

AS LEVEL

Sample Candidate Style Answers and Commentary

SOCIOLOGY

H180

For first teaching in 2015

Component 2

Version 2



Contents

Introduction	3
Section A	
Question 1	4
Question 2	5
Question 3	6
Question 4	8
Question 5	10
Question 6	12

Section A

Question 1 Describe two findings from the data in Source A.

[4]

Low band – Sample answer

Source A shows that full time employees earn more money. Also, full time women are more likely to earn less than £8 an hour.

AO2 - 2 out of 4 marks.

Commentary

There are two correct points from the source but no detailed use of exact numbers. The answer does not show that the student has read across to the vertical axis to understand the difference between groups. There is limited use of comparative language. The response is partial.

How the answer could be improved

Use specific numbers to make comparisons: what is the % difference? This could be calculated and stated to boost marks. Also when saying words like 'more than' or 'less than', the comparative group needs to be stated.

High band – Sample answer

Source A shows the hourly wage gap between part time and full time employees. For example, around 50-52% of part time employees earn less than £8 an hour whereas around 52-53% of full time employees earn more than £12 an hour.

Source A also shows that there is a gender gap in hourly wages, especially for full time employees. For example, around 57% of all full time male employees earn more than £12 an hour, compared to 49% of full time female employees, a percentage difference of around 8%.

AO2 - 4 out of 4 marks

Commentary

Two points are stated clearly with detailed use of the source. There is accurate reading of the vertical axis and comparative language is used: 'whereas' and 'compared to'.

Question 2 With reference to Source B, explain why sociologists operationalise concepts.

[9]

Low band – Sample answer

Sociologists need to define the terms that they use for their research. This is because they need to know what they are looking for in a study before they start the data collection. For example, if researchers wanted to measure racism, they would need to describe what they mean by racism: prejudice, stereotypical thoughts of others, discrimination such as abuse, neglect. This is shown in the source in the word "poor".

A01 - 3 out of 6 marks. A02 - 1 out of 3 marks.

Total = 4 out of 9 marks.

Commentary

There is no explicit use of key concepts but there is a sense of understanding the concept of operationalisation. However, it is underdeveloped, lacking in wider knowledge. The example of racism is good knowledge but not relevant to the source. There is only a quick mention of the source with no real point made about it.

How the answer could be improved

Keep referring to the source in the answer. The examples referred to must always be relevant to the question set.

High band – Sample answer

Operationalisation is the process in which sociologists define concepts and ideas in order to measure them. For example, in the source, the researchers are investigating the concepts of "poverty", "disadvantage" and "better off backgrounds". These terms can all be debated on how to define them and are therefore subjective (based on opinion, which may be inaccurate or invalid). To stop any confusion over how the researchers carried out their measurement of the topic, they needed to define their terms in a way that could be seen as quantifiable and therefore more objective. Source B states that "disadvantaged schools" was defined/operationalised based on the % of children who received free school meals (FSMs) and that a figure of 50-75% of pupils on FSMs was seen as a "disadvantaged school". This is seen as a more reliable measure: one that other researchers could replicate in later studies in order to check the conclusions made by Horgan. Positivists would see this process as a means to improve both the reliability and validity of the study.

A01 - 6 out of 6 marks. A02 - 3 out of 3 marks.

Total = 9 out of 9 marks.

Commentary

There is excellent explicit use of terms (validity, objectivity, reliability) and there is thorough use of the source, highlighting operationalisation using the specific context of the source

Question 3 With reference to Source A, explain why official statistics are used in sociological research. [12]**Low band – Sample answer**

Sociologists use official statistics because they are quick to use and cheap to obtain. Official statistics come from the Census which is a postal questionnaire that takes place every 10 years. This data is free to use from the Government website. Sociologists use this in order to save money. Postal questionnaires like the Census tend to ask closed questions where the sample ticks a box for their response. Data from official statistics have high levels of validity as they can be trusted to be honest data from the Government. The Government has a legal and moral duty to record data in an accurate manner across a range of topics such as education, policing and employment, like in the source. However, interpretivists do not like quantitative data as it lacks verstehen needed in sociological research. They would say that official statistics are not valid and not in-depth enough for good research. The source uses statistics to show the gender gap in wages. We can use this to make in detail comparisons between different groups, something that Positivists would see as good sociological research, measuring precise data in an objective manner. Objectivity refers to using the facts of the evidence rather than opinion or bias in the research method.

A01 - 6 out of 8 marks. A02 - 2 out of 4 marks.

Total = 8 out of 12 marks.

Commentary

The first four sentences keep saying the same, basic point about the method being cheap/free. It is better to state this quickly and then move on. The point about validity is good. The answer wasted time on referring to Interpretivist criticisms of official statistics: this question is only AO1 and AO2 skills, not AO3. The Positivist theory reference shows good understanding and depth of what objectivity means. Overall, there is not enough range of knowledge for the top band but the information presented is mainly relevant and supported by conceptual evidence. In terms of AO2 marks, the response is generalised, with not enough links to the source.

How the answer could be improved

In answering this question, more thought needed to be given to the specific use of official statistics for the topic of wage gaps between different groups. Aim to make use of the more complex research method concepts such as validity and reliability, rather than the more simple practical points.

High band – Sample answer

Official statistics are collected by the Government and its agencies to measure large-scale trends about the population. Sociologists make use of this source as a secondary source of quantitative data.

Source A refers to data concerning how wage gaps exist between full time and part time workers and men and women. This is useful evidence as it's large scale: we can assume the sample was a national sample, and therefore, use it to make generalised conclusions. This refers to the concept of representativeness, something that Positivists would praise as it allows the researcher to make universal laws about society. Durkheim referred to official statistics as "social facts" in order to emphasise how he felt they could be trusted and seen as objective.

Official statistics can be analysed in sub-groups to study a topic in more detail adding to more validity (accuracy) in measuring a topic eg: Source A shows men and women in both part time and full time work leading to thorough comparisons being made.

The Government has a large amount of money to fund research when compared to sociologists in research teams. This means that the data collection can occur at a very frequent rate: source A refers to data in 2010. We could assume that the Government would measure the same data in the same manner to monitor trends/correlations over time. This makes it more reliable. This would be useful from a feminist perspective, to measure if the gender pay gap widens or not.

Governments might use official statistics in order to inform social policy decisions. For example, the evidence in source A might lead to a review on the equal pay act as to whether it is achieving the aim of opposing workplace discrimination.

A01 - 8 out of 8 marks. A02 - 4 out of 4 marks.

Total = 12 out of 12 marks.

Commentary

The answer starts with a clear definition of method. It lists the advantages of official statistics and develops each point well: references to key concepts such as representativeness, trends, validity, reliability, correlations. Connections to Positivist and feminist theory are well developed. The answer keeps referring back to the source to illustrate points made.

Question 4 Using source B and your wider sociological knowledge, explain and evaluate the use of [20] interviews for researching the effect of poverty on young children's experiences of school.

Sample answer

Interviews are a very flexible research method. Horgan's study decided to use a semi-structured interview which is seen as a middle ground between a free flowing, unstructured interview and a much more pre-planned structured interview.

Horgan needs to be aware that his sample are of a very young age and that they are answering questions on a sensitive and personal matter: the sample may feel they are being judged as "poor" or "deprived" by the researcher. With this in mind, Horgan has to build trust and rapport between him/her as researcher and the sample. It would seem that the source made most use of open ended questions when the sample were free to express themselves in their own words. Anoop Nayak did the same when interviewing young men in Newcastle regarding their identity and found success in obtaining lots of rich, detailed data. Interpretivists like this. There is an ethical strength to the study in that a good rapport in the interviews will help the children in the sample feel happy and free of distress/intimidation in what could be a very formal situation.

However, interviews are criticised. They are very hard to repeat and therefore unreliable: Horgan and Nayak will have had rather unique relationships with their sample which other researchers may find hard/impossible to repeat.

The sampling of interview studies tends to be poor: although the source states that 220 children were interviewed, this is from a non-random sample known as a purposive sampling technique. This is when the researcher goes directly to a group of people they think are relevant to the topic in their research question. Positivists would argue that this is a major weakness as we cannot generalise from such a sample. The results that Horgan obtains are fixed on the sample he went to on purpose.

In addition, Positivists would prefer to study a topic like poverty with quantitative data. This would allow for more precision on the topic. Having said this, the source does state that Horgan made use of a comparison between disadvantaged and better off areas: this is a comparative approach that the Positivists would praise.

A01 - 4 out of 6 marks. A02 - 4 out of 6 marks. A03 - 5 out of 8 marks.

Total = 13 out of 20 marks.

Commentary

There is good understanding of interviews and theories of research methods. There is good use of a range of concepts: reliability, sampling, ethics, rapport. In terms of Application marks, the answer does refer to the source/ context of the research but not consistently enough to get into the top level.

How the answer could be improved

Some of the knowledge is underdeveloped. For example, it doesn't explain why semi-structured interviews are difficult to repeat and therefore unreliable. The answer could have referred to a wider range of concepts; for example, validity and verstehen as further concepts.

High band – Sample answer

Interviews are when a researcher meets their sample in person and asks them a series of questions. If the researcher wants an interview to occur like a natural conversation, this will become an unstructured situation in which new questions can be improvised and unexpected data followed up. Structured interviews can sometimes be seen as face to face questionnaires, especially if they are focused on closed questions. Interviews can also occur in either group or 1:1 situations.

Group interviews may be advantageous for the topic of researching the effect of poverty on young children's experience of school. This is because, ethically, it could be seen as a sensitive topic: children may feel embarrassed if exploring issues to do with poverty and disadvantage. A group of friends may make the sample feel more confident in talking freely to the researcher: they may therefore have a stronger rapport in the interview. The source refers to Horgan's use of a "cartoon character" to ask questions with the younger children of the sample: it seems Horgan was aware of the need to make the interviews an unthreatening and comfortable experience for the sample. This could lead to more in-depth answers from the sample, something the Interpretivists would hope would lead to *verstehen* (empathy) with a sample group. All of this makes the interviews more valid and true to life. The source refers to "open-ended" questions where the children are encouraged to explain answers in their own words. Group interviews are also beneficial for sampling: they allow a researcher to reach a group in the same time it would take to interview an individual, leading to a larger sample size. The source refers to 220 children, which is a large size for a qualitative based study.

However, size of sample does not make the research representative. Interview studies normally make use of non-random samples as they are a time consuming method that it is hard to repeat to lots of randomly selected sample members. The source refers to all the schools being selected in Northern Ireland. If Horgan picked postal questionnaires as the method, there was more opportunity for a randomly selected sample and therefore a more representative group from which a conclusion could be generalised.

There are other weaknesses to interviews too. The group interviews used by Horgan can lead to peer conformity in answers. For example, in Paul Willis' study of the "lads" seem to be boasting and exaggerating their level of rebelliousness at school. In addition, good interview rapport is hard to replicate: another researcher might not carry out the interview questions with the same personal skill and therefore, the research collects very different levels of depth. This makes them very unreliable. This is when interviewer effects can have an influence. The gender, age, class and ethnicity of Horgan and Willis may have affected the rapport with their sample. For example, in measuring if poverty has an effect on education, perhaps a sample of children from disadvantaged backgrounds would not share their true opinions as they saw the researcher as a middle class professional that couldn't understand what their life is like.

Positivists would also criticise unstructured interviews as the researcher ends up with hours of recorded conversations: there would be bias in the editing process of this work.

Overall, interviews tend to create more rapport and *verstehen* with a sample than questionnaires but they have problems of group conformity and poor representativeness. Interpretivists tend to prefer the unstructured, free-flowing style of interview whereas Positivists would prefer a much more structured and therefore reliable approach. Horgan seems to balance both of these approaches as the source states that he used "semi-structured" interviews.

AO1 – 6 out of 6 marks. AO2 – 6 out of 6 marks. AO3 – 7 out of 8 marks.

Total = 19 out of 20 marks.

Commentary

The answer includes excellent use of a wide range of concepts and theories. The answer keeps referring back to the source and the topic in the question. Willis is selected to illustrate a point, relevant to the topic in the question. Theoretical links are well expressed and in depth. The context of the research topic is addressed in a successfully explicit way.

How the answer could be improved

Some points could have been fully developed, for example the point on 'bias in the editing process' could be illustrated further.

Question 5 Describe TWO ways in which males are disadvantaged.**[10]****Sample answer**

Males are disadvantaged in family life. This is because they receive far less time off work for paternity leave: many men only take two weeks. In addition, there is evidence that many men felt they can't take the paternity leave that is due to them as they fear their boss will look badly on this. This can mean that men lack a quality relationship with the early years of their children. Also, there used to be a protest group called "Fathers for Justice" that argued men are disadvantaged after divorce: their ex-wives control access time to their children in an unfair manner.

Males are disadvantaged at school as they do less well. There is a big GCSE gap. When they are interviewed in studies, boys don't like coursework work at school and have an anti-learning subculture (Willis).

AO1 - 6 out of 10 marks.

Commentary

Some good knowledge shown on family disadvantage: paternity leave and "Fathers for Justice" references are relevant and detailed. Both points show use of concepts and evidence eg. anti-learning subculture. There is an underdeveloped second point though and a lack of research evidence/studies.

How the answer could be improved

The answer could have included specific GCSE data in the second point and reference to more studies eg. Mac an Ghaill. Perhaps the student spent too much time on the first point and ran out of time for the second. Which study was it that interviewed boys to measure they don't like coursework? Not liking coursework might not be seen as a 'disadvantage': the answer needed to explain how assessment requirements in the curriculum perhaps don't favour boys as much as girls or how a lack of male teachers at primary school means boys lack positive role models in education.

High band – Sample answer

Males are disadvantaged in terms of educational performance. In 2013, 56% of boys obtained five or more A*-C grades at GCSE including English and Maths which was 10% less than girls in the same year. This gender gap has been consistent since the late 1980s/early 1990s. Boys do worse than girls in literacy based subjects the most: English GCSE for example. Mitsos and Brown argue that boys are disadvantaged by teacher discrimination in that teachers tend to be less strict with boys and have lower expectations for their academic standard. Boys are also disadvantaged by a far higher permanent exclusion rate from school than girls: the ratio of boys excluded compared to girls is around 4:1 (2012, Source: School Census data). Connell might link this to a "live fast, die young" value system for some boys that do not see the value in education for their long term benefit, similar to Willis and Mac an Ghaill's research on boys at school.

Males are also disadvantaged in terms of health. Men have a significantly lower life expectancy than women. ONS data from 2013 states that on average, boys can expect to live to 79 years of age, 4 years less than girls who can expect to live to 83 years of age. Connected to this fact is the significantly higher suicide rate for men than women. ONS data (2013) shows that the suicide rate for men compared to women is over three times higher. This may be a reflection of how men are disadvantaged by a culture in our society that means they feel they cannot share their emotional problems with others or seek help from health care workers.

AO1 – 10 out of 10 marks.

Commentary

Excellent knowledge and understanding is used. Four key statistics are used in detail and there is good use of relevant studies that connect to the overall point in an explicit manner. The studies are well connected, for example similarity described between Connell, Willis and Mac an Ghaill.

Question 6 Evaluate the functionalist view that the roles of men and women should be different. [20]**Sample answer**

Parsons refers to how men should focus on being a breadwinner for their families and that women should focus on being a housewife who raises the children of a family. This is the functionalist view of the family. Parsons believes that there is a general consensus regarding how men and women should carry out different roles in the family. He calls this the warm bath theory and feels women and men are better at and more happy in carrying out these traditional conjugal roles. This traditional view would be supported by the New Right such as Murray. Murray sees it as important for mum and dad to raise children in a traditional nuclear family. Otherwise children are not properly socialised and create an underclass.

Parsons wrote these ideas in the 1950s which could now be seen as dated. Women today want choice on what kind of role they would like, many feeling that they will focus on a career path. This was true in a sample of girls that were interviewed by Sue Sharpe. She found that girls in the 1970s prioritised getting married and starting a family whereas a later generation of girls interviewed in the 1990s felt that educational progression leading to a good career choice was a better path for them. Postmodern ideas also say women have more choice today.

Feminists believe that men and women's roles should be based around the same opportunities in life. Girls, on average, do better than boys in education, so the proportion of women that choose the path Parsons describes is in decline. Why would girls pick the housewife role when they are better qualified than their male partners?

The Government have introduced paternity leave. This goes against Parsons' view as he would argue that dads should not aim to be child carers to their children at all. This should be left to the wives. But feminists would praise paternity leave as it encourages more equality in family relationships. Feminists would see Parsons as patriarchal (male dominated) and oppose what he says.

In the mass media, the roles of men and women are changing compared to the era that Parsons was writing in. There are lots of different role models for boys and girls as they become men and women in society. These role models are diverse and lead to different roles now being seen as relevant for modern day men and women.

AO1 – 4 out of 6 marks. AO2 – 3 out of 4 marks. AO3 – 6 out of 10 marks.

Total = 13 out of 20 marks

Commentary

A good line of reasoning with some logical structure shown, this answer covers a decent range of material: Parsons, Murray and Sharpe. Some points are underdeveloped; for example, the warm bath theory could be explained further; Murray's view in terms of gender differences needed to be developed further. In terms of evaluation, there is explicit evaluation but, again, underdeveloped; for example, the postmodern theory point for example, and reference to media role models could benefit from some sociologists that support this.

How the answer could be improved

Refer to a variety of feminism(s) when criticising Parsons. Aim to refer to a broader range of sociologists as named references. Knowledge could be developed conceptually; for example, Parsons could be linked to the expressive and instrumental roles. Improve the amount of explicit AO3 skill by offering examples that further explain the points raised.

High band – Sample answer

Functionalists support the idea of a domestic division of labour in family roles. For Parsons, women should dedicate their role towards being a homemaker and carer for her husband and children: the expressive role. Whereas men should focus on the ability to be a successful breadwinner: the instrumental role. Parsons felt that this arrangement was most functional for the family and society as the husband and wife can specialise in their specific roles. Functionalists tend to see the caring role as a natural extension of women's biological function to have children. Parsons' idea is often referred to as the "warm bath"; a metaphor that represents the woman's role to relax her breadwinning husband as if she was a warm bath that he can make use of. This fulfils the function of stabilising the adult personality of the male breadwinner.

Feminist ideas would challenge Parsons for having a sexist expectation of women's roles. They believe in the pursuit of equality; that men's and women's role should be equal and not different. Freidan and Oakley both carried out research and found that many housewives feel isolated, alienated and patronised. Oakley would argue that Parsons neglects the social construction of the caring role for women; females are socialised into taking on the caring role; it is not biological and in-built. Marxist feminist ideas from Benston and Ansley would argue that Parsons neglects the true monetary value of housewives for the capitalist economy: they reproduce the next generation of workers and maintain the current generation of workers for free. Radical feminists would challenge Parsons even further: that his warm bath idea reflects a fundamental level of patriarchy (male dominance) in the entire structure of our society. Radical feminists such as Firestone propose to make use of science and IVF technology to free women's bodies from the pregnancy process and so, free them from the expectation of becoming carers. This would make women more truly equal to men. Black Feminism would challenge Parsons as he neglects awareness of how gender roles vary according to ethnic group. For example, the rate of employment as a breadwinner for a family is high for women in British Afro-Caribbean families.

However, Parsons' ideas on gender roles have found support in more recent times. Hakim argues that a significant proportion of women still actively choose to become carers. Hakim argues that society now has enough legal protection, contraceptive options and workplace opportunity that women can focus on breadwinning roles as equally as men can, if they choose to. She challenges the feminist idea that patriarchy is ingrained into the structure of society: women have more agency (freewill and the power to make choices) than feminists suggest.

Feminists would respond to Hakim's points and still challenge the Functionalist assumptions about women's roles. For example, although paternity leave and childcare policy has become more supportive of sharing childcare, not enough investment is made into this to give the majority of women real choice.

AO1 – 6 out of 6 marks. AO2 - 4 out of 4 marks. AO3 – 10 out of 10 marks.

Total = 20 out of 20

Commentary

Parsons is the right focus for this question. Thorough knowledge and understanding followed by explicit evaluation points are given throughout. There are a range of evaluation points: notice the 'Functionalist comeback' section in the 'Parsons might counter...': which shows high level evaluation ability. A very good range of key sociologists are referenced. The conclusion is brief but relevant and well supported.



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