



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2012**

Sociology

SCLY4

(Specification 2191)

**Unit 4: Crime and Deviance with Theory and
Methods;
Stratification and Differentiation with
Theory and Methods**

Report on the Examination

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SCLY4

General

The majority of students were able to answer all the questions in their chosen section. Few students missed out whole questions but, when they did, there were obvious consequences for the total mark.

There seems to be an overall improvement in responses to methods in context questions. Students seem more able to demonstrate application and are using the Item more effectively in their responses.

In some cases responses to Question 04 and Question 08 appeared to be rushed, with students apparently running out of time. Since this question carries a large proportion of the marks available, this usually cost marks. Some students chose to answer this question first; these responses were often more thorough and scored more marks.

Section A – Crime and Deviance with Theory and Methods

The great majority of students chose this Section.

Crime and Deviance

Question 01

There were many good responses to this question. However, a lack of explicit analysis and evaluation prevented many students from accessing the top mark band. Most students were able to offer some relevant knowledge of at least one explanation of suicide. Most commonly this was Durkheim's theory, which was presented with varying degrees of accuracy and depth. Some answers were excellent, establishing each theory's provenance and using the material well in evaluation. The best showed considerable understanding of the arguments put forward by each author. Good answers were able to analyse and evaluate the contributions of Durkheim, Douglas, Atkinson, and Taylor. Halbwachs and Baechler appeared less often. Some good answers also considered the social forces that created suicide rates and contrasted them with individual reasons for suicide.

Some students spent a long time describing the typologies developed by different sociologists and, while this demonstrated some knowledge, it did not add much to the analysis or evaluation. Many students failed to draw out the real implications of the various studies, merely describing the findings, while the less successful answers used the Item and tried unsuccessfully to link to other perspectives, eg feminism or Marxism.

Some students had very little knowledge and understanding of sociological material on suicide. The stronger of these attempted to apply a 'perspectives' approach; the weaker wrote general accounts containing very limited sociological knowledge and understanding.

Question 02

The quality of answers to this question varied considerably. A number of responses were able to cite relevant sources such as Hall, Gilroy, and Lea and Young. Some students were able to use concepts such as labelling, institutional racism, canteen culture, resistance, over-policing, moral panics, relative deprivation, marginalisation and subculture. These answers showed a clear understanding of what such concepts meant and how they had been used. Good answers contrasted two different ways of explaining ethnic differences both in offending and in victimisation (ie societal/structural reasons as opposed to social construction of statistics). Better answers were able to discuss differences between different ethnic groups. These responses recognised the need to address victimisation although this was often framed in terms of ethnic minorities being the victims of differential treatment by the agents of social control rather than as victims of crime. A small proportion raised the notions of criminal neighbourhoods, age profiles, racist attacks and intra-ethnic crime. Unfortunately, a number of very good answers on offending failed to reach the top mark band because the issue of victimisation was not dealt with.

Some less successful answers relied on assertion, often claiming that specific instances 'proved' an explanation to be correct. The Stephen Lawrence case was often referred to as was 'The Secret Policeman'. Less successful responses described general theories of the link between social class and crime, such as subcultural and ecological theories, but the link to ethnicity was often left implicit. Left and right realism appeared, as did Merton's strain theory. Some potentially sound arguments about social background were often undermined by simplistic views about the way in which single-parent families and poor educational achievement, inevitably lead to criminal behaviour. Less successful responses discussed minority ethnic groups as one homogeneous category.

Methods in Context**Question 03**

This question was answered reasonably well, with a large proportion of responses scoring marks for application. Many were able to take points from Item C about the homeless and link them to strengths and limitations of structured interviews. Fewer students than in the past produced 'methods only' responses as more made determined efforts to explore the research characteristics of the group in question and/or to link strengths and limitations of the method to the research issue. Most were more successful in doing the former than the latter. Stronger answers went much further, for example connecting poor language skills to difficulties with pre-set questions, or living on the streets to being interviewed by a middle-class professional, in each case making a clear connection between the interview situation and the research characteristic.

Some responses confused structured with unstructured interviews and there still seems to be considerable confusion about the difference between validity and reliability. There was also a tendency for some students to propose an alternative method, in this case often unstructured interviews, and then to proceed to a lengthy analysis of the strengths and limitations of this method rather than the one specified in the question. Many students ended with a paragraph about triangulation, or the benefits of a different method. Neither point was wrong but nor did they add to the discussion of strengths and limitations of the method specified in the question. Weaker answers drew on the clues given in Item C to raise issues but often failed to take them any further. For example, many stated that the homeless 'may welcome the chance to talk about their situation', so they might be willing to talk in an interview; many stated that the homeless

'are mistrustful of the police', so they might not trust the interviewer. A number of points made were about sampling rather than interviewing.

Some students seemed to know very little about structured interviews and made no attempt at application.

Theory and Methods

Question 04

Strong answers considered interpretivism and positivism as theoretical perspectives and linked this to an evaluation of the research methods that they tend to use. These answers were evaluative throughout and were able to unpack the key concepts and explain the ideas behind the perspectives. Better answers were clear in what distinguished interpretivist methods from others and discussed their merits within a context of different theories of what sociology is aiming to achieve and how society is ordered. Examples were often successfully included to illustrate these theoretical and methodological differences.

Many answers to this question took the form of a series of points in favour of interpretivist methods, followed by a series of points for positivist methods, offering minimal analysis, and evaluation only by juxtaposition. Thus, many failed to show any real understanding of relevant debates. Other answers focused on theoretical rather than methodological issues and explained the differences between interpretivism and positivism but without showing how these differences relate to research methods. Some students became involved in lengthy discussions of different sociological theories with no reference to methods, while others brought in everything that they knew about science and/or values. Less successful answers tended to describe studies that used qualitative methods or became bogged down in descriptions of interactionism without discussion of methods. Other answers involved a run-through of qualitative methods and their strengths and limitations but with little or no link to theoretical or methodological considerations.

Some students had clearly not come across the term 'interpretivist' and talked about 'interpreting' official statistics or secondary data.

Once again some students produced very brief responses to this question, indicating either uncertainty over how to tackle it or a lack of time to do it justice.

Section B – Stratification and Differentiation with Theory and Methods

Very few students opted for this section and the following comments are based on a very limited range of student responses.

Stratification and Differentiation

Question 05

Most students were able to offer a satisfactory account of different systems of measuring social class. Most frequently the Registrar-General's Scale was contrasted with the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC). This also enabled most students to address the use of occupation as an indicator of class. More successful students recognised the strengths of using occupation as an indicator (eg as a proxy for education and income levels) and its limitations (eg failure to recognise inequalities within a profession). Stronger students offered

alternative definitions, such as subjective or consumption-based accounts to contrast with 'objective' or occupational criteria for determining social class.

Most students were able to offer some evaluation of measurements of class, but these were often repetitive, noting that several measurement scales were based around male occupation, perhaps with a feminist critique. Some students wasted considerable effort by attempting to explain why social class exists (eg role allocation), rather than focusing on how it may be defined and measured. Less successful answers failed to engage with the issue of different ways of defining and measuring social class, or discussed issues to do with the problematic nature of class in contemporary society, without reference to definition or measurement.

Question 06

Most students were able to use Item E as a platform to discuss how ethnicity may affect education and employment opportunities and were able to refer to relevant studies (eg Gillborn, Wright, Modood) to illustrate these arguments. Many students were also able to introduce experiences with the criminal justice system as an alternative life chance. Some students lost direction by discussing aspects of various ethnic minorities' family lives and other aspects of culture, without clear analysis of how these may impact on life chances. Some also tended to treat ethnic minorities as a disadvantaged homogeneous group. More successful answers were able to recognise, for example, the significant differences in educational achievement between groups such as Indians and Pakistanis and, in some cases, to use these evaluatively (eg to suggest that crude racism may not be the 'whole story' behind differences in outcomes). The answers that discussed different ethnic groups tended to make some reference to the post-9/11 position of Asian groups in British society. Some students were also able to effectively recognise the interplay of ethnicity with factors such as class and gender (eg to recognise the specific challenges faced by some Asian women). However, many offered unproductive paragraphs about class and gender that had no bearing on the question.

Methods in Context

Question 07

Most students are clearly grasping the nature of 'methods in context' and, as such, few offered answers that were solely based on either discussion of the underclass, or a 'methods only' account of structured interviews. However, some are still writing lengthy and unproductive introductions about the topic of the research. Most students were able to offer a range of strengths and limitations of interviews, while more successful answers were likely to pick up consistently on the 'structured' aspect in terms of reliability, insight, and level of interviewer skill required. Some made several points that were more pertinent to unstructured interviews. In terms of application, some unsuccessful responses did no more than insert the term 'underclass' into generic statements about the strengths or limitations of interviews. More effective answers used Item F as the basis of discussion about structured interviews. Examples included how a structured interview may be preferable to questionnaires when studying respondents with limited literacy skills and how non-work may mean that potential respondents have significant free time to engage in interviews. Some were able to raise application points such as the risk of stereotyping areas when choosing where to focus a study of the underclass. However, some answers contained crude generalisations about the potentially violent and drunken nature of the underclass. Students generally failed to point out the difficulty of operationalising the concept of the underclass and the difficulty in deciding who is a member of this group.

Theory and Methods

Question 08

Strong answers considered interpretivism and positivism as theoretical perspectives and linked this to an evaluation of the research methods that they tend to use. These answers were evaluative throughout and were able to unpack the key concepts and explain the ideas behind the perspectives. Better answers were clear in what distinguished interpretivist methods from others and discussed their merits within a context of different theories of what sociology is aiming to achieve and how society is ordered. Examples were often successfully included to illustrate these theoretical and methodological differences.

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Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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