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

SOCIOLOGY **9699/21**

Paper 2 Principles and Methods 2 **October/November 2009**

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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Answer **two** questions.

1 Positivists believe that the social world is like the natural, physical world. It is made up of objective facts, independent of individuals, just waiting to be discovered. Sociologists should approach the study of society, therefore, rather like a biologist investigating the structure of a living organism or an astronomer examining the stars. The ultimate aim is to identify a set of laws that govern human behaviour rather like the laws of the universe that physicists seek to explain. Positivists argue that this aim can only be achieved by sociologists adopting the methods and procedures that are used in the natural sciences.

Through following the rules of scientific method, verifiable data and valid correlations can be established that may be used to confirm or deny an *hypothesis*. In essence, this involves testing theoretical statements against evidence that is gathered by the most logical method in an objective manner and interpreted in an impartial way. Positivists believe that it is possible for sociologists to study society without their own values influencing the research findings.

Interactionists have questioned whether it is appropriate to study society using the methods and procedures of the natural sciences. They have also challenged the notion that value freedom is possible when studying society, or even whether it is desirable. Interactionists prefer methods of research that enable the sociologist to enter the lives of the people they are studying and develop an in-depth understanding of how they interpret and negotiate their social relationships.

(a) What is meant by the term *hypothesis*? [2]

(b) Describe **two** methods of sociological research favoured by positivists. [4]

(c) Explain why it might not be possible, or even desirable, to study society in a value-free way. [8]

(d) Assess the arguments for and against using scientific methods in sociological research. [11]

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2 Questionnaires are a set of written questions that are either given to respondents to complete or are posted to them. Postal questionnaires are most likely to reach the largest group, although they have the lowest response rate. Questionnaires are widely used in sociological research because they allow a large number of questions to be asked to a wide group in a short space of time.

Sociologists working within the positivist tradition favour the use of questionnaires because of the *reliability* of the method and the ability to identify trends and make generalisations from the data that is collected. From an interactionist perspective, however, research based on questionnaires is said to lack validity.

Interviews are an alternative to questionnaires. There are three main types of interview – structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Whereas a questionnaire will be given to a respondent to complete privately, an interview consists of a face-to-face question-and-answer session between interviewer and interviewee. The presence of the interviewer in this process creates many advantages and disadvantages when compared to questionnaires.

(a) What is meant by the term *reliability*? [2]

(b) Describe **two** reasons why postal questionnaires may have a low response rate. [4]

(c) Explain why interactionists consider that research based on questionnaires lacks validity. [8]

(d) Assess the strengths and limitations of using interviews rather than questionnaires in sociological research. [11]

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3 In traditional societies the social position of an individual is generally ascribed at birth in accordance with law, custom or inherited status. Such systems are characterised by very little *social mobility* and are sometimes referred to as 'closed' societies because the life prospects of each person are fixed or predetermined.

Under the process of industrialisation traditional systems of stratification gave way to a more open system that was characterised by competition and a higher degree of social mobility. Customary divisions and traditional distinctions were replaced by distinctions based on social class. Class position is largely determined by an individual's place within the economic system and is to some extent achieved.

Sociologists within the functionalist tradition claim that in modern industrial societies class origins are irrelevant in determining where an individual is placed in the economic system. They say that a meritocracy exists in which access to higher status positions in society is based on achievement and ability. This view has been challenged by sociologists in the Marxist and Weberian traditions who argue that social class background does have a major influence on the way modern industrial societies are stratified. However, postmodernist writers have suggested that class divisions have little role in shaping social identities today.

(a) What is meant by the term *social mobility*? [2]

(b) Describe **two** ways in which an individual might achieve a higher position in society. [4]

(c) Explain why postmodernist writers think that class divisions have little role in shaping social identities today. [8]

(d) Assess the extent to which a meritocracy exists in modern industrial societies. [11]

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