

SOCIOLOGY

Paper 9699/11
The Family

Key messages

- Candidates should read the questions carefully and follow the command words.
- Candidates should refer to theories, research and concepts to demonstrate a sociological understanding.
- Candidates should divide their time equally between **Section A** and **Section B**.
- Candidates should use the stimulus material for ideas on which to construct their responses but should not copy out sections of the material.

General comments

Questions requiring knowledge were well-answered by most but many candidates were less successful on questions requiring evaluation. Candidates need to substantiate their points and show they have studied sociology by using relevant evidence. Candidates should plan a structure for their essays that has an introduction, a main body and a conclusion which use the words in the question and return to these key words in their conclusion. In this way they should be able to avoid list-like essays that repeat points. Whilst it was evident that some candidates had a reasonable level of sociological understanding, less successful responses were instead often reliant on a more common sense or anecdotal approach.

Most candidates displayed some knowledge and understanding and had a general understanding of the main perspectives such as functionalism, New Right, Marxism and feminism but often. However, some responses did not fully address the specific requirements of the question set and instead focused on the general topic area of the question.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Most candidates answered all sections of **Question 1**

- (a) The term was well understood by most candidates gaining full marks, but many answers much longer than required, giving unnecessary explanations describing why there were single parent families or detailing the difference between a single and a lone parent family. A small number of answers explained the 'lone' but not the 'parent' part of the definition or described the parent but not the child(ren).
- (b) The majority of candidates answered the question accurately; but some candidates only gave one example or explained one example in two ways. It is always more successful to give two separate ways to answer this question. A significant number failed to score full marks on this question as they tended to focus on aspects of parental provision or parental nurturing or socialisation. Many offered non-sociological answers, such as keeping children isolated or spoiling them. Many did refer to children no longer having to work and also to age restrictions on things such as alcohol and films. Other candidates gave three or more examples. An uncommon error was to not understand the meaning of 'realities of adult life'
- (c) Answers needed to focus on why societies are more child-centred and not describe societies that are **not** child-centred. A common error was to outline childhood as a social construction. The most successful answers were organised in paragraphs with each paragraph making a point then

supporting that point with sociological evidence. This is done by using sociological concepts, theory or studies. Answers which clearly focused on why these families exist were more successful than those which described how families behave. Some answers concentrated on reasons for the end of a marriage rather than answering on child-centred societies. Candidates must take their time to read the questions carefully to understand their meaning before they begin to answer.

- (d) There were some excellent responses, drawing on feminist theory and looking at a range of factors such as domestic violence, both in the past and the present. Good use was made of how the blurring of roles between family members may lead to disagreements. Other successful answers discussed divorce, secularisation, growth or decline in extended family relationships. Many good answers showed understanding but could have been improved by the inclusion of sociological support. The most successful answers looked at a variety of relationships, rather than just conjugal roles, such as the relationship between parents and children. An error was to describe the consequences of failed relationships for individuals and society as well as to assert that domestic violence is new. The use of such terms as confluent love is to be encouraged but candidates do need to know what concepts mean. A number of responses were one-sided therefore not gaining any evaluation marks for this question.

Section B

Question 2

This was the more popular of the two optional questions. Some candidates had a clear understanding of its requirements and concentrated on aspects of diversity and dominance of family types in modern industrial societies. There was some misunderstanding of the question with candidates just describing different family types, explaining why the New Right think the nuclear family is the best type, outlining the functions of the family, debating definitions of the family or describing two dominant family types existing at the same time. Many candidates provided a description of different family types as evidence of family diversity, with many of these being one-sided.

There were some common errors in knowledge such as asserting that:

- adopted children mean the family cannot be nuclear
- joint conjugal roles mean the family cannot be nuclear
- an interracial is a new type of family structure
- a single parent family is a new family type
- child-centred families are a new family type.

Many candidates based most of their answer on the work of Murdock as if he was a contemporary writer even when they noted that he published in 1949.

Very few candidates supported their response with sociological studies, writers or theories. Many had difficulty in explaining why the nuclear family was no longer the dominant type; with some spending a great deal of time on the Fit Thesis and then asserting it is dominant. More successful answers referred not only to family diversity, but also secularisation, rising divorce, decline in marriage and a small number pointing out the similarities between the nuclear family and newer family types, such as same sex families.

Question 3

The most successful responses to this question demonstrated a good breadth of knowledge and engagement in the question, showing a detailed range of ideas, to support the view that the family supports capitalism. The most successful responses also balanced their answer by considering the other purposes or functions of the family. These tended to refer to Zaretsky, Althusser, Marxist feminist and functionalist views of the family. The majority of candidates did recognise the view in the question as Marxist, although an uncommon error was to confuse Murdock's economic function with the Marxist view. Weaker responses provided vague explanations based on Marx's views of the family; some wrote about Marx's theory of society in general with poor focus on the family.

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Key messages

- Be aware of the requirements of the syllabus especially in terms of understanding of key terms. Some candidates seemed to think conjugal was any relationship within the family.
- Plan essays to include main supported points and an evaluative conclusion.
- Allocate time for each question to reflect the amount of marks a question carries.

General comments

Most candidates seemed to understand the demands of the questions and many well supported and diverse sociological examples were provided by students. Questions requiring knowledge were well-answered by most but many candidates were less successful on questions requiring evaluation. Candidates need to substantiate their points and show they have studied sociology by using relevant sociological evidence. Candidates could improve on results by supporting points with relevant studies, theories and by using relevant sociological terms and concepts in their responses. Most candidates constructed a coherent essay but a number of them were limited to no more than three relevant points and in some cases the use of theory was generalised and needed to be more closely linked to the question. Some candidates were successful in their use of studies and concepts but would have benefited by the use of more theories.

Candidates displayed good knowledge and understanding of the theories and issues that are involved in gender relationships within families.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

The majority of candidates answered all sections of **Question 1**.

Question 1

- (a) Some candidates gave clear definitions of the term as the studying of the different stages that a person passes through. Some candidates understood it was to do with age but were unclear in what way. The majority of candidates understood the 'life course' aspect of the concept, but overlooked the 'analysis' part. Many were able to indicate that it was to do with 'stages' of a person's life but did not indicate that it was a study of those stages, or were unable to offer a substitute for the word 'analysis'. A common error was to repeat the question back by stating that it was the analysis of life course which gained no marks. Some answers were too long for two marks.
- (b) Many different roles were offered such as student, child and nurturing. A common error was to describe behaviours and not roles. Too often, responses were too vague to receive any marks. Education/student was understood, but after this role was considered, many responses failed to identify another role. Some weaker responses tended to dwell on 'social' rather than 'role' with complete misunderstanding the question. Many students were also unclear on interpreting 'young people'. A few saw this as requiring an extensive description of 'primary socialisation', or described 'functions'. Some offered a description of a role without saying what the role was, or identified a role without describing it.

- (c) This was a well answered question by many candidates who compared status of the elderly in a range of societies making good use of the concepts of 'immigrants in time' 'infantalisation' and gerontocracy. Some answers which had good underpinning knowledge would have benefitted from sociological references such as the work of Victor and Kagan. There was some excellent use of organic and mechanical solidarity to highlight the differences between societies. An error was to compare the status of the elderly to that of children which was not what the question asked. Most candidates handled this question fairly well at least providing some comparison between two societies. Some candidates even compared between classes and genders, with the more successful ones using studies to support points. There were some excellent answers, as well as some very weak ones which relied on stereotypes, some making use of the position of the elderly in their own societies comparing them to neighbouring ones. Variations in the social position of the elderly according to gender, class as well as culture were often considered. A variety of appropriate sociological evidence was used.
- (d) This question was generally well answered, with many candidates demonstrating a clear understanding of what is meant by social construction, using studies and cross-cultural examples (frequently comparing eastern and western societies or pre-industrial to industrial or the studies of Mead or Malinowski) and historical comparisons. Candidates should be aware of the need to understand key terms accurately. Many responses demonstrated good knowledge of childhood changing over time, often drawing on the work of Aries. Fewer candidates were able to show good (or any) knowledge on biological factors and weaker candidates failed to grasp that childhood was the 'concept' that society had an impact upon, although those who discussed socialisation gained some marks. Others used the ideas of Piaget, Freud and Tiger and Fox as evidence that childhood was said to be a biological or socio-biological construct rather than a purely social construct. These were excellent and offered some clear evaluation points rather than juxtaposition. At the higher end there was some sophisticated evaluation of postmodern blurring of childhood and adulthood though, drawing on Postman's work.

Section B

A number of responses showed a limited awareness of chronology many citing, for instance Murdock (1949) and Parsons (1959) as evidence of current sociological thinking. Although a detailed understanding of the dates at which work was published is not a necessary requirement many answers would have benefited from starting with use of historical sociology and then assessed that using more contemporary evidence ratter than the other way around.

Question 2

Fewer candidates answered this question compared to **Question 3**. In order to be successful at this question there was a need to have a clear understanding of both cultural factors and family structures. Few responses demonstrated a clear understanding of what might count as a cultural factor, so the most common approach was simply to describe a range of family types found in different times and places. Many essays showed an awareness of factors other than the cultural that affects the structure of families. The main alternative to culture considered was economic mainly through historical comparisons, (e.g. Parsons' 'fit thesis' applied to the Industrial Revolution). Many confused structure with size (in the sense of how many children a family could afford). A few responses argued for social class as an influence, mainly via the concept of stratified diffusion. Some candidates interpreted the question as one about which type of family is 'best'. Many candidates listed factors that influence family structure without mentioning if these factors were cultural factors or not. Such identification would have improved these answers. Discussion of cultural variations was most often based on ethnicity or religion. Common examples of ethnic variation were Afro-Caribbean female-headed single parent families and South Asian extended families; a few touched on the way migration to Western countries was changing this, leading to conflict with the family 'back home'. Variation due to religious factors rarely went beyond religious opposition to divorce or homosexuality keeping the incidence of single parent families and same sex families low, whereas secularisation was seen as increasing both.

There was some confusion concerning what 'structure' actually refers to. That's to say; often students confused it with roles in the family. So, teachers could help students by emphasising the distinction between family structure and family roles. A few responses included no explicit reference to cultural factors at all. There was also a tendency to digress from discussing influences on structure to the desirability or otherwise of particular structures, e.g. New Right criticisms of non-nuclear families.

Diversity in family structure was understood, and many candidates made creditable use of post-modernist theorists. The impact of social policy or legislation was only occasionally mentioned, usually via common-sense examples such as the legalisation of same sex marriage. Only a handful of responses addressed the notion of life-cycle diversity. There were some good accounts of post-modern analysis of family structure, but rarely explained in terms of *influences* beyond vague claims that 'things are different now'.

Question 3

This was the most popular of the essay questions. There was some excellent use of a variety of feminist theories frequently well supported with research findings and this was answered well by most candidates. Clearly, candidates had been well prepared to answer questions on this issue. Many made effective references to postmodern society, though more could have strengthened their essays by discussing the variety of family types characterising contemporary life in the West and their effect on gender roles. Candidates sometimes had a tendency to write too descriptively in a historical narrative of what roles used to be like in pre and early industrial societies. Some answers lost focus on the question by describing Murdock's four and Parson's two functions in great detail. However, most approached the essay by discussing reasons why families were asymmetrical, many taking a feminist approach and examining the oppression of women in designated roles. The majority of candidates then explored reasons for symmetrical families and linked this to the argument that gender no longer influences roles within the family with much more understanding. Even in less developed answers there was the use of some concepts, looking beyond just 'working women'. Some answers were vague on the use of Marxism but most were good in the application of different feminist theories.

Discussion of gender roles beyond mothers was more limited. In order to improve performance candidates should go beyond conjugal roles (which should remain central to any discussion) to also consider the position of boys and girls in families as well as other relationships based on gender. However post-modernism and family diversity was utilised well. Stronger answers used sociologists and studies and there were some very impressive responses where developed answers showed clear understanding and evaluation of sociological studies and approaches.

Some responses were actually hampered by a surfeit of knowledge, presenting a sequence of undeveloped summaries of research studies at the expense of building a clear argument. Candidates might be well advised to be more selective and aim for quality rather than quantity of material. Answers which showed signs of planning were usually more successful.

Defining key terms is important, but there were some excessively complex opening definitions of 'family' which did not really inform the discussion that followed. Similarly, attempts to clarify the meaning of 'gender' at the outset simply led to assertions about fluidity which were then largely ignored.

Weaker responses sometimes drifted into discussing roles played in society, usually in terms of continuing gender discrimination at work and lost focus on the family.

Evaluation usually took the form of juxtaposing perspectives and or variants of perspectives, but even less developed responses quite often showed awareness of specific debates such as Oakley's critique of Wilmott and Young.

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Key messages

- Candidates should read the questions carefully and follow the command words.
- Candidates need to plan their time appropriately to spend the required amount of time on each question; there was some evidence of rushed final answers.
- Candidates need to plan their essay answers to avoid repeating points.

General comments

Questions requiring knowledge and understanding were very well answered but some candidates were less successful in questions requiring evaluation. Responses could also be improved by supporting points with relevant studies and theories as well as using relevant sociological terms and concepts in their responses. Some candidates were successful in their use of studies and concepts but would have benefited by the use of more theories.

Candidates need to address the exact question that has been set, so more work on interpreting questions may improve performance.

Candidates displayed good knowledge and understanding on the meaning of childhood and different feminist theories.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

- (a) There was a clear understanding shown by many candidates of the idea of an age group as well as that group having shared characteristics. Some candidates who failed to define the term then used it appropriately in other answers. A common error was to write an over lengthy definition which described what people at different times in their life do rather than noting that groups share characteristics
- (b) Many answers gave two clear ways in which adults and children are treated differently and often good use was made of compulsory education, parental prosecutions if they failed to care for their children and the legal system but some candidates tried to use the legal system twice. Candidates are more likely to be successful if they use clearly distinct reasons when answering **Question 1 (b)**. Less successful responses simply identified one way but did not develop their answers. Common errors were to concentrate on what adults do with little or no reference to children, some candidates gave examples of how the two groups are treated in the same way and not differently. Other answers failed to address the question by giving long explanations of how one group of children are treated differently to another group of children (such as different ethnic groups). Others compared the treatment of boys to girls or produced lists of what children do. A few long responses described the work of Aries without linking to the set question. A common error was to assert that adults do not get care and attention at all but children do.
- (c) Successful answers displayed a clear understanding of the question by showing how exposure to the adult world could influence the lives of children. Many used the effects of uncensored exposure to the internet (Postman) or being forced, due to poverty, to work or become child soldiers to show

how this can influence children's lives. Some spent a sizeable portion of their answer describing adequate socialisation before explaining consequences for children of inadequate socialisation. The most successful answers tended to reference the failure of some dysfunctional families, including the creation of 'deviants' and New Right criticism of welfare dependent families such as single female parents. Much good use was made of the work of Palmer on toxic childhood and Postman as well as issues of child abuse. A number of responses included evaluation even though this is not required for this question. Some answers described positive consequences such as early maturity, but failed to show how this was a result of the failure to protect. An error in some answers was to outline what the lack of protection was i.e. exposure to the internet with no mention of the consequences of this action. Careful reading of the question should enable candidates to avoid misinterpretation such as describing poor socialisation which was not linked to the failure to protect.

- (d) Many candidates displayed an excellent understanding of the question supported with a very good range of material which included such key thinkers as Scase and Scales. Others relied on dated sociology such as Parsons and Murdock. Again there was some evidence of misinterpretation of the question as candidates described the social problems that may be caused by children looking at the internet. Other answers described different types of children rather than addressing the issue of childhood disappearing. Many were able to offer some consideration of 'yes it is...no it isn't' which showed a focus on the question asked. Aries was used but mainly to state that childhood did not exist in the past. A few evaluated his claim by using Pollack. Many also used the examples of child employment, soldiers, slavery, prostitution and the various examples of children being nurturers in different named societies as evidence that childhood has disappeared or is none existent. This was then contrasted with modern society being even more child centred with the introduction of laws protecting children, continuing compulsory education and dependency as well as the existence of pester power, Tiger mums and helicopter parents. A few candidates highlighted class, gender and cultural differences as factors that can influence childhood. Some answers to this question were longer than **Questions 2 or 3** for less than half of the marks. Explicit evaluation was rare.

Section B

Many essays were repetitive and/or lacked focus on the question. Candidates who made an essay plan were usually more successful.

Question 2

This was a very popular question that was well answered by many candidates who made good use of the ways in which the state can influence roles through policy, such as supporting instrumental and expressive roles. In many other answers there was an overwhelming reliance on conjugal roles, many of which described conjugal roles as being equal, some even stating that conjugal roles means equality in relationships. Many candidates approached this as a generic 'gender equality' question, basing their response mainly on the domestic division of labour, with accounts of the shift from segregated to joint conjugal roles and the rise of symmetrical families, often citing the work of Wilmott and Young or Bott, with Oakley or Duncombe and Marsden challenging the myth of symmetry. Studies dealing with aspects such as financial control and decision making (Pahl, Vogler and Edgell) were covered in stronger responses.

Some responses included potentially relevant points without explicitly linking them to the question. For example, gender inequality in paid employment was described, but with no explanation of how this impacted the family or domestic abuse (of wives and female partners) was discussed without any reference to unequal familial power relationships. Similarly, many responses mentioned the increase in same sex and female-headed single parent families, but drew only simplistic conclusions about the implications for patriarchy ('the father cannot be head of the family if he isn't there').

Few candidates sought to make an explicit distinction between 'roles' and 'relationships'. It was also rare to consider either roles or relationships beyond the conjugal role, though the rise of child-centeredness was occasionally mentioned in connection with changes in family types, i.e. privatised nuclear families reinforcing traditional gender roles. The most successful answers expanded beyond conjugal roles to include other roles and relationships within the family. There were some very good descriptions of the different treatment of boys and girls in the family. There were also some references to continuing or declining respect for male elders (patriarchs rather than patriarchy in the sociological sense). An uncommon error was to discuss patriarchy in society rather than in the family, again showing a misunderstanding of the question.

Evaluation mainly took the form of considering ways in which families in most cultures have become more egalitarian. Some successful answers attempted to discriminate between varieties of feminism, arguing that liberal feminists and Marxist/radical feminists would take opposite sides in the debate.

Question 3

This was the minority choice. Many of the answers produced excellent, thoughtful, well supported and evaluative sociology covering a wide range of evidence and theory from the functionalist, Marxist and Feminist perspectives with the strongest responses attempted a definition of value consensus.

The majority of responses demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of the functionalist perspective on family functions, though many simply reproduced what they had learned (Murdock's four functions, Parsons' two) without tailoring this material to the issue of value consensus. Consequently aspects such as reproduction and the stabilisation of adult personalities were described alongside primary socialisation, with no acknowledgement that only the latter related directly to value consensus. Candidates seemed to take it for granted that all four (or two) functions were equally important, but failed to spell this out. There was also little attempt to unpick any possible distinction between functions and roles.

Similarly, many responses included a section about the loss of family functions to the state (education and healthcare) but most seemed unsure how to relate this to the question.

The process of primary socialisation itself was well understood and outlined, with many candidates providing appropriate accounts of primary socialisation in general and socialisation into gender roles.

This topic lent itself to clear evaluation by juxtaposing perspectives: Marxists say the family's main role is to serve capitalism, feminists say it is to serve the patriarchy, post-modernists say it is to serve the preferences of individuals (if indeed there is such a thing as 'the family'), though post-modernism was often relegated to the conclusion. A wide range of studies were cited in support of each alternative perspective, from Ansley to Zaretsky.

Common errors were to include over lengthy descriptions of the work of Engels which had little relevance to the question and therefore lost focus on it. Some answers asserted that domestic violence is evidence of lack of value consensus where as others asserted that value consensus must be for the good.

Some stronger more successful responses argued that the competing perspectives all support the claim in the question, i.e. that all are seeking 'consensus', with disagreement only about the values involved (capitalist, patriarchal, individualistic).

There was occasional confusion between 'role of the family' and 'roles in the family' especially when discussing gender socialisation and Parsons' 'warm bath' theory.

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Paper 9699/21 Theory and Methods

Key messages

- Good responses showed sound knowledge and understanding of sociological concepts and theories.
- Some candidates were able to apply sociological theories appropriately to the questions but this continues to be an area in need of improvement.
- Most responses still tend toward description rather than analysis and evaluation.
- Poor understanding of the meaning of some key concepts undermined responses to some questions.
- A number of responses were over reliant on the stem material in answers to **Question 1**.
- A number of essay responses gained low marks as they were based mainly on non-sociological material.

General comments

The most successful candidates produced high quality scripts that showed very good engagement with sociological issues. Answers that gained lower marks were primarily descriptive and lacked evidence of analysis and assessment. In particular, some candidates struggled to apply their knowledge of sociological theory to questions. In **Section A** there was evidence that candidates were sometimes over reliant on the stem, often rewriting parts of it in their answers instead of using it as a prompt to develop points. Many candidates used practical issues as building blocks for their answers, often with limited development. Whilst there was quite a reasonable knowledge of sociological methods, partial understanding and weak application of key concepts such as validity and reliability continues to undermine some responses. There were few if any rubric errors or time related issues in this session.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

- (a) Many responses were able to define the term *hypothesis* accurately and there was a reasonably clear understanding of the term. Most responses were able to gain one mark, with 'educated guess' being a common response. The best responses developed their answer with precision.
- (b) The majority of candidates were able to identify and describe two reasons, most discussed control and replicability. However, a number of responses repeated the stem material rather than develop it and therefore received only two or three marks.
- (c) Most candidates were able to show some knowledge of positivism and a number developed this to state the involvement of quantitative, experimental, objective approaches. The best responses went on to explain what could be gained from these in terms of causal laws etc. Some candidates simply stated that positivists believed that society could be studied scientifically.
- (d) Most candidates managed one or two reasonable points and showed knowledge of arguments against the use of experiments – ethical issues were notably popular, with many responses outlining Milgram and Zimbardo's experiments. Often the descriptions of these examples were overly long at the expense of analysis. Many responses referred appropriately to the Hawthorne effect. Some candidates did not always apply their responses explicitly to experiments and discussed some of the issues in relation to observation techniques in general. A number of

candidates structured their response as arguments for and against experiments, but few assessed the arguments they had made.

Section B

Question 2

Good responses looked at how values might be involved in stages of the research process, and the strongest ones linked these to how perspectives involve values (Marxist, feminist or functionalist). Weaker responses focussed on intentional bias by dishonest sociologists. A number of candidates introduced references to Weber and the freedom/neutrality distinction, but few covered the debate directly. Evaluation was often by juxtaposition.

Question 3

Some candidates looked at the interactionist perspective on socialisation and role theory but these were not always well understood. Better responses used structural theories to show elements of determinism in capitalism, patriarchy or functionalist systems but often these were only partly focussed on the question. A notable number of candidates simply outlined the history of liberal freedoms, technological change and increased social mobility and therefore did not address the sociological debate at the heart of the question. A small number of candidates confused interactionism with interpretivism.

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Paper 9699/22 Theory and Methods

Key messages

- Good answers showed sound knowledge and understanding of a range of sociological concepts and theories. The best responses contained content that was evaluative and well applied to the question.
- Candidates are more comfortable with methodological based questions than theoretical ones.
- A number of essay responses still tend toward description rather than analysis and evaluation.

General comments

Responses to **Question 1** revealed examination technique, i.e. in demonstrating appropriate skills and use of time. Whilst there was reasonably sound knowledge of sociological methods, partial understanding and weak application of key concepts such as validity and reliability undermined some responses. For example, in **Section A, Questions 1(b) and 1(c)** both tested candidates' knowledge of the method of group interviews and the overall impression was that there was a lack of familiarity with this technique. This was evidenced by the fact that a number of candidates used practical issues as building blocks for their answers, often with limited development. In **Section B** the essay questions produced a fairly even division in terms of number and quality of response. There were some very good scripts that were analytical and evaluative, but a majority were overly descriptive and often lacked direct focus on the question. With these responses any evaluation tended to be by juxtaposition. **Question 2** focused on interactionist views, and a number of responses to it suggested that candidates were less comfortable discussing and applying this theory than they were the range of structurally based ones. This was evidenced by the fact that, in many cases, candidates began their responses by outlining the opposing view. A small number of candidates confused interactionism with interpretivism which led them to produce answers largely on methodological lines.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

- (a) The majority of responses were able to demonstrate a sound understanding of semi-structured interviews as a method that involves the use of pre-set questions with the flexibility to explore related issues.
- (b) Most candidates provided a fairly sound account of two limitations of group interviews. Problems relating to social desirability and variations in group effects (dominant versus submissive respondents) were both well covered. Some responses repeated the wording of the stem or provided lengthy descriptions of the features of group interviews which was not necessary.
- (c) Many responses to this question suggested that candidates lacked full knowledge of group interviews as a method. Whilst many candidates were able to produce competent responses from their general knowledge of qualitative interviews – many of the reasons are similar – a lack of detailed understanding of the uses of group interviews meant that they often did not receive the highest marks. Effective answers included discussions of how the non-interrogative nature of group interviews can generate unanticipated ideas and insights; its value in relation to researching marginalised groups with shared experiences, and the process of 'cumulative recall' through which one group member's contribution activates the ideas of others.

- (d) Most responses demonstrated a clear understanding of what is meant by 'positivist arguments' and 'qualitative data' which led to a number of good responses. The strongest candidates were successful in linking these two ideas together and applying them to the problems associated with collecting qualitative data in an interview situation. Most candidates produced two sided responses and outlined positivist and interpretivist approaches but focused evaluation of positivist arguments against the use of qualitative interview methods was rare. Many structured their response as for and against, but few assessed the arguments they had made.

Section B

Question 2

The majority of responses highlighted a number of the central ideas of the interactionist perspective. Many candidates outlined views associated with such theorists as Mead, Cooley, and Goffman and these were generally clear and to the point. There were also some useful references to Garfinkel's breaching experiments. Good responses directly engaged in the debate between structuralist and action theorists. A number of candidates were more comfortable outlining structural approaches which sometimes led to a lack of focus on the question. There is a tendency for some candidates to see interactionism as a perspective simply supporting the view that individuals are able to exercise complete freedom of choice in decision making. This premise led a number of responses to outline a range of freedoms that were marginal to the question. A small number of candidates confused interactionism with interpretivism.

Question 3

The majority of candidates demonstrated a sound understanding of what is meant by 'value consensus' and 'social order'. The key themes of functionalist theory were often covered well, notably Durkheim's concepts of organic and mechanical solidarity, and Parsons' AGIL model of the social system. In most cases criticisms of the functionalist analysis of social order were linked to the critiques put forward by conflict perspectives such as feminism and Marxism. Good responses made accurate links to structuration theory and reflexivity. The strongest candidates were also able to apply an interactionist perspective, and some even raised the question of whether, in an era of globalisation and postmodernity, the idea of value consensus has lost its coherence.

SOCIOLOGY

Paper 9699/23 Theory and Methods

Key messages

- Good answers showed sound knowledge and understanding of a range of sociological concepts and theories. Many candidates were able to apply their understanding effectively to the questions.
- The most successful essay responses contained thoughtful evaluative content that was well applied to the question.
- A number of responses included evaluative content in **Question 1(c)** which is not required for this question.

General comments

Question 1(b) tested candidates' knowledge of the method of content analysis and the overall impression was that there was a lack of familiarity with this technique. This was evidenced by the fact that a number of candidates used practical issues as building blocks for their answers, often with limited development.

Questions 1(c) and 1(d) looked at the uses of quantitative and qualitative data in sociological research and candidates typically produced some good answers to these questions, mostly making appropriate links to positivism and interpretivism. Some scripts showed only partial understanding of key concepts such as validity and reliability which undermined some responses. In **Section B** the question focusing on the postmodern approach suggested that candidates were less comfortable discussing and applying this theory than other sociological theories. This was evidenced by the fact that, in many cases, candidates began their responses by outlining the opposing view. Similarly, in **Question 2** candidates seemed to be more comfortable outlining structural perspectives than action theories. Most responses showed good knowledge and understanding of the theories but were often overly descriptive and lacked a direct focus on the question. **Question 2** was far more popular and generally produced better responses than **Question 3**.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

- (a) Most responses showed some understanding of the term validity. However, many were only able to give a partial definition, usually by referring to 'accuracy' or 'truth'. A number of candidates confused the concept with that of reliability.
- (b) Most candidates were able to identify and describe at least one strength of content analysis. The most prominent strengths highlighted were practical advantages revolving around cost and easy access, as well as reliability. A number of responses tended to repeat the stem material rather than develop it and therefore often received no more than two marks. Overall, most candidates did not show developed knowledge of content analysis as a method.
- (c) Most candidates were able to identify a range of criticisms of the use of quantitative data, which meant that they generally scored four or five marks. Those that carefully linked their critique to the interpretivist perspective were able to go higher and many candidates produced some very competent answers. Other responses did not apply their understanding of interpretivism to criticisms which limited the number of marks awarded. Conversely, in a minority of cases candidates outlined their understanding of interpretivism but made few links to the rest of the question. There was a notable tendency for candidates to provide evaluation and produce two

sided responses. They were not penalised for this but the question only required candidates to explain.

- (d) Most candidates showed a good understanding of the limitations of using qualitative research and many were able to produce responses of a high standard. The strongest answers outlined limitations in terms of practical, ethical and theoretical issues, and were able to link these to a range of qualitative methods - usually observation techniques or unstructured interviews. There was also some good use of empirical evidence to support the points made. Some opted for a range of points while others went into greater depth focusing on one or two examples. Both approaches were acceptable. A number of candidates structured their response as arguments for and against the use of qualitative data, but did not always assess the limitations they had identified. However, evaluation was evident in the majority of cases.

Section B

Question 2

There were some very good responses to this question and most candidates provided a reasonably good overview of structuralist approaches, typically functionalism, Marxism and feminism. Some focused most of their attention on one of these but the majority highlighted the views of at least two. Those that picked up from the wording of the question that the debate was a clash between determinism and agency typically produced high quality responses. Moderate responses were often overly descriptive and content to outline and contrast functionalist and Marxist views with little application to the structural element that was at the heart of the question. With these sorts of response evaluation was invariably by juxtaposition. Interactionism and sometimes postmodernism were used as assessment tools, although candidates were generally less confident with this side of the argument. For example, there was a tendency to see interactionism as a perspective that simplistically puts forward the idea that individuals have complete freedom of choice over their actions.

Question 3

This question was much less popular with candidates though there were some exceptionally good responses. The high quality responses recognised that the question was not directly about inequality, rather the postulated view that class has declined as an identity marker. These sorts of answers also showed good knowledge and understanding of postmodern thinking. The most thoughtful responses explored and evaluated the proposition with reference to both empirical evidence and various theories. Typically, they also considered other social identities such as age, gender and ethnicity as part of their analysis or as evaluation. Weaker responses showed little understanding of postmodernism, sometimes ignoring it altogether, and very often used non-sociological material to support their points.

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Key messages

- Continued improvement in the overall standard of the scripts.
- Scope to include more analysis and evaluation in answering the **(b)** questions.
- Good use of relevant concepts and theories in some answers.
- Some answers lacked focus on the key terms in the question.
- Higher marks could be gained by making more use of references to research evidence.

General comments

The standard of the scripts overall continues to improve. More candidates are demonstrating a sound understanding of relevant sociological material, including concepts, theories and studies. There are fewer low scoring answers that are based on general knowledge and personal opinion. Higher marks could be gained by adopting a more analytical and evaluative approach to the **(b)** questions. For the **(a)** questions, more use of examples to support key points would be another way to gain further marks. Not focusing on the key terms in the question was a problem with some of the answers. For example, some candidates attempted to answer **5(b)** without referring to the new media, even though the latter term was central to the question. Encouraging candidates to make a note of the key terms in the question before starting to answer is to be recommended. Referring back to the key terms at regular intervals in the answer is also advisable. Examples of rubric errors were rare. Some candidates answered more than the three questions required, with the extra answers rarely contributing to an improvement in the overall mark. Failure to reference answers with the appropriate question number was a feature of some scripts. Candidates may disadvantage themselves by omitting the question number or writing the number illegibly, as it makes it difficult for the examiner to know which question is being attempted.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

- (a)** Good answers explained clearly the Marxist view of how education helps to support capitalism. Lower in the mark range, a lot of answers explained the Marxist view of the relationship between education and the social class system. While this type of response had some relevance to the question, the candidates needed to explore more directly the economic role of education in order to gain high marks.
- (b)** There were some good answers that demonstrated a detailed understanding of the debates about the relationship between education and meritocracy. The evaluation was often delivered through contrasting the functionalist and Marxist perspectives on the role of education. Some candidates also discussed examples of particular education systems and their contribution to social mobility. Lower in the mark range, answers were often confined to a few basic observations about the impact of class inequality on educational achievement, with links to the question poorly explained.

Question 2

- (a) High quality answers identified several ways in which educational performance may be influenced by the way teachers view pupils. Each example was explained in relevant detail, often drawing on appropriate concepts and study evidence. Lower scoring answers often lacked references to sociological material and relied instead on a few general observations about pupil-teacher relationships.
- (b) Good answers questioned in detail the idea that educational achievement is determined by intelligence. This often included reviewing the limitations of IQ tests and debating the nature of intelligence and its relationship to academic attainment. There were also a lot of answers that triggered the middle of the mark range by providing a general account of factors that may influence educational achievement. The lack of detailed focus on the role of intelligence was a limitation with these answers. There were a few low scoring answers that relied on personal observation to make a case for or against the view expressed in the question.

Section B

Question 3

- (a) There were some good answers that explained several economic indicators that are used in measuring development. Lower scoring answers were confined to a basic account of one or two economic indicators only. Some candidates confused cultural indicators with economic indicators.
- (b) Good answers demonstrated a detailed understanding of modernisation theory and also offered a sustained analysis and evaluation of the strengths and limitations of the theory. Contrasting theories of development were used to draw conclusions about the usefulness of modernisation theory. Lower scoring responses demonstrated some knowledge of modernisation theory but offered few points about its usefulness in understanding the position of developing societies.

Question 4

- (a) Good answers offered a sustained account of the links between colonialism and economic exploitation. Examples from particular countries were often used to support key points. There were some low scoring answers that demonstrated only a limited understanding of colonialism and its connection with exploitation.
- (b) High quality responses used a range of examples to discuss the impact of transnational corporations on development. Good answers also often included links to different theories of development. The possibility that transnational corporations have a positive impact on developing societies was another line of analysis offered in the higher scoring answers. There were some low scoring responses that discussed the issues without referring to relevant concepts, theories and study evidence.

Section C

Question 5

- (a) Good answers considered several ways in which owners of the media can influence the content of the media, using relevant sociological concepts and studies to support key points. Low scoring answers were often confined to describing just one or two ways in which owners can influence media content.
- (b) There were some good answers that maintained a strong focus throughout on the new media. Some lower scoring answers neglected the reference to 'new media' in the question and wrote instead about influences on media content in general. High quality answers considered ways in which consumers can influence the content of the new media and also examined different viewpoints about the extent to which power lies with the consumer. The contrast between the digital optimist and the digital pessimist positions was often used to further the discussion.

Question 6

- (a) Most answers to this question demonstrated an understanding of the term 'moral panics'. Good responses used relevant sociological concepts and studies to explain the role of the media in creating moral panics. Lower scoring answers were often confined to a limited attempt to explain the idea of a moral panic.
- (b) There were some good answers that used different models of media effects to discuss the issues raised by the question. Useful contrasts were drawn between direct and indirect models of media effects. Lower scoring responses offered a few points about media influence on attitudes and behaviour, but lacked references to relevant sociological concepts, theories and research findings.

Section D

Question 7

- (a) While most candidates understood the term 'new religious movements', making relevant links to secularisation proved difficult for some. High quality answers described several ways in which the growth of new religious movements can be linked to the declining power of established religion which is a feature of secularisation.
- (b) There were some good answers that discussed how secularisation may have led to process whereby religious organisations increasingly seek to change society as a way of attracting new supporters and influence. Opposition to secularisation was also advanced as a reason why religious organisations may increasingly express opposition to the existing social order. There were some low scoring answers that demonstrated only a limited understanding of the role of religious organisations in campaigning for social change.

Question 8

- (a) Good answers explained several differences between denominations and other types of religious organisation such as churches, sects and cults. There were some low scoring answers that identified one or two characteristics of denominations, but made no contrasts with other types of religious organisation.
- (b) Good answers often included a discussion of the difficulties of collecting evidence about religious belief and practice, questioning the extent to which we can know whether people were more religious in the past than today. Some candidates offered accounts of the secularisation thesis as a way of approaching the issues raised by the question. This was effective where the focus was on debates about the supposed decline in religiosity in modern society. However, some versions of this approach gained only low marks because the links between the secularisation thesis and the issues raised by the question were never clarified.

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Key messages

- Some answers to the **(b)** questions demonstrated sophisticated analysis and evaluation.
- References to concepts and studies was lacking in some responses.
- Most candidates demonstrated good knowledge of sociological theory.
- Some candidates made poor use of time by including evaluation in answering the **(a)** questions.
- A lot of answers to the **(b)** questions relied too much on general sociological knowledge at the expense of analysis and evaluation.

General comments

The standard of the scripts overall continues to be very high. Some candidates write extremely long answers that are full of relevant sociological knowledge and analysis. The standard of these scripts frequently exceeds that which can reasonably be expected at A Level and the candidates concerned deservedly achieve high marks.

There are also some candidates who write very long answers, but the structure adopted is weak and some of the material covered has only loose relevance for the question. These answers consist primarily of general sociological knowledge and little is offered in terms of analysis and evaluation. Candidates who fall into this category would be better advised to write shorter answers and take more time to think about the requirements of the question and how best to structure the response. Many of the answers made good references to theories, but sociological concepts were less widely used and a lot of answers lacked references to relevant studies. More use of evidence, from sociological studies and other appropriate sources, would be one way in which candidates could gain higher marks.

There were no rubric errors and most candidates were able to answer three questions in the time allocated. Some candidates made poor use of their time by including an evaluation in their answers to the **Part (a)** questions. These questions require an explanatory response only and there are no marks for evaluative content.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

- (a)** There were some good answers that identified a range of material factors influencing which pupils succeed in school. High scoring responses often included appropriate references to sociological studies and research evidence. There were some lower scoring answers that focused more on cultural factors than material factors.
- (b)** Good answers explained some of the reasons behind the improvement in female educational achievement in recent years. High quality responses also considered whether all of the obstacles to female educational achievement have now been removed. Different feminist contributions and perspectives were used to develop the discussion and key points were often supported with references to relevant studies. Lower scoring answers often consisted of an uncritical description of some obstacles to female educational achievement, such as the hidden curriculum and gender stereotyping by teachers.

Question 2

- (a) There were some good answers that offered several well developed examples of how pupil attitudes to education may be influenced by the hidden curriculum. The work of Bowles and Gintis often featured in the higher quality responses. Lower scoring answers were limited to just one or two simple examples illustrating the influence of the hidden curriculum.
- (b) Some of the answers were unbalanced in that far greater attention was given to discussing the influence of social class on educational achievement than the influence of ethnicity. High scoring responses discussed the influence of social class in detail, but also drew appropriate contrasts with ethnicity as another factor influencing which pupils succeed in the education system. Some candidates rightly emphasised the conceptual and theoretical difficulties in determining whether or not social class is more important than ethnicity in influencing educational achievement. The cross-cutting nature of the respective influences (class and ethnicity) was explored in some of the higher scoring answers. Lower in the mark range, there were a lot of answers that offered no assessment and were confined to a descriptive account of some ways in which social class may affect which pupils succeed in the education system.

Section B

Question 3

- (a) High scoring answers identified several reasons why women are more likely than men to experience poverty in developing societies. Each reason was explained clearly and well-chosen examples were used to support the main points. Lower scoring responses were confined to just one or two observations about why women may be more likely than men to experience poverty.
- (b) Most candidates recognised that this question invited a discussion of dependency theory. Good answers also often included a discussion of the impact of colonialism on developing societies. Lower scoring answers often addressed the issues raised by the question without using relevant sociological concepts and theories. There were also a few less successful answers which discussed the factors affecting economic growth in developing societies without referring to the impact of developed societies.

Question 4

- (a) Candidates who attempted this question generally demonstrated a good understanding of Malthus' model of population growth. Good answers identified several limitations of the model, while lower scoring responses relied mainly on an explanation of the model with little or no reference to the limitations.
- (b) There were some good answers that demonstrated a detailed understanding of the impact of international migration on global development. High quality responses considered both the positive and the negative consequences and reached sound conclusions about the overall impact of international migration. Some candidates made good links to various theories of development, including dependency theory and the world systems perspective. There were some low scoring answers that discussed international migration without directly addressing its impact on global development.

Section C

Question 5

- (a) Good answers provided several well-chosen examples of how ruling class ideology may be promoted by the media. References to the work of sociologists such as Stuart Hall, Chibnall, and Ericksen often featured in high scoring responses. Lower scoring answers were confined to a few general remarks about the Marxist theory of the media.
- (b) High quality answers usually included a summary of ways in which media owners can influence the content of the media, alongside a discussion of other social actors and agencies that might also be able to influence media content. Contrasting theories of the media were often used to advance the discussion of who controls the media. Lower scoring answers were often one-sided, focusing on

the notion that one particular group controls the media (such as media owners) without considering other possible alternatives.

Question 6

- (a) Good responses provided several examples of how the media may influence feminine identities. High scoring answers also often included references to relevant sociological concepts such as labelling, stereotypes, objectification, and media representations. Lower scoring answers were often confined to describing one or two media stereotypes of women's social roles.
- (b) There were some good answers that contrasted direct and indirect models of media influence as a way of evaluating how far the media are able to control the way people think. Other high quality answers focused on the Marxist theory of the media, discussing the mass manipulation and hegemonic models of media influence and contrasting these with other perspectives on media influence, such as the pluralist theory. Lower scoring answers generally approached the question without referring to appropriate sociological theories and models of the media. There was some use of relevant concepts such as ideology and propaganda, but overall these answers included only limited references to appropriate sociological material.

Section D

Question 7

- (a) Most candidates recognised that the idea of religion being the worship of society derives from the writings of Emile Durkheim. Many were able to provide an accurate summary of Durkheim's contribution in this area and some used relevant examples, such as totemism, to support their answer. There were a few low scoring answers where the candidates offered their own interpretation of the idea that religion is the worship of society, showing little or no understanding of Durkheim's arguments.
- (b) Good answers provided a detailed account of the Marxist theory of religion and also considered the extent to which that theory underestimates the power of religion to bring about social change. High quality responses often included examples of where religion appears to have influenced social change and the reductionism evident in some Marxist theories of religion was also highlighted. Some candidates also used Weber's Protestant Ethic thesis to question Marxist accounts of the factors that led to the emergence of industrial capitalism in Western Europe. Lower scoring responses were often confined to a basic account of the Marxist theory of religion, with little or no linkage to explanations of social change.

Question 8

- (a) Some high quality answers made good use of references to relevant sociological concepts, such as cultural defence, marginalisation, cultural transition, and religious consumerism, as a framework for explaining why religion is often important to minority ethnic groups. Lower scoring responses struggled to provide a convincing sociological account of the attractions of religion for minority ethnic groups.
- (b) Most candidates recognised that the question offered an opportunity to consider the secularisation thesis and particularly the idea of religious revival. Good answers reflected on the extent to which secularisation has occurred and questioned whether there has been a revival in religious interest in recent years. Examples of new religious movements were often used to consider how far there has been a renewed interest in religion. Lower scoring responses often offered a simple account of the secularisation thesis with little or no consideration of the issues surrounding religious revival and the growth in new religious movements.

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Key messages

- Some good scripts combining detailed sociological knowledge with effective analysis and evaluation.
- Some answers were too short and demonstrated little sociological knowledge.
- Further marks could be gained by referring to relevant sociological theories.
- More use could be made of research evidence to support key points.
- High quality answers to the **(b)** questions included a sustained evaluation.

General comments

The overall standard of the scripts continues to improve and more candidates are demonstrating the higher order skills of analysis and evaluation. Good answers to the **(b)** questions combined detailed sociological understanding with sustained evaluation of the issues raised by the question. Use of sociological evidence and theories to support the evaluation was a feature of high quality answers to the **(b)** questions. There continues to be a few candidates who rely on assertion and general knowledge as a basis for their answers. The marks awarded to responses that lack reference to appropriate sociological material are inevitably low. It is important therefore that candidates have the opportunity to study the recommended textbooks and are encouraged to use references to sociological sources in their answers. Some candidates include evaluation when responding to the **(a)** questions. Evaluation is not required for these questions and thus there are no marks to be gained by including evaluative content.

Most candidates answered three questions in the time available and there were no rubric errors. Some candidates answered more than three questions, though they appeared to derive no advantage from this strategy in terms of marks achieved. The questions on education proved most popular, with those on global development less frequently attempted.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

- (a)** There were some good answers that explained several ways in which the culture within school disadvantages working class pupils. The concept of cultural capital often featured in high quality responses. Lower scoring responses lacked focus on cultural factors within schools, referring instead to general factors influencing the educational achievement of working class pupils.
- (b)** Most candidates demonstrated at least a basic understanding of the concept of cultural deprivation. Good answers made strong connections between cultural deprivation and the reasons why educational achievement is low among some minority ethnic groups. High quality responses questioned the extent to which cultural deprivation is responsible for low educational achievement among some minority ethnic groups, considering the importance of other factors such as social inequality, racism, and lack of cultural capital. There were some low scoring answers that mentioned a few factors influencing educational achievement without relating the material to minority ethnic groups specifically.

Question 2

- (a) Good answers provided several examples of how pupil sub-cultures may influence educational achievement. High quality responses also included well-chosen references to relevant concepts and study findings. There were some low scoring answers that showed some understanding of pupil sub-cultures without relating the material to educational achievement.
- (b) There were a few high-quality answers that provided a sustained discussion of the relative importance of gender and social class in determining educational achievement. A lot of responses identified ways in which gender and social class may influence educational achievement without considering whether gender is the more important factor. This type of answer gained marks in the middle of the range. Low scoring responses included answers that ignored the reference to gender in the question and offered only a few observations about the influence of social class on educational achievement.

Section B

Question 3

- (a) Good answers explained a range of factors that lead to high levels of international migration. Lower scoring responses were confined to one or two basic points about the influences on migration in general.
- (b) There were a few high-quality responses that reflected on whether greater access to education would be a solution to poverty in developing societies. Some candidates made good use of the contrasts between cultural and structural explanations of poverty. Low scoring answers were often limited to a few points about the causes of poverty in general, with no particular reference to education as a key factor.

Question 4

- (a) There were some good answers that demonstrated a sound understanding of several ways in which government corruption may be an obstacle to development. Low scoring answers made points about corruption without showing links to development.
- (b) High quality responses identified several ways in which international aid agencies may contribute to development. Good answers also included an assessment of how far aid agencies assist the process of development. There were some low scoring answers that gave examples of international aid agencies without discussing their contribution to development.

Section C

Question 5

- (a) There were a few good answers that demonstrated a detailed understanding of the post-modernist contribution to the study of the media. These responses included references to relevant post-modernist concepts and theories. A lot of answers demonstrated only a limited understanding of post-modernist ideas.
- (b) Good answers provided a clear account of the uses and gratifications model. High quality responses also evaluated the strengths and limitations of the model through drawing contrasts with theories of media effects, such as the hypodermic-syringe and cultural effects models. There were some low scoring answers that demonstrated only a vague understanding of the uses and gratifications model.

Question 6

- (a) Good answers described several difficulties in researching the effects of the media on audiences. High quality responses included references to relevant studies and the methodological and theoretical issues associated with the research. There were some low scoring answers that offered only a vague account of one or two difficulties in researching the effects of the media.

- (b) There were some good answers based on a discussion of the relative merits of the pluralist and Marxist theories of the media. Other high-quality responses identified different groups who may be able to influence the content of the media and debated which groups have most influence. Lower scoring answers relied on general knowledge about the media rather than using relevant sociological material to address the issues raised by the question.

Section D

Question 7

- (a) There were some good answers that used functionalist theory to explain how religion contributes to social cohesion. High scoring answers included references to relevant concepts such as value consensus, collective conscience, totemism, and the sacred and the profane. Lower scoring responses attempted to answer the question without referring to relevant sociological concepts and theory.
- (b) Good answers demonstrated a sound understanding of the position of women within different religious organisations. High quality responses also assessed the view that women have little power within these organisations, often making effective links to feminist theories and/or post-modernist ideas. Lower scoring answers offered some points about the position of women in religious organisations, but without evaluating the view expressed in the question.

Question 8

- (a) High quality answers described several examples of how interactionist ideas have contributed to the study of religion. Some candidates made particularly good use of references to Weber's ideas, including his Protestant Ethic thesis. Other interactionist sociologists mentioned included Berger, Luckmann, Miller, and Wuthnow. There were some low scoring answers that demonstrated little understanding of the interactionist contribution to the study of religion.
- (b) Most candidates recognised that the question provided an opportunity to discuss the secularisation thesis. Good answers explained the thesis and also provided an assessment of how far religion has lost its social significance in recent times. High quality responses were supported with references to relevant research evidence and concepts. There were some low scoring answers that attempted to address the issues raised by the question without using appropriate sociological material, such as concepts and theories.