

Sociology

Advanced GCE A2 H581

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H181

Report on the Units

January 2009

H181/H581/MS/R/09J

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the syllabus content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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Advanced Subsidiary GCE Sociology (H181)

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Chief Examiner's Report

This was the first session for the new AS sociology specification. The vast majority of entries were for unit G671 with only a few hundred candidates sitting unit G672. This probably reflects the logic of beginning a sociology course with the basic concepts which underpin the first unit. Overall, there was a large variation in the performance of candidates; those who attained high marks were able to demonstrate that they understood, interpreted and evaluated sociological evidence with clarity and accuracy, whilst low achieving candidates had a very basic understanding of sociological evidence, tending to rely instead on anecdotal and asociological material. The term 'sociological evidence' refers to concepts, studies, data, theories and contemporary examples and candidates are encouraged to use a range of these in order to demonstrate they have a wide-ranging knowledge and understanding. There follows a report on each of the two units from this session, with some suggested teaching tips for teachers, focusing particularly on the skills needed to achieve success in this specification. Teachers are encouraged to read the relevant sections and to attend INSET courses during the autumn term to gain further feedback should they require it.

G671 - Exploring Socialisation, Culture and Identity

General Comments

Overall, candidates performed at a reasonable level, within the context of a new specification and mode of assessment (pre-release material), although there was a significant variation in performance between individual candidates and whole Centres. The vast majority of candidates answered all four questions and most candidates managed to dedicate an appropriate amount of time to answering Question 4 which was worth half the marks. A significant number of candidates chose to answer Question 4 first, although this sometimes resulted in them not spending enough time on the other questions. The majority of candidates were aware of the Assessment Objectives (AO's) for each question, although some introduced evaluative comments into Questions 1 and 2 even though this skill was not being assessed in these questions. There was a big difference between the high performing candidates who understood, interpreted and evaluated sociological evidence with clarity and accuracy, and the low achieving candidates, whose answers contained anecdotal and asociological material with assertive evaluative commentary. Sociological evidence includes concepts, studies, empirical data, theories and relevant contemporary examples and candidates need to be encouraged to use a range of these in order to reach the top level in the mark band for Assessment Objective 1. There was also a significant variation in answers to Question 4 with many candidates misunderstanding the role of the pre-release material in answering this question. The most effective answers to Question 4 recognised that the pre-release material is a stimulus to a research context given in Question 4. Weaker responses were overly descriptive, copying out whole chunks of the pre-release material or offering much generalised knowledge about the advantages and disadvantages of research methods. There is further commentary regarding candidate performance in Question 4 below.

Question 1

To achieve full marks on this question, candidates needed to offer a wide ranging and detailed definition and at least two examples. This was achieved through the use of sociological concepts (such as identity, roles, norms) and processes (such as socialisation into feminine identity). Responses which highlighted the variety of feminine identities were rewarded. Examples given could include the different types of femininity, examples of norms associated with femininity and/or studies of femininity/ies. The vast majority of candidates had some knowledge and understanding of the concepts of femininity although there was a wide range of responses to this question. At the top end, candidates displayed clear and frequent use of sociological evidence, making the definition explicit and detailed. Examples included types of femininity (passive, normative etc.) and studies (Blackman's New Wave girls, for example). At the bottom end, candidates failed to pinpoint an explicit definition and examples tended to lack sociological terminology (for example, 'wearing pink', 'straightening their hair'). Some candidates confused femininity with feminism and, as a result, were only achieving limited definition marks by accident.

Teaching tip: *Devise a revision activity which involves students making key concept cards. Use the concepts from the specification content and get students to write an explicit detailed definition on one side of the card, and two examples on the other side.*

Question 2

This question required candidates to focus on two agencies of socialisation in relation to age. The mark scheme allowed credit to be given for responses which focused on age identity or behaviour and rewarded the use of concepts (role models, peer pressure etc) and contemporary examples for AO1.

Four marks were available for AO2a which required candidates to explicitly explain the process of socialisation (how it occurs). The vast majority of candidates were able to identify two agents of socialisation, but were ill prepared for this specific question as they did not use a range of sociological evidence to discuss age-related behaviour. Most candidates attempted to interpret the question as an 'agencies of socialisation' or 'gender role socialisation' question and offered generic responses, without focusing on age. Such answers were marginally relevant and failed to score highly. Responses which did explicitly focus on age related behaviour tended to be anecdotal and asociolgocial and candidates need to be better prepared for answering questions on age. Candidates may have improved their marks on this question by employing sociological terminology, such as role models, social control. Having said that, those candidates who had been prepared for a question on age as a source of identity performed well and were able to reach the top mark bands. There were some particularly good examples relating to old age and youth and where candidates referred to gender within the context of age (eg. 'Teenage girls') they were rewarded.

Question 3

On the whole, this question was answered very well and the vast majority of candidates had some knowledge of the concept 'laddish culture' and why males may adopt this. There was frequent use of sociological evidence in the form of concepts (e.g. hegemonic masculinity, crisis of masculinity') and studies (e.g. Mac an Ghaill, Frosh, Willis, Connell). Many candidates made effective use of the pre-release material, although to move beyond the basic level in the mark scheme, they needed to use a wider range of sociological evidence as reliance on one study does not offer the required range/breadth needed to gain high marks in this question. Weaker responses did not include a range of sociological evidence and tended to use the process of socialisation as a reason for the adoption of 'laddish behaviour', discussing the influence of, for example, the family, peers and media in a generalised way. One skill which was often absent in candidates answers was AO2b (analysis and evaluation). Question 3 asks candidates to 'explain and briefly evaluate'. Candidates who scored highly on this skill discussed other types of masculinity in contrast with laddish cultures or discussed the different experiences of masculinity as related to ethnicity and social class.

Teaching tip: *Practice Question 3's by giving students a writing framework which guides them to addressing all three of the Assessment Objectives*

Question 4

The quality of responses to this question did vary enormously between Centres and between candidates. In particular, there was a noticeable difference in candidates' knowledge and understanding of key concepts (reliability, validity, representativeness, generalisability) and in applying the given research context to the question. In terms of AO1 and AO2b marks, candidates could not get beyond Level 2 (basic) without explicit and accurate use of methodological concepts. Strong performing candidates were able to relate the strengths and weaknesses of the different research methods/ sampling to issues of validity and reliability and representativeness in a wide-ranging way.

Many candidates, however, lacked sufficient understanding of the key concepts and responses were often vague and confused in their application, or key concepts were only implied. Candidates were also rewarded AO1 marks for displaying knowledge and understanding of the wider research process (e.g. Operationalisation, sampling, ethics) although few did this in a sustained or detailed way. Marks were also rewarded for knowledge and understanding of theory, but there was a real range of candidates' understanding of Positivism and Interpretivism. Although the question was specifically asking about mixed methods, responses were awarded marks for individually explaining and evaluating specific methods. The vast majority chose to focus on interviews and questionnaires, as this was the focus of the pre-release material, but where candidates made use of other methods (e.g. observation), this was rewarded. Some candidates, for example, explained how forms of observation could be used to study young people and laddish behaviour. However, few succeeded in doing this well.

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In terms of AO2a marks, candidates needed to hook their answers around a consideration of the given context; i.e. researching young people and laddish behaviour and recognising the mixed methods approach in generating relevant research in this area. It is important to point out that the purpose of the pre-release is to act as a *stimulus*, not for candidates to copy out whole sections of Jackson's aims and findings. Many candidates mentioned that Jackson carried out a form of pilot study and referred to her as 'Dr Jackson' showing they had carried out further research around the study. In general, this did not add to their marks as responses were often confused and vague about these points. It would be better for candidates to have a wider knowledge and understanding of other research findings and methods in order to effectively evaluate the methods selected by the researcher (Jackson) on the pre-release. For responses to be rewarded top band marks for AO2a, (Interpretation and application), candidates needed to engage with the context of young people *and* laddish behaviour. Very few did this in a sustained way and the vast majority of responses only paid lip service to the given context. High attaining candidates were able to assess the methods in terms of the context by, for example, examining the problems of administering questionnaires to teenagers in a classroom on the topic of their (laddish) behaviour.

Teaching tip: *Improve student's contextualization skills by giving them a variety of research scenarios and asking them to plan a Question 4 around mixed methods question.*

G672 - Topics in Socialisation, Culture and Identity

General Comments

The quality of responses for this session varied greatly, with evidence that some candidates were well prepared in terms of knowledge and understanding of relevant sociological theories, concepts and contemporary evidence. However, there were a number of Centres whose candidates almost all produced very weak responses that lacked any sound sociological material and which achieved marks in the lower end of the mark bands.

In terms of options, in this session, the Family was by far the most popular, followed by Youth, Religion and Health. An overwhelming majority of candidates chose to answer both Family questions. Only a small number of candidates opted for Health and Religion. There were a small number of scripts with rubric errors and these usually made the mistake of answering only one question. Generally candidates used their time appropriately, producing approximately three quarters of a side of A4 for part (a) and at least two sides for part (b). Few appeared to run out of time on the second part (b) question.

Most candidates performed quite well on part (a) questions, with the majority reaching marks in Level 3 of the mark scheme. The most common issues that prevented them from achieving Level 4 were:

- Candidates identified more than two points
- Candidates identified and explained only one valid point
- Candidates identified two points which overlapped to such a degree that they could only be treated as one point.
- Candidates failed to fully explain their two points often simply identifying and giving a brief explanation.
- Candidates failed to make use of sociological theories, concepts and/or contemporary evidence to develop their answer and demonstrate sociological knowledge and understanding
- Candidates included explanations that had little relevance to the point identified
- Candidates used time inappropriately on material not required by the question, for example, by including criticisms or evidence against their explanations.

Teaching Tip - *To achieve the top band marks for part (a) questions, two points need to be identified and then explained using relevant sociological evidence including theories, concepts and contemporary evidence. It is important that candidates are encouraged to select points that will enable them to show a range of knowledge and understanding. In part (a) questions, candidates need to identify two clear and distinct factors with explanations that do not overlap. Using a separate paragraph for each point identified and explained is a useful way for candidates to be clear that they have offered two different points. Candidates should be encouraged to write between three quarters of a side to one side of a page on a part (a) answer.*

On part (b) questions weaker answers tended to suffer from the following problems:

- Candidates had insufficient sociological knowledge and responses were mainly anecdotal or drawn from common sense. Better candidates made use of sociological theories, concepts and/or studies.
- Some candidates produced answers that were well informed sociologically but they

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- used material that was of only marginal relevance to the question on the paper.
- Candidates failed to interpret and apply sociological data, for example statistics and findings of sociological studies or examples from current events or broader social trends.
- Candidates produced one-sided answers that only considered evidence agreeing or disagreeing with the view.
- Candidates produced balanced answers but these simply juxtaposed arguments or evidence with little explicit evaluation. Better candidates offered critical comments, weighed up arguments and evidence and drew a reasoned conclusion about the view.
- A number of candidates wrote part (b) answers that were little longer or even shorter than their part (a) answers. Candidates should be aware that part (b) requires a response that is at least twice as long as part (a), reflecting the marks allocated.

Skills

The skill of knowledge and understanding was the one where candidates were most able to achieve the top mark band. To do this they needed to include a wide-ranging and detailed knowledge and understanding of sociological evidence and clearly present knowledge of counter arguments.

Teaching Tip - *To achieve the highest marks in the skill of knowledge and understanding candidates need to include sociological evidence i.e. theories, concepts and/or accurate contemporary evidence on various sides of the argument. They need to show a detailed understanding and so must learn as much about the evidence as they can to be able to write about it in an informed way. Teachers should aim to select teaching material that will best facilitate this process.*

The skill of interpretation and application seemed challenging to a number of candidates, some of whom were able to produce responses with sound knowledge and understanding of relevant concepts, studies etc. but were unable to apply these effectively to the question. Some simply listed evidence without reference to the question while some responses were characterised by their superficial, anecdotal approach.

Teaching Tip - *To achieve the highest marks in the skill of interpretation and application candidates need to select and apply different types of data including theories, concepts and/or contemporary evidence on various sides of the argument. Candidates should aim to identify the most relevant data and then show how this relates to the question, highlighting patterns and trends, supported with evidence where appropriate.*

The skill of analysis and evaluation is a testing area for candidates. Analysis involves breaking down an argument to gain a clearer understanding. This is an essential stage in the evaluation process. Most candidates offered some evaluative comments. However, a large number of candidates evaluated by juxtaposing arguments and theories without any exploration of strengths and weaknesses of evidence. A sustained evaluative approach throughout the answer should be aimed for, with candidates adopting an evaluative tone from their introductory paragraph onwards. Some candidates produced responses that only gained marks for evaluation in the concluding sentences whilst others evaluated only one side of the view.

Teaching Tip – *Candidates should be encouraged to write in a way that shows that they have engaged with the views involved in the question and which shows that they have got to grips with these views. This process produces an in-depth understanding of sociological data that will then enable candidates to construct a clear set of arguments and an evaluation of these arguments. A sustained evaluative approach can be demonstrated by candidates writing an evaluative introduction, making some pertinent*

evaluative points about studies, theories and ideas, and summarising the different views in relation to the question. The candidate should aim to evaluate specific sociological arguments from more than one side of the view, based on the available evidence, methods and explanations. Candidates could be encouraged to use key evaluative terms that signal that they are evaluating the evidence or the argument at that point e.g. 'however', 'on the other hand', 'conversely', 'on the contrary', 'in contrast'.

Overall, candidates fulfilled the requirements in terms of quality of written communication, producing work written in continuous prose and with clarity of expression, although there were a noticeable number of candidates with significant spelling, punctuation and grammar errors.

Comments on Individual Questions

OPTION 1 THE FAMILY

- 1 (a) This question was generally well answered. Better responses were able to use sociological evidence to develop an explanation, for example, by including reference to the changing role of women, feminism, consumerist lifestyles and postmodern outlook. A number of candidates cited divorce as a reason but few were able to offer a relevant explanation. Responses that reached the top mark band did not typically achieve full marks because the explanation needed to be further developed or was provided in detail for only one of the two reasons.
- (b) This question produced a broad range of responses with some very well informed answers showing a clear understanding of the question. Such responses tended to draw on the work of Zaretsky, Engels, Marcuse and Marxist feminists like Ansley and Benston to support the Marxist view and included counter views from functionalism, the New Right and Postmodernism. Top band responses utilised the wording of the question and were clearly focused on discussing various views on the role of the family in society. However, most candidates showed very little knowledge and understanding of Marxist views although they could articulate views from other perspectives. Many offered very confused responses that either mistook Marxism for functionalism or were very unclear about the distinctions between the two. Some answers contained no reference at all to Marxist views.
- 2 (a) The question was not generally as well answered as 1(a) and included many more anecdotal explanations. Candidates who were awarded marks in the top band typically referred to changes such as more child-Centredness, changing gender roles, and changing family types. Explanations often lost sight of the question of changes in relationships between parents and children. There were a significant number of candidates who ignored the reference in the question to 'the past 30 years' and wrote at length about historical material relating to pre-industrial society, producing responses of marginal relevance.
- (b) There was a range of responses to this question and overall it was better answered than 1(b) with candidates seeming to be well prepared for this part of the specification. There was usually a clear attempt to address both sides of the debate and maintain a focus on the question of negative impact. Some candidates produced quite narrow responses that did not move beyond issues relating to single parent families. Weaker answers were anecdotal, narrower in range and left arguments unsubstantiated. Some offered generalised discussion of types of diversity that were not applied to the question.

OPTION 2 HEALTH

- 3 (a) There were very few candidates who chose this option. This question was not well answered and candidates did not seem well prepared for this part of the specification. A number of candidates were unclear about the concept of alternative medicine and there were few well-informed responses. Those that did reach the top mark band typically referred to Illich and iatrogenesis, postmodern views on diversity and choice and evidence on the growth of alternative medicine.
- (b) There were some strong answers to this question but also a significant number of very weak responses that were limited in their understanding of the meaning of 'structural factors'. Candidates who were awarded marks in the higher mark bands tended to organise their responses into sections that showed knowledge and understanding of a range of health related ethnic inequalities and relevant sociological explanations. Most answers, however, were limited to a brief and narrow discussion of factors like racism and poor housing with little analysis and evaluation.
- 4 (a) Answers to this question were generally better than 3(a) and candidates usually offered two distinct and valid identifications. Responses that reached the Level 4 mark band developed an explanation that was sufficiently detailed and included theoretical, conceptual and/or contemporary evidence. Most responses tended to be less well informed and although they referred to relevant factors such as women's stressful lifestyle and men's attitudes to visiting the doctor, explanations lacked supporting evidence.
- (b) This question produced few very good responses. Better answers typically included the work of Parsons and referred to concepts such as the sick role, rights, obligations and doctors as gatekeepers and included counter views drawn from Marxism, Weberianism and feminism. Most candidates, however, struggled to present anything more than a much generalised outline of functionalism with only a fleeting reference to the role of health professionals.

OPTION RELIGION

- 5 (a) Only a small number of candidates opted to answer this question. Of those who did, most were able to identify two reasons and include some explanation in support although this tended to be anecdotal. The most common reasons cited were that women have more time than men and thus women are closer to matters of life and death. Few responses reached Level 4 and this was mainly because they lacked sociological evidence in explanation.
- (b) There were some very good answers to this question. These used a range of evidence drawing on arguments concerning religious pluralism, spiritual shopping, religious attendance and participation. Such responses made some attempt to engage with the wording of the question as it referred to 'the contemporary UK' and counter views were clearly presented. There were a surprising number of responses that neglected the recognised sociological material and attempted to construct an answer that was built around examples of 'unreligious' behaviour such as divorce, abortion, sexual permissiveness etc. These tended to be superficial and anecdotal and struggled to rise beyond the lower marks of Level 3 at best.

- 6 (a) Very few candidates opted to answer this question. Of those who did, most were able to identify two characteristics of NRMs and develop their points reasonably well, typically citing examples from Wallis' typology and offering some illustrations of particular religious groups. Lower level responses were typically confused in their understanding or offered very narrow, superficial explanations.
- (b) There were very few answers to this question. The view that 'religion promotes social change' was typically supported via examples such as Martin Luther King and Ghandi with Weberian explanations neglected. Marxist views were used as counter arguments. Responses to this question tended, therefore, to be quite narrow and lacking in detailed knowledge and understanding.

OPTION 4 YOUTH

- 7 (a) This question was generally well answered and a number of candidates produced responses that were quite well informed about functionalist views. Better answers typically referred to Parsons and Eisenstadt and processes such as 'rite of passage' and 'transition from childhood to adulthood'. Such responses supported their points with relevant explanations. Some candidates were able to identify two valid features but produced only limited explanations or explanations that branched off into less relevant discussion of youth subcultures.
- (b) There were a small number of well-informed responses that referred to relevant studies and explicitly addressed the question of youth subcultures as a response to racism. Evaluation in such responses, however, tended to simply juxtapose youth subcultures as a response to issues of class or gender with little explicit evaluation. Quite a few candidates referred to evidence relating to skinheads but were unclear in their analysis of this material. Most responses were quite superficial and, although they made reference to relevant data, failed to develop as sound an argument as the material would suggest.
- 8 (a) This question was generally well answered and candidates drew on a variety of concepts such as status frustration, cultural capital, labelling, material deprivation and cultural deprivation. Weaker responses tended to identify factors such as differences between state and private schools and material possessions and explained these anecdotally.
- (b) There were a variety of responses to this question with some very strong answers that covered a range of relevant factors including chivalry factor, girl gangs, changing masculinities and femininities and methodological issues such as neglect of girls by researchers. There were also some weaker answers that simply described rather dated research on boys and deviance. Such responses tended to assert that girls' deviance was increasing but offered little evidence in support.

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE (Sociology) (H181)
Jan 2009 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
G671	Raw	100	68	60	52	44	36	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	30
G672	Raw	100	69	62	55	48	41	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	30

Specification Aggregation Results

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
H181	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0

0 Candidates aggregated this series

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:
http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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