



General Certificate of Education

Sociology 5191

Unit 1 SCY1

Report on the Examination

2007 examination - January series

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SCY1

General

In the very large entry for this paper, there was inevitably a broad range of responses, making generalisation difficult. However, one tendency was for candidates to perform relatively well on the shorter questions, but then to produce what were often mediocre answers to the essays. It may be that candidates who were sitting an AS unit for the first time in January had not yet developed sufficient depth of knowledge and understanding, or sufficiently good essay-writing skills, to produce work of a better quality. Even where knowledge was reasonably good, many candidates could show only relatively limited AO2 skills such as evaluation.

As in previous examinations, some candidates wrote overly long answers to the short questions: instead of a phrase or sentence for a question asking for the identification of a reason, function, etc some wrote a paragraph or more. Centres need to impress on candidates the consequences of this poor time management: the at best marginal gains of a long answer to parts (a) to (d) do not compensate for the losses incurred in having to write relatively brief essays. In answering short questions, candidates should also be encouraged to set out their answers appropriately, for example by starting each point on a new line.

Question 1: Families and Households

This was by far the most popular question.

- (a) The vast majority of candidates answered this successfully. However, some only scored one mark, for example for conveying the idea of conjugal but not segregated roles.
- (b) This proved more difficult for many candidates, who tended to give functions or theories rather than evidence, or historical rather than contemporary evidence. Better answers scored for identifying evidence such as the high rates of remarriage or the prevalence of images of the nuclear family in the media.
- (c) This was usually answered well, with many gaining full marks. However, some candidates wrote excessively long and sometimes repetitive answers. Others failed to gain full marks, partly because they showed a lack of understanding of their material in giving the same function twice but worded differently. Popular responses included primary socialisation, stabilisation of adult personalities and economic functions.
- (d) In general this was answered well, with many candidates scoring full marks for reasons such as the higher divorce rate, reduced social stigma attached to lone-parent families and the greater financial independence of women. However, some candidates seemed to think that the 1969 Divorce Reform Act provided financial assistance, or even that women had not hitherto been able to petition for divorce.
- (e) Most candidates performed reasonably well here and were able to describe the findings from a number of relevant studies, such as Boulton, Gershuny, Edgell, Hardill, Pahl, Crompton, Morris, Beck, etc. However, many were unable to highlight in these accounts precisely that which the question called for: namely, the specific factors that might affect the domestic division of labour or power relations between couples. In weaker answers, there was also a strong tendency to focus wholly or largely on the division of labour to the neglect of power or, sometimes, simply to conflate the two. Some adopted a simplistic 'march of

progress' framework to assert that conjugal roles were now equal, while many answers relied on no sources more recent than Oakley, Young and Willmott or Parsons. The best answers were able to consider a range of factors, such as women's paid employment, biology, socialisation, social class or age/generational differences, social policies, social networks, etc and to use material from studies and perspectives to support their accounts.

- (f) Many of the weakest responses merely recycled material from Item 1B, adding little of their own to it despite the often considerable length of some of these answers. Somewhat better but still limited answers produced one-sided accounts of the 'functional fit' thesis. Quite a few candidates did not appear to understand industrialisation as referring to a process rather than a one-off event (eg 'industrialisation occurred in 1750'). Those who did were often hazy as to when it might have occurred. Many showed a somewhat confused knowledge, for example of Young and Willmott's four stages; others muddled or combined Laslett and Anderson's findings, which made effective use of such material (for example, to evaluate Parsons) near impossible. By contrast, well-organised, evaluative answers used such material accurately to present a debate between functionalism and its critics. Some went further to discuss changes in the status of women and children that resulted from industrialisation. A few candidates used cross-cultural material to good effect.

Question 2: Health

This was the least popular question.

- (a) Most candidates knew the answer, but some thought morbidity meant death.
- (b) The commonest correct responses gave suitable examples, such as wheelchair users being disabled by lack of access ramps to buildings. Those who failed to score either did not understand the meaning of 'social construction' (often reinterpreting it to mean 'social causes') or failed to give a clear example relating to illness or disability.
- (c) Most candidates had little difficulty with this, and gender differences in smoking, alcohol consumption or driving figured frequently. Some failed to score full marks because they gave as a reason 'women lead healthier lifestyles' (which did score), but then went on to include examples of this (such as smoking less) as their other reasons.
- (d) Most candidates succeeded in identifying two appropriate reasons, with language barriers, the inverse care law or class differences between ethnic groups, and racism of medical personnel commonly identified. However, some wrote excessively long answers that included various sociological theories and/or studies; these were not necessary even to score full marks.
- (e) Weaker answers were often undeveloped lists of points about class habits (smoking, diet, etc), often with exaggeration and over-simplification. However, most candidates answered reasonably well. Some spent most of their time discussing access to health care to the neglect of health chances, but the majority had some idea of the difference between the two. Most answers were reasonably well organised, generally in terms of material/structural and behavioural/cultural explanations, though better answers often went beyond these to consider other approaches (though some were confused in their understanding of artefact and/or selection explanations of class inequalities). These answers drew on appropriate empirical material to illustrate their accounts.

- (f) Candidates whose knowledge of the sociology of health was limited to inequalities in health found themselves falling back, often heavily, on Item 2B, sometimes combined with a commonsense account of how good, kind, etc doctors are (although the case of Harold Shipman was also cited as evidence of the opposite). Such candidates were unable to identify with any coherence a debate about the medical profession that the question called for, though some were able to offer a one-sided account, usually of Parsons on the sick role. Stronger answers presented two or more theoretical views, most commonly functionalism and Marxism or feminism. However, even these tended to deal only with power and not address altruism or technical expertise. Latrogenesis appeared fairly frequently, though not always to much effect. Very few answers included Weberian views or material on professionalisation.

Question 3: Mass Media

This was the second most popular question.

- (a) While many candidates gained the marks for answers such as 'provides an outlet for emotions', a significant number had no knowledge of the term and resorted to guessing.
- (b) The commonest responses to score here were desensitisation, following role models, and reinforcement. Candidates failed to score for answers such as 'copycat behaviour', since this constitutes a restatement of the question (where viewers commit acts of violence themselves), rather than a reason for such behaviour.
- (c) Some answers listed general methodological points about questionnaires, interviews, etc without linking them to the study of media effects, but better responses suggested difficulties such as the problem of distinguishing between media and non-media effects, or between long- and short-term effects, or ethical difficulties in exposing audiences to potentially harmful effects. Some candidates wrote excessively long answers here.
- (d) This was generally well answered, with uses and gratifications, two-step flow and selective filter models most often identified. Explanations of these were generally satisfactory, though some weaker ones amounted to little more than the statement that the model in question was an 'active audience' approach. 'Pluralism' was allowed as an answer but, since many of the relevant models could be accommodated within a pluralist framework, this tended to mean that the second model identified was a subset of pluralism and so failed to score further marks. Again, some candidates wrote excessively long answers – sometimes a page or more.
- (e) The weakest answers tended to lump owners, editors and journalists together and to offer commonsensical descriptions of their roles. However, most candidates were able to offer some appropriate sociological material. Some took a more theoretical path, typically outlining classical and hegemonic Marxist and pluralist views, though sometimes these lost focus on news output. Others opted for a more empirical account of various news-producing factors and processes, such as gate-keeping, agenda-setting and news values, with varying degrees of clarity and detail. Some answers tended to drift into a discussion of the effects of news output on audiences, but good answers remained focused, addressed the roles of owners, editors and journalists separately, and integrated empirical and theoretical material effectively.
- (f) Many weak answers were anecdotal accounts of media portrayals of gender, often heavily dependent on lengthy descriptions of characters from soap operas. Others were more

'abstract' accounts that asserted that women were 'always' portrayed in this or that stereotypical way. Marginally better versions at least included the idea that representations may have changed somewhat. More sociologically informed answers drew on one or two appropriate studies (eg Tuchman, Meehan) and concepts (eg symbolic annihilation). Not all candidates considered how men are portrayed in the media. However, many did show an awareness of differences between different media and/or of changes in representations over time. Most answers tended to the descriptive rather than the analytic, and only the best addressed the issue of explanations head-on. Most who did so considered varieties of feminism and postmodernist views, though often as a list rather than evaluatively.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.