



General Certificate of Education

Sociology 6191

**SCY6 Crime and Deviance;
Stratification and Differentiation**

Report on the Examination

2008 examination - June series

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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SCY6

General

There were some exceptionally well-informed, focused and articulate responses that were a pleasure to read. These candidates demonstrated both knowledge and understanding of sociological subject matter and the ability to manipulate this knowledge in ways that engaged with the set questions. These candidates deservedly scored high marks.

At the other extreme, there was a tendency – especially on Questions 1(c) and 2(c) – to write poorly organised and badly focused answers that tended to be very generic. While candidates were sometimes able to show a reasonable knowledge, their inability to process and organise this knowledge satisfactorily meant that they scored relatively poorly on AO2 marks. A possibly related tendency was the continued absence from many scripts of any evidence of planning – including those who wrote a great deal, where one might have thought that planning would be at an even greater premium. Similarly, long, unfocused and discursive answers to Questions 1(a) and 2(a) showed poor examination technique as well as poor use of the available time.

Question 1: Crime and Deviance

This was the more popular question of the two on this paper.

- (a) Most candidates were able to identify one advantage and one disadvantage of overt as compared with covert participant observation. The advantages most commonly proposed were that it poses fewer ethical problems and that it allows the researcher to ask questions. Disadvantages included problems of refusal to grant access to the group and that the group might act differently as a result of their knowledge that they were being observed.

These issues were generally well understood, but candidates often failed to score more than four of the available marks because they were unable to explain these advantages in the context of crime and deviance. For example, many simply asserted that criminals would act differently, without explaining that this might be because they feared that the researcher would report their behaviour to the police. In other words, candidates failed to make the synoptic link between their knowledge of the method and their knowledge of crime and deviance.

A minority of very weak answers confused overt and covert methods and failed to score, while some others drifted into accounts of a different method altogether from that in the question. Some failed to understand the comparative nature of the question and asserted as advantages of overt participant observation features more likely to be found in covert techniques.

- (b) Although a minority of candidates could not muster anything more than very insubstantial or even commonsensical responses here, the majority had enough knowledge of two substantive topics to begin to construct a satisfactory answer.

There were two different ways in which candidates made the connections between crime and deviance and other substantive topics. The first was to identify instances of deviance or crime within the topic, eg domestic violence in families and households, truancy in education, etc. The second was to show an association between the two areas, for

example that inadequate socialisation in lone parent families causes crime. In general, those who adopted the latter approach were much more likely to show the chains of reasoning that were required to develop an analytical and evaluative answer to this question.

Another shortcoming of some answers was to identify parallel explanations – as, for example, in ‘labelling at school’ and ‘labelling in crime’. Even when this process was unpacked and described in each case, candidates often still failed to make a connection between the two areas. By contrast, those who adopted the line of reasoning that ‘labelling in school may lead to crime and deviance’ were far more likely to develop a satisfactory response to the question.

More generally, many answers had only limited and sometimes inaccurate conceptual or theoretical content. For example, Willis’ study was widely described as demonstrating a ‘labelling’ approach and sometimes regarded as an illustration of status frustration. There was little attempt to evaluate any of the ideas put forward.

- (c) Some candidates produced well-informed, well-focused essays in response to this question. At their best, these dealt with a range of theoretical approaches and empirical studies, often organised to good effect in terms of the debate between those approaches that broadly accept the validity and accuracy of official crime statistics, and those that regard them as a social construct. These answers kept their sights firmly on the question of class differences in crime rates and drew appropriate conclusions from their discussion of the literature.

On the other hand, some candidates failed to do some or all of the above. The main shortcomings seen in answering this question were as follows:

- making synoptic links to substantive topics rather than to sociological theory, which led them away from the main focus of the question
- misinterpreting cultural factors from Item A to mean differences in crime between ethnic groups (or sometimes genders) and losing focus on social class differences
- confusing and conflating theories and concepts from different perspectives – for example, locating Merton within Marxist theory, linking status frustration intimately to labelling, or discussing the ‘ruling class’ when describing functionalism; similarly, confusing the British Crime Survey with self-report studies or with the CKP (Crimes Known to the Police) Index
- drifting seamlessly between theories and studies, while showing no understanding of the perspectives with which they are associated
- describing theories and studies of crime and deviance without relating them to social class differences in crime rates
- failing to evaluate the theories
- not making use of Item A as a guide to organising the answer and so not addressing the debates that would have demonstrated a synoptic understanding of how different perspectives explain class differences.

Question 2: Stratification and Differentiation

Few candidates attempted this question.

- (a) Most candidates were able to identify one or two problems. These often included the problem of hybrid ethnicities and sometimes the problem that researchers and

respondents may use different categories. However, some candidates struggled to articulate a coherent explanation of the problems they had identified. Weaker answers sometimes resorted to a descriptive account of ethnicity and life chances rather than addressing the set question.

- (b) Many candidates began their answers with religion but, after drawing heavily on Item B, were unable to offer much additional evidence of the extent of inequality or the reasons for it. Responses were generally better when they moved into work and leisure, families and households, or education. Many candidates wrote a great deal for this question, but some lost sight of the need to address both the extent of gender inequality (for example through an account of empirical research findings) *and* the reasons for it (in the form of sociological concepts and theories). Generally, candidates seemed happier to deal with the extent than with the reasons.

Another tendency was to write about gender *differences* (for example in conjugal roles) without being explicit about the *inequalities* themselves (for example the dual burden). Those who focused on reasons sometimes lost sight of any specific topics and simply gave general accounts of gender inequality in terms of patriarchy, etc.

- (c) Many candidates showed a good knowledge of some potentially relevant material. Most notably, candidates were quite well versed in functionalist, Marxist and Weberian perspectives on stratification. However, they often struggled to interpret and apply this material in ways appropriate to the central concerns of the question, and in particular to the question of change. For example, when Marxism was used, it was often inappropriately focused on possible future change, rather than changes that have already occurred.

Other, generally less theoretically informed, answers offered a description, class by class, of the UK class structure. Some of these were able to introduce descriptive accounts of certain changes (generally embourgeoisement and proletarianisation). Some answers that focused on change did so from within a distorted time-frame that encompassed an industrial revolution putatively occurring in the 1940s or 1950s. Accounts of changes that were identified were often not linked to any theoretical concerns.

However, some answers showed a very good ability to unite theoretical and empirical material on changes in the class structure and to draw conclusions from discussion of a range of appropriate issues and relevant material. These issues included social mobility, feminisation of the labour force, class fragmentation, de-industrialisation and globalisation, the expansion of higher education, the underclass, etc. The best answers used this material to explore its implications for sociological theories of class.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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