

Section A Sociological Perspectives - Paper II - 25 mark question

NAME:	DATE:

NOV 2009

Positivists believe that the social world is like the natural, physical world. It is made up of objective facts, independent of individuals, just waiting to be discovered. Sociologists should approach the study of society, therefore, rather like a biologist investigating the structure of a living organism or an astronomer examining the stars. The ultimate aim is to identify a set of laws that govern human behaviour rather like the laws of the universe that physicists seek to explain. Positivists argue that this aim can only be achieved by sociologists adopting the methods and procedures that are used in the natural sciences.

Through following the rules of scientific method, verifiable data and valid correlations can be established that may be used to confirm or deny an *hypothesis*. In essence, this involves testing theoretical statements against evidence that is gathered by the most logical method in an objective manner and interpreted in an impartial way. Positivists believe that it is possible for sociologists to study society without their own values influencing the research findings.

Interactionists have questioned whether it is appropriate to study society using the methods and procedures of the natural sciences. They have also challenged the notion that value freedom is possible when studying society, or even whether it is desirable. Interactionists prefer methods of research that enable the sociologist to enter the lives of the people they are studying and develop an in-depth understanding of how they interpret and negotiate their social relationships.

- (a)** What is meant by the term *hypothesis*? [2]
- (b)** Describe **two** methods of sociological research favoured by positivists. [4]
- (c)** Explain why it might not be possible, or even desirable, to study society in a value-free way. [8]
- (d)** Assess the arguments for and against using scientific methods in sociological research. [11]

MAY 2009

Social order is possible because each individual member of society plays specific roles. Each role carries a *status* and a set of expectations about how the person performing the role will behave. These expectations reflect the values and beliefs that form the culture of the society.

It is mainly through interaction with other people that the individual learns the expectations associated with his or her roles. This process is known as socialisation. Through socialisation people learn that social sanctions exist to encourage behaviour appropriate to their roles and to discourage inappropriate behaviour. These sanctions may be negative or positive.

Among sociologists there are different views about what is meant by socialisation and how this process takes place. Functionalists view socialisation as a one-way process in which society, through agencies such as the family, the education system and peer groups, ensures that individuals perform the roles already defined for them by those agencies. However, this view has been criticised for implying an 'over-socialised' concept of the relationship between the individual and society. Interactionists argue, for

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example, that socialisation is not a one-way process because people are free to negotiate their social roles and obligations.

- (a) What is meant by the term *status*? [2]
- (b) Describe **two** examples of sanctions that might be used to discourage inappropriate behaviour. [4]
- (c) Explain how social order is maintained in a closed institution, such as a mental asylum or a prison. [8]
- (d) Assess the functionalist theory of socialisation. [11]

NOV 2008

Sociologists who believe that society can be studied in a scientific way are known as **positivists**. They claim that it is possible to identify external variables determining human behaviour on the basis of which general social laws can be formulated. However, writers in the Interpretivist tradition, such as Max Weber, have criticised the positivists for exaggerating the similarities between sociology and the natural sciences. Sociology has not achieved anything like the degree of agreement, certainty or ability to predict of the natural sciences. It cannot, for example, use laboratory experiments in the same way to derive its data. This makes it far harder for sociologists to separate and control variables in order to establish the cause or causes of events.

Positivists generally accept that there are practical difficulties in applying the methods of the natural sciences when studying social behaviour. However, they argue that what sociologists do is, nevertheless, scientific in that sociology constitutes a body of organised knowledge developed through systematic enquiry using techniques that approximate to those of natural science, producing valid data and using methods that are high in reliability.

An altogether different view of science has emerged from what has been termed the 'realist' school. This argues that it is misleading to typify science as being based on experiment and that, outside the laboratory, scientists are faced with as many uncontrollable variables as social scientists. Many explanations in science are based on theory rather than direct observation of the underlying causes of an event. Hence, the realists claim that the differences between sociology and the natural sciences are not as great as the critics of positivism have suggested.

Other writers, such as Kuhn and Lakatos, have pointed out that even in the natural sciences knowledge to some extent is socially constructed. This brings into question therefore the idea that the natural sciences are in some way more objective or value-free than the social sciences.

- (a) In the context of scientific research what is meant by the term *variables*? [2]
- (b) Describe **two** problems with using laboratory experiments in sociological research. [4]
- (c) Explain what it means to say that knowledge is socially constructed. [8]
- (d) Assess the interpretivist critique of positivism. [11]

MAY 2008

For **social order** to exist, it is necessary that individuals conform to generally accepted patterns of behaviour, *at least to some extent*. Without a degree of conformity, life would be chaotic. Imagine, for example, if all the teachers and pupils in a school arrived one morning and did exactly what they wanted instead of carrying out their normal roles, order would quickly disappear. Social order largely depends

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on people fulfilling the roles they have learnt to play in a given situation. Pupils are expected to behave as pupils and teachers as teachers, and so on.

Rewards and sanctions play a key part in encouraging conformity. Individuals who are seen to perform their roles well may receive rewards such as a higher salary, job promotion, an official honour or title, or some other form of praise and esteem that is seen as desirable. People who behave in a way that is socially unacceptable may be punished with sanctions such as ostracism, loss of privileges, telling-off, and fines or jail sentences if they have broken the law.

There are essentially two types of explanation of social order, one of which can be linked with functionalism and the other with the Marxist perspective. Functionalists like Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons focus on the role of shared norms and values in maintaining cohesion in society. Parsons argued that social order is created through the process of socialisation whereby people come to internalise the same views about what is acceptable behaviour. By contrast, Marxists claim that weaker groups are pressured into accepting the rules of society by the powerful. Conflict rather than consensus underpins society in this view. For Marxists, order is maintained through the exercise of economic power and the influence of ruling class ideology.

(a) What is meant by the term *ideology*? [2]

(b) Describe **two** reasons why school pupils generally conform to their expected roles. [4]

(c) Explain why some individuals and groups may fail to conform to generally accepted patterns of behaviour. [8]

(d) Assess the functionalist theory of social order. [11]

NOV 2007

Sociologists are divided about whether the methods and techniques used in the **natural sciences** can be applied in sociological research. Sociologists in the positivist tradition support the scientific approach. Through their research they seek to discover 'scientific laws', which could explain the causes, functions and consequences of social phenomena, such as rates of crime and suicide. In contrast, sociologists who support the interpretivist perspective maintain that there is a fundamental difference between the subject matter of the natural sciences and the social sciences.

This perspective derives from the work of Max Weber. He rejected the idea that people can be studied in the same manner as the physical world. People attach meanings to what they do and sociology has to acknowledge this and attempt to interpret those meanings. However, this raises the question of whether sociologists are able to interpret other people's behaviour in a way that is objective and value-free. Positivists warn that in-depth studies that focus on understanding the meanings people attach to their behaviour give rise to many difficulties. They are also likely to be contaminated by researcher bias to such an extent as to make the results totally unreliable.

(a) What is meant by the term *researcher bias*? [2]

(b) Describe **two** problems that a sociologist may face in seeking to interpret objectively the actions of other people. [4]

(c) Explain why some sociologists think that people cannot be studied in the same manner as the physical world. [8]

(d) 'The differences between the logic and methods of the natural sciences and sociology have been exaggerated by the critics of positivism.' Assess this view. [11]

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MAY 2007

A conventional assumption is that children often behave differently from adults because of natural differences between the two age groups. Thus it may be assumed that playing with toys and seeking the attention of adults are forms of behaviour that infants are naturally predisposed towards. The process of growing out of **childhood** and maturing into an adult is also often seen as something that happens automatically to people once they reach a certain age. Yet these commonsense assumptions run up against the problem that there is considerable cultural diversity in the behaviour patterns of infants. Similarly, the age at which people are considered adults varies between societies. These cultural differences suggest that, far from being natural, the identities associated with the roles 'child' and 'adult' are socially constructed.

- (a) What is meant by the term *socially constructed*? [2]
- (b) Describe **two** examples of cultural differences in the behaviour patterns of infants. [4]
- (c) Explain how a person develops a 'social self' during infancy. [8]
- (d) Assess the claim that sociologists have exaggerated the role of socialisation in shaping human behaviour. [11]

NOV 2006

One of the central concerns of Sociology is to explain how and why societies hold together. What prevents societies breaking down into lawlessness and chaos? This is known as the problem of social order. There are essentially two types of explanation of **social order**. One is associated with functionalist theory and the work of Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons in particular.

Functionalists focus on the role of shared norms and values in maintaining cohesion in society.

The second explanation of social order derives from the Marxist tradition. For Marx, social order is the product of the balance of power between competing groups. This involves the powerful constraining weaker groups, with cohesion sustained through economic pressures, political and legal coercion, and ruling class ideology. This type of order implies ongoing conflict and a struggle for change, rather than enduring stability. In Marxist theory, the State plays a key role in managing conflict and maintaining social control in the interests of the ruling class.

- (a) What is meant by the term *ideology*? [2]
- (b) Describe **two** examples of how economic pressures may play a part in maintaining social order. [4]
- (c) Explain the role of the State in managing conflict and maintaining social control. [8]
- (d) Assess the strengths **and** limitations of the functionalist and Marxist theories of social order. [11]

MAY 2006

The process by which individuals learn the culture of their society is known as **socialisation**.

Primary socialisation, probably the most important part of the socialisation process, takes place during infancy, usually within the family. Socialisation is not, however, confined to childhood. It is a lifelong process. In modern industrial societies, other important agencies of socialisation include the educational

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system, the media, the occupational group and the peer group. Without socialisation, an individual would have little resemblance to any human being defined as normal by the standards of his or her society. Most societies have a range of sanctions that may be used to support the socialisation process and to deter deviant behaviour. This is known as social control.

- (a) What is meant by the term *peer group*? [2]
- (b) Describe **two** sanctions that may be used to deter deviant behaviour. [4]
- (c) Explain how children learn to interact with other people during infancy. [8]
- (d) 'Sociologists have exaggerated the extent to which people conform to social norms and expectations in modern societies.' Assess this claim. [11]

NOV 2005

A **social problem** is any condition or form of behaviour that gives rise to concerns about the cohesiveness and stability of society. Delinquency, divorce, unemployment, and industrial conflict, are just some of the phenomena that may be considered social problems. However, it is important to note that what constitutes a social problem in one society may not be regarded as such in another. Alcohol consumption is an example of this. Even within a particular society social problems can be and often are viewed differently. For example, some groups in a society may regard immigration as a problem while others may regard racism as a problem. It is usually the most powerful groups who are able to define what is considered a social problem and what social policies are adopted for dealing with it. Hence, it is important to discover where power lies in order to identify and understand social problems.

- (a) What is meant by the term *social policy*? [2]
- (b) Describe **two** social problems in your society. [4]
- (c) Explain how some groups may benefit from having the power to define what is considered a social problem. [8]
- (d) Assess the view that sociological research should be used as a basis for solutions to social problems. [11]

MAY 2005

Sociologists emphasise the importance of **socialisation**, rather than biological instinct, as the key to understanding human behaviour. They point out that learning plays an essential part in creating social beings and that this takes place primarily through interaction with others. Individuals begin at an early age to become aware of the existence of others and to take this knowledge into account as they form their own identities. The family plays a crucial part in this process. For example, it is usually through interaction with other family members that a child first becomes aware of his or her gender identity and learns to recognise the norms and values that define how people of each gender are expected to behave in society.

- (a) What is meant by the term *socialisation*? [2]
- (b) Describe **two** examples of gender socialisation within the family. [4]
- (c) Explain how a child learns to interact with other people. [8]

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(d) Assess the claim that sociologists have exaggerated the importance of socialisation in shaping human behaviour. [11]

NOV 2004

Sociologists are strongly opposed to accounts of social behaviour that rely on common sense. They point out that in everyday life 'common sense' is just a phrase people use to claim that what they are saying is beyond question. But the claim is not backed up by any systematic appeal to evidence; if it were it would cease to be common sense. By contrast, sociological reasoning sets out the steps of an argument systematically, shows where and how the argument is supported by evidence, and states how the evidence was collected.

Furthermore, sociologists attempt to examine the assumptions on which their own research and arguments are based, so that they are not misled by irrational and unsupported ideas. They also make their work available for criticism and review by other sociologists so that any *bias* may be detected; common sense simply claims that it is common sense, and therefore cannot be challenged.

(a) What is meant by the term *bias*? [2]

(b) Describe **two** possible sources of bias in a piece of sociological research. [4]

(c) Explain how the use of the hypothetico-deductive method may make sociology superior to common sense. [8]

(d) Assess the view that sociological research can never be as rigorous and objective as research in the natural sciences. [11]

MAY 2004

Many sociologists admit 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 this or that feature of social life is unacceptable, and research that may lead to improvement is a 'good thing'. This means they are concerned about how their research data is used and whose interests it serves.

Positivists, however, take a very hard 'scientific' line and claim that they do research that is neutral in value. 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 or bureaucrats to decide how their research is used.

(a) What is meant by the term *value-judgement*? [2]

(b) Describe **two** factors apart from personal values that may influence the sociologist's choice of research topic. [4]

(c) Explain how the values of the researcher may lead to bias in the collection and presentation of research data. [8]

(d) Assess the view that the purpose of sociological research should be to bring about improvements in society. [11]

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NOV 2003

Social control is a term widely used in sociology to refer to the processes by which the behaviour of individuals or groups is regulated. Since all societies have norms and rules governing conduct, all have some mechanisms for ensuring conformity to those norms and for dealing with deviance.

Social control is consequently a widespread feature of society.

Sociologists study social control in order to understand its precise nature and to identify the mechanisms at work in particular social contexts. They often distinguish between two methods of ensuring conformity: formal and informal control.

(a) Distinguish between *formal* and *informal* social control. [2]

(b) Describe **two** means of informal social control. [4]

(c) In whose interests does social control operate? [9]

(d) 'Most individuals or groups are powerless to resist the processes of social control.' Discuss. [10]

NOV 2002

Sociology aims to understand what humans do, not through studying the biological or individual psychological make-up of individuals, but by examining the ways that the society in which they live influences and shapes what they do. In the debate about whether humans behave 'naturally' or are 'nurtured', sociologists are firmly on the side of nurture. They claim that in order to participate effectively in society we must learn particular roles and the norms and values appropriate to them through interaction with other individuals. This process is called '**socialisation**'. However, there are different views in sociology about how individuals learn the *norms* and values of society. For example, is a social identity something that can be chosen and interpreted by individual actors or is an individual's identity more like the part an actor learns for a performance where their role and lines have already been written for them?

(a) What is meant by the term *norms*? [2]

(b) Describe **two** examples of how society may shape what individuals do. [4]

(c) Explain why sociologists consider that human behaviour is influenced by nurture rather than nature. [8]

(d) Assess the view that social forces beyond their control determine an individual's identity. [11]

MARK-SCHEME FOR 2 MARK QUESTIONS

NOV 2009

(a) What is meant by the term *hypothesis*? [2]

A hypothesis is an untested statement about the relationship between concepts within a given theory. Two marks for a clear and accurate definition; one mark for a partial definition such as 'something the sociologist wants to test' or 'a supposed relationship between things'.

MAY 2009

Section A Sociological Perspectives - Paper II - 25 mark question**What is meant by the term *status*? [2]**

Status refers to the social honour or prestige that is acquired through occupying a particular position in the social structure e.g. teacher, doctor. Two marks for a clear and accurate definition; one mark for a partial definition, such as 'the position a person has in society'.

NOV 2008**(a) In the context of scientific research what is meant by the term *variables*? [2]**

Variables are the factors that may influence the outcome of an event or experiment. An answer along these lines would be worth two marks, with one mark for demonstrating partial understanding e.g. 'variables are things that cause other things to happen' or 'variables are the things scientists try to control when setting up an experiment'

MAY 2008**(a) What is meant by the term *ideology*? [2]**

At the most basic level, ideology refers to a set of ideas or beliefs. Two marks for an answer along those lines. One mark for an answer that demonstrates partial understanding of the concept e.g. 'ideology refers to the beliefs people have' or 'ideology includes the ideas we have about the world'

NOV 2007**(a) What is meant by the term *researcher bias*? [2]**

Researcher bias refers to the distortion of the research process and/or results that is due to the influence, consciously or otherwise, of those carrying out the research. Two marks for a clear and accurate definition, one mark for a partial definition.

MAY 2007**(a) What is meant by the term *socially constructed*? [2]**

The term socially constructed refers to the idea that social reality is created through the interpretations of individuals and groups interacting with each other. Two marks for a clear and accurate definition, one mark for a partial definition.

NOV 2006**(a) What is meant by the term *ideology*? [2]**

Ideology may be defined as false or mistaken ideas that are imposed by one group on another to maintain its advantaged position in society. A definition along these lines would merit full marks. A more limited definition that is at least partially correct may be worth one mark.

MAY 2006**(a) What is meant by the term *peer group*? [2]**

A peer group is composed of individuals sharing similar age and social status, with which an individual mixes socially. An accurate definition along these lines would achieve full marks. A simple, partial definition – such as 'a group of friends' or 'people of the same age' – may be awarded one mark.

NOV 2005**(a) What is meant by the term *social policy*? [2]**

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Social policy may be defined as objectives formulated or adopted by the government that are directed towards meeting the social needs of the population. A clear definition along these lines would merit two marks, with one mark for a good but flawed attempt

MAY 2005

(a) What is meant by the term *socialisation*? [2]

Two marks for a clear and accurate definition, such as: 'the social process by which people learn norms and values and a distinct sense of self'. One mark for a partial definition.

NOV 2004

(a) What is meant by the term *bias*? [2]

Bias may be defined as the selective use of evidence or arguments that distorts or conceals the truth (= 2 marks). One mark for a poorly expressed or otherwise limited effort that has some merit e.g. 'a one-sided view' or 'a personal opinion only'.

MAY 2004

(a) What is meant by the term *value-judgement*? [2]

A decision about what is right or wrong, good or bad that ultimately depends on personal belief (= 2 marks). One mark for a poorly expressed or otherwise limited answer that has some merit e.g. 'someone's own view' or 'something that people believe to be right'

NOV 2003

(a) Distinguish between *formal* and *informal* social control. [2]

Sex refers to the biological differences between males and females; gender describes the socially assigned roles and expectations associated with males and females. Two marks for a clear distinction; one mark for some relevant insight.

NOV 2002

(a) What is meant by the term *norms*? [2]

A norm is a shared experience of behaviour that connotes what is considered culturally desirable and appropriate. Two marks for an accurate definition along these lines. One mark for a partial effort. E.g. 'norms are social rules'