



UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL EXAMINATIONS  
General Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary Level and Advanced Level

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**SOCIOLOGY**

**9699/21**

Paper 2 Principles and Methods 2

**May/June 2011**

**1 hour 30 minutes**

Candidates answer on the Question Paper.

No additional materials are required.

**READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST**

Write your Centre number, candidate number and name on all the work you hand in.

Write in dark blue or black pen.

You may use a soft pencil for any diagrams, graphs or rough working.

Do not use staples, paper clips, highlighters, glue or correction fluid.

You may not need all the answer lines for your answers.

DO **NOT** WRITE IN ANY BARCODES.

Answer **two** questions.

The number of marks is given in brackets [ ] at the end of each question or part question.

This document consists of **13** printed pages and **3** blank pages.



Answer **two** questions.

For  
Examiner's  
Use

- 1 Many sociologists recognise that their research is influenced by their personal values. They believe that the purpose of research is to make the world a better place. Therefore the choice of research topics requires a value-judgement that some features of social life are unacceptable and that research which may lead to improvement in society is a 'good thing'. Sociologists who hold this view are concerned about how their research data is used and whose interests it serves.

Sociologists who favour the positivist perspective take a different view. They claim to carry out research in a way that is *value-neutral*. All they do, they say, is to search for the truth. What is done with the information they produce is not their concern. They are content to leave it for politicians to decide how their research is used.

- (a) What is meant by the term *value-neutral*?

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- (b) Describe **two** factors, apart from personal values, that may influence the sociologist's choice of research topic.

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2 Participant observation is one of the research methods that is widely used in sociology. Overt participant observation describes the situation where the study group knows the identity of the researcher. Covert participant observation is where the identity of the researcher is concealed from the study group. Sociologists in the interpretivist tradition favour the use of participant observation. They claim that researchers who use this method are able to collect data that is high in validity.

However, positivists identify a number of limitations with participant observation. Loss of objectivity and the difficulty of making comparisons based on a small scale study are two potential problems. Critics have also pointed out that there are many ethical issues associated with covert participant observation. Positivists prefer to collect *quantitative data* using research methods such as questionnaires and structured interviews.

(a) What is meant by the term *quantitative data*?

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(b) Describe **two** ethical issues associated with *covert* participant observation.

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(c) Explain why interpretivists believe that the data collected using participant observation is high in validity.

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3 Social status in traditional societies is based mainly on ascription. Each person inherits a social position at birth in accordance with law, custom or religious practice. Usually, the individual remains within their ascribed position throughout life. Consequently, there is very little *social mobility* in this type of society. In modern industrial societies, traditional systems of stratification have been replaced by a more open system that is characterised by competition and a higher degree of social mobility. Customary divisions give way to a system of stratification based on social class and economic success.

Modern industrial societies may also be described as meritocratic. A meritocracy is a system in which people are rewarded on the basis of how hard they work and how much ability they possess. Functionalists believe that in order for the complex modern economy to operate efficiently, it is essential that people are rewarded on the basis of their ability and achievements. However, there is a debate in sociology about the extent to which modern industrial societies are meritocratic. Sociologists in the feminist and Marxist traditions reject the idea that a meritocracy exists.

(a) What is meant by the term *social mobility*?

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(b) Describe **two** ways in which an individual may achieve a higher position in society.

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