



UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL EXAMINATIONS  
General Certificate of Education  
Advanced Subsidiary Level and Advanced Level

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**SOCIOLOGY**

**9699/02**

Paper 2 Principles and Methods 2

**October/November 2008**

**1 hour 30 minutes**

Additional Materials: Answer Booklet/Paper

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**READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST**

If you have been given an Answer Booklet, follow the instructions on the front cover of the Booklet.

Write your Centre number, candidate number and name on all the work you hand in.

Write in dark blue or black pen.

You may use a soft pencil for any diagrams, graphs or rough working.

Do not use staples, paper clips, highlighters, glue or correction fluid.

Answer **two** questions.

At the end of the examination, fasten all your work securely together.

The number of marks is given in brackets [ ] at the end of each question or part question.

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This document consists of **4** printed pages.



Answer **two** questions.

- 1 Sociologists who believe that society can be studied in a scientific way are known as positivists. They claim that it is possible to identify external variables determining human behaviour on the basis of which general social laws can be formulated. However, writers in the interpretivist tradition, such as Max Weber, have criticised the positivists for exaggerating the similarities between sociology and the natural sciences. Sociology has not achieved anything like the degree of agreement, certainty or ability to predict of the natural sciences. It cannot, for example, use laboratory experiments in the same way to derive its data. This makes it far harder for sociologists to separate and control variables in order to establish the cause or causes of events.

Positivists generally accept that there are practical difficulties in applying the methods of the natural sciences when studying social behaviour. However, they argue that what sociologists do is, nevertheless, scientific in that sociology constitutes a body of organised knowledge developed through systematic enquiry using techniques that approximate to those of natural science, producing valid data and using methods that are high in reliability.

An altogether different view of science has emerged from what has been termed the 'realist' school. This argues that it is misleading to typify science as being based on experiment and that, outside the laboratory, scientists are faced with as many uncontrollable variables as social scientists. Many explanations in science are based on theory rather than direct observation of the underlying causes of an event. Hence, the realists claim that the differences between sociology and the natural sciences are not as great as the critics of positivism have suggested.

Other writers, such as Kuhn and Lakatos, have pointed out that even in the natural sciences knowledge to some extent is socially constructed. This brings into question therefore the idea that the natural sciences are in some way more objective or value-free than the social sciences.

- (a) In the context of scientific research what is meant by the term *variables*? [2]
- (b) Describe **two** problems with using laboratory experiments in sociological research. [4]
- (c) Explain what it means to say that knowledge is socially constructed. [8]
- (d) Assess the interpretivist critique of positivism. [11]

- 2 Participant observation is a widely used method of sociological research. This approach involves the researcher becoming a part of a group or community in order to study it. Gaining access to the group in order to begin the research can be problematic. Some researchers choose to reveal their identity to some or all of the people they are studying. This is known as *overt* participant observation. In *covert* participant observation the research is carried out secretly, with the researcher concealing his or her identity from the group.

Once access has been gained, the extent to which the participant observer might influence the group or activity being studied has to be considered. This is particularly a problem with overt participant observation, as people are likely to behave differently if they know they are being observed. But even if the researcher carries out the investigation secretly, the presence of another person may still affect the behaviour of the group.

Participant observation is a good way of studying human behaviour in depth. Interactionists favour this method because they believe that the purpose of research is to get as close as possible to the realities underlying human relationships. However, critics argue that observers run the risk of getting so close to their subjects that they lose objectivity. The validity of the research findings would be undermined in this way. There are also a number of ethical and practical problems associated with participant observation studies.

Widely quoted examples of participant observation studies include the following: Laud Humphrey's study of homosexual behaviour in public toilets, *Tearoom Trade*; Eileen Barker's study of a religious sect, *The Making of a Moonie*; and Erving Goffman's study of a mental institution, *Asylums*.

- (a) What is meant by the term *validity*? [2]
- (b) Describe **two** problems that an observer may face in gaining access to a group in order to begin research. [4]
- (c) Explain why participant observation is a good way of studying human behaviour in depth. [8]
- (d) Assess the strengths **and** limitations of *covert* participant observation. [11]

- 3 Ascribed status refers to social positions that are fixed through life, as with a caste system. An achieved status is one where individuals take up a social position according to their own talent and ability. Functionalists argue that status in pre-industrial societies is largely ascribed, whereas in industrial societies it is increasingly achieved on the basis of merit. Talent, ability, ambition and hard work are steadily replacing ascribed characteristics as the criteria for determining a person's position in the class system.

If the functionalist view is correct then industrial societies should be characterised by a high level of social mobility as people move up and down the social scale on the basis of their achievements. Many studies of social mobility have been carried out by sociologists in order to determine whether industrial societies are becoming more 'open' in the sense of there being greater equality of opportunity and less inherited privilege.

Taking occupation as the indicator of class, researchers have distinguished between long-range and short-range mobility, and between inter-generational and intra-generational mobility. However, there are various problems associated with using occupation as an indicator of class for the purposes of studying social mobility. It is also problematic that many studies have not included data on women's mobility, and patterns of female mobility tend to be rather different from men's. Likewise, ethnicity has not always been identified by researchers as an independent variable that may affect opportunities for upward social mobility.

- (a) What is meant by the term *inter-generational mobility*? [2]
- (b) Describe **two** ways in which an individual can achieve upward social mobility. [4]
- (c) Explain why using occupation as an indicator of social class may give rise to problems when studying social mobility. [8]
- (d) Assess the functionalist view that social position is increasingly achieved on the basis of merit in modern industrial societies. [11]