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MASTERING SOCIOLOGY

GERARD O'DONNELL

M
MACMILLAN

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To Sara, Duncan (Young Social Scientist of the Year 1982)
and Rory, my expert advisers

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	xii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
<i>The exam and preparing for it</i>	xv

I WHAT IS SOCIOLOGY?

1 Sociological terms and concepts	1.1 Culture and social order	3
	1.2 Socialisation	5
	1.3 Conformity and deviance	6
	1.4 Roles and status	7
	1.5 Norms and values	9
	1.6 Conflict and consensus	10
2 Sociological method	2.1 Major research methods	12
	2.2 Questionnaires	14
	2.3 Interviews and observation	15
	2.4 Sampling	16
	2.5 Primary and secondary sources	18
	2.6 The uses and presentation of research	19

II THE FAMILY

3 Development and characteristics of the modern family	3.1 What a family is	27
	3.2 Why families?	30
	3.3 Differing family patterns	34
	3.4 Family forms in Britain today	36
4 The changing nature of the modern British family	4.1 The changing role of the family	39
	4.2 Changing relationships within the family	39
	4.3 Maternal and paternal roles	41
	4.4 The nuclear family – its advantages and disadvantages	43
5 The stability of the family	5.1 Conflict within the family	45
	5.2 The law and the family	47

CONTENTS

5.3	Divorce and remarriage	48
5.4	Marriage breakdown – its social and personal cost	50

III THE SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

6 Informal and formal education	6.1	The purpose of education	59
	6.2	Socialisation	60
	6.3	Social control	60
	6.4	The media and youth culture	63
7 Changes in British education	7.1	Historical development	69
	7.2	The bipartite and tripartite system	70
	7.3	Comprehensive education	72
	7.4	The future	75
8 Ability and achievement	8.1	Heredity and environment	77
	8.2	The culture of the school	78
	8.3	The influence of family and class	80
	8.4	Sex, race and peer group	88

IV SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION

9 Stratification	9.1	Age stratification/status	97
	9.2	Feudalism	98
	9.3	Caste	99
	9.4	Social class	100
10 Wealth and income	10.1	Wealth and power	104
	10.2	Distribution of wealth in Britain	105
	10.3	Poverty	106
	10.4	Relative poverty	114
11 Social mobility	11.1	The extent of social mobility in Britain	117
	11.2	Barriers to mobility	122
	11.3	Avenues of mobility	124
	11.4	Social change	127

V WORK AND LEISURE

12 The meaning of work	12.1	The effect of work on behaviour	133
	12.2	Alienation and job satis- faction	136
	12.3	Coal-miners and fishermen	138
	12.4	Lorry drivers and assembly line workers	140
13 Rewards and conditions	13.1	Status	145
	13.2	Hours and conditions of work	146
	13.3	Pay and fringe benefits	148
	13.4	Trade unions	149
14 The changing conditions of employment	14.1	Industrialisation, automation and mechanisation	152
	14.2	Changing occupations and occu- pational structure	155
	14.3	Unemployment	157
	14.4	Women and work	165

VI DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF POPULATION

15 Population change in Britain	15.1	Historical perspective	175
	15.2	Life expectancy	177
	15.3	Post-1870 birth rate	177
	15.4	Death rate and infant mortality	180
16 The effects of population change	16.1	An ageing population	184
	16.2	Population movement	185
	16.3	The balance of the sexes	189
	16.4	Inner cities	191
17 Migration	17.1	Emigration	197
	17.2	Immigration	198
	17.3	Ethnic groups	200
	17.4	Racism	202

CONTENTS

VII SOCIAL STABILITY AND CONTROL

18 The nature of social order	18.1 Conformity	211
	18.2 Deviance	212
	18.3 Social control	214
	18.4 Sanctions	215
19 Agencies of social control	19.1 Family	218
	19.2 Education	220
	19.3 The peer group	220
	19.4 Religion and the media	222
	19.5 The Law	225
20 Crime and delinquency	20.1 The nature of crime and delinquency	227
	20.2 Causes of crime and delinquency	229
	20.3 Crime and statistics	231
	20.4 Class and gender in relation to crime	234

VIII SOCIAL CHANGE

21 Reasons for social change	21.1 Stagnation v. development	241
	21.2 Cultural factors	241
	21.3 Political factors	242
	21.4 Economic factors	243
22 Processes of social change	22.1 Rural lifestyles	244
	22.2 Urban lifestyles	246
	22.3 The media and change	250
	22.4 International influence	252
23 Religion	23.1 Religion and morality	254
	23.2 The churches in modern Britain	254
	23.3 Church and State	259
	23.4 Secularisation	260

IX THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

24 Forms of government	24.1 Totalitarian government	267
	24.2 Democratic government	270

	24.3 The British system of government	272
	24.4 Political parties	276
25 Pressure and interest groups	25.1 Different types of pressure groups	278
	25.2 Advantages of pressure groups	280
	25.3 Disadvantages of pressure groups	281
	25.4 Methods of operation	281
26 Voting behaviour	26.1 Voting patterns	286
	26.2 The influence of social class and ethnic origin	286
	26.3 The influence of sex, age and religion	293
	26.4 The media and opinion polls	293
X EXAMPLES OF COMPLETE QUESTION PAPERS AND OUTLINE MARKING SCHEMES		303
XI QUESTIONS WITH SPECIMEN ANSWERS		321
XII A COMPARISON OF ORDINARY WITH ADVANCED LEVEL		333
XIII GLOSSARY		339
<i>Index</i>		349

PREFACE

Mastering Sociology is a systematic introduction to the study of society; combining a comprehensive coverage of the various sociology ordinary level GCE syllabuses in the text, with a wide range of extracts from a variety of source materials which both extend the text, allow the students to experience something of the flavour of the originals, and can provide a base for the kind of data response and stimulus questions which are becoming increasingly popular.

Unusual and valuable features of the book are specimen questions with examples of the kind of outline marking schemes used by GCE examiners and specimen answers of a length and content calculated to get high marks in Sociology at 'O' level, but within the capability of good candidates. These schemes and answers, together with examples of actual recent questions set by all the Boards currently offering Sociology at 'O' level, makes the book particularly appropriate to the self taught student, while enhancing its value as a class text.

All areas of the AEB, Oxford Local, Welsh Board, Cambridge Local* 'O' Level and London 'O/A' Level syllabuses are covered; although the book in general follows the sequence of the new AEB syllabus introduced in 1982. [*In respect of Cambridge Local, this explicitly requires students to engage in cross-cultural comparison where this is appropriate. It is not possible to include much cross-cultural material in *Mastering Sociology* – examples will be found in *The Human Web* (John Murray) by Gerard O'Donnell or *Human Societies* – Hambling & Mathews (Macmillan).]

In preparing the book particular regard has been paid to the proposed amalgamation of the GCE and CSE in the new GCSE and the development of Joint 'O' level/CSE examination (e.g. The East Anglian, London Regional and University of London joint examination operational from 1986). To this end text material should be within the capability of most students while source material will often stretch the most able and provide a base for 'A' level work.

As you start this book your examination may seem a long way off, but it is useful to bear in mind some points about the examination so that you can get used to practising them as you answer the sample questions set at the end of each section.

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THE EXAM AND PREPARING FOR IT

1. In answering the sample examination questions set in the earlier sections of the book it must be borne in mind that while it is necessary to subdivide the book into syllabus headings in order to present the subject coherently, the areas of sociological study are interdependent. A particular question may require information drawn from a number of sections (e.g. family, class and education). When you have finished the book, try working through some of your earlier efforts, drawing this time on all the knowledge that you have acquired during the course.
2. Write clearly. Boards do vary in the importance which they attach to structure. London states: 'Candidates are reminded of the necessity for good English and orderly presentation in their answers'; AEB is less concerned with style provided the meaning is clear. In all cases, write in essay form – do not write notes as your answer, although you may wish to make a few notes on your paper before commencing your real answer. (Put a neat line through these and the examiner will ignore them.) Remember the examiner will have hundreds of papers to mark in two or three weeks – he or she will not spend a lot of time trying to work out what you mean or in deciphering your handwriting; the repetition of points to try and make a scrappy answer look longer will not impress and flowery description is a waste of time.
3. If the question is broken into sections look for the number of marks awarded to each part. It is a waste of time to devote several lines to an answer that can gain only 1 mark; the examiner will only expect a few words. A common (and disastrous) error is to write almost all you know about a particular topic in answer to a section attracting few marks and then fail to repeat relevant information in the major section which is intended to attract that information.
4. A mere recital of the names of sociologists gains no marks at any level. At 'O' level you are not expected to know detailed sociological theory (ethnomethodology, etc.) – you *should* know the different approaches to sociological enquiry and it is useful to be able to give examples of specific research. (Oxford Board specifically states: 'Candidates should be prepared to make reference to any relevant sociological studies or surveys of which they have knowledge when

answering questions set on any part of the syllabus'.) You should be able to make balanced judgements about the structure and institutions of society but mere unsubstantiated opinion is worthless. You should know something of the various methods of research used by sociologists and be able to interpret and analyse evidence presented in a variety of ways – that is one reason why graphs, tables and extracts are included in the book.

5. Sheer length gains no marks. Time will limit your length in any case – a good answer to an essay question may be 500–600 words long; but a well-constructed concise essay may be able to present all the relevant facts in less.
6. Work out how much time you can afford to spend on each question; when the time is up to move on to the next question – you can return to complete unfinished answers if you have time. Three good answers will almost certainly gain less marks than five average ones.
7. Spend some time reading through the paper carefully and choose those questions you know most about (not those that sound easy). Some people find it best to write up their second best answer first – so that they become more confident as they progress.
8. Do not answer more questions than you need – some boards exclude all surplus answers written after the required answers, others mark them all and take the best answers up to the required number – you are always wasting valuable time.
9. Answer the question asked, not the one you hoped would be asked. If you have read 'model' or 'specimen' answers, do not be tempted to regurgitate them verbatim; extract from them the material relevant to the question asked.
10. A reading list is not included in this book because experience shows that few 'O' level candidates have the time (or inclination?) to read more widely than the textbook.

However you will enjoy and appreciate sociology more if you *do* extend your reading – dipping into *New Society* a weekly magazine, and in particular its pull-out supplement 'Society Today' which appears about once a month (some sample extracts are included in this book) and is directed at GCE candidates; and read more of some of the books from which extracts are taken.

11. The 1950s and 1960s in Britain saw the first major invasion of Britain by Sociology. In these years many standard, popular sociology texts were introduced which gave (and still give) valuable insights into sociological concepts. *Coal is Our Life*; *Family and Kinship in East London*; *The Fishermen* remain useful books but students do need to be aware of how dated some of these studies now are and compare them critically with the realities of the 1980s.