

## Sociology

Course Code: BHS315116

As this is the first year for this syllabus, candidates are advised to read the Report carefully for the nuanced differences between this and previous courses.

### Investigation Project

The investigation projects this year were, in general, of a poorer quality than previous years. As there are three criteria assessed on the investigation project it is important to look at the requirements for each one. While there were some outstanding pieces of research of a sociological nature, the majority of the projects contained significant errors either in research design or the written report on their findings. Specific advice from the markers is given below regarding both of these issues. On the whole many of the research tools were not well thought through and consequently they didn't enable a great deal of depth of exploration of sociological concepts and debates. Candidates are advised to read the IP Guidelines carefully regarding topic choice, consultation with their teacher, referencing and the suggested guide for the written report.

#### Criterion 5: Use ethical sociological research methods

Most candidates performed well on Criterion 5 and demonstrated a satisfactory understanding of research methodology. The majority of candidate contributions followed guidelines, expectations and on the whole researched topics that did fit with the Equality/Inequality module. Weaker candidates chose research ideas which proved either too difficult to adequately research or lacked sufficient depth of sociological interpretation, used definitions from general rather than sociological sources, provided insufficient resources, poor in text referencing and insufficient depth of coverage re word limits.

When describing method, weaker candidates lapsed into first person and failed to indicate the number of participants and how they were accessed. This is also the section where candidates should clearly articulate the ethics involved in research and not limit themselves to a statement such as a disclaimer was at the top of the survey. This should not occur as candidates do not need to count the method in the word count and therefore more detailed methodology and ethical considerations should be included. There is no need to mention/list secondary sources as this is covered in the Reference List.

Many candidates are still **surveying opinions** about issues of inequality (e.g. Do you think there are fewer females than males in management roles? Do you think women's sport is covered less than men's? ) In doing this candidates are gathering data that is not establishing a credible body of evidence that can be used to investigate the causes and consequences of the inequality. Stronger candidates had a clear idea of how to gather data that exposed the causes and consequences and designed their research well. For example strong candidates used surveys around the number of male and female managers in a work place or did an audit of the number of news items about male and female sports over a period of time. Surveying opinions has been a problem for several years now and makes for a weak research design.

There were candidates who presented graphs showing raw data that failed to make a statement beneath the graph. Whilst this was the case in many instances some candidates stated results beneath their graph and then repeated this same information in a summary of main trends. It needs to be one or the other.

#### Criterion 6: Use evidence to support a sociological point of view

The depth of sociological evidences articulated within the Introduction and Discussion sections differentiated sophisticated and complex contributions from those which simply summarised their topic with little application of relevant and supporting empirical research. The level of analysis and evaluation of data was generally quite poor and students should be discouraged from simply graphing all research trends with no discussion/analysis of how these relate to their research aim.

A discussion around addressing one of the **focus questions**, causes and consequences or economic, political and social dimensions of the inequality, or how the inequality related to an institution, was key to this. *Criterion 6, element 6.6* is clear: "outlines links between empirical evidence and sociological concepts and theories." The focus questions weren't always investigated sociologically.

Many Discussion sections focused too heavily on the explanation of problems and means of improving research limitations at the expense of data analysis and evaluation. Stronger projects reflected research that provided clear evidence on a topic (from a range of sources, not just online references), rather than a perception of evidence.

Candidates are reminded that the investigation is a Sociology investigation and it is expected that their reports will analyse the data they have collected using ideas and opinions within the field of sociology. In the Internet age it is easy to find commentary on many investigation topics. On some topics, particularly those to do with the media and sport, there is a wealth of commentary readily available on line. Much of this commentary, however, is not sociological but rather opinion pieces by journalists and other commentators. While candidates are not discouraged from referring to this material it should be as a supplement to the ideas and theories of Sociologists, not a replacement for it. Candidates are urged to turn first to recent Sociology texts and then flesh out their discussion with reference to wider commentary.

The use of opinion pieces, [study.com](http://study.com), [boundless.com](http://boundless.com) and [dictionary.com](http://dictionary.com) as references is not scholarly. Sociological research and text books and Government agencies and organisations should be the centre of the literature search. Google is not a credible place to start.

### **Criterion 7: Communicate sociological ideas, information, opinions, arguments and conclusions**

Candidates are also urged to pay more attention to the **reference list** they are required to attach to their reports. Some candidates included both a reference list and a bibliography. This is unnecessary, as the use of Bibliography and Reference list complicated matters and some students struggled to know what to put in were. There is very little value in including a Bibliography since the markers are only interested in what students have cited in their reports...the bibliography is hence extraneous to the report.

Candidates should focus on attaching a list of references that contain all and only those works they referred to in their reports. Many candidates chose to include in their reports references they had obtained from other secondary sources. In these cases they either need to track down the original reference and include it in their reference list or they need to indicate that it is cited in another work and show this in their in-text references, for example (Smith, 1998 cited in Brown, 2006, 124). Far too many reports included references in the report that had been obtained from other secondary sources but did not include these in the attached list of references. As a result reference lists often bore little relationship to the works actually referred to in the report.

Some common mistakes were:

- quotations are required to have a page number
- references in text not appearing in the reference list
- references in reference list not appearing in text
- websites not referenced by author or organisation and so were difficult to connect to in text referencing
- inconsistencies in style both in text and reference list.

There was an occasional **word count** issue with candidates not following the guidelines. Some had no increments, incorrect increments, or counted or didn't count the correct part as per the guidelines. Word count didn't always appear on the cover page or at the end of the project.

## Some General Comments:

IP topics need to be chosen carefully to address the overarching Guidelines questions of inequality. A number of topics had no obvious link to this requirement, and the candidate needed to explicitly state how their topic and the findings related to inequality.

Avoid use of the word 'prove'.

Direct quotations require a page number. Try not to quote at length. Unfortunately there has been an increase in this regard.

Acknowledge all references.

In text references should match reference list.

All references should have been in text referenced.

Online Journals need to be cited as such with web addresses

Do not include data from the secondary sources e.g. a graph from the ABS in your Results section

The IP must 'stand alone'. Thus additional material in the Appendices is best limited to a copy of the survey and interview transcripts. Raw data may be included in a table or spread sheet. Copies of graphs not used in the report and other data, especially data from secondary sources, **should not be included**.

## Stronger candidates

- Chose a topic which was clearly linked to inequality
- clearly stated what their IP topic was in their introduction, and used the introduction to explore secondary sources related to the topic
- used a coherent and systematic report format, and applied attention to detail – for example, ensuring all references on the reference page were cited within the report; graphs used in analysis were within the body of the report and not in the appendices; key findings were referenced to the relevant graph or table; graphs and tables were clearly labelled; APA guidelines followed to a high degree of accuracy
- demonstrated a thorough understanding of research methodology and explained this in their report – for example the sample size (for surveys); ethical considerations examined and addressed explicitly; relevance of key questions with survey/interview
- Those who used a survey instrument ensured that all questions asked were utilised in the research findings, i.e. no irrelevant questions. Baseline questions such as age, gender, regional location etc. were used to tease out differences in responses and as a tool of comparison to demonstrate clear findings
- Surveys went beyond being simple opinion polls and avoided 'do you think' questions
- Graphs and tables were effectively labelled and used to indicate relationships and used more complex models such as bar tables and line graphs; raw data converted.
- Analysis and discussion was a well-balanced mix of primary research findings, supported and extended by secondary sources. All research well referenced to appropriate graph, table or source
- Made links to theorists, theory, and perspectives

## Weaker candidates

- Chose a topic which did not clearly link with inequality, or the link was not explicitly made
- did not introduce their topic, or if they did they did not link it to secondary sources or the relevance of the sources was not established. Some introductions were just too brief.
- had a poorly structured report which lacked key elements, or placed information in incorrect places – e.g. graphs and tables used in discussion but placed in the appendices; inconsistent referencing – citations in report but not in reference list and vice versa; not following APA style adequately or inconsistently; changes in font size and style in unexpected places
- did not mention or inadequately mentioned ethical considerations – some failed to address how using participants outside the Guidelines needed to be explicitly address in their ethical considerations
- Surveys and interviews were often just opinion polls, 'do you think'; findings of key questions on the survey were not always included, baseline questions were not used as a sorting tool
- Data was often represented using very simple graphs such as pie charts, with no explanation beneath and sometimes no label; raw data presented in graphs and not converted.
- Analysis and discussion was poor – sometimes it was simply a 'dump' of secondary sources with little or no reference to the primary research findings, or alternatively it was all a description of primary research and no secondary sources.

- Did not make links with theory or perspectives

## Exam Questions

In contrast to the quality of the IPs the responses to the questions on the written examination were much stronger with many candidates providing well thought out answers that used the provided stimulus well. As two of the criteria assessed are topic specific, students are assessed on each of these only once. It is important then that students respond with a carefully structured answer to the question as it is asked on the paper. There are differences in wording each year and a major feature of an excellent answer is how it responds to the question using the given stimulus. Sociological theory, concepts and explanations should be used to analyse the given topic.

## Section A

### Question 1 (40 candidates)

Although only a small number of candidates answered this question, there was a wide variety in the sophistication of the responses. The stronger responses focused on the topic of socialisation as a mechanism of social control and explained the process in depth. The socialisation process from the interactionist perspective was used very ably with detailed explanations of the work of Mead, Cooley and Goffman. This was followed by detailed discussions of the functionalist and conflict perspectives explanations of social control and the need for it in society. The role of the institutions in socialisation and social control was very well covered. Discussions of Control Theory, positive and negative sanctions and the functions and dysfunctions of deviance featured in good responses. It was pleasing to see some candidates refer to agency and the role of the individual in determining their own behaviour. Weaker candidates would have been better to have answered Question 2 as most showed a better understanding of socialisation and the development of identity rather than the process of social control.

### Question 2 (80 candidates)

Candidates who answered this question were generally well prepared and had a sound understanding of socialisation and self-identity; they were able to clearly explain how socialisation plays a major role in shaping an individual's identity.

Most students accessed stimulus 2, *The Self*, to support their claims: many also referenced stimulus 1 *Social Control and Socialisation* and Stimulus 4, *Relativity of deviance* thus demonstrating wise and relevant use of the available examination resources.

Many students, while focussing on the interactionists, included a discussion of the functionalist, conflict and feminist perspectives. Students covered the theories of Mead and Cooley very well and many students referenced Goffman's dramaturgy model especially in reference to the online self.

Better responses gave examples of each stage/element rather than just composing a list that demonstrated limited understanding. Many candidates explored primary, secondary and tertiary socialisation agencies. Some candidates included relevant quotes from the course to support their claims. Better responses included references and explanations of: the individual and collective identity, the role of individual agency, free will and social structure in shaping identity. Several responses included an explanation of cultural transmission theory so that a discussion of deviance and reference to stimulus 4 became relevant.

When the theories of socialisation and development of self-identity and the perspectives were compared and contrasted, an evaluation of them seamlessly ensued. A few candidates did not attempt an evaluation of the theories and perspectives that is needed for high award on criterion 1.

### Areas for improvement:

Supporting a point with, "as discussed in Stimulus 2" did not provide sufficient evidence of interpretation of the stimulus. Students should quote specifics and integrate them into their arguments.

Some candidates tried to answer the question using cultural transmission and labelling theory that may have worked, had they made a connection to the relevant Interactionist theorists. Instead these answers were distracted by deviance theory and lost the focus of the question.

Formulaic introductions

Learned essays that did not make reference to or attempt to answer the question

The majority of students were able to state the limitations of the perspectives/theories but very few were able to interrogate them with reference to the question or the stimulus.

### Question 3 (252 candidates)

**Marker 1:** Overall, candidates addressed the question – that is, they addressed deviance through the examples of criminal behaviour in contemporary Australian society. Very few candidates failed to address the specific requirements of the question (criminal behaviour as exemplified in stimulus 3), however, better answers used specific evidence from stimulus 3 (as well as other stimulus materials in Section A, particularly stimulus 4) to discuss alternative explanations of deviance.

Better answers also provided evidence from other sources such as texts (Robertson, Germov and Poole etc.), government reports and research (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Institute of Family Studies etc.). These candidates integrated evidence from the stimulus with evidence from the course to support their discussion and address the question.

#### *Criterion 1*

- Better answers included a wide range of sociological terms and concepts that were relevant to the question. The inclusion of the terms and concepts throughout the essay, enhanced and supported the discussion,
  - Some examples: the positive and negative functions of deviance were explained and discussed in relation to the criminal behaviour in Stimulus 3. Some candidates aligned this discussion with the Functionalist perspective and made connections Durkheim's theory of anomie. Some candidates also linked anomie with Merton's Structural Strain theory.
  - In discussing each of the theories, better answers included a wide range of relevant terms that were explained and discussed in relation to the criminal behaviour in stimulus 3 or the examples of 'deviant' or conformist behaviour in stimulus 4. For example: Cultural Transmission theory – differential association, age, intensity, ratio of contacts etc.; Labelling theory – primary and secondary deviance, stigma, sanctions, degradation ceremony, reintegrative shaming, moral panic, moral entrepreneurs etc.
- Better answers clearly explained a range of alternative sociological explanations (theories and theoretical perspectives) of criminal behaviour.
  - These theories were related to the discussion of deviance using specific examples of the criminal behaviour suggested in stimulus 3.
- Alternative explanations included:
  - Theoretical Perspectives:
    - Functionalist, Conflict, Feminist, Interactionist approaches to explaining deviance.
    - Better answers covered at least three of these theoretical approaches in depth and detail. Some candidates were able to successfully and accurately align their discussion of specific theories with the theoretical perspectives. Some candidates aligned dimensions of inequality (SES, gender, race, geographic location) to their discussion of Conflict explanations of deviance and made good use of evidence from stimulus 3 to support their discussion.
  - Sociological theories:
    - Cultural Transmission Theory, Labelling theory, Structural Strain Theory, Control Theory.
    - Better answers explained three of these theories in depth and detail.
    - Some candidates tried to cover all four theories, but many of these were unable to provide depth and detail in their discussion. Overall, this tended to weaken the quality of

the essay, however, some candidates managed to cover the four theories in detail and depth as well as aligning them with the theoretical perspectives.

- Evaluation of alternative explanations of deviance:
  - Most candidates included some discussion of the limitations (as well as the strengths) of each of the alternative explanations included in their essay.
  - Weaker answers: included a memorised section from one of the texts (e.g. Robertson) at the end of the paragraph.
  - Better answers: discussed both the strengths and the limitations of the theory with reference to examples from the stimulus materials. For example, absolute definitions of deviance (Structural Strain, Control and Cultural Transmission theories) fail to account for the relativity of deviance and conformity. The criminal behaviour described in stimulus 3 may be seen as conformist for the youth of Edmonton.

#### *Criterion 7*

Candidates who were able to provide a clear, coherent and structured argument were able to more effectively communicate their understanding of alternative explanations of deviance and address all aspects of the question.

- Better answers tended to include concise, clear sentences and paragraphs that included a topic sentence, a series of sentences that elaborated and explained the topic and a concluding sentence – some provided a concluding sentence that effectively introduced the topic of the next paragraph. In each
- Weaker answers tended to lack a coherent essay structure; the paragraphs included too many different points and were quite often very short or extremely lengthy.

The stimulus was used effectively by most students, particularly in making connections with the theories of deviance. Making connections with the essay topic would have further strengthened responses. Students struggled to focus on the essay topic in relation to criminal behaviour; this was often ignored for a focus on youth deviance. Stronger responses were able to acknowledge the criminal behaviour but did not extend to analysis of this form of deviance. Unpacking criminal behaviour as an aspect of deviance and making connections to formal and informal norms/sanctions would have added a sophisticated layer of analysis to the essay.

Candidates need to be careful to avoid racist assumptions in discussing Indigenous Australians and crime. Some candidates were distracted from the essay topic by discussions of class struggles in outlining the conflict theory. Greater focus could have been given to the essay topic and stimulus analysis by not attempting to cover so many perspectives as well as theories. Some students attempted to write about conflict, functionalist, interactionist perspectives and cultural transmission theory, labelling theory and structural strain theory.

There were some strong responses to this question that demonstrated that candidates knew the explanations very well but could also link to the given stimulus and evaluate as theories of deviance. There were some obvious prepared introductions and some of these did not note the change in the wording of the question, which did not refer specifically to theories of Deviance but, 'why some young people are more likely to be involved in criminal behaviour in contemporary Australian society...'. Candidates need to address the set question and not one they have rehearsed during the year. This is critical to success in this section given the requirements of Criterion 7.

#### **Question 4 (155 Candidates)**

Better responses demonstrated that deviance is relative to a number of factors including time, place, gender, age and culture. The stronger candidates showed that deviance is difficult to define because of the ever-changing norms and values of CAS and provided some examples of behaviour once deviant but now acceptable and vice versa. These stronger candidates also demonstrated an understanding of the relationship between socialisation, some by using cultural transmission, and deviance.

Most candidates referred to stimulus 4 and stronger responses also to stimulus 3 where they were able to refer to the Labelling theory. Once they had established the relativity of Deviance candidates could then address the second half of the question.

## Section B

### Question 5: Power and Politics

21 candidates attempted this question and the majority of answers were strong.

Most candidates approached this in one of two ways. Some structured their essay around the conflict/feminist and functionalist perspectives in regard to how they interpret power and from there made an analysis of how this is played out in the institutions.

Others structured their answers around an exploration of the institutions and how power is used in the family, education and work. Concepts of stratification, cultural capital, gender roles, hidden curriculum and educational outcomes then emerged.

Many candidates could demonstrate how Government Acts had influenced the power structure in society. Few candidates attempted an explanation of how the institution of media influence the power structure of society.

A few candidates did not attempt an evaluation of the theories and perspectives which is needed for high award on criterion 2.

Candidates used stimuli well and often to support their argument.

### Question 6: Stratification (160 candidates)

Candidate responses to this questions demonstrated a detailed understanding of the topic of stratification and related perspectives and theories. Many candidates wrote extensively.

Stronger responses were able to make connections between two institutions identifying contributing factors and groups impacted by stratification such as gender, Indigenous Australians, and/or class.

It was evident that candidates had invested a great deal of preparation in response to this question. Caution should be exercised in ensuring that candidates do not rely on rote learning an essay response/structure for use in the exam. It is important to respond to the essay topic and make significant reference to the stimulus and topic. There is no set response structure expected and students should seek to explore and analyse the issue with preference to a structure that suits the stimulus focus and institutions discussed.

Few students attempted to differentiate between how institutions create and maintain stratification in CAS. This was particularly problematic for those candidates that wrote at length about the functionalist perspective.

Greater focus could have been given to addressing those perspectives and theories that relate more directly to stratification in depth than attempting to cover all areas in superficial review.

Similarly institution content should relate to the essay topic. E.g. family structure changes needed to relate to stratification, such as the improved status for women but the issue of how the double burden is experienced in the family work balance, or family forms are changing but there is clear inequality for single female parents/families. There needs to be a balance between outlining perspective and theories whilst providing analysis of the essay topic and linking this to the stimulus. Some responses were heavily reliant on prepared perspective based responses that were not sufficiently linked to the essay topic and stimulus.

Stronger responses related the essay topic to the feminist perspective (over looked by a number of candidates despite the stimulus focus) and social reproduction theory.

Candidates are advised that examples from the stimulus, rather than references to a stimulus number, provide greater evidence of analysis and understanding for Criterion 7.

Candidates are urged to avoid deterministic/fatalistic views of low SES and future opportunities for social mobility e.g. agency

### **Question 7: Interrelationships (150)**

This question was answered soundly by a number of candidates. Stronger responses were those, who were able to apply sociological theory well, integrating, shaping and expanding their arguments by applying the relevant concepts and stimuli material within their essay.

It was evident however that a few less able students had pre-prepared answers, this was clear when reading the responses as students used specific wording and even stimuli examples from last year's exam paper. Candidates are advised that this is not a wise way to prepare, as candidates will be penalised for not responding to the specific question, or for not using the stimuli presented to them. Some less able candidates forgot to refer to theory at all, so despite making a relatively sound attempt to describe the interrelationships between two institutions the essays really lacked evidence of true analysis and sociological understanding.

Able candidates began their argument by constructing really effective introductions, where they were able to define the characteristics of institutions, referring to the specific wording of the question, and identifying the institutions that would be considered in the body of the essay.

Functionalist, feminist, conflict and interactionist perspectives were used to effectively develop arguments relating to the importance of socialisation processes in, most often the institutions of education and family. Change in one institution creates change in other institutions this develops the interrelations between institutions and this was explored very well by some candidates. More able candidates were also able to indicate awareness of the vital combined impact of socioeconomic and ascribed status, drawing nicely on Bourdieu's work here. The other institutions were not often referred to often, this year particularly media.

Strong responses referred to:

- The role of socialisation as a major part of the interrelationships
- Used the stimulus pieces well - linked inequality to disadvantage
- Referred to the perspectives and evaluated them
- Most popular institutions discussed were family and education with a few bringing in work. No responses discussed media at all.

Weaker responses:

- Mentioned all 4 institutions in the introduction but only discussed 2 in the essay
- Didn't mention perspectives at all
- No terms and concepts used
- Lots of retelling of the stimulus pieces but no analysis

### **Question 8: Changes (200 candidates)**

Well prepared candidates demonstrated their ability to apply their knowledge to the set question and link this to the stimulus material. There were strong responses that discussed family and education or family and work as their focus institutions. A number of changes over time were introduced such as the diversification of family type that was linked to the Family Law Act, technology, attitudinal shifts, increased participation in education and the work force. Changes to education focused on public and private schooling and historical and contemporary access, HECS fees and gender changes initiated largely by the feminist movement. Changes to work included increased technology, participation of women in the workforce, casualisation etc.

Stronger responses introduced a range of concepts into the course of their discussion and imbedded these into the relevant theoretical perspectives

Candidates need to ensure that they clearly refer to and incorporate the stimulus into their response. It should not be briefly referred to in brackets (stimulus 1). Weaker candidates simply summarised the content of the stimulus and made little to no effort to link to or introduce alternative explanations. Some candidates had a larger



focus on family and less on their second institution. There needs to be an effort to deal with both institutions equally.

Stronger students evaluated stimuli (not just discussed).

Stronger students made connections between historical changes such as the Family Law Act (1975), the stimuli and theory.

Students much ensure they provide a cohesive response, incorporating theory, stimuli and other examples in the one argument. A lot of students had a separate paragraph on theory, a paragraph on historical changes and a paragraph on stimuli.