SOCIOLOGY (BHS315116)

INVESTIGATION PROJECT (IP)

A major change to the IP Guidelines was implemented this year to align the topics with the current syllabus. This has widened the scope of the types of topics that can be studied and many candidates took advantage in formulating their research question. Students should discuss the meaning of these topics with their teacher, as part of their study of Module 3: Equality and Inequality, to reach an understanding of inequality in Australia prior to beginning their IP.

Students are required to base their IP on one of the following three topics.

1. The causes and consequences of inequality: political, social and economic.

2. Social differentiation and structured inequality as reproduced through socialisation.

3. Structured inequality as it occurs through the institutions of family, school, work and education.

An indication of the topic and the group to be investigated should be listed on the cover page of the project as well as the aim, research question and/or hypothesis. Some reports produced by candidates lacked a connection to inequality. Rather than quote a definition of inequality, students are advised to define and explain the aspect of inequality they are investigating in their introduction linking back to one of the three topics above and the social group they are investigating.

Generally the overall quality of the IPs was very sound, many candidates this year chose some interesting variations on familiar themes from past years. A select few, but really exceptional projects were successful because of their consistent adherence to the guidelines combined with a demonstrated deep understanding of the nature of their chosen topic and quality application of primary research.

The candidates who were not successful in completing the project to a pass standard did not address the topic of Inequality adequately. Students should be encouraged to establish this through careful selection and use of relevant primary research in addition to supportive application of sociological terms and concepts.

One issue of concern this year was the number of reports that had clearly been submitted without final corrections being made. This included a number of reports that were submitted with the teacher’s comments and suggestions included in the text – suggestions and corrections that had self-evidently not been acted on. The deadline for this assessment task is known well in advance and a significant amount of time in the course is allocated to it. Hastily submitted reports that include teacher’s comments in the text do not reflect well on the dedication or competence of the candidate.

The Guidelines give clear direction on what should be included in each section of the report. While it is acknowledged that the report format is suggested and students are not penalised if they use a different format, there are certain elements that all reports are expected to contain in some form or another.

TOPICS

A number of IP’s didn’t make a clear case for why their particular issue was an example of an inequality. These papers failed to properly address Inequality. The focus was on the differences between groups (men/women, rural/urban, public/private schools, etc.). Some failed to state if and/or how inequality causes this difference, many did not clearly articulate some of the sociological implications for the inequality. Students need to interpret the data - it does not speak for itself.
For instance, it is not sufficient to say that lower SES students or rural students are disadvantaged as they have lower university participation rates unless it is explained how this affects life chances e.g. probability of being unemployed/finding full time work/income etc. Similarly how/why is a difference in the amount of time males/females spends completing housework an inequality? It isn’t sufficient to just say that because women do more than that in itself is an inequality. This could be linked to the ’double burden’, functionalist views on roles in the family, etc.

Discussion of social problems (drinking, bullying, etc.) is not inequality unless it is linked to an issue e.g. bullying as a part of discrimination against an ethnic group where the topic is on racism not bullying per se.

INTRODUCTION

It is expected that the introduction will explain the area and topic to be investigated. Key terms and definitions should be explained (if necessary). A BRIEF literature review should give the background information to the issue based on reading prior to the investigation. A clear statement of the aim/research question or hypothesis should be given. The introduction should not contain analysis and discussion of the issue that belongs later in the report as support or interpretation of the research finding.

Many introductions were too long (600-800) and included definitions of a range of concepts only marginally linked to the topic and a range of theorists not always relevant to the study. Some of the inequality background was well researched and read like an essay rather than an introduction. The introduction needs to link into the actual study e.g. a list of all the factors that create indigenous inequality cannot then be put aside to ask a few people if they think inequality exists. In the same way after listing all the ways that household gender roles have been reported, it needs more than asking a few participants if they think housework is equally divided.

Stronger students chose recent studies and statistics and then went on to look for support (not proof) as it related to that study or chose an older set of statistics to see if the findings had changed in the 20 years or so, they used percentages and had clear relevant specific questions.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

This year many candidates took advantage of the fact that the contents of the research methodology section lays outside the constraints of the word count. Candidates utilised this to their advantage. However candidates need not go into minutiae.

There have been some differences in the way that candidates have presented certain elements of the study such as:

- Addressing limitations of research design
- Definitions of terms used in the study (e.g. SES)
- An overly detailed explanation of the purpose/rationale for each question utilised in the study.

Some of this explanation can be avoided by being integrated into the results section when describing the data presented in graphs and figures (i.e. the SES of participants in the study was determined by the highest level of reported education achieved by either parent…as can be seen in fig one above X% of respondents reported both parents having completed a tertiary level of education…).

While the suggested report format is open to differences of interpretation, candidates should be wary of unnecessary detail and abusing the lack of word count on this section of the report.
Quite a number of reports failed to give specific details of the age/gender/sourcing of participants used in study, particularly when using participants from outside a school setting or participants with specific attributes that made them the target for the research study. Candidates need to accurately describe their type of research, i.e. not calling their IP an Experiment.

ETHICS

Candidates need to present evidence to show that they have met the ethical requirements when carrying out their research. Some students did not do this adequately particularly if they used subjects other than members of their school, family and friends or if their topic was particularly controversial. Candidates are reminded to ensure that any member of the public (not family or part of the college population), involved in the research has completed the provided consent form. It is a sound idea to acknowledge this in the ethics section.

Some candidates spend a great deal of words explaining in detail how their research met the ethical guidelines. While it is important candidates indicate that they have met the ethical requirements for their research in some cases this space would have been better allocated to discussing the findings.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

In designing the research instrument, the literature review, research question and discussion should align. Questions in surveys should address the research topic. Survey questions often asked for perceptions rather than reality. For example, asking public school students if they feel they are being treated inequitably needs to be supported with other primary or secondary data that shows that is the case. The use of terms such as stigma, idealise, objectification and normalise in surveys on the assumption that these terms would have a shared understanding among participants. Candidates should provide a definition of these terms or find an alternate way to ask about these types of concepts.

RESULTS

Interviews provide a challenge in how to present the data. Candidates should try to look beyond presenting the data obtained just as summaries of each interview question. Possibilities are tables of the main findings, graphing of certain data and direct quotations within the analysis. Students are reminded that the results should be in a clear easily read manner with graphs and tables labelled. Results used in the analysis and discussion need to be in the report, as it is a standalone documents. Raw data should not be on graphs or included as ‘extra’ graphs in the appendix as it is not necessary to graph every question from a survey. The Appendices should contain a copy of the research instrument and a transcript of any interviews and may include a table of raw data. If the results are not relevant to the study then do not include them.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

It is important that students examine an issue using a sociological lens. The analysis and discussion should centre on the results of the primary research into the topic of inequality to show the key findings and to link these to relevant sociological secondary research. The triangulation of primary data and secondary sources (preferably sociological) leading to a conclusion is the purpose of the project. Too many IPs briefly referred to their findings and then wrote an essay on their topic based solely on secondary sources. This is not the intent of the IP. As an example, it is not sufficient to just demonstrate that there is a gender difference in the amount of housework that males/females complete. The result should then be framed through a theoretical lens (such as functionalist/conflict and/or feminist arguments about the function of the family and gender roles within it) thus leading to a conclusion as to why such a difference exists and whether it disadvantages one gender over another. In this way, through the triangulation of primary data and secondary sources, the candidate can: view the issue through different perspectives/theories, check for consistency in results against other studies, provide greater understanding on the issue and produce a robust and comprehensive discussion.
A small number of weaker IPs were submitted by candidates who had attempted to rely only on a content analysis as their primary form of research. In the discussion and analysis section there should be a consistent effort made by the student to link their secondary research to primary data through triangulation.

Finally, candidates need to pay particular attention to what their primary research actually shows. There was an alarming tendency among some candidates to write what they wanted their research to find rather than what the data actually indicated. There could be no better example of this than the following quote: ‘most participants admitted to being abused by customers (26%).

**REFERENCING**

Reference lists were in the main consistently and methodically combined and presented correctly as per the guidelines. For some candidates, referencing was still quite problematic with many finding it difficult to accurately reference sources utilised in the study. Frequently the sources cited did not accurately reflect those listed in the Reference section. Similarly many students listed a range of sources in their Reference List that were not cited in the body of their folio. Where possible, up to date and Australian sources should be used. Old statistics, up to fifty years old, needs to be contextualised if a comparison is going to be made with the primary research.

All, but only, those works cited in the text should be included in the list of references. The works that are referred to should be appropriate to the candidate’s own research topic and within the context of contemporary Australian society. In the age of the Internet it is easy to find research from around the world on a similar topic to the one been investigated but which has little relevance in the Australian context.

**FEEDBACK ON IP CRITERIA**

**Criterion 5**

Most candidates followed guidelines, expectations and on the whole researched topics that fitted with one of the social groups and topics suggested in Module 3 and demonstrated a satisfactory understanding of research methodology. Formation of and clear articulation of a research aim was provided, although some still opted to deliver a hypothesis more fitting to Psychology. Stronger methods clearly outlined participant selection, procedure and ethics. Weaker contributions were briefly written in present tense and first person.

Too many candidates stated use of convenience sampling, but continue to use the term ‘convenient sampling’. Teachers need to remind students to check for this carefully as spell check will not help with this distinction.

Data presentation and the initial descriptive summary of the results (or selected aspects of the results), demonstrated candidates’ sound knowledge of how to interpret data, though the labelling of tables, graph axes, figures, etc. continues to be poorly addressed. When providing some statement of the tables/figures, candidates need to do more than just repeat the title of each. Many candidates graphed every question, rather than the responses that were focused upon in their analysis and discussion. Some also opted to repeat (unnecessarily) information from the table/graph statements in a summary of key trends.

A number of candidates provided considerable detail (excessive and unnecessary) in outlining the reasons for the inclusion of questions for their survey, even adding supportive secondary data. Unfortunately, this then meant that less effort was given to the analysis and discussion.

Ethics were addressed generally well, either as specific dot points or well-written paragraphs referring to the ethics listed in the guidelines. Weaker offerings merely referred to the ‘ethics document from TASC’ or referred markers to the ‘Disclaimer’ on their research tool in the Appendix.
Criterion 6
Stronger contributions provided a coherent analysis of data through links to existing contemporary empirical background secondary resources, most with an Australian focus. These projects provided an analysis/discussion which clearly explored the issue provided in the Introduction, integrated a wide range of sociological concepts and terminology, referred to limitations of research and offered a clear conclusion.

Weaker responses repeated information provided in the Introduction (in some instances, the quotations were unchanged) and did not analyse and discuss the results graphed/tabled summarised. Often old evidence dating back to 1996 was cited, where more recent evidence is available and many candidates only used online references.

Criterion 7
Generally, most candidates performed well on this criterion, though the balance between the Introduction and Discussion sections remains an area of concern given there was often too much detail provided in the introduction not always followed by a comprehensive analysis and discussion.

Weaker investigation projects did not extend to the minimum word length, failed to integrate references in their discussion of data trends, made in-text referencing errors, lacked careful proof reading, failed to follow the guidelines re presentation of report sections, the inserting of the progressive word count and procedures around referencing (specifically, the uncertainty of the differences between a ‘references list’ versus a ‘bibliography’).

WRITTEN EXAM

Well-constructed essays provided a well thought out argument, supported by evidence from the stimulus and the course, leading to a sound conclusion. Candidates are advised to read the syllabus document and the required elements in the exam specifications for each separate criterion. This is especially important as Criteria 1 and 2 are only assessed once on the exam.

Criterion 1 focuses on the application of sociological theories about socialisation, identity construction and deviance and candidates are expected to provide at least two alternate theories. Candidates are expected to apply the theories to real life situations by providing evidence from the stimulus or course. An evaluation of the two (or more) sociological theories should be provided, at the very least by comparing and contrasting the theories as a means of understanding social processes such as socialisation, identity construction, social control or deviance.

Criterion 2 focuses on the application of sociological theories to at least two of the institutions: family, education, work and media. Candidates are expected to provide at least two alternate sociological theories associated with the institutions and to evaluate those theories; this may be in the form of comparing and contrasting the different perspectives on the role of the institutions in society. Candidates are expected to apply the theories to real life situations by providing evidence from the stimulus or course.

Criterion 7 focuses on the structuring of the response to address all aspects of the question. Thus it is expected that students will cite and use examples from the provided stimulus to support their argument. The stimulus is an integral part of the Sociology exam paper and candidates are advised to respond to the specific wording of the question when constructing their answer and to use evidence from the stimulus.
SECTION A:

QUESTION 1  (25 RESPONSES) SOCIALISATION AND SOCIAL CONTROL

The candidates who had prepared well for this question demonstrated a clear understanding of social control and the mechanisms of social control in society, including mention of positive and negative sanctions and the role of the institutions. Strong answers constructed arguments that incorporated the provided stimulus on social control as part of their analysis of the process of social control in society. The functionalist perspective on socialisation and social control was contrasted well with the conflict perspective as well as discussion centred on agency. Discussion on the functions and dysfunctions of deviance was included in several very good responses as this enabled students to consider the benefits of social control for society as well as those who might be disadvantaged. Stronger candidates extend their argument to include control theory as this enabled them to look at the connections made in society that encourage conformity and discourage deviant behaviour. Some students may have been better to have chosen the socialisation question as they focused solely upon that aspect of the question with very little reference to social control.

QUESTION 2  (76 RESPONSES) SOCIALISATION AND IDENTITY

This question called for detailed understanding of the essential concepts of socialisation and identity. It also required an understanding of theoretical perspectives related to socialisation and identity formation.

Most candidates began the question with a discussion of the process of socialisation and the agents of socialisation and how this contributes to identity formation. Better answers used the stimulus well in support of socialisation theory this then led into a discussion of how the individual learns the culture of their society and forms their own identity.

Some capable candidates were able to extend this argument by acknowledging that individuals are not just shaped by our social environment, that in CAS they increasingly have the power to reshape their own social roles. In some excellent responses these points about individual agency and also resocialisation were made.

Nearly every candidate had at least some knowledge of theoretical explanations of the acquisition of identity. Students should be reminded about the importance of making a careful selection from the stimulus material. Applying this material to the written response is key to a robust result.

Again, use of the stimulus as examples for the Symbolic Interactionist’s theories of Cooley, Mead and Goffman was crucial to attaining a higher rating and able candidates drew on the available material well. Dramaturgy and Impression Management were logical concepts to use with the stimulus material provided. Some answers incorporated these theories and also the concepts of primary and secondary socialisation very well. Some candidates also aimed less successfully to draw on theories of deviance. These candidates had limited success as the effort to cover too much in their argument prevented them from making a cohesive argument overall.

QUESTION 3  (257 RESPONSES) SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES OF DEVIANCE

Criterion 1

Stronger responses to this question demonstrated good knowledge of key explanations, identification of relevant stimulus examples as well as discussion of the strengths and limitations of the theories of deviance.

These responses were able to provide a clear understanding of the key concepts and make relevant, meaningful and accurate links to the stimulus.

Weaker responses, whilst demonstrating some understanding of the key concepts, could not successfully link these to the stimulus, confused the names of theorists and misidentified key perspectives.
Criterion 7
Many candidates had learnt prepared introductions and responses to this question. Stronger responses tailored their essays to ensure that they addressed the set question and provided well written essays, written in paragraphs that, at times, used the terms of the question with topic sentences that went beyond listing the theories of deviance as the ‘first’, ‘second’ theory of deviance etc. They also made relevant use of the stimulus. Weaker responses did not refer to the given terms of the question.

Extra information is called for but should be provided, in addition to, not at the expense of the stimulus material. Long paragraphs on Macquarie Fields needed to be refined.

Other points to note:
- The perspective is Interactionist not interactionalist
- Intensity was often inaccurately described in the Cultural Transmission Theory
- Excessive information on socialisation is not warranted.

QUESTION 4  (93 RESPONSES) MEANING AND RELATIVITY OF DEVIANCE

Almost every candidate who answered this question had a solid knowledge of the main theories explaining deviance. However, the desire to write down this knowledge in many cases overwhelmed a balanced answer to the actual question which was focused on the relativity of deviance. While most answers made at least a passing reference to the relativity of deviance and many were able to draw on stimulus 4 in their description, far fewer were able to provide examples beyond the stimulus material. Better answers were able to draw on wider events to support their arguments though very few did so at any length, the desire to write down all the theories was just too overwhelming. Students are encouraged to draw on examples like the same sex marriage survey and its outcome which was dominating the media in the lead up to the exam. It is recommended that Sociology students keep at least one eye on issues and events in contemporary Australian society and use their newfound knowledge of sociological theories and ideas to interpret them. Future students might reflect on different examples that could be used to support an analysis of the different facets of the relativity of deviance – over time, between cultures, in different social settings and the like. On this note many students chose to ignore Stimulus 4 to support their answer in favour of the stimulus material provided for other questions. While students are free to use any of the material on the exam paper wherever they like, and indeed are encouraged to do so, it is worth bearing in mind that specific stimulus material is provided for each question. The stimulus material has been chosen because it has particular relevance to the question linked to it (Stimulus 1 links to Question 1, Stimulus 4 to Question 4 etc.) and it is a good idea to start here when planning your answer.

SECTION B:

QUESTION 5  (165 RESPONSES) INSTITUTIONS AND STRATIFICATION

Marker 1: Answers were well supported with evidence from the course. Students quoted studies and research and CAS examples such as NAPLAN and Gonski review to support their arguments.

On the whole the stimuli provided on the exam paper were used effectively. Some candidates lapsed into changes in family structure, which would have been relevant had there been a connection made with stratification. However, this connection was not always made evident.

Many candidates were able to cite theorists associated with the theories. Family, work and education were the institutions used in most analysis of stratification. A few candidates attempted to use media in this context. Time management on the whole seemed sound. Only a few candidates’ answers indicated that they had not finished and run out of time.
Marker 2: Responses to this question generally succeeded in answering the basics of the question; i.e., they discussed two social institutions, social stratification and two theories or perspectives.

The majority of candidates chose to apply at least two of the sociological perspectives (functionalist and conflict were most often cited) rather than to apply more specific theories. Some candidates discussed the theories explaining unequal educational outcomes, and some discussed theories related to gender stratification in the family and/or work. Most responses discussed education and family as their two institutions; work was also often included with a small minority discussing the institution of media.

It was evident that almost all candidates had prepared responses for this question in advance; most were relatively lengthy – at least four pages – and had ‘generic’ explanations for the key concepts and perspectives. Preparation is of course desirable; candidates are simply reminded that when they are writing their responses they should think about how their knowledge can be adjusted/tailored to the specific stimuli and question phrasing such that they are creating a unique response.

Criterion 2:
While almost all responses described/applied two theories or perspectives, many candidates did not analyse and evaluate the theories. Candidates are reminded that a thorough response will always analyse and evaluate the theories or perspectives under discussion; which ideally means they should compare them to one another in terms of similarities/differences, and evaluate the strengths and limitations of each in addition to explaining how they apply to social stratification. A significant number of responses merely explained two perspectives and defined social stratification, without explicitly describing how the perspectives would explain the existence of social stratification in the institutions. Candidates are reminded to return frequently to the question to ensure that their entire response is crafted around explicitly answering it.

Criterion 7:
The majority of candidates created a response that satisfied the requirements of an essay answer, including an introduction and a conclusion. Less successful responses did not provide a conclusion.

Less successful responses were poorly structured and did not follow a cohesive argument; conversely the stronger responses were focused on creating an argument/response that addressed the question: they explained what social stratification is, explained what social institutions are and their purpose, provided evidence regarding the existence of social stratification in these institutions, and explained how and why this might be the case according to at least two perspectives or theories. Stronger responses discussed concepts such as Bourdieu’s cultural capital and habitus, intra- and inter-generational social mobility and how this can occur.

The difference between the creation and maintenance of social stratification was not discussed.

Discussion about institutions must relate to the question: how do they create and/or maintain social stratification? Discussions of how an institution has changed over time (particularly with reference to the family and work) need to relate these changes to social stratification.

Further to this, discussions about the institution of family often referred to the family’s SES but did not explain how this related to social stratification – for example, the implications of being born into a lower SES vs a higher SES family. Explanations of the family as an institution of stratification generally focused on gender inequality but did not as often discuss the notions of social reproduction, cultural and other capitals, social mobility and agency. There were also some stereotypes applied regarding lower SES parents and their aspirations for their children, which should be avoided.

Similarly, education as an institution of stratification often stereotyped the ‘private vs public’ school debate into ‘better vs worse’, with generalisations occurring about the quality of teaching, for example, existing within the two systems. The use of stereotypes in general does not display a desirable depth of understanding without an explanation of the reasons behind them and the nuances separating the generalisations from details. (For example, what is ‘better’ about private schools, and why might these things be? What are the reasons behind the differences?)
Almost all candidates incorporated one or more stimuli into their responses; stronger answers integrated the stimuli more thoroughly by using them to further their argument rather than merely referencing them in passing.

In general it would have been preferable to see more analysis and rationale/explanation – rather than simply defining and describing, explanations of how and why show greater depth of understanding.

QUESTION 6  (30 RESPONSES) INSTITUTIONS AND POWER AND POLITICS

There was evidence of prepared answers in response to this question on the role of power and politics in society. The very best answers used their knowledge of the institutions, theories and perspectives and linked this to the stimuli to respond to the nuances of the question.

Essays generally took one of two approaches to the question. There were several essays that considered power and politics in institutions through the functionalist, Marxist, interactionist and feminist perspectives. These responses drew upon changes to legislation such as the impact of the Family Law act or funding for education. Comparison of the perspectives was an effective way to evaluate the positives and negatives of the theories.

The second approach began by examining the institutions such as family, education and media and how power and politics within these institutions may be interpreted as beneficial or not. Concepts such as patriarchy, proletariat, stratification, social reproduction and the poverty cycle added to the examination of shifts in power within in the institutions over time. Some students struggled to link these ideas to the idea of power in society and may have been better off to answer a question on changes or even stratification in institutions.

QUESTION 7  (178 RESPONSES) INSTITUTIONS AND CHANGES OVER TIME

Stronger answers attempted to link how different perspectives interpret changes in institutions over time, and then used these perspectives to critique each other.

Stimuli provided were well used. A very few candidates didn’t use stimuli at all, resulting in a D for Criteria 7.

Some answers over emphasised the inequality caused or addressed by the changes, and this side tracked their argument. The majority of answers were driven by an analysis of family and education. A few candidates tackled media and family resulting in not so strong answers.

Little coverage of how work in CAS has changed over time and the influence this has had on education and women in the workforce (family) was undertaken.

QUESTION 8  (79 RESPONSES) INTERRELATIONSHIP OF INSTITUTIONS

There were many good answer and some excellent analyses of the interrelationships across institutions. Students had prepared well for this question and were able to critically discuss some, or all, of: conflict/ functionalist / interactionist /feminist viewpoints. Bourdieu, Bernstein also featured with the link between family and educational attainment, cultural capital, elaborated and restricted codes.

There was good use of the stimuli and it was vital that there was reference to these but not by paraphrasing that extended into paragraphs. Students, who were looking for inspiration but did not have the concepts and theories, used the stimuli as the main source of information and only commented on what these contained.

The best answers often used the link between family background and educational attainment from Stimulus 7 as a strong starting point and bits from the rest of the stimulus to demonstrate the interrelationship. Some students incorporated relevant aspects of all the stimuli. Students should try not to use the word ‘believed’ when explaining the theories or theorists.

Overall this was a question chosen by students who were confident in their theoretical background and had the ability to use this and the stimuli in an effective, logical and well-argued way.