INVESTIGATION PROJECT

There were some excellent reports with interesting topics which were clearly linked to inequality. Topics included: youth and mental illness, ethnicity and media, ethnicity and social attitude, gender and media, power and politics, indigenous people and educational outcomes, rural students and educational outcomes, and asylum seekers and media.

However, a number lacked sociological content and inequality was not established in some cases. Candidates must ensure that they are clear about the issue of inequality. It is not the same as difference or limited opportunities. Likewise the issue of agency can account for an individual’s choices in life. Where inequality was established, some IPs failed to take it a step further by exploring the possible consequences of the inequality. For example, to prove there are more women than men in nursing is not enough. To look at the inequality experienced as a consequence of this gender imbalance, is the focus of the IP. This final step was neglected in some cases. Gathering quantitative data from secondary sources was rarely done. Some candidates did not explore the sociology behind the research. They did not consider the social, economic and political dimensions of inequality or cover the consequences of inequality.

Many reports had lengthy involved introductions, some of them just a long collection of quotes with no other content included. A significant number of students wrote detailed introductions about a passionate topic, then wrote a short analysis of the primary research therefore not providing an opportunity to evaluate and analyse inequality through the primary and secondary sources. This made marking criterion 3 difficult.

Too many Research Design and Method sections were poorly written, with no real explanation of how the research was carried out. Often, the research did not contribute significantly to the study. Many research tools were too long to be used to advantage in a study this size, 20 – 36 questions, and survey questions were badly constructed. Some interview/survey questions were emotionally loaded and may have influenced the answers given. Some questions were double-barrel. A respondent would not know which way to answer. Candidates need to present summaries of their interviews in the results section. There were too many who presented the interviews in their appendices and asked examiners to go to the appendices to see the summaries.

Some reports were written up with sections out of recommended order. Typically the Results followed the Discussion and Analysis section, and some Reference Lists were in the Appendix section. While the guidelines are suggested, it makes good sense to follow the suggestions so that the report is clear for markers. For the same reason it is a good idea to avoid fancy font. While not obligatory, I recommend size 12 Times New Roman, Calibri or Arial and double or 1½ spacing.

Results need to be in results section, not in appendices. Results need to be labelled; tables are tables and graphs are figures. The x and y axes of graphs need to be labelled. Figures were on the whole well labelled, but some were not, making the interpretation of data a guessing game for the marker. In the discussion candidates need to be more specific in comparing and contrasting their primary and secondary materials and then applying sociological theory and concepts.
Referencing still needs care. Few reports had all elements correct. Many in text citations were inaccurate and did not match up with what was in the reference list. Direct quotations require a page number. Website entries were particularly inaccurate when cited both in text and in the reference list. Many references in text were left off the reference list. Refer to TQA’s “How do I reference (cite) the source of other people’s information, images, ideas or words I use in my work?” in conjunction with TQA’s *Authenticity and Academic Integrity: A Guide* which is available at [http://www.tqa.tas.gov.au/1468](http://www.tqa.tas.gov.au/1468). Remember referencing is important for criterion 7.

Editing was not evident. This is important, especially when many word processors have auto-correct, and word are changed to something out of context. Be sure to get the authors’ names right. For example, Talcot Parsons is one person, not two, as is Lois Aspin. Formal language should be used, and inappropriate, emotive, or subjective language avoided. Seek outside help with this if necessary. It is essential to develop these skills.

Candidates who achieved sound results provided a clear outline of their research method, and how this met ethical guidelines. They followed correct report procedure and referencing, had selected a topic that clearly dealt with the issue of inequality, and the impact on an individual’s or group’s life chances. They provided their results in graph or annotated form, and made sociological connections using sociological sources. The primary research was supported by a number of secondary sources from a sociological perspective. Limitations of the research were mentioned.

**EXAMINATION**

**Overall Comments**

I strongly urge candidates to carefully choose the questions they decide to answer. There were so many answers which clearly belonged to a different question. Use the allotted 15 minutes to closely read the stimulus material and the questions, and plan your answers.

**Section A**

Question 1 asks how socialisation involves internalisation of norms, and mechanisms of social control.

Question 2 asks how socialisation shapes an individual’s sense of identity.

Question 3 asks for the meaning of deviance and an explanation of the relativity of deviance.

Question 4 asks for alternative theories of deviance to explain deviant acts. Candidates could write about 4 main theories, but it is probably better to write about 2 in depth and link these to the stimulus material rather than listing 4 theories superficially.

Many candidates simply wrote about 4 theories of deviance to answer all these questions and did not effectively link the theories to the stimulus articles. In other words they did not answer the question and would have been penalised on Criterion 4.
Section B
Question 5 asks for a discussion on power and politics.

Question 2 is about stratification.

Question 3 is about changes over time.

Question 4 is about interrelationship between the institutions.

Section B answers were somewhat better than Section A, with most students writing about two institutions. Again look carefully at the wording of the question. Remember too, that the criteria still must be addressed. Some students overlooked criterion 6 which calls for ‘alternative theoretical explanations’; there was no mention of theories.

While the questions states to include material from the course, some students wrote long explanations of case studies studied in class to the detriment of using the stimuli provided. In some cases this indicated the student had learnt an essay and had just rewritten it in the exam.

SECTION A

SOCIALISATION, CONFORMITY AND DEVIANCE

Question 1

Socialisation, internalisation of norms, and social control.

This question was answered by 5.5% of the candidates.

Most students were able to explain the process of socialisation and mention the agents of socialisation, but many did not make clear the role of socialisation in the system of social control. Distinctions between the formal and informal elements of this system were not discussed either.

Some students did not refer to sanctions. They should be addressed here. Many students did not confidently discuss the idea that while culture is a major influence on our behaviour, behaviour can be modified.

The concept of identity was addressed competently by some students in relation to interactionist processes (Cooley’s and Mead’s theories were well described by some). However, there was less recognition of the role of the social structure, subcultures, and ascribed statuses.

Question 2

Socialisation and self- identity

This question was answered by 11% of the candidates. Most students were well prepared for this question. They had a clear understanding of the construction of identity and used a range of relevant sociological concepts. Candidates discussed the Functionalist,
Conflict and Interactionist perspectives in relation to socialisation, clearly showing how identity construction is an individual process or a product of the functions/dysfunctions in society. Goffman, Cooley and Mead were well understood. The impacts of primary, secondary and tertiary socialisation were also discussed. There was a considerable depth of knowledge of a wide range of theory, concepts and terminology.

Some candidates used the concepts of culture, subculture, deviance and social norms for their answers. This then lead to a discussion of how these ideas create identity. Some of the better answers here made clear reference to stimuli 3 and 4 in order to support their argument. Others were poorly constructed and tended to discuss deviance.

Better answers discussed the issue of agency and the role of free will in the process of socialisation. Strong answers used the stimuli competently. It is inadequate just to say “See stimulus 1.” Candidates must competently analyse the stimuli using sociological concepts and ideas and show clearly how this contributes to the overall argument. Evaluation and limitations of theories/perspectives was not well done.

**Question 3**

**Meaning and relativity of deviance.**

This question was answered by 20% of the candidates.

This question required an explanation of the way diversity and deviance could be viewed by difference groups/subcultures. The relativity of deviance needed to be discussed as varying from place to place, time to time, and situation to situation, and the fact that at times it is actually conformity to the norms of a subculture while against the norms of the broader culture.

Students needed to indicate that they understood why some behaviour can come to be defined as deviant, and how deviance is a social construct. The socialisation process has an impact on the internalisation of norms by the individual.

Able candidates included key words in a nicely constructed introduction which mentioned that those individuals or groups whose behaviour is defined as deviant, different, or marginal are more likely to be susceptible to negative labelling, by the conforming majority of contemporary Australian society.

Stronger candidates indicated their understanding and depth of analysis by using the stimulus material well. Better answers offered a definition of deviance and referred to this concept in connection to time, place, gender, culture and age,

The response should have included some discussion of subculture, difference, deviance and conformity. Subculture was not often included. Some candidates ignored or just neglected to mention any of the key words from the question in their answer and succeeded only in making their essay seemed like a pre-prepared generalised response that could have been applied to any of the questions in this section.

Some very weak responses chose incorrectly to apply the four main theories of deviance and then not provide any effective evidence or supportive stimulus material to consolidate their argument. Clearly this material would have been more effectively applied if candidates had chosen question 4.
Better responses were able to discuss effectively who had the power and the moral authority to apply deviant labels, drawing effectively on Becker’s labelling theory and Lemert’s distinction between primary and secondary deviance. Candidates who included a discussion of these interactionist accounts of deviance were rewarded.

Question 4

Theories of Deviance

This question was answered by 63.5% of the candidates.

Candidates seem to have become more familiar with comments on previous examiners’ reports and prepared well and avoided common mistakes. A refreshing number of very well constructed and informative answers were apparent. The answers had introductions that referred to specific wording of the question and set a framework for the marker in terms of the direction of the planned essay.

Effective answers were able to make links to stimulus material and identify that patterns of more serious youth crime are relatively resistant to change over time. More able candidates demonstrated their confidence and knowledge relating to theoretical explanations by applying a wider range of sociological course material. They structured their essay thoughtfully and logically, integrating a wide range of stimulus material well.

Analysis, evaluation and careful application was the key to an A standard response. Candidates must avoid dumping the main theories of deviance and only superficially applying the stimulus material. Some answers did not mention the stimulus at all.

SECTION B

INSTITUTIONS, POWER AND POLITICS

Question 5:

Dimensions of Power and Politics

This question was answered by 3% of the candidates.

Few students answered this question. The great majority of them drew on their knowledge of the institutions of family and education. Successful responses made it evident that they were answering the question before them, providing links back to this question and also links to the stimulus material.

Some mentioned ‘power’ and ‘politics’ at the start and the end and nothing in between. Many would have been better off answering the change over time question, as they gave examples of changes that have occurred in particular institutions, but did not articulate how hegemonic groups had used their influence and position to do so. Most failed to explain how this question focussed on groups gaining and maintaining resources at the expense of others through their position, status and wealth.
More able candidates were able to identify the complex process of gendered relations and power when discussing work and family; drawing on concepts such as patriarchy and the gendered division of labour in their answers. Less able candidates referred only loosely to the women's movement or feminism, but were unable to elaborate on the impact this movement had on society.

Question 6

Stratification

This question was answered by 23% of the candidates.

It is very helpful when students take the trouble to enhance their communication with the marker through effective presentation. It is not easy to write neatly under pressure, however, there are simple and effective strategies which everyone can adopt to help the marker assess the quality of the student’s understanding of the question.

These are:

- Clearly citing the stimulus, eg. (Stimulus 1).
- Leaving a line between paragraphs and a margin on the left-hand side of the page.
- Not writing on the reverse side of the page.
- Using formal, objective language.

Criterion 4:

Strong responses:

Addressed the question, the role of stratification in two institutions, comprehensively, used a wide range of appropriate sociological language (terms, concepts).
Used the stimulus materials widely and effectively to support their discussion.
Provided considerable depth and detail in their analysis and discussion, leading to a logical conclusion.
Critically analysed and evaluated the strengths and limitations of sociological theories and perspectives.
This evaluation was particularly effective when related to the stimulus materials.

Weaker responses:

Failed to address the question.
Made little or no reference to the stimulus materials.
Paraphrased or re-stated some stimulus materials, but failed to demonstrate how this related to the question.
Relied on anecdotal evidence rather than relate their discussion to the stimulus materials.
Criterion 5:

Strong responses:

Used sociological language consistently and effectively throughout their essay.
Linked sociological terms and concepts to the question, stimulus materials and other evidence from the course.
Provided strong evidence of their understanding of a wide range of sociological terms and concepts throughout the discussion.

Weaker responses:

Used informal, everyday language rather than sociological language.
Provided little or no evidence of their understanding of sociological terms, concepts.

Criterion 6:

Strong responses:

Conveyed their understanding of alternative and divergent perspectives in Sociology, such as Functionalist, Conflict, Feminist, Interactionist, in relation to the question and stimulus materials, supported by further evidence from the course.
  o Some included Interactionist (micro) explanations as part of their evaluation of the strengths and limitations of the macro explanations.
Some students provided a sophisticated analysis of how these sociological perspectives reflect a range of values, attitudes and beliefs in relation to stratification in CAS.
  o For example, how does stratification contribute to social stability?
  o How does stratification reproduce structured inequality?
Strong responses provided a range of sociological theories to explain stratification in relation to the stimulus materials.
  o Aligned theories to perspectives. For example:
    ▪ Conflict: Bourdieu - cultural capital; Connell - patriarchal dividend; Bowles and Gintis - hidden curriculum
    ▪ Functionalist: Hakim - preference theory; Douglas - deficit theory; Parsons - instrumental and expressive roles
Strong responses provided some degree of evaluation of sociological theories in relation to the question and stimulus supported with evidence from sociological texts, ABS, etc.

Weaker responses:

Weaker responses provided little or no evidence of their understanding of alternative sociological theories or perspectives.

Question 7

Changes over time.
This question was answered by 49% of the candidates.
Strong answers balanced two institutions and used theories to advantage.

However generally student struggled to apply theories and justify inclusion of stimulus material in institutions.

Some students confused changes with interrelationships.

Although this question showed a good general understanding of the material not all students were able to address the 3 criteria. Many were able to provide a sound analysis of the stimulus material but did not include an analysis and evaluation of the theoretical perspectives. To be able to do this required students to address Criterion 6 ‘Construct an argument that includes alternative theoretical explanations’.

Those who did address Criterion 6 provided a range of answers and understanding. Some of these were very general and lacked detail while others were comprehensive and well integrated. Those students who did well on the 3 Criteria not only applied, analysed and evaluated the Conflict and Functionalist perspectives but also included Feminist and Neo Functionalist perspectives. They were able to explain each perspective in detail, draw on the stimulus material to demonstrate the relationship to each perspective as well as discussing the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective.

**Question 8**

**Interrelationship**

This question was answered by 25% of the candidates.

The biggest issue for candidates was making sure they were actually answering the question. Many wrote about the different institutions but failed to discuss how they were interrelated. It is inappropriate to just summarise/describe the stimulus material. Candidates need to interpret the stimuli in a relevant way, justify their positions and choice of stimuli and then draw a valid conclusion based on their evidences. It is inadequate to just say “See stimulus 1”. Some students did not mention the stimuli.

Most answers wisely chose to deal with two institutions in detail rather than try to bring a third or fourth institution into the discussion. Avoid listing institutions in the introduction if they are not going to be discussed in the body of the essay. Family and work or work and education were the most popular institutions. Students need to use the language of sociology. There were some discursive responses that just ‘chatted’ about relationships.

Better answers showed a thorough understanding of theories, concepts and areas of research. Several answers discussed the Feminist perspective and these answers were competent. Candidates understood the impact of the Feminist Movement and the implications it had for women in relation to family, work and education. The best answers also discussed relevant legislation, such as the Maternity Leave Act and Dad & Partner Pay and showed how this legislation has evolved as a result of changes to family, work and education and the interrelationships between these institutions.

Theoretical perspectives were generally well discussed. It is important to integrate this into the answer in a thoughtful and logical manner.
BHS315111  Sociology

ASSESSMENT PANEL REPORT

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