ASSESSMENT REPORT 2020
BHS315116 – SOCIOLOGY

General Comments

It was pleasing to note that the majority of candidates had prepared well for the exam and wrote highly detailed responses that were sociological in content. The 2020 paper was modified according to the requirements as published by TASC. This meant streamlined questions and shorter stimulus pieces. The essential elements of the exam remained and provided a predictable selection of questions for candidates. Teachers and students are advised to read previous assessment reports, as valuable information regarding the criteria and elements assessed is provided in these as well as insights into suggested content.

Candidates are required to answer two questions in essay form and the conventions associated with this form of writing should be taught and adhered to in preparation for the exam. This form of writing requires an introduction that sets out a structured response to the question, followed by body paragraphs which provide a detailed, supported analysis of the issue leading to a logical conclusion. At least two sociological explanations for the issue should be explored in the essay. In addition, it is essential to use the provided stimulus, along with other examples from the course as evidence to support the proposed argument.

The response should be presented in paragraphs with correct spelling, grammar and punctuation. The spelling of terminology, concepts, theories and sociologists should be learned as these are part of the expected content in a response.

SECTION A – SOCIALISATION: CONFORMITY AND DEVIANCE

Question 1 – Alternative sociological theories
(252 candidates)

This question was by far the most popular question on the paper. The wording was slightly different from previous years and may have posed a challenge to some candidates. Several markers assessed this question and advice has been provided for students and teachers from three of these in order to give a wider range of opinions.

Marker 1
This question was generally well handled by this year's candidates. Most responses were approximately 3-4 pages in length and indicated solid preparation. The strongest responses were those that addressed the question specifically with its focus on youth crime in Tasmania. Some candidates were able to include supporting criminal statistics, as well as providing insightful references to the stimulus material. It was pleasing to see many candidates accessed all stimuli in Section A for their response, indicating an understanding of the relevance of aspects of each, for this topic. There was also a pleasing use of a range of theories presented, contrasted and evaluated by these students. The strongest answers were those which were able to distinguish correctly between theoretical developments (e.g. Sutherland's differential association and Cohen's delinquent subcultures; Becker's labelling theory and Lemert's deviant career). The strongest

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responses were also able to present associations between the theories of deviance and the relevance of alternative forms of 'approaches to juvenile justice' as mentioned in Stimulus 1.

Inaccuracy in descriptions of the theories was apparent in the weaker responses. This took the form of incorrect attribution of theories to theorists (e.g. Merton's cultural transmission theory …), or an incorrect attachment between theories and perspectives (e.g. Control theory is from the conflict perspective …). Similarly, it would be advantageous if teachers could make a distinction between concepts and theories with their students, as these were used inaccurately in a number of papers. A recurrent error also occurred in relation to the Labelling theory – in particular to the difference between Lemert's description of primary and secondary deviance, with a number of candidates explaining 'primary deviance is when you are not caught ...', and apparently not understanding the notion of internalisation of the deviant identity. It was interesting to note that many of these errors appeared in responses which were formulaic in content and structure, indicating that students were disadvantaged by information shared prior to the exam which was inaccurate.

Marker 2
Strong candidate responses focused on giving reasons as to why at-risk youth are likely to engage in deviant behaviour. This was supported by the evaluation of three main theories: cultural transmission theory, structural strain theory and labelling theory. Some candidates made connections to the relevant perspectives. Stronger responses were notable due to the detail provided relating to each theory with the identification of key theory features and an evaluation of that theory's strengths and weaknesses.

Strong responses were also well-structured essays that contained a sophisticated response and analysis of the essay topic. These candidates were able to provide links between key features of the theory and the stimulus, notably stimulus 1. These essays were written in a formal academic style from an objective standpoint. Some candidates attempted to integrate the functions and relativity of deviance into their response but typically there wasn't an attempt to connect such detail to the essay topic of at-risk youth, creating a disrupted essay structure.

Candidates are encouraged to maintain an objective viewpoint of deviance within the community and to avoid negative stereotyping of suburban communities in Tasmania. Likewise, candidates are encouraged to draw on Australian examples to illustrate their knowledge of the deviance theories. Weaker responses lacked formality of tone, structure and provided inconsequential detail which lacked sociological analysis and theoretical explanation.

Marker 3
This question was answered well, with very many strong candidates using appropriate examples from real life scenarios in addition to the stimuli material in support of their discussion. Stronger candidates were also able to offer genuine insight into the reasons why some young children in Tasmania and Australia may be committing crimes, by examining the great diversity of contributing factors such as: impact of poverty, family of origin and socialisation practices, childhood abuse and neglect, intergenerational transmission of violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and mental health issues. Some well-considered essays also drew on the knowledge of more recent trends in young female criminal offending. Much research in Sociology identifies the interplay between such factors.

Stronger candidates were able to demonstrate that crime seems to have these multiple causes, and then go on to cite relevant statistics as well as a number of references to the stimulus provided. Rather more simplistic were a number of candidates who spent too long describing the process of socialisation at length. Whilst worthy of inclusion, students should not spend too much time here. Candidates should try to be clear about which question they actually are answering. Some weaker responses included a jumble of references to the relativity of deviance and the process of

socialisation, rather than refer explicitly to the wording of the question, detracting from the overall impact of the essay. Decide on a question and then stay on track would be sound advice.

Stronger candidates used accuracy and detail in their application of theory, indicating that they had prepared well. Rather than write everything they could remember, stronger candidates were generally able to provide more than two well considered theoretical explanations, then move on to offer an extension of their discussion by acknowledging some of the limitations and strengths of each theory chosen which they also often were then able to apply to an example from the stimuli. Students could consider any combination of deviance and crime theories here: functionalist, conflict and interactionist theory.

Stronger candidates notably also were careful to structure their essay well. Ineffective introductions were characterised by the use of material that was not expanded on in the argument that followed. Some rather dated texts are still being referred to; for example, Robertson. Many students did not remember to refer to key wording or theorists in their introduction, nor did they remember to signpost to the marker during the body of the essay that they were aiming to stay on track by referring to key words or concepts. Conclusions were not often used, but when they were, they were presented as opportunities for stronger candidates to polish their essay off in a confident way by returning to the key wording as well as main points.

Question 2 – Relativity of deviance
(114 Candidates)

Answers to the relativity of deviance question were strong and gave a comprehensive overview of the alternative theories of deviance. However, many of the responses failed to appropriately answer the essay question. Some responses were less than two pages, resulting in a lack of depth in their responses. Many responses began with a definition of deviance however not all utilised stimulus 2 which gave a detailed definition of the relativity of deviance. Stronger responses incorporated the definition from the stimulus to their own definitions.

Most candidates were able to correctly explain and evaluate Labelling theory, Cultural Transmission theory and Structural Strain theory. Most responses addressed the relativity of deviance in their introduction and conclusion. Weaker responses provided retellings of the theories of deviance without properly addressing relativity of deviance throughout their paragraphs. This meant that students were not able to discuss the strengths and limitations of each theory in relation to the essay question. It was great to see that many candidates were using multiple stimuli in their written responses. However, for some students, the use of stimulus 1 meant that their response focused on youth crime within the body of the essay. This meant that the response lost its opportunity to properly answer the question on the relativity of deviance.

Question 3 – Socialisation and Social Control
(32 Candidates)

Overall, the responses to this question were well done and drew on a range of ideas and sources from the course to explore the response to the essay topic. Some candidates responded with a generic essay relating to social control and socialisation that had not been adapted to this year's exam question. Stronger candidate responses were able to outline the process of socialisation and how this functioned as a feature of social control as related to key institutions and agencies tasked with social control. Many candidates struggled to stay on the topic due to a lack of focus on the essay topic diverging into a discussion of theories of deviance and reasons for non-conformity.

The control theory and cultural transmission theory were frequently and accurately used to examine the role of socialisation in creating social control within Australian society but also to highlight why that process is not always successful in inducting conformity. Whilst some candidates used the labelling theory to explore social control methodology it would have been interesting to see how this could be connected to the agents of socialisation in particularly the media.

Strong responses were able to articulate the role of stratification in social control and the different modes of behavioural expectations as part of socialisation. This could be illustrated through examples from Bourdieu or social reproduction theory. Similarly, discussion of the hidden curriculum, cultural capital and the functions of deviance were sophisticated ideas used to explore the role of socialisation in social control through the agents of socialisation, e.g. education.

Some candidates were very skilled in drawing on a range of stimulus examples to support their answer including the education stimulus from Section B, demonstrating their high level of comprehension of the socialisation process and its lifelong practice. However, some candidates ventured too much into the realm of institutions getting caught up in discussing stratification and its link to socialisation without linking this idea back to deviance and social control.

More sophisticated responses were able to accurately outline the various perspectives and relevant theorists linked to explanations of socialisation and social control. Further focus on evaluation of theorists and positions would have strengthened response to the essay topic. Most essays were effectively structured and coherent in their argument, accurate spelling of key concepts and theorists could have been improved.

Question 4 – Socialisation and Identity
(27 Candidates)

This question concerned socialisation and formation of identity. Socialisation in its many forms should not, however, be considered the focus of the essay, as many candidates who answered this question launched into a very predictable and lengthy discussion of socialisation, spending too much time explaining the various agencies, often providing inappropriate examples. Although a brief discussion is warranted, a stronger answer will also be able to explain the significance and meaning of identity, individual agency and then provide a balanced account of alternate theoretical viewpoints related to the emergence of self. Of value is also the concept of re-socialisation.

Some discussion of interactionist theory is useful in response to Question 4 such as: Cooley and the Looking Glass Self and Mead who elaborated on Cooley's work. To round off a response to Question 4 a consideration and application of Macro approaches of conflict and functionalist should be used. Theoretical explanations needed to be detailed and accurate given that there was less stimulus material to draw on. There needed to be a critical appraisal of the strengths and limitations of the theory and also the concepts used.

Some original and successful candidates drew upon examples from the course and real-life examples relating to the formation of identity and understanding of self by applying Goffman's concept of dramaturgy. Drawing on their experiences and understanding of the impact of social media upon self and stating how this has led to a more 'fluid' version of identity. Arguing that the use of different social media platforms has great power to create different versions of self with external validation applied through posts likes and dislikes etc.

SECTION B - INSTITUTIONS: POWER AND POLITICS

This section of the paper examines the candidates' understanding of the institutions of society. It is important that candidates write about at least two or more institutions in a balanced way so that the emphasis is not on one institution more than the other/s. In addition, candidates must include at least two sociological explanations for the particular aspect of social institutions they are exploring. Finally, the constructed answer must include information from the provided stimulus pieces. Candidates are encouraged to also include evidence from course work as part of their constructed response.

Question 5 - Institutions and stratification
(153 Candidates)

This question is about social stratification and the various theoretical explanations for it as it is reflected in the four institutions identified in the course. Unfortunately, many students spent almost all their answer on describing stratification in general and the sociological explanations for it and virtually none of their answer on how the institutions they had chosen were stratified and what the consequences of this are for Australian society. Students are reminded the question is about stratification within the institutions of work, education, family and media.

Further to this, it is important to try to craft a balanced response. Better answers explained the key concepts of stratification and institutions and then proceeded to actually answer the question: evaluating theoretical explanations for *how their chosen institutions contributed to social stratification within CAS*. While it is important to explain the concept of stratification, one must then go on to explain institutions and how the institutions create/maintain social stratification, as well as how sociological theories and perspectives explain this, and how well they explain it.

Stronger responses applied at least two perspectives/theories to explain social stratification in two institutions and provided evidence for this through the stimulus and other information they had learned. This year, a number of responses applied and evaluated the feminist perspective in explaining social stratification in the institution of the family. Structures were varied, with some stronger responses taking a highly theoretical approach with perhaps less emphasis on the roles of the institutions, and others focusing on social stratification in the institutions and then applying theoretical explanations to this. Candidates are reminded that they must discuss two (or at least two) institutions equally – there were numerous potentially strong responses that only minimally discussed a second institution or did not do so at all.

Many answers chose to discuss family as one of their chosen institutions. Hardly any of these answers discussed stratification between families. The focus was instead on stratification within families based on gender. This makes for a very narrow and limited discussion of stratification within the institution of the family. Better answers were able to describe how families differed in terms of the wealth and privileges they possessed and in the life chances they were able to offer their children. This in turn provided an excellent segue into a discussion of social stratification in institutions such as work and education.

There were a number of responses that may have been heavily influenced by IP research on inequality, in particular with regard to gender. While their discussions on gender inequality were potentially relevant, they needed to explain them in terms of how the institution of the family creates and maintains gender stratification and explain these using theoretical perspectives (and evaluate their strengths/limitations in this regard).

It is important to have a balance of discussion between the two chosen institutions. Some candidates used an integrated structure rather than exploring stratification in the institutions separately. This requires skill to ensure that stratification is examined in both institutions in a balanced way rather than implied in one institution and explicit in the other. For

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example, the concept of social capital and how that may impact educational achievement needed to be linked to stratification between families. It is not for the examiner to infer how wealth or lack of it in a family is linked to social capital and how this might have an effect on educational achievement.

Question 6 - Institutions and change over time
(194 Candidates)

This was the most popular question from this section of the paper, however, there were many responses that did not meet the basic requirements for an essay response in Sociology. Students and teachers are directed to previous assessment reports to add to the information provided here to give direction on the expectations regarding the use of the provided stimulus and inclusion of sociological concepts, terminology and theory.

Stronger candidates were able to discuss the changes to the institutions and the theoretical perspective or response to this. Using the theories to help support their explanation of the causes and consequences of the changes enabled candidates to do well on this question. As always, an evaluation of the theories within this context was a feature of stronger responses. Weaker responses often appeared to be pre-prepared with little or no use of stimuli with minimal reference to theories' explanation of changes.

On the other hand, some responses focused too much on the theoretical perspectives and lacked any real depth in discussing the changes of the institutions themselves. It is important to use relevant legislation within the question as often these are significant societal indicators of change. Suggested legislations are in the course document, but teachers and students should research these as part of their course work, tracking change over the past 50 years to present time. Although the historical development of work, family, education and media may be studied in class, the question relates to contemporary Australian society and recent changes.

Candidates appeared to have a better grasp of changes related to family and work, to a lesser degree education and limited evidence in relation to media. Many essays wrote about media ownership in relation to change but failed to frame that in context with theories or legislation. It should be noted that quite a few of the stronger responses chose to discuss 3-4 institutions and did so to quite a high degree, including a wide range of evidence and theoretical perspectives.

Question 7 - Institutions and power and politics
(23 Candidates)

It was pleasing to see that most candidates had prepared well for this question and demonstrated a good understanding of power dynamics in CAS. All four institutions were referred to in the responses with several looking closely at the power of media to influence public opinion. There were very strong responses that considered the impact of legislative changes related to the institutions of family, education and work such as equal pay, family law, paid parental leave and education acts etc. These responses analysed the shifting power relationships in the institutions using the lens of the functionalist, conflict, feminist and/or interactionist perspectives.

Whilst there were strong responses that considered the changing landscape of media ownership and the concentration of power, candidates are reminded that their discussion and analysis must be sociological in nature. The response should provide at least two sociological explanations for power and politics within the selected institutions. As with all responses to questions on the Sociology exam, the use of the supplied stimulus is a compulsory component. In addition, at least two institutions must be referred to with a balance of discussion between the two chosen institutions. Although there were only a small number of responses to this question there were several that did not meet these requirements.

Question 8 – Institutions and interrelationships
(54 Candidates)

Stronger candidates were able to discuss the interrelationship in the context of stratification and in some cases changes to the institutions. Weaker responses appeared to be pre-prepared and failed to include any real use of the stimuli. Students should be clear on the structure of their responses and ensure they use the language of the question clearly in their introduction (this can be said for all responses) to ensure they set up a strong argument and clear direction for the essay. Stronger responses tended to focus on institutions of family and work and discussed the societal impact of these institutions working together.

INVESTIGATION PROJECT

GENERAL COMMENTS

Overall, the standard of the reports was high. Most reports were well researched and referenced and the overall presentation met the requirements as described in the guidelines. The majority of candidates reached the word count and it was clear that a lot of effort had gone into their investigation.

Criterion 6 was the most difficult criterion for students to achieve on. Most projects included in their discussion and analysis section a very good overview of their findings and linked their findings skillfully to similar findings in other secondary research. However, many candidates then failed to evaluate those findings in the context of sociological theory or did so in a superficial way. Additionally, it was not always explained how the research findings contribute to systemic inequality in CAS.

A range of research instruments was utilised and it was pleasing to see students selecting the appropriate method for their topic. Content analysis, interviews and case studies were used in addition to surveys. Several candidates combined more than one method of primary research such as an interview and a survey or a content analysis and a survey. This is not required and has advantages and disadvantages. It needs to be reinforced that a high-quality Investigation Project based on one method of research such as a survey or interview is all that is required. Too much information from primary research can be as problematic as too little. Where students used more than one method successfully, the second method supplemented the main research instrument confirming or extending the data. Many surveys and interview research tools contained too many questions that did not contribute meaningfully to the research brief. A shorter survey where every question is usable would be desirable.

Stronger responses had a clear topic/question/focus which was clearly stated on the cover page of the IP. Candidates used academic resources in their literature review, analysis and discussion. The introduction showed a strong understanding and link to inequality. Stronger responses pinpointed the inequality and were able to really explore that through their investigation using secondary evidence to support them.

Weaker responses relied on limited academic resources and websites. The research instrument (often a survey) asked basic questions. It should be noted that simply asking somebody's opinion on a topic does not mean there is inequality. Weaker responses used a survey to determine 'perceived inequality' without a further research instrument or supporting sources to explore the issue. Many candidates underestimated ethical concerns and did not address these adequately.

Topics

While most of the research undertaken by students this year was in accordance with the guidelines, one particular concern was the number of candidates who did not have a clear understanding of what it was they were investigating. Candidates are reminded they need to investigate an area of inequality that fits within both parts of the Guidelines – that is both the focus topics and the social categories. They do not have to prove the inequality they are investigating. It may be that their research finds the opposite to what they were expecting and the opposite to research referenced in Sociology textbooks. If this proves to be the case, candidates can contrast their findings with standard sociological views and offer up explanations as to why their research returned different findings. Candidates do need, however, to have a clear sense of what they are researching. As several reports demonstrated this year, it is very difficult to write up your findings if you do not have a clear idea of what you were looking to investigate in the first place.

There was an increase in the socialisation topic questions which showed a great variety in subject and allowed for a discussion of the causes of inequality. Stronger responses could make the connection between socialisation and reproduced inequality whilst others only addressed socialisation as a causal factor. An investigation into STEM subjects was popular but did not always explicitly discuss how the subject selection connected to the impact of life chances e.g. employment and income. Health inequality topics must make sure they are clearly linked to a sociological perspective of the issue. Candidates need to be clear that issues relating to negative and unfair experiences don't necessarily translate to an inequality.

A surprising number of folios fell outside the focus topic suggestions. Candidates should be reminded to read the IP Guidelines carefully regarding topic choice. It is important for candidates to communicate well with their teacher prior to commencing their research, to establish both the validity and suitability of topic and research methodology before launching into the investigation process. As a result, many folios were less than convincing in relation to the dimensions of inequality/equality chosen. The planning tool provided in the guidelines should be used and signed off by the candidate and teacher prior to commencing any primary research to ensure that the topic fits the guidelines and the method of researching it is to be carried out ethically.

Many candidates were clearly determined to concentrate on topics related, in many instances, to eating disorders and mental health issues. These topics are clearly worthy of investigation and do concern many teachers and students alike, most particularly in this problematic year. But unless the candidate can support their investigation with relevant contemporary sociological evidence the success of the work is compromised.

Ethical Research

In an extension of this advice on topic selection, candidates are urged to think carefully about what their primary research tool is seeking to investigate. If your primary research is in the form of a survey, think carefully about what your survey is trying to find out and avoid including superfluous questions that don't contribute to this aim. It is all too easy when drafting your survey questions to include things that seem really interesting but which, once you have set about analysing your data, don't contribute to the focus of your research.

Always remember that you will need to collate and analyse your data once your survey has been completed. Too many questions, and questions without a clear purpose, will leave you with a great deal of material to put together and wondering how you can fit it into your report. A good survey is a short survey with a few well-focused questions. In addition, if candidates use more than one method of primary research, they may find that they have too much data to be adequately analysed and discussed in such a short report.

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Ethical research involves careful planning and consideration. Candidates should be reminded that when, for example surveying a class of much younger students from the same school, that permission from the Principal and also the teacher/s of the students themselves should be obtained in addition to the students themselves. Or that when using social media particular care should be taken with the organisation, distribution and collection of surveys.

Many research methodology descriptions were less than thorough with explaining this type of approach. This year, ethical disclaimers, in general, were not constructed well and seemed in some instances as just an add on or an afterthought and not an important consideration under Criterion 5. Stronger candidates outlined why they had used a particular form of research and why it suited that topic. They also outlined in detail the main ethical concerns and how these were negated. Weaker responses were too broad in their description of ethical requirements. Markers were concerned with some ethically questionable research, particularly in the areas of eating disorders, domestic violence and mental health. Teachers should be wary of approving research of this nature.

Presentation of the Report

The vast majority of reports were structured in a way that fit the IP guidelines and included all the appropriate material. Referencing was inconsistent in many IPs and the APA guidelines were not followed particularly well.

Teachers and students are reminded that the guidelines give very specific advice regarding the presentation of the folio, including suggestions regarding font, size and spacing of text. The guidelines also suggest the use of a cover page listing the topic, aim, research question and final word count. Candidates are also reminded that a formal style of writing should be used. The Introduction should not be longer than the analysis and discussion section of the paper. In addition, the Introduction should not contain definitions of terms unless they are specialist terms associated with the particular issue under investigation. It is not necessary to begin with a generic definition of inequality. A more nuanced definition explaining the particular aspect of inequality under investigation may be helpful in directing the literature review to expand upon recent research and sociological explanations.

Results

Notable this year was an increase in the amount and scope of research done e.g. 3-5 interviews, 50 surveys and content analysis. Unfortunately, this appeared to be at the detriment of the report analysis and discussion. This is partly due to the sheer volume of data obtained and then not presented in the results section, or too much data to be adequately discussed in a short report of this kind. Some great examples of content analysis were used, but the findings from these reports were not always clearly presented.

Quantitative data in most cases should be converted to percentages to best interpret the patterns existing in the responses. Very few candidates had made sure to do raw data computation. The results figures descriptor should demonstrate an understanding of the patterns revealed in the graph, i.e. the main trend, rather than being a summary of the figures.

Candidates should consider how well their results can be read by the examiner. Low-resolution screenshots are not the best option for displaying research. Similarly, the size and number of figures are important to consider in presenting information

Sociological Analysis

Sociological sources are preferred for providing definitions rather than dictionaries, other faculty definitions and general definitions. Stronger responses were able to make clear connections to the sociological analysis of inequality and the chosen topic. These responses demonstrated an understanding of the causes and/or consequences of inequality rather than points of difference or disadvantage. Weaker responses had limited secondary sources that were not sociological in content. Strong research was not always matched by strong sociological analysis. The literature review and discussion are important components of the report.

The analysis and discussion are of the findings from the primary research. Therefore, the results, as presented in the Results section, should be the focus of the report. This is not an essay but an analysis of what was found out through the research e.g. interview, survey etc. Research into the area investigated and sociological explanations should be used to interpret and analyse the findings even if they contradict the predicted outcome.

Referencing

Markers look for accuracy in referencing, both in-text and in the reference list. Relevant recent research into the area under investigation from sociological texts, journals, ABS data and other scholarly sources should be drawn upon for information on the topic with an emphasis on recent Australian material, where possible. Candidates who did well on the folio provided accurate referencing of a broad range of appropriate and relevant sources of contemporary Australian sociological information on their topic.

A weakness of many folios was the failure to construct even a very simple reference list well and use the APA conventions suggested. However, it was clear there was an attempt to cite all used works in all IPs. The specifics of the APA guidelines were often not followed.

Many weaker folios had listed secondary sources in their final reference list which had not been used anywhere in the body of the report, many also failed to refer to their own research instruments in their reference list. Many weaker folios lacked any substantial sources at all, with a cluster of folios surprisingly relying predominantly on Psychological journals and texts which related to international findings and not contemporary Sociological issues in Australia.