

**MARK SCHEME for the October/November 2010 question paper
for the guidance of teachers**

9699 SOCIOLOGY

9699/21

Paper 2 (Data Response), maximum raw mark 50

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Mark schemes must be read in conjunction with the question papers and the report on the examination.

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- 1 Sociologists who believe that society can be studied in a scientific way are known as positivists. They claim that it is possible to identify external variables determining human behaviour on the basis of which social laws can be formulated. Positivists believe that sociological research should be based on the methods and procedures of the natural sciences.

However, sociologists in the interpretivist tradition have criticised positivists for exaggerating the similarities between sociology and the natural sciences. Sociology has not achieved the same degree of agreement, certainty or ability to predict as the natural sciences. For example, sociologists cannot use laboratory experiments in the same way as natural scientists to collect data. This makes it harder for sociologists to separate and control variables in order to establish the causes of events.

Thomas Kuhn has questioned whether the natural sciences are objective and value free. Kuhn claims that all knowledge is *socially constructed* and he emphasises the importance of social interests in shaping the things that are believed about the world. Scientific discovery does not only occur through open-minded enquiry. Scientists have particular theoretical beliefs that do not just depend on evidence but are influenced by the interests and values of the scientific community.

- (a) What is meant by the term *socially constructed*? [2]

In the context of the source, socially constructed refers to the idea that what is considered to be knowledge is shaped by social processes. A definition along these lines would be worth two marks; one mark for a partial definition, such as 'influenced by society' or 'no absolute truth'.

- (b) Describe two problems of using laboratory experiments in sociological research. [4]

Reward references to any appropriate practical, theoretical, and ethical problems that deter the use of laboratory experiments in sociological research. One mark for each problem identified and a further mark for clearly describing each problem.

- (c) Explain why the claims of science to be objective and value free can be questioned. [8]

0–4 Very limited understanding of the question will be a characteristic of answers that fit the lower part of the band. A few isolated references to the ideas of thinkers such as Kuhn, Lakatos or other relevant contributors to the philosophy of science would be worth 2 or 3 marks. Some very simple attempt to explain the idea of knowledge being socially constructed would reach the top of the band.

5–8 At this level, the claims of science to be objective and value free will be tackled directly, though the analysis offered may be rather basic at the lower end of the band. It is possible to reach the top of the band by outlining relevant contributions to the debate about the status of science, e.g. Kuhn, Lakatos, the Realists, Feyerabend, Lynch, post-modernist writers, etc. However, if this approach is adopted, there must be an attempt to show in what sense the work of these thinkers highlights the possible lack of objectivity and value freedom in scientific investigation. In other words, the relevant links to the question set should be made explicit in answers that merit the top of the band.

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(d) Assess the interpretivist critique of positivism.

[11]

- 0–4 A simple account of positivism with no further development of the answer would merit 3 or 4 marks. Similarly, some oblique reflections on interpretivism with no direct links to the question would fit the upper part of the band.
- 5–8 A summary of the limitations of positivism from the viewpoint of the interpretivists would trigger the lower part of the band. A more substantial account of the interpretivist critique of positivism would merit higher marks within the band. Answers at this level may be mostly descriptive, though some simple assessment might be expected in answers that reach the top of the band.
- 9–11 Answers at this level will demonstrate a good knowledge of interpretivism and its contrasts with the positivist perspective. There will also be a clear attempt to assess the interpretivist critique. This might take the form, for example, of arguing that interpretivists have exaggerated the differences between the social sciences and the natural sciences, or a defence of positivism could be partly constructed through exploring the ideas of the realists. Lower in the band, the assessment will be limited to a few standard observations, but a more thoughtful and sustained analysis can be expected in answers that merit full marks.

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- 2 Participant observation is a widely used method of sociological research. It is particularly favoured by sociologists in the interpretivist tradition. In participant observation the researcher joins the study group in order to observe people in their natural surroundings and to learn to see and feel things as they do. Participant observation studies are usually carried out over a long time period.

Gaining access to the group in order to begin the research can be a problem. Some researchers choose to reveal their identity to some or all of the people they are studying. This is known as overt participant observation. In covert participant observation the research is carried out secretly, with the researcher concealing their identity from the group.

Supporters of participant observation argue that it enables the sociologist to achieve a detailed understanding of the subject under study and that the data it produces is high in *validity*. However, critics identify a number of limitations with participant observation, especially the many ethical problems that are associated with covert observation.

- (a) What is meant by the term *validity*? [2]

Validity is the term used in sociology to describe data that gives a true measurement or description of what it claims to measure or describe. An accurate answer along these lines would be worth two marks, with one mark for demonstrating partial understanding of the term, e.g. 'validity means truthful' or 'validity means the study findings are accurate and correct'.

- (b) Describe two difficulties for a sociologist in gaining access to a group they wish to study. [4]

Problems in gaining access might include, for example, being accepted by the group, blending into the group if a covert observer, tracking down and making the initial contact with group members and, for covert observers, explaining your presence in the group without arousing suspicion. One mark for each problem identified and a further mark for describing each example clearly.

- (c) Explain why interpretivists favour the use of participant observation in sociological research. [8]

0–4 A few general observations about the strengths of participant observation, with little or no direct connection to the interpretivist perspective, would be worth 2 or 3 marks. To go higher in the band, there must at least be a simple attempt to explain what features of participant observation specifically attract the interpretivists.

5–8 Answers lower in the band may contain some material that is focused on describing the merits of participant observation in general, rather than addressing the particular wording of the question. However, to justify this band there must also be some sound points about why interpretivists specifically favour using participant observation. Higher in the band, the explanation will be sustained and well formulated. Features of participant observation that attract interpretivist sociologists include the ability to experience the way of life of the study group, the depth of understanding gained, the ability to observe interaction and to understand meanings, and the opportunity to study deviant and marginal groups.

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(d) Assess the strengths and limitations of overt participant observation. [11]

0–4 A few general points about the strengths and/or limitations of participant observation in general might be worth 3 or 4 marks. An answer that confuses overt and covert observation throughout can score no more than two marks.

5–8 Overt participant observation will provide the main focus of the answer at this level, though some of the strengths and limitations identified may also apply to covert participant observation. Lower in the band, answers may be limited in range and/or describe mainly practical pros and cons of overt observation. To go higher, a wider range of relevant points needs to be offered and we might expect some relevant theory to be included in answers that merit the top of the band. Any assessment may be somewhat implicit and/or rather basic at this level.

9–11 A good range of practical, theoretical, and possibly ethical, issues related to overt participant observation will be covered. There will also be some attempt to evaluate the pros and cons of using this research method. The assessment may be a little pedestrian lower in the band, but it needs to be more developed and subtle to merit an award of full marks. Good use of relevant examples of overt participant observation studies may be a feature of answers that reach the top of the band.

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- 3 Although women are a growing proportion of the paid labour force in most modern industrial societies, there is still gender inequality in terms of wages and job conditions. Women usually earn less than men and are more likely to be employed on a part-time or temporary basis only. Women are also likely to be found in lower-paid occupations such as clerical work, professional work in health, education and welfare, repetitive assembly work, cleaning and catering.

It also remains the case that the top positions in most workplaces are dominated by men. In 2008, women in the UK still constituted only around 2% of chief executives and company directors, 6% of all judges, and 16% of senior managers. The low representation of women in these top positions is seen by feminists as evidence of a 'glass ceiling' that women encounter as they progress in their careers and which very few go beyond. Some feminists believe that the inequality women face in the workplace reflects the *gender division of labour* within the home. They refer to studies showing that the majority of labour within the home is carried out by females.

- (a) What is meant by the phrase *gender division of labour*? [2]

The gender division of labour refers to the distribution of work roles and statuses on the basis of sex. Two marks for a clear definition along these lines and one mark for partial understanding, such as 'sexual division of labour refers to men and women doing different jobs'.

- (b) Describe two reasons why women earn less than men. [4]

One mark for identifying each appropriate reason and one mark for the development of each reason. Reasons include, for example: women may have more career breaks; the dual labour market theory; the reserve army of labour explanation; hostile or unhelpful attitudes of male-dominated trade unions; patriarchy and the prejudice of male bosses; lower career and employment expectations among females.

- (c) Explain why women may find it difficult to reach the top positions in business and the professions. [8]

0–4 Lower in the band answers will be distinguished by the lack of relevant content and possible reliance on a few assertions in place of relevant sociological reasoning. Better answers in the band will identify a few appropriate reasons why men fill most of the top jobs, but the points will lack development and/or theoretical grasp.

5–8 The explanations offered will be developed and well informed. At the lower end of the band, there may be reliance on some general theories and explanations of sexual inequality, such as those within the Marxist and feminist traditions. Higher in the band answers will include material that addresses specifically the issue of access to top jobs, such as: discussion of possible male bias and self-recruitment; different attitudes to employment and career success between the gender groups; and the cultures of leadership in contemporary industrial societies that may reflect patriarchal influences, thereby making it easier for men to succeed to positions of power and feel more comfortable in such roles.

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(d) Assess feminist explanations of gender inequality in the workplace. [11]

- 0–4 A few reflections on feminist theory with little or no linkage to gender inequality would be worth 2 or 3 marks. Some general comments about the causes of gender inequality in the workplace without any clear reference to feminist theory would fit the top of the band.
- 5–8 A simple descriptive account of the reserve army of labour idea would creep into the bottom of the band. A more developed reprise of feminist explanations for gender inequality in the workplace would merit the top half of the band. At this level, any assessment is likely to be rudimentary and may be in the form of juxtaposition through references to different strands of feminist theory and other sociological perspectives.
- 9–11 Answers will demonstrate a good understanding of the feminist explanations of gender inequality in the workplace. There will be a concerted attempt to assess the claim on which the question is based. The analysis will be a little basic at the bottom of the band, but sustained and thoughtful in answers that merit full marks. Some of the assessment may be in the form of juxtaposition with non-feminist explanations of gender inequality, but at this level we should also expect some explicit evaluation of the usefulness of feminist explanations of gender inequality in the workplace.