-wannabees' or Johal and 'cultural code switching' proving the most popular. Weaker responses tended to select examples that were more difficult to explain in the light of the question for example teddy boys or skinheads and the links they had with the upper class or ska music respectively. Occasionally some candidates also confused hybridity with postmodern identity which was not relevant to the question or mistakenly used the concept of neo-tribes which was concerned with fluidity and the end of subcultures. Marks were not given for either of these.

Question 8

8* Explain and briefly evaluate the view that youth culture benefits capitalism.

[16]

This question provided a mixed response. The best candidates used the work of Functionalists such as Abrams about how youth culture benefits the economy or writers from the CCCS such as Brake or Phil Cohen to illustrate the 'magical' or 'imaginary' way that youth culture ultimately benefits capitalism despite perceived resistance. Evaluation tended to be in the form of neo-Marxism that youth culture could provide genuine resistance or post-modernism in that youth culture was about having a good time rather than benefitting capitalism. Less successful responses included writing about anything to do with 'youth and deviance' eg Cohen or Merton which was not applied well and marks were not given.

Question 9

9* Assess Interactionist explanations of youth deviance.

[24]

Generally, particularly in terms of knowledge, this question was well answered. Candidates could describe Interactionist explanations, often using the work of Becker, Cicourel or Stan Cohen although weaker responses spent too long on descriptions and did not present key Interactionist concepts well. Counter arguments often proved difficult with candidates often resorting to juxtaposition and simply listing alternative theories of explanations of deviance such as Functionalist or Marxist perspectives. The best responses provided well balanced knowledge with evaluation and were rewarded with the highest marks.

Option 3 overview

Only a handful of candidates answered questions on the Media, but of those, there was a wide range of knowledge on display. Typically, candidates excelled at Question 10 being able to draw on key sociological studies with ease.

Question 10

OPTION 3

Media

10* Outline **two** ways in which minority ethnic groups are represented in the media. Illustrate your answer with examples. [12]

This was well answered overall with almost all candidates selecting two ways and basing their response on studies by Van Dijk, Barker or Malik. Some candidates even used the same sociologist to illustrate two separate points such as Van Dijk's work on minority ethnic groups being seen as both abnormal but also as a threat. Candidates that supported their responses with extra studies or contemporary examples also added considerable depth to their responses and these scored highly. Only a handful of responses did not show any sociological understanding and in these cases, they just talked about misrepresentation in television programmes such as Apu in The Simpsons without any concepts or studies and so could only achieve Level 2.

Question 11

11* Explain and briefly evaluate the view that violence portrayed in the media creates a more violent society. [16]

This question was answered reasonably well with the best responses keeping a focus on violence and not the broader notion of deviance. Candidates scoring highly on the question did not provide lengthy descriptions of theory and studies such as Bandura Ross and Ross, and Packard and the hypodermic syringe model were most commonly used. On occasion, some candidates tried, unsuccessfully, to resort to going through their models of how the audience receives the media such as the two step flow model but too often they did not link to the question and did not score highly. Evaluation was generally drawn from the Pluralist writings on how the audience were not passive or Active audience approaches and how people had a choice in how they received the media.

Question 12

12* Assess sociological views of why female representations are changing in the media. [24]

This question produced a mixed response. When done well, candidates were able to draw on a wealth of literature such as Fourth Wave Feminism, Harraway and Cyborgs, Liberal Feminism and Gauntlett. However, at times the evaluation was better than the knowledge with extensive use of sociologists such as Mulvey, Wolf, Tuchman and Ferguson. Candidates in general seemed better prepared for a negative question about female representations in the media instead of the question presented. Weaker responses included too many and too lengthy descriptions of modern campaigns eg 'ban bossy' or 'Like a Girl' campaigns with no sociological depth to underline the point they were making.

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